

Gender Issues In Contemporary Sermons

by

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ABSTRACT

GENDER ISSUES IN CONTEMPORARY

SERMONS

Christine Bainton

The purpose of this research was to examine gender issues in contemporary sermons. My sample consists of sermons delivered on BBC Radio 4 as part of acts of worship broadcast during 1993-4 which were examined to analyse how language, gender and power intersect to produce these discourses. In order to contextualize this material, chapter one focuses on the history of the sermon and its institutionalisation. Chapter two analyses the preachers' use of generic terms and their use of the second person plural mode of address. In chapter three, I examine the gendered illustrations offered in the sermon sample in order to investigate how they contribute to create alienating and exclusionary discourses. Chapter four deals with the ways in which self-disclosure and the use of personal experience provide a means by which knowledge can be assimilated and transferred to others as well as acting as an inclusive mechanism in preaching. In chapter five, I demonstrate that metaphors have the potential to function as an inclusive device but that this influence may be negated if the gender content of the metaphor conveys gender-biases. Chapter six centres on the form and structure of the sermons as a way of considering the issue of a participatory address. The conclusion focuses on the way in which aspects of the notions of inclusive language intersect with the ways in which authority is traditionally defined. This thesis demonstrates that contemporary broadcast sermons do not endeavour to reflect the demands for inclusive language or less authoritarian discourses which have been made by feminists and advocated by most denominations in the Christian churches.

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PREFACE

This thesis is presented in accordance with the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* by Joseph Gibaldi (4th edition. New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1995). Leicester University granted permission for the inclusion of transcripts of the sermon texts which form the sample and which otherwise could not be readily accessed. In transcribing the sermon sample, I have replicated as accurately as possible what was said within the conventions of written English. Any errors in the transcriptions are mine. Please note that bracketed references in the text of my thesis to my sermon sample refer to the page numbers in this thesis, on which the reference can be found.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines gender issues in the language of contemporary sermons. It does so in the context of my experience of alienation as a female listener to sermons preached predominantly by men to a congregation consisting of women and men.¹ Over the last twenty years various ecclesiastical discussions and debates have occurred concerned with different aspects of the relationship between “women and the church.”² As a woman sitting in the pew listening to sermons, I was very aware of the disparity between many preachers’ utterances and feminists’ views of an equitable society.

My sense of disenchantment stemmed from the male-centredness of the language and presentation of acts of worship in general and the sermons in particular. This led me to a broader investigation of sexism in language. I found that women in America were the first among second-wave feminists to argue that their words, ideas and viewpoints were ignored, and in the 1970s and 1980s feminists made language a feminist issue (D. Spender; S. Ardener; D. Cameron *Feminism*; J. Coates *Women*; C. Miller and K. Swift; B. Thorne, C. Kramarae and N. Henley). As their findings gained credibility, British feminist theologians such as Monica Furlong, Janet Morley, Hannah Ward, Vivienne Faull and Jane Sinclair raised the issue of sexism in theological language. The full range of Christian feminism is multi-variate and complex: it operates through a diffuse network which is committed to ensuring that the church will no longer be led and shaped only by men. Since language is fundamental to the church’s tasks, it must be part of Christian feminists’ agenda for change.

¹ The prohibition of women priests and women preachers was promulgated by a canon in AD475. Nevertheless, women have continued to preach in a variety of formal and informal capacities within different denominations throughout history. The historical-political importance of women has been obscured or ignored by studies producing histories only of ‘great’ men, the ordained male priest, or important male pulpit preachers (P. S. Wilson 13). Currently, much work is being undertaken to redress these deficiencies (N. Hardesty; P. Mack; K. K. Campbell; B. J. MacHaffie; M. J. Selvidge; S. M. Stuard).

² For example, the changing Christian attitudes to women’s work, sexism in liturgical language and the ordination of women to the priesthood (A. Borrowdale; M. Furlong, *A Dangerous*; J. Chapman).

As a result of the feminists' campaign, sexist language has been replaced by the notion of an "inclusive language" in most churches of America, Canada and New Zealand. The aim of this change has been to enable women to participate more fully in acts of worship (V. Faull and J. Sinclair).

In the UK, this issue did not become a focus for attention until the 1980s. In response to pressure from various groups, many denominations in the UK undertook reviews of their liturgical language. Liturgical language is the language used throughout the act of worship though it more specifically refers to the prescribed language of prayers, intercessions and hymnody (M. Perham; A. C. Thistelton). In order to make liturgical language more inclusive generic terms such as "man" are to be replaced by "people" or "human being." Recent translations of the Bible have also attempted to eliminate some of the overt sexist language (The New Jerusalem Bible 1985; The Revised English Bible 1989; The New Revised Standard Version 1989).³

The various denominations have each adopted their own approach and proposals. For example, the *Alternative Service Book* has been used in acts of worship in the Church of England since 1980, whilst the Methodist Church, the United Reformed Church, the Roman Catholic Church have each modernised aspects of their own liturgy and utilise revised translations of the Bible. Most denominations, but not all, have encouraged their clergy to use non-sexists terms. Nevertheless, these recommendations are restricted to the assigned language of the act of worship. None of the guidelines extend specifically to the language used by preachers during the delivery of their sermons.

Though liturgical reviews have been undertaken and the revision of written texts of many churches has occurred, there is always a time-lapse between decision-making and implementation. My experience of recent church services is that although clergy use non-sexist language in the formal sections of the service many still prepare their sermons without

³ The most recent translation of the Bible is one which removes sexism, racism and even any offence to left-handed people. It was published in October 1995 by the Oxford University Press in The United States of America. However, "there are no current plans to market this version in Britain" (C. Laurence 14).

regard to a sexism which may be revealed or implied by their own language. This suggests that they have familiarised themselves with guidelines and directives specifically prescribed by their churches without appreciating the reasons for these changes and so perpetuate dominant discourses in the language of their sermons. I have encountered many examples of inclusivity through amendments to some parts of the liturgy which have been completely negated by exclusive techniques operating in other sections of the same act of worship. A fully inclusive service has to be consistent with the use of non-sexist language throughout the whole act of worship.

I began this project because of my own particular experiences of alienation, exclusion and lack of identity when listening to sermons delivered in various local churches which made my research topic “visible” to me. Experience as a valid form of knowledge is one basis of feminism (G. Bowles and R. D. Klein; M. Maynard; L. Code). The use of experience allows us to understand women’s oppression through the process of discovery in order to create change (L. Kelly, S. Burton and L. Regan 28). My experiences became the catalyst for my critique of contemporary sermons to determine the causes and the extent of gender-bias in the practices of sermon preparation which combine to create women’s alienation. This thesis does not attempt to analyse or critique the theological content of any sermon with regard to the various denominational doctrines. Rather, my thesis examines the intersection between gender, power, knowledge and language use in a sample of contemporary sermons.

Methodology

From the 1970s personal experience became increasingly important in feminist research. The early stages of second wave feminist scholarship advocated and defended the view that feminism has specific methods of conducting research (Bowles and Klein; S. Reinharz *Feminist*; H. Graham). There was a critique of the dominant research methods, specifically quantitative research with its emphasis on the detachment of the researcher and the collection and measurement of “objective” facts through a (supposedly) value-free form of data

collection represented as a 'masculinist' mode of knowing (Maynard 11). Feminists' refusal of this "objectivity" led to methods derived from the assertion that all knowledge is subjective and based on experience. A qualitative approach of semi-structured or unstructured interviewing was the research technique most often associated with feminist research (Kelly).

Early feminist research was defined as having "a focus *on* women, in research, carried out *by* women who were feminists, *for* other women" (L. Stanley, *Feminist* 21). However, for more than a decade there have been debates about feminist research methodologies which have resulted in more differentiated positions. Discussions have focused on the issue of method (C. Marsh; L. Stanley and S. Wise, *Breaking*, J. Brannen; E. McLaughlin; L. Kelly, L. Regan and S. Burton), also various aspects of research practices (Kelly; Stanley and Wise, *Breaking Out Again*; C. Kirkwood; M. Hammersley), and emphases on epistemological considerations (S. Harding *The Science*; J. Flax *Political*; L. Nicholson *Feminism*; S. Reinharz, *Feminist*; D. Smith). These different accounts of feminist methodology have led to arguments for the promotion of pluralism (L. Alcoff and E. Potter; b. hooks; Stanley and Wise, *Breaking Out Again*; Kelly, Regan and Burton) which is one way of avoiding any one feminist methodology setting itself up as a "dominant discourse."

My research is not "on" nor "with" women since it studies men's writings (92.5%) and focuses on homiletical practices occurring in the patriarchal institutions of the Churches. The few women preachers in this sample were trained in these same institutions and their sermons, as I shall indicate, reflect male dominated practices. The gender issues I have researched, however, are feminist issues which are tied into notions of femininity and masculinity. By analysing the content and rhetorical strategies used by the preachers I am endeavouring to examine the ways in which gender is structured and depicted in sermons.

For my sample I chose to tape-record the sermons. As I use the sermons for educational purposes no copyright infringement has taken place. There were several reasons for doing so. Initially I had thought about recording sermons in churches I attended, but this method of

gathering a sample leads to several problems, some of them concerned with making the actual recordings. Preachers either speak from a raised pulpit or stand on the chancel steps. Personal portable recorders have limited usage. The acoustics of the building, the distance between the speaker and listener/researcher and congregational noises may cause poor quality recordings which are difficult to transcribe with accuracy. Also, if the equipment is not tested and adjusted for reception, a useless recording may result. Moreover, sermons are transient discourses; they cannot be replicated if the recording system fails for any reason. Therefore, a sophisticated system installed and checked is required to ensure a transcribable recording.

Such installations and personal tape-recordings would acquaint preachers with the fact that their sermons were being recorded which would necessitate explanation and discussion concerning the purposes of the research. However, my research investigates ways in which language is constitutive of hierarchical gendered social relations. Explaining this might have affected the content of the sermons. I also wanted to obtain a sample of sermons which represented what any given preacher “normally” said, insofar as this is possible. Alerting preachers to my specific interests might have skewed the results in particular ways.

I also wished my sample to reflect a diversity of churches in the pluralistic UK rather than focusing on a single denomination. Therefore, I decided to record sermons from broadcast acts of worship since this strategy overcame the practical problems, and provided me with a sample of multi-denominational sermons. After much consideration I chose to record for one year the Radio 4 Morning Services which are broadcast every Sunday morning within a forty-five minute time constraint. The sample year encompasses the ecclesiastical period Easter Sunday 1993 to Easter Sunday 1994.

Broadcast sermons are public utterances and recording from the radio ensures that the whole of the text is available for examination. This method for compiling my sample could be regarded by some people as “objective” and therefore “masculine” technique. However, the traditional male research model of unilateral control of the enterprise features the

researcher giving instructions to the subject who is being researched. These instructions are in accordance with a hypothesis and research design about which the subject may well not have been consulted or informed: "Getting to know about what the subject does in fulfilling his instructions is more important than relating to the subject. To this end the researcher can influence the subject, but not vice-versa" (P. Reason and J. Rowan 155). However, the preachers, who are the authors of the texts which constitute my sample, were not given instructions by me as the researcher. In addition, they were not aware that their sermons were being transcribed for analysis. Therefore, they did not prepare their sermons with that knowledge in mind. Thus, no bias in the preachers' language usage or preparation due to the knowledge that their sermons were being examined specifically for gender issues occurred. I had no influence over the preparation of these sermons nor the selection of the preachers or their denominations. My research is thus in some respects closer to ethnography than laboratory-based science research but within that, my agenda is feminist, that is informed by a perception of the centrality of gender for the presentation and interpretation of experience.

The use of covert recordings to obtain my sample may be regarded by some people as unethical. I consider any such suggestion to be inapplicable because the preachers were aware that their words were being broadcast via a public medium. These were not private utterances. If we consider ethical issues to be concerned with exploitative and damaging effects on the researched which constitute abuse of power by the researcher (Cameron *et al* 13), then I would argue that my research has no such effect. Historically, social research has never been a neutral enquiry: "It is strongly implicated in the project of social control, whereby the state or other agencies that ultimately serve the interests of the dominant group" (Cameron *et al* 2). Almost all research is conducted by the more powerful on the relatively powerless. Issues of ethics can only be considered within these parameters because they are a result of these assumptions. However, it is the clergy who occupy the power positions within the institution of the churches and even as a researcher I am subordinate as are all members

of the laity. I am researching the powerful from a less powerful base in order to understand how marginalisation and alienation arise.

Once clergy have completed their training preachers are virtually free to express their own views in sermons provided they stay within broadly defined boundaries commensurate with the doctrinal theology of their denomination. They are not normally subject to a programme of continual assessment or vetting; the congregation rarely enter into serious discussion with their preacher about the style and content of a sermon. Consequently, there is no feed-back which could provide guidance in the preparation of subsequent sermons. This may be an issue in an age of consumerism which has brought about a change in traditional power relationships. Commercial and political organisations have realised that success can only be achieved by listening to, accommodating or manipulating the requirements and aspirations of their customers and supporters. This shift in power from the producer to the consumer embraces a mutuality which results in a feminisation of the notion of authority. The traditional notion of the authority of the churches contradicts this contemporary view of the rights of the consumer/listener. It may indeed result in resistance rather than solidarity.

There are various forms of resistance to sermons, both inward and outward, that can be deployed by listeners who feel offended by the preacher's use of language. Slight infringements may produce irritation which is transitory whereas repeated instances will cause alienation and marginalisation resulting in listeners switching off either actually or metaphorically. Persistent use of male gender-bias is likely to result in women members of the congregation refusing to attend acts of worship and leaving the church. Dwindling congregations indicate failure of evangelical mission but offer no insights as to the root causes of this withdrawal,⁴ which are likely to be complex and multifarious.

⁴ There are many factors that have contributed to the decline in church attendance. For example, many consider the church in general and preaching in particular to be anachronistic, old-fashioned and/or in crisis (T. Beeson; I. Bradley; A. Craig, *Preaching*; C. Fant). Various churches have endeavoured to encourage people to attend services by offering a modern service, making them more relevant and/or focusing on a target group such as the under forties, e.g. The Nine O'Clock Service in Sheffield.

This thesis is intended to be a positive response to my feelings of alienation when listening to sermons. The purpose of this research is to assist me as a feminist in understanding the reasons for this alienation. Undertaking feminist research demands my participation, my presence and my voice to be included in the production of a polyphonic text. My position as a feminist researcher is to understand the causes of my alienation when I listen to these sermons in order that I may be proactive in as well as creating useful knowledge which may encourage others to instigate social change.

My primary sources for this research were broadcast sermons from a given period. These were prepared by (mostly) men as members of religious institutions. Though there is a relationship between gender and other forms of bias, such as class, education, race and disability, I shall not specifically discuss them in this thesis. I have chosen to focus on language usage because it is fundamental to the understanding of how and why oppressive social relations are created and reproduced.

I did not predetermine the criteria according to which I would analyse the sermons before examining the texts. Instead I selected the areas for focus in each chapter of this thesis after reading and re-reading the sermons in order to draw out common threads between the sermons. During the initial reading, I found two obvious sources for my alienation. These are associated with the use of generic language and notions of femininity. The issues of sexism in language have been raised by feminist linguists as they exploded the myth of the neutrality of language (Kramarae *Women*; S. McConnell-Ginet; Miller and Swift; Spender *Man*; S. J. Wolfe); whilst other feminists have discussed stereotypical gendered attributes (I. H. Frieze *et al*; C A. Oglesby and M. Shelton; O. Hartnell, G. Boden and M. Fuller). The gendered aspects of other chapters emerged as I re-examined and re-considered the texts. Thus, the chapters explore particular gender issues that arose out of my examination of the primary

sources. In the chapters I discuss how and why oppressive relationships have been created and reproduced in the way language is used in the sermons.⁵

My thesis is inter-disciplinary which necessitates an underpinning of a range of theoretical frameworks such as feminism, linguistics, communication theory, epistemology, and homiletics. It consists of an introduction, six chapters and a conclusion. The first chapter explains how and why sermons became embedded in acts of worship. This historical overview is necessarily concise since Christianity spans almost 2000 years. I discuss the legacy of the interplay between gender, language, power and knowledge in homiletical practices. The chapter therefore provides the contextual framework for the emergence of sermons in acts of worship. In chapter two, I analyse the sermons in terms of the use of exclusive and inclusive language. The first section covers aspects such as the use of generic language, sexism in syntax and sexism in semantics. The second part focuses on gender issues arising out of different modes of address in order to analyse the way in which overt and covert power is used in the preachers' language.

Chapter three examines the imagery offered by preachers in their sermons. Gendered imagery is used by most of the preachers in one form or another. The first part discusses images connected with notions of femininity and masculinity. The second section focuses on the preachers' use of exemplars whom they quote or refer to. The last part of this chapter is an examination of the persuasive power resulting from the deployment of these rhetorical devices.

Chapter four centres on the preachers' use of personal experience in their sermons. Personal experience is excluded from dominant "masculinist" forms of knowledge which rely on "objective" facts as "true" knowledge (J. O'Barr and S. Harding; Stanley, *Praxis*; D. Smith). In contrast the use of personal experience is an axiomatic aspect of feminist epistemological theory. Epistemology is concerned with what kinds of knowledges are

⁵ See Sara Mills, *Feminist Stylistics*, which demonstrates the oppression of women caused by/perpetuated by advertising.

possible and how they are legitimised. Feminists' debates about what constitutes knowledge have resulted in shifts of understanding in this context. My analysis of the preachers' use of personal experience examines what kinds of personal experiences they offer to legitimise knowledge and how these operate as narratives.

Chapter five continues the discussion concerned with epistemology through my examination of the texts in terms of the use of metaphor. I examine the texts for genderised metaphors and the effects these produce. In chapter six, I focus on the structure and style the preachers use in their sermons. I analyse the texts for certain structural features to determine how they assist in perpetuating particular male dominated institutional practices. My concluding chapter draws together the gender issues discussed in chapters one to six as I explore the implications of my examination and analysis of my sermon sample.

The Sermon Sample

Before examining my sample, it is necessary for me to define the term "sermon" in order to explain how my sample was achieved. Sermons have been delivered for hundreds of years. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a sermon as "something that is said; talk, discourse": more specifically as "a discourse usually delivered from a pulpit, and based upon the text of a scripture, for the purpose of religious instruction or exhortation." According to N. G. Smith (1958):

The sermon is a medium of communication, through which the convictions, the faith, the zeal of dedicated men [*sic*] are transmitted to others. While it is the chosen medium for communication of Christian truth it is not the sole medium . . . The sermon is a unique and distinctive form of communication also as a discourse addressed to a worshipping people. The sermon has its setting in a service of worship, in the atmosphere of worship. It is addressed to a group of listening people who have gathered to worship God and hear what He would speak. It is a mixed audience, representing people of all ages, from all walks of life, in various stages of spiritual

development.(153, 8)

My own definition of a sermon is an address prepared and delivered by one person, usually referred to as the preacher, to a congregation who sit silently, and passively listen to the discourse. These are conventions which I experience every time I attend an act of worship which contains a sermon. (I do not include discussions, talks or plays which can be offered in place of a traditional sermon). Therefore, communication proceeds from a speaker to a hearer via a one-way verbal process. The listeners do not take part in a verbal exchange with the preacher during the sermon event. Consequently, there is a power differential between speaker and hearer. The preacher possesses power and authority over the listening audience by virtue of having and occupying the verbal space. The congregation is thus rendered subordinate at the time of delivery of traditional sermons.

During the year of my recordings, conventional sermons were not delivered in every act of worship. For example, neither the Service of Celebration of Alternatives held in Galloway on 19 September to commemorate the Eve of The Next Stage of the World Earth Summit nor the Cenotaph Remembrance Sunday Service held on 13 November contained an address. The six weeks of Lenten meditation comprised group discussions of themes of faith such as “healing” and “Christian fellowship” with no formal act of worship. Other services provided a pre-recorded dialogue with several people talking in place of the sermon. Listeners to these acts of worship heard an edited recording instead of one person preaching during the service. My sample yielded 39 acts of worship which contained 40 conventional sermons (one service contained two sermons). All have been transcribed and are included as an appendix to this thesis. I have also included sermon number nine which is an example of a discussion and exchange of ideas for comparison with the traditional sermon.

Since the format of an act of worship has flexibility, sermons are not confined to an exact time limit or defined within a prescribed number of spoken words. The addresses in my sample ranged from 443 words to 2315 words. The mean sermon length was 1286 words.

The UK is geographically composed of four different countries, each with its own particular diversities and sub-cultures. BBC Radio is a public broadcast system available to everyone in the UK thus potentially attracting an audience to a religious programme from all over the UK. There is no rigidly defined formula for selecting the churches from which these acts of worship are broadcast.⁶ According to Canon N. Vincent, the Head of Religious Broadcasting, “the BBC selects the venue for the service. We pursue regional representation although cost is a factor. The general objective is to present a balanced mix of the main Christian denominations throughout the UK” (letter to author, 14 March 1993). Nevertheless, this criterion is constrained by several factors: (1) the location of some churches creates expensive problems for sound engineers; (2) some churches lack space and facilities for accommodating the technological hardware which is essential for a high level of presentation, and (3) many churches or chapels are too small to provide a large enough congregation to ensure a high standard of participation and guarantee a quality programme (J. Atkinson 113).

The regional representation of the sermons in my sample is shown in Table I.

Table I

<u>Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Broadcast Venues in Study Sample</u>		
Country	Number of Venues	Percentage of Venues
England	27	69.2
Wales	5	12.8
Scotland	4	10.3
Northern Ireland	3	7.7
Total	39	100.0

This is a small sample of the many sermons that are delivered each Sunday in churches throughout the UK. Nevertheless, all four countries in the UK are represented in the sample. However, no exact figures are available which list churches, chapels or places where acts of

⁶ In these acts of worship only Christian denominations are represented, rather than, for instance, Jewish or Muslim ones.

worship containing sermons are performed every Sunday. Some buildings are either not used or used occasionally. In other parishes the congregations are grouped under a single incumbent or they have no clergy in charge. Some churches and chapels have services on alternate Sundays, whilst others hold more than one service each Sunday at which sermons are delivered. Moreover, modern independent churches are just what their name implies, very independent. They tend to lack central organisations which hold such information. Therefore, it is not possible to state accurately the number of sermons delivered on a Sunday morning or comment on the representativeness of my sample for sermons in the UK as a whole.⁷

Our pluralistic society tolerates a large variety of denominations of Christian churches. In my sample thirteen different branches of the Christian religion presented broadcast acts of worship containing sermons. Table II lists the denominations represented in my sample.

Table II

<u>Representation of Denominations in Sermon Sample</u>			
Denomination	Number of Sermons	Denomination	Number of Sermons
Church of England (Anglican)	16	Church of Wales (Anglican)	1
Baptist	4	American Ecumenical	1
Roman Catholic	4	Free Church of Scotland	1
Presbyterian	4	Methodist	1
Church of Scotland	2	Pentecostal	1
Methodist with United Reformed Church	2	United Reformed Church	1
Episcopal Church of Scotland	2		
Total Number of Sermons 40			

⁷ Statistics are available which provide the number of churches, the number of clergy in various denominations and church membership in the UK. See, Peter Brierley and David Longley eds. *The UK Christian Handbook*. 3rd edn. (London: Marc Europe, 1994). This information is insufficient to determine the number and proportion of sermons delivered in each of the UK countries on a Sunday. Some statistics are obtainable from the record offices of the respective churches. However, most of the replies to my letters requesting such information state that such details have not been obtained.

Not all the categories of Christian denominations were represented during my sample year. However, thirteen denominations are depicted in this sample which indicates a diversity of denominations. A comparison between denominational representation in the sermon sample with that of church attendance in the UK is not possible because these figures are calculated differently by the various churches.⁸

Gender and Status of the Preachers

During the year that this sample was collected, the most important ecclesiastical issue of the Established Church of England, the major Anglican church, was resolved. At the time, the only denomination which had, and still has, no women clergy of any rank, were the Roman Catholics. The Church of England had women clergy restricted to the lowest rank of deaconess. Though they were not ordained priests they were allowed to preach. After ten years of fierce controversy the Church of England voted at its General Synod in November 1993 to ordain women as priests. In February 1994 changes to the ecclesiastical law were promulgated which permitted women priests. However, the ecclesiastical law forbids women to become bishops. But there are no restraints against Anglican deaconesses preaching. All the other Nonconformist churches have had ordained women priests for many years whereas the Roman Catholic church has only male priests/preachers. Table III gives the numbers of female and male clergy and the percentage female clergy in the major denominations.

⁸ Figures in the *UK Christian Handbook* quote Roman Catholic mass attendance whilst other denominations derive their figures only from adult attendance or membership.

Table III**Frequency and Percentage of Female and Male Clergy in Some Major Denominations**

Denomination	No. Female Clergy	No. Male Clergy	% Female Clergy
Anglican	703	13369	5.26
Baptist	80	2826	2.83
Independent	38	3549	1.07
Methodist	217	2119	10.24
Pentecostal	808	2565	31.50
Presbyterian	270	2837	9.52
Roman Catholic church has only male priests/clergy			

Source: P. Brierley and D. Longley. eds., *UK Christian Handbook Book 1992/3*. London: Marc Europe, 1994.

Only three of the sermons in my sample were delivered by female clergy (7.5% of the total preachers). All three were deaconesses attached to the Anglican church. Though my sample is extremely small these women preachers (3 out of 17) constitute 17.6% of the total Anglican preachers. Thus, the Anglicans provided a generous proportion of female speakers. In contrast the other denominations did not offer any of their women clergy as preachers. In particular, the Presbyterians, who have nearly ten percent female ministers and provided seven sermons in my sample, offered no female preachers in their acts of worship. This suggests that female ministers in Nonconformist churches may be marginalised and relegated to invisible roles. Thus, the public position of preaching through the broadcast institution appears to be exclusively a masculine enterprise within the domain of the reformed churches.

However, the Nonconformist churches do not have a traditional hierarchy in their structure which defines clergy ranking. Justification for priestly status is derived from the doctrine of The Apostolic Succession to which the orthodox churches adhere. In my sample, the Anglicans supplied seventeen sermons, only one of which was delivered by a Bishop. The Roman Catholics provided four sermons, one spoken by an Archbishop, two by Bishops and one by a priest. This suggests that the Roman Catholic Church's choice of representative from their church in broadcast services is biased heavily in favour of its senior priests. There may be a number of reasons for the choice of preacher such as those concerned with the

status of Roman Catholics in the UK, in that they are not the Established Church, or, the church may consider that the views of high status priests carry greater credibility with listeners.⁹ Whatever the reason, it is the case that the Roman Catholic Church tends to present the most powerful members in their hierarchy in radio broadcast services.

The Radio

This thesis centres on sermons delivered during acts of worship broadcast on Sunday mornings via the medium of the radio. Therefore some attention needs to be paid to the significance of this medium for the sermons under consideration. In this section I seek to

- (1) explain the influences of radio as a medium for communicating acts of worship;
- (2) demonstrate the particular difficulties encountered when sermons are delivered through the medium of the radio;
- (3) indicate the likely profile of the audience which these acts of worship attract.

The wider issues concerning the role of radio broadcasting in people's lives and the effectiveness of this medium of communication is beyond the scope of this thesis.¹⁰

The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) is a major communication medium. According to Asa Briggs (1965), "the golden age of radio was from the incorporation of the BBC in 1927 until the outbreak of war in 1939" (vol II 6). However, in 1949 the *Report of the Broadcasting Committee* still maintained that the influence of the radio as a factor shaping society's perceptions in post-war years was immense, since it asserted that "socially, broadcasting is the most pervasive and therefore one of the most powerful, means of affecting men's [*sic*] thoughts and actions" (5). A decade or so later, such a belief became inevitably questionable as society was more divided and pluralistic and as the diversity of media increased. From the mid-fifties to the mid-sixties, attention shifted away from the radio towards television. Thus "radio gave a clear impression of a medium in the decline"

⁹ The relationship between authority, credibility and influence is discussed further on pages 20-1.

¹⁰ For a discussion of these issues, see H. W. Robinson, *The Impact*, and Steven Barnett and David Morrison, *The Listener Speaks*.

(Windlesham 107). Some consider the radio to have become marginalised in policy debates and displaced by the television (P. M. Lewis and J. Booth; C. Curran). As we approach the end of the twentieth century radio has undergone many changes which have become more rapid in recent years. The proliferation of specialist and local radio stations has tended to draw listeners away from the BBC's traditional channels. Nevertheless, Radio 4 is still generally regarded as the BBC's flagship station, symbolising its authority and tradition as a public service broadcaster (Windlesham 121-2).

The Radio as a Medium for Communication

Marshall McLuhan (1964) drew attention to the idea that the form as well as the content of a communication carries meaning when he announced that "the medium is the message" (13). In essence, he claims that the various media which have been developed in the technological age are wielding a power over us far beyond our control. The significance of his view is based on the notion that what is communicated via these various media is of less importance, of less power, than the specificity of the media themselves.

McLuhan also makes a distinction between *hot* and *cold* media. He defines a *hot* medium as one that extends one single sense in "high definition" which is filled with data. He proposed the term *cold* medium to apply to one which has "low definition" because so little is given and so much has to be filled in by the listener. Under these definitions, radio is a *hot* medium as it extends listening. McLuhan (1964) comments that

Radio affects most people intimately, person-to-person, offering a world of unspoken communication between writer-speaker and the listener. That is the immediate aspect of radio. A private experience. This is inherent in the very nature of this medium, with its power to turn the psyche and society into a single echo chamber. (299)

Later theorists hold other, partly opposing, views regarding the notion of intimacy and believe that there are powerful ideologies inherent in technologies, with the consequence that

the adoption of particular media has implications for the social and religious meanings and expression of the message (J. Ellul; W. Ong, *Orality*; G. Gerbner *et al*). In other words, there is more to the message than the medium. C Arthur (1993) comments:

Consistent with this strand of thought is the insight that how the mass media function within a society has a strong shaping effect on how a society understands itself. This occurs in two ways. On the one hand, the media shape social understanding and expression by virtue of their nature and organization. Mass communications in themselves are strongly ideological: their messages are highly centralized, largely impersonal, machine mediated, lacking opportunity for feedback and participation, and restricted by their technological characteristics. This is compounded by the nature of their economic and social function. (44)

Thus, when the medium and the message are both constructed from similar ideological bases, the two effects must reinforce each other. It is under these circumstances that the use of radio as a medium for broadcasting sermons would appear to be especially effective, since sermons are themselves messages which are selected to reinforce particular ideologies. In addition, contemporary preachers expect no interaction between themselves and the listener¹¹, because it is not normally permissible or acceptable to heckle or question a preacher's words within an act of worship, especially in a church. The preacher thus possesses a certain power and authority whilst the listener is outwardly reduced to being subjugated and passive.¹² These combined effects result in a deeply patriarchal base in many religious institutions.

On the other hand, the radio as a medium can encourage the notion of intimacy and an active response. An illusion of intimacy can be produced in two ways by the preacher.

Firstly, listeners can submerge themselves into their private¹³ world with the preacher

¹¹ There have been a few preachers, particularly in the nineteenth century, who did interact with their audiences.

¹² Of course, a person is entitled to speak to the preacher after the act of worship. My experience is that this rarely happens because opportunity, time and personal reasons often prevent such interactions. A determined persistent person will make her/his point, but most parishioners say nothing, or complain amongst themselves.

¹³ Many people carry small personal radios in order to provide their own private world among crowds. Evidence of this can be seen every day on public transports systems, people riding bicycles and on crowded

appearing to be addressing the hearer alone, thereby creating a personal intimacy. Secondly, an illusion of intimacy-by-sharing operates if the speaker chooses a specific discursive language to deliver her/his message.¹⁴ The effects of intimacy are manifested in how listeners react to the radio. According to a study examining the role of radio in people's lives by S. Barnett and D. Morrison (1989):

One by one, the listeners with whom we spoke would make the somewhat embarrassed confession that they invariably spoke to their radio. Whether it be an anguished riposte to a totally unreasonable or contentious interviewee, the triumphant answer to an impossibly difficult quiz question or the frustrated groans at another squandered opportunity during live soccer commentary, the houses, cars, offices and factories of this country are full of people furtively locked in dialogue with their transistors. (7)

This study therefore contradicts the idea of the passive listener who lacks opportunity for participation. The reaction of listeners speaking to a radio might, in fact, be a phenomenon that could be seen within the context of the changing pattern of the current British household structures. Initially, families or groups sat round a single wireless set listening to a specific programme, usually selected by the "head of the household", and afterwards discussed the issues. Nowadays, radios are relatively inexpensive and more people are living on their own, either through choice, marital break-up and/or increased longevity of life (Office for National Statistics). As the number of single person households increases, sources other than co-habitants become important for social interaction. The illusion of intimacy-by-sharing becomes more like a two-way process when the listener talks back to the radio. Views appear to be exchanged. Moreover, during the last few years, the radio as a medium has increasingly

beaches or public spaces. In the domestic sphere, teenagers in particular, submerge themselves in noise from the radio whilst they do their homework. Moreover, since radios are relatively inexpensive, many households contain several radios. This has resulted in a fragmentation of the social listening experience as different people are able to listen to different programmes in different rooms.

¹⁴ Issues arising out of this point concerned with the use of "inclusive" language are discussed in chapter two.

encouraged interaction with listeners through phone-in programmes and listeners' comments or views for discussion programmes.

All the sample sermons were delivered primarily to a live congregation and the radio listeners were an extension of that audience. The delivery of my sermon sample was thus the traditional method of a preacher presenting a sermon in a church as a monologue, a one-way process. The use of the radio as a medium for delivering a sermon however effects a shift in the power positions of the preacher and the listener. One might argue that preachers speaking through the medium of radio have their power and authority reduced due to the illusions of intimacy whilst the listeners have their power increased because of these illusions. However, the purpose of preaching is to inform, persuade and engender an appropriate response to the message (G. Ireson; S. T. Logan, J. I. Packer; W. E. Sangster). Any reduction of the preacher's power may have an effect on the outcome of the response of the listeners to the sermons. The criteria for effective preaching are the ability to persuade and influence people derived from structures of domination (C. Smith). This masculine construct of power through persuasion is directly related to both the power of authority and the credibility of the speaker (Frieze *et al*). This is reflected in many homiletical texts (e.g. J. W. Cox *Preaching*; F. Craddock *Preaching*). However, the notion of intimacy-by-sharing is considered to be a feminine attribute (Harntnell, Boden and Fuller). Feminist theologians also advocate the use of a language of mutuality and dialogue in sermons: "authority and intimacy are of necessity inextricably woven together in feminist preaching" (C. Smith 47). The feminisation of the broadcast sermon due to an illusion-of-intimacy may act to dilute the response of listeners. However, this appears insignificant when compared with the strength of the combined dominant structures of the churches and mass communication.

The preacher's power may be enhanced if the preacher has a high status (K. Wolfe 81-4). Research on the impact of religious broadcasting on its audience indicates that audiences' perception of the source influences the efficacy of the communication itself:

In general, those sources which individuals hold in low esteem appear to constitute at

least a temporary handicap. Changes in opinion in the direction advocated by the communicator were significantly greater when material was credited as coming from a high credibility source than as coming from a low credibility source. (H.W. Robinson, *The Impact* 129)

This research suggests that sermons delivered through the medium of the radio by high ranking clergy such as bishops have a much greater impact on the listeners than ones delivered by a parish priest or minister. Whether this remains true for audiences of broadcast sermons in the 1990s is not known since BBC audience profile data are limited (letter to author from Canon N. Vincent, 14 March 1993).

The Anglican and the Roman Catholic churches are well established patriarchal institutions. They use titles such as Archbishop, Bishop, Dean, Canon, Rector, Vicar or Curate to designate hierarchical positions within their churches which denote authority and status. In contrast, the Nonconformist churches do not use ranks as status indicators in their organisations. Their clergy are all referred to as ministers: “even the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland only holds the office for one year and then resumes his [*sic*] service as an ordained minister within the structures of the Church of Scotland” (letter to author from Rev. A. McDonald, 4 Oct. 1994). A more egalitarian structure operates within these churches since they do not provide individuals with symbols that can be translated into traditional notions of authoritative power. Therefore, an Anglican or Roman Catholic listening to a bishop preaching may be influenced by the preacher’s status. However, members of the Nonconformist churches may be less likely to be influenced by the position and status of the speaker.

The listener’s individual reception of a sermon can be inflected by a further dimension, that of a sense of an “imagined community.”¹⁵ McLuhan refers to this imagined community as a “global village” and suggests that this sense of association can homogenise the group

¹⁵ For debate on whether this sense has to pre-exist the transmission or whether the latter can create community see P. M. Lewis and J. Booth, chapter six.

who are listening. Insofar as the idea of community is associated with women's greater sense of sharing and social interaction, the notion of an "imagined community" may represent another feminised aspect of broadcast worship. However, J. Atkinson (1979) raises a limitation to this dimension of feminisation:

Listening to the radio is often solitary and passive. Authentic religion is a call to response and action. Is not broadcast religion the opposite - an invitation to adopt the role of spectator? Perhaps even the electronic exposure to worship and other Christian activities may create a sense of need or desire for fellowship. Who will deal with those pastoral problems or provide the longed-for fellowship? It is demonstrably difficult for a box to cope with either situation. (102)

He suggests that the effect of such feminisation is reduced by broadcast acts of worship because they can only engender an abstract sense of community whereas corporate worship involves the physical as well.¹⁶

My brief examination of the radio as a medium for communication has raised several gender issues. It suggests that aspects of feminisation occur during the mass communication process. However, these are of limited influence when the ideologies of mass communication and the patriarchal institutions of the churches combine and reinforce each other to produce deep structures of domination which provide broadcast sermons. In 1978, J. Bluck stated: "the need for Christians to understand, evaluate and use the media creatively becomes more urgent than ever before" (54). In 1998 critiques of prevailing theological understandings of mass communication and domination need to include a feminist perspective.

I have commented that listeners may exercise their own forms of resistance to broadcast programmes. However, my interest focuses on those who remain listening to these sermons. In the following section I shall discuss aspects of the audience profile that are pertinent to this study.

¹⁶ For discussions concerning the authenticity of physical contact versus spiritual communion in sermons see C. Morris, *Love* 40-1.

The Specificities of Listeners to Religious Programmes

The BBC Religious Broadcasting Department follow the guide-lines set out by the Central Religious Advisory Committee (CRAC) which advises the BBC on policy matters relating to religion. CRAC membership is drawn from the major Christian traditions and world faiths represented in the UK. The aims of the religious broadcasting department¹⁷ are:

- (1) to seek to reflect the worship, thought and action of the principal religious traditions represented in the UK, recognising that those traditions are mainly, though not exclusively, Christian;
- (2) to seek to represent to viewers and listeners those beliefs, ideas, issues and experiences in the contemporary world which are evidently related to a religious interpretation or dimension of life;
- (3) to seek also to meet the religious interests, concerns and needs of those on the fringe of, or outside, the organized life of the church.

In general terms, there are four types of religious programmes broadcast on Radio 4: worship, music, documentary, and discussion. Each of the types of material is likely to attract different listeners though these audiences will overlap to some extent.

The most recent study examining the role of radio in people's lives commissioned by the Home Office was the undertaken by the Broadcasting Research Unit in 1987. The sole aim of the study was to investigate the needs of the radio audience. The report was published by HMSO in 1989 under the title *The Listener Speaks: The Radio Audience and the Future of Radio*. It found that "those who prefer local stations or Radio 4 are likely to listen every day. Radio has traditionally been recognised as a morning medium: the highest audiences are recorded in the morning" (10).

Radio listeners are known to be loyal to their particular favoured programme as the report editors Barnett and Morrison (1989) state:

¹⁷ The editorial policies, guide-lines and aims are observed by the five domestic radio services, local radio and the World services as well as the BBC's television service.

Listeners behave very differently from viewers and are generally loathe to switch around different stations, experiment, or change stations for particular programmes. The extent of this dedication changes a little, though not dramatically, depending on the time of the day. Two-thirds of weekday morning listeners stick to the same station rising to three quarters in the afternoon and evening. Saturday and Sunday listening is even more dedicated. (15)

The study also revealed that the commitment to Radio 4 over television is unmatched by other measurable groups.¹⁸ Sunday listening holds the highest loyalty factor throughout the day with a response of 81% in the morning, 90% in the afternoon and 87% in the evening. However, with respect to age profile and loyalty of station, 56% of the oldest groups stay loyal to Radio 4. Data revealing the profile of listeners to religious programmes indicate that the largest group is the oldest age group, composed of those over fifty-five, consisting of both sexes from all socio-economic classes.

Very little has been written about audiences of religious programmes. G. D. Gaddy (1984) states that "beyond popular editorial speculation, there has been little work on causes or consequences of religious broadcasting use" (289). The studies indicate that some sort of selection process does appear to take place. However, a distinction between de facto selectivity and selective exposure needs to be made (D. O. Sears and J. L. Freedman). De facto exposure is documented and demonstrates that religious people are more likely to listen to religious broadcasts as well as being in agreement with the values and beliefs of the communicator before s/he speaks (E. C. Parker, D. W. Barry and D. W. Smythe; F. L. Casmir; J. L. Dennis; H.W. Robinson *A Study*; R. C. Ringe; D. C. Solt; R. L. Johnstone; Gaddy, *Predictors*; J. M. Buddenbaum). However, studies concerned with the selective

¹⁸ The authors of the report assume that the only reason for the equivalent strength of devotion to Radio 4 and television is due to the fact that Radio 4 is a speech programme. This may be a causal factor but there are others. For example, one possible reason for loyalty could be that the programmes, other than short news bulletins, generally tend to be relatively short and varied on Radio 4. Thus, a listener might be less likely to change stations if they are not interested in a particular programme because a different one will soon be broadcast.

exposure hypothesis indicate that, although audiences do expose themselves to views that reflect their own, there is not much evidence that this happens because the audience has a preference for supportive information (Sears and Freedman 209-34). Some listeners may simply prefer a particular programme style without regard to religious content (H. W. Robinson, *The Impact*). Others may need affective, rather than intellectual reinforcement whilst some may be interested in the speaker's subject matter. Alternatively, they may not listen because they are not interested. The process of selection defines the audience of a religious programme as well as the effects of those broadcasts. As N. R. Johnson (1973) states emphatically:

The near universal conclusion of media research is that mass communication generally has a reinforcing effect. Each programme selects its audience and consequently reinforces opinions and interests rather than changes or creates them.
(448)

These reinforcement effects should not be minimised. B. R. Berelson (1960) has hypothesised that "the more specialized the media, the greater the reinforcement" (543). Religious media can be regarded as highly specialised. Therefore, at the same time that selection acts to reduce the size and diversity of the audience, it also acts to magnify the reinforcing effects, or at least keep these constant. A specific implication for religious broadcast is that if the audience is likely to select messages with which it already agrees, the churches will make contact through religious broadcasts with an audience already captive to them. Robinson (1966) comments that "religious broadcasts may be rather ineffective in touching unchurched people with the gospel and that actual conversion will be quite rare" (128). However, J. T. Klapper maintains that "although conversion is a far less frequent effect of mass communication than is reinforcement or minor change, it nevertheless does occur" (62). It seems that two contrary processes are at work: selection acts to decrease the proportion of the audience eligible for conversion and at the same time it increases the possibility that the fraction of the audience who are eligible for conversion will be converted,

because of the religious predisposition suggested by their behaviour (Gaddy, *The Power* 290). Nevertheless, the above mentioned studies indicate that in communicating religious messages radio functions as an agent of reinforcement far more than as an agent for change. This inference is significant from a feminist perspective as the latter aims for social change.

In the UK, religious programmes are broadcast to a minority of people. According to Canon Noel Vincent, chief producer of worship programmes BBC, “the audience rating for the act of worship broadcast on Radio 4 on Sunday mornings at 9.30-10.15 a.m. is estimated to be 1.07 million each Sunday. There are no audience profile statistics available” (letter to author, 14 March 1993). The reasons why people choose to listen to these particular programmes is not known: “it is difficult to distinguish from our figures alone between a listening diet which reflects deliberate consumer choice and a diet which is more the product of what is available” (Barnett and Morrison 47).

However, a higher proportion of the older population are women (National Statistics Office). Through being older, they may be conditioned to accept the status quo and are therefore less likely to consider themselves feminists and/or query androcentric positions. Nevertheless, most women, whatever their age, accept and recognise that injustices of sexual inequality in general have been the objects of change since second-wave feminism. Feminist emancipation is a slow process of evolution. What may not be achievable by women of one generation may be accomplished by succeeding generations as feminist research continues to expose gender inequality. This thesis is my response and contribution to that on-going process. Its main focus is to expose and analyse gender-bias in contemporary homiletical practices which subordinate and alienate women. The next chapter discusses the social-historical contexts within which Christianity developed and from which the modern sermon has evolved.

CHAPTER ONE

THE GENESIS AND EVOLUTION OF PREACHING IN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCHES.

This chapter is concerned with the development of the sermon as a form of address in the context of the rise and fall of the power of the Church as an institution. As the topic spans 2000 years of the history of Christianity, I shall consider only the relevant major issues during this period. My focus is on the historical perspectives that produced the genderization of homiletical practices. I seek to analyse the beginnings and the institutional, organisational forms of the Church as a hetero-patriarchy, which led to the use of the sermon in services as one device defining genderised roles for women and men; to trace the rise of the Church as a hegemony which used preaching as a coercive force to act as a medium for social control and its subsequent decline in power with the emergence of the democratic state; and finally to consider the legacy of these power paradigms with respect to sermons delivered in a contemporary acts of worship.

1.1 The Jesus Movement and Early Christian Missionary Movement Within Judaism

The Jewish liturgy evolving over many centuries reached a stabilised form about two centuries before Christ (S. Maybaum; W. O. Oesterley). The Old Testament asserts that God spoke through the preaching of Moses and other Hebrew prophets. It contains many examples of spiritual discourse delivered by leaders of the people, who were judges, priests and prophets. The prophets, and many of the great mystic saints, were presented as channels of the divine word which had been revealed to them:

Then I said, "Ah, Lord God! Behold I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth." But the Lord said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a youth'; for to all whom I send you shall go, and whatever I command you shall speak. Be not afraid

of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.” Then the Lord put forth his hand and touched my mouth; and the Lord said to me, “Behold I have put my words in your mouth.” (Jer. 1. 6-9)

The Old Testament prophets were essentially preachers and the Judaic liturgy demonstrates the importance which Jews attached to the spoken word (J. Lindblom 311-2). At this time Orthodox synagogue worship included three basic elements: prayer, scriptural reading and scriptural discussion. Oral reading of the text was followed by oral commentary which broadened into a discussion during which adult male members of the congregation participated. Though this took a variety of forms in Jewish practice, the basic pattern of exegesis, comparison of texts and citing of parallels, was invariably text plus commentary (Oesterley 305-7; G. F. Moore 41-2, 111-21). Thus, Christ was a member of a community whose culture was familiar with this form of rhetorical process of integration and sharing as a means of learning (J. J. Murphy, *Rhetoric* 272-3).

The New Testament focuses on the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, who reflected this communicative practice in his preaching. Matthew records in his Gospel that

Jesus Christ began to preach, saying, “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”..And he went about Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people. (Matt. 4. 17, 23)

The Gospels and epistles are kerygmatic texts¹ which detail how Christ preached and that the apostles in turn repeated the process. An account of how Jesus taught in the synagogue can be found in Luke 4. 16b-21:

And he went to the synagogue as his custom was, on the Sabbath day. And he stood up to read; and was there was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the

¹ Kerygma is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as “the words of Jesus kerygma, not dogma, nature, or science and the miracle of the kerygma is just this, that through the once and for all event in Jesus Christ becomes event all over again in the faith of the hearer. Hence kerygmatic (adj.)-belonging to or the nature of preaching”.

book and found the place where it was written, “The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering the sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.” And he closed the book and gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Three basic elements within this sermon are apparent: the liturgical, the exegetical and the prophetic. Christ’s sermon was delivered within the context of a Jewish service and he spoke from the text, but his sermon is summed up with the prophetic declaration, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” Christ declares that he is preaching God’s word. These words place on preachers the responsibility of being more than a commentator on the text as is the Jewish tradition. Christian preaching supposedly mediates not only God’s authority, but also His *presence* and His *power* (Y. Brilioth 8-10).

In addition, Christ commanded his followers to spread his ideas through speech. This is clearly stated in the Synoptic Gospels by Matthew, Mark and Luke. Mark 3.14-5 reads: “And he appointed twelve, to be with him, and to be sent out to preach.” Matthew writes:

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority on heaven and earth has been given to me. Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded of you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.” (Matt. 28. 17-20)

According to J. J. Murphy (1974) the Synoptic Gospels say that “Christ states that preaching as teaching is a fundamental responsibility of all his followers” (*Rhetoric* 274). However, there was no precedent for this command. The Jews saw their duty as guardians of their body of Scripture which had been entrusted to the people of Israel alone. The integrity of the Jewish system required religion and national identity to be inseparable: “the Judaism of the

time had no other claim than to save the tiny nation from sinking into the broad sea of heathen culture” (A. Klausner 376).

Christ’s command to spread the Gospel on a global basis, coupled with no distinction concerning those people to whom it should be preached, promulgated missionary preaching, resulting in Christians being converted from various ethnic groups. Moreover, Christ shared the Jewish methodology of multiple interpretations, recommended it to his followers and expected it to be a major factor in the new Christian message system (Murphy, *Rhetoric* 280). Christ did not deny women the opportunity to be active as prominent missionary leaders in the Jesus movement; neither did he declare that his narratives should be reduced to one ideological statement with a fixed meaning.²

The Oral Tradition of Preaching

Preaching in the time of Christ was, as it is today, an oral form. This can allow for the rapid spread of instruction across space in densely populated areas. It does not demand high standards of education on the part of the preacher since lack of reading skills can be compensated for by a retentive memory. Lack of either or both of these skills in the audience does not immediately matter. However, there is the ever-present issue of distortion as accounts are passed from one person to another. Many studies have been undertaken assessing the accuracy of verbatim repetition of poems, songs and stories within oral cultures (W. J. Ong, *Orality* 30-77). J. Opland (1976) concluded that “any poet in the community will repeat the poem, which is in my mind limited testing, at least sixty percent in correlation with other versions” (114). This study suggests that even in an oral culture, a high degree of accuracy in the repeating of poems does not necessarily occur. A study by A. B. Lord (1960) on the memory feats of oral bards shows that although singers are aware that two different singers never sing the same song exactly alike, nevertheless a singer will protest that “he can

² For an analysis of this development of modes of multiple interpretation in respect to medieval preaching, see Harry Caplan “The Four Senses of Scriptural Interpretation.”

do his own version of a song line for line and word for word, any time and indeed, just the same twenty years from now” (27). Lord’s results indicate that when their renditions are recorded and compared, they turn out never to be the same, though the songs are recognisable versions of the same story. As Lord states: “word for word and line for line is simply an emphatic way of saying ‘like’” (28). R. Finnegan (1977) also found no greater verbatim accuracy, “only close similarity, in places amounting to word-for-word repetition” (76). Thus, there are variations from one performance to another by the same speaker as well as variations of the “same” song between different performers. A similar degree of difference can be expected in relation to preaching.

However, many theologians do not accept that there is a considerable degree of distortion of the stories of Jesus due to the fallibility of the memory. Whilst accepting some difference, C. H. Dodd (1958) posits strict limits to the margin of uncertainty. He challenges the notion that the oral tradition is the equivalent of gossip and states that

it is the sifted and certified tradition of a community. The early Christian Church was an intimate community and an effectively organized community. It had a strong sense both of its duty to publish its faith and of the responsibility for the truth of what it published. The Christian community, acting through its accredited agents - apostles, evangelists and teachers - knew that it was on its honour to speak the truth, like a witness in court. (15)

In his argument, Dodd assumes that speaking “the truth” and repeating the same thing word-for-word are the same. He also declares that the memories of the disciples were better trained and more accurate: “among the Jews the teaching of a Rabbi was preserved and transmitted by word of mouth. The disciples of Jesus adopted the same method as a matter of course. They were not likely to be less conscientious about it than the disciples of any Jewish Rabbi” (Dodd, *About* 14). Thus, Dodd adheres to a fundamentalist view of the truth of the Scriptural texts.

The period of oral tradition before the first of the Gospels emerged in written form probably lasted about thirty years. The followers of Jesus retold what they remembered of Christ's ministry and teachings, and wandering charismatic healer-preachers also recounted their recollections (G. Thiessen). They retold their stories for many reasons which include: (1) to ensure that the details would not be forgotten, (2) to win followers for Christ, (3) to help them to understand Christ's message, (4) to provide them with an oral commentary on the Scriptures, and (5) to share the Good News of Christ. The preaching of the early church remained in oral form, focusing on the stories and sayings of Jesus, largely because they believed in his imminent return.³

Furthermore, there was a prohibition against writing by others than the authorised scribes (Wilson 22). At the time of Christ, there were two powerful factions among the Jews. One group eventually compiled the written text of the Mishnah, a Hebrew commentary on the Jewish Law, whilst the other group translated the scriptures into Aramaic, the common language of the day. However, E. J. Goodspeed (1942) comments:

They were prevented from maintaining written records and they were obliged to commit their work to memory since use of writing would have claimed for them an equal status with "That Which Was Written." It was some considerable time before this prohibition against writing was removed. (2)

Thus, the Jewish authorities maintained a form of control and censorship of the interpretation of the Laws as well as retaining power over a largely illiterate populus.

The Preaching Mission of St. Paul (3-68)

The Acts of the Apostles chapter 9.1-32 detail the conversion of Paul of Tarsus who is widely regarded as one of the greatest orators in Christian history. He introduced several new concepts regarding the issue of preaching: the relation of grace and preaching, the contrast

³ Throughout the history of Israel, particularly when her fortunes were at their bleakest, the Jews believed that they would be delivered from being dominated by 'unbelievers' and Israel would be set free (Maurybaum; Oesterley).

between preaching and ordinary oratory, the authority of the preacher, and the relation between preaching and the act of worship (Brilioth 16-18; Murphy, *Rhetoric* 280-4). Paul suggested that the power of a preaching discourse might depend on God's gift of grace to speaker and hearer, rather than on the rhetorical skill of the speaker: "and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (1Cor. 2.4). This proposition implies that the possession of grace makes human rhetorical skill⁴ unnecessary because God's message is so powerful that it only needs to be uttered.⁵ According to Murphy, "one practical result of this principle was that for a dozen centuries the Church was almost exclusively concerned with *what* to preach not *how*" (*Rhetoric* 282).

Ancient rhetoric was entirely speaker-oriented. Paul identified another element in Christian preaching which is the concern for the spiritual welfare of listeners rather than the success of the preacher (1Cor 1. 17-20). Paul is saying that the message not only has divine power but that the preacher has a special duty to enable all people to know Christ. Thus, the Christian orator is to work for the salvation of his hearers.⁶

Many New Testament scholars consider Paul's letters as essays because the sermon, as we now know it, was still taking shape (R. Bailey). However, scholars who have studied Paul's writings have demonstrated that his preaching differs radically from the pre-gospel preaching of his contemporaries in the Jerusalem-centred church (T. G. Long, *Preaching*). According to Wilson (1992):

It [Paul's preaching] is primarily centred in conceptual arguments, not narratives which dominate the Jesus tradition...He uses Scripture with great frequency, though

⁴ This is different from Plato's idea of truth being persuasive in itself, or the Stoic-Senecan view that the speaker should speak with simplicity to let the message transmit itself. It is also different from Aristotle's dictum that the truth will prevail if opponents have equal skill.

⁵ Note the remark of St. Thomas Aquinas: "the Holy Spirit makes use of the human tongue as an instrument, but it is He who perfects the work within us" (*Summa theologiae*, 2a, 2ae. 177.1).

⁶ B. Chenu *et al* (1990) comment that this gives rise to martyrdom out of the work of proclamation: "if Christians died specifically for Christ, they imitate his passion and their actions speak more powerfully than their words" (6).

not in detailed fashion. He often appeals to texts as simple proofs of argument and will follow a brief explanation of a text with an application...What we see in Paul is the proclaimed word still taking shape. (25)

Patterns of ancient rhetoric broadly defined as “established oral ways of persuasive speech,” can be found in some of Paul’s texts: thus rhetoric is fundamental to Paul’s style of preaching (B. L. Mack 56-7). Whether or not Paul’s letters are regarded as sermons, his influence on establishing the importance of preaching cannot be understated:

it is clear that preachers found instruction in both the preaching practices and the metarhetorical statements of Christ and Paul. Both figures became enshrined apodeitically⁷ in what became the New Testament. Christ’s mandate for preaching, his use of parables and multiple significations, Paul’s theology of preaching and his influence on the liturgy - all these factors operated powerfully in the earliest centuries of the new church. (Murphy 284)

After he left a community, and sometimes before speaking to a community, Paul wrote letters to them as a way of setting up a communication network among new Christian churches. In sending his spoken word in a letter he claims the same authority as if he were bodily present. As he writes:

For though absent in body I am present in spirit, and as if present, I have already pronounced judgement in the name of the Lord Jesus on the man who has done such thing. When you are assembled, and my spirit is present with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan....(1Cor. 5. 3-5).

In insisting on the authority of presence in absence, Paul was strengthening the position of the written word. Moreover, Paul also asked that his letters to the churches be read aloud so they could be shared with the community: “and when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you read also the letter from

⁷ Apodeitically is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as “expressing necessary truth, absolutely certain, capable of clear and certain demonstration.”

Laodicea" (Col. 4.16). By reading aloud the letters of Paul, an oral form of teaching as preaching was being encouraged which promoted the use of the written word. However, this emphasis on speaking the written word does not imitate the oral tradition of Christ's preaching. Simultaneously, this instruction offered a means of delivering Paul's words *verbatim* which privileged them. Importantly, it conjoins the oral tradition with a written dimension, thereby creating the precedence for the androcentric formalisation and structuralisation of a preacher's discourse.

Some scholars have sought to delineate the difference between the Jesus movement in Palestine and the Christian movement in the Greco-Roman cities as a difference between Jesus and Paul, thereby constructing Paul as the founder of Christianity (L. E. Keck, *Ethos* 29-49). Fiorenza (1983) takes issue with this reconstruction of early Christian origins:

The difference between the two movements cannot be traced to Jesus and Paul but only to the development of two distinct environments which were propelled by different goals. As a consequence they appealed to different religious-political experiences, as well as to different theological legitimizations. Both movements were inspired by Jesus, the Christ, but both saw him in quite different lights. The Christian movement had already developed *before* Paul and was joined by him. Paul has become its most important figure because his letters have survived oblivion, but he was neither its initiator nor its sole leader. (101)

She also questions the notion that Paul's unquestioned authority represents the "orthodox" apostolic position: "such a construction has no basis in history since Paul's letters show clearly that he and his missions were very controversial and far from acknowledged by all the segments of the early Christian movement" (Fiorenza 101).

Moreover, many groups of the faithful met in private houses. Though few details remain concerning preaching in the early part of the first century, this informal atmosphere probably encouraged people to suggest interpretations and opinions. Thus, the early house church, centred in the private sphere, was free from institutionalised constraints as it functioned in an

egalitarian system (K.J. Torjesen 7). The early Christian movements were initiated by women and men from the rural dominant patriarchal Jewish background of the Jesus movement and the dominant religious culture of urban Roman-Hellenism which moved in different environments and operated in both private and public spheres. There is, therefore, no single community of early Christians who constitute “the Judeo-Christian tradition” used by most male theologians to describe “the common history of Jews and Christians”.

1.2 The Bible and the Word of God

The Bible is a collection of the sacred writings of the Christian religion comprising of the Old and New Testaments and regarded as *The Word*⁸ of God. The Old Testament comprises the sacred Scriptures of the Hebrews, which records the history of the Hebrew people as the chosen people of God. The New Testament consists of the Gospels, Acts of the Apostles, Pauline and other Epistles, and the book of Revelations. The oldest of the four Gospels⁹ is attributed to Mark, reputed to have been written shortly after the great fire of Rome in AD64. That is to say, it was written about thirty-five years after the events it records. It is not certain how early the traditions of the sayings of Jesus began to be written down. Dodd (1958) suspects that it was not long after the church extended into Greek-speaking countries:

The Greeks were bookish people and liked to have things in writing. So by degrees they compiled fly-sheets with a few sayings on some special topic. Then the fly-sheets were brought together into more comprehensive collections. It seems certain that there were a number of sayings of Jesus in circulation. Some of them were used in the composition of the Gospels. (15)

⁸ “Word” is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as “Scripture, the Bible, or the Gospels as embodying and representing divine revelation. Often called the Word of God.” (translation of Greek *logos*, as in the Gospel according to John 1.1).

⁹ The modern English word “Gospel” comes from the west Saxon i.e. Old English term *Godspel*, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, when the phrase was adapted as the translation of *evangelium*. The ambiguity of its written form led to it being interpreted as a compound GOD + ‘spel’ in the sense of discourse or story. GOD + spel = God’s tidings, which passes into the continental Germanic languages from the English missions. In each case the form of the first element shows that it identified with ‘God’ and not ‘Good’. Thus, the gospels are records of Christ’s life and teaching contained in the books written ‘for evangelists’.

Every year after AD65 surviving eye-witnesses grew scarcer. But by AD75 the church had become a copious body, with growing numbers of converts to be instructed and an increasing number of teachers to be recruited. W. Neil (1965) maintains that the Gospel according to Matthew was written to answer a need for a standard text-book or authoritative work of reference:

It was necessary to have something in writing for the use of those converts and catechumens who would not have the verbal instruction and inspiration of apostolic teachers and preachers. (36)

The oral tradition was most successful in rural communities where people could neither read nor write. At the same time, with this written material a wider public could be reached than through street-corner preaching. In the cities, life moved at a higher tempo, there were more distractions and less time to devote to memorising texts. The Gospel according to Luke of about AD75 is considered to have been written for this group of people; C. H. Dodd refers to this Gospel “as a missionary book” (*About* 29). Those targeted were the educated, reading classes in the cities of Europe. St. Luke’s preface gives a clue to the reasons why he wrote his gospel:

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, just as they were delivered by those from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed. (Luke 1, 1-4)

He seems to indicate that various attempts had been made to write a collection of Jesus’s sayings, no trace of which exist today, along the lines which he himself follows. There appear to be three main reasons why this Gospel was written down: (1) to reach a wider and educated audience, (2) to establish more control over the versions of Christian narratives in

circulation by proclaiming the “truth” of some, and (3) to preserve what were considered to be eye-witness accounts in the context of temporal movement.

The fourth book of the Gospels, that according to John, is now dated by some scholars as early as Luke’s, and all would place it in the first century (C. K. Barrett). Christianity had hitherto been stated in Hebrew terms, but if it was to appeal to the Greek-speaking world it had to be preached in ways which they could understand and appreciate. Goodspeed (1940) maintains:

To meet the needs of the Greek public some adjustments had to be made. Christianity was addressing it in Jewish terms. A Greek who felt like becoming a Christian was called upon to accept Jesus as Christ, the Messiah. He would naturally ask what this meant and would have to be given a short course in Jewish apocalyptic thought...The times demanded that Christianity be transplanted to Greek soil and translated into universal terms. The Gospel of John is the response to this demand. (297-8)

According to D. Macleod (1987) “the New Testament can be regarded as a record of the witness and action of the disciples and today the Christian preacher’s task is to take words once spoken and make them speak again” (30). T. H. L. Parker (1967) also comments, “preaching is the hand-maiden of the eternal word which God once uttered and which was witnessed by the words of the apostles” (21). They declare that the New Testament is the actual transcript of the early Christian movements and the Scriptures written by men should be heard as the Word of God through the voice of the preacher. Thus, they consider that followers of Christ should imitate him or repeat the stories in the transcripts.

This androcentric view of the New Testament is contested by feminist theologians who consider the Gospels to be paradigmatic remembrances, which are expressions of communities and individuals who attempted to say what the significance of Jesus was for their own situations, and not comprehensive accounts of the historical Jesus (C. E. Carlston; R. T. Fortna; H. C. Kee). According to Fiorenza (1983):

The Gospels may not be understood as actual transcripts of the life or work of

historical Jesus nor simply as textual tenets abstracted from their historical context and their social world. They did not simply set down what Jesus said and did; rather, they attempted to comprehend what Jesus meant to his first followers and what meaning his life had for their own time and communities. The Gospels center on the life-praxis of Jesus and speak of women only in passing. When they do so, they tell us as much about the community to whom these stories or sayings were transmitted as about the historical women in the life of Jesus. (102)

Fiorenza's historical-critical perspective considers the Scriptures to be invitations to discipleship as she focuses on the New Testament writers' concern with proclamation and interpretative persuasion. The Christian historical sources thus reflect the experience, opinion or control of the male writer but not of women's historical reality and experience and should be read as androcentric texts.

Most of the New Testament literature was written in the last third of the first century. In the last decade of the first century Christian texts emerged that sought to order relationships in terms of the Greco-Roman household (Colossians, Ephesians, 1Peter). Neither a stabilised form of monoepiscopal office nor a unified structure of organization yet existed: "the situation in Asia Minor seems to have been still very fluid and diversified " (Fiorenza 245).

1.3 House Churches, Women Priests and the Emergence of the Church as a Body Politic

No highly organised communications system for preaching existed in the first three centuries of Christianity. All the evidence indicates that the early house churches had a regular worship which included readings with discussions (W. Meeks; C. Richardson). The main medium of communication was an egalitarian oral exchange between preacher and listeners (Torjesen; D. Sawyer). Thus, no authority was invested in the preacher's interpretations of the texts: "the early Christian movement was not defined by the dichotomy

between the religious equality of all members and the spiritual superiority of the apostle and other ministers” (Fiorenza 286).

For more than two centuries Christianity was essentially a religion of the private sphere (Fiorenza 160-204). It was practised in the private space of households rather than in the public space of temples. Thus its concerns were the domestic life of the community rather than the political life of the city. Wherever Christianity spread, women were leaders of house churches. This was accepted in Greco-Roman society because it was assumed that women’s speech in the household would reflect women’s subordination to her man (husband, father, or master) which in turn would be transmitted through her interpretation of the Scriptures (Torjesen 33-41). The shift from charismatic leadership and communal authority to an authority vested in local officers occurred in the second century. This shift generated three interlocking developments:

(1) the patriarchalization of local church and leadership; (2) the merger of prophetic and apostolic leadership with the patriarchially defined office of bishop; and (3) the relegation of women’s leadership to marginal positions and its restriction to the sphere of women (Fiorenza 288).

By the third century, the practice of adjudicating disputes led to the establishment of bishops’ courts (Torjesen 156). In 306, when Constantine became the first Christian emperor, he placed the bishops’ court on the same legal basis as the empire’s municipal courts. Thus, subordination and respect for bishops were developing theologically towards an understanding of authority vested in monarchical episcopacy:

the bishop’s throne stood at the front and center of the worshipping community and was eventually placed on a raised platform. In this new understanding of church office, the bishop ruled the congregation in God’s stead (Torjesen 157).

Consequently, the patriarchially defined authority of the monoepiscopacy became “the social symbolic centre for patristic Christians” (Fiorenza 304).

Until this period the Romans persecuted the Christians. They used punishment, coercion and distraction as they sought to control the people (B. Chenu *et al* 3-21; M. G. King 16-7). After three centuries of Christian martyrdom the Roman Emperors realised their strategy was unsuccessful. Licinius met with Constantine in 313 and they agreed an edict which made all religions in the Empire equal (J. W. Wand 123-9). Nevertheless, Licinius renewed his persecutions. Constantine waged war on him and his victory made him sole ruler of Europe (R. Bainton 116-9). However, the Church became divided and Constantine summoned the First Ecumenical Council at Nicaea AD325. Twenty canons promulgated by the church fathers dealt as much with administrative details as with religious doctrine. They decreed for example that prayers shall be offered standing and bishops had the special function of preaching (C. J. Hefele).

Thus, new formalities of Christian liturgies began to evolve as Christian services became an increasingly public event. This gradual process of transformation attracted members of the ruling elites who were not only trained for public speaking but also experienced in city politics. Their notions of authority, order, organization and leadership came from the political life of the city and many Christian communities welcomed these aristocratic members. This resulted in the concept of leadership shifting from ministry to governance. The church, thus, was emerging as an established hierarchy, with preaching being a duty confined to the senior clerics.¹⁰

Nevertheless, a bishop could not preach simultaneously throughout his diocese and this responsibility therefore needed to be unofficially delegated to others. Moreover, there was no recognised means of policing the observance of this canon. It is likely that there were many preachers, other than bishops, in the early centuries, and some records of their work have

¹⁰ The strident and powerful writings of Tertullian insisted that the church was a public institution and viewed the transgressing of the boundaries of women's proper sphere as a primary cause and example of the moral decadence of the third century. His enormous influence in recasting the structures and functions of church life in the mould of public life contributed to the shaping of Western Christianity which excluded women by virtue of their gender, social class and professional training (Torjesen 158-73). For a comparison of Tertullian with the Latin moralists on women's issues see J. C. Fredouille.

probably been deliberately lost, or rejected as insignificant (Wilson 13). This could be the case particularly with regard to records of women preachers who had fallen out of favour by the latter part of the fifth century (J. Morris; B. Brooten). In addition, there is a hidden history of women's leadership which has been suppressed by selective memory of succeeding male historians: Roger Gryson (1979) in his book *The Ministry of Women in the Early Church* declares this consensus of his and preceding generations:

From the beginnings of Christianity, women assumed an important role and enjoyed a place of choice in the Christian community. Paul praised several women who assisted him in his apostolic works. Women also possessed the charisma of prophecy. There is no evidence, however, that they exercised leadership roles in the community. Even though several women followed Jesus from the onset of his ministry in Galilee and figured among the privileged witnesses at his resurrection, no women appeared among the Twelve or even among the other apostles. As Epiphanius of Salamis pointed out, there have never been women presbyters. (109)

The view that women played little or no role in the Jesus movement is still held by most Christians including clergy and scholars (Torjesen 11). Nevertheless, evidence that women were priests in the early church is still being discovered in archaeological sites (T. Harper; F. Nitro-Garriga). In addition there is considerable proof, literary and epigraphic, for women's leadership in this period:

Pliny, the Roman Governor of Bythinia (ca. 110) mentions two slave women (*ancillae*) who were ministers of a Christian community. Cyprian (third century) mentions a woman presbyter in Cappodacia. A fourth century papyrus refers to a Christian woman, named Kyria, as a teacher (*diadaskalos*). (Torjesen 115)

Friction between social conventions about women's place and women's roles as house leaders, prophets, evangelists, and even bishops precipitated bitter arguments:

As Christianity entered the public sphere, male leaders began to demand the same

subjugation of women in the churches as prevailed in Greco-Roman society at large. Their detractors reproached women leaders, often in strident rhetoric, for operating outside the domestic sphere and thus violating their natural and society's moral codes. (Torjesen 38)

The distinction between public and private space and the notions about fe/male attributes functioned as coercive forces against women's leadership. Nevertheless, it is likely that women continued to preach in formal as well as informal capacities: "the era and its institutions were virtually saturated by contradictions between the codes that purport to limit women's roles and the obvious fact of women's influence in every sector, including the public" (Torjesen 115).

By the fourth century Christian worship was changing from an unregulated informal social movement to an official organised institution which worshipped in public temples called basilicas. Thus, architectural space defined Christian worship as public (T. G. Jackson 17-9; H. Kahler 54-8). This resulted in greater controversy over women's leadership because the public-versus-gender ideology restricted women's activities (Torjesen 155-6).

As Christianity became a patriarchal state religion which adopted attitudes towards gender roles derived from Greco-Roman society, fewer women held church offices. The legitimacy of women's leadership roles was contested resulting in "a canon in AD475 which forbade women to preach in public, because it was considered offensive to men" (Wilson 14). This injunction is also understood as an apostolic prohibition against women writing books on their own authority (Fiorenza 309). Nevertheless, it took centuries to repress women's authority as teachers in the church. The process of total exclusion was never accomplished since women have claimed mystic-prophet teaching authority¹¹ throughout succeeding centuries (A. Oden).

¹¹ Among others, Hildegard of Bingen, Julian of Norwich, Mechthild of Magdeburg, Catherine of Siena, Teresa of Avila, Susanna Wesley, Lucretia Mott and Georgia Harkness.

Preaching methodology was not debated by the bishops during the first four centuries: “it was not regarded as a key issue though urgent theoretical questions did receive attention” (Murphy 285). However, during the fourth century the character of the sermon changed. Though it continued to be a liturgical act, it was placed into the developing order of the service. The sermon followed the lections in order to establish a connection between the address and the text which had just been read (Brilioth 25). This indicates the beginnings of the formalisation of the act of worship though the preaching ministry does not appear to have been completely transformed with defined sermonic practices. However, St Augustine (354-430) produced the major preceptive treatise on preaching which influenced and still influences the Churches theology and preaching.¹²

1.4 Preaching from the Early Middle Ages (AD 650) to The Reformation (16th Century)

From 650-1200, the monastic institutions provided formalised training and discipline for male monks. Women were not permitted in these institutions though they had nunneries.¹³ There was a rigid hierarchy among the clergy; parish priests with little education were considered inferior to the élite contemplatives of the monastic orders, whilst the highest status was reserved for bishops who exercised ultimate authority (Brilioth 61-73). However, at the Second Council of Vaison AD529, the preaching monopoly of the bishops was broken by allowing priests to preach, supposedly because “it was for the edification of all churches and the benefit of all the peoples not only in the cities but also in the rural areas. If, because of illness, the priest is unable to preach, let the homilies of the holy fathers be read by the deacons” (P. F. Mulhern 687). This order presupposed that the sermons, written in Latin, were able to be read by the speaker.

¹² The development of the Latin sermon and the influence of St. Augustine in homiletics is discussed in chapter six which focuses on the structure and style of sermons.

¹³ In the earlier Anglo-Saxon period there were double monasteries (with women and men).

Moreover, between AD550 and AD700 the Latin spoken as a vernacular in various parts of Europe evolved into various forms of the Romance languages (Ong, *Orality* 112). After this time, speakers of these offshoots of Latin were unable to understand the old written Latin; their spoken language had moved too far away from its origins. The official discourse of Church or state continued in Latin and was taught in schools. Learned Latin became prescribed through school statutes and was thus controlled by writing, whilst the new Romance languages developed orally (Ong, *Orality* 113). It not only became a written language, it was also a language which was sex-linked.¹⁴ For over a thousand years, Learned Latin was a language written and spoken mostly by males and “clerics continued the custom of making their sermon outlines in Latin, even though they spoke French, German or English” (Brilioth 70). Moreover, monastic education at that time was primarily for the purpose of enabling devotional readings and daily offices. Consequently, many preachers acted as mere mouthpieces for mechanical translations of sermons by the senior clerics. Therefore, although the authority to preach was delegated to a priest, what he preached was still controlled by the bishop. The authority and the influence of the episcopacy further consolidated the institutionalisation and prescription of sermonic practices.

The relationship between the monks and pastoral care and between monks and the secular orders is unclear. Nevertheless, there was a lack of provision for training secular clergy in the organization of the early medieval church. Therefore, the parish priest was not trained in the construction of sermons or in the specialised skills which combine rhetorical and didactic abilities. B. Hamilton (1986) offers the following reasons for this:

Before 1100 most ordinands were trained by their parish priests, who taught them how to read Latin service books. Until priestly celibacy was enforced in the twelfth century ordinands were often the sons of priests and learned their father's skills. It is clear that many priests had only a formal knowledge of Latin. They could read the

¹⁴ Ong comments that Latin was a language learned outside the home which, because of its base in academia, was totally male - with exceptions so utterly rare as to be quite negligible (*Fighting* 119-48).

liturgy, but would not understand what they read. (69)

Nevertheless, a regular worship service was held at least once each Sunday in each community throughout the Christian world. Murphy comments:

It must be remembered that Christian liturgy consistently included both the reading of Scripture and some form of commentary upon that reading. A staggering total of discourses was involved, when one considers the thousands of churches active over hundreds of years. (*Rhetoric* 297)¹⁵

Under the influence of the Carolingian renaissance, more emphasis was given to preaching as an educational device and it was recommended for use for instruction on the Lord's prayer, the Creed and the Ten Commandments (Brilioth 70).

In the ninth and tenth centuries, as a result of the Benedictine revival the Latin verb *praedicare* became the term for the task of preaching. The objective was to translate the Gospel every time it was read into the language of the people and to explain it with the addition of exhortations (J. M. Connors 691-2). Furthermore, it was deemed important that the teaching must serve to enlighten people. Thus the preacher was to assume a pedagogical role (Brilioth 71). There were many different ways in which the responsibility of preaching could be discharged, varying from a very simple interpretation to applying a homily from a collection of patristic sermons. In c.992 -998, Aelfric, later abbot of Eynsham, wrote the two series of *Catholic Homilies* which provided preaching material in English for the *temporale*, and which he issued with *Prefaces* which outline his hope that they will be used to educate the unlearned man as well as the educated. The intention was for the *Catholic Homilies* to be circulated around the parishes, but the expense of hand-written copying prevented all but the

¹⁵ The addition of vernacular sermons to the Latin also served to increase this total. Canon 17 of the third Council of Tours AD813 called on bishops to provide for vernacular preaching "so that all could more easily understand what was said".

churches with a rich patronage from being able to use these sermons. Thus the Church was developing a hegemony by using sermons to educate and instruct its audience.¹⁶

In 1073 Pope Gregory VII led a struggle between the Holy Roman empire and papacy for supremacy in world politics. He envisioned a Christian theocracy governing the world through a Roman pontiff. Conflicts increased between church and state over the locus of authority and the hegemony of power. Towards the latter end of the early Middle Ages, the general level of the clerical learning improved, although many rural areas still had barely educated and poorly trained priests (H. Dressler 687; M. Deanesely 104-16).

According to Brilioth (1965), "the renewal of preaching, which is one of the distinctive characteristics of the later Middle Ages, 1200-1500, can be traced to three major sources: the Crusades, the monasteries and scholasticism" (74). As B. Hamilton (1986) states:

Throughout the twelfth century the papacy co-ordinated preaching for particular purposes such as the launching of new crusades, the introduction of new reforms and the combating of heresy. For heretical leaders attracted large followings through their preaching, particularly where there was no tradition of regular preaching among the Catholic clergy. (71)

For this purpose, travelling preachers were permitted to speak outdoors, often beneath some spot marked by a portable cross. The cross was a focal point which reminded the audience of the sacrifice which Christ made through his death by crucifixion. It also gave authority to the preacher who was addressing people who were not necessarily frequent attenders at church services. Outdoor preaching attracted large crowds at a time when there were few other distractions from the arduous living conditions. Furthermore, the general lack of education provided an audience which was susceptible to the persuasive power of oratory. With few possessions and little prospects of betterment the infectious enthusiasm of a crowd encouraged volunteers for the crusades. Thus, preaching adopted a political slant as it was

¹⁶ c1000-1200, collections of homiletical texts such as the *Blickling Homilies* and the *Vercelli Homilies* also had some currency; unlike Aelfric, though, the authors of these other homilies had little concern for strict orthodoxy and freely mingled apocryphal material with orthodox texts.

used to recruit combating armies. Moreover, the success of the crusades increased the prestige and power of the Pope and bishops (Deanesely 104-16).

At the beginning of the thirteenth century two new religious orders of mendicant friars were established: the Order of Preachers, the Dominicans, and the Order of Friars Minor, the Franciscans. The primary role of the Dominicans was to teach the clergy theology, whilst that of the Franciscans was to preach to the laity. The latter who were devoted to evangelical preaching toured the countryside. Their preaching became the focus of contact between them and their audiences. Thus, the Franciscans played a considerable part in influencing those who did not normally attend church services (Bainton 33; Deanesely 152-61).

During the pontificate of Innocent III (1198-1216), monasticism strengthened the Church's influence on its peoples. The Franciscans sought and obtained approval from this Pope who had laid restrictions on them: they were to preach only on the subject of penitence. They became renowned for their reconciliation of feuds and by so doing acquired pseudo-judicious powers over the populous. Thus, the ideals of the Church had an impact on every aspect of culture as it engaged in an alliance with politics. Both the Dominican and Franciscan orders spread rapidly and by 1300 most large towns had their own group of friars.¹⁷ The extensive literature created by the mendicant friars on the art of preaching, *artes praedicandi*, is evidence that they considered the task of preaching of prime importance (T. M. Charland). This increased number of technical homiletical manuals was stylising the format of the sermon, as well as confirming the authority of those who followed procedures; the preaching process became standardised.¹⁸ Consequently, "during the thirteenth century, the papacy possessed more power than any other institution and even directed the affairs of Europe" (Bainton 35).

A papal schism occurred in 1377 in England when a radical named Wycliffe offended the church with his nationalistic, pro-government views. He sponsored a translation of the Bible

¹⁷ For a detailed and comprehensive text on preaching in the Middle Ages in England, see G. Owst.

¹⁸ The influences which shaped the typical sermon derived from monasticism and scholasticism are discussed in chapter six.

into English in order to make it more comprehensible to lay-people, and instituted an order of poor priests, called the Lollards, to proclaim his version of the Bible. Wycliffe had little confidence in the older monastic orders especially the friars¹⁹: “in his eyes the Franciscans and other itinerants were interlopers, who made the work of the parish priest more difficult” (Bainton 71).

By the end of the fifteenth century the sermon had come to occupy a central place in most of the western churches. Evidence shows there was no dearth of preaching in the years immediately preceding the Reformation (H. Dressler 688). There were some rural parishes where clergy never preached. Nevertheless, urban dwellers would have the opportunity to hear many sermons (Brilioth 95). However, social discontent during these centuries also saw the decline of the papacy in prestige and power concurrently with the decline of the monastic orders (Deanesely 176-86; Bainton 59-71).

Moreover, popular national resentment was fuelled by Martin Luther, a Catholic monk, who criticised some established doctrines of the Church and denied the supreme authority of the Pope. He believed that Christianity was solely known through the Scriptures, theological education should concern itself exclusively with Biblical studies and that Christ’s presence is not only disclosed in the sacrament but also in preaching the Word (G. O. Forde; F. W. Meuser and S. D. Schneider). Luther’s Reformation critique of the church led to new theological paradigms which contributed to widespread reforms and divisions in the history of the Church (Wilson 92). These resulted in a review of preaching, the organisation of a new church with a revised liturgy and a new system of government (C. L. Rice 495). Concurrent with the expansion of Lutheranism, three other types of Protestantism emerged in the sixteenth century: the Reformed Church including the Presbyterians, the radical Protestants known as the Anabaptists, and the Anglicans (Wilson 99).

¹⁹ Interestingly, Chaucer in his book *The Canterbury Tales* had no more respect for the sincerity of the friars. He wrote contemptuously about them, though he depicted the village priest as an amiable character.

1.5 Preaching in Roman Catholic and Reformed Churches from the 16th to the 20th Century

The process of religious renewal, arising from the Reformation, replaced the singular form of Christianity of the Roman Catholic Church with diverse denominations which flourished throughout Britain. The specificity of each denomination's emphasis on the importance of the sermon in their acts of worship and its theoretical homiletical framework is complex. In addition, diversity, sectarianism, factionation and amalgamation of groups within the denominations of the Nonconformist Churches resulted in the formation of splinter-churches (C. S. Horne; P. Sangster). Therefore only the main characteristics of those major denominations represented in my sermon sample are covered in the following résumé.

Roman Catholicism

The Roman Catholic Church reacted against the Protestant movements in various countries. According to Brilioth:

The most striking example of this renewed interest is an injunction of the Council of Trent in 1563, which states that bishops and priests must make provision that sermons be preached in every congregation, at least on all Sundays, as well as during seasons of fasting, or at least three times a week. (143)

This injunction emphasised the requirement to preach. Homiletical expositions on the books of the Bible, especially the Old Testament also appeared as a result of the Council of Trent. Thus, the Roman Catholic Church “emerged with its organization improved, its discipline strengthened, and the power and authority of the Pope greatly enhanced” (S. Neill 34).

In addition to determining the responsibility for preaching, the Council of Trent took steps to secure ordained men for preaching by decreeing that seminaries be established to train priests. Ignatius of Loyola founded the Order of the Jesuits in 1543. He promulgated twenty-four rules for preachers based on classical rhetoric. Homiletical treatises by dozens

Jesuit authors in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries reflected this background (J. M. Connors). Extensive systematic courses were set up in seminaries in the nineteenth century with the obligation of the parochial priests to preach. The Counter-reformation led to codified Catholic doctrines in the task of preaching (M. R. O'Connell; H. O. Evennett; A. D. Wright). Thus, preaching practices became further regulated resulting in doctrinal orthodoxy cementing rigid control of the priest's discourse.

The Presbyterians

When the puritans were forced out of the English church pulpits, they organised their own congregations as "prophesyings." Presbyterianism was officially recognised as the religion of the Church of Scotland in 1690. Furthermore, "the ecclesiastical development of Scotland since the Reformation had produced a Church not only doctrinally distinct from that of England but much more independent of the State" (G. I. Machin 112). However, extremism and discontent among the clergy established the break-away Scottish Free Church in 1843. This evangelical revival demanded more interpretation of the texts to reach the people through the use of sermons. Most of the dissenting groups joined the Church of Scotland, although the minority Free Church of Scotland still remains (J. M. Burleigh; J. Cunningham; J. R. Fleming). Nevertheless, the Calvinist tradition of preaching is "firm in its insistence on the Bible as sole authority and the view that anything not expressly commanded in the Bible ought to be rejected from the Church" (Neill 33). This fundamentalist stance upholds the belief that the Bible is the Word of God.

The Baptists

By the middle of the seventeenth century the earliest "separatist" church in England was the group of Baptists established by Thomas Helwys in 1612 (D. Edwards 268). They denied the validity of infant baptism, setting themselves up as a truer church (if not *the* true church) with an insistence of adult or "believer" baptism. They claimed that the church should be a

voluntary society comprising of two components: members choose their church through the declaration of personal uncoerced confession of faith and their corporate worship was free of state regulations (W. H. Robinson). Moreover they rejected the power of the King in making laws and ordinances or placing spiritual lords over them (E. A. Payne).

The earliest theological competence of the average seventeenth century Baptist should not be underestimated: “after all, they had most of them chalked up many hundreds of hours of sermon hearing, discourses which were meaty and are by no means to be written off as the windy, nasal rantings of high-church satire” (E. Rupp 137). By the early eighteenth century, the service of the Word was an amalgam of prayer, Scripture and sermon. Worship followed no fixed form and had no service books or canons of prayer (Payne; W. H. Robinson; R. G. Torbet). Preaching based on Scriptural laws remains the central focus of the Baptist service.²⁰

The Methodists

The founders of Methodism²¹, John Wesley (1703-1791) and George Whitefield (1714-1770), were initially clergy in the Church of England. The Methodist movement was a protest against the abuses prevalent in the Established Church, resulting in Wesley and his followers being debarred from holding their services on church properties (Bainton 218). Consequently, they reverted to the practice of holding public outdoor meetings. This revival of the old practice of field-preaching attracted large groups of followers particularly among the lower classes (W. L. Doughty; A. Outler; H. H. Mitchell, *Celebration*). Huge sections of the population were unemployed or working in oppressive conditions not conducive to

²⁰ Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892) was one of the Baptists’ most important preachers. The Metropolitan Tabernacle, seating six thousand people, was specially built for his use. His sermons lasted for forty-five minutes as there was no organ in the Tabernacle in his time. His sermons were published in enormous editions and translated into several languages: “Spurgeon tops all records in both respect and range of extant production” (Brilioth 169).

²¹ In practical terms Methodism meant joining a Methodist ‘society’. The term Methodist used in the early 1730s referred to men “thought to be ridiculously methodical in their observance of the custom enjoined in the Book of Common Prayer” (Bainton 199).

regular church attendance. Wesley rode from village to village focusing especially on the miners: "He preached to them at five in the morning, by the pits and called upon them to mend their ways, to be sober, chaste and humane" (Bainton 223). Wilson considers that "outdoor preaching helped to alleviate the grayness of life and provide hope for those who were hungry" (130). Nevertheless, Wesley perpetuated the view that their deprivation and poverty was their own fault. In addition, his discourse promoted the belief that acceptance of suffering is the highest form of Christian witness by suggesting that the more people suffered in this world the greater their chance of reward in the next world: "the Methodists' proclamation of the Gospels became a social and political force, since it emerged as the consciousness of a special call to preach the gospel to the poor and disinherited" (Brilioth, 168). D. Edwards (1989) too maintains: "their philosophy appealed to the poor as some itinerant preachers were modestly paid whilst most were not because the gospels taught that food and clothing ought to be enough" (67). But these views also retained the distinctions between the privileged rich and the destitute poor and made no attempt to address these differences or recognise a need for social justice.

Wesley also created a hierarchical class system within his own chapels: "his preachers, appointed and not infrequently dismissed by him, were divided into two classes; the more select and trusted 'Assistants' were superior to the 'Helpers'" (D. Edwards 67). He published his own sermons and "instructed his preachers to reshape their lives in the image he desired. They accepted this supervision, far closer than any bishop's" (Bainton 225). Thus, Wesley acted as an autocrat with dictatorial tendencies.

1.6 The Church of England, the State and Preaching from the 16th to the 20th Centuries

The Anglican Reformation is related to the other Christian movements of the sixteenth century, but not identifiable with any one of them (O. Chadwick; T. M. Lindsey; F. H. Powicke). In the reign of Henry VIII, three factors effected a change in the religious practice

of this country: (1) the king's desire for a male heir led to his divorce and hence the breach with the Pope, (2) the spread of Lutheran ideas, and (3) the growth of national and anti-clerical feeling. Thus, the English Reformation provided an example of a combination of nationalism and religious revival (Neill 36). Moreover, when Henry VIII caused the rift with Rome he appointed himself as head of the Church of England; this had both the effect of reinforcing secular power with religious authority and of empowering the religious establishment within the country's legal framework.

In 1558, the rules of succession were altered which allowed the enthronement of Queen Elizabeth I. Within a year she severed all remaining links with Rome when, by Act of Parliament, she became Supreme Governor of the "established" Church of England. The doctrinal position of the Anglican Church was set forth in the Thirty-Nine Articles which were broad enough in definition to be acceptable to all but entrenched Roman Catholics and rigorous Calvinists.

The relationship between liturgy and preaching in the Anglican church is complex. In the *First Prayer Book of Edward VI* (1549), the sermon maintained its place in the service of the Lord's Supper, which was normally celebrated as high mass. The sermon was based on the established pericope of the day, but when the mass was said as a communion service in accordance with the *Books of Common Prayer* (1552, 1559, 1662), it was delivered as a non-liturgical addition. This resulted in the replacement of the pericope as the preaching text and substitution of texts drawn from other liturgical passages or Psalms. However, the connection between the church's calendar for the year and the text of the day within the communion service became more fixed. Emphasis was also placed on preaching sermons within the other services of matins and vespers. Elizabeth I appointed bishops to implement her policies. The prayer book of 1559 was used in every parish church but most of the services were not accompanied by sermons: "many rectors, vicars or curates were unable or unwilling to preach though they were obliged to comply with the bishop's regulations" (D. Edwards 88). The "outstanding" preachers published their sermons and many of the rank-

and-file clergy read these out to their congregations, or wrote their own versions based on published ones. Thus, the renowned preachers “set the norm for the next generations” (Rupp 515).

During the reign of George III the number of Justices in Holy Orders increased considerably. This was seen not only as a sign of the closeness of Church and state but also evidence that religion was playing a greater part in “social control” whereby the church was a part of the coercive machinery of the state (N. Sykes 322). The Church’s education work reinforced this view, when in 1780 Robert Raikes began his Sunday schools: “some modern writers have seen the schools as an attempt by established orders to instil loyalty into the children of the poor; they were institutions of discipline and repression” (E. P. Thompson 441). The intention of the schools was to teach children to read, principally the Bible, and sometimes to write. Some instructed children in personal and moral attitudes which were considered appropriate for life and work for their adult world. However, many of the schools “operated within the expectations of the society which created them, thus reflecting the prevailing sense of social order” (E. R. Norman 35). The Church was regarded as a political force at the end of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries:

the pulpit was a greater power than it is now, partly because it had fewer rivals, and the objection to political sermons which is entertained in some circles today did not exist. Although the social status of the parson was low, his political influence was great. (T. Malden 320)

Further adjustments in the relationship of Church and state in the second half of the nineteenth century marked the continued advance of the political system towards the practical recognition of religious diversity. In addition, there was pressure from the Nonconformists for the removal of Church influence on education, and the entry of the state into the field of education eroded the role of the Church in political opinion forming (G. F. Best 155-73; H. Martin).

The political influence of the bishops in the House of Lords continued to diminish as a distinction was drawn between 'political' and 'moral' questions. It became usual for bishops to restrict attendances in the House of Lords to matters which more or less directly concerned the interests of the Church:

'The attendance of Bishops in the House of Lords, except on Church and semi-Church questions, has immensely fallen off,' Gladstone wrote to Lord Hartington in 1884; 'and the political function is, properly on the whole, sacrificed to diocesan duty'. (Norman 189)

At the end of the century the Religious Disabilities Removals Act removed religious subscription from the qualifications required for membership of Parliament. However, Parliament retained control over the Church even though the position of the Established Church had been rendered anomalous within the context of the Constitution. The power of the Church was changing to that of moral, ethical and social arbiter as control of the country became invested in a secular democratic parliament (P. d'A. Jones). Thus, the sermon as a medium to propagate political doctrines was severely curtailed.

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, the Bishops still had power in the House of Lords because few hereditary peers were active in politics and there were no life peers. However, in 1911 the Bishops were obliged to vote for a bill which curtailed the powers of the House of Lords, thereby further reducing the Church of England's influence on legislation (Norman; R. H. Tawney). In a period of social radicalism the Church failed to translate this into political terms and also failed to change their own class attitudes (Norman 222). The Church remained an upper class and upper-middle-class institution, with many clergy failing to see that their social idealism was often at variance with their own class and cultural behaviour (C. Gore 303).

The Church of England at this time was not only controlled by classism but also dominated by sexism. Women church workers who could not rise above the status of deaconess or Sunday School teacher were completely subordinate to male authority (A.

Hastings 42-5). The prevalent view of the Established Church was, and remained for a long time, summed up in a comment in the *Church Times* on 18th August 1916 by Canon Lacey who wrote: “the scheme of ladies who desire ordination has for a long time been familiar to me; I have never found occasion to do anything but laugh at it” (4). The Baptists and the Congregationalists, however, accepted ordination of women in 1917.

A crisis in the relationship of Church and State implicit in the rejection of the *Revised Prayer Book* by Parliament in 1928 further demonstrated the subordination of the Church to the State. Few churchmen had considered that Parliament would override their decisions in matters such as liturgy and public worship. The vote was humiliating since it was a reminder of the legal realities of the submissiveness of the Church (Norman 285-306; Hastings 203-8).

In 1970 the Church Assembly was replaced by the General Synod which consists of three houses: bishops, clergy and laity. It became the legislative authority of the Church of England which gave it the power to have the final authority on all matters of doctrine and worship. Parliament recognised this as affording democratic representation and was prepared to leave the governance of Church affairs to this body thereby obviating clashes between secular power and church development. In addition, bishops were to be selected by committee with the Prime Minister’s role being only that of choosing between two approved candidates. Nevertheless, the Church still has some influence in the political process by virtue of the twenty-six seats in the House of Lords occupied by the Archbishops and senior bishops. According to H. Clark (1993) this implies

that the leadership of the Church operates on the assumption that it is entitled (indeed, expected) to make its voice heard on social issues - and that it will be respectfully heard and sometimes heeded by policy-makers, churchpeople and citizens alike. (99)

Thus the Church became even more distanced from the State but “it remained at least on the fringes of mainstream power structures” (G. Parson, vol II 94).

However, the character and working of the General Synod provided an ethos which was very different from that of former decades:

The very authority of the synod, with its own quasi-parliamentary procedures and mounting sense of ecclesiastical power, reduced the sense of dependency upon the Crown and Parliament. The Church would now be permitted, very largely, to rule itself, both because that is what it wanted to do and because the political establishment no longer bothered very seriously about this section of its former empire. (Hastings 606)

Having lost most of its power in the state machinery, the Church appears to consider that the General Synod is almost as important as Parliament. They have adopted the adversarial style of debating and a decision-making process that requires majority voting. This competitive setting produces splits and conflicts among its members producing unofficial “parties” in the Synod. Its complicated structure strengthens and deepens its internal patriarchal structures.²²

Paradoxically, the General Synod’s structure gave power to church members as it provided the freedom for social ideas to be debated in the house of laity. Equality of opportunity between the sexes and recognition of women’s role in the Church had become abiding ideas of the second half of this century. Thus, the house of laity was used as a platform for a pressure group in favour of the ordination of women to the priesthood. The Church’s most important issue since the Reformation was that of the vote of its General Synod in November 1992 concerning the ordination of women priests. All three Houses of the Synod had a majority in favour of the proposal to admit women to the priesthood in 1994. The first thirty-five women priests were ordained at Bristol Cathedral on March 12th 1994 and a further seventy were ordained at St. Paul’s Cathedral in April 1994. The impact of these women in the Church in general and their influence on homiletical practices in

²² The General Synod’s methods of working are under review. At the time of writing it is suggested that it may not be until 2005 that any changes may take place to the way decisions are made.

particular can only be assessed in the future when there is a body of texts which can be examined.²³

This chapter has traced the historical development of the Christian Churches in the United Kingdom to date and indicated the purpose of sermons as an integral part of acts of worship. Christian influences rose from Christ's open-air preachings to become the hegemonic patriarchy which formulated the development of Western culture. This power base has been declining with the growth of democratic government. Sermons have been used throughout these changes, and their form and language have reflected the shifting power bases which have both caused and shaped social order. At the end of the twentieth century the UK is a democratic, secular, pluralistic society with changing mores. Nevertheless, social reality and ideological prescription do not always correspond. The following chapters of this thesis examine the extent to which sermons currently respond to our emerging society in which women are endeavouring to achieve equal status with their male contemporaries.

²³ However, the Baptists and Congregationalists started to ordain women into the priesthood in 1917. Other Nonconformist Churches permitted female ministers some twenty-five years ago. The Church of Scotland and the English Free Churches "were briefly excited by the first intake of women ministers some years ago. When the practice was accepted as normal, women ministers started to complain that their ordination had really changed nothing, and that their churches' élites remained as masculine as ever" (C. Longley 23).

CHAPTER TWO

INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE AS A MODE OF ADDRESS IN PREACHING

Feminists who have undertaken research on the topic of 'women and language' have been particularly concerned with sexism in language. Lourdes Torres (1993) lists many of the issues they have addressed:

gender marking and sex-bias in language structure and content, stereotypes and perception of language use, sex difference and similarities in language use-linguistic components, conversational interaction, genre and style, children and language, language varieties in American English and non-verbal aspects of communication.
(285)

It is now well established that there is sexism in the English language and it operates in many forms (Spender 15; Cameron, *Feminist*; J. Coates, *Women*).

One of the earliest challenges concerned with language as a medium of gendered representation came from feminists with the claim that "English is biased in favour of the male in both syntax and semantics" (M. J. Schneider and K. A. Foss 1). Probably the best known aspect of sexism in syntax is manifested in the use of generic nouns such as "man", "men" or "mankind" and the generic personal pronoun "he" to be understood as having a broad meaning which includes women. However, feminist linguists have documented empirically that people think *male* when the generic terms *man* and *he* are used (A. P. Nilsen; J. Schneider and S. Hacker; L. Harrison; C. Kramarae, M. Shultz and W. O'Barr; W. Martyna). Casey Miller and Kate Swift (1976) comment:

Those who have grown up with a language that tells them they are at the same time men and not men are faced with ambivalence - not about their sex, but about their status as human beings. For the question 'Who is man?' seems a political one, and the very ambiguity of the word is what makes it a useful tool for those who have a stake in

maintaining the status quo. (37-8)

From 1980 feminist theologians in the UK, embracing feminist linguistic positions, attempted to shift the liturgical language of the church away from its male gendered bias.¹ As a result, the churches accepted the notion of a non-sexist language which is currently referred to as *inclusive* language. The report by the liturgical commission of the Church of England (1989) states:

Both theological and pastoral sensitivity require that the language used in all liturgical texts, as well as other aspects of liturgy, for example, preaching, should not only permit but indeed facilitate the full participation of women in the worship of the Church. Sensitive Christians have begun to remedy the problem of the liturgical language that is discriminatory toward women by careful choice of vocabulary which includes all people. Such language is referred to as 'inclusive' language. (GS 850 67)

Many denominations accept, in general, the above definition of inclusive language.

Nevertheless, not all clergy accept that liturgical language is sexist despite the feminist theologians' explanations of their objections to the use of generic language. They vehemently defend the retention of this sexist tradition in *Making Women Visible: A Report by the Liturgical Commission of the General Synod of the Church of England* (1988) by declaring that

the primary sense of 'man' is generic and this is still the way words 'man', 'men' and 'mankind' are heard and used by a large section of British society. These terms are deeply embedded in the culture and literature of society and are the vehicles for

¹ There are two major issues around "inclusive" language spoken in sermons. This chapter is concerned only with the first issue which alludes to the corporate language of the text. The second issue refers to the exclusive use of the male personification of God. However, little progress has been made in this respect. In 1992, The Faith and Order Committee of the Methodist Church approved that "the exploration of female imagery in our speaking of God should be strongly recommended in order that we seek a more balanced understanding of God, and manner of speaking of God in whose image both male and female is made" (107). The Church of England has responded to this feminists' challenge by "recognising that it raises serious questions on several different levels and are pursuing a study of this matter" (GS 859 68). For other churches this is not an issue: the male personification of God is doctrinally enshrined. It remains to be seen whether the Churches face the implications of feminists' reappraisal of exclusive male imagery of God.

important truths. To abandon this is to undermine a valuable register of the English language. On this view, those who have come newly to hear the terms as excluding women should seek to regain their innocence [*sic*]. (GS 850 22)

The last sentence in this text introduces the word “innocence” which suggests a fall which may be associated with crime, sin or sexual knowledge. This reflects the consistent re-telling of the male-biased version of the Genesis story of Adam and Eve which vilifies women by promoting the belief that man never had an “evil” thought until he was “seduced” by woman. Dualistic thinking of the early Church Fathers² equated woman with body, irrationality and sensuality as distinct from man who is associated with the soul and rationality (A. Brown 102-5). The Church Fathers represented woman as a symbol of weakness because she was supposed to be more carnal and more likely to sin. Martin Luther also waxed eloquent on the superiority of man through his interpretation of Genesis 3 (E. M. Plass 1290). The negative image of Eve, and therefore woman, permeates Western religious art.³ Elizabeth Davies (1975) comments:

The cruel myth of Eve’s guilt has succeeded in its purpose. The Christian Church has used it for 2000 years to chasten women, and women themselves have accepted it as proof of their unworthiness. This gigantic hoax was perpetrated by men with the deliberate intention of placing women in a subservient, penitential and guilt-ridden position. (144)

Over the last forty years, some theologians have tended to demythologise the Genesis story (Rudolph Bultmann and his followers) whilst others have attempted to retain it as a myth and not take it literally (Paul Tillich). Nevertheless Mary Daly (1973) asserts:

The fact is, however, that the myth has projected a malignant image of the male-female relationship and the “nature” of women that is still deeply imbedded in the modern

² The title Church Father refers to any of the writers on Christian doctrines in the pre-Scholastic period, i.e. before the twelfth century. Examples of early Church Fathers are Tertullian, Chrysostom and Augustine.

³ There are hundreds of examples in art where Eve is associated with sin. For example, Michelangelo’s *The Temptation* (1511), Jean Cousin le Père’s *Eva Prima Pandora* (1490-1560) and a sculpture by Auguste Rodin (1840-1917) depicts the hand of evil with the hand holding out a woman.

psyche. In the Christian tradition it continues to color the functioning of the theological imagination. (45)

Thus, the authors of the 1988 General Synod report perpetuate the prejudices of this myth as they lend implicit support to traditional images that legitimise social evils. The argument they proffer to defend the use of generic “man”, “men” and “mankind” is flawed because it maligns women through its connotations. The General Synod have failed to confront and acknowledge the message it conveys.

Though alternative gender neutral words or text changes are suggested in the report, the decision to use any, all or none is left to the discretion of the priest:

The commission is of mind in offering these texts for optional and intelligently selective use where there is dissatisfaction with the existing texts, and where those who have no strong feelings themselves, nevertheless agree that the adaptations should be used. Objectors should be shown as much consideration as proponents. (GS 850 22)

Thus, no official directives were issued by the commissioners. Moreover, they appear to be more concerned with the priest’s viewpoint rather than those of the laity since they take no account of the effect of these words on the listeners. The argument that using generic terms are justified on the grounds that a preacher intends the reference to be generic does not take into consideration the inherent sexism which such use *per se* subscribes to or engenders among the audience.

The definition of sexist language initially referred to ideas and practices that reinforce divisions between the male dominant group and the female inferior group: “the English language is sexist as far as it relegates women to a secondary and inferior place in society” (G. Berger and B. Katchuk 3). The early theories focused on language which downgraded women in relation to men. Recently, however, the definition of sexism in language has been broadened to include any such language that might subordinate men as well as women. In other words, power structures have become the defining characteristic of the definition of sexism in language. This gender-neutral definition of sexism in language has challenged the

identification of sexist language with women's oppression. These liberal views presuppose that both women and men are oppressed by their restrictive sex roles. Cameron (1992) considers "this notion to be a red herring. Sexism is a system in which women and men are not simply different, but unequal, this is the origin and function of 'sex roles'" (100). Moreover, feminists continue to produce analyses that demonstrate how language, gender and power are interconnected (Kramarae; K. MacKinnon; S. McConnell-Ginet; C. Moraga and G. Andaluá; A. Rich, *Lies*; Spender; S. Wolfe).

Other gender issues arise out of the debates about preachers' use of pronouns in addressing and referring to the worshipping community. They centre on the interaction of language, gender and power where gender is a matter of social relations and dominance. In this chapter I shall examine my sermon sample for these particular interrelations which are manifested through preachers' use or non-use of "inclusive" language. The first part of the chapter discusses issues surrounding sexism in syntax and semantics. The second section focuses on the interaction of those relationships resulting from the preachers' modes of address.

2.1 Sexism in Syntax and Semantics

An examination of my sermon sample reveals that despite the debates surrounding the use of generic language several preachers still continue to use it. Typically, one preacher said:

Not long before, Jesus told him [Peter] that he would give him the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Then all of a sudden it's "get behind me Satan. You are an obstacle in my path, because the way you think is not God's way but *man's* . . . *Man's* way is to be angry." (emphasis added; 304-5)

This preacher's use of the term "man" is ambivalent with regard to whether the speaker intends its meaning to be generic, genderised or both. He uses the term "man" both times without an article. According to a report by the Liturgical Commission of the General Synod of the Church of England (1988)

the most common situation in which the generic sense of 'man' continues is when it is used without the article in proverbial or abstract contexts. Particularly persistent is its use, without any article, to mean 'The human creature regarded abstractly, and personified as an individual, as for example in 'Man lives under the threat of nuclear annihilation'. . . In a number of situations there is no adequate alternative that preserves either the emphatic stress of the monosyllable or the personification of the race as an individual (20).

Thus, the preacher is using "man" in the generic sense since he uses it without an article and as though he intends women to be included. Nevertheless, in the beginning of the preacher's interpretation of the biblical text he comments that Jesus is talking to Peter, who is one of his male disciples. Jesus then refers to Peter as Satan. All three, Jesus, Peter and Satan, are male personified by convention. Thus, the preacher's immediate reference points preceding the use of the word "man" are male. However, he ends the section of text with what appears to be "man" in the generic sense and repeats this usage again in his sermon. But, the second time he qualifies this apparent non-sexist term with an attribute of anger which is sex-role stereotyped as male (P. Rosenkranz; D. Broverman *et al*; S. Rowbotham). The effect of these mixed gendered/non-gendered meanings is to weaken any argument that females are included in them. The text retains an androcentric bias.

A different preacher similarly uses generic terms with male gendered connotations:

And I was immediately reminded of a verse from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* of how the better weather inclined *men's* hearts to go on pilgrimage. (emphasis added; 281)

Chaucer's tales invoke images of medieval monks, women pilgrims as well as non-ecclesiastics going on pilgrimages. It is not obvious in this preacher's use of the word "men's" whether he is referring to males only or whether he intends the term to be understood in the generic sense. Whatever the intention, listeners may conclude that the preacher is talking only about men which is deeply ironic as Chaucer's group is mixed sex.

Another preacher uses the generic “men”, “man” and the personal and possessive pronouns “he” and “his” several times:

In other words, the fact that Christ died for all *men* implies that all, without exception, are spiritually dead. Therefore, the whole human race is in need of a new life. Everyone has fallen short of God’s standards and has sinned. *Man*’s sin has alienated *him* from God and from *his fellow man*. Freud describes the dark side of *man* in his book Civilisation and Its Discontents. “*Men* are not gentle, friendly creatures wishing for love,” he says, “*homo homini lupus. Man* is wolf to *man*.” We don’t even have to look at what’s happening in the former Yugoslavia . . . Although *man* has a spiritual need and tries to find fulfilment, *he* nevertheless wants to keep God from interfering with *his* life. (emphasis added; 296)

The whole of this text is peppered with generic terms accompanied by male sex-trait stereotypes of aggressiveness and independence (O. Hartnell, G. Boden and M. Fuller; Frieze *et al*). These are reinforced with the use of the double generic term “fellow man.” The addition of male personal pronouns intensifies the male-centred focus. The preacher’s token use of the non-gendered “human race” and “everyone” in his discourse does little to alleviate an overwhelming sexist terminology and suggests that he does not consider generic terms to be problematic.

Sexist language abounds in classical and modern literature. One preacher offers several quotations which contain generic language set within a historical context:

An American Astronaut looking at earth from space said, “now I see earth and *mankind* more as a whole than individual races, religions and nations.” . . . John Donne wrote, “no *man* is an island entire of itself, *every man* is part of a continent, a part of the main. Any *man*’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in *mankind*. Therefore, never to know for whom the bell tolls. It tolls for thee.” (emphasis added; 329)

The first quotation was spoken by Neil Armstrong in 1969 whilst John Donne's writings date from the early seventeenth century. Both predate the mainstreaming of the notion of sexist language. Altering this language for use in sermons raises questions about historical and literary integrity. Vivienne Faull and Jane Sinclair (1986) comment that "there is no easy answer to this problem. Sometimes an indirect quote can be helpful. For example. 'John Donne commented on the reality that no one among us is an island entire of itself, Rather each of us is a piece of the continent'" (36). The use of such paraphrased quotations can overcome gender problems inherent in generic language.⁴

The generic terms "fellow" and "fellowship" are also heard as male sexed words (Faull and Sinclair 31). An example of the generic usage of the word "fellow" in my sermon sample can be seen in the following extract:

It seems that God loves us so much that He insists on treating us a *fellow* workers with Him . . . On the night that he was betrayed and his closest friends ran away and didn't want to know him he shared with them a meal of *fellowship* . . . He knew that God wants more than anything else in the world for us to remain in *fellowship* with him and share his work and love. (emphasis added; 314)

In the first sentence the generic term "fellow" may be understood as non-gendered. However, the preacher cements a dominant masculine image in his second sentence through his reference to Christ, a man, and to the male disciples who shared Christ's last supper. This male-gendered imagery is transposed onto the final generic "fellowship" thereby assigning this gender-neutral term to the masculine. As a consequence of these reinforcements of gender designation, listeners to these generic terms are likely to perceive them to be male genderised.

Another preacher uses this generic term six times in his text:

And in the second place, not only is Jesus made visible in the lives of individual

⁴ Other issues are raised by these quotations, such as the use of images and literary references which intersect with language, gender and power. These are examined and discussed in chapter three of this thesis.

people, he can also be seen in the *fellowship* of the church . . . But it is not primarily the size of the Christian community across the world that makes Jesus visible, but rather the *fellowship* that exists among those who believe in him and who meet together to worship . . . people have encountered a warm, open welcoming *fellowship* of believers . . . Let me quote to you from a letter from a young man, whose discovery of faith began when he was drawn into a welcoming and accepting Christian *fellowship* . . . when people do find themselves as part of an authentic Christian *fellowship* . . . The same word of life can be seen today reflected in the lives of people in the *fellowship* of the church. (emphasis added; 334)

This preacher uses the term “fellowship” in the first sentence as a metaphor for the church as a community. Between the second and third extracts he adds a quote from St. Ambrose and couples this with the quote from a young man’s letter. The generic term “fellowship” used here excludes women because of the continued, additional references to men.

One woman preacher recounted:

long before I was ordained and a *fellow cleric* with my husband . . . (emphasis added; 378)

The female preacher uses the adjective “fellow” in the generic sense since she includes herself as a member of the group of clergy. Her reference to her husband as a cleric negates that neutral sense and implies a male gender to the term “fellow” by association. Through her choice of words there is an implicit suggestion that she perceives herself to be “one of the boys” and/or explicitly that she has no problems with the term “fellow” and understands it as an inclusive term.

Preachers who insist on using generic terms either refuse to acknowledge the feminists’ claims that generic terms are no longer acceptable or they are unaware of the objections to their usage. Nevertheless, they overtly reinforce and perpetuate the sexist view that males are more important and more representative of the human race than females. Moreover, the churches consist of groups of people who make up their community. Historically, they have

generated their own ideologies about reality in which not every group has equal access to their linguistic system through which these realities are publicly articulated. These realities are controlled by the dominant group which, in the case of the churches, is men. Women are the less powerful group and their reality is not represented. As Shirley Ardener (1978) explains:

There are dominant modes of expression in any society which have been generated by the dominant structures within. In any situation, only the dominant mode of the relevant group will be 'heard' or 'listened to'. The 'muted' group in any context, if they wish to communicate, must express themselves in terms of this mode, rather than in ones that they might otherwise have generated independently. (20)

She considers that muted groups have to perform a translation and claims:

This dominant model may impede the free expression of alternative modes of the world which subdominant groups may possess, and perhaps may inhibit the very generation of such models. Groups dominated in this sense may find it necessary to structure the world through the model (or models) of the dominant group, transforming their own model as best they can in terms of the received ones. (S. Ardener, *Defining* xii)

Women constitute the "muted" group. Muting is not the same as silencing: "the muted group may speak a great deal. The important issue is whether they are able to say all they would wish to say, where and when they wish to say it" (E. Ardener 21). Muted groups have a distinctive view of reality: "the muted structures are 'there' but cannot be 'realised' in the language of the dominant structure" (E. Ardener 22). The Ardeners accept that women have their own model of the world as well as the capacity to use the dominant language. Nevertheless, for men, the dominant group, language and reality coincide whilst for women they do not coincide without translation. The passages quoted from the sermon texts represent one version of the Ardeners' model of the dominant/muted groups which indicate the way in which males construct language so that it provides positive reinforcement of their

own identity whilst requiring women to accommodate and transform those uses. Preachers using generic language have inherited a culture and tradition structured on such ideological positions. They reproduce ideas of male superiority and of the oppression of women through a language derived from institutionalized structures of dominance from within those churches.

Interestingly, no preacher in my sermon sample used the generic terms “brothers”, “brethren”, “brotherhood”, “sons” of God, or “fathers” and “forefathers”. Six preachers (15%) used the generic terms “man”, “men” or “mankind” in their sermons. This means thirty-four (85%) which is the vast majority of preachers avoided these particular generic terms. Eight preachers (20%) used the generic terms “fellow” or “fellowship” in their sermons. Thus, thirty-two (80%) did not use these terms. Twelve preachers (30%) used one or other of these two generic terms in their sermons. Importantly, twenty-six of the sermons (70%) contain no generic terms. A significant majority of preachers in my sample thus actively avoided using this type of sexist language. This indicates a shift in such usage and possible acceptance that the use of generic terms is ambiguous and may be perceived to exclude women.

Trevor Pateman (1980) argues that changes in language use can affect attitudes of listeners even if sexist thoughts prevail in the minds of the speaker or hearer: “The change in practice constitutes a restructuring of at least one aspect of one social relationship” (77). The lack of usage of generic terms by preachers in my sermon sample indicates that feminist discourse may have intervened in the usage of these words which has ensured their removal from the linguistic practices of most of these preachers.

As well as using single non-gendered words to replace a generic term the churches’ guidelines also recommend using other expressions which they perceive to be “inclusive phrases” to designate groups of people, in particular:

- (a) Generic ‘man’, ‘men’, ‘mankind’ can usually be altered by changing the expression to ‘person’, ‘people’, or ‘humanity’. Occasionally ‘a human being’ sounds better. In

phrases such as ‘all men’ the ‘men’ can be dropped. First person plural pronouns and adjectives can also help. Example: ‘Such good things as pass man’s understanding’ (Collect, last Sunday after Pentecost) to: ‘such good things as pass human understanding’ (*or* ‘our’ understanding).

(b) ‘Sons of God’ are ‘sons and daughters of God’ or ‘children of God’, (Collect Thanksgiving for the Institution of Holy Baptism) to: ‘that we may rejoice to be called sons and daughters of God’.

(c) ‘Brothers’, ‘brethren’, and ‘brotherhood’, in most cases can be made to include women. Example: ‘. . . what we do for the least of our brethren, we do also . . . to: . . . what we do for the least of our brothers and sisters, we do also . . . (Faull and Sinclair 30-1)

Other texts offer the same recommendations (GS 859 67; P. P Allen 410-3). These suggestions imitating the sequencing of the noun order offered by Faull and Sinclair is evident in the following examples from my sermon sample:

hundreds of crosses scratched into the walls centuries ago by the *men and women* who had actually made it. (emphasis added; 281)

There have always been *men and women* however . . . Above all today we need *men and women* who . . . (emphasis added; 339-41)

And to cap it all, they look round and say, “no his *brothers and sisters* are here.” (emphasis added; 289)

Each is an individual, a *brother or sister* in Christ. (emphasis added; 330)

At first glance this inclusive technique appears to be an acceptable method of removing sexism in language. However, the preachers have used paratactic gender pairing. The use of these paratactic constructions is undermined by the gendered sequencing to which they are subject. Feminists have highlighted the problematic of sexual polarity (Nilsen; M. Schulz; J. Stanley and E. Toth). Sexual polarity occurs when things or people are classified in terms of masculinity and femininity as in the paratactic phrases above. The dichotomy set up by these

alternative phrases does not eliminate their more intangible sexism. Feminists have developed a theoretical framework for a phenomenon in language that differentiates the sexes in semantic terms on the basis of masculinity as the unmarked form occupying the positive semantic space, with femininity as the marked form occupying the negative semantic space (Nilsen; Schulz; J. Stanley; Toth). They indicate that language as a system not only embodies sexual inequality between women and men, with men enjoying its advantages, but also that sexism in language is related to society. As J. Stanley comments:

In the case of gender, [minus male] must be the significant feature of girl or woman, because females are defined as 'non-males' since males are the standard comparison for the entire species, and women are the beings contrasted against them. (29)

The rationalisation that man comes before woman was recorded in the sixteenth century. According to Spender (1980):

the first record we appear to have is that of a Mr. Wilson in 1533 who insisted that it was more *natural* to place the man *before* the woman, as for example, in male and female, husband and wife, brother and sister, son and daughter. Implicit in his insistence that males take precedence is the belief that males 'come first' in the natural order of this, and this is one of the first examples of a male arguing for not just the superiority of males but that this superiority should be reflected in the structure of language. (147)

This view of male superiority was sealed in 1746 when John Kirby formulated his Eighty Eight Grammatical Rules in which he stated that the male gender was more comprehensive than the female. This rule was "extremely useful for the nineteenth century grammarians who vehemently took it up and insisted on rigid adherence to this rule in the name of grammatical correctness" (Spender 148). This interpretation of difference was discussed in this country in 1935 by Margaret Mead. Cameron (1992) comments:

Mead pointed out that every society designates some qualities and activities 'masculine' and others 'feminine', but the qualities may be different and even opposite

from one culture to the next . . . Mead also makes another important point. Whatever is thought to be masculine is also valued more highly than whatever is considered feminine. We are dealing with not just difference, but with an hierarchy. (84)

The attribution of gender is relational and comparative in this dichotomy, since a pairing always takes the genders sequentially and hierarchically. This means the masculine comes first in the order of pairing: “the semantic derogation of women fulfils a dual function: it helps to construct female inferiority and helps to confirm it” (Spender 23). Thus, while these pairings appear to be inclusive and non-sexist by equal reference they nonetheless perpetuate sexism through other means, in this instance through their sequencing.

However, the English language possesses very few suitable single words which reflect both sexes but do not imply gender. The only word to be considered as a replacement for the gender pair “sisters and brothers” is sibling. However, Faull and Sinclair maintain that “Polly Bluck and others comment that though there has been discussion in the USA about reviving “sibling” as a term, the term sounds archaic to British ears” (17). So far, no suitable alternatives have been offered.

Only seven (17.5%) of the preachers used gender paired terms in their sermons; the majority (82.5%) used none. A closer examination of the texts reveals that only two preachers (5%) used both a generic term and gender pairing in their addresses.⁵ Nevertheless, in each of the extracts above taken from my sample the preacher positions the male first followed by the female. None of the preachers who uses these pairings places the female before the male. The practice of replacing generic words for hierarchically gender paired terms does not remove sexism. Rather, it shifts the direct sexism of overt power in language found in generic terms to one of less direct power through sexual polarity and sequencing of

⁵ Fourteen preachers (35%) used either a generic term or gender pairing. Thus, 65% of the preachers avoided using any generic terms or gender pairings.

gender pairing. The hierarchical ordering of sex difference codes a power differential which marks the subordination of women.⁶

2.2 The Mode of Address

The second aspect which underpins the notion of “inclusive” language relates to the language used by clergy when addressing or referring to the congregation. Liturgical texts incorporate scripture in many different ways: as sentences, focusing the attention of the congregation; as versicles and responses, enabling worshippers to respond corporately; within collects, prayers and acclamations; in canticles and psalms. For example, the first part of the responses chanted in Morning and Evening prayer are taken from Psalm 51.15:

. . . O Lord | open · my | lips:

and my | mouth · shall pro | claim your | praise.

The focus of these chants centres on the individual. This reflects the dominant discourse of the supposedly male trait of independence (O. Hartnet, G. Boden and M. Fuller 50-4; Frieze *et al*, J. Parsons, P. Johnson, D. Rubble and G. Zellman 54-6). However, this versicle and response has been slightly altered in the *Alternative Services Book* (1980) to:

Minister O Lord, open our lips

People and our mouth shall proclaim your praise

The change which uses the first person plural pronoun in the modern version promotes a corporate feeling within the act of worship. This assists in group feelings of mutual support and identity which are attributes of female sex-trait stereotype of caring and sharing (J. Finch and D. Groves 18; A. Borrowdale 25; L. Leghorn and K. Parker; J. B. Miller). Other minor adjustments to the preachers’ mode of address have also been implemented in the *Alternative Services Book* (1980). For example, the Rite A version of ‘The Nicene Creed’ begins: “We believe in one God”, whereas Rite B version retains the traditional words “I believe in one

⁶ I have found no texts concerned with the use of generic language in churches which have also discussed the problems of sexual polarity and sequencing in gender pairing.

God.” These small changes in the mode of the address by preachers and congregation in Rite A indicate a shift from a male gendered discourse to one which embraces some aspects of female gendered stereotypical characteristics. Other denominations have offered similar recommendations and guidelines to their clergy.

Official church documents apart, some preachers or theologians publish standard preaching manuals and homiletical texts. Many discuss the language of the liturgy, which includes the sermon, in general terms:

the language of the liturgy needs to be couched in terms which are meaningful to the worshippers, which enable them to hear, receive, and to respond to the word of God. Liturgical language which has failed to do so has failed to work as a language of worship. (Faull and Sinclair 11)

Michael Perham (1984) identifies five elements which are necessary if the language of worship is to fulfil its functions:

- (i) The language of worship must convey, as accurately as possible, the truth as we perceive it. The language of liturgy influences all who use it and hear it, since it is often repeated. It is therefore important that all such language should be theologically sound.
- (ii) There is need to ensure that the words of worship express what is really in our heart, that we say what we most want to say.
- (iii) The language of worship must be intelligible. Liturgical language should not contain confusing anachronisms or unnecessarily technical concepts.
- (iv) Liturgical language should be marked by its beauty.
- (v) Liturgical language should mean what it says. (22-4)

Perham's principles are ones which have largely been adhered to in the rubrics and texts of official modern language liturgies (Faull and Sinclair 11). These rules and recommendations were published in the mid 1980s, yet they make no reference to sexism in language which was the main reason for feminist theologians' demands for a revision of the liturgy. It is

possible to preach a sermon which complies with all these requirements whilst being offensive to women or men listeners. Furthermore, “beautiful” language for example is a matter of personal taste and there are no maxims which will guarantee this objective. Much of Perham’s wording is open to a variety of interpretations and marked by vagueness. The onus remains on individual clergy to incorporate any aspects of “inclusive” language; a male-biased liturgy does not allow many women to express what is really in their hearts. The whole representation of the language of worship here is marked by a lack of critical interrogation.

Most homiletic manuals or texts on preaching either ignore the language of preaching as an issue or they dismiss it as a minor matter as they comment that language must be “simple”, “clear”, “fresh”, “expressive”, “ordinary” or “conversational” (W. Bennet and B. H. Bonsall; Craddock; Ireson; O. C. Edwards; J. Stott; H. W. Robinson). Buttrick states that sermons should be constructed in “everyday, common and simple language” (187). Such statements set up general norms for sermonic language. D. Shearlock (1990) states: “we ought to think out clearly just what we are going to say, to find and use a proper vocabulary which is an appropriate vehicle for communication” (34). Language as a means of communication is not discussed in any depth in these texts. Neither is sexism in language with respect to generic terms nor the use of “inclusive” language even though the texts in question were published after these issues had been highlighted.⁷ Faull and Sinclair mention the use of “inclusive” language in sermons:

Sexist language can easily be avoided in items such as sermons and prayers, especially prepared for a specific service of worship...Inclusive language can be chosen readily when a sermon is being prepared. (36)

This reference to “inclusive” language implies that preachers should consider using the second person plural mode of address when preparing their sermons.

⁷ All the authors of the homiletical preaching manuals mentioned are male. Very few of them have been written by feminist preachers or theologians. Christine Smith comments that there is “the significant absence of feminist theoretical work as it applies to women’s preaching” (13).

Thus, according to the recommendations by the liturgical committees of the Churches, the mode of address that reflects the notion of “inclusivity” is the first person plural. The following extract from a sermon illustrates this:

We all have to make a journey through life. We don't have any choice about that. But we do have a tremendous choice in how we follow it. We're so free in this country that we often take the freedom of choice for granted and instead of actually making a choice about which way we go we simply let ourselves get carried along with the flow of things around us. (282)

The preacher acknowledges the presence of his listeners through his use of “inclusive” language. The function of this use of “we” is to bring the audience into the speaker's world through “you and me” which implies solidarity. Basil Bernstein (1971) explains this usage: “the major function of this code is to reinforce the form of the relationship (a warm and inclusive relationship) by restricting the verbal signalling of individual response” (128).⁸

Hans-Georg Gadamer (1975), writing about the operation of human consciousness believes that “the careful understanding of Scripture and the ministry of proclamation in the church are paradigmatic for hermeneutics in general” (388). He maintains that “language speaks us rather than we speak” (421). This idea suggests that speakers are objects rather than subjects of language and denies the elements of choice and responsibility for that choice which speakers have in what they say. Regarding the ministry of proclamation, Gadamer (1976) also states:

The sermon rather than the explanatory commentary of the theologian's exegetical work . . . stands in the immediate service of proclamation, for it not only communicates the understanding of what the Scripture says but also bears witness to itself. (57-8)

⁸ This use of inclusivity makes no allowance for the differences in authoritative/social status between preacher and listener. These aspects are discussed later in this chapter in an examination of a sermon in my sample.

He continues, “it is the nature of language and conversation to focus on subject matter and shared meaning. Language is ‘I-less, it does not belong to the sphere of ‘I’ but to the sphere of ‘We’” (65). Buttrick (1986) utilises Gadamer’s theories when he describes how sermons happen in consciousness and maintains that “sermons prefer ‘us’ and ‘we’” (106). Gadamer and Buttrick both suggest that if the language of sermons is intended to achieve a position of shared consciousness this must be reflected in an “inclusive” mode of address. Thus both Gadamer and Buttrick seek to minimise the individuality of the preacher in the sermon.⁹

Nevertheless, there are instances in my sermon sample where the use of the first person plural pronoun “we” can be considered to be an exclusive mode of address by some listeners to these addresses, e.g.:

We believe the people who live in *our* community need *our* prayers. So, each Sunday, *we* pray for different streets in Burnage, here in Manchester. *We* believe that it is helpful if people can share their problems with Jesus. So, *we* often pray with individuals who want *us* to do so, after *our* service. (emphasis added; 235)

The preacher is offering information about his parish and parishioners to listeners. However, he appears to be addressing two distinct groups of people simultaneously: the members of his congregation and radio listeners. He is reasserting values that he assumes members of his visible congregation share. At the same time, he is offering information about his parish and parishioners as though he were speaking for himself and his congregation to another audience different from his congregation. Therefore, he appears to be indirectly acknowledging another group listening to him on the radio. The effect of this linguistic practice is to render the radio audience as a separate group which excludes them from the “inclusive” context of the second person plural speech model in these utterances. One might, of course, consider this as leading by example but this does not detract from the exclusiveness of the address.

⁹ The first person singular is discussed in the context of the preacher’s use of personal experience and self-disclosure in chapter four of this thesis.

An examination of my sermon sample reveals that four preachers (10%) made a direct reference to the radio listeners:

Printing presses of Caxton's day enabled the Christian message to be carried to many nations. And now we have *great telecommunication systems which allow my voice to be carried right into your home*. (emphasis added; 252)

The Gospel story speaks to us today wherever we may be. To us certainly here in Highfields, *to you listeners in your home*, to people all over the world. (emphasis added; 264)

Christians both here in church and *listening today*, the invitation is the same. (emphasis added; 291)

When two mission training colleges are worshipping together at the beginning of a new term and can share with *a wider audience through the radio*, we have an ideal opportunity to take a fresh look. (emphasis added; 367)

The preachers acknowledge the presence of the radio audience. However, they are mentioned only once throughout the whole of each sermon. This is more than occurs in the other sermons but radio listeners are still relatively marginalised.

The vast majority of preachers (87.5%) took no direct, expressed account of the huge radio audience they were addressing. Preachers of a broadcast service are aware that their sermon will be heard by a much larger audience than the average congregation they habitually address. The radio audience rating for this service is over one million listeners (N. Vincent, letter to author). Preachers addressing a visible congregation are able to utilise non-verbal signals to assist listeners to feel that they are participating in a dialogue. However, non-verbal signals such as eye-contact, gestures and smiling are not available as communication aids to radio listeners. Therefore, radio listeners are at a disadvantage compared to the congregation present at an act of worship. They are further disadvantaged because they are not active participants in the service. Thus, they are external to the cohesive influences that physical presence can engender. Church services also tend to operate in a

closed, protected environment, free from external factors that impinge on people's daily lives. It is much more difficult for radio listeners, immersed in their specific surroundings, to stay in contact with the preacher. The onus is on them to make a concerted effort to give their undivided attention throughout the sermon. The need to support or encourage radio listeners does not appear to have been considered as an important issue by the preachers.

Only one preacher pondered the difficulties inherent for radio listeners during his sermon:

And will you join us to praise God now? Will you set aside whatever you're doing for a moment or two and praise Him with us? And as you praise with us, will you allow Jesus to come close to you and touch you with his love? We will praise him along with you using the old Latin words "we adore you O Lord: Adoramus Te Domine." We sing it to a chant that comes from Taizé in France. And some of our members are going to speak out their own reasons for praising God in situations in which they have found themselves. Will you too speak out within yourself your praise within your situation? And may you find God faithful in his promise to love you, to speak to you and make you whole. (302-3)

The whole of this text is addressed to the listening radio audience. In the final part of his sermon the preacher specifically invites radio listeners to join in the act of worship. By accepting that some listeners might not be paying attention, he makes a deliberate attempt to bring those listeners into a shared consciousness with himself and the congregation. He is rebuilding any loss in communal consciousness by requesting the inattentive radio listener to join in with everybody else. The power of this invitation is further enhanced through framing the request in a series of questions which allows the listener to make choices. The preacher continues by explaining how he and his congregation will also be accompanying the radio listeners. His final sentence offers the possibility of reward if his requests are granted. Throughout this section of his sermon the preacher appears to allow the hearer either to accept or reject his invitation. The complex devices used by this preacher neutralise or even

appear to reverse the power relationship between himself and the audience. Therefore, the distribution of power between the preacher and participants is more diffuse and feminised.

The selection of the most applicable mode of address in sermons is critical because it is one vehicle for conveying the message to achieve the various objectives asserted by Samuel Logan (1986):

The purpose of preaching is to inform, persuade, and call forth an appropriate response to the God whose message and instruction are being delivered...It is a kind of speaking aimed at both heart and mind, and seeking unashamedly to change the way people think and live. It is always an attempt at persuasion. (9, 23)

Thus, preachers should attempt to move listeners to actions which may or may not be specified. As “preaching mediates not only God’s authority but His *presence* and His *power*. Preaching effects an encounter, not simply with truth, but with God Himself” (Logan 12), authority is an integral aspect of preaching. This is supposed to be mediated by the preacher. In consequence s/he has considerable and specific power in relation to the listening public. This power differential is further magnified by virtue of the fact that Christian preaching is a particular mode of Christian instruction: “Preaching is teaching, first and foremost. It is more than just teaching; it is teaching *plus* application” (Logan 21).

Preaching thus involves an asymmetrical power relationship between preacher and audience which appears to be overt and stable.¹⁰ The intensity and effectiveness of the preacher’s power can be enhanced by various modes of reinforcement or reduced by a complex usage of ambiguous utterances through the mode(s) of address used by preachers in their sermons.

The power structures in this context can be made explicit through commands often used in the imperative form (R. Hodge and G. Kress 100). An examination of my sermon sample indicates that eight of the preachers (20.0%) employed this modality. For example:

¹⁰ I do not include lay preachers since they have different functions and their position is not the same as that of an ordained minister. All the sermons in my sample, with the possible exception of one whose preacher was referred to as a “Professor of Religious Education,” were delivered by ordained preachers.

Look at what you're doing. *Look at* what the people around you are living for. *Look* what their actions show. (emphasis added; 262)

Go and tell. Away you go. *See* who you meet. *Find* ways of telling them. *Engage* with them. (emphasis added; 294)

Think about the potato in all its myriad forms from King Edwards to pink fur apples. (emphasis added; 313)

Think about it. If the Lord of Glory decided to make a visit today, would we be excited or distinctly uncomfortable? (emphasis added; 346)

Think of the parties, the lights, the excitement. (emphasis added; 359)

Think. Will you let it slip useless away? . So, *look* to this day. (emphasis added; 364-6)

In these excerpts, the instructions to “look”, “see” and “think” dominate. In the context of the situation sermons are conventionally delivered in buildings to a seated congregation which limits the preachers’ opportunity to appeal all the senses. Moreover, there are several ways in which the use of imperatives may be considered as persuasive techniques, for example, through the dominant discourse of an order from a superordinate to a subordinate which is overtly authoritarian (as in the military culture) or in a less authoritarian manner (as in the case of a mother speaking to a child).

However, in the context of preaching the use of imperatives may be considered as inclusive when a speaker appeals to the senses of the hearer. Buttrick (1989) contends that “the language of preaching must be shaped for common consciousness” (296). In addition he considers that preaching should have a sense of immediacy and contemporaneity since he states that “we must preach as if the congregation and ourselves were hearing the story for the first time with immediate force” (347). He suggests that the way in which sermons can evidence this sense of immediacy is through the use of contemporary language and imagery. He advises the use of imagery and language in the sermon so that listeners can “visualize, think, feel and, therefore understand on many different levels at once” (189). He claims that

when sermons work towards capturing a sense of immediacy and contemporaneity they avoid the “then/now split” (346). Thus, Buttrick suggests that preachers are able to invoke a sense of contemporaneity and immediacy into a shared consciousness between themselves and listeners through the use of imperatives which call listeners to use their senses. In this way, the use of imperatives is not used as a form of domination but may be understood as a feminine approach to connection and sharing.

A different preacher uses several imperatives in a long exhortation:

May I make a few simple, practical suggestions? Later on today, *sit down* quietly and *open* the Bible in the Old Testament at the book of Isaiah, chapter forty-three. *Read* those first eight verses that I read earlier. And as you read, *imagine* that God is holding you in His arms, that you are encircled by His love. *Look up* and *see* the loving face of God as He says those words to you. And as you accept the love He offers, *praise* Him. Or take a pen and paper and make a list of all the good things in your life and then *read* them slowly praising God for each one. Then *write* another list of all your problems and difficulties at this time. And this time as you read each one say to yourself, “God knows this and is here with me.” And *praise* Him that He is there. Or, *find* at least one other person or a small group with whom you can share your pain and praise. You will find acceptance from His people and you will know yourself accepted and loved by Him. (emphasis added; 302)

The preacher begins this section of his text by posing a rhetorical question which contains the modal auxiliary “may.” This question serves several functions. It takes account of the people being addressed, thereby according them civility and respect. Equality is implied between speaker and hearers whilst acquiescence from listeners is assumed since they have no right to reply in this context. Hodge and Kress (1993) state:

Language functions to deceive as well as inform. Modal auxiliaries encode probabilities and hearers-speaker relations, but blur distinctions of past, present and future, and knowledge and power attempts to neutralize the power relation. (125-6)

By use of this rhetorical question, the preacher, thus complicates and masks the power relations between himself and the listeners. Their ambiguity serves to reduce the overt power of the preacher as it acts to persuade listeners to comply with his suggestions. This is further reinforced through the preacher offering a variety of choices from which listeners can select. The use of a modal auxiliary and the feminisation of the imperatives through a shared consciousness neutralises the power relationship. In the final sentence, the preacher moves to using other determinants for power derived from status (Frieze *et al* 305). He appeals to the idea of community, of being an insider and of being accepted as a way of gaining compliance from the listeners, by playing on their socially based needs.

Eight of the preachers (20%) in my sample used imperatives. This means that thirty-two (80%) did not use the command mode in preparing their sermons. The majority of preachers in my sample made use of neither the traditional understanding of imperatives, which is an authoritative speech model, nor of the feminist approach invoking a sense of immediacy or contemporaneity, as forms of persuasion or compliance.

Since one of the main purposes of preaching is to teach, the modes of address chosen by preachers depends on their preferred teaching styles.¹¹ All the sermons contain the first personal plural pronouns “we,” “us” or “our” to some extent.¹² An analysis of the modes of address used by preachers in my sermon sample reveals that many of the sermons are composed of complex interwoven paragraphs of varying modes of address resulting in polyvocal texts. None of the texts is confined to one mode of address only.

In order to discuss how gender, language and power operate through modes of address I shall examine and analyse extracts from two sermons which I shall discuss separately. In the first sermon, the preacher, after citing his Biblical text, begins his address in the third person and remains in this speech mode for approximately half his sermon. Throughout the latter

¹¹ Chapter six of this thesis discusses gender issues concerned with sermon preparation and style.

¹² This use of plural pronouns ranges from as few as 3 in one sermon to the maximum of 70 in another.

part he alternates between two modes of address: the first person plural and the third person. He begins his sermon:

One hundred and fifty years ago on the eighteenth of May 1843, Edinburgh witnessed one of the most remarkable scenes in its long and eventful history...Leading at home to the building of hundreds of new churches, manses and schools as well as theological colleges of international renown and leading abroad to the development of missionary endeavour on a scale and of a quality scarcely equalled by any other community in the English speaking world. (246)

The preacher uses the neutral third person form of address in this half of his sermon to deliver historical information to his listeners. Thus, he disseminates knowledge in his role as teacher or “expert” to the listeners which has the effect of distancing him from the audience thereby taking the active role whilst allocating a passive role to the listeners. Hodge and Kress (1993) comment that “the detachment from a particular person gives the utterance an impersonal force. The third person form implies a neutral transmitter and it is the form in which to present the statement as authoritative” (92). The use of this form reinforces an unequal power relationship with the preacher disseminating knowledge because he possesses power and authority which reduces listeners to the subordinated position. “Expertise” is considered a masculine form of power (Code) and significantly used by more men than women (R. Centers, B. Raven and A. Rodrigues; P. Johnson). Thus, the preacher here uses a male gendered type of discourse in his particular mode of address to influence the listeners.

This preacher shifts into the first person plural for the next section:

So we return to our text: “remember the days of old, consider the years long passed.” The words remind us that it is a religious duty to remember and that we do well to commemorate “The Disruption” this evening. Of course, our remembrance is tinged with various emotions, as remembrance almost always is. (248)

This change of mode of address allows the preacher to define a shared social relationship between himself and the listeners (Bernstein 78, 128). However, Trevor Pateman (1980)

suggests a different explanation: “the use of ‘we’ serves to solidify the relationship if both communicating parties do possess roughly equal status” (89). In the context of broadcast sermons in which, for instance, the status and title of preachers is declared at the end of every act of worship (this particular preacher was accorded the title of “Reverend Professor”), equal status is unlikely between the preacher and the listeners. Pateman comments: “the use of ‘we’ is repressive when it disguises an absence of argument or when it disguises an existing social inequality” (87). Social inequality between preacher and hearers is concealed through this “inclusive” use of “we” which therefore constitutes a repressive discourse permitting power differentials between speaker and listeners to prevail. Preachers using the first person plural pronoun in this context are indirectly subordinating listeners. Thus, this type of “inclusive” language may attempt to reduce the power differential between preacher and listener but does not negate the preacher’s existing power base.

Later this preacher reverts to speaking in the third person:

Perhaps church folk should be more aware of their lamentable proneness to bigotry, Pharaseeism, and the excessive love of power. Their tendency to identify the interests of their own particular group with the will of God and their fatal fondness for identifying piety with the privilege of being rude to everyone who disagrees with them. (248)

The preacher refers to “church folk” with the third person plural pronoun “their” when he discusses particular negative characteristics that he considers “church folk” to possess. By changing his mode of address from the first person plural to third person plural, the speaker implies an underlying suggesting that these negative “bad” attributes belong to “church folk” who are “not us” but “them, out there.” The modal auxiliaries add further ambiguity and vagueness about temporality to these statements which are partly a description and partly an exhortation to action. The purpose of the vagueness and ambiguity may be as Hodge and Kress suggest to deceive and blur distinctions of past, present, future, knowledge and power:

“a speaker uses modalities to protect his utterances from criticism. The person who is in control of complex modalities, and doesn’t have to stammer, must be a member of an intellectually powerful class with a proper awareness nevertheless of his social position” (128).

The sermon continues:

We remember also with gratitude, pride and even a little envy. Envy at the central place which the church and church affairs occupied in the life of Scotland one hundred and fifty years ago, as well as all the brilliant leadership. Could we equal it today? Given to the infant Free Church by Charmers, Candlish, Cunningham, and Guthrie. And to the much battered old Kirk by James Robertson, Norman McCloud and Robert Lee. At the heroic sacrifices made by ministers . . . Pride also at the unprecedentedly generous support given to . . . Generosity that still has much to teach us. (248)

The preacher discusses the positive “good” characteristics of the early members of this church. However, his choice of the first person plural mode of address invokes a feeling of group identity which acts as a persuasive mechanism to encourage the members to imitate these role models. According to Frieze *et al* (1976), “referent power is a likely base for female use and possibly more likely for females than males. Because of its reliance upon perceived similarities, referent power is often used by women over women and men over men” (312). It can also be used for any people who identify with one another. The remainder of the sermon is spoken in this “inclusive” mode of address relying on another referent power base, that of St Paul’s rules for Christian controversialists with whom the preacher identifies his church members.

Several times during this sermon the preacher begins a section with the word “remember.” This usage provides a sense of contemporaneity as it brings an otherwise pedantic discussion into the present which to some extent feminises his discourse. Nevertheless, the two modes of address used by this preacher serve two major levels of power differentials. The use of the third person for the first half of the address detaches the

speaker from the utterances and thereby gives that section of the text an impersonal authoritative force. The shift into the first person plural mode of address at the beginning of the second half of the text limits the authority of those utterances. Nevertheless, these limits are enhanced by the interspersal of occasional third person and past tense utterances. Consequently, there is an overall sense of the use of modes of address to reinforce existent power structures.

The preacher of the second sermon to be discussed here uses a mixture of modes of address. He uses all three grammatical persons, creating a random pattern sometimes using one mode in one sentence then switching to another for several sentences. However, his most preferred modes of address are the first person singular and the third person, whilst his least preferred one is the “inclusive” form using the first person plural “we.” He begins with a personal disclosure using the first person singular:

As a teenager, I asked the Lord Jesus into my life and I’ve never looked back. I can remember that day, it’s over forty years ago, as though it were yesterday. And although of course there have been times in my life when I’ve had problems, illness, disappointment or frustration, I’ve always been aware of God’s presence to encourage, to strengthen, to comfort and to be with me. Whatever I may have achieved in my life is because of the knowledge that God in Christ is with me. What God has done for me, I believe He can do for you. (267)

The preacher begins this section using the first person singular in which the source of authority is the speaker who is the subject of the utterances. By offering for consideration the way he deals with his emotional experiences, he discloses that he has found solace in God when he has had problems in his life. Thus, he connects to the communal consciousness of the listeners as he shares his faith experience. He stays linked to the audiences’ consciousness as he continues to deepen that connection by offering various feelings with which listeners may identify:

If you’re lonely, upset; if you’re frustrated, even angry; if you have been ill-treated,

abused, let down; if you have suffered and are suffering at this very moment; if you have thinking and wondering the things of God . . . (267)

By using words describing general emotional feelings he includes every member of the audience because they can all identify with some sentiments. Their thoughts become self-centred but their consciousness remains linked to that of the preacher through shared experiences. An illusion of intimacy occurs which enhances the preacher's influence as he shifts into the third person grammatical mode of address using active verbs in order to exhort listeners to accept his words:

God is speaking to you, speaking to you at this very moment and he wants you to respond. He wants you to know and to love Him. He wants to come and live in your heart and your life. He wants you to express the freedom which comes from knowing and loving Him. He wants to take away any feeling of guilt, of sinfulness, any feeling of rejection or bitterness, even unforgiveness that you may be experiencing at this moment. And he wants to give you a new start. (267)

The preacher discusses God's wishes for the human race.¹³ He uses his confidence concerning the positive rewards he received from God to persuade listeners to comply with the following requests:

Will you let Him do that? Will you do as I did, all those years ago, will you let Lord Jesus into you life? He loves you. (268)

Throughout this passage this preacher uses language of mutuality and sharing brought about by modes of address that enable shared experiences, faith connections and communal consciousness to act as persuasive techniques. According to Smith: "The criteria for effective preaching held by feminist preachers appear to be creating or enabling a quality of faith connection and participation in the transforming power of true solidarity in community"

¹³ In this passage five sentences begin with "He wants." The rhetorical device of reiteration also fosters the building up of congregational consciousness and understanding. The use of reiteration is discussed in chapter six which is concerned with the structure and style of sermons.

(47). This preacher, therefore, utilises a feminist persuasive methodology in this section of his sermon.

The foregoing examination and analysis of the modes of address used in two different sermons of my sample are typical examples which demonstrate how language, gender and power interrelate. In response to feminists' demands, "inclusive" language has been adopted by some preachers on the assumption that it promotes equality with the listeners. This view takes no account of how such language may act to disguise power differentials brought about by the traditional understanding of authority. Neither is there an awareness that in the particular circumstances of broadcast services an inappropriate usage of this "inclusive" language may effectively exclude radio listeners. Most preachers in my sample have accepted that generic terms are understood to be male-gendered and avoided their usage. However, gender pairing as paratactic sequencing in place of generic terms substitutes a direct form of sexism by one that is indirect. It reinforces the view that man is the standard form by which women are measured. Thus, sex differentials are maintained although they are disguised by this usage of "inclusive" language. In addition, this approach to gender assumes it is only a question of difference or that it is only necessary to ensure that women are made visible.¹⁴ The principles and general norms offered by both homileticians and the preachers of my sermon sample in the context of "inclusive" language suggest that most of them have a naïve view of the relationship between gender, language and power. Furthermore, they seem unaware of how mass media influence the communication process. They also ignore the diversity of listeners.

¹⁴ This view is examined further in the next chapter which focuses on the preacher's use of gendered illustrations and imagery.

CHAPTER THREE

GENDERED IMAGERY IN SERMON ILLUSTRATIONS

In the preceding chapter I discussed the preachers' use of generic terms and diverse modes of address in the light of the churches' recommendations for "inclusive" language to be spoken in acts of worship. Faull and Sinclair state: "there are other considerations which make a sermon inclusive. For example, as well as illustrations about men, illustrations about women for women (i.e. which relate to women's lives) need to be included" (36). Thus, they consider that sermons which contain imagery about both women and men will make them inclusive. In this chapter I shall explore how preachers employ imagery and illustrations in their sermons and analyse this usage in relation to issues of gender, language and power.

Homiletical text and preaching manuals have been developed from convention and tradition.¹ All insist that illustrations are an essential part of sermons though the authors may stress their own particular preferred types. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines an illustrations as "that which serves to illustrate or make clear, etc.; an elucidation; explanation; an example; an instance." W. E. Sangster's *Craft of Sermon Illustration*, published in 1946, reprinted in 1987, and reissued in 1990, is still regarded by many theologians as one of the best guides to this aspect of preaching. As David Shearlock (1990) writes, "when you read this book today, you find it has dated very little and that it still speaks with clarity and relevance to our present situation, despite all the changes that have taken place during the intervening decades" (89). According to Sangster, "length is not a determinant. A phrase can illustrate - or it may take a paragraph" (*Craft* 26). He lists and discusses nine types of illustration: figures of speech, analogy, allegory, fable, parable,

¹ Chapter six, concerned with the structure and style of sermons, discusses the development of homiletical texts.

historical allusion, biographical incident, personal experience and anecdote (Sangster, *Craft* 27-45).

Three types of gender-specific illustrations were used by the preachers of my sample: the use of personal experience,² a short narrative associated with specific ideas about femininity and masculinity, and references to “famous” or “well known” people who are or have been public figures, role models or acclaimed experts in their field.

3.1 Representations of Femininity and Masculinity

The only non-gender specific image referring to people used by a few preachers in my sample is that of a baby. For example, one preacher said:

A tiny *baby*, just lifted out of the bath, all bright and shiny, can leave us gasping with amazement at the beauty of a new life. (emphasis added; 226)

The sex of the baby is neither explicitly nor implicitly declared through this preacher’s illustration. Listeners are able to conjure up their own picture of any baby having a bath. A different preacher also focuses on the figure of a baby:

When a *baby* catches your wee finger in *his* tiny hand and you wonder at the marvel of the perfection of God’s creation. (emphasis added; 298)

The picture of a baby drawn by this preacher is similar to that of the preceding extract. In this example, the preacher also begins by using the non-gendered word “baby”, but the infant becomes male sexed through the speaker’s use of the male possessive pronoun “his”. Female infants are thus not only rendered invisible but may be understood as inferior to the “perfect” male babies. This explicit male-gendered image produces a monodimensional view of human beings which reflects ideas about the supremacy of the male sex (Spender 96-101).

An anecdote about a man possessing self-confidence and a logical, rational mind, which is based on theological imagery, is told by a different preacher:

² I examine the preachers’ use of personal experience as another type of gendered illustration in the next chapter.

Some time ago, my wife and I were on holiday in Wales at Christmas time. We had arrived in a far corner of the country, cold, tired and hopelessly lost. There had been hours of heavy snow and we couldn't seem to get back on track. So we went to make enquiries at the local shop and on the way back we met a jovial old gentleman driving a beat-up farm yard truck. "Follow me," he said. With that he flew into his vehicle and hurtled across the countryside. We could barely keep up with him. It seemed as if he was taking us on a grand tour of Wales. He cut across farms, went over hills and down valleys and suddenly he stopped by the side of the road. "That's the road over there," he said. And with that, he disappeared in a cloud of snowdust. Without his guidance we would never have made it. And it is just like that with the ministry of the Holy Spirit. He has been sent by Jesus to be our helper, our friend and guide. (253)

Apart from its male focus, this story highlights another issue which has been debated by Christian feminists. The narrative is full of ethereal imagery as the old man is described in terms of a ghostly figure soaring over the countryside who mysteriously vanishes. The jovial old gentleman is likened to the Holy Spirit. The three persons of the Trinity are referred to as God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Trinitarian theology has been recognised as excluding women from a meaningful role in the life of the Church. Feminist theologians are pressing for a re-imagining of the Trinity in various ways, one of which is that the Holy Spirit, a possessor of feminine qualities, should be personified as female (P. P. Allen; M. Grey; E. Johnson; S. McFague, *Metaphorical*; T. Phillip; M. Suchoki; B. B. Zikmund). Despite these discussions, the Churches³ remain trenchant in their doctrinal insistence that God and the three persons of the Trinity are male personified (G. Leonard; W.

³ In 1992, the Methodist's Church Faith and Order Committee Report agreed, "Trinitarian theology may accommodate the imagery of Mother as well as Father when speaking of the first person; and there is no reason why female imagery should not be used when speaking of the third - as it has been in the past" (99). For full discussion see pages 83-107. Their prayer book was revised accordingly in 1993. Also, the official prayer book of the Anglican Church in New Zealand entitled *A New Zealand Prayer Book* published in 1989 contains a prayer addressed to God as "Father and Mother" on page 181.

Oddie). Consequently, it is inferred that men are like God (Daly, *Beyond*). This narrative upholds the exclusively male personification of the Trinity which identifies men's superiority by association. Such male-centredness is also evident in another kind of Scriptural imagery, warfare, which is utilized by some preachers in my sample. The following story is recounted by one preacher:

One morning a business man sat on a train opposite two Americans in suits. Suddenly, one of them had some kind of fit and threw himself off his chair onto the floor. The other promptly pulled him up, loosened his shirt, collar and tie, opened his mouth and got him to swallow two small tablets. The business man asked if he could do anything to help. "Thank you, but he'll be OK in a moment," said the American about his friend. "He often gets these attacks, it's just one of those things." "Are you sure?" said the business man. "Sure, I'm sure" replied the American. "Look, it's my job. I've given up my career to travel with this guy. I'm his assistant. He'll be OK, thank you." "What," said the business man, "do you mean to say you spend your whole time just being around for him? That's commitment if I ever saw it." "No, you don't understand," came the reply. "You see, this man and me, we fought together in Vietnam. One time I'd been left for dead. Shot through both of my legs, but this man came back for me and carried me to safety. He got me help. I'm only alive because of him. So you see, what I'm doing for him is nothing in comparison to what he has already given to me. All that I have, all that I am, isn't enough to begin to say thank you. (324-5)

Here an equation is made between men laying down their lives for each other during war and their peacetime life styles. The male bonding experienced in one context is translated into another and suffused with Christian associations underwritten by the fact that in both cases responsibility was accepted where the men were not compelled to act; they offered themselves as good Samaritans to help their neighbour. The world represented is an all male one which bespeaks the power of male bonding.

Male bonding in the context of war may supply one set of imagery; the use of sport offers another. Sporting imagery was used by a minority of preachers in my sample. One preacher said:

“I only want to know who broke the window,” says dad to the nervous *footballers* in the garden . . . What the papers say covers a wide-range of views about how long the government is going to survive, or which *football* manager is going to resign.

(emphasis added; 260)

Whilst a different preacher offers another sporting image:

There’s a certain amount of feeling between the Welsh, Scots, Irish and English not to mention the French, when the *rugby grand slam* is up for grabs. (emphasis added; 311)

Both sports, football and rugby, are associated with men. The “traditional men’s sports” are based on stereotypical masculine attributes such as being active, competitive, dominant, aggressive, tough, risk taking (C. A. Oglesby and M. Shelton). Competitive games such as football and rugby are conventional male sports traditionally played by men.⁴ Sporting imagery which focuses on these games may distance, through exclusion, women in the listening audience. In addition, both stereotypical sporting imagery and warfare imagery may alienate male listeners who not share such combative attitudes. The difficulty of avoiding the reproduction of gender stereotypes in a culture in which they are all-pervasive is only too apparent in these images.

Several preachers identified the people in their illustrations by their professions or skilled worker status. One preacher told a seafaring story:

An *old sea captain* spotted a light on a collision course one foggy evening. Instantly, he had his *communications man* flash a message that the other should change the course ten degrees to the north. Just as quickly a message came back telling the *captain*

⁴ Even in schools where females are permitted to play in football or rugby teams, teams are divided into two leagues on gender lines. This maintains the status quo and prevents interruption of the established process of male identity formation (J. Hargreaves).

to change his course ten degree to the south. Now the *captain* wasn't used to having his authority challenged like that and so he sent a message that he was a "*full captain*" and that the other should change course ten degrees to the north immediately. No sooner had he finished with that message that another one came back stating that the sender was a *seaman first class* and the *captain* should change course ten degrees to the south immediately. Really angry now, the *captain* fired back the message, "I am a battleship. Move ten degrees to the north." And just as quickly came back the reply, "I am a lighthouse. Move ten degrees to the south." (271)

The male characters in this tale of one-up-man ship [*sic*] emphasise notions of authority relationships (Frieze *et al* 304). The justification for coercion by the captain stems from his belief in legal rational authority. He wants to use his superior position to attempt to obtain compliance by coercion from the subordinate seaman. However, the lighthouse keeper suggests to the captain that he will cause a catastrophe if he continues on his course. The captain realises he has made an error and in order to avoid a catastrophe needs to change course as directed by the seaman.

It could be argued that this narrative points to the relativity of authority and serves to undermine power structures based on status, a terrain where men tend to occupy the highest positions. This does not detract from the fact, however, that what is presented is an androcentric world and that the final decision is arrived at through a competitive, mock one-to-one battle between two men claiming equal authority though on different grounds.

Where the previous speaker focused explicitly on an androcentric context, a different one did so more indirectly. This preacher invoked six hierarchical, patriarchal institutions to represent the contemporary world: the law, medicine, education, politics, the media and business.

And the news report goes on. Jesus will visit our prisons. He will walk the wards of our hospitals. He will sit at the back of our school classrooms listening to what is taught and watching how the children behave. He will sit in the gallery and observe

Prime Minister's Questions in the House of Commons. He will study what is written in our national newspapers. He will attend the board-room of our big companies. He will sit in on a police interrogation and go out on the beat and see how an officer is regarded by the people he is trying to serve. (347-8)

All the institutions referred to employ pyramidal models of organization and authority, compartmentalise knowledge into demarcated disciplines and their methodologies are defined by traditional assumptions and criteria (J. M. Altekruze and S. V. Rosser 31). In addition, in this sermon, the neutral term police officer is genderised through the male personal pronoun. The whole imagery suggested by this preacher's discourse is infused by a reference system dominated by men and power structures. Women are placed in the "muted" position as they are rendered invisible.

There were numerous instances of covert ways of excluding women in preachers' use of illustrations in their sermons. The following illustration which focuses on policing as an occupation is an example :

Our view of our world is like a TV *cops and robbers* story. After a long drawn out battle, *the baddies* will be caught and get what's coming to them. We, having identified ourselves with *the cops*, glow with satisfaction at having putting the world to rights. (emphasis added; 330)

The images invoked by the colloquial terms for police officers and criminals have male connotations. There is an underlying inference that "good" people are males and therefore, only males can correct social injustices. Gender is subtly coded in this illustration even though since the 1980s there have been a new variety of "cops and robbers" films and television drama, which centre on female "cops" such as *Cagney and Lacey*. But the very phrase "cops and robbers" predates the arrival of female detectives on television screens. It, therefore, harks back to an all male world divided into "good" and "evil", analogous to God and Satan.

The whole of my sample contained only two references to job titles that are conventionally defined as female occupations:

It's one thing to have a doctor, or *a nurse*, a shop assistant or a representative of the church who behaves properly, but it is very different and far better when you have one who really cares. (emphasis added; 311)

The preacher suggests four different jobs titles. The first two appear to be paired into a male/female dichotomy. Traditionally, a doctor is a man whilst a nurse is a woman. This gender segregation suggests an inequality between the two sexes through income and status differentials. The gender hierarchy in organisations constructs the man as more authoritative and more responsible (J. Acker; S. Clegg and D. Dunkerley; S. Cohn; A. J. Mills). Moreover, the man is the decision maker whilst the woman's role is to support him. The "superiority" of the male is further enhanced through the linguistic technique of placing the male image before the female image. Thus the social relationship and power differentials in this illustration convey meanings that define the male as the dominant gender.

Another preacher suggests a different list of occupations:

And we want to bring all our gifts, our skills and our experiences as development workers, engineers, priest, *secretaries* or medics. (emphasis added; 369)

This preacher also points to a traditional female occupation, that of the secretary. Again, the relationship between boss and secretary is based on the male/superior female/subordinate model. Certainly since World War II secretaries have been the personal assistant of one "male boss". Thus, they act as a kind of office "wife". As Rosemary Pringle (1992) comments:

The office wife is portrayed as the extension of her boss, loyal, trustworthy and devoted. She is expected to 'love, honour and obey', relieving him of routine and the trivial, creating the conditions for his detachment from the mundane rituals of everyday life. (173)

This image of the secretary is also part of popular culture, represented in stereotypical ways based on familial or sexual terms which construct them as operating as a “heterosexual married pair” (C. Delphy and D. Leonard; R. Clark; E. Cassidy and K. Nassbaum; C. Pateman, *Disorder*).

The most popular female role suggested by preachers of my sample is that of the mother, an unpaid worker, often the servant of every member of the family:

Mary is thought of as one who is called by God to a special future. God had a purpose for her life. So what was it, this highly esteemed vocation? No more and no less than to be a mother . . . People used to tell me you forget the agony of child-birth once the child is with you. Stuff and nonsense, I say. You never forget that indescribable pain. But the suffering is part of the greater reality, so you bear it. It only begins with the labour but goes on in being a mother. Intense effort. Sometimes to the point of the unbearable. Yet if you're wise, you don't try to deny the pain or blame that suffering for your child you cannot entirely know the wonder of loving them . . . it's in pain we bring forth children and it can be in pain we explore the will of God for us. (360)

The representation of motherhood offered here is one of suffering. The preacher promotes motherhood as a means of sacrificial giving of women in service without seeking reward. There is not only an implied suggestion that suffering without complaint is a virtue but also that it is a privilege to suffer in the service of others. Dorothee Soelle (1975) rightly comments that “the Christian cult of suffering has been shamelessly exploited to justify injustice and oppression” (103). Christians are often urged to accept and be transformed through suffering. This theology of suffering prevents proper discussion of the effect suffering has and is the excuse for unjust social and working conditions which go unchallenged: “the ethic of service is used to legitimise oppression and maintain the status quo” (Borrowdale 51).

The same use of the image of maternity turns up in another sermon:

Like being in love . . . which with effort and perseverance can grow into that equally reckless love shown by Jesus giving his life for us. All through life, we can find love in both a kiss and a cross. *A mother* cradling her baby looks so lovely and serene.

Beautiful, a Madonna Mary of the Nativity scene. Interestingly no-one's ever put on canvass a screaming night of teething or coughing. Love on the surface belies the depth of love which goes on underneath. (emphasis added; 378)

The first mother figure is depersonalised, she has no name. She is compared to Mary, the most prominent female figure in Christianity. Mary has been the object of extravagant veneration which has inspired artistic imagination. However, this image of Mary owes more to religious art than it does to the Bible (M. Warner; A. Brown). The preacher then produces a different image of motherhood which includes sleepless nights and worry. This image is developed through the use of an illustration:

Like *Robert, single parent*, going round the supermarket hand-in-hand with his little daughter Lucy. A warming sight, full of rosy sentimentality, until we chatted. This was their last outing for a while, he said. He was due back in hospital and Lucy back into care. The kiss and the cross run very close together. (emphasis added; 378)

In this instance, the preacher changes the female-gendered focus of mothering to a male-gendered focus of fathering. No mention is made of the mother: she may be dead, incapacitated, or taking little or no part in caring for the child. By ignoring the mother's situation some listeners may infer there is an underwritten gender differential since the father is perceived as "good" whilst the mother may be "bad" due to her absence. The story is one of implied misfortune. Motherhood in our society is closely associated with guilt and anxiety (A. Borrowdale). Feminists concerned with the politics of motherhood have pointed out many factors associated with the feminisation of caring perpetuated through patriarchal structures (R. Arditti; R. Duelli Klein and L. Minden; R. Coward; C. Delphy; B. Friedan; A. Dworkin; Rich, *Compulsory*). The preacher, however, may have decided to include a man in an illustration about a single father as the issue of male parenting has become increasingly an

object of public debate. Nevertheless, male single parenting is still comparatively rare, an apparent desire to mention the minority group with the exclusion of the majority group can create an ambiguous discourse in which gender roles are reinforced rather than queried.

As well as supporting traditional views of women as mothers there is support for traditional views on marriage and the family through the preachers' use of familial relational terms:

A *bride* dressed with the utmost care and splendour stepping out radiantly from her family home. (emphasis added; 226)

This image suggests the traditional marriage, the public commitment and legal relationship between a woman and a man, known as husband and wife, which binds them and their children together as a family as well as the handing out of the female from one family setting to another.

However, the institution of marriage is founded upon the creation accounts of the Old Testament; woman and man were created as "one flesh" and given the task of procreation. The overall treatment of marital fidelity in the Old Testament places it in the context of the divine covenant, the highest relationship (Exod. 4.22; Ps 103.13; Jer. 31.9; Hos. 1-3; Hos. 11.1-4). This constructs the marriage of human beings as the nearest parallel to the covenant between Yahweh and Israel which Christians have re-interpreted to be the mythical union between Christ and the Church (Prov. 2.17; Mal. 2.14). The New Testament sees the relationship as a public one, woven into the work and worship of the community. According to Elaine Storkey (1985):

The typical family of the Bible was not monogamous but polygamous, not nuclear but extended. Even in the New Testament, where monogamy did become the norm, the nuclear family was not in great evidence. Instead communal living was practised, with approval, and a variety of households forms was in evidence. (84)

No detailed teaching concerning marriage is found in the Gospels, though St. Paul's views are developed, albeit controversial (1Cor. 7; Col. 3.18-9; Titus 2.3-5; 1Pet. 3.1-7). Some

Marxist feminists question the Churches' endorsement of the bourgeois family and comment, "it [the family] is not, as has so often been claimed, some kind of 'natural' instinctive and sacred unit" (F. Edholm 177). Contemporary Christian forms of family life and marriage have been encouraged through capitalist culture. Thus, Marxist feminists and some Christian feminists believe the Churches to be pawns of the capitalist system (E. Storkey). In consequence, the modern construction of marriage and family which some consider to be derived from biblical sources is not regarded by all people to represent relational realities as they were practised by those portrayed in the Bible.

I have discussed some of the gendered imagery offered by preachers of my sample which focused on one or other of the sexes. Some preachers used an illustration that incorporated both a woman and a man interacting in one short narrative. The following extract demonstrates this usage:

A few months ago at a healing service a couple were praying with a lady with a very bad back. As one was praying, the other kept hearing in their head, the word "disappointment". He tried it out on the lady who burst into tears and confirmed that an operation promised to cure her back had left her sore as ever and she was bitterly disappointed and resentful. God wanted to speak to her about the disappointment and the resentment as well as about her back. (300-1)

The woman is suffering ill-health and distressed. The man appears to be "special" not only because God talks to him but also because he is depicted as God's chosen tool to enable the woman to free her emotions. The woman is depicted as unhealthy and emotional, the man as healthy and rational. He is "superior" to the woman since he acts as a channel through which God can reach her. The preacher implies her inferiority by associating her with described negative attributes whilst those of the man are all depicted as positive. A gender dichotomy is set up by this preacher's use of imagery which articulates stereotypical sex-traits (P. Rosenkrantz *et al*). The preacher is adhering to recommended guidelines by including

imagery of both a woman and a man but the gender differences presented result in an inequality of representation.

Other preachers choose a different textual approach when offering imagery and illustrations about both women and men by treating each gender separately. They first focus on one gender and follow that illustration with one about the other gender. An example of this procedure can be seen in the two following extracts from one sermon:

A girl comes up to university. Everybody else seems so confident, so well organised, so much as if they had a right to be there. But she's full of doubts and questions. She looks at the reading list in her room and says, "I'm here on false pretences. I'm not going to make it. Whatever else it is that other people have I don't seem to have it." . . . And when she looks back at her university course, it isn't the 2:1 that pleases her most, though that was an achievement, it was the self-discovery, it was the growing in confidence. (372-3)

The female student is referred to as a "girl". The girl image has connotations of immaturity and dependency. In addition, she is described as lacking in confidence and self-esteem. This lack is expressed in the third person form which presents the statement as authoritative (Hodge and Kress 92). Her lack of confidence is reiterated by the preacher. This time it is expressed as a personal emotional response through the preacher's use of direct speech on the part of the young woman in the present tense. This serves to compound and reinforce the perceived negative characteristics attributed to the woman. Females are stereotyped as emotional and excitable in a minor crisis as well as being less confident than males (I. K. Broverman *et al* 59-78; Frieze *et al* 58). Indeed, studies of achievement-related competence or expectations for success have established that females perceive themselves to be less competent than men. Compared to males, females have relatively low evaluations of their own abilities, performance, and likelihood of future success (V. C. Crandall; Frieze *et al*; E. E. Macoby and C. N. Jacklin; Parsons *et al*). Thus social perception appears to substantiate

the validity of this particular stereotypical image which is reproduced and reinforced in the sermon.

This female focused illustration is immediately followed by one which is male focused:

And this young man would like to be a Christian, but he meets so many people who are effervescent, so confident in their faith, they make him guilty somehow. He's got a basic idea that as a basic irreducible minimum he ought to assent to the Apostle's Creed. But most of the time he's not sure, honestly, if he believes anything at all.

How he would like to. (373)

The preacher refers to the "young man", rather than a "boy", thus assigning him greater maturity than the woman in the previous passage. He is also described as lacking in confidence. His problem centres on the uncertainty of his belief. However, this is not reinforced through the presentation of a personal emotional response. The preacher continues to describe the young man in the third person. The immediacy of the young man's emotions is thus lost, his plight seems rational rather than emotional.

Although these two illustrations appear similar, they are not equivalent in their presentation. The female image is more personal and more negative than that of the male. Through the use of this type of successive genderised illustrations in a sermon preachers promote and reinforce stereotypical notions of femininity and masculinity to the detriment of women. Overt and covert power mechanisms operate in the language of these "paired" illustrations. Thus, they not only fail to eliminate the differential power relations between the genders, they also serve to legitimise dominant discourse.

An examination of my sermon sample indicates that 21 out of 40 (51%) include one or more images concerned with stereotypical notions of femininity and masculinity. 19 out of 40 (49%) offered no illustrations based on gendered imagery depicting sex-role attitudes, behaviour or personality characteristics.⁵

⁵ Of the 21 preachers (51% of total) who chose to use gendered imagery, 11 (52%) referred to marriage, the family and motherhood in traditional stereotypical relational and familial terms. In respect of all the preachers, these images were favoured by 11 out of 40 (27.5%). Therefore, in the sample as a whole, 72.5%

3.2 Naming

The second way in which gender is indexed in my sermon sample is through the preachers' direct reference to people by citing their name. In the following extract from my sermon sample one preacher references a "great" man who lived two hundred years ago:

William Wilberforce, writing about the abolition of slavery at the beginning of the last century said, that "it is through power of the Gospel of Christ that this cruel domination is being uprooted and destroyed for ever. (emphasis added; 336)

This preacher cites a nineteenth-century British politician and philanthropist who was also a Christian. He uses this example to show that the power of Christ can manifest itself through people to overcome social injustices in the world. His theme at this point in his sermon is contemporary social justice. The notion of the exemplary individual, the "great man", who can promote changes offers a particular view of history based on nineteenth century concepts of progress, survival of the fittest and individualism. Standard versions of history have presented us with images of men as individuals who have battled against the odds. Feminist historians like Joan Scott have argued against such a view of history and indicated how women's roles have been written out of history. However, the reference to the singular man in history still persists in modern culture and was in evidence in my sermon sample.

Instead of using the name of an historically "important" person one preacher offered a contemporary media personality as an exemplar:

Bob Geldof performed wonders for famine and relief. (emphasis added; 306)

Most listeners will have heard of this pop-star and his good works. According to A. Brittan (1989) the "great" man or "hero" of the late twentieth century "is not a politician or a military man. Today's heroes are media constructs or great sportsmen" (162). The use of media personalities as exemplars as indicated in this example not only generates a male-

preachers did not focus on these particular images. In addition, 6 out of this 21 (29%) selected only imagery describing male sex-type attributes or sex-typed social roles, whilst 3 (14.5%) used only female-gendered stereotypes which focused on the ethic of servicing and nurturance.

centred focus but also emphasises the relative constancy of male appropriation of heroism in our culture.

The use of media personalities alongside the name of St. Paul acquired a different dimension in another sermon:

He doesn't, thank God, keep a special relationship with *Paul, Billy Graham* and *Cliff Richard*. He wants to have a special relationship with you and me. (emphasis added; 300)

Though this preacher interprets and discusses his biblical text found in St. Paul's letter to the Colossians prior to this comment, he makes no other references to Billy Graham or Cliff Richard in his sermon. He assumes that they are known to the listeners as well as appearing to suggest that they are comparable to St. Paul as important contemporary Christians. Thus there is an implied contrast between "you and me" as "ordinary" and the named people as "extraordinary." The preacher draws on an assumed shared cultural knowledge of living media personalities which focuses on white males whose dominance is encoded in this illustration.

Not all the preachers in my sermon sample use such exemplars though 20 out of 40 (50%) contain at least one name. The 59 "famous" people alluded to cover a wide historical period ranging from Caesar to the present day. In addition, they are selected from various occupations or professions as diverse as theology, literature, religious journalism and the popular culture of media personalities (see Table 1 below).

Table I

List of All Named Exemplars in Sermon Sample

Martin Luther	Bob Geldof	Thomas Helwys
Oscar Romero	Bishop Helder Camara	Edmund Leach
George Bernard Shaw	St. James	Prof. David Walsh
Sir Owen Chadwick	Freud	Chalmers
Caxton	Whitefield	Candlish
G.K. Chesterton	Caesar	Cunningham
C.S. Lewis	Michel Quoist	Gordon
George Herbert	Steven Pile	Guthrie
William Wilberforce	Petron	James Robertson
Milton	St. Pyron	Norman McCloud
Walt Disney	John Donne	Robert Lee
Keith Floyd	St. Ambrose	Samuel Danforth
Billy Graham	Pauleralion	F.W. Faber
Cliff Richard	Thomas Carlyle	John Wittrop
Michael Ramsey	St. Patrick	Dr. Francis Schaeffer
Chaucer	Dave Allen	John Oxenham
Lord Soper	Alastair Cook	Nikolai Berdyayev
Gordon Wilson	Gerald Priestland	John Robinson
Brian Keenan	William Barclay	Studdard Kennedy
Rev. Frederick Dennison Morris	Dr. Benjamin Jowett	

The most glaring fact revealed by this list is that all the exemplars are names of men. Not one well-known woman's name, living or dead, nor any of their works or deeds, are cited in any of the sermons in my sample. This list alone demonstrates the enormous task needed to eliminate the male gender bias prevalent in the Christian churches. Surely some of these nineteen preachers must know of appropriate examples of women who have contributed to society at large and the Christian churches in particular. If this not the case, then there is an obvious need for preachers to broaden their reading so they reflect a more equitable view of contemporary society. Exclusion devalues women's abilities as well as marginalising and relegating them to invisible roles. Moreover, this list represents a whole year's broadcast services. Radio listeners were subjected to a repetitive diet of "superior" men which not only reinforces traditional ideologies but may be perceived as verging on misogyny.

According to Spender, names and meanings do not exist independently of human beings:

Naming is the means whereby we attempt to order and structure the chaos and flux of

existence which would otherwise be an undifferentiated mass. By assigning names we impose a pattern and a meaning which allows us to manipulate the world. (163)

This concept of “naming” appeared about the same time as writing was “invented” (G. Lerner). The development and institutionalisation of patriarchal gender symbols as in the concept of naming is supposed to parallel the move away from the Mother-Goddess as the sole creator (G. Lerner 146-51). S. N. Kramer (1976) believes this change to be the result of the increasing power of the priests who began to record ancient myths in such a way as to serve political ends: “the powers of the Mother-Goddess were given to her son in an attempt to justify this bit of priestly piracy” (14). Though the dethroning of the Mother-Goddess took place in many different cultures at different times, most scholars date the patriarchal period of Biblical history from about 1800 BC (C. Christ and J. Plaskow; S. D. Collins; N. Goldberg; R. Hamerton-Kelly).

The radical feminist Mary Daly (1973) was at the forefront of the debate on the politics of naming within religion when she stated:

It is necessary to grasp the fundamental fact that women have had the power of *naming* stolen from us. We have not been free to use our own power to name ourselves, the world, or God. The old naming was not the product of a dialogue - a fact inadvertently admitted in the Genesis myth in which Adam names the animals and women. (8)

The book of Genesis enshrines a homosocial exchange in which a male God bestows upon another man named Adam the power of naming:

So out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought forth them to man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper fit for him. (Gen. 2. 19-20)

Daly believes that men have manufactured a position which reinforces a central male view of the world. As Spender suggests: “our inherited Biblical record has been edited and translated

and it is in some of this editing and translating that we can locate the politics of naming” (166).

A high proportion of the exemplars are acclaimed writers or journalists. One preacher comments:

It’s this bad sort of experience that led *George Bernard Shaw* to say that “home life is no more natural to us than a cage is natural to a cockatoo”. And it’s like *Edmund Leach*, the Reith lecturer, said in those lectures years ago: “Far from being the basis of good society, the family with its narrow privacy and tawdry secrets is the source of all our discontent.” However good or bad those experiences may be, the fact is most of us are part of some sort of family and live in some sort of home. So I want to explore the impact and difference that Jesus can make in these sort of situations. (emphasis added; 238)

This preacher offers no information about the first exemplar he has chosen and appears to assume that the listeners are familiar with the man and his works. However, he adds credentials to the author of his second quotation which suggests that he considers some listeners may be unfamiliar with the second named exemplar. Nevertheless, he indicates to his listeners that he is educated since he has knowledge of these texts. But, Edmund Leach’s lecture delivered in 1967, was framed within a Marxist thesis borrowing from Engel’s view of the family as a form of oppression. According to Janet Daley (1997), “these [views] were leading debates on social reform. Today they are tripping along in its wake” (16). The preacher is using these “famous” men’s credentials and views to strengthen and promote his own interpretation of the biblical text which follows in the next part of his sermon.

Many feminists state that not only has there been a male monopoly in naming the world but historically women have also been educationally deprived (V. Woolf). Although some women of the élite classes have had access to education through class privilege, many of them were deprived of conditions that encouraged theoretical writing (E. Showalter; Kaplan). Historically, our patriarchal order has restricted most women to writing within the

private sphere. Women wrote letters, diaries, and even novels for women, provided they did not write within the public male sphere (E. Showalter; S. Gilbert and S. Gubar). To write for the public sphere was considered a threat. As John Stuart Mill observed in 1859: “women who read, much more, women who write, are in the existing constitution of things a contradiction and a disturbing element” (460). In addition, women of less affluent classes have had less leisure time than men: most of their time was taken up with constant interruptions and demands from family and husbands as well as paid work. (M. Glastonbury; T. Olsen). Thus, lack of time also restricted their opportunities.

Those women who did venture outside the domestic sphere suffered ridicule and contempt when their writings were perceived as inappropriate, i.e. when they wrote on matters conceived of as part of the male domain. According to Margaret Walters (1976) Harriet Martineau, one of the first women political economists, wrote a treatise on population control which was commented on in the 1833 *Quarterly Review* with the following remarks: “Poor innocent! She has been puzzling over Mr. Malthus’s arithmetical and geometrical ratios for knowledge which she should have obtained by a simple question or two of her mamma” (331). Other women writers received similar rebukes (M. Peters; J. Goulianos; Kaplan). The division of women’s writing into the proper private sphere and the inappropriate public sphere is one which does not operate for men in the same way. As Spender states:

the determining factor is not always what is stated, or how it is stated, but *who* states, and the public/private distinction which is made in women’s writing comes not from the writing but the sex of the writer. The diaries and letters of men - particularly influential men - are necessarily classified as private, and those of male politicians for example, have frequently been published, treated with serious consideration, and even revered as the ‘real’ facts. (193)

However, there have been some non-fiction women writers in the eighteenth and nineteenth century and many in the twentieth century. Nevertheless, the literary canon before the

twentieth century is dominated by male writers which may explain why preachers do not cite women's texts.

An alternative strategy is employed by another preacher who names a poet, adds another male exemplar and also uses generic language in the following extract from his sermon:

And I was immediately reminded of a verse from *Chaucer's* "Canterbury Tales" of how the better weather of spring inclined *men's* hearts to go on pilgrimage. But today on this feast of *St. James*, the patron saint of pilgrims. (emphasis added; 281)

This preacher begins his sermon with an introduction to theme of his text about our journey through life as a pilgrimage. His reference to Chaucer invokes an image of medieval monks travelling dusty roads. His central focus remains male-gendered through his use of "men". Though this noun can be considered in the generic sense meaning women and men, the mention of a male patron saint establishes a gender-biased image of male pilgrims. In the rest of his sermon he interprets and discusses his theme in the context of contemporary life with no gendered references. However, at the beginning of his conclusion he says:

And so we come back to the theme of this feast of *St. James. James the fisherman* chose to follow Jesus. *James the disciple* chose to be sent out as an *apostle*. (emphasis added; 283)

The preacher re-focuses his image of the male pilgrim by qualifying James as both a fisherman and a disciple. Both this profession and the particular title were only held by men in the Jewish culture of the time (S. Brown; Goodspeed *A History*; Oesterly; Thiessen). Through the use of these exemplars, this preacher not only lends intellectual authority to his interpretation but also reinforces male supremacy, with overtly gendered imagery.

According to Kaplan (1976) one discourse which has historically been denied to women is poetry: "the language most emphatically denied to women is the most concentrated form of symbolic language - poetry" (29). She thinks that prejudices against women poets were deeper than those against their writing of novels and "the boundaries were shifted in order that the taboo could be preserved" (9). Spender comments: "the patriarchal expectation is

that some women can write novels, but no women can write poetry that is acceptable to men...The belief that women cannot write poetry is still not uncommon today” (214-5).⁶

Hymns are also poems. One preacher concludes his sermon by quoting a verse from a hymn:

That’s what we’re going to sing of now in a hymn written by F.W. Faber:

There’s a wideness in God’s mercy

like the wideness of the sea.

There’s a kindness in his justice

which is more than liberty. (262)

This preacher introduces the hymn with the name of the hymn writer. Though five other preachers quote a verse from a hymn none of them prefaced the hymn with the name of the writer. The majority of the most popular hymns have been produced by men. However, there are several women poets who wrote on religious themes and many ‘well-known’ female hymn writers both historically and recent.⁷

Since sermons are religious texts it would seem contextually appropriate to offer theologians and/or priests as exemplars. This was done by some of the preachers:

Michael Ramsey, that wise *Archbishop*, once said, “There is nothing about God that you cannot see in Jesus.” And the reading we had from St. Luke’s Gospel certainly tells us about God’s power of work in Jesus. (emphasis added; 274)

⁶ Though this view is conceived from an historical aspect, it does not seem to be confined only to men in our culture today. In October 1995, Germaine Greer, a “famous” feminist published *Slip-Shod Sibyls: Recognition, Rejection and the Woman Poet*. In it, she suggests, that if we judge the “she-poetry” against the whole poetic tradition we may “never again read the work of famous female poets”. She discusses the details of the way women poets were published and marketed over the centuries. She argues that the young, pretty ones were published too readily, puffed, flattered, exploited and then in middle-age dismissed. She considers that the study of early women poets is futile because they are too mediocre or too little is known about them. Another anthology *Victorian Women Poets: An Anthology*, by Angela Leighton and Margaret Reynolds, was published in the same month. However, it does not take the same view and “is not intended as anthology of great poetry”, but is an insight into the lives and inspiration of women who wanted to write poetry.

⁷ For example: Anne Steele (1717-78); Harriet Auber (1773-1862); Charlotte Elliott (1789-1871); Jane Leeson (1809-1881); Caroline M. Noel (1817-77); Mrs C. Alexander (1818-95); Mrs M.F. Maude (1819-1913); Mrs. L.M. Willis (1824-1908); Christina Rossetti (1830-94); Mrs. Dorothy F. Gurney (1858-1932); Marcella Martin (b. 1908); Emily Chisholm (b. 1910); Judith O’Neil (b.1930); Elizabeth Cosnett (b. 1936).

John Robinson, the Bishop of Woolwich in the sixties put it very simply, “no one will ever find a gracious God unless they meet a gracious neighbour.” (emphasis added; 357)

The French *priest Michel Quoist*, whose published prayers have helped millions of people to pray, has always been concerned with this problem of time More recently *Quoist* has commented, “we are stuck between the past and the future.” . . So let us pray that in the words of *Michel Quoist*, “we may discover the value of time.” . . (emphasis added; 364)

The status of the exemplars in the above extracts is hierarchically listed, ranging from the most senior Anglican priestly office, to that of the lowest rank, the priest. They index the deep patriarchal base of ecclesiastical order. Religious authority has a mediating function: “the church mediates between God’s will and man’s [*sic*] aspirations to reach Him and meanwhile to obey Him and His commandments” (T. Molnar 40). The preacher/teacher acts as the agent for this mediation. The object of authority is to gain consent by various means. According to Molnar:

ritualized and symbol-laden tradition is a strong requirement of authority, the more as we proceed from a small well-linked group like a family, to the larger heterogeneous groups like the community of believers in a church. The rites and symbols make up for unity that is lacking in the group where individuals do not know each other well. And these rites and symbols are the more effective as their origin reaches further back, because the participants feel linked to each other through the long line of ancestors in the past and descendants in the future. Rites and symbols possess authority just as the individuals when entrusted with it. (44)

Molnar maintains that authoritative symbols add cohesion to an otherwise disparate group. Thus, those preachers who adhere to the traditional institutional views of authority and its influence as a coercive force in gaining assent for acceptance of their instruction and actions

use the additional hierarchichal male institutionalized symbols of authority. They exhibit a particular ideological stance derived from a traditional understanding of the Apostolic succession. This view also decrees that only men can be bishops or archbishops in the UK.

Anti-authoritarians desire the removal of the institutional church which embraces all its formalities including that of mediating authority (L. Kolakowski; S. Kierkegaard; C. Friedrich). Thus, authority is played down by those who do not believe in its legitimacy. The Nonconformist churches, for example, do not subscribe to the Apostolic succession nor do they utilise hierarchichal priestly rank in their churches. If preachers are the mediators between the Godhead and human beings, the rank of the priest would appear to be irrelevant. If it is relevant, a value differential operates. Consequently, listeners may be more persuaded by those in “authority” possessing a higher rank. An examination of my sermon sample indicates that 8 out of the 40 (20%) preachers referred to high ranking priests or “highly” acclaimed theologians as exemplars. The majority, however, (80%) did not choose to cite such ecclesiastical scholars.

Throughout the whole of my sample, the names of women are mentioned in only two texts. One preacher said:

One night the soldiers systematically slaughtered the children, women and men.

Ruthena was with us. She was the one survivor, a witness who had seen her husband killed and her children taken from her. Her story was harrowing and I could not speak. It all happened a dozen years ago and she wept as she told us of the killings. (emphasis added; 230)

The preacher uses the woman’s first name, thereby presenting her as a private individual to whom the listeners may relate in a person-to-person way. Her victim status is underwritten by the use of the forename. These linguistic mechanisms place her in a particular position which reproduces particular aspects of gender stereotyping.

A war-torn country is also the setting for the other preacher’s story which contains a woman’s name:

The other, *Edna* our Jewish guide, whose parents came to meet us, wanted to know why we, when we were near their home, had not dropped in for a cup of tea. We could not have been better served. (emphasis added; 309)

In this extract the preacher not only presents Edna as a private individual but he also places her in a domestic setting. Her role is to serve and look after those on a pilgrimage. She, too, is placed in a female-gendered stereotypical position.

Only 2 out of the 40 preachers (5%) give a woman a name in their illustrations. In both instances only her Christian name is used. Therefore, 38 out of the 40 (95%) did not include any women's names in their sermon. Even where accounts mention women, they are depersonalised and subsumed under the general heading "women". Many of these images of name-less women are referred to in the earlier section of this chapter which focuses on representations of femininity and masculinity in illustrations.

However, one preacher recounts a story in which the man is named whilst the woman is not named:

A story is told of the Brazilian bishop Helder Camara. He was invited to say mass for a sister celebrating her sixtieth anniversary in her profession as a nun. Pretending to be not quite sure what anniversary it was they were celebrating, Camera said to her, "Sister, let me get this straight. Exactly how many years have you spent in religious life?" Very humbly, and looking round to make sure that no-one was eaves-dropping, she said, "I've only spent one day in religious life, because every day I have to start all over again." (366)

In the introductory sentence, the preacher references this story as belonging to Bishop Camera. His title and full name immediately centres the story on the man. A second mention of his name reinforces this focus and emphasises the status difference. No name is given to the nun. Through the absence of her name, she is marginalised in this story. Credence is given to her statement by her interaction with an eminent man whose status lends significance to the dialogue. However, one positive interpretation of this story is that it is

precisely the marginalised woman who has the greatest insight by answering the question metaphorically rather than literally. Nevertheless, the woman is anonymized.

In some contexts, there was an interesting discrepancy between the preachers' use of naming and that of the Bible. One preacher attempted to paraphrase the resurrection story in the following words:

The up-to-date news that morning from *some women* was that his body had gone missing from the tomb. (emphasis added; 235)

Whilst this representation is non-specific about the women, all four Gospels' accounts of the crucifixion and resurrection specifically name women who were the first to know and understand that the scriptural promises had been fulfilled. Matthew says: "there were also *many women* there: among them *Mary Magdelene*, and *Mary*, the mother of James and Joseph, the mother of the sons of Zebedee" (Matt. 27.55). The other accounts provide the names of two other women who were also present, *Salome* and *Joanna* (Mark 16.1-10; Luke 24. 1-10; John 20. 1-16). Not only were these women favoured by the angels in the tomb, since the latter ignored the guards who were men, but Mary Magdelene was greatly honoured by Jesus as he revealed himself first to her and directed her to tell the male disciples of his resurrection. These events are even more astonishing since "in first century Judaism, a woman could not act as a witness in a court of law because it was assumed her evidence was unreliable" (W. M. Swartley 186). In his paraphrase the preacher does not name the women. He uses the indefinite pronoun *some*. He even changes the indefinite quantity *many* for *some* which implies a smaller number of women in the crowd. This reduces the importance of Christ's relationship with women. Moreover, by categorising them as a group of women the preacher denies their individual identity as well as their special place in Christ's ministry. This interpretation serves to undermine the importance of this women-centred event.

In her introduction to the *Woman's Bible* Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1895, 1898) comments: "the Bible is not a 'neutral book' but a political weapon against women's struggle for liberation" (2). She calls the Bible the men's Bible, and deems it to be a product of

patriarchal society. Feminist biblical theologians have sought to show that women's contributions to the life of the church were never as marginal as most of their male colleagues would like to suggest (A. Brown; Fiorenza; R. Reuther; P. Tribble, *Depatriarchalism*). These feminists have endeavoured to promote a different perspective of women's influence in the early church, but the opportunity to recover evidence to support their claims has been lost through the androcentric process of establishing early Christian authors (Fiorenza). Despite androcentric translations, the Bible does contain a few passages which mention women. The most important woman-centred narrative for Christian feminists is perhaps the resurrection story referred to above.

A different Biblical text was paraphrased by another preacher using the following words:

The Judeo-Christian tradition begins historically with one man in Ur of Chaldeans, sensing that his life was stale and unhealthy and taking his protesting wife and family out on a journey, not knowing whither they went. And the boots were given and made for walking. (372)

The kingship system and family relations are emphasised in this imagery. However, the preacher paints a picture of a man who is an active decision maker, possessing authority, courage and strength. He also describes the man's wife as difficult and passive. Thus a stereotypical gender dichotomy is set up by the preacher. No name is given to the man or woman in this illustration, but he mentions the geographical area and sets the historical context, so one can assume that is referring to the story of Abram who went on a journey to Canaan. This narrative is found in Genesis:

Terah took Abram his son and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife, and they went forth together from Ur of Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan...Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you." . . . Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions which they

had gathered and the persons they had gotten in Haran; and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan. (Gen. 11.31-12.5)

In this version, there is no suggestion that Abram's wife was difficult, complaining, or that he needed to persuade her to accompany him on the journey. The only descriptions of Abram in the text are that he is an old man of seventy-five, and that he is the channel for God's guidance. The preacher uses exaggerated language in his interpretation of this story to establish a gender dichotomy that promotes positive masculine attributes and contrast them with negative feminine ones for which there is no biblical authority.

3.3 The Persuasive Power of Illustrations

An examination of my sermon sample reveals that 16 out of 40 preachers (40%) used both gendered illustrations and naming of exemplars during their discourses whereas only 5 out of 40 (12.5%) used neither. The vast majority of preachers (87.5%) favoured the use of some such imagery. The foregoing detailed examination of my sample demonstrates that using these illustrations led the preachers to generate meanings of a monodimensional view of male reality. At least half of the listeners are likely to be women; therefore, such imagery may produce feelings of alienation and exclusion in many of these members of the congregation.

One of the main purposes for using illustrations is to assist preachers to persuade listeners to act in a particular way (Logan; L. de Koster). Sangster (1954, 1990) states:

At any level of persuasion, illustration is the preacher's help . . . A man may evade the point of an argument by half refusing to follow it and almost seize with eagerness on any obscurity in the exposition in order to sidestep the thrust which he shrewdly suspects, but a picture placarded before his eyes is not so easily avoided. He *sees* the point. He cannot escape seeing it. His very struggle against the truth grows feeble. Whatever the branch of preaching it be, skill in the use of illustration means more power in the effort to persuade. (21)

Apart from the sexist language and the masculine metaphorical adversarial imagery pervading this rhetoric, Sangster states that illustrations are a persuasive mechanism. This being the case, they are an outlet through which power may be deployed to influence people to conform. Preachers using gendered stereotypical imagery are placing specific moral pressures on women and men to conform to such norms. They define what is considered “normal”, appropriate, desirable, acceptable and what is not; this implies that which is not “normal” is in need of normalisation. In addition, preachers citing “great” men as authorities to lend credibility are perpetuating a system of “experts” evolved by various patriarchal institutions. Thus the use of exemplars restricts knowledge, appropriates it for an élite and reinforces hierarchy. Women have generally been excluded from the ranks of the “super-person” which lends further credence to the “great man” theory of achievement and success (A. M. Jagger and S. R. Bordo 251). Further, in recent years, historians have re-examined documentation concerning some well-known public figures or “great” men and have uncovered aspects of their lives which undermine or taint their “greatness”. In modern society the use of exemplars by preachers is fraught since such projection of traditional authority may be dismissed by listeners as an opinion rather than a “fact”.

The power of persuasion is constrained by social alignments:

A field of social agents can constitute an alignment in regard to a social agent if and only if, first of all, their actions are coordinated in a specific manner. To be an alignment, however, the coordinated practices of these social agents need to be comprehensive enough that the social agent facing the alignment encounters that alignment as having control over certain things that she might either need or desire . . .

The concept of a social alignment thus provides a way of understanding the “field” that constitutes a situated power relationship *as* a power relationship. (T. Wartenburg 150)

In the context of sermons, preachers only exercise power when listeners are persuaded to amend their actions or views as a result of the discourse. Michel Foucault (1984) asserts that “power is everywhere not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from

everywhere" (*History* 93). He does not conceive power relationships as being imposed only from the top down: "the configuration of power relations emerges from the support which force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and distinctions which isolate them one from another" (*History* 92). Thus, he rejects any reification of power. He insists that

power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicle of power, not its point of application. (*Power* 98)

For Foucault, negotiations within a society are not essentially about possession of power but rather about the contested terms of the deployment of power. His concept of "discourse" differentiates his theory from feminist thinking on power. He identifies discourses as historically variable ways of specifying knowledge and truth: "we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth" (*Power* 93). He states that these discourses function as a set of rules and are therefore powerful. Thus, this power may be exercised by clergy through the institution of the Churches. Moreover, power is constituted in discourses and it is in discourses, such as those of the sermon, that power lies. As Foucault continues:

we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between a dominant discourse and the dominated one, but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that come into play in various strategies...Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart. (*Human* 100)

He asserts that power is not something possessed or wielded by powerful agents, because it is co-constituted by those who support and resist it (*Human* 95). Thus, there is no power without resistance. All social situations are saturated with power. Moreover, his neutral domain of discourse democratises knowledge and decentres the subject: "what matter who is

speaking; someone has said; what matter who is speaking” (*Discipline* 72). Thus he infers no links between knowledge, power and gender.

Nevertheless, an audience listening to gendered imageries may sense an asymmetry of power between the preacher and themselves because of the reinforced institutional practices. Moreover, this power possesses a sense of domination backed by force because it may be understood by them as extra-discursive or relating to their wider realities. In this context gender and power are interwoven. Therefore, what is comprehended by listeners during sermons is located inside the terms of power determined through structures of domination.

However, Foucault suggests that all discourses can give rise to resistance when he asserts:

there is plurality of resistance, each of them a special case: resistances that are possible, necessary, improbable; others that are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent; still others that are quick to compromise, interested, or sacrificial; by definition, they can only exist in the strategic field of power relations. (*Power* 96)

He defines power as always allowing for resistance though he suggests that there is no specific direction to resistance: “I believe in the freedom of people. To the same situation, people react in very different ways” (*Technology* 14). There are several ways in which listeners can resist the oppressive or repressive preaching discourses mentioned in the introduction to this thesis. The gendered illustrations and exclusively male exemplars will cause many women to feel excluded or offended which will reinforce their resistance to the preacher’s exhortations. Use of such illustrations as persuasive mechanisms opposes the very objective for its usage. Persistent use of irritating or alienating discourses will be met with increasing forms of resistance and ultimately the sanction of withdrawal from those churches.⁸

The churches’ task is to encourage congregations and foster regular attendance as well as attracting new membership. The choice of type, and presentation of, persuasive mechanisms

⁸ Radio listeners may switch off and refrain from listening to further broadcast acts of worship or switch off occasionally when so minded.

within the sermon is the prerogative of the preachers but they need to take account of the issues discussed in the foregoing chapter. Preaching sermons which include gendered imagery reinforcing and perpetuating traditional notions of authority and power is likely to alienate some listeners, women and men, and should be viewed as a counter-productive endeavour.

CHAPTER FOUR

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE

Personal experience is regarded by homiletics as another type of illustration which may be incorporated into sermons.¹ The gender issue from which I shall analyse its usage in this chapter differs from those discussed in the preceding one. In this instance, the focus for the examination of my sample engages with the epistemological implications that constitute the ways in which legitimate knowledge is claimed. Mainstream Anglo-American epistemology assumes that the person who “knows” is a value-free and ideologically neutral abstraction (Code; G. Lloyd *History*). The first section of this chapter reviews feminist critiques of mainstream epistemology relating to the construction of knowledge and the second part is concerned with homiletical views on the advantages and disadvantages of the use of personal experience and self-disclosure in sermons. The last section examines and analyses the preachers’ personal narratives found in my sermon sample.

4.1 Personal Experience: Feminist Perspectives

Though people often draw on their personal experiences as a means of understanding, traditional epistemology describes knowledge as based on so-called objectivity and value-neutrality (Code; Foucault *Power/Knowledge*). This excludes the use of personal experience as a way of knowing in the world because the very phrase *personal experience* links experience to the individual person and thus denies transcendence, universality and objectivity in favour of the subjective. However, feminists argue that experience and knowledge are inter-related. Thus, fundamental to feminism is the premise that women are not represented in knowledge as traditionally understood. The description and analysis of women’s experience is perhaps the most significant contribution to conceptions of knowledge made by second-wave feminism (M. Humm 53).

¹See chapter four page 90 for a list of types of illustrations.

Feminists have raised issues concerning the use of experience in determining how knowledge has traditionally been understood (Daly *Gyn/Ecology*; Harding *Science*; J. Scott, *Feminists*; N. Jay). Historically professions and institutions have insisted on drawing a distinction between “true” knowledge and experience by actions which “took control of knowledge, primarily through enforcing standards of objectivity” (M. Lowe and M. L. Benson 53). Traditional theorists of knowledge such as Aristotle, Descartes, Bacon, Rousseau, Nietzsche, and von Humboldt assert that knowledge is distinguished by virtue of objective validity in contrast to the inferior cognitive effects such as opinion or beliefs. They reasoned that only men have authority and only they possess the cognitive capacities to achieve objective knowledge whilst women are inferior in reason because they gain knowledge through their senses (Lloyd *The Man*). Man was equated with objective knowledge and woman’s knowledge was construed as subjective and inferior. Objective knowledge has been valued more highly than experience and has conferred authority where experience has been denied authority. As Code (1991) comments:

The explanation of this supposition derives, in part, from a long-standing assumption that knowledge that deserves the label will *transcend* experience. It may indeed have its beginnings there, but knowledge properly so-called must leave the particularity and seductiveness of sensory and affective experience behind to approach the ideals of objectivity, rationality, and impartiality which continue to govern epistemological theory. (242)

This knowledge/experience differential is one of several dichotomies that have structured mainstream Western epistemology. It marks an hierarchical distinction which defines a set of exclusionary, oppressive constraints and imbalances (Lloyd *History*; M. Gatens; Stanley and Wise; J. Flax; S. Harding and M. Hintikka; Jagger and Bordo; Bordo, *Cartesian*). In mainstream epistemology this set of dichotomies sustains a denigration of “feminine” modes and an institutionalisation of “masculine” modes. According to Code:

From Plato’s insistence that knowledge is achieved only through liberation of the deceptiveness of senses, through Descartes’ conception of the soul of pure intellect, to Kant’s critique of pure reason, this is a persistent theme. (242)

Hence the association of reason with the matters of the mind and of emotions with bodily experiences. Implicit here is the view that emotions and experiential engagement with the material world or other intelligent human beings may hinder the attainment of certainty in “pure” knowledge. According to Bordo (1989),

Cartesian objectivism is of a piece with, and indeed consequent on, a seventeenth century flight from the feminine. Rationalists and empiricists were of one mind in their conviction that the essential epistemic task was to tame the female universe . . . Ideal objectivity is the masculine epistemological stance that a knower must adopt if this project is to be carried out successfully. This stance is, above all, detached from the particularities of time and place, from personal quirks, prejudices, and interests, and most centrally, from the object itself. (453-4)

Masculinity became identified with empiricism, rationalism and objectivity, sustained by a gender ideology that segregated the “private” woman and the “public” man. The 1980s saw a rapid increase in the number of feminist theorists who challenged the mainstream traditional epistemological and ontological view of Cartesian duality, which places emotion as the antithesis of reason and therefore incapable of producing “real” or “true” knowledge (Bordo; J. Butler; Duran; Gatens; E. Gross; Jagger; M. Lugones; N. Tuana; C. Whitbeck). Barbara Johnson (1987) also states that “not only has personal experience tended to be excluded from the discourse of knowledge, but the realm of the personal self itself has been coded as female and devalued for that reason” (43). As Nancy Miller (1991) comments:

Feminist theory has always been built out from the personal: the witnessing “I” of the subjective experience. The notion of the “authority of experience” founded a central current in feminist theory in the 1970s and continues - dismantled and renovated - to shape a variety of personal and less personal discourses at an oppositional angle to dominant critical positions. (14)

Thus, feminist writers refused to accept the polarised categories of subjective/objective as discrete since they validated the experiences of what Shirley Ardener calls “muted groups” as an alternative to Baconian objectivity (Ardener; J. B. Miller). They called for a

pedagogy which acknowledges the multiple contexts within and out of which knowledge is produced. Thus, personal experience has been validated and legitimised by feminists (Stanley and Wise; Bowles and Klein; Maynard; Gross) as a way of knowing and a way of being in the world which is different from that proposed by Cartesian scientism. On this basis, knowledge gained from experience distinguishes feminist approaches which contrast with the absence, suppression or distortion of experiential factors evident in mainstream traditional epistemological theories. The emergence of women's studies was predicated upon an assertion of the common and universal characteristics of women as encapsulated in the concept of experience.² It is within this context that I shall discuss the preachers' use of personal experience in my sermon sample in part three of this chapter.

4.2 Personal Experience: The Homiletical Views

Before analysing my sample for examples of personal experience, it is pertinent to discuss the homileticians' views on this subject. A survey of homiletical texts and preaching manuals³ indicates that there are opposing views among theologians as to whether using personal experience as a means of explaining Scriptural texts has validity. Ireson (1982) justifies its usage by citing the following Biblical passages which direct people to bear witness:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our own eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands . . . that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us (1 John 1.3)

But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit is come unto you; and you shall be my witness in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.

(Acts 1.8)

² This idea of a universally shared experience has been challenged by feminists from the 1980s onwards, see bell hooks.

³ There are hundreds of preaching manuals and homiletical texts. It is not possible to examine all of them for the purpose of this chapter. Therefore I have focused my discussion on some of the most frequently cited texts which make specific reference to the use of personal experience in sermons. I discuss other texts in relation to the structure and style in sermon preparation in chapter six.

J. Bettler (1986) also vindicates the use of personal experiences on the basis that eye-witness accounts are found in the Scriptures:

St. Paul made frequent use of his own experiences to illustrate points in his letters (cf. II Cor. 12. 1-10; Phil. 1.12-26; I Thess. 2.1-12). Hosea's marriage became an illustration of God's loving faithfulness. And Jeremiah's time in a pit and buying a field illustrated God's judgement and blessing upon Israel. Surely, if Biblical authors made such frequent use of their own life situations in their messages, we should not hesitate to do the same. (349)

Some theologians advocate the use of experience without reference to the Bible and defend it because of its ability to capture a sense of immediacy and contemporaneity:

The preacher was droning on about the Amalekites. All over the congregation heads began to nod, eyelids drooped, children began to squirm, and teenagers passed notes. Then an amazing thing happened; suddenly his audience snapped to attention. Young and old alike strained to hear. What had occurred? What was it that so abruptly transformed this apathetic group of parishioners into an alert, interested body? They came to life when they heard these words: "Let me tell you about an experience that I had" . . . (J. E. Adams 350)

Shearlock (1990) accepts that the occasional reference to one's own personal past can be revealing and helpful to the congregation:

There is a liveliness and immediacy about what has happened to me, which can sometimes produce exactly the right link between my mind and theirs, especially if it relates in some way to shared experience or to one which is readily recognised as being pertinent to the specific content to which it is set . . . Used sparingly, personal anecdotes have a natural, proper and valuable place in our army of illustrations.

Without them, I might never seem to exist as a person. (92)

Thus, theologians and preachers who advocate the use of personal experience in sermons think these illustrations enable the preacher to offer a positive testimony and create a connection to the audience. This aspect of the "personalness" of sermons is promoted by Ireson who writes:

Preaching is essentially a personal matter. The preacher is not a lecturer handing out knowledge in which he may not be personally interested: he is a man [*sic*] addressing his fellow men [*sic*] in the name of the Lord. And while he does not speak on his own authority, he must speak from his own convictions and experience. (84)

Though Ireson advocates preachers using personal experience, he makes a distinction between God's authority and the preacher's experiences and convictions which he constructs as the vehicles for conveying the authority of God. He therefore does not emphasise the authority of experience, as feminists might describe it, but the authority of God as expressed through the use of personal experience.

Some homileticians advocate the use of personal experience but offer various cautionary notes. R. E. C. Browne (1958, 1976) maintains:

many [listeners] are upset and embarrassed when the preacher is personal in the wrong way, that is, when through illustrations he divulges or appears to divulge intimate biographical or autobiographical details. He seldom hears of the upset and embarrassment he causes on these occasions, but comment is made and people are slow to confide in one who talks too much about those to whom he ministers even when he does so in the most general and anonymous terms. (97)

There is a peculiar jump in this passage from "autobiographical details" to "talking too much about those to whom he ministers." The assumption seems to be that the preacher would talk, by way of experience, about those in his congregation. It is unclear if Browne thinks preachers have no experience apart from their parishioners or lack sensitivity in deciding what is appropriate to talk about. The whole passage seems ill-conceived and faintly ludicrous. Without doubt preachers can sometimes cause concern to members of the congregation if they do not take into consideration those people they are talking about. This may result in a loss of credibility and trust with notions of confidentiality and professionalism having been breached. However, Browne's assumptions construct preachers as indiscriminate in their judgments which is itself problematic.

The issues that emerge from exaggeration or embellishment of stories are also discussed by some preachers and theologians as they warn clergy to be circumspect in their use of personal experience with respect to embellishments. Sangster (1954, 1990) comments:

Even among men who would hesitate to invent moral tales (*and tell them as if they were true*), it is not unusual to “embroider” or “improve” a true story. It is almost a form of fable. It is a piece of fiction made to serve a homiletical need but told as if it were actually true. (108)

Though the validity of relating personal experience is accepted by Sangster, he advises preachers to keep to the facts as known and not recount a story that is false, wholly or partially, nor should they exaggerate. He suggests that listeners’ respect for the preacher might be diminished if they suspect that the preacher is not telling the ‘truth’. Sangster’s passage is one of very many in homiletical texts which indicate a curious assumption of the potential failings of a preacher. One would not go amiss in thinking that homileticians suspect all preachers of being liars, breaking confidences and generally being incapable of judging the morally and socially acceptable boundaries of what they might present in their sermons.

However, exaggeration is often used as a technique which can act to persuade people to comply or acquiesce to a proposition or request from another person (Adams 351). Its efficacy depends on listeners’ acceptance of the speaker’s observations. Doubt or disbelief evidenced by exaggeration may render the narrative suspect, and therefore ineffectual. The use of exaggeration may diminish the overall level of influence that a personal story may possess. Sangster (1954, 1990) highlights the possibility of conceit when he offers the following illustrations as a warning to preachers when using personal experiences:

His [the preacher’s] manner of relating a story has a way of shedding light upon himself (more than he knows!!) “I was once addressing a *great* congregation in . . . ;” “I was hurrying along, in an endeavour to keep *my rule of fifteen pastoral calls in an afternoon*, when . . . ” Just overtones! And all true no doubt! But what chronic condition of vanity is it that casts statements like these into molds [*sic*] and adds unnecessary words and clauses to set the self in pleasing light? (110)

The view that using personal experience may promote self-aggrandisement is developed further by Sangster when he maintains:

The path, alas, is made slippery for him by the undoubted worth of personal testimony to the grace of God, but when a man yields so completely that he talks of his own conversion (and seeming to imply that this is the *one* way into the Kingdom of God), or lectures on his own life story (as is the way of itinerant evangelists), something serious has happened to that man. Let a man be doubly careful to scrutinize an illustration in which he figures prominently himself. We are really not so important as that. (40)

Sangster states that the preacher should not display self-importance in public, but rather place a greater emphasis on his own short-comings through humility. In both these passages Sangster perceives the use of personal experience as a way of self-glorification. This view is not at all accepted by feminists who approach the issue of self-disclosure from the very different perspectives of understanding their reality through mutuality and sharing of their experiences. Some argue that women are socialised to be more relational than men which results in them being more self-revealing in general (J. B Miller; N. Chodorow; C. Gilligan). Moreover, relationships are built on the sharing of self with one another: “mutual relationships are created on the equity of all people having the opportunity and responsibility of the sharing of self” (C. Smith 147). In the context of preaching, from a feminist perspective, the use of personal experience produces a non-hierarchical dialogical mode of communication.

Theologians who are also communication theorists advocate the use of personal experience from two different perspectives: incarnational theology and pastoral theology. Myron Chartier (1981) considers that “a sermon on the conversion of Paul [for example] may well include a section on ‘my’ conversion. Christian preaching can be a vehicle for sharing one’s personal faith journey” (33). Clyde Fant (1975) also declares:

The incarnation is the truest theological model for preaching because it was God’s ultimate act of communication. Jesus, who was the Christ, most perfectly sent by God to us because the eternal Word took on human flesh in a contemporary

situation. Preaching cannot do otherwise. (29)

Thus, self-disclosures of experiences of God in Jesus Christ become the paradigm for incarnational preaching. Appropriate self-disclosures on the part of the preacher provides the listeners with a point of identification with the Word. The use of certain kinds of personal disclosure from the perspective of incarnational theology is thus justified (Chartier; Fant; G. Egan; J. Macmurray; J. Powell).

Pastoral theology centres on the minister's duties to her/his congregation. H. Nouwen (1972) asserts

Modern humanity is inward-oriented, and within, there is turmoil. To minister to such a generation, preachers must be able to clarify the immense confusion which can emerge when people enter this eternal world. To help others understand their inner beings, pastor-preachers must be able to disclose their own movements, feelings, thoughts, and experiences, by gaining self-awareness and insight. They are called upon to be servants of servants, by being the first to enter the promised but dangerous land - the first to reveal to those who are fearful what they have heard and observed. (36)

The idea of relating experiences is constructed here by Nouwen as a direct analogy to Jesus' injunction that the disciples should go and tell what they have seen and heard, thus establishing a sense of continuity within a particular biblical tradition. Preaching, then, is more than sharing the Christian story. It also requires the preacher to tell her/his own story as well as the stories of others in the community. The use of personal experience is supported by some theologians on the basis that the New Testament in particular is based on a recording of eye-witness accounts.⁴ An example can be seen in Perpetua's autobiographical accounts of her imprisonment and trial. Perpetua (c.AD181-203) was one of the early Christian martyrs whose unique form of personal proclamation was pervasive for four centuries (Wilson 32). H. Musurillo (1972) offers a sample of Perpetua's preaching:

⁴See chapter, one pages 31-3, where the accuracy of the Biblical written text derived from oral tradition is discussed.

What a difficult time it was! With the crowd the heat was stifling; then there was the extortion of the soldiers; and to crown it all, I was tortured with the worry of my baby . . . Then I got permission for my baby to stay with me in prison. At once I recovered my health, relieved as I was of my worry and anxiety over the child. My prison had suddenly become a palace . . .

Hilaranius the governor said to me: "Have pity on your father's grey head; have pity on your infant son. Offer the sacrifice for the welfare of the emperors."

"I will not," I retorted.

"Are you a Christian?" said Hilaranius.

And I said: "Yes, I am."

When my father persisted in trying to dissuade me, Hilaranius ordered him to be thrown to the ground and beaten with a rod. I felt sorry for father, just as if myself had been beaten. (111)

Perpetua's description of her personal dilemmas appeals to universal notions of motherhood derived from the idea of a loving relationship between a parent and child. This narrative operates both as a personal story and as a means for listeners to share in the discursive act through identification. In the debate between the advocacy of sharing through the use of personalization and potential problems of solipsism it needs to be pointed out that narratives can be both personal *and* possess a shared communal appeal as Perpetua's story demonstrates. D. Switzer (1979) adds a further dimension to the value of self-disclosure when he states:

If the church is not the *honest* community, it is no *community* at all. If the pastor (preacher) is not the model of genuineness and self-disclosure, then upon whom may we depend to guide and empower the community of faith in the direction of the honesty that we must have with each other and before God? (89)

Chartier demonstrates the importance of such revelation to both personal and inter-personal understanding when he states that "self-disclosure is vital to physical and mental health, self-understanding, personal growth, and inter-personal relationships" (34). This view is supported by S. M. Jourard who comments, "the healthy personality displays the

ability to make him- or herself known to others and has little need to conjure up devices to evade that possibility” (33). Macmurray (1961) states, “I know myself only as I reveal myself to you; and you know yourself only in revealing yourself to me. Thus self-revelation is at the same time self-discovery” (170). L. R. Wheeless (1985) considers that self-disclosing communication enriches relationships between people since he comments:

When an individual shares thoughts and feeling with an other, trust between those persons is a likely outcome. Another possible outcome is intimacy. The degree of intimacy and trust in the relationship depends on the amount and depth of the self-disclosure, as well as upon the degree of honesty used in its conveyance.
(155)

Thus, self-disclosure conveys trustworthiness and builds a bond which can foster reciprocal interpersonal commitment from others. Many theologians who are also communication theorists, think that the key to development of Christian communities would seem to lie in self-disclosure (G. Egan; Fant; T. Ferris; Jourard; Macmurray; T. Oden; Powell; Switzer).

Other theologians and homileticians hold the opposing view that sermons should not in any way focus on the preacher. Among these, the most cited is Buttrick who states:

Personal reference in sermons result in undesired shifts in point-of-view and split consciousness in the listeners. Personal language puts the congregation’s focus on the preacher rather than the intent of the sermon. (94)

Buttrick seeks to minimise the individuality of the preacher by maintaining that the sermon should not construct divided consciousness between speaker and listener. He stresses the need to concentrate the minds of listeners on the subject matter of the discourse and not on the personality of the preacher. Buttrick subscribes to the idea that it is possible to sever the speaker from the spoken during communication. He implies an impersonality to the preacher’s utterances which is not possible to achieve but accords with a particular masculine discourse based on the idea that the subject and knowledge can be discrete entities.

Many texts that predate 1970 make no reference to the use of personal experience at all. Since 1980 other homileticsians have advocated different preaching styles which do not use notions of personal experience in this context.⁵ Thus traditional theologians and homileticsians either decry the use of personal experience in sermons, or they recommend its usage without compunction, or they promote it but warn preachers of various inherent problems. My survey of a variety of these texts suggests that most homileticsians think that carefully selected personal experiences can be utilised with success in sermons because stories about daily life enable listeners to respond to them through identification and comparison with their own experiences (Bennet and Bonsall; Browne; Ireson; Sangster; Shearlock; C. Smith).

4. 3 Personal Experience: Examination of the Sermon Sample

Whilst engaged in training sessions at theological college E. Hunter (1987) studied the use of personal experience in sermons produced in preaching classes. She found that “women are far more likely than most white males to tell a story they have lived” (15). Likewise, C. Smith comments that “women tend to be more relational and contextual in their preaching than men are. I think we are also inclined to direct our sermons to the person, rather than the mind, of the hearer” (120). Similarly, Gilligan (1982) also concludes that

women’s experience of relationships and responsibility results in their having a different epistemology; instead of the Greek ideal of knowledge as a correspondence between mind and form, many women exhibit the Biblical conception of knowing as a process of human relationship. (173)

These views suggest that men are more likely to adhere to the traditional mainstream understanding of knowledge as facts, whilst women have a preference for using personal experiences

Examination of the preachers’ use of personal experience in my sample reveals several types of narratives most of which mirror Biblical stories. For example, they focus on

⁵Some of these different approaches to preaching are discussed in the next chapter.

contemporary war themes, faith journeys, education and teaching anecdotes, family situations and self-disclosures concerned with personal emotions.

Contemporary war stories, which I examined and discussed in the preceding chapter with respect to gendered imagery, are the most numerous personal narratives. One speaker tells of his personal experience after visiting a war-torn country:

I've just returned from El Salvador, that country beginning to live a tentative peace after the years of violence and bitter civil war. Well, on Good Friday, I went with a few friends to El Mazote, a ghost village out in the hills, once the home of over a thousand people. But one night the soldiers came and systematically slaughtered children, women and men. Ruthena was with us. She was the one survivor, a witness who had seen her husband killed and her children taken away from her. Her story was harrowing and I could not speak. It all happened a dozen years ago and she wept as she told us that Good Friday the killings she had seen. And she then spoke of Jesus, of how faith has sustained her, how she believed he'd been with those people in their living and in their dying. She even said that if the soldiers could but acknowledge what they'd done she would try to forgive them in the spirit of Jesus. And I felt that I could almost have reached out and put my finger into the nail prints and my hand into the side.

And then, on Easter Day, I visited two other communities for worship. Both had people present who had been tortured, held in prison, abused by the powers of the day. They couldn't forget the past, but they could celebrate and they did celebrate the hope that Jesus brings them. They remembered the martyrs. They pledged themselves in solidarity to seek justice and peace and righteousness, and all the signs of God's kingdom, and they praised God who was with them. Christ was risen amongst them. They were free people. I could almost see the stones of hate and oppression being rolled away before this resurrection life. (230-1)

The preacher begins his narrative by centring himself as the authority of the experience through his use of the first person singular pronoun. However, having set the scene, he switches the focus from himself to that of a third party as he re-tells the memories of

Ruthena, an eye-witness of the atrocities that occurred in the South American republic of El Salvador in the seventies and early eighties when Christians were tortured and martyred. Through this approach the preacher constructs himself as mediator between audience and the story-teller's experiences. The experiences he recounts are not his own personal experiences. The only personal experience he shares is the suggestion that he found her story distressing and was emotionally and spiritually affected by it. The second part of the story is similarly constructed but he widens his field as he moves from the focus on an individual's story to that of a group of people. By doing so, his narrative shifts from the particular to the general as he constructs himself as mediator between the listeners and a community.

Appropriately, this sermon was delivered on the first Sunday after Easter. Thus, the preacher uses this narrative to build continuities between the Easter story of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, and an understanding of how the survivors of war atrocities cope with their experiences. He draws on contemporary issues to give relevance to the Easter story in a present-day context. In addition, at the time that this sermon was delivered civil wars were raging in Africa and Yugoslavia. This story thus enabled listeners to compare the plight of people in El Salvador with those suffering war atrocities elsewhere. Nevertheless, this narrative which begins as a personal story transforms into an impersonal anecdote which reveals little personal self-disclosure.

Yugoslavia, a country in the midst of civil war at the time of the broadcast, is the setting of a different preacher's own personal experience:

I've not long returned from Croatia. And I've seen at first hand some of the appalling things that people do to each other. One of the team couldn't even come to church, he just kept walking around crying. But while I can be shocked I can't be surprised . . . I talked about this with a Croatian pastor. We were trying to understand the speed, the craziness and the depravity of all we'd seen happening . . .

(278)

The preacher relates his first hand experience of the effects of atrocities and mutilation of innocent people that civil war provokes. He offers no extended descriptive examples of his

observations perhaps because at that time the media were providing very explicit details of the suffering. He focuses mainly on emotions which are engendered by the barbaric acts featured in this conflict and indicates a diversity of emotions, from shock (the person who walks around crying) to horror which does not manifest itself in any behavioural change (he is not surprised). This range of responses allows different listeners with diverse responses to feel involved in this tragedy.

After identifying “man’s nature” as the reason why people commit atrocities, this preacher returns to his personal experience when he says:

I’ve been humbled too by the examples I encountered in Croatia. Like the young mother who had seen her father and two brothers murdered in Bosnia . . . (279)

He recounts a woman’s experiences of seeing her husband killed and violence done to women and children in a way that encourages sympathy. This narrative mirrors the account in the previous preacher’s story centred in El Salvador. Neither of these preachers attempts to identify or discuss how these women’s accounts of male violence made them as men feel, nor do they specifically mention the mutilation and raping of the women by men. These issues are perhaps difficult and sensitive for some men to discuss; they do however at least indicate that the men are aware that these atrocities happen and that males are generally the perpetrators of such violence. Nevertheless, both preachers refrain from stressing this aspect but focus on stereotypical images of women and children as victims of war expressed in terms of standard war clichés.

A different war-torn country was the scene of another preacher’s personal story in which hospitality is the theme:

Many years ago now, I had the privilege of working for a while in the Lebanon. My strongest memory of my time there was of an impressive hospitality to me as a stranger, even when I was introduced to those who were the poorest refugees in the midst of what was then a disintegrating country. They would provide a lavish spread for me as a visitor, even whilst having so little for themselves. For not to provide that hospitality would be a disgrace, a shame to them . . . (294)

The preacher promotes the view that everyone can be hospitable, even the poorest and dispossessed. He concentrates on the interaction he was drawn into when invited to share a meal with local people. At the same time, there is always a question of how the preacher came to be in these places. As this is rarely explained, the listener is drawn into an assumption of a continuing itinerant missionary quest by the Church akin to that of the disciples.

However, all three of these stories about war-torn countries are related by foreign visitors who were never personally involved in the conflicts, politics and suffering. These accounts are concerned with distant countries. This tends to insulate the audience from the full horror of events. They contribute to the media-rization of conflicts which are traumatic for those who endure them but are often only news stories to the listeners whose lives are barely directly affected by such events.

The topic of journeys of faith can also be found in personal narratives which are discussed in terms of conversions to Christianity. For example, one preacher first tells of his experience of congregational conversions and then recounts his personal testimony:

The wonderful thing is seeing over the years, nearly twenty that I've been in this church, that a large number of people have taken that very step and received Christ into their lives. (267)

The preacher begins by telling listeners that he has seen many people converting to Christianity. This declares that the church in which he ministers is very successful in winning new converts.⁶ However, this narrative may appear to many listeners to contradict their perception of reality because Church registries which publish membership figures show a decline in attendances, with more people leaving the churches than becoming converts (Brierley and Longley).⁷

He continues his sermon with a personal testimony of his own conversion:

As a teenager, I asked the Lord Jesus into my life and I've never looked back. I can

⁶If this is indeed the case, a study of this church's services and its community and pastoral ministries to establish factors contributing to its success rate may be very informative and useful.

⁷An article in *The Daily Telegraph* 13 February 1998 states: "The Church of England has suspended publication of its annual attendance figures - which have shown a relentless decline since the 1960s - because it says they are unfairly gloomy" (Victoria Combe 15).

remember that day, it's over forty years ago, as if it were yesterday. And although, of course, there have been times in my life when I've had problems, illness, disappointment and frustration, I've always been aware of God's presence to encourage, to strengthen, to comfort and to be with me. Whatever I may have achieved in my life is because of the knowledge that God in Christ is with me . . . (267)

This self-disclosure is offered after the preacher interprets the Old and New Testament readings which speak of the revelations of God through the prophets and Jesus Christ. Thus the preacher is placing himself in a comparable position to those in the Biblical stories (the Word) thereby declaring that he is an instrument of the revelation of God. Incarnational theology offers him a rationale for this type of narrative.

After telling his personal conversion story he attempts to draw personal commitment to God from the listeners by saying:

What God in Christ has done for me, I believe He can do it for you. If you're lonely, upset, if you're frustrated, even angry; if you have been ill-treated, abused or let down; if you have suffered and are suffering at this very moment; if you have been thinking and wondering about the things of God, God is speaking to you at this very moment and He wants you to respond. He wants you to know and love Him. He wants to come and live in your heart and your life. He wants you to express the freedom which comes from knowing and loving Him. He wants to take away any feelings of guilt, of sinfulness, any feeling of rejection and bitterness; even unforgiveness that you may be experiencing at this moment; and he wants to give you a new start. Will you let Him do that? Will you do as I did, all those years ago? Will you let the Lord Jesus into your life? (267-8)

In this part of his sermon the preacher appears to be evangelising and seeking converts as well as enabling those listeners who also experienced a memorable conversion to remember their own particular revelation. In so doing he attempts to address a large proportion of his audience. This group is comprised of people who demonstrate they are already committed Christians by being present in the congregation as well as those regular

radio listeners who are also members of a Christian community. Within this group there are various sub-groups of people who became Christians through different routes. In the context of this narrative, there are those whose conversion was a slow process rather than an event as memorable as the preacher's, and there are those who were brought up in the faith and have adhered to it since childhood. These people may feel that their faith is weaker because they did not experience the "specialness" of being "chosen" or "accepted" by God at a specific moment in their lives.

Interestingly, this preacher found his fervent faith during his teenage years, probably before serious traumas of life had affected him. From that early date he has viewed all events in his life in the belief that God will help him and defend him in all eventualities. However, he directs his entreaty to people who he assumes are suffering or troubled in some way. The use of this type of personal experience and belief may help persuade some listeners to accept God in Christ. It may also express the desire of those of the congregation who wish to, but are unable to, answer his question in the affirmative.

The narrative presupposes that when a person accepts the Christian faith it remains with them for all time. This simple view of faith takes no account of the fact that for many people faith is intermittent, transient and requires constant review and renewal. The preacher is using his conversion as a contemporary parallel to that of Nicodemus related in the New Testament lesson prior to this evangelical address. Though the preacher's experiences support his belief, the reality and complexity of many listeners' lives may prevent them from finding a correlation between his words and their own experiences.

The focus on personal imperfections and inadequacies within the context of faith journeys is explored by a different preacher:

You can praise God, because you are special to Him and He loves you. I find this one very difficult. I never had any difficulty in believing that God loved other people. There were lots of people who were so obviously close to him, so spiritual. I didn't have any difficulty in preaching about God's love. After all, the Bible said, God loved the world and I told people so. But I knew what went on in my mind. I knew the real me. But I knew God couldn't love me and often I couldn't praise Him

because I felt left out. But I was wrong, totally wrong. For God does love me. For when Jesus died on the cross and said, “Father forgive them”, he didn’t attach a list of exceptions to the foot of the cross. When he said, “anyone who comes to me I will not turn away,” he didn’t attach a list of conditions like the small print on the last page of a tour company’s travel brochure. (299-300)

This admission of human failings does not identify any specific weaknesses so it is a limited self-disclosure. This has the advantage of allowing all listeners to feel included because they are free to personalise its contents by substituting their own inadequacies. By targeting nobody in particular, the preacher embraces everyone in his audience and thus provides the listener with a point of identification. This self-disclosure conveys honesty and “genuineness”. The preacher continues his narrative by quoting the Biblical passage from Isaiah forty-three to support his own rationale.

The feminist perspective of this thesis demands that reference should be made to the women preachers in my sample. Their representation is so small (under 8%) that no valid conclusions can be drawn. Only one preacher describes details of her personal experience. The Biblical nativity story is a traditional theme for a sermon delivered on the last Sunday before Christmas Day. However, an unusual perspective to this familiar story was offered by this female preacher as she recounted her experiences of pregnancy and child-birth:

My eldest child, Megan, was due to be born on Christmas Day. So I remember how all of life became a waiting game that year. We tried to speed her up. I dug the garden and walked up and down Greenwich Hill, which can be seen just across the Thames here. We tried every remedy known to old wives’ in our attempt to hasten her arrival and none of them worked. I still have something of a guilty conscience about allowing her to be induced when she was seventeen days overdue. (359-60)

The experiences of pregnancy and child-birth told by a woman preacher provide the opportunity to speak about a familiar Biblical story from a different perspective than those commonly offered. After reminding listeners about the Gospel story of the Annunciation this preacher recalls, in this passage, her own experiences of waiting for the birth of her

child. This creates a female perspective on the Virgin Mary's pregnancy. However, this personal experience may exclude men and even those women listeners who have never experienced pregnancy.

The narrative contains a remarkable inconsistency. The preacher says that she endeavoured to accelerate the process of childbirth through using physical means and trying "old wives' remedies," many of which are risky, with no apparent compunction. Yet, she confesses to pangs of guilt when she was eventually obliged to allow medical intervention to speed up the delivery. All of these non-professional and professional forms of intervention are interfering with the so-called natural processes. It could be perceived that she places doubt in her absolute belief in God. This section of the narrative also perpetuates the hierarchical relations of gender politics in the construction and dissemination of knowledge. The preacher refers to women's accumulated knowledge on midwifery as "old wives's tales" and reveals that they did not produce the desired result. She then confers authoritative epistemic status to the professional medical treatment because it did produce the desired result (B. Ehrenreich and D. English; B. K. Rothman; S. Hunt and A. Symonds; S. Robinson and A. Thorne; J. Sleep). Thus, her narrative offers a particular version of a concern which has been the object of debate in feminist circles.

A very different aspect is revealed in another part of this sermon where the preacher offers her understanding of how she acquired knowledge derived from her personal experience:

People used to tell me that you forget the agony of child-birth once the joy of the child is with you. Stuff and nonsense, I say. You never forget that indescribable pain . . . (362)

She declares that her experience has given her knowledge which is different from "conventional wisdom." The preacher's representation denies the commonly perpetuated idea that the pangs of childbirth are transformed or forgotten by the sight of the child. She imports her view of realism which serves as an antidote to the conventional view. In this way she gives greater credence to knowledge gained through her own experience than

reliance on other people's opinions which may or may not be formed from objectified knowledge.

Another preacher recounts a personal narrative in which he discloses that he too gained knowledge through his personal experiences:

I've been thinking to when I was a curate, just a year in and working with a first rate training vicar. What I remember is waiting impatiently for his summer holiday to come. I wished he'd just go away. I prayed. I'd do it better when he's not watching. I couldn't, of course. At least not straight away. When he'd gone, it was harder than I'd guessed. I wanted him back, to do it for me, to show me again. I am not good at being taught and trained. I don't like being watched. It was the same when I was learning to mend a puncture on my bike at the age of nine or ten. I listened to my father as he carefully explained it. He taught me by showing me, but after a while I just wished he'd go away and let me do it better when he wasn't watching. It wasn't better. When he'd left it was harder than I'd guessed. I wanted him back, to do it for me, to show me again. But, I slowly learnt to mend punctures without him around, by remembering the way he went about it. And fifteen years later, as a curate, I learnt to do something of a priest's work, even when my training vicar wasn't around, by recalling what he tried to do and how he went about it.

(285)

The preacher is using a personal story to explain how he came to appreciate the qualities of a "good" teacher. This story probably appears credible and relevant to most listeners who will be able to remember similar feelings about a person or people who have been involved in their learning experiences. It indicates that the preacher validates personal experience as a way of understanding and acquiring knowledge but he also appreciates that experience is an essential ingredient for acquiring certain skills. He seems to be advocating a heuristic approach to teaching and learning.

The preacher uses his same reactions and feelings towards two different people in two different stages of his life: the first relates to an adult/adult interaction, the second a child/adult interaction. However, both narratives offer male authority figures from whom

the preacher learns. He presents the idea of a benevolent, guiding hierarchy. Implicit in these paired illustrations is the idea that experience leads to “true” self-knowledge and tends to reinforce its lessons in later life. He follows these paired personal interactions with similar interpretations of the two Scriptural lessons read during the service. The preacher interprets the Old Testament text to demonstrate that Joshua learnt from Moses and the New Testament text to explain that Jesus was taught by God. His personal experience narrative reflects both Biblical texts, and thus replicates a particular narrative paradigm.

The dynamics of an interpersonal exchange between a daughter and father is at the centre of a different preacher’s personal narrative:

Recently, on holiday in Norfolk several of us in the family wanted to go out in a boat and see the field of Blakeny, but Harriet my eldest daughter didn’t. We tried a lot of persuasion but to no avail. “Look,” she protested “I don’t like boats, just like you don’t like cats. That’s the way God’s made you and me.” Well, it was a pretty shrewd argument for a ten year old to put to a vicar. What I had to learn and keep having to learn was to leave it at that. To respect her choice even when it didn’t suit me. I could have gone on about it, badgered her, maybe even forced the issue . . .

(239-40)

This story indicates that this preacher’s experience taught him that he needed to learn to allow his daughter the opportunity to make her own responsible choices and accept she was capable of doing so in certain instances. He too comments that he had to repeat this experience before accepting the situation, thus implying that learning to be a parent is a acquired through experiences and is a continuous learning process.

Of the fifteen sermons in my sample that contained personal experiences, one is unusual with respect to the number of self-disclosure stories offered. Four different personal anecdotes illustrate this sermon:

(I) Sometimes, when the pressure is on and other things interrupt what I have to do, I can, so my wife tells me, be very abrupt. She’s quite right when she tells me off. I tend to go on the defensive then and ask, “what have I said now that’s wrong?” And she will reply, “it’s not so much what you said, but the way you said

it.” (308)

(ii) Almost a year ago, I had the pleasure of leading a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. It was an experience of a life-time. I had been so used to the difficulties of that land being presented in news reports for more years than I can care to remember. But I was delighted by the hospitality we experienced. We had the assistance of two delightful people . . . (309)

(iii) When our family did an exchange with an American minister and his family, some years ago, we experienced something of a culture shock most Britishers used to experience on arriving in the USA. “Have a nice day” was not part of our vocabulary then. I remember asking one of the young people from the church, who worked in the burger bar if they ever got fed-up with being pleasant to people and saying, “have a nice day.” (310)

(iv) A week ago, my wife and I were invited to a Silver Wedding celebration and at one stage I thought that due to pressures and uncertainties on that day, it would be better to make our apologies rather than have to leave arrangements hanging in the air. When we expressed this to our hosts, it was said to us, “you must be there.” To know that it was really meant, to be wanted for our own sakes, was a precious experience. (311-2)

All four accounts focus on an aspect of relational awareness in every-day life situations. The speaker is demonstrating that knowledge is easily conveyed through personal experiences and he believes that sharing those experiences is an effective means of imparting such knowledge. These four narratives are related to everyday, real-life situations rather than abstractions of Scriptural exegesis. One might argue that this preacher imports a feminine line of self-presentation into his preaching.

An examination of my sermon sample reveals that fifteen out of the forty preachers (37.5%) recounted personal experiences in their sermons. The larger portion (62.5%) did not choose to disclose personal feelings, behaviours, thoughts or actions concerning incidents they had experienced or witnessed. Interestingly, these overall percentages of the total sample produce a 1 in 3 proportion which corresponds to that of a 1 in 3 proportion in

the case of the women preachers. However, the small number of women preachers in my sample prevents any conclusions with respect to whether women are more relational and contextual than men in their preaching. It is also likely that during training under male mentors they were encouraged to adhere to traditional male epistemological views of the authority of objective knowledge. Finally, the kind of woman who becomes a preacher may well be someone who prefers a certain impersonality in speaking.

Despite the strong arguments promoting the use of personal experiences in sermons by some theologians and homileticians, it is perhaps a reflection on the so-called reserve of the British male that the majority of preachers did not reveal their experiences in their sermons. Chartier suggests this reason why male preachers may not choose self-disclosures: "Self-disclosure tends to be seen as a weakness due to cultural sexist stereotypes. Tough masculine men are expected to suffer in silence rather than express their feelings to others" (37). Furthermore, as mentioned above, institutional practices which establish procedures by which ordinands are instructed based on traditional homiletical texts which in turn are based on established epistemological theories may also discourage the use of personal disclosures. Chartier suggests that this attitude is in fact reflected in the whole educational process when he states that

many persons have not had communication experiences that promote self-disclosure, either at home or at school. Such persons often lack communicative attitudes and behaviors and vocabularies that would help them describe their self-perceptions and express how they feel about themselves. Training in self-disclosing communication has not been provided. (37)

There are other factors why preachers may not recount personal experiences or offer self-disclosure which are concerned with their intra-personal feelings. One reason is related to the personality of the preacher and her/his ability to persuade listeners. Traditionally, part of a preacher's ability to influence people rests on the established notions of their authority. However, some preachers may consider that any revelation of their personal experience and self-disclosures may also serve to undermine their power and influence. Such a view infers that if people reveal any aspect of their personal lives or

character, listeners may lose respect and disregard opinions from such a suspect source. Their competence as a preacher may be questioned by listeners (Chartier 38). This *reverse halo effect* is derived from structures of power and domination. It is diametrically opposed to the feminist understanding of the use of personal experience and persuasion which suggests that mutuality and sharing of personal experience and self-disclosure operate at a more egalitarian level and not through structures of domination.

Another issue arising from the use of self-disclosure in sermons is associated with the ministry of the preacher. Preachers in the service of God may be expected to suppress the self in favour of their ministry. The use of personal experience and self-disclosure disrupts that requirement. It is interesting that suppression of the self is both a feminine attribute, in that others come before self, and also a masculine characteristic of showing no emotions. Self-disclosure by male preachers thus constitutes a double transgression, especially in a public and church context.

Nevertheless, feminist epistemology has singled out personal experience as an important basis for knowledge which should be acknowledged. One might expect sermons to include an element of personal experience since the establishment of Christianity itself and the Christian churches was based on abstraction from personal experience, for example, the witnesses to Jesus' activities. My sermon sample indicates that some preachers do indeed use personal experience even though the dominant discourse of the church does not support it, investing instead in the depersonalisation of the sermon as a way to maintain authority.

The fact that most of the personal experiences recounted reflect Biblical stories suggests that they appear to be comparable to particular types of narratives. Many of the preachers who used them tended to present narratives which cast themselves as observers to situations which mirrored Biblical stories. This offered a rationale for such usage which may cause preachers to consider their inclusion only when they can establish contemporary parallels with the Scriptures. Therefore, categorising the use of personal experience into types can paradoxically serve to depersonalise experiential narratives. Moreover, the use of

personal experience can aid “inclusiveness” through mutuality and sharing. Thus, a re-thinking of how personal experience is used in sermons may be required.

As the telling of personal experience suggests a direct connection between a preacher’s life and her/his sermon, so metaphors work by indirection. Another dimension of the gender issues surrounding the ways in which knowledge is constructed is discussed in the next chapter which examines and analyses the scope and function of metaphor in my sample.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE USE OF METAPHORS IN PREACHING

Another context in which gender issues arise in my sermon sample is the preachers' use of metaphors. As I shall discuss below, this relates both to the use of metaphor and to the content of metaphors. The former has been widely considered with current research into metaphorical meaning indicating the difficulties in accommodating metaphor into a theory of language (T. J. Cohen; D. Davidson; M. Platts; I. A. Richards; D. Davidson and G. Harman; H. P. Grice; J. Searle; P. Werth; S. Sacks; R. Barthes; W. V. Quine). This is partly because of an increasing recognition of the pervasiveness of metaphor in everyday discourse (J. Lyons, *Language*; M. Reddy; G. Lakoff and M. Johnson; S. Sontag). Interest in metaphor has also arisen from its alleged power as a vehicle for the understanding of knowledge and truth (P. Ricoeur; Davidson; D. Rummellhart; M. Davies; S. Blackburn; D. Berggren; T. Binkley). So much attention has been focused on this subject about which Wayne Booth (1978) quipped, "We shall soon have more metaphoricians than metaphysicians" (*Metaphor* 47). David Cooper, writing in 1986, comments: "that metaphor has become an important and much discussed topic in recent philosophy and linguistics is clear from the number of writings which have appeared over the last ten years or so" (43).¹

There are disagreements as to whether metaphorical meaning belongs to the elements of language themselves, such as words and sentences, or the use of these elements.²

Nevertheless, Cooper states, "most writers are in no doubt where metaphorical meaning is to be located - in *parole*. If it does not adhere in words, it must issue from the speaker . . . this is the view which deserves to be called 'standard'" (66). Searle (1979) makes the central

¹ Some of the many aspects of metaphor that have been explored include the characteristic features of metaphor, the use of metaphor, the pragmatics of metaphor, the semantics of metaphor, linguistic competence and the cognitive status of metaphor, the notion of metaphorical truth and the possibility of paraphrasing metaphor.

² The arguments over whether metaphorical meaning belongs to the scope of semantics or pragmatics is further complicated by the view that it may belong to neither. For a discussion of metaphor without meaning and metaphor as maverick utterances see Cooper, pages 89-117.

point: “the speaker means metaphorically something different from what the sentence means literally . . . metaphorical meaning is always the speaker’s utterances” (92-3). A speaker’s meaning is a function of his/her intentions so that talking about a metaphor’s possible meanings is talking about a speaker’s possible intentions (Cooper 67). However, there is an indeterminacy in terms of what might have been meant by the speakers. In order for me to “interpret” the meanings of a preacher’s metaphors I can only judge what I consider the preacher “probably” intends me to perceive when I examine the metaphors he or she uses. Moreover, I am less interested in what the preacher intends and more in what I understand the metaphors to mean.

Due to the diverse interdisciplinary debates about the phenomenon of metaphor there is no generally accepted definition or theory that explains metaphor, nor is there an agreed demarcation between the literal and the non-literal.³ However, a distinction between the literal and metaphorical definitions has to be drawn for the purposes of this examination of my sermon sample because it would not be possible for me to develop any points for discussion without such a differentiation. Language which “means (or intends to mean) what it says, and which uses words in their ‘standard’ sense, derived from the common practice of ordinary speakers of the language, is said to be literal” (T. Hawkes 2). The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines metaphor as “The figure of speech in which a name or descriptive term is transferred to some object different from, but analogous to, that which it is properly applicable; an instance of this, or metaphorical expression.” Figurative language interferes with the system of literal usage by its assumption that terms literally connected to an object can be transferred to others. This interference takes the form of transference, or “carrying over,” with the aim of achieving a new, wider meaning. The effectiveness and relevance of this process depends on its contextual position, and more importantly, on the social and

³ For a discussion of the difficulties arising from the multi-disciplinary views of what a metaphor is, and the disagreements as to whether something is literal, metaphorical, neither or both, as well as confusion over terminology, see Cooper pages 1-34. There is also disagreement over the meanings of established metaphors, dead metaphors, idioms and polysemes (see M. Davies; Davidson; Searle).

historical backgrounds against which it is set. None of these factors is constant. In other words, “the notion of metaphor itself is shaped at any given time by linguistics and social pressures, as well as by its own history: it has no pristine form” (Hawkes 5). There is also the view that there are no different “types” of language. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this thesis I shall distinguish between those metaphors used in conversational or “ordinary” language and those framed in the context of “religious” language.⁴

As I have already stated in chapter one, the history of the development of sermons spans two thousand years. Consequently it is necessary to restrict my examination of preachers’ usage of metaphorical language in this chapter to those aspects which affect contemporary gender issues. Because the study of metaphor lends itself to an interdisciplinary analysis I have combined approaches to my discussion of metaphor from subject areas of linguistics, rhetoric, communication, homiletics and anthropology. Even within these disciplines there are many texts engaged with particular aspects of metaphors but only some of the most salient points arising from these inter-related implications can be discussed here. In this chapter I shall examine my sample texts in terms of the preachers’ use of metaphorical utterances. I have divided the chapter into two parts: the first discusses the use of metaphor as a linguistic device and the second examines the content of the metaphorical utterances.

5.1 Homiletics and the Feminization of Metaphor as a Linguistic Device

Within homiletical theory there are two diametrically opposed views of metaphor and its usage. The classical view is derived from Aristotle, Cicero, Horace, Longinus and Quintillian. It sees metaphor as “detachable” from language but it may be imported into language to achieve pre-judged effects. Metaphors thus aid language to conceptualise the reality of a world in terms of an immutable “truth.” This device has no claim to literal meaning because it works by analogy to subvert the “proper” meaning of words. Advocates of this Hellenistic stance consider that it is preferable to have a language devoid of

⁴ There are also distinctions made between religious and theological language (see Rikhof).

metaphors altogether.⁵ Proponents of this view tend to think language is most effective when committed to written form. The opposing romantic Hebraic view sees metaphor as inseparable from language. It stresses its vital function as an expression of the imagination which enables the creation of a new reality. In general, those committed to the latter view have a preference for language retaining the “ambiguities” or potency of oral language and the speaking voice (Ong *Presence*; Hawkes).

Homiletical theorists have attempted to combine elements of Hebraism with Hellenism but have produced what R. Kennedy (1993) calls a “crisis of rationality” (1). Underlying this crisis is the assumption that “the autonomous consciousness of the thinker could account for any reality by the strict application of science and logic” (Kennedy 1). R. Bernstein (1983) also refers to what he calls a crisis of rationality, but he includes it within a broader concept of “Cartesian anxiety” which he defines as

the assumption that only two options are available for those who inquire into the matters of knowledge and action. Either some ultimate ground for knowledge and action exists, some objective foundation, or we are beset by relativistic skepticism which ends in befuddled plurality. This opposition includes the crisis of rationality versus irrationality. (767)

Both Kennedy and Bernstein suggest that homiletical methodology has remained oblivious to this dilemma by choosing either a dogmatic rationalism or a charismatic irrationalism. This view is upheld by W. L. Haynes (1988):

Focusing on rhetoric solely through literate framework has long since led to treat oral rhetoric as if it were written and performed . . . as if the rhetorical process at work in oral composition and interaction differs little, if at all, from those of written thought, to then attempt the promulgation of an orally-performed version of literate rhetoric. (98-9)

⁵ Debates and disagreements concerned with metaphor and truth are beyond the scope of this chapter but can be followed up in Cooper, see pages 198-279.

Homiletics construct sermons from a standard design⁶ usually dependent on a linear framework and Haynes advocates that aspects of oral culture be re-introduced to the literate homiletical methodology. H. Frei (1974) also suggests that the idea that texts contain themes, propositions or principles is “a response to skeptical rationalism’s charge that the Bible was a collection of irrational, embarrassing myths” (154). Thus, there is a dichotomy within homiletic departments of theological institutions concerning the rationality or irrationality of the tenor of the sermon. In addition, different denominations place different emphases on the extent to which preaching is taught and studied within their faculties. Although the contemporary studies of knowledge and reality have revealed the shortcomings of Cartesian dualism, Kennedy comments that “preaching has continued to live in an isolated intellectual tower. It is as if the art of preaching has become a still-frame picture from the eighteenth century” (3).

Metaphors have been perceived by some linguistic purists as violations of normal, literal language (G. Ryle; C. Turbayne; T. Drange). This has led to the application of terms generally associated with theology being used by these linguists to define what happens in metaphorical utterances, for example, “transgression,” “violation” and “mistake.” The word “transgression” belongs to the biblical-word group that includes “sin”, “iniquity” and “trespass”, whereas the literal translation of transgression is to step across. According to C. Brown (1978), “the concept of sin embraces the gamut of human failure from the transgression of a single commandment to the ruin of one’s own whole existence. Sin is a conscious deviation from the right way” (573). Therefore, transgression refers to not following the correct direction, as well as a departure from the standard or norm. Thus, to transgress is to violate the law. Applied to linguistics, metaphor becomes stigmatised as a

⁶ The next chapter concerned with structure and style discusses these aspects. Intriguingly, sermon textbook titles often employ architectural or construction metaphors to show that sermons are assembled like an edifice. Some examples are: H. T. Bryson and J. C. Taylor, *Building Sermons to Meet People’s Needs*; J. E. Massey, *Designing the Sermon*; and D. F. Stevenson, *In the Biblical Preacher’s Workshop*.

law-breaker. This approach to metaphor as a type of deviance insists that the literal meaning is the norm and standard use of language.

The sociological term “deviance” is also often used to explain what happens in metaphorical utterances.⁷ Some homileticians apply this notion of deviance as “bad” to metaphors thereby deeming them to have a negative connotation in preaching. This view of metaphor as “transgression” or “deviance” in the religious domain raises a pertinent question. If metaphor really is a misuse of language, are those who use metaphor guilty of “sin”? Modern Biblical literalists seem to make such a charge, since J. T. Draper (1984) warns: “They who use metaphor have abandoned divine revelation . . . Once we depart from divine revelation, we have at least opened the door to whatever deviation a person chooses to engage in . . . ultimately, historic, biblical Christianity will be in shambles” (20-2). Draper’s view ignores the influence of Origen (AD 185-284) on the incredibly rich period of medieval preaching (Wilson 67; J. W. Trigg; J. T. Leinhard; Brilioth). The medieval churches were obsessed with interpreting all scriptural writings in the four-fold, allegorical, non-literal manner derived from Origen’s preaching style: “With his commentaries and other writings, he [Origen] helped to secure the church’s move in the direction of allegory and typology for the next thousand years and beyond” (Wilson 38). Draper also ignores the accepted view that the parables of Jesus are types of metaphor or meta-metaphor (A. Wilder; J. D. Crosson, *Parables*; Kennedy; Keck, *Future*).

These negative assessments of metaphor in preaching also reflect on the credibility of the preacher. Booth (1978) proposes ten theses about metaphors. In the seventh thesis he states: “the deliberate use of a recognisable metaphor (a special case of the deliberate use of any abnormality, any figuring) inevitably invites judgements of the speaker’s character” (176). One might argue that all the utterances invite judgments of a speaker’s character, not just metaphors. More importantly however, this suggests that in a modern homiletical tradition,

⁷ More recently there has been a transformation of deviance from “badness” to “sickness” also known as the “medicalization of deviance” (P. Conrad and J. Schneider). Some fundamentalist churches resist this change of perspective when they insist, for example, that alcoholism is a sin and not a sickness.

which has classified metaphor as a deviant use of language, there is an implicit mistrust of people who use them.⁸

Kennedy comments that “the typical charges against metaphor by homiletics have been its danger and its seductive power, i.e., ‘deviance’” (61). This connection between deviance, transgression with seduction, adds a dimension of gender to the term metaphor. Seduction of men by women is still used by those theologians who interpret the Genesis story of Adam’s disobedience of God as evidence of the Fall being occasioned by Eve’s seduction of Adam (A. Brown; U. Cassuto; M. Henry). Over the centuries, Eve has been characterised as irresolute, irrational, more sensual, open to temptation, conspiratorial, and insecure (J. A. Phillips 55-77). All of these negative attributes have been conferred onto the word metaphor with the effect that within these terms metaphor becomes genderised as feminine. Kennedy describes the genderisation of metaphor by homiletics when he refers to

the slow but steady transformation in language used to talk about metaphor as “figures of speech”, “fickle”, “merely emotional”, and generally weaker form of language.

Such language, I believe, can be traced to what Jacques Derrida calls logocentric, phonocentric, and phallogocentric prejudices of our Greek forebears. The language used to talk about rhetoric in general and metaphor in particular expresses a masculine prejudice. (62)

Kennedy calls this masculine prejudice the “feminization of metaphor” which he traces to the positivistic views of rational thought of the empiricists that assume metaphor possesses feminine attributes: “As the entire history of Western civilisation is the story of the oppression and subjugation of women, so is the treatment of metaphor as a mere figure of speech to be kept in its proper place “ (63).⁹ He compares the “qualities” of femininity and masculinity which index the feminization of metaphor:

⁸ This suspicion is particularly relevant for the fundamentalists’ and literalists’ view.

⁹ This view was recognised by the Pope John Paul II when he wrote an open letter to women on 10 July 1995 about feminism and apologising on behalf of the Roman Catholic Church for the wrongs it had done to them. In his hymn of praise for women he called for the full range of rights for women though he did not mention birth control and reiterated the view that abortion was a “sin.” Some feminists see this letter as the Pope

MASCULINE

rational
science
technology
literal
Western
repressive
strength
objective
Protestant reformation
Fundamentalism
superior
proper
Adam

FEMININE

rhetoric
figures of speech
imagination
myth
Eastern
inferior
weakness
inappropriate
Renaissance
liberal
merely emotional
pleasure
seductive ("Eve")
style and grace
clothing
beautiful
deviant

Following the model projected here, homiletics would benefit from (1) a defeminization of its traditional treatment of metaphor, and (2) an acceptance of the powerful positive feminine qualities suggested here. (64)

Kennedy states that there has been a failure of homileticians to reconsider their theory of metaphor. He asserts that their traditional view that metaphors are a deviant usage of language is based on phallocentric prejudices.

Despite all of these negative linguistic and homiletical views of metaphorical language, an examination of my sermon sample indicates that all the preachers used metaphors at least once during their discourses. Moreover, in the following discussion I shall demonstrate that metaphorical utterances in preaching can act as an inclusive, non-authoritarian mechanism in the communication process.

A total of 79 different metaphors were utilised. Some of the same ones were chosen by different preachers resulting in a total frequency count of 186 instances. The most commonly

offering a tribute to the women's movement; others received it with a hollow laugh and considered it to be just window-dressing.

used metaphor in my sample is that of the concept of *The Church*.¹⁰ Preachers using this term metaphorically are not talking about a church in its literal meaning as a building designed for public forms of Christian worship. For example: “How is it then that the church has flourished in the era of the absent Lord?” (252). Here, the word “church” firstly refers to something that is alive and not an inanimate object such as a building. The preacher intends this concept to mean a community of people. He does not specify any particular set of people and the inference must be that he includes all Christians. The reference to “era” in association with the word “church” places the latter in a temporal context. These two meanings placed on the word “church” appear to have some shared metaphorical entailments which enable coherence of this sentence for the speaker. The preacher is speaking in terms which presuppose that listeners will understand what he is saying. As Ted Cohen points out, “a figurative use can be inaccessible to all but those who share information about another’s knowledge, beliefs, intentions and attitudes” (*Metaphor* 9).

In the context of social and personal relationships this sentence may be perceived as meaningless by listeners from other religions or cultures. Edward Sapir (1964) commented that culture and language are so intimately connected that “way of life” is inextricable from way of speaking: “We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation” (26). Those belonging to the Christian community will understand the meanings of each others’ metaphorical utterances.¹¹ This has to be viewed in the context in which communities do not exist in complete isolation from each other. It means that metaphorical utterances may be understood by those not directly involved in any given community.

Cohen adds another dimension to metaphorical language when he suggests that it presupposes and reinforces an intimacy between speaker and hearer, and “the cultivation of

¹⁰ The use of the term “the church” as a metaphor is a recent understanding of this concept: i.e., since the 1960’s. The history of this term is complex. For an in-depth discussion and critique of this particular metaphorical concept see Rifhof.

¹¹ Aristotle (384-322 BC) who wrote the first discussion of metaphor recognised that metaphors have a social role. See *Rhetoric* Book III where he examines the subject of metaphor.

intimacy might be the crucial function of such talk” (*Metaphor* 5). In the case of preaching, this sense of intimacy is perhaps fostered through the preacher’s and listeners’ similar interests and attitudes brought about by Christianity and the social conditions governing their lives. The use of the metaphor, *The Church*, serves to re-state and reinforce a shared reality to which preacher and listeners subscribe as their way of life. All those who understand the metaphor in the same way as the preacher are included to form a group of like-minded people who in “togetherness” sustain each other through a “special” intimacy.

Metaphorical language may create a sharing-by-intimacy, enhancing interpersonal relationships and functioning as an inclusive mechanism in the context of preaching. Research into gender differences between the way women and men converse indicates that women engage in more intimate conversations than men (R. Buhrke and D. Fuqua; J. Fischer and L. Narus; J. M. Reisman). W. K. Rawlings refers to women’s greater intimacy competence and remarks that “in contrast, a considerable number of males practice the ‘hail-fellow-well-met’ and activity-oriented carriage. . . useful for the world of work but not for facilitating intimacy” (54). Thus, language which enables intimacy and sharing to operate is conventionally genderised as feminine.

However, this perception is now being challenged (E. Behr 135). Some research concerned with the notion of intimacy in relation to gender and verbal communication suggests that intimacy has been conceptualised and measured in a female-biased way (P. Camerena, P. Sarigiani, and A. Peterson; F. M. Cancian; D. Sherrod; S. Swain; J. T. Wood and C. C. Inman). There are debates among researchers studying the similarity and differences of the ways in which women and men create intimacy through conversation involving shared experiences, the sharing of ideas and/or activities. It may well be that men choose not to use such modes of address, but any reason for this has not been clearly established (Behr 153). Nevertheless, the evidence overall suggests that females employ more phraseology which creates a greater intimacy than males.

Twelve preachers (30%) used seventeen different ways to speak metaphorically about the concept of “the church” as a group of people rather than a building. Those people acquainted with this particular metaphorical concept are likely to understand the various meanings combined within a single metaphor through a shared cognisance. Though metaphors invite the possibility of several meanings, the ability to assimilate a variety of multiple meanings to one metaphor acts to unite listeners, resulting in a strengthening of the sustaining function of intimacy.¹² The polysemous aspect of this metaphor reinforces the view that metaphors are feminine devices which invite listeners to be active participants in the communication process through the exercise of their imagination.

The notion of the authority or credibility of the preacher adds a further dimension to this discussion. With regard to preachers using metaphors in their sermons, their credibility or authority depends partially on whether listeners accept or reject their metaphors. As Booth comments: “to understand a metaphor is by its very nature to decide whether to join the metaphorist or reject him, and that simultaneously to decide either to be shaped in the shape his metaphor requires or to resist it” (*Metaphor* 65). The preacher has the choice to use traditional Christian metaphors, offer alternative ones or use none at all. This choice affects the type and degree of credibility or authority that the preacher prefers to assume or generate. Preachers possess authority because of numerous factors but primarily those derived from their particular denominational structures and they tend to choose to remain consistent with its traditions. Kathleen Hall Jamieson examined the metaphors of Pope Paul VI:

By employing the metaphors in which Christ, the apostles, and nineteen centuries of popes have expressed Catholicism, Paul VI implies that he has preserved the tradition of the Church, and hence is legitimate heir to Peter . . . Paul’s metaphors endorse ancestral doctrine. (52)

¹² An examination of these various meanings for the concept of “the church” raises other issues which are beyond the scope of this thesis because they are concerned with doctrinal aspects derived from the huge number of denominational strands of Christianity.

Thus, the credibility of Pope Paul VI resides in a pre-existing authority.¹³ Jamieson argues that “as a result it is unlikely that [Pope] Paul’s metaphors will tantalize with their freshness, but likely that the audience will assign intended referents” (52). Pope Paul’s metaphor of *The Church as a Body* for example will be accepted by Roman Catholic listeners with its extended meanings such as: Christ is the head of the body. The Pope is Christ’s vicar; the faithful are members of the body, the faithful, through sinning, can sever themselves from the body. The metaphor, *The Church is the Body of Christ*, sustains a traditional culture for the preacher who derives external authority from this metaphor (Kennedy 100).

The other instances of “religious” metaphors in my sermon sample can be categorised as appertaining to notions of Faith, Christianity, Christian Love, God, Evil and the Bible. All these metaphors, framed within the context of Christianity, affirm, reinforce and re-state a shared understanding and language habit of Christian communities. Those who recognise and subscribe to particular metaphorical expressions will interpret a whole range of related examples according to their understanding of their denomination’s doctrinal theories (N. Hawthorn 114). The use of metaphor as a feminine device creating community through intimacy-by-sharing provides a mechanism by which denominational-specific metaphors sustain some masculine notions of authority in a covert way. As a consequence, there seems to be a contradiction by traditional homileticians who argue against the use of metaphor on the grounds of its inability to provide epistemic authority yet advocate the usage of certain metaphors which preserve the traditional status of the preacher.

However, there is another school of thought that criticises this approach to the understanding of authority as static (A. King; R. Sennett). Gerard Hauser comments, “Rather than thinking of authority as a thing, Sennett suggests it is a social construct. It exists as an event in social time and space, the product of an interaction” (93). Thus, the preacher creates

¹³ Kennedy comments, “place the Pope in the pulpit of a country Baptist church in the deep South [USA] and initial credibility is lost, and only that which he can derive will count” (100).

authority within an act of worship rather than relying only on an external authority. Aristotle (AD384-322) took this view when he advised:

... as a rule we must trust men of probity more, ... and ... on points outside the realms of probity, where opinion is divided, we trust them absolutely. This trust, however, should be created by the speech itself, and not left to depend upon an antecedent impression that the speaker is this or that kind of man. (L. Cooper 8-9)

Aristotle does not say how listeners come to trust preachers absolutely but presents it as a given which could be due to any number of reasons. Nevertheless Aristotle appears to be stating that the preacher's task is to gain allegiance. This would suggest that epistemic authority is established by the interaction with the listener. Therefore, despite all the claims of the power of tradition, "the audience may refuse to mobilize its power, to withhold its power, or extend its mandate to a spokesman" (A. King 25). Thus, the audience decides whether to accept a metaphor in the context that allows the metaphor to exist. As Booth argues, "The metaphors we care for most are always embedded in metaphorical structures that finally both depend on and constitute selves" (*Rhetoric* 63). This view promotes the idea of a derived authority partly determined by the metaphors a preacher employs. Derived authority which invites active participation is non-authoritarian and feminine in characteristic. A preacher may choose to rely on traditional authority and use standard Christian metaphors. Paradoxically, the risk taken by preachers who use unconventional metaphors creates a potential for sharing and intimacy which may enhance or diminish their derived credibility.

If a sermon contains lengthy descriptions of events or situations with many facts and pieces of information it may be considered to be using traditional authoritarian discourse to impart knowledge (H.W. Robinson; Ireson; Stott; Logan; R. Howe; Fant). This didactic method of teaching subordinates listeners as passive recipients of "facts" which requires speakers to use literal language as an instrument of "clarification." However, metaphors use few words to convey a large amount of information: Max Black (1979) regards a metaphor

as “a condensed model” (62). Paul Ricoeur (1978) comments that “metaphor is a poem in miniature” (93). The usefulness of metaphor as a shorthand method of conveying ideas is observed by M. B. Miles and A. H. Huberman (1984): “ They are data-reducing devices taking several particulars and making a single generality of them” (221). This is an important factor since there are time constraints for addresses delivered during an act of worship as well as those associated with listeners’ attention spans. An example from my sermon sample where a metaphor provides a preacher with a shortcut to understanding occurs in the following sentence describing people’s reaction to stress: “Some people bottle it up when they have a problem” (235). This metaphorical utterance likens people to containers. It succinctly binds a number of mental images about the interrelation between people and their emotions: (1) a person’s body is a container with a lid; (2) this body can be filled with personal problems; (3) the lid prevents those problems leaving the body; (4) the body fills up to the brim with problems causing pressure against the lid; (5) the pressure inside the body either forces the lid off to release the pressure or it remains tight and the person’s mind/body breaks, and (6) this release in pressure and/or collapse of the person is manifested as some sort of breakdown which may be physical or mental. Thus, this commonplace metaphor conveys several images through the use of few words.

Since the corollary of this metaphor is that sharing problems may help prevent people from becoming afflicted it also infers the possibility of communication between listener and preacher (Cohen; Cooper 158). Metaphorical utterances such as these enhance the interpersonal relationship between speaker and hearer. They enable listeners to actively participate in the communication process rather than be passive recipients of fixed meanings proscribed by the preacher. Thus, the data-reducing ability of metaphors inviting multiple meanings, audience participation, and pointing to non-authoritarian epistemic knowledge may be viewed as feminine (J. Kristeva *Desire* 133-47).

Traditional homileticians promoting the view of religious positivism banish the use of metaphor in religious discourses because they perceive it to be an inferior linguistic device.

They focus only on its negative aspects deeming it to possess feminine characteristics which, by definition, they perceive to have no virtue. These views owe much to an earlier era when the authoritarian preacher was addressing an uneducated audience who were expected to accept the words of their superiors without question thereby maintaining structures of exclusion.

5.2 The Genderised Content of Metaphors Used in my Sermon Sample

In contrast to this dismissive view of metaphor, all the preachers in my sample used at least one metaphor in their sermon and many used several. Metaphors are not only a linguistic device, they also relate to a specific content. An assessment of the metaphorical content used in my sermon sample indicates that they may be allocated to several categories. Many of them possess genderised characteristics. In particular, many contained a preponderance of adversarial situations or conditions reflecting stereotypical masculine imagery, attributes or characteristics. For example: “Good News to the poor and oppressed must always involve the overthrow of evil and the provision of justice” (280).

I have chosen to place the gendered content of the metaphors found in my sermon sample into two groups: (1) a male-gendered group containing those metaphors with referents based on adversarial, competitive conditions, and (2) those metaphors possessing a gender-neutral content based on co-operation or non-adversarial conditions. The two groups are discussed separately in the next part of this chapter.

Adversarial Metaphors

Almost a quarter (25%) of all the metaphors used by preachers in my sample are male-gendered in content. This group consists of 17 referents based on adversarial, competitive conditions. These same examples were repeated by various preachers resulting in a total frequency of 63 instances. Some of the metaphors are used in parts of the sermon where the preacher is speaking in the context of religious concepts or ideas whilst others are framed

within conversational language and the relating of the everyday lives of people. Thus, 12 are classed as everyday, while 5 have a specifically “religious” content. The metaphors with adversarial content found in my sermon sample are listed below in Table I.

Table I

<u>Adversarial Metaphors and Frequency of Usage in Sermon Sample</u>			
Metaphor	Frequency	Metaphor	Frequency
Words/Ideas as Arguments	1	Life as War/ Battle	4
Words/Ideas as Weapons	5	Words/Ideas as War/Conflict	6
Love as War	1	Money as Weapons	1
Knowledge as Power	1	Money as Power	2
Arguments as War	5	Time as Power	5
Love as Power	3	Emotions as Power	1
Faith as Power	16	Christianity as War	1
Christianity as Adversary	4	Christianity as a Game	2
Faith as Knowledge	5		
Total no. of metaphors		17	
Total frequency of usage		63	

Five different metaphors implying notions of power were used by several preachers. They are *Love as Power*, *Time as Power*, *Money as Power*, *Knowledge as Power* and *Emotions as Power*. For example: “the present escapes us and can leave us wallowing in frustration. Truly we are stuck between the past and the future” (365). These metaphorical utterances invite images concerned with the concepts of time. *Time as Movement* is the first metaphor used by the preacher as he invokes images about time as a moving thing which cannot be caught or stopped, thereby generating a sense of its power by demonstrating that human beings cannot control time. This sense of power is inferred by the second metaphorical phrase which suggests time imprisons people. The two sentences have coherence because the first metaphor generates the sense of power which develops a derived use in the subsequent instance. In this manner, the preacher expresses the way he feels about time in terms that listeners may appreciate and share. The underlying image is one of power differentials cast along a binary divide, with people, disempowered on one side, and time, empowered, on the other.

A similar pattern of metaphorical function can be seen in the following extract from my sample where notions of power are associated with knowledge in terms of “Not brains teeming with yet more data with which to impress” (233). In this instance, knowledge is constructed as facts used to impress and as in a sense, illusory. Simultaneously, a certain kind of knowledge which is fact-based, masculinist, objectified knowledge is derided. Again listeners are able to understand the metaphorical meanings of knowledge as power generated by this utterance through a shared common stock of language relying on male epistemic notions which are pervasive and hidden within such language systems.

Other metaphors were more explicitly male-gendered. The metaphor *Words/Ideas as Weapons* was used by several preachers in my sample:

This wide ranging hard hitting manifesto . . . (247)

In our contemporary society, especially when we are daily bombarded with media images of plenty, success, happiness and satisfaction . . . (263)

The first thing that strikes me . . . (367)

However, the crunch comes in the last line . . . (374)

All these metaphors generate images of words or ideas possessing attributes of force, strength, toughness and power which are stereotypically male gendered (Frieze; Hartnell, Boden and Fuller). Further examples of militaristic imagery are invoked by the following metaphorical utterances:

It hit him with a bang that there was more to Jesus than even the teaching and preaching. (275)

But we often have to wrestle with the fact that . . . (368)

The reasons we struggle to understand . . . (361)

All of these metaphors focus on the one person dealing with internalised problems in a combative way. Imagery of physical fighting in battle, conflict or competitive contact sports are generated by these metaphors, all of which are centred upon traditionally masculine roles, interests or occupations. Furthermore, the person in the first metaphor is explicitly

masculine as identified through the use of the male personal pronoun. In this instance the preacher employs the third person mode of address as he interprets a biblical story about a man; in contrast, in the second and third metaphors the second person plural is used. In these latter instances, the subject of the sentences are female and male listeners together with the male preacher. The male-gendered metaphors tend to masculinise the subjectivity of all the listeners by aligning them to a masculine world view.

The metaphor *Arguments as War* in the context of personal relationships is also used by a few preachers: “It’s so easy to win the argument and lose the person” (306). This metaphor invites imagery of two people arguing, with no explicit suggestion of physical violence, but with connotations of masculine competitiveness inferred through the overt interaction of a win/lose idea based on power. Disagreements occurring in close personal relationships are also couched in terms of arguments as a battleground in the following extract:

We offer love within our families and friendships. Yet even there, we end up hurting each other, letting each other down, leaving scars, despite our best intentions. (225-6)

The metaphors *Argument as War* and *Love as War* are used by the preacher to invoke images of people within familial and neighbourhood groups having disagreements, resulting in inflicting emotional and psychological damage. The suggestion here is one of verbal exchange rather than physical combat but the expression understood from the parent domain of physical conflict leaving visible evidence on the body, develops a derived use in that of a verbal disagreement.

All the metaphors mentioned above concerned with weapons, battles and conflicts may be placed under one general metaphor, that of *Life as War*. One preacher uses several referents based on adversarial metaphors which combine to broaden the scope of the utterance to construct an understanding of people’s lives as war: “sorrow, anxiety and all other things that militate against our well-being . . . people today take part in the struggle against hunger, poverty and disease” (336). Warfare imagery is conjured up which portrays physical

fighting, combative tactics and military terminology. Inferred in all the combative metaphors is the notion of power which is male-gendered by virtue of the imagery invoked and androcentric because it is goal-oriented. The preacher appears to assume that such metaphorical utterances are received in the same way by all women and men. Listeners who do not identify with these metaphors or do not share the preacher's views, experiences or interests are likely to feel distanced by them.

Some theologians advocate the use of adversarial metaphor in the liturgy by stating that the Bible and the language of early Christianity is replete with these metaphors. The most obvious New Testament example of a battle metaphor is Ephesians 6, 10-7: "Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." In a similar vein, hundreds of hymns contain numerous war metaphors such as "Onward Christian Soldiers." Many similar hymns were written at the time of Victorian imperialism and indicate a legacy of the history of religious wars. Biblical fundamentalists also claim that every word of the Bible is absolutely true:

The Old Testament is great literature that stresses war, male dominance, and murder of enemies-but "enemies" always exist more than compassion or tolerance. If it is god-given and without error, then its values, also god-given, are eternally right.

Conservative evangelical Protestants use an inerrant bible as a major weapon in their war to retain the separate spheres that guarantee male dominance (M. French 55).

Betty A. Deberg's (1990) analysis of fundamentalist positions shows that fundamentalism arose in part to counter feminism and reassert male control. Fundamentalists campaigned to attract men by "first diminishing women's influence and power . . . and secondly by replacing the feminized rhetoric of Christianity as a church of compassion and nurtiveness with a masculinized language of virility, millenarianism, and Christian heroism" (French 51). Thus, fundamentalists expressed an overwhelming fear of effeminacy and an exaggerated attention to masculinity (L. I. Sweet; Deberg).

Battle metaphors cross theological spectra. Christians who accept war metaphors as a dominant concept may also conceptualise the forces of evil as their enemy in a verbal and spiritual battle (Lindsey; Kennedy 108). Kennedy considers metaphoric concepts crucial to preaching. He justifies the metaphorical concept *Christianity as War* because

violence is so much part of everyday life of our planet, and because the metaphor of war is prevalent in the Bible and preaching in general. The metaphor allows us to conceptualize the Christian life in terms of something that we understand more readily, namely physical conflict. First, in a general sense fighting and war are commonplace on our planet. Our prospects of survival are partially related to our concepts of fighting and conflict. (106)

There may well be in any church a subgroup of listeners, who as men with shared interests in and experience of war, may feel a shared “special bond” which creates intimacy, mutuality and solidarity in the interaction of their memories. There may also be a small subgroup of women listeners who can feel particularly included due to their personal experiences. However, in the UK as a whole there is an increasing proportion of men who have no experiences of, and marginal interests in, the subject of war and these together with a majority of women may feel excluded or even alienated by such metaphorical utterances.¹⁴ The social reality of many people in other countries may indeed be living everyday with conflict, civil war and physical combat for survival but it is not the personal reality of the majority of people living in the UK today. Many of them have never been involved in warfare and most women do not engage in combat or rely on physical force to survive (there are of course those who experience domestic violence, mugging and rape). Militaristic metaphor and symbols serve to perpetuate a sense of male solidarity which owes more to history than present-day reality. Thus listeners may feel alienated by militaristic metaphor on the grounds that they neither re-state nor reinforce their perception of life. However, it is

¹⁴ The use of war imagery in other contexts, such as computer games, has been shown to create single gendered audiences, alienating most women.

worth noting that since second wave feminism rhetoric used to discuss the male backlash against women's advances is referred to metaphorically as the battle of the sexes. As Susan Faludi (1992) comments:

Women's advances and retreats are generally described in military terms: battles won, battles lost, points and territory gained and surrendered. The metaphor of combat is not without its merits in this context and, clearly, the same sort of martial accounting and vocabulary is already surfacing here. But by imagining the conflict as two battalions neatly arrayed on either side of the line, we miss the entangled nature, the locked embrace, of a 'war' between women and the male culture they inhabit. We miss the reactive nature of a backlash, which by definition can only exist in response to another force. . . when feminism itself becomes the high tide, the opposition doesn't simply go along with the reversal: it digs its heels, brandishes its fists, builds walls and dams. And its resistance creates countercurrents and treacherous undertows. The force and fury of the backlash churn beneath the surface, largely invisible to the public eye. On occasions in the last decade they have burst into view. (15)

Such commonly used adversarial language may be accepted by many women and men who perceive their lives to be a constant antagonistic "war" against each other. Nevertheless, the Salvation Army, for example, to some extent supported the view that warfare symbols and imagery are inappropriate in our contemporary society when in March 1998 they decided to discontinue wearing their military-style uniform.

As well as direct experience, our perception of our world depends also on what we perceive to be central to the understanding of our lives. Women and men are likely to have a different focus since as children they "are socialised into culturally approved gender roles largely through language" (Coates, *Women* 166). D. Maltz and R. Borker characterise girls' talk as collaboration-oriented and boys' talk as competition-oriented. Thus through socialisation girls and boys acquire gender-differentiated language which remains with them as adults. According to Ong, "male performance tends to proceed by establishing stresses,

not only in the physical world but also in the world of discourse and of the mind” (*Fighting* 75). Men pursue a style of interaction based on power and competition, while women pursue a style based on solidarity and support (S. Ervin-Tripp; Coates *Women*; E. Aries).

In the wider sphere of linguistics, Lakoff and Johnson also accept the use of adversarial metaphor when they make the connection between arguments and war: “We talk about arguments as war because we conceive of them that way--and we act according to the way we conceive things” (5). They are not implying that arguments and wars are the same but that “the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (5).

Any preacher’s use of metaphor can only be viewed as successful in creating an interpersonal bond and enhancing shared intimacy if listeners respond favourably to the metaphors. The historic context of metaphor dictates that it should be set within its appropriate social conditions or it will lose relevance and have a negative influence on the audience if it does not cohere with their reality. As Kennedy asserts:

Metaphors are central to the preacher’s ability to shape and control the reality of his congregation . . . Metaphors possess the power to form community and intimacy between the preacher and congregation. A preacher becomes responsible for the metaphors he/she uses, and is given or refused authority on the basis of the audience’s response to those metaphors. (105)

This proviso is all important because it constrains preachers to speak to listeners in ways that do not alienate them due to a lack of shared reality. In order to observe this requirement preachers should bear in mind any effects of gender differences which influence alternative perceptions. Thus, the gender-biased content of metaphors may serve to sustain a community which perceives their lives in terms of those metaphors but it may also serve to alienate members who do not subscribe to the preacher’s created metaphorical reality.

Non-Adversarial Metaphors

The preachers in my sermon sample utilised a large number of metaphors possessing a non-adversarial content. These metaphors have referents based on co-operative, non-adversarial or apparently “neutral” connotations (i.e. buildings, illness, companions, plants, food). For example: “Or whether the green shoots of recovery are really showing” (260). An examination of my sermon sample reveals that 52 metaphors (75%) were used which had referents based on these “gender-neutral” conditions. Some of these were repeated, indicating a total frequency of 132 instances. Table II below lists the non-adversarial metaphors and the frequency of their usage found in the sermon sample.

Table II

<u>Non-Adversarial Metaphors and Frequency of Usage in Sermon Sample</u>			
Metaphor	Frequency	Metaphor	Frequency
Life as Journey	7	Seeing as Understanding	2
Life as Commodity	1	People as Food for Evil	1
Life as Structure	1	People as Containers	10
Life as Brittle Object	1	Labour as Food	1
People as Musical Instruments	1	Nostalgia as Heavy Object	1
Nation as Construct(ion)s	2	Sickness is Down	4
Words/Ideas as Movement	5	Money as Food	1
Words/Ideas as Food	2	The World as Physical Substance	1
Words/Ideas as Threads	2	Love as Movement	1
Words/Ideas as Commodities	1	Time as a Commodity	1
Words/Ideas as Journeys	1	Time as a Living Organism	1
Words/ Ideas as Objects	1	The World/Society as a Patient	7
Words/Ideas as Structures	1	Traditions as Companions	1
Words as a Physical Substance	1	People as Hidden Objects	1
World/Society as a Structure	6	Countries as Communicators	1
Forgiveness as Commodity	1	The National Economy as Vegetation	1
Attributes as Hidden Substances	1	Hunger as Vicious Animal	2
Nostalgia as a Plant	1	Emotions as Heavy Objects	1
Debt as a Container	1	Words as Threads	2
The World as Container	1	Words as Physical Barrier	1
Words as Music	1	History as Container	1
Time as Money	1	God as Investor	1
Christian Life as Journey	11	Faith as Suffering	6
Christianity as Commodity	1	Evil as Food	1
Christianity as Vegetation	1	Evil as Vegetation	1
Bible as Person	1	The Church	17
Total no. of metaphor		52	
Total frequency		132	

This table demonstrates the wide variety of subjects which preachers found appropriate to express in metaphorical terms. The majority of referents may be classified as objects, products or living organisms, but the largest group consists of terms which involve processes such as the metaphor *Words/Ideas as Movement*:

. . . a few words or a story seem to jump out of the pages. (236)

Of course I realise that there must be equally surprising stories circulating about life in the vicarage. (237)

He pleads with them not to toss aside the Gospel message they originally received from him. (295)

A line which springs to mind from that song is . . . (308)

The idea of movement is explicit in these metaphors and it is reasonable to expect that most women and men listeners will have no difficulty in understanding and interpreting such utterances. The metaphor functions to include all listeners through a shared understanding which “creates a common bond of ‘general’ intimacy among those with ‘ordinary’ interpretative competence” (Cooper 156). In this instance where people share a common stock of language a bond of intimacy, albeit weak, is formed.¹⁵ However, the content of this “neutral” metaphor refers to a process rather than a product, activity, task or shared interest. Task-oriented ways of talking are regarded as androcentric whilst process-oriented talk is considered to be a feminine mode of speaking (F. L. Johnson and E. J. Aries; J. Pulakos; M. H. Richey and H. W. Richey; Z. Rubin; D. G. Williams; L. K. Woolesy and L. L. McBain). Thus, the metaphorical content of *Words/Ideas as Movement* is genderised as feminine.

Life as Journey is the most popular metaphor from this group which contains a process in its content. One preacher says: “Tatiana, our daughter, might well be about to mark a special mile-stone in her life” (343). The preacher likens his daughter’s life to that of going on a journey. This metaphor used in “ordinary” language may be paired with that of *Christian*

¹⁵ This is not to suggest that all metaphors involve a commonality of interests. Of course, there are many which do not.

Life as Journey used in a “religious” context. Some preachers use both metaphorical concepts in the same sermon to reinforce each other. For example:

First of all, we all have to make a pilgrimage, a journey through life and secondly, God should be part and parcel of that journey. . . Today, all of us face choices as we make our journey through life. We can, if we choose, simply go along with the flow of life around us, content with our lot, but probably not achieving much in eternal terms. Or, if we choose, we can make that journey into a real pilgrimage, a journey to God. (281)

This preacher likens people’s lives to travelling on water. As we move through the waters so we live our lives. We can either be in control and steer our way through these waters or we can do nothing and drift wherever the tides and currents dictate. This translates into the idea that we have the choice either to take charge of our lives or to let whatever happens in life determine our actions and destination. Implicit in his last sentence is the proposition that a person can take control of their life and that by so doing they can achieve the goal of a fulfilling life in the service of God. The logical progression is that the process becomes task-oriented. Thus, the feminization of the metaphor through the use of process as content becomes defeminised and to some extent androcentric because the preacher uses the masculine notion of control and couples it to a goal. The idea of individual responsibility is inferred. Thus, the gender effects may be counter-balanced resulting in a metaphor which may be considered to be gender neutral.

In my discussion of the use of metaphors in sermons I have demonstrated that in homiletical theory, metaphor has been largely neglected as a means of knowing and a way of describing social reality. The main reason for this stance stems from the fact that the language used to discuss metaphor was couched in terms which exposed a strong masculine prejudice. However, Binkley (1974) extends the boundaries of those theories which express metaphor in terms which suggest its distinction as a law-breaker could no longer be upheld when he insists, “once we recognise that there is no pure core of literal meaning, we lose the

inclination to set up the literal as the ideal standard against which figurative language is measured” (140).

Contemporary studies of metaphor have endeavoured to remove many of the prejudices against metaphor. Since the 1970s theorists of metaphor have attempted to resolve the deadlock between the various linguistic views.¹⁶ In particular, G. Lakoff and M. Johnson collaborated to offer a view that combines the insight of both viewpoints, yet avoids common errors. This involved rejecting the possibility of any absolute objective truth as well as finding an alternative account to objectivity in which human experience and understanding play a central role. They saw their task as reformulating the problem of metaphor rather than solving it. Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) major conclusions are:

Metaphorical concepts provide ways of understanding one kind of experience in terms of another kind of experience. Typically this involves understanding less concrete experiences in terms of more highly structured experiences. Many concepts are defined metaphorically, in terms of concrete experiences that we can comprehend, rather than in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. Different cultures have different ways of comprehending experience via conceptual metaphor. Such differences will be reflected in linguistic differences. We are thus led to a theory that is dependent on understanding: a sentence is true in a situation when our understanding of the sentence fits our understanding of the situation (*Conceptual* 486).

Lakoff and Johnson emphasise that metaphor is conceptual, that it is pervasive in everyday language, and that no account of meaning and truth can pretend to be complete, or basically correct, if it cannot incorporate metaphors. Importantly, they recognise the cultural influence of the close relationship between a “way of talking” and a “way of life” which subscribes to a type of neo-romantic anthropological view of metaphor. This close relationship in which

¹⁶ Also, some homileticians have attempted to bring changes to preaching methods to include narrative theories, communication theories, inductive models and a phenomenological approach (Chartier, E. A. Stiemle; E. Lowery; H. H. Mitchell; Craddock; Buttrick). These are discussed in the next chapter.

the way people speak is related to the way they live was a major concern of B. L. Whorf and E. Sapir. Sapir (1970) states:

Language is a guide to social reality . . . Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of a particular language which has become the medium for expression for their society . . . We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation. (121)

Thus social environment and language are intimately connected so that a way of life is inextricable from a way of speaking. As Claude Lévi-Straus (1964), the anthropologist, writes:

Language does not exist in the analytical reason of the old-style grammarians nor in the dialectic constituted by structural linguists . . . Language is an unreflected totalization. And if it is objected that it is only so for a subject who internalises it on the basis of linguistic theory, my reply is that this way out must be refused, for this subject is one who *speaks*: for the same light which reveals the nature of language to him also reveals to him that it was so when he did not know it, for he already made himself understood, and that it will remain so tomorrow without his being aware of it, since his discourse never was and never will be the result of a conscious totalization of linguistic laws. (252)

He comments that in order to theorise about metaphors it is necessary to take into account the context involved which means including the speaking voice and *persona*. However, Lévi-Straus does not consider the further dimension of gender influences in the communication process.

The influence of gender dimensions in the use of metaphors in preaching is complex. This is due to the fact that gender issues in respect of metaphor usage in preaching are both intra-contextual and inter-contextual which are likely to combine and influence the other gender

aspects. An examination of the preachers' use of metaphors in my sermon sample indicates the contradictory positions which metaphorical language may invite. The complexities of the contradictions and requirements by denominational practices as well as the differing perceived realities of preachers and listeners due to gender dimensions suggest that careful consideration of all the effects that arise during the use of metaphors is required of preachers when preparing their discourse. It may well be that using metaphors in preaching to re-state and sustain an inclusive experience may not overcome some of the differences between people's social realities. Nevertheless, there is overwhelming evidence that metaphorical language creates interactive communication between preacher and listener as it engages the congregation.

CHAPTER SIX

GENDER ISSUES IN THE STRUCTURE OF SERMONS

In chapters two to five I discussed various gender aspects of the language used by preachers in my sample in their addresses. My primary intention in this chapter is to examine the patterns in the structure of the texts developed by preachers when preparing their sermons. Preaching is a complex process combining personal interpretation with public exposition. Moreover, “there is no one way everyone is to preach” (Craddock, *Preaching* 21). Therefore, I shall undertake a close analysis of the sermon structures in order to reveal the gender dimensions in them.

I have divided the chapter into three sections. The first part examines the openings of the sermons in the preachers’ use of invocations. The second part discusses homiletical views on the form and style of sermons and the differences between men’s and women’s approach to this type of communication. The third section looks at the sermon structure and its relationship to institutional structures within the churches. The three sections will demonstrate how sermons continue to be framed in androcentric terms in the structures which they present and re-present.

6.1 The Invocation

Ten of the preachers (25%) in my sample prefaced their sermons with a brief prayer or an invocation to the Holy Spirit. But they were offered in slightly different ways. The following are proclamations¹ rather than supplications:²

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen (232)

In the name of the living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen. (266)

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. (281)

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. (285)

¹ A preacher who uses an invocation as a proclamation is overtly declaring that s/he has the authority to preach.

² A preacher who uses an invocation as a supplication is requesting permission to speak.

These invocations indicate that the preacher believes s/he is speaking as God's mouthpiece, i.e. "in the name of", thereby asserting that the sermon has a particular authority and credibility. According to H. Hebert (1937):

The difficulty of preaching lies in the fact that it is hard for the preacher not to obtrude his personality in some unpleasant way. Yet the invocation of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit at the beginning of the sermon forbids any attempt of the preacher to be clever or to speak as a personality in his own name. He is there to expound the word of God, not at all for his own glory but for the edification of the Church; for he is there not as a master but as a servant. (15)

Hebert signals a convention about the derived authority of the preacher. This is confirmed by Shearlock (1990):

It is a time honoured custom for sermons to begin either with a brief prayer or with the invocation of the Holy Spirit. Though not an essential preliminary, it is an entirely proper start, since it reminds both preacher and congregation that, far from there being a repetition of private opinions, all sermons are meant to be delivered in the name of God. (83)

Other preachers in my sample began their sermons with the use of a supplication rather than a declaration:

May I speak in the name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.
Amen. (263)

May I speak in the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen. (359)

The use of the auxiliary "may" before the verb suggests that the preachers are asking God for permission to speak as His spokesperson, or they could be indicating deference to God through humility. It is a rhetorical question since "nearly all of us think of a sermon in terms of an appointed preacher speaking from a symbolic location to a congregation which does not interact verbally with the preacher" (J. Thomson 3). However, not all listeners will be familiar with the tradition of an invocation since some denominations do not emphasise the authority of preachers in this way. Such an audience might consider that the preacher is requesting their acquiescence to speak. Consequently, they might interpret it as

politeness and deference to them personally. Nevertheless, these forms of invocations embody a declaration of intent. Using a supplication is therefore a less direct and more subtle way of establishing a preachers authority to preach. An invocation may also be used because “the purpose of preaching is to inform, *persuade*, and call forth an appropriate response to the God whose message and instruction are being delivered” (Logan 9). Preachers may think they are more persuasive if they seem less overtly coercive by using the modal auxiliary.

Two preachers began their sermons with the following invocations which are almost identical:

May the words of my mouth and the thoughts and meditations of all our hearts be now and always acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer.
Amen. (343)

May the words of my mouth and the thoughts and meditations of all our hearts be now and always acceptable to thee, O Lord our strength and our redeemer.
Amen. (374)

Here the preachers include the listeners in their prayer in a language of mutuality, dialogue and a sharing of faith. However, though this approach is more inclusive than the “set-apartness” of the declaratory statement, this prayer is spoken by the preacher on behalf of the congregation. Therefore, the notion of authority invested in the pulpit is still prevalent.

There is in any case a further practical purpose for a speaker starting a sermon with an invocation since the congregation are usually standing when it is spoken. The time taken for them to be seated and prepare themselves for the address which follows the preface also allows the preachers time to compose themselves, arrange any papers, microphones or preaching aids and initiate eye contact with the listeners.

Among the preachers in my sample 25% chose to begin their sermons with an invocation. Eight of these preachers belonged to the Anglican Church. Since my sample has a total of seventeen Anglican preachers this means that 47% prefaced their address with a bidding prayer. This suggests that the tradition of beginning the sermon with an entreaty appears to some extent to be particular to the Anglican Church. However, this

particular declaration is relevant only to those orthodox denominations who believe in the doctrine of the Apostolic succession. This is the authority given to bishops derived from the Apostles through the unbroken line of consecration (Dressler; Mulhern) which is the result of priests ordained by bishops having received the authority to preach (Murphy; Brilioth). Other denominations, which do not have hierarchical gradings of clergy, do not adhere to this doctrine but rather to the belief that all their ministers/members are given the authority to preach by God.

Authority in preaching “has traditionally been defined as that quality of proclamation that pertains special rights, power, knowledge, and capacity to influence or transform” (C. Smith 46). James W. Cox enumerates six sources of the preacher’s authority: divine call, ordination, education, experience, integrity of character, and biblical text (*Preaching* 19-22). Craddock repeats this list:

Authority is that which gives one the right to speak. It is ecclesiastical by reason of ordination; it is charismatic by reason of call; it is personal by reason of talent and education; it is democratic by reason of the willingness of the listeners to give it their attention. (*Preaching* 24)

Craddock views authority as a matter of the right and privilege of position. Though he expresses the preacher’s authority in a less dominant way than Cox, the essence of separateness between preacher and listeners is maintained.

Many feminists question these sources of the preacher’s authority (Letty M. Russell *Household* 34-5). The criteria for many women preachers “appear to be creating or enabling a quality of faith connection and participating in the transforming power of true solidarity in community” (C. Smith 47). Thus, authority and intimacy are more likely to be inextricably woven together in feminist preaching which in any event favours connectedness over separation, and non-hierarchical structures rather than hierarchical ones.

In one instance a preacher in my sample offered the following preface to his sermon:

Our Father, we pray that the voice of your Spirit may be heard speaking in and to all our hearts, for Jesus’s sake. Amen. (346)

This prayer is spoken as a congregational prayer. There is an intimation of equality between the preacher and listeners since no explicit authority and power is used to influence the listeners. The authority of the preacher is displaced so that this appears to be the one example in my sample that could be considered to be an invocation which adheres to a more inclusive feminist vision of a more egalitarian world.

Only one preacher in my sample ended his sermon with an ascription³:

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. (287)

This declaration is exactly the same as the one with which he prefaced his sermon, therefore reiterating that God had spoken through him and reinforcing his authority to preach.

The majority of preachers (75%) in my sample did not preface their sermons with any invocation. Thus, most did not consider the need to declare directly or indirectly that they were ordained clergy who were specially chosen by God and given authority to preach. This suggests that the use of authority as a dominant patriarchal influence and as a persuasive force is no longer necessarily regarded as important even within the framework of a traditional act of worship. It is possible that the preachers assumed that this authority can be taken for granted.

6.2 Homiletics, the Sermon Form and Style: Gender and Writing

At the end of the twentieth century there are many accepted ways of preparing sermons (Buttrick; M. J. Townsend). During the 1960s liturgists and theologians attempted to come to terms with the social mores of Christian communities in a rapidly changing world such as those addressed in Vatican II. One major influence was the effect of high speed communication through television (Arthur; Gerbner *et al*; W. F. Fore). This electronic medium stimulated the audio and visual senses demanding a high degree of audience/viewer involvement (McLuhan; W. Kuhns; Ong *Orality*). Changing patterns of communication influenced people's opinion of the standard monologue style of preaching

³ A preachers who uses an ascription at the end of her/his address is praising God for his words and declaring that s/he has finished the sermon.

traditional up to that time: “monologue preaching may still have a place within a Christian community, but as an instrument of mission, it is finished” (R. G. Jones and A. J. Wesson 115).

Monologue preaching is determined by traditional homiletic theory spanning nearly two thousand years of Christian history. Its development can be traced from influences like the Greek homily, St. Augustine’s principles of rhetoric, preaching manuals of the Early Middle ages, classical rhetoric, homiletical literature reflecting Non-Nonconformism, memorising and copying of standard sermons of highly acclaimed preachers from all traditions who “set the norm for generations” (Rupp, 155). In addition, preaching orders such the Dominicans and Franciscans were established. Thus, by the mid twentieth century hundreds of preaching manuals on the construction of sermons had been published. Through the promulgation of homiletical regulations most religious institutions had established well defined methods of sermon preparation. These resulted in the dominant traditional monologue sermons based on a fixed structure, style and mode of address.

Numerous critiques of the traditional monologue discourse ensued during the 1960s (C. Reid; W. D. Thompson and G. C. Bennett; D. J. Randolph; T. Hall; Fant; A. N. Martin). Counter-attacks on these critiques were published in the seventies by preachers and theologians who sought to re-discover past “masters” of homiletical craft (M. Lloyd-Jones; A. Gilmore; C. Morris *The Word*;). However, “they proceeded by assertion rather than by argument” (Townsend 133).

Other theologians sought fresh approaches to preaching from literary imagery and poetry (R. E. C. Browne; E. Achtemeier *Creative*; Randolph) whilst some emphasised the prophetic nature of preaching (J. Gillies; D. Coggan; Forde). Some even went so far as to advocate dialogue preaching which encouraged stimulation and involvement from the congregation (Howe *Partners*; H. H. Mitchell; J. Engels; J. L. Killan; M. Marty; Wilder).

Greater awareness of the cybernetic revolution and newer approaches to preaching continued to be developed through the 1980s (Klass Ruhia). For example, David Gillett proposed a visual approach as he discusses “the value of what has been called the ‘blob’ method for teaching which takes one point as a subject and comes at it from different

angles, reinforcing and making clearer the picture that is forming in the person's mind" (12). He suggests that the sequential ordering of the sermon is out of touch with our increasingly visual culture where people are more used to watching images than listening to linear logic. Craddock comments:

There is no form that can be identified as a "sermon". Even though Greek rhetoric dominated the field of homiletics for centuries, not even that pattern for oral presentations can justifiably be acknowledged as *the* form of a sermon. It remains the case, to this day, that a sermon is defined more by content than by form.

(*Preaching* 170)

Craddock does not suggest that a sermon shall be formless, but that a variety of forms exist and should be deployed according to the preacher's ability and as the occasion demands. Moreover he insists that a pattern for the development of a sermon "is necessary for communication and its purpose is to serve to arrest, accent, focus, and aid the listener's apprehension of the message" (*Preaching* 172). Some preachers observed that the use of the narrative had become popular, whilst others advocate the sermon as an art form (D. Macleod; Achtemeier *Preaching*, T. Troeger; G. B. Reiersen; F. Beuchner; L. J. Averill).

All these diverse positions have their own proponents but many homiletical texts published over the last twenty years retain the structure and style based on recommendations and practices expounded in earlier standard homiletical manuals (W. H. Robinson *Expository*; O. C. Edwards; Ireson; Stott; Logan; Shearlock). In addition their references and bibliographies include many books published during the fifty years (or more) preceding their own publication. These manuals perpetuate the traditional sermonic forms and styles of "highly acclaimed" preachers from a past era.

During this same period from 1960-85, one point of debate was the extent to which Aristotelian logical discourse had become dominant. It was demonstrated that this approach was inappropriate for the discussion of many Biblical passages:

The first major problem with logical, sequential linear sermons is that in most cases such a format imposes an alien format on the particular literary form of the biblical text which lies before us. Not many biblical texts are constructed in a point-by-point

linear fashion. Almost all of the Old Testament and most of the material in the gospels, however, comes to us in a variety of literary forms none of which is crafted in points, linearity, logic or sequence. (Richard A. Jensen 34)

John Stott (1982) also comments:

[A] danger to which we are exposed when structuring our sermons is that of artificiality. Some preachers impose an outline on their text which neither fits nor illumines it, but rather muddies the clear waters of truth and confuses the listeners. The golden rule for sermon outlines is that the each text must be allowed to supply its own structure. (229)

Though Craddock agrees with this insistence on integrity, he modifies this assertion by saying, “this is not to say that the shape of the sermon *must* come from the text”

(*Preaching* 178). However, Bernard Brandon Scott (1985) is more assertive:

If the text of the day is a parable or an aphorism, a healing story or an exorcism, a controversy or a Beatitude, the sermon must remain faithful to the demands of the genre or else we play the text false. (79)

The underlying idea appears to be that the identification in the Bible of the form and function of units such as proverbs, parables, blessings, pronouncements, thanksgivings, letters, epistles and dialogues allows the opportunity for preachers to be diverse in the forms and styles they employ in their sermon preparation. However, it is somewhat unclear how the move from the biblical text to the sermon proceeds.

Despite these justifications, other recently published homiletical manuals still uphold the view that the sermon structure should follow a particular form. Shearlock (1990) comments that

very nearly all the experts agree that a sermon needs some kind of shape or structure. The sermon that merely meanders along is almost certainly one without a clear-cut aim, beyond perhaps that the preacher has in mind that he must say something about Christmas, or miracles, or the life of St. Paul. Although this is all too easy to deliver, it's also all too easy to forget. (72)

Though Shearlock maintains that the sermon must have form and structure or it is likely to be ineffective, the only structural form discussed by Shearlock is “the one shape that is virtually impossible not to follow is the threefold structure of introduction, development and conclusion” (72). He reinforces this claim by referring to the tripartite structure⁴ advocated by Ireson in 1957 when he comments:

Canon Ireson also advocates the threefold structure, though he describes the divisions as:

Introduction, in which the mind is received to prepare a particular truth [*sic*];

Presentation, in which the truth is so presented that it can be assimilated; and

Application, in which the truth is related to daily Christian living. (73)

Shearlock references his quote to Ireson (1957) and makes no comments as to what he thinks Ireson means by these statements. However, Ireson’s (1957) comments on the shape of the sermon actually state:

First: INTRODUCTION- preparing the mind to receive the truth.

Second: PRESENTATION: presentation of the truth in such a way that the hearer can assimilate it.

Third: APPLICATION of truth to daily Christian living. (63)

Thus Shearlock paraphrases Ireson since he does not cite Ireson’s quotation accurately.

Moreover, Ireson revised this book in 1982 and in his section on the shape of the sermon he says:

First and foremost he must REGISTER, that is, he must establish contact with the minds of his hearers. If he fails to do this he will be a voice crying in the wilderness.

Second, he must present his truth in such a way that the hearers can grasp it. It is no use for him to use all the right and proper language if his speech does not convey the right meaning. His task is to make him see what he means. In other words he must

REVEAL.

⁴The three parts are not of equal length: the central section, the presentation/development is usually the longest part. This three-stage plan is also referred to by other preachers as the threefold structure of introduction, development and conclusion. This design of sermonic form is not the same as the rigid structure of the medieval three-point sermon. This demanded a theme text that was divisible into three significant words.

Third, he must make clear the truth with which he is dealing applies to them: what response to it means in terms of their lives. That is to say RELATE his doctrine to devotion and duty. (33-4)

In his later book Ireson appears to have shifted from the rationalist position of suggesting a sermon structure consisting of three parts to be ordered sequentially to one that does not suggest a structure to the sermon but that there are three points to bear in mind during its preparation. These three points, also, could occur simultaneously in the text. Shearlock ignores this shift of Ireson's views to quote his earlier 1957 views to give weight to his argument for a simple linear three-part sermon structure.

R. L. Dabney (1979) divides his sermon plan into five parts: the exordium (introduction), the explication, the proposition, the argument and the application (137-67). O. Edwards (1982) refers to his "how-to-do-it-all" manual by suggesting a similar construction to the homily:

Prepare an introduction that is brief . . . Present your thoughts in sequence . . .
Check the chain of your argument for weak links . . . Arrange your thoughts in a progression so orderly that it seems inevitable . . . Aim at leading your hearers to understand, to feel to act . . . (74-98).

Edwards reduces the reader or hearer to passive acceptance of a predestined outcome, thereby consenting to the writer's views.

We can see how preaching manuals have tended also to become a dominant discourse as Morris (1975) argues: "The fundamental structure of the sermon is a progression of ideas which lead one after another to an irresistible conclusion. They *are* the sermon; all else is frippery; the pretty phrases, topical anecdotes, well-chosen quotations" (108). Morris takes the rationalist stance. He advocates that ordered ideas produce an inevitable outcome. In addition, he states only they constitute a sermon and further stresses this dominance through the use of the italicised *are*. He dismisses other possible components of the sermon as unimportant trifles. He describes them as adornments in words which are associated with femininity (Frieze *et al*; Hartnell, Boden and Fuller). Through his choice

of language which utilises stereotypical feminine imagery Morris sets himself up as autocratic, prescriptive and may be construed as misogynistic.

The quotes above are from standard homiletical texts published by the various denominations which are commonly recommended by other preachers and theologians as “good” references. Importantly they all recommend the linear sequential form of sermon design derived from Aristotelian logical discourse. Rational homiletics parodies scientific procedure, whereby the object is isolated for study, inference and deduction to occur, followed by descriptive statements. Homileticians who prepare sermons from a standard design consisting commonly of introduction, texts, propositional topic, categorical points and conclusions usually dependent on a linear framework perpetuate a particular kind of masculine discourse and so deny legitimacy to other sermon forms.

Preaching Styles: Men’s Writing

One of the functions of preaching is to teach (Packer). Over the last twenty years some educational reforms have been implemented in both primary and secondary schools and educational institutions because it has been realised that the form of the teaching discourse determines the degree of participation demanded of the hearers. A similar issue is at stake in the context of preaching.

A sermon may develop deductively or inductively, or through a combination of both modes. In deductive sermons the ideas appear as part of the introduction, and the body explains, proves or applies these (H. W. Robinson, *Expository* 125). The goal for the listener is “to acquire information, accumulate data, amass facts, assimilate ideas” (Jensen 18). The deductive process tends towards a didactic sermon which contains a moral message aimed at improving the listeners. This technique characteristically throws the light *on* a theme in order to teach *about* it. Moreover, “didactic preaching becomes the task of passing along the true and essential doctrines and information of God’s words to the listening audience” (Jensen 25) This method of preaching presupposes that meaning is fixed in one “true” interpretation. Therefore, it is an authoritarian masculine mode of

preaching as teaching which depends on reason and order as persuasive arguments, with listeners' passive reception of the information.

Explaining the meaning of the text via an inductive mode throws light *through* the text which may reveal several layers of meaning. This mode of preaching (as teaching) presupposes that a text is the medium through which a variety of meanings can be exposed. Nevertheless, listeners are still being led to one particular meaning, though this technique is more covert and less authoritarian than the didactic approach. The listener is more involved in the interpretation procedure. Inductive preaching fits the criteria for feminist preaching more closely as the latter requires "the craft of authentic weaving together mutuality, solidarity, and deeper faith sharing." (C. Smith 47).

On discussing the approaches for the form and style of the body of the sermon, Ireson (1982) distinguishes between these two methods:

There are, broadly speaking, two methods of approach to the communication of the kind of truths with which we are dealing. There is what educational text-books call the *deductive* or 'telling' method, and there is the *inductive* or 'revealing' method . . . If therefore the preacher is to get his message across he must proceed inductively, from the particular manifestation(s) to the general principle of universal truth . . . I am not laying down as a rule either that we should never use direct or deductive methods, or that we should never begin with a doctrinal assertion.

(underline emphasis added; *Handbook* 42-9)

Ireson indicates that no matter which method is used there is no room for multiple meanings and both modes are dominant discourses derived from masculine styles of sermon preparation and writing. There is also uncertainty in Ireson's reasoning. On the one hand he is asserting that the inductive method must be used, whilst on the other hand he states he is not being prescriptive. It is the specificity of the sermon's meaning so unequivocally asserted here, which can make the listener feel quite alienated.

Though preaching is an oral communication most homiletical manuals contain chapters or sections on "putting the form on paper" or "writing the sermon" (Browne; Craddock *Preaching*; Ireson *Handbook*; Shearlock; Stott; W. H. Robinson, *Expository*). They vary in

their views as to the use of the written word in delivery, but they all maintain the necessity of writing down the sermon as an integral part of the preparation.

Nevertheless, the primary intention is for sermons to be heard, rather than written: “they should therefore, be prepared under criteria for oral communication rather than under criteria for print communication. They should be prepared for ears, not eyes” (Jensen 35). Fant also comments:

Students were encouraged, directly or indirectly, to *write* sermons like the ones they were reading. As a result, the sermon was increasingly prepared for the eye rather than the ear. Devices suitable for reading - paragraphing, formal syntax, tightly fitted logical arguments, complex outlines, literary language - were superimposed on the sermons. Of course, the sermon continued to be delivered orally from a manuscript really prepared for reading, but increasingly from a manuscript prepared for reading. (112)

Even in 1971, Thor Hall advocated that sermon preparation, sermon construction, sermon presentation needed a re-think:

For too long we have thought of the sermon in terms of print-oriented sensory organization - as a prepared statement, a finished product, a textual exposition.

Sermon preparation has come to mean the writing of a sermon. Sermon construction usually has been discussed in terms of literary criteria, with primary emphasis on the reasonableness of content, logical progression of argument. (129)

The written text requires proper grammatical style, paragraphing, long sentences, sentences completed, an overload of information, abstraction, ideas and illustrations arranged in linear sequence, descriptions or summaries of conversations (Craddock, *Preaching* 190). These are all characteristics of the dominant literary culture.

Homiletics who emphasise the written sermon ensure that preaching follows an androcentric discourse and reduce the characteristics of orality.

Orality and the Characteristics of Women's Writing

The characteristics of women's writing and the way it differs from male discourse have been examined by feminist critics over the last three decades (Annette Kolodny; Patricia Meyers Spacks; Elaine Showalter; Nina Baym; Mary Ellman; Gilbert and Gubar; Margaret Homan). French Feminist criticism and also some Anglo-American work, stresses the importance of the body as a source of language usage (Hélène Cixous; Adrienne Rich; Rachel Blau DuPlessis; Alicia Ostriker). Feminist debates over language have drawn attention to the philosophical and linguistic difficulties women experience in communication. Women wish to express their feelings as well as their minds when they write (Shoshana Felman; Nelly Furman; Carolyn G. Burke; Mary Jacobus).

Psychoanalytical theories locate the difference of women's writing in their psyche as well as in the relation of gender to the writing process (Luce Irigaray; Kristeva; Chodorow; Gilbert and Gubar; E. Abel; Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron).

French feminist psychoanalysts think that western thought has been based on a systematic repression of women's experiences. Though they share masculinist thinking as a common opponent "they envisage different modes of resisting and moving beyond it" (Ann Jones 87). Cixous links women's diffuse sexuality to women's written language:

Her writing can only keep going, without ever inscribing or discerning contours . . . She lets other language speak - the language of 1000 tongues which knows neither enclosure nor death . . . Her language does not contain, it carries; it does not hold back, it makes possible. (293)

She ends her narrative with her invocation of other bodily drives in a continuum with women's self-expression:

Oral drive, anal drive, vocal drive - all these drives are our strength, and among them the gestation drive - just like the desire to write: a desire to live self from within, a desire for the swollen belly, for language, for blood. (295)

Thus, Cixous asserts the primacy of multiple female libidinal impulses in women's unconscious and in the writing of female discourses. In similar terms Irigaray states:

the geography of her pleasure is far more diversified, more multiple in its

differences, more complex, more subtle, than is commonly imagined - in an imaginary system centred a bit too much on one and the same. "She" is infinitely other in herself. That is undoubtedly the reason she is called temperamental, incomprehensible, perturbed and capricious - not to mention her language in which "she" goes off in all directions and in which "he" is unable to discern the coherence of any meaning. (103).

These theorists suggest that women's use of language is related to their experience of their body which can be seen in their writing. It has indeterminacy of meaning, breaks and rhythm. Kristeva asserts that

women write as "hysterics", for two reasons: the predominance in them of drives related to anality and childbirth, and their marginal position vis-à-vis masculine culture. Their semiotic style is likely to involve repetitive, spasmodic separations from the dominant discourse, which, more often they are forced to imitate. (*Desire* 77)

Thus, Kristeva adds iteration and rhythm to the list of characteristics of women's writing. However, she differs from Cixous and Irigaray since she does not confine these attributes to females only; she contends that both females and males have access to the semiotic pre-phallogocentric discourse. Kristeva's view is borne out in my sermon sample which shows that male preachers used iteration in either the simple or elaborated form. For example:

But lastly, that will only happen if we're prepared to *share*. The five thousand could only be fed because they were prepared to sit down together on the grass and *share* out food fairly between them. Only then did they discover that there was more than enough. And so for us too. Our spiritual hunger, like the physical hunger of so many in the world, can only be met if we're prepared to sit down and *share*. Of course, life in a city is all about *sharing*. We couldn't really survive at all if we didn't depend on one another for so many of our needs. We're knit together in a complicated web of relationships, but the churches right at the heart of the city are here to shed light on that truth to show our world a pattern of real *sharing*. To challenge our world to justice in its systems of distribution. To give our world a vision of unity in its

brokenness. As Christians we believe that *sharing* is not only part of us but also part of the God whom we worship . . . The three persons who endlessly *share* in one another's life and love which then spills over into all creation. (emphasis added; 265)

The theme of this preacher's sermon is sharing. In this paragraph he repeats his theme several times to reinforce it. Reiteration is a rhetorical device of emphasis. Its power of persuasion relies on a quasi-hypnotic effect of the rhythmic oscillation brought about by repetition. Moreover, reiteration in a sermon "fosters communal understanding" (Buttrick 295).

This preacher uses a domestic weaving imagery to create a sense of intimacy when he interconnects the personal level to the social justice level thereby emphasising the communal involvement rather than the individual. According to C. Smith these are traits associated with feminist preaching (11-3). Iteration in either a simple or elaborated form is used by 19 out of 40 (47.5%) of the preachers in my sample.

In contrast to the French feminist theoreticians mentioned above, cultural theorists focus on the woman writer's cultural environment to explain women's use of language (Ann Douglas; Baym; Ardener; Myra Jehlen; Gerda Lerna, *Placing*; Mari McCarty).

Patricia Waugh makes the following general observation:

In terms of literary expression it is evident that, to a large extent, women writers have not revealed the same obsession with formal abstraction, aesthetic distance, autonomy, and "objectivity" which has dominated modern aesthetics and much twentieth-century literature. (76)

However, the debate still continues and no definition of women's writing is agreed: "there is no "absolute" women's style and for each writer gender is only *one* historical determinant among many and constituted in a variety of ways" (Waugh 77). Nevertheless, women's discourses are distinguished from men's with a preponderance of references to the "body" as a source of imagery, writing about feelings and personal experience, using less abstraction and a non-linear, fragmented, polysemic, rhythmic and iterative form and style. Moreover, these characteristics for women's writing are similar to those

characteristics regarded as requirements of orality. Orality contains rhythm, pacing, repetition, active verbs, mnemonic aids, ideas clustered by association, brevity of information and sentences sometimes left uncompleted (Ong, *Orality* 31-77). Thus, women's writing styles appear to relate more closely to Jensen's assertion that sermons should be prepared under criteria for oral delivery rather than those of traditional written communication (35).

In the context of preaching styles, women's writing adheres most closely to the narrative or story-telling sermon:

This method is seen as one which is able to recapture the original impact, cross cultural and educational boundaries in ways other methods find difficult, and mesh in our experience of life as "a tale that is told". (Townsend 135)

The merits of the use of narrative and story over didactic and inductive abstracted sermons are that story-telling represents groundedness. The narrative involves the hearers by allowing them to relate to their everyday lives (Wilder; Jensen; D. E. Gowan; R. Coleman; R. Roth; S. McFague, *Speaking* ; E. A. Steimle, Niendenthal and Rice; N. Clark). One of the holistic characteristics of feminist preaching is "the preaching of the shared story where the storyteller and the circle of listeners *bend* to each other" (Niendenthal and Rice 13). Narrative preaching or "story preaching" is not to be confused with using a story to illustrate points of a sermon.⁵ Many of the characteristics of women's writing are also found within some of the other sermon styles, such as interactive and dialogue preaching.

Examination of My Sermon Sample for Structure and Style

"Alternative" methods of preaching have been tried and "radical" solutions to the problem of how to preach have been suggested, resulting in hundreds of books on the topic.⁶ There is more opportunity for variety in preaching styles now than there was ever before:

⁵The preachers' use of a story as an illustration is discussed in chapter three in this thesis.

⁶ For a guide to a bibliography covering most aspects of homiletical literature see David Buttrick pages 463- 85. Buttrick has selected over five hundred texts ranging from the "beginner" to the more "sophisticated" reader and comments: "the bibliographies are limited, for they do not include foreign

The future [of preaching] belongs to imagination and variety. We have learned that there is time for the ten minute sermon, and a time for the thirty minute one as well there is a time for the story and a time for proclamation; there is a time for audio visual aids and a time for the dialogue. (Townsend 135)

When my sermon sample was delivered in 1993-4, a large variety of forms and styles was available for preachers to use and modify when preparing and developing their sermons.⁷ However, an examination of my sermon sample reveals that they display predominantly characteristics associated with the didactic preaching of the traditional form of homiletics. Jensen lists its characteristic features:

- The goal of the preaching is to teach the lessons of the text.
- In order to teach the lessons or meaning of the text the points to be made are usually abstracted from the text.
- The sermon is developed in a logical, sequential and linear manner.
- The sermon is prepared under the criteria for written material. (27)

None of these characteristics are either similar to those assigned to orality or to women's discourses whilst all of them adhere to that of a masculine style derived from Aristotelian logical discourse. All, or most of these four characteristics are evident in every sermon in my sample. I shall discuss these characteristics separately and in turn in the next part of this chapter.

An analysis of my sample indicates that 39 out of 40 preachers (98%) explain the meaning of the text or Scriptural reading to the listeners. In the following example the preacher interprets the Gospel story:

If we go back to the scene in the Gospel, we have a picture of a crowd of people sitting around Jesus. Quite literally, he stands in the centre of that crowded circle. He looks at them and says, "here is my mother and my brothers and my sisters." He doesn't disown his family, he just extends it. He says that all followers have a

language titles or periodical literature, and they include only a few selected books with which I am familiar" (463).

⁷ At the time of writing this thesis in 1998, more books on other perspectives in preaching have been published. See, Jeremy Thomson, *Preaching as Dialogue* (1996); John Leach, *Responding to Preaching* (1997); Tim Stratford, *Interactive Preaching* (1998).

relationship with him that is as close and as personal as his own blood relatives.
(238).

The preacher offers his explanation of the scriptural passage in order to teach a particular message from the text. Listeners are not invited to interpret the text for themselves. Though he uses a dominant discourse he does not use overtly authoritative language. In contrast, another preacher comments:

When St. Paul writes in the New Testament “do not let many of you become teachers,” it is not a word of caution designed to say that there are better things you could be doing with your life. It is in fact a statement of high responsibility that teachers have and a warning of God’s judgement on them if they take that responsibility lightly. But it is a clear judgement on a society which so often seems to undervalue those with a teaching vocation. (317)

This preacher uses dominant language in his interpretation of the text by telling his listeners both what the text does and what it does not mean. This technique effectively renders the hearers passive. By using phrases such as “in fact” and “clear judgement” he underlines the supposed truth value of his claims. He thus sets himself up as an authority.

When teaching the lesson of the text is understood to be the central focus of the preaching task “the question-answer format is often used” (Jensen 29). This technique is simple. A question is asked. The question is answered. Often the answer leads to another question, and so on. The following example from my sample illustrates this method of interpretation:

The five thousand people we heard about in our gospel reading a few minutes ago must have been experiencing that sinking feeling of emptiness in their stomach as they realised that they weren’t going to get a meal that evening. *How could they?* They were in a desert place far from any source of food and they had next to nothing between them. True there was a lad who had five loaves and two fishes. *But what was the use of that among so many?* And then a miracle happened. (emphasis added; 264)

By using this technique, the preacher is following a particular procedure for persuasion derived from Ciceronian rhetorical practice. Questions and responses are both determined by the preacher. This precludes a hearer's alternative questions and answers. Though an apparent dialogic exchange may occur between speaker and hearer, the purpose of this technique is to persuade the listeners into accepting the preacher's viewpoint. This strategy was popular with the preachers of my sample since 32 out of 40 (70%) employed this approach.

Jensen's second criterion for a didactic exegetical method relies on the abstraction of the meaning of the text so that the sermon proceeds on that assigned meaning of the text. In this case the preacher is using the text as a pre-text to continue the development of the theme which he has abstracted from the text:

What becomes important to the preacher is not the total configuration of the text as parable or miracle story or recitation of God's saving deeds. The important thing to the preacher is the *meaning* of the miracle event so that the sermon is a didactic sermon on the abstracted meaning. (Jensen 30)

The following extract is an example of such an abstraction:

When we read the story of Paul's conversion to Christianity, we're told of what happened on the Damascus road . . . But it was only when Paul met Jesus, that his personality and many gifts were able to be fully used . . . Worshipping in our congregation here are many people for whom the power of God has turned their lives around. In practical terms it has made them less selfish, more caring and certainly more ready to share the good news with others. Just as in a plant the roots matter to the general overall health of the plant, so it is with our lives. (241-2)

The preacher begins by talking about Paul's conversion. The meaning of this conversion is abstracted from the text and the sermon then focuses on the abstracted meaning. The significance of this story (Paul's behaviour changes after his conversion) is *about* allowing God into our lives so we might become better human beings. This sermon proceeds to develop this point in various ways without reference to the particular context of the story. What becomes important to the preacher is not the total configuration of the text as story

but the *meaning* of this conversion. Thus, the text has been used as a jumping-off point for teaching about opening our whole lives to God's influence. According to Steimle (1980), "abstractions tend to stifle or preclude further considerations" (175). They are another way of limiting possibilities of interpretation, thus they are characteristic of a dominant discourse. An examination of my sample reveals that 38 out of 40 (95%) preachers used abstractions in varying amounts in their sermons.

Those preachers who structured their sermons in a linear, logical manner tended to use numerals to indicate sequence. This approach is demonstrated by the following extracts from one sermon:

Firstly, Jesus sent them two by two, for company . . . *Secondly*, he sent them with his authority to tackle evil . . . *Thirdly*, although he sent them to travel . . . *Fourthly*, you notice that they too were travelling very light The *fifth* word for them (emphasis added; 292-3)

The use of overt structuring in sermons suggests an inevitability in the thought underlying the sermon which predetermines the positions that might be taken. According to Stott, "the purpose of a sermon is to support the body, and in so doing should keep itself largely out of view" (229). The majority of preachers in my sermon sample appear to align themselves to this premise since only five of them (12.5%) use ordinals to advance their discussion or to introduce the salient issues of their sermon.

Sermons are oral discourses, therefore, "preachers have to strive for simplicity and clarity. This will mean short sentences, with few if any subordinate clauses. 'Preach', Bishop J. C. Ryle once said, 'as if you were asthmatical.'" (Stott 234). Preachers who prepare their sermons under the criteria for written material are likely to produce long sentences with numerous clauses. The following extract from a sermon in my sample contains many such sentences containing a main clause and a number of subordinate clauses:

There have always been uncompromising men and women however, who have held on to the authentic message of Jesus Christ and to a Christianity that has a radical uncompromising and unsettling edge to it: an uncomfortable Christianity

that challenges our narrow self-interest. Even in the early centuries after Christ there were those who felt that the church was selling out to the prevailing market forces of the day and they broke away looking for something that was closer to Jesus's own words and example. And like the Old Testament prophets and John the Baptist and like Jesus himself, they went out into the desert to learn about discipline and self-sacrifice, and to train themselves into single-minded uncompromising obedience to the demands of the Christian discipleship . . . (339)

This section of this preacher's sermon continues in the same vein for nearly three printed pages as he uses lengthy passages of information to provide a mini history lesson. All the hall-marks of a written prose and Jensen's indicators of a didactic discourse are evident.

During the last three decades feminist critics of textuality have shown that "gender both informs and complicates the writing and reading of texts" (Abel 1). As Cixous (1976) states:

Nearly the entire history of writing is confounded with the history of reason, of which it is at once the effect, the support, and one of the privileged alibis. It has been with the phallogocentric tradition. It is indeed the same self-admiring, self-stimulating, self-congratulatory phallogocentrism. (879)

The predominant characteristics of the form and style of my sermon sample indicates that this male-biased textual discourse made up of information, facts, long sentences, abstractions and linear logical sequencing still prevails in the major denominations of the Christian Churches which are selected for broadcast acts of worship.

Moreover, in chapter three of this thesis I discussed the preachers' use of only male writer's literary quotations and indicated that this approach silenced women's cultural production. The prevalence of the didactic sermons appears to reinforce this view. However, there is a further ideological dimension to the reasons why particular sermon styles may be preferred which is discussed in the next section.

6.3 Style as Ideology: Sermon Structure and Institution

Preaching aspires to create and confirm faith throughout the everyday life of the hearer. Many denominations of the Christian Church are divided as to the understanding of the Scriptural doctrines. In addition, there is a difference of view as to whether faith is generated by the listener in response to God, or whether it is generated by God. Therefore, those who believe that the doctrine of the verbal inspiration of Scriptures is the way in which faith is generated require the “correct” biblical ideas to be expounded by the preacher. Jensen comments that

this understanding of faith can be discerned as differences between denominations.

Denominations arise because they believe different doctrines to be true. The “faithful ones” in every denomination are always out to purge from their midst those who do not believe the right things. This unbiblical (where in the Scriptures is faith understood in this radically cognitive way?) understanding of faith has been the cause for many scandalous Christian schisms. (41)

This interpretation of how faith is generated effectively allows it to mean faith is believing the right ideas about the Scriptures. As Cameron (1995) comments:

The politics of discourse are about getting others to believe that the point of view embodied in this or that verbal representation is not really a point of view but the plain truth of the matter, whereas alternative representations are biased and perverse.

(*Verbal* 74)

An obvious pressure is placed on the preacher by his/her institution to preach the text in such a way that it privileges that institution’s interpretation in line with ideas about *the* truth rather than *a* truth.

Preaching styles that depend on indirect communication leave open-ended personal interpretations of the story. This allows the listener to complete the sermon in a way that is meaningful to them. Preachers do not have absolute control over the objectives they aspire to achieve. They are bound to relinquish some of the powers of authority tied into male dominant discourse. Furthermore, indirect communication operates on the premise that what is already in the hearer’s consciousness is brought to further consciousness

(Kierkegaard; Craddock *Overhearing*)). Direct communication requires information to be assimilated. Given the audience profile to whom the sermons in my sample were broadcast it is reasonable to suggest that the deductive/inductive mode of address might be the most appropriate.⁸ It is possible that one reason why most of the preachers in my sermon sample use many characteristics of the didactic style is the preachers' perceptions of the listeners' expectations, rather than a disinclination of the preachers to adjust their preaching style.

In addition, the sermon is part of the whole act of worship which progresses in a linear way. It is filled with data, information, hymns to sing, prayers to say. The pattern these follow is ordered, sequential and devised to conform to a traditional logicallity. In most churches the pews are in rows, the people are not only seated in a linear formation they also "sit in the same places every week" (Craddock, *Preaching* 92). Therefore, most acts of worship become institutionalised in a system which is itself systemized in corresponding ways. The sermon is bound within a set of liturgical procedures which are constrained within a fixed spatial arrangement and controlled by convention.

Another important explanation for the didactic sermon could be that sermon styles are a reflection on the strength and power of long established traditional institutions within which these clergy are trained. Niendenthal and Rice comment:

Few seminary students and fewer seminary faculty members could probably ever see themselves adopting an institutional view of preaching. Many preachers after they have been in the ordained ministry four or five years, come to accept an institutional view of preaching - often without being aware of the pervasive power of the institution in shaping the Sunday sermon. (6)

Obviously, preaching as teaching has its own legitimate role to play in the life of the church. However, stylistic values "are symbolic of moral, social, political and ideological values" (Cameron *Verbal* 77). As Berel Lang (1991) comments, "when we write we are

⁸ The kind of audience that listen to broadcast acts of worship on Sunday mornings is discussed in the introductory chapter of this thesis.

constructing not only a representation of the world but also representations of ourselves as social and moral agents” (136). Karl Hertz claims that preaching serves three purposes:

to maintain and strengthen loyalties; to keep the Christian frame of reference intact, offering the perspective of life on God’s terms; and to provide a therapeutic effect, giving people “something to go on” for a week. . . Good preaching, sociologically considered, brings people together, with all their needs, in order to express the relationships in which they stand and from which they get their meaning. (54)

Thus, male preachers socialised conventionally and trained in traditional preaching practices are likely to prepare their sermons in such a way as to reflect those traditions and restrict the variety of styles.

However, female preachers are also likely to have been socialised conventionally and, as I discussed in the previous section, according to feminist critiques of textuality should be more likely to prepare their sermons in a more informal style. My sermon sample contains only three sermons delivered by deaconesses so no general conclusions can be drawn from this sample. Examination of these indicates that all Jensen’s criteria for a didactic sermon are represented in the women preachers’ sermons and they are not distinguishable in form and style from those delivered by the male preachers. This suggests that institutional requirements may suppress other female-gender influences or that the women actively choose to become part of the institution. Thus, the didactic preaching style has become another establishment system through which a degree of control can be exercised.

The majority of sermons in my sample conform to an androcentric model of communication. Their preparation has been influenced by a complex interaction between the production of the text in accordance with institutionally prescribed practices, and the extra-textual factors of the male-biased mechanisms operating within most Christian denominations.

CONCLUSION

I began this research because I repeatedly felt a sense of alienation and exclusion when listening to contemporary sermons (see "Introduction" of this thesis, pages 1-3). This sense of exclusion deepened to such an extent that it became important for me to determine, if possible, the causes of my disaffection and disenchantment.¹ All the sermons I normally encountered were delivered by men to a mixed-sex congregation which generally consisted of a larger proportion of women than men (Brierley and Longley 209). As a woman who sat in the pew listening to these discourses I realised that there was somehow a breakdown in communication between the preacher and myself. When discussing this point with other female worshippers I discovered that they too found most sermons irritating to varying extents. Even though the promotion of "inclusive" language intended to redress gender imbalances in liturgical language has been advocated in acts of worship by most denominations for more than ten years the sermons I experienced were still androcentric discourses occasionally vaguely masked by gestures towards political correctness.²

I undertook this study of gender issues in contemporary sermons in order to determine whether there was concrete evidence for my feelings of exclusion. In considering how to arrive at an appropriate sermon sample I decided to study broadcast sermons because the preachers prepared their discourses in the knowledge that they would be broadcast to a large and diverse audience. This sample selection avoided any bias in the sample derived from a direct interaction with a preacher in order to gain consent to record his or her sermons. Simultaneously, the broadcast sermon is in the public domain, therefore available for analysis. (A full discussion of these and related issues can be found in the introductory chapter, pages 3-6.) In analysing my sample I did not intend to undertake a theological analysis nor to examine the preachers' meta-linguistic delivery skills. The focus of this

¹ The purpose of this study was not to interrogate my church-going *per se* in order to ascertain why I went to church/listened to sermons in the first place, although that might have been another topic to explore.

² For a discussion of political correctness and language usage see Deborah Cameron's *Verbal Hygiene*.

research are the gender issues that arose in the actual language used within the texts. Whilst I would not suggest that this concise study provides all the answers, my analysis of my sermon sample raises several gender issues which inform and structure this thesis. The thesis endeavours to explain the means by which preachers become trapped in conventions of preaching which are androcentric. As the analysis of the sermon sample progressed it became evident that male bias in the sermons was endemic throughout the various denominations of the Christian church. In consequence sermons remain an exclusive discourse determined by certain structures of domination. Some fundamental re-appraisal of the approach to sermon preparation is long overdue.

All homiletical texts include chapters on the techniques of how to prepare sermons and discuss the role of preaching (see pages 180-8). Some focus on the importance of non-verbal communication and may even offer suggestions on this from basic communication theory. Most explore aspects of social and interpersonal dimensions as they focus on preachers' delivery techniques and suggest ways to improve oral skills. Over the last thirty years there has been extensive criticism of the quality of contemporary preaching but none appears to attach much importance to the diversity of the listeners to whom these are delivered and, predictably perhaps, none consider that the gender of listeners to sermons needs to be taken into consideration.³ It is assumed by homileticians that there is homogeneity among listeners and that their social reality is the same regardless of gender. Since it is likely that at least half the audience of sermons will be female, failure to establish a rapport with them must be viewed as a serious flaw. This study of gender issues in contemporary sermons attempts to address this neglect as it highlights areas for discussion.

Before considering gender issues in contemporary sermons I felt that it was necessary to offer a brief account of relevant aspects of the history of preaching. The first chapter therefore traces how and why sermons became embedded in acts of worship from a

³ A recently published text (April 1998) advocating interactive preaching justifies its usage on the grounds of cultural heterogeneity. It discusses social differences such as class and education but ignores the gender dimensions (Stratford).

historico-political perspective. I discussed their legacy from the Old Testament prophets and Judaism, the representation of the preaching of Jesus, preaching in early church gatherings in the domestic enclaves of private homes, the emergence of preaching in public institutions, the development of the sermon form, the impact of the Reformation, the rise of democratic institutions, and ended with the decline in the power of the churches and the consequent diminishing influence of the sermon as a medium for social control and moral education. This last point notwithstanding, at the end of the twentieth century sermons are still delivered in most acts of worship among most denominations of the Christian churches.

We live in an age when preaching is out of favour. However, the importance of the sermon as a teaching opportunity and therefore part of the church office should not be underestimated (D. Macleod). According to homiletical texts the most important purpose of preaching is teaching. Religious instruction has been systematically reduced in State education and in many schools it has been replaced by discussions on comparative religions with less emphasis on Christianity. The number of children attending church Sunday schools has also diminished. The Head Teachers Annual Conference in May 1998 declared that there is likely to be no room for acts of worship within the timetable due to the demands of the school curriculum.⁴ Lack of formal religious education in schools may further reduce church attendance in future years. Therefore, it becomes ever more incumbent on preachers to follow preaching practices which include all participants in the act of worship in order to stem the exodus of disillusioned members and encourage new ones.

The Notion of Inclusivity

A necessary criterion for such practices embraces the notion of "inclusivity" which requires interaction and participation by all the listeners as well as the speaker. Sexism in language was highlighted by feminists as a cause of antagonism between women and men

⁴ A report in the *Times Educational Supplement* from the National Association of Head Teachers states: "The NAHT has renewed its campaign to end the legal requirement for daily collective worship, saying it is unworkable" (F. Rafferty and N. Barnard).

more than thirty years ago with the result that most denominations in the Christian churches recommend avoiding the use of generic terms (Furlong; Morley and Ward; Faull and Sinclair). In chapter two I demonstrated that while most preachers no longer use generic terms there are a few who fail to accept this advice. However, the use of gender-pairings which place the masculine word before the feminine one in order to eliminate the direct sexism of a generic term effectively replaces overt sexism with covert sexism. Thus, sexual polarity and hierarchy continues to be perpetuated under this guise of a gender equality technique. The churches' second major recommendation on the subject of inclusivity was to advise preachers to use the second personal plural mode of address wherever possible. The assumption was that using "we" embraces everyone listening and includes the speaker. My analysis of the preachers' use of this inclusive mechanism demonstrates that such a usage does not necessarily provide a mechanism for inclusivity. I indicated that this usage may be inclusive for a very particular group of listeners, for example, all clergy, but for a diverse audience exclusivity can still occur.

Speech using imperatives is considered to belong to the language of domination. Therefore, one would not necessarily expect such a mode of address in the context of "inclusive" preaching. One homiletician addressed this issue by contending that imperatives invoke a sense of immediacy and contemporaneity into a shared consciousness between preacher and listener (Buttrick). In chapter two, my analysis of the sermon sample for the preachers' use of imperatives showed that only a small minority of preachers (20%) used them to create such a shared consciousness. Thus, most appeared to be unaware that, according to the context of the situation, imperatives can operate as a feminine approach to aid inclusivity.

A review of homiletical texts for a discussion of how to generate inclusivity indicates that most fail to address this topic; a few (Buttrick; Faull and Sinclair) give a brief comment whilst none of them devote a whole chapter to this important issue. These texts ignore the issue of inclusivity and those that have been revised do not take into account current attitudes

to sexist language. Some in fact have been published after the churches recommended guidelines for avoidance of sexist language, yet scant reference to this is contained within these texts. Rather, the tendency is to focus on and reiterate points from previously published preaching manuals to the exclusion of recent changes. The churches' interpretation of inclusive language assumes that as long as generic terms are avoided and the second person mode of address is used the sermon embraces all listeners. My analysis of my sermon sample for these aspects of "inclusivity" alone suggests that most preachers and homileticsians appear to have a limited understanding of how language and gender intersect.

The use of illustrations which relate to people's lives is advocated by authors of preaching manuals (Ireson; Shearlock; P. J. Vosteen). In this none of them considers the differences between the genders to be of any importance nor do they consider that persistently referring to one gender is tantamount to denying the existence of the other and serves to alienate those who belong to the excluded group. One of the most powerful means of denying women's contributions to society is to ignore their achievements (Virginia Woolf *A Room*). This attitude was exhibited by all the preachers who cited the works and deeds of "great" men which not only implies male superiority but suggests that only males can actualise "great" accomplishments. Half of the preachers in my sample offered at least one male exemplar in their sermons, some named more than one. This male-centredness was compounded by at least one preacher who cited one "great" man's works, followed it with another male-centred illustration and peppered the text with generic terms. Using several overt means of declaring male superiority and rendering women invisible and inconsequential is bound to be construed as offensive or insulting by and to many female listeners. A high proportion of preachers used these types of gendered imagery which suggests that most of them were either unaware of the gender problems intrinsic in such illustrations or chose to ignore them. Blatant gender bias was exemplified in 59 instances where "important" men's achievements were cited but not once was a well-known woman mentioned in this way. The question arises whether these preachers have a deep seated misogynistic view of the world, or are ignorant

of any notable achievement by any women throughout history, or are effectively gender-blind. A further research project would be needed to investigate this issue. As I discussed in chapter two such exclusion of women's achievements restricts knowledge and exposes an unacceptable attitude which still pervades contemporary preaching practices.

The only text that I found which considers the use of illustrations from a gender perspective is that by Faull and Sinclair, significantly two women priests⁵. Their answer to this problem was to suggest providing a balance of illustrations for both sexes. However, I demonstrated in my examination of the preachers' use of gendered imagery in chapter two (pages 92-104) that simply offering an illustration focusing on both sexes does not necessarily overcome the difficulty. What is at issue is the content of the gendered imagery which must endeavour to demonstrate equality. Preachers using stereotypical illustrations about either sex can easily alienate listeners who do not identify with those stereotypes. Therefore using illustrations to embrace both genders without consideration of the full range of gender implications may not in itself counteract an exclusionary effect.

The use of personal experience in preaching is advocated in many preaching manuals and homiletical texts (Ireson; Shearlock; Craddock *Preaching*). Justification for its usage rests on several factors including the fact that the Bible itself contains eye-witness accounts, that such usage enables a sense of contemporaneity and immediacy to be achieved, or that it creates a connection between speaker and hearer. Feminists have validated and legitimised the use of personal experience as a means by which knowledge can be assimilated and transferred to others (Stanley and Wise; Code; Daly *Gyn/Ecology*; Maynard; Bordo; Butler). However, in chapter four my analysis of the sermon sample showed that only 37.5% of the preachers chose to use this type of illustration. Therefore, most preachers did not choose to offer self-disclosure or a personal experience as a type of illustration in their sermons. Where they did so, they told their story in such a way that they presented themselves as observers of the

⁵ This replicates the pattern noted by feminists and members of other groups such as blacks (e.g. bell hooks) that the silencing of particular sections of society is only broken by those groups speaking out and up for themselves.

event rather than participants in the incident. Since these narratives mostly paralleled Biblical passages, there is an impression that preachers limit the types of personal stories they are prepared to disclose to those that replicate scriptural narratives, thereby de-personalising these accounts.

Feminist theologians who advocate preaching from a feminist perspective declare that using personal experience in preaching builds relationships between speaker and listener (C. Smith; E. Hunter). A degree of mutuality, trust and intimacy is supposed to be brought about by the use of self-disclosures. Some homileticians, however, are disinclined to promote the use of personal experience since they believe that such self-disclosure focuses attention on the personality of the preacher rather than the message which is being conveyed (Buttrick). Others, who are also communication theorists, justify this strategy when preaching from difficult concepts such as incarnational and pastoral theology (Chartier; Nouwen; Fant). A re-assessment by homileticians of the understanding of how self-disclosure and the use of personal experience function in preaching and act as an inclusive mechanism is clearly needed.

In chapter five I examined the scope and function of metaphors in language and demonstrated that they can operate as an inclusive mechanism in preaching. Linguistic purists consider that metaphors to be a deviant use of language (Ryle; Turbane; Drange). The traditional homiletical assessment of the use of metaphor aligns itself with that of the linguistic purists. Kennedy states that this view is based on phallogentric prejudices which have defined metaphors as feminine devices to be avoided in preaching. The homiletical judgement here contrasts with the argument that the Bible is full of metaphors and indeed the parables of Jesus are themselves metaphors or meta-metaphors (Wilder; Crosson *Parables*; Keck *Future*). There are also preachers who deny the multiple meanings of the scriptures and insist on only one interpretation which they use to perpetuate a particular denominational ideology. However, the ways in which metaphors can aid understanding and inclusivity in preaching are more pertinent to my discussion than the arguments for or against their usage

on linguistic grounds. Linguists have shown that metaphors create intimacy-by-sharing and have become so pervasive in everyday conversation that people frequently use them reflexively (Cohen; Cooper; Lakoff and Johnson). All the preachers in my sample used at least one metaphor in their sermon which indicates that none of them subscribes to the extreme linguistic view which refuses to legitimise metaphoric usage. The analysis of how metaphors are employed as a device in my sermon sample substantiates those theories that accept the ability of metaphorical language to have the potential to create a sharing-by-intimacy, enhance interpersonal relationships, to function as an inclusive device and add colour and interest to the discourse. I note, however, that it would take further research involving listeners to acts of worship to ascertain their specific responses to the use of metaphors by preachers and to verify the notion that their usage creates intimacy. Such research was outside the scope of this thesis.

Even though metaphors may act as a linguistic device to aid inclusivity, any beneficial influence can be negated if the gendered content of the metaphor carries the wrong message. When I analysed the content of the metaphors in my sermon sample for gender dimensions I discovered that 25% of them contained imagery drawn from the masculine adversarial fields of competition and warfare. By implication this indicates that 75% of the metaphorical content was not gendered in such an overt or specific way. However, some of the metaphors were used by preachers more than once. Thus, 32% of all metaphors used by preachers in my sample contained some adversarial content. A frequency of 63 adversarial and a frequency of 132 non-adversarial metaphors were used, giving a total for all metaphors found in my sermon sample of 195 instances. It remains the case that where overt genderization of metaphors occurred, this was consistently at the level of referencing traditional masculine positions.

Some homileticians justify the use of adversarial metaphors on the grounds that the Bible contains warfare imagery (Kennedy; Lindsey). On the other hand, feminists have suggested that the use of such metaphors guarantees male dominance and also acts to reassert male

control to counter feminism (French; Sweet; Deberg). Since metaphor as a linguistic device sustains and re-states people's perceived reality preachers using those with a gendered content may negate any advantages of their usage. Listeners of either sex may be alienated by the adversarial content of the metaphor if they do not perceive their reality in those terms. Since the Christian churches are preaching messages of love, forgiveness, reconciliation and peace, in a time when sexual equality is an important priority, it might be more consistent to use less adversarial language.

Metaphorical content which is “gender neutral” might create intimacy-by-sharing, re-state and sustain shared perceived realities of preacher and listeners. However, my analysis of my sermon sample with respect to the preachers’ use of “gender neutral” metaphors suggests that these cannot accommodate all aspects of the diversity of listeners. Under certain circumstances metaphor’s power of inclusivity may be limited to existing members of a group and exclusionary to those listeners who are unaware of the particular nuances of that metaphor which may only be obvious to those who have been introduced to its specific significances. Nevertheless, the evidence indicates that interactive communication between listeners and preachers is enhanced through the use of “neutral” metaphors if preachers take care to select those which are appropriate in scope and function.

The structural form of the sermon is perhaps the most influential factor that determines the amount of participation for the listeners in the communication process. In chapter six I discussed the variety of sermon forms and styles available to preachers. These range from the didactic discourse which reduces the listeners to passive recipients to the other extreme which is the non-authoritarian interactive sermon allowing a verbal exchange of ideas between preacher and listener. My sample includes none of the latter category of sermon which are in any case extremely difficult to co-ordinate and seem to occur rarely. Between these two extreme styles there are variations and mixtures of approaches which activate different amounts and types of participatory mechanisms. It would appear that a middle

ground between the extremes needs to be explored if preachers are to find the most appropriate form for the message and the occasion.

The sermons in my sample were delivered during broadcast acts of worship so that interactive sermons requiring verbal exchange of ideas might be particularly inappropriate for these services since the majority of the audience are not physically present. However, this does mean that other types of participatory sermons are necessarily unsuitable. The larger part of the audience had neither access to the non-verbal communication aspects of the delivery nor to the community spirit of the presence of the congregation. For these reasons one would hope that extra effort might be made by the preachers to hold the attention of the radio audience. One very obvious means by which a preacher can attract radio listeners' attention is to specifically mention them. A direct acknowledgement of their existence may help to make these listeners feel involved as part of the community of listeners. This aspect was discussed in chapter two and it was shown that only 5 (12.5%) of the preachers in my sample made a direct reference to the radio listeners and in each case they were mentioned only once. By far the larger portion of preachers, 87.5%, assumed radio listeners needed no encouragement or support for them to remain attentive. This lack of acknowledgement of the radio listeners by preachers who broadcast their sermons seems extraordinary when one considers that this may be their one and only opportunity to address an audience of about a million people.

As well as directly acknowledging the presence of the radio audience, it seems reasonable to expect that the preachers would bear in mind this huge audience and consequently prepare their discourses in such a way as to stimulate and encourage them to remain listening. The form and structure of the sermon not only shape the discourse but also provide the opportunity for inclusive elements to be incorporated into the sermon. Therefore, the form and style that allows the preacher the most scope to incorporate as many inclusive techniques as possible might well be the most effective in capturing and retaining the audience's attention.

My sermon analysis demonstrates, however, that all the sermons possess very few characteristics of interactive discourses through which listeners may be encouraged to become participants in the act of worship. Although the sermons are not identical in form or style, nevertheless, they all contain most of the traits of a didactic discourse. By choosing to preach *at* the listeners rather than *with* the listeners the ministers jeopardise the attention of their listeners.

The lack of variety of form and style in my sermon sample led me to reflect upon why the preachers chose to deliver a traditional monologue sermon. There are several possible reasons which include attitudes of preachers who

- (1) think this is the type of sermon that the listeners have become accustomed to and expect,
- (2) feel confident when they adhere to the traditional style,
- (3) believe that this is the "best" or most suitable method of preaching and,
- (4) may feel constrained by denominational demands that require this type of sermon.

Which of these/or other reasons are the deciding factor is not possible to ascertain without further research but it is clear from my sample that there is a striking similarity in the form and style of all the sermons. There may well be situations in which a didactic discourse can be justified but these specific sermons were delivered on Sundays throughout one whole year (1993-4). Thus, there is every reason to think that they represent a typical style of sermon that most churchgoers, irrespective of denomination, experience most weeks. It seems evident that a revision of this practice ought to be considered.

The constant theme found in all preaching manuals is that the main purpose of preaching is teaching. Modern teaching practices have moved away from using the didactic method of "chalk and talk" which requires the student to passively accept and learn by memory the teacher's words for every lesson. Research into teaching has shown that interactive participation by the students can provide a more conducive learning environment (C. Biott and P. Eason; M. J. Drummond; M. Galton and J. Williamson). Dynamic two-way communication stimulates interest and increases personal endeavour resulting in a shared

responsibility in the learning process. The last twenty-five years have produced a wide variety of teaching methods many of which follow feminist approaches to communication. This shift towards such teaching styles has now become so common that schooling is referred to as having become "feminised" (G. Weiner; S. Askew; B. Campbell; A. Giddes 195-6; M. Stanworth; J. Wrigley). These new teaching methods are often hailed as one of the reasons for improved standards in schools⁶, but are by no means restricted to the classroom situation. Modern business management, politicians and a vast array of promotional and training organisations have adopted these techniques to promote their own particular cases. Television has educated the public to expect slick presentation of news, documentary programmes, debates and advertisements. The finance available to the television and radio media has set high standards of presentation which ought to be emulated by anyone who wishes to "broadcast" a serious message. The increasing popularity of phone-in radio programmes may also be heightening listeners' requirements to be participators in communication processes rather than passive listeners. Preachers need to consider how these factors are likely to affect listeners' attitudes to sermons. One key to effective preaching as teaching appears to lie in the degree of participation and interaction between speaker and listener. My examination of the sermon sample shows that there are several contributory devices and techniques available for preachers to use when preparing an inclusive sermon. The onus is on preachers to understand how to incorporate the maximum number of these

⁶ It has also been suggested that the feminisation of schooling is the major reason for the increase in truancy by teen-age males who are disaffected by modern teaching methods because they prefer fact-based teaching. This view is held by those who consider that feminised modern teaching practices suit females better than males and cite them as the reason for the fact that females are now achieving higher grades than the males in most subjects. This situation is compared with those of the traditional regime of didactic teaching in which males achieved higher grades than the females:

For many years, girls did better than the boys in terms of school results until the middle years of secondary education. Then they fell behind: boys did better than girls at O- and A- Level, and at university. Recently, however, these trends have started to alter. Girls in British schools have started to forge ahead of the boys. In 1995 all-girls schools took the top five places, and fourteen out of the top twenty places, in a league of school tables. At the end of the 1970s about the same number of boys got five or more passes at O- Level. In the intervening years a gap has developed: girls are doing better than boys at GCSE and A- Level. (Giddes 412)

mechanisms into their sermon preparation and presentation if they wish to create an effective inclusive teaching discourse.

The Notion of Authority

Another main purpose of preaching is to persuade listeners to respond in a particular way (Loan 9; Arisen; Packer; Bettler; Adams; Broadus). The role of the preacher as rhetorician has a long history.⁷ Aristotle defines rhetoric as "the faculty or power of discovering in the particular case what are the available means of persuasion" (*Rhetoric* 1.2). It is a definition that has been cited for over two thousand years. Christian rhetorical practice stems from Augustine who refocused Aristotle's ancient classical thought to include a moral pedagogy. Augustine's rhetorical prescription supplied the basis for the homiletical theory of rhetoric. Thus, moral behaviour and charitable attitudes became, in part, a matter of persuasion.

The power of a person's ability to persuade has been traditionally understood to be linked to the authority of that speaker. Thus, the degree of authority and credibility of the speaker was deemed to be an important influential factor. Authority in preaching has traditionally been defined as "that quality of proclamation that pertains to special rights, power, knowledge and capacity to influence or transform"(C. Smith 46). Current society and modern thinking no longer consider power relationships in quite this manner (Foucault *History*, Wartenburg). The "ordinary" individual possesses the power of resistance which s/he may exercise within certain constraints. This recognition of resistance and the tendency to question statements from established authorities is reflected in modern presentations where non-authoritarian persuasive mechanisms are utilised. In the context of preaching today listeners have the power to choose whether to listen to preachers' exhortations, or ignore them in part or in total. Thus, preachers can no longer rely on their assumed authority to ensure a positive response through delivering a dominant discourse.

⁷ For a discussion on the history of rhetoric and the influences of Aristotle, Cicero, Quintillian and St. Augustine among others, see de Koster. On pages 324-30 de Koster offers a bibliographic section.

This, however, does not appear to have deterred the preachers in my sample from using in their sermons the kind of discourses which imply authority. As I discussed in chapter six their sermons were predominantly didactic and didacticism is one means of conveying authority. The preacher's interpretation of the scriptural text, for example, is delivered in a way that emphasises to listeners that the preachers' interpretation is the "correct" version. This tactic is employed by those who seek to promote particular ideologies and do so in a way which prohibits further discussion. Other indicators of dominant discourses are the use of facts and information, the abstraction of ideas and the use of sequential ordering of points. These are often combined with the use of the question-and-answer techniques which allow the preacher to pose and answer the question in their own terms. Each of these techniques assumes the superiority of the preacher over the listener by virtue of his/her authority and credibility. Critiques of the didactic sermon offer a justification and rationale for more interactive, dialogic preaching and suggest that the church is failing in its preaching because of its insistence on using out-moded preaching practices (Jensen). These critiques discuss the issue only in terms of listeners' participation as they recommend the use of story-telling narratives and other interactive styles. The issue of gender is completely ignored in this context.

In chapter five I demonstrated that the scope and function of metaphors in sermon becomes complex when concerned with gender issues operating through the gendered existence of the preacher, in language itself, and in metaphor as device and as content. Preachers possess external authority predominantly derived from their denominational structures. However, they can also gain authority from listeners through the use of unconventional metaphors which allow listeners to explore them and accept or reject the preachers' inferences. Such personally derived authority is non-authoritarian and feminine in characteristic because it invites audience participation. Thus, preachers may rely on external authority by using established Christian metaphors and/or they may choose to derive some authority from utilising less familiar metaphors, thereby sharing a breadth of understanding

both temporal and spiritual. However, those who offer only unconventional metaphors and rely on a more egalitarian means of persuasion take a risk that their credibility may be undermined by this strategy.

When considering the question of authority the use of personal experience becomes an issue. As discussed earlier, the use of personal experience and self-disclosure is also a non-authoritarian persuasive mechanism. In chapter five I showed how the sharing of self may create mutuality, trust and intimacy, all of which are aspects of a feminist preaching approach (C. Smith; Hunter). Most of the preachers (70%) in my sample did not reveal aspects of themselves by offering personal narratives. A certain amount of risk is involved when preachers disclose personal details about themselves because these may not show them in the most flattering light and so might undermine their credibility and authority. The depersonalised preaching of the dominant discourse thus offers protection for the preacher and the authority they represent.

The practice of citing the names of "great" men's deeds or works in sermons is perhaps the most explicit means from which external authority is derived. In chapter three I examined the prevalence of the preachers' practice of citing "great" men to lend authority to her/his words. The extent of this appropriation of externally derived authority is further enhanced when preachers refer to a priest's source of work by adding a rank or title bestowed by their denominational institution. Hierarchical status has traditionally been a powerful source of persuasion. However, the patriarchal base of ecclesiastical orders is supported in the main by those denominations which adhere to the ideology of the Apostolic succession and will have less influence on listeners who belong to denominations whose doctrines do not subscribe to this belief. Furthermore, in a meritocratic society more respect may be attributed to people's achievements rather than any rank or title. Because women have for so long been excluded from so many power positions they may have an investment in basing value judgements on people's actions rather than their social status. Using "great" men as exemplars to a mixed denominational audience is likely to have limited influence. Preachers can no longer assume

to gain external authority for their words in a modern society which has become cynical as a result of the exposure of the feet/feat of clay of so many "great" men. The use of such "famous" exemplars may well have a negative effect on listeners, increasing their dissatisfaction with contemporary preaching.

Employing the second personal plural mode of address is recommended by churches (Faull and Sinclair) on the grounds that it projects the idea of a shared social relationship between preacher and listeners. The assumed authority of the preacher may therefore be eliminated if s/he uses "we" to mean "you and me." This use of "we" solidifies relationships provided speaker and listeners do possess similar status. However, such a discourse remains repressive if status is disguised (Pateman). Power differentials are indirectly maintained when, for example, an Archbishop speaks in this fashion. Though the power relationship between an Archbishop and listeners may be reduced it is not removed and only a displacement from an overt to a covert differentiation occurs. In respect of the preacher being a parish priest or minister, the churches' understanding that such a mode of address which masks aspects of his or her authority appears to presuppose that the status of the speaker is necessarily superior to that of the members of the congregation. This, however, depends on the individual. Many listeners have higher educational achievements and are accorded greater social status than many preachers. The critical element here may well be context. It is worth noting that the so-called "royal 'we'", or the influence of its use, may increase rather than decrease power differentials between preachers and listeners.

Another dimension of this discussion on the notion of authority as a structure of domination and preaching, as just mentioned, is the inter-relation of the structure of the sermon with the venue of the delivery which is usually a Christian church. In contrast, Jesus's preaching generally took place at open air gatherings. He spoke to an audience whom he encouraged to ask questions (Mk 11. 12-4, 20-2). Moreover, the preaching recorded in the New Testament exhibits a variety of settings and preaching styles. The notion of authority as power for certain individuals was not part of the theology of Christ's

preaching. The early followers of Christ held their services in the privacy of the domestic premises and shared in the discussion of the day (Torjesen; Fiorenza). In chapter one I reviewed the contribution of women's leadership in the early church and how their more egalitarian preaching practices were systematically effaced by the institutionalisation of the church. Preaching today occurs mostly in most churches with rows of pews facing the altar. Thus, people are seated in a linear fashion with their backs to each other. The structural context of the setting used thus actively discourages possibilities of participation and interaction. The sermon is part of an act of worship which usually follows a set linear, sequential pattern. Traditional monologue didactic preaching also shares these characteristics. The design of churches' interiors and the service order thus not only mirror the traits of these sermons; they also support and sustain each other.

Epilogue

Due to the complexity of the gender issues which emerged from my examination of the sermon sample, it was necessary for me to undertake the foregoing discussion of my analysis in relation to aspects of inclusivity and the understanding of authority as though they were independent topics. However, this research indicates that there is a fundamental inter-relationship between the ways in which authority is defined and exercised and the ways in which aspects of inclusivity may or may not be created. This relationship is not only dynamic but the influences intermingle at various levels which may result in contradictory messages being transmitted simultaneously. In these particular instances the language of mutuality and dialogue is incompatible with structures of domination.

The traditional sermon is shaped by its form which controls the embodiment of the enriching elements that are integral to this style of discourse. The removal of some of the structures of domination from these sermons can be achieved by careful consideration of issues of gender when preparing these elements, for example, exchanging generic terms, employing the second person plural, offering non-stereotypical illustrations about women as

well as men, using self-disclosure and metaphors. However, even if all these strategies are employed some of the dominant structures of a didactic discourse may still be evident and effective. Unless the application of authority derived from deep seated patriarchal bases is removed, oppression and alienation of some listeners may still occur. A re-appraisal by theologians of the affects and effects of authoritarian discourses is required in order to promote preaching practices which enable listeners to be full participants in the sermonic process. This must take account of all aspects of the interrelationship between language, power and gender in the context of a participatory and transforming discourse.

Though the practice of preaching allows the opportunity for many diverse forms of discourses, my sample suggests that the present style of broadcast preaching and much pulpit preaching has been reduced to what is best described as a stereotypical monologue which has become synonymous with the term "sermon." This means that the word "sermon" has become very specifically defined. Moreover, the word "sermon" is often used colloquially in a pejorative sense because of its authoritarian implications.⁸ If the term "sermon" cannot be divorced from a didactic monologue then maybe it would be advisable for preachers to deliver "an address" (or something described by another term) which is based on non-authoritarian structures and language and freer from prejudicial connotations.

The fact that my sermon sample displays so many language-based aspects of structures of domination indicates the power of institutional practices. It is not possible to know how long ago the preachers in my sample received their training, nor is it possible to know whether they have attended courses which demonstrate the use of modern communication techniques in preaching. A complementary study to this thesis might examine the ways in which

⁸ The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the word, **sermon**: "3. (a) A discourse (spoken or written) on a serious subject, containing instruction or exhortation. Also *contemptuously*, a long or tedious discourse or harangue; and the verb **to sermonize** 1. *intrans* To deliver or compose a sermon; = PREACH v. i. chiefly *deprecatory*. 2. *trans* To talk seriously or earnestly, to 'preach', to 'lecture'." Eric Partridge's *Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* describes the words: "**Preach**: An act of preaching; a sermon; a discourse; tediously moral talk. **Preachify**: To deliver a (tedious) sermon; moralise wearisomely: coll. 1775. **Preachy**: Given to preaching; as if, as in, a sermon: coll. 1819, Miss Mitford, 'He was a very good man . . . though preachy and prosy.'"

ordinands are trained to preach, by whom, the types of teaching environments and the emphasis on this aspect of ministry during training. Homiletical classes within theological colleges are the places where practices are established, explored and assessed so these are the centres where improvements and changes can most readily be implemented. Even the women's sermons in my sample follow a similar pattern of a didactic discourse as those of the men's which suggests that the teaching of preaching at theological training institutions probably still insists that this is the appropriate way to prepare sermons. My sample contained only three sermons delivered by women. Further research into women's sermons would provide an additional dimension beyond the scope of this research.

Homiletical texts which discuss the crisis in preaching draw attention to the fact that a large number of preachers succumb to boredom and slump of the middle years . . . Then there are preachers who have "lost their souls." Torn by parish tensions, social and economic pressure . . . they have become dried up . . . but what disturbs us is the kind of preaching they produce. (Macleod 16)

Such assertions indicate a need for a programme of continuous professional development and an end to the system which allows clergy to remain in the same post serving the same community for many years.

I stated in the introduction to this thesis that this research was my contribution to the on-going debate by feminists to expose gender inequalities and expunge derogatory stereotyping. This examination of my sermon sample gives insights into why many contemporary sermons may cause exclusion, irritation and alienation to listeners and specifically to female members of the congregation. It demonstrates that gender operates in particular ways in these discourses and that preachers rarely if ever take the trouble to address or correct these. Moreover, in the very few instances in preaching manuals where the subject of gender is discussed it is dealt with in terms which indicate a naïve understanding of the ways language, gender and power intersect. If homileticians who publish preaching

manuals are unaware of the implications of these influences then it is not surprising that the preachers they train or advise fail to recognise that there might be.

More women attend most church services than men⁹ and mothers are the primary teachers of infants and children. These two reasons alone are sufficient justification for insisting that sermons should be devised in terms that acknowledge the importance of women's roles in our society. The churches need to recognise the social realities and diversities among members of their congregations if they wish to maintain church membership and encourage new converts. Modern democratic society fosters individual freedoms which oppose authoritarian leaders who may attempt to coerce people to comply with their wishes through the use of overt structures of dominance.

The power of resistance held by the laity is underestimated by preachers and church leaders, yet they have the evidence of rapidly declining church memberships. The loss of members substantiates the many criticisms of preaching methods that are documented here and the observation that preaching is in a crisis (Macleod; Fant). The Bible's own models for preaching, modern teaching practices, the social dimensions of gender equality, all indicate that the conventional sermon with its authoritarian approach is rarely appropriate in contemporary society. If the churches wish to remain alive and effective the gender issues

⁹ It could be argued that this suggests that more men than women are alienated by sermons. However, the sermon is only a part of an act of worship which is itself a part of the wider aspects which constitute the institution of the church. There may be many reasons, independent from those brought about by the sermonic discourse, which may cause men and women to take no part in church life. These include factors such as a disinterest in religious matters, a view that the church is an anachronistic institution, those who are in their workplace on Sundays, those who choose to watch or take part in sporting activities on Sundays, those who shop on Sundays, those who visit relatives and friends on Sundays and people's personal opinions concerning priests or ministers in general or in particular. There may well be other inter-contextual factors in the act of worship which alienate more men than women, such as the type of music offered or the rituals of the liturgy. Other over-riding reasons may prevent women leaving the church at a particular time, such as social contact or a commitment to undertake a particular task in the church community. Whatever the reasons, there is no justification for suggesting that because more women than men attend church services gender issues in sermons are not an important cause of alienation or irritation for women. Situations change and oppressive sermons may well become so unacceptable to many listeners that at any particular time these may result in a withdrawal from the churches. This thesis does not attempt to investigate the reasons why more women than men attend church services which would be an examination of motivation rather than one of the reaction and response to the specific discourse referred to as a sermon.

which I have discussed in this thesis concerning preaching practices need to be addressed and more effective ways of preaching devised.

APPENDIX

TRANSCRIPTS OF SERMON SAMPLE

11th April 1993

9.30 a.m. Morning Service

Radio 4

Family Mass from St. Sebastian and St. Paul's Kingsbury, NW London.

Preacher: Rt. Rev. Dr. Vincent Nichols, the Bishop of London.

There are some phrases in the English language which catch my attention immediately. If someone starts to say, "Surely you have heard about so-and so?" They immediately have my full attention and if I happen to overhear the phrase, "Oh, haven't you heard? Then I'm all ears. So when St. Peter said "You must have heard about the recent happenings in Judea" he'd had have had full attention- this was going to be hot news. And yes indeed it was hot news and we too have heard that same news across the centuries from generation to generation. We have heard and we too believe that Jesus Christ put to death on a cross is risen from the dead. Yes, we have heard and so this morning we celebrate this Easter Mass rejoicing in the wonderful gift of faith in the risen Lord. He is our life, our hope, our joy. This faith refreshes us and enlivens us.

This morning our church is full of the colour of spring flowers and alive with hope and enthusiasm. It rings with our songs of praise. Yes! We have heard and we believe. Even though we never saw the empty tomb first discovered by Mary Magdalene and the disciples, Peter and John. We can realise what an amazing moment it was for them in that first Easter garden. Their despair was turned into amazement. The darkness of death into the radiance of life. Yet this morning, we hear again the words of the gospel telling us that when John went into the empty tomb he saw and he believed. Until that moment they had failed to understand the teaching of Scripture that He must rise from the dead. Now, this is our task too, to understand the teaching of Scripture, to reflect deeply on the meaning of this wonderful event that Christ truly rose from the dead.

How can we picture the risen Christ? What image comes into our mind? May I suggest that we recall the meeting of the risen Christ with the apostle Thomas, the one who found it impossible to believe until he had seen. Jesus comes to Thomas and shows him the wounds in his hands and sides. Then Thomas believes, he can see and touch. He knows, he knows this is the same Jesus, the one he had come to know and follow and love. Thomas knows this is the One who died a broken man on that ugly cross, the wounds prove it. And do you know, the wounds are important? The risen Christ is marked with the wounds of human sin and suffering. The risen Christ is not a superman, he is not a sky-walker. This is not a fairy story or a myth. He is Jesus the man from Nazareth. This story of the resurrection, it's not a story of a great escape. Jesus didn't escape from the tomb, nor did he avoid suffering and death. This gospel doesn't take us away from life, nor shield us from its hardships. Faith in the risen Lord isn't a substitute for living. No, rather it reveals the truth that lies often forgotten at the heart of life, beneath the hardships, beneath the scars hidden even in the tomb. The risen Lord bears the wounds of his crucifixion, they don't disappear. He bears the wounds of every human suffering, He bears the wounds caused by our sins. He bears the marks of the suffering of Bosnia that fill our television screens. His broken body is to be seen in the famine struck people of Africa. His cry of anguish from the cross finds an echo in the parents of young children victims of crime and murder as they carry those tiny white coffins into church. The risen Lord doesn't remove or wipe out these stark facts, rather, he bears their marks in his risen body. He tells us in this victory, that every pain, every suffering, every tragedy is greatly honoured by God and used to bring new life.

The risen Christ then, is the wounded Lord transforming our tragedies into the triumph of new life, God given life, God given forgiveness. Yet, the wounds that the risen Christ bears are not only the wounds inflicted by tragedy and great sin, they're also the wounds caused by inadequate loving. For love too, as we know, brings its wounds and hurts and scars. Each of us in our daily lives, tries to show love for each other. We offer love within our families and friendships. Yet, even there, we end up hurting each other, letting each other down, leaving

scars despite our best intentions. Now on this Easter day, we can know that God accepts our best effort at loving. God welcomes the love that we are able to give now no matter how inadequate it may seem, how clumsy or inappropriate we may think it is. If it is a love that's spoken with truth, then God welcomes it, God wants it, God accepts it. And in this magnificent moment of Christ's resurrection God fulfils all our loving. So, the risen Lord is the Lord of our wounded love. In him we can see our love in all its glory. We can turn to each other, to those whom we love and say, "Look, there's the risen Lord, there is radiant love that's the real truth of my love for you, a love stronger than death."

Are there any moments to compare with this glory of Christ's resurrection, any experience we can compare? A tiny baby, just lifted out of the bath, all bright and shiny can leave us gasping with amazement at the beauty of new life. A young lad wearing his best suit for the first time and unexpectedly looking like a real young man. A bride dressed with the utmost care and splendour stepping out radiantly from her family home. In such moments, we may glimpse inner beauty or hidden potential we'd never realised was there. So too, in the splendour of the resurrection we see Christ not coming back to life, but breaking through to a new and total life. His risen glory removes the veil that obscures the beauty that is ours as sons and daughters of God made in God's own image and likeness and destined for eternal glory.

This is surely what St. Paul means when he tells us this morning that the life we have is hidden with Christ in God. But when Christ is revealed and he is your life, you too, will be revealed in all your glory with Him. In Christ, all the best we ever want for each other, all we ever strive for, all we ever weep over, even the things which at time we give up hope, in Christ these all find their fulfilment and true expression. For the risen Christ whom we greet this morning is our own dear, frail human nature revealed in all its glory and in its full destiny. For God in Christ gives us everything that we need to fulfil the deepest longings of our hearts. The risen Lord is the promise of our future glory and that promise is now fulfilled. So on this Easter day, more than on any other we can rise and greet the dawn in joy

and confidence. We can smile welcome to the new day and to everyone we meet, for we know that our hope is sure, our future is certain, our confidence in God unshakeable.

Christ is risen, Alleluia! (Alleluia) Risen as he said (Alleluia!) We're the happiest of people (Alleluia). Thanks be to God (Alleluia!).

18th April 1993

9.30 a.m. . Morning Service

Radio 4

Mansfield Road Baptist Church, Nottingham. A service of preparation for the National Baptist Assembly.

Preacher: Rev. Dr. Brian Haymes, Principle of the Northern Baptist College.

Jesus invited Thomas to put his finger into the nail prints in his hand and his hand into the spear wound in his side. We're not told whether Thomas did reach out and touch, but we are told that he said to the scarred and risen Jesus "My Lord and my God." Now that's the kind of statement that can only be described as awesome! It's a little like finding yourself saying to someone, "I love you", and knowing that you mean it. It's scary, exciting, spine-tingling because you're announcing the truth of your life. My Lord and my God- awesome! Martin Luther said, "Everyone has their God", that is everyone has someone or something that their heart clings to and confides in that takes the ultimate priority in their living. Well, there are lords and gods a plenty offering themselves as candidates for the post, but suppose you make the wrong choice.

There was a woman who idolised her children, she gave herself utterly to them. It looked devoted love, but her children came to resent her for her possessiveness, the god she was trying to make of them, her unwillingness to let them be themselves. And the business man, whose personal ambitions and career were everything, his wife, his children and eventually his own health were the sacrifices paid in service to that god. Remember, Dave Allen says farewell at the end of his shows by wishing that your god goes with you. But if you've made the wrong choice here, then both for yourself and others, the consequences can be disaster.

Some gods oppress, some are insatiable in their demands sucking the life from their worshippers demanding control and denying freedom. Thomas says to Jesus risen from the dead, "My Lord and my God." Will Jesus liberate or oppress? We have to acknowledge that

in the name of Jesus great wickedness has been done; in the name of Jesus men have oppressed women, white people have demeaned black and brown people; in the name of Jesus rich and powerful people have put and kept the poor in their place. Such things are done, they are oppressive, unjust and wicked and they seem to imply that calling Jesus, "My Lord and my God" may be good news for some but by no means for all. Well, it's a feature of false gods that they seek to control. By contrast, liberation is the mark of the true God. Can that be said of Jesus?

In the history of our own nation we can see that his followers have sometimes sought control, prestige, status in His name in order to oppress others. Here in Nottingham we remember a man called Thomas Helwiss. He was one of those at the beginning of the seventeenth century who found the religious laws enforced by the state, repressive and unjust. So he went to the continent where there was a greater freedom. He returned in 1612 and with others formed the first Baptist church on English soil. He wrote a book and sent a copy of it to James 1, then King of England. In it he argued that the power and authority of the state should be acknowledged and respected, but that neither monarch nor parliament had any authority in matters of religion and faith. "Let them be heretics, Turks, Jews or whatsoever," he said, "it appertains not to the earthly power to punish them in the least manner." That was one of the first pleas for religious liberty in England. Helwiss was put in prison for it and there he died. But he believed in spite of what Christians can sometimes do with Christ, that only the authority of God in Jesus could save the freedom of humankind.

So much hangs on how we understand Jesus and his significance. He can be used to control others and he often is, but is that the truth about Him? John's Gospel undoubtedly sees Jesus as one with authority and purpose. He had come so people should find and receive life in all its fullness. He did not come to condemn and moralise, shutting people up in prisons of guilt. Instead, he challenged any oppressive forms of religion, even if that offended the professionals of his day. He said he didn't want to call disciples his servants, but friends. We find him talking with outcasts, enemies and especially the vulnerable. And

do you remember that story when he took a towel and knelt and washed his friends feet? He didn't seek to control others, he didn't pull rank or claim status. He said, "There was no greater love than the gift of life for friends," and that is what he gave. And John's Gospel says, "This is the word of God to become flesh and living amongst us." God is like this and all of it stands in sharp contrast to the assumptions we have about greatness. And indeed in this sense Jesus's kingdom is not like this world. He will not join our game of power struggles. He is not into self advertising or personal followings. He has come to give life, to love people into life and his wounds are the marks of his way. It is to this one with the scars and resurrection and life that Thomas says, "My Lord and my God."

I've just returned from El Salvador, that country beginning to live a tentative peace after the years of violence and bitter civil war. Over 70,000 people have been killed, many by the notorious death-squads. The struggle began because of great social injustice which brought the oppression of poverty. The rich few could control the lives of the many poor. Archbishop Oscar Romero martyred as he led people in worship, bluntly called what was going on "evil repression." Well, on Good Friday, I went with a few friends to El Mazote, a ghost village out in the hills, once the home of over 1000 people. But one night the soldiers came and systematically slaughtered children, women and men. Ruthena was with us, she was the one survivor, a witness who had seen her husband killed and her children taken screaming from her. Her story was harrowing and I could not speak. It all happened a dozen years ago and she wept as she told us on Good Friday of the killings she'd seen. And then she spoke of Jesus, of how faith had sustained her, how she believed he'd been with those people in their living and their dying. She even said that if the soldiers could but acknowledge what they had done she would try to forgive them in the spirit of Jesus. And I felt that I could almost have reached out and put my finger into the nail prints and my hand into the side.

And then, on Easter Day, I visited two other communities for worship. Both had people present who had been tortured, held in prison abused by the military and the powers of the day. They couldn't forget their past, but they could celebrate and they did celebrate the hope

that Jesus brings them. They remembered the martyrs, they pledged themselves in solidarity to seek justice and peace and righteousness and all the signs of God's kingdom and they praised God who was with them. God with a human face, with scars and wounds and love that would not let the world go. Christ was risen amongst them, they were free people. I could almost see the stones of hate and oppression being rolled away before this resurrection life. It was here, amongst some poor, wounded, all-too-human people, I found the reality of the living Christ, the one shared the same flesh as theirs who endured their death. And now among them his love was transforming. There was no desire to control or oppress or make a name for themselves, but there was life and hope. Here was a people on the way to liberation. Here were people who sang, not in boast, but in gratitude to Jesus, "My Lord and my God. My Lord and my God."

25th April 1993

9.30 a.m. Morning Worship

Radio 4

All Saints Church, Guildford.

Preacher: Rev. Dr. Kenneth Stevenson.

In the name of the father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen. There are some very obvious ways of recognising people after an interval of time. Face, voice, dress, mannerisms, all the things that help make them who they are in our eyes. And the first halting moments in the conversation are likely to be coloured by shyness and joy. "I'm so glad to see you again, how little you've changed? How are you? What would you like to do during your stay?"

But in the Gospel passage dramatically read to us just now, it is as if the natural ways of recognising people are suspended. The two disciples are walking away from Jerusalem to a place called Emmaus about which we know virtually nothing. They walk side by side, downcast, like members of a group who have just had a shattering experience which they simply cannot understand like Jesus's public execution. They cannot take in anything or anyone else. It's on this dusty unknown road that an anonymous stranger, the Jesus of Easter, joins them. He is not interested in his own identity, but rather with the concerns of his new companions. He does not dominate the conversation but he listens to them. He hears them tell what is on their minds, only then does he give them the explanation they need which is, that their hopes have not been destroyed, they have been fulfilled. The saviour had to be done to death because goodness of that degree of recklessness and consistency, the goodness of Jesus's life and example could only provoke human fear and brutality.

We, the whole human race find Jesus so threatening that we have to try to get rid of him. But it is not possible to kill God. We can ignore Him, we can say that He does not exist. We can even say that He could be an option for those who like that sort of thing. But if He does exist then there is nothing we can do to obliterate Him from human experience. This is what

Jesus explains to his friends. He is ready to meet them, their story, their life is also his story, His life and the two are intertwined for ever. The climax on that road to recognition comes when they get to Emmaus and they begin their meal together. Jesus breaks the bread and in an instant their eyes are opened. That moment of recognition is enough for them for the next step. When we meet Jesus, he motivates people, in this case, the two friends knew they had to return to Jerusalem to the rest of the group of the disciples. To tell them that God is not dead, He has survived the worst that could possibly done to any human being. A shameful, slow, public death. "Did not our hearts burn within us?" they asked each other as they looked back to the walk with the Lord. It was hearts burning with the key to all their yearnings, not brains teaming with yet more data with which to impress.

And this is God, not someone who forces Himself on people against their will, nor someone attempting to make an impact just for the sake of it. Our God sidles up to people, hears them out, identifies with their dejections and disappointments as well as with their joys and achievements. And then slowly coaxes them towards a greater awareness towards the truth and a new perception of themselves and the world around them. The Jesus of Easter, so far from being a stranger is, in reality, a friend. A friend who keeps on loving the world even especially those dark places where his kingdom of love seems most distant. Bread and wine are what his companions had taken and blessed and shared to celebrate that love that friendship that presence. Not a presence that can be manipulated but a living presence that can touch the hearts of all who share in this service where ever they are.

While the bread and wine are placed on the altar in a few moments we shall be singing a hymn that prays to the risen Lord with these words:

O living bread from heaven, Jesu our Saviour good,
Whom thine own self has given to be our souls true food.
For us thy body broken, hung on the cross of shame,
This bread its hallowed token, we break in Thy dear Name. Amen.

2nd May 1993

9.30 a.m. Morning Worship

Radio 4

St. Margaret's, Burnage, Manchester.

Preacher: Rev. Alan Pugmire.

Along Burnage Lane are a variety of buildings, schools, pubs, a community centre, library, shops and a laundry. Soon the local authority housing office will move onto the lane. But most of buildings are the several hundred houses where people live. A few houses were built in the last century, others are modern. Most were built in the nineteen twenties and the nineteen thirties. Behind them are similar houses which make up Burnage, many are in a small cul-de-sacs where people can get to know their neighbours. But they are all part of the one community. Like many neighbourhoods, the Lane is the focal point for people from these houses. Parents meet on the Lane as they take their children to and from school. The pubs on the Lane are meeting places, some meet inside, young people often gather outside them. People meet as they go to the shops where the shopkeepers know their customers. Also along the Lane are churches. The churches have different worship traditions, but work together through Christians together in Burnage.

We walked along the Lane silently behind a cross on Good Friday. We pray together regularly and next spring we will share the good news, and good news is in the news, of Jesus in a united mission in Burnage. The Lane is where people meet, they stop and talk, they catch up on news, they share problems with each other. You may have a place in your community like that. it may a street, a shop, the village green or at the school gates. But it is a place where people meet and meeting people and talking to people is part of life.

Years ago two people were walking along another Lane, it was longer, about seven miles. Unlike the people in Burnage, they were planning to walk the whole length of the Lane. As they walked, they talked. They talked about their problems. They were sad. They were

disappointed and they were confused. It is a good thing to talk about problems, some people bottle it up when they have a problem, they don't share it. But it helps to share. Someone has said 'a problem shared is a problem halved'. We live in a world where people face problems and problems cause stress. There are many days of absenteeism from work due to stress, but for others their stress is, that they have no work to go to. Some problems are personal or domestic, we keep them to ourselves. Others are to do with what is going on in the world. People are sad, disappointed or confused. They need someone to talk to. You may feel like that you need someone who is a good listener.

The couple on that Lane years ago had problems. As Luke in his gospel writes: "As they talked and discussed, Jesus himself drew near and walked along with them." They didn't recognise him, in fact they thought he was dead. The problem they had been discussing was that Jesus had been crucified, but they had hoped that he would bring freedom. The up-to-date news that morning was from some women was that his body had gone missing from the tomb. Well, it had! For Jesus was alive. He hadn't stayed in the tomb. He walked along the road with them unrecognised. He must have walked most of the seven miles with them. They had about two hours of walking and talking with Jesus. Very gently, he drew out of them what their problems were. "What are you talking about to each other as you walk?" They referred to "the things that had been happening there these last few days." "What things?" He asked. What had been a conversation between two people became on with three people. They had found it helpful to talk to each other, but even more helpful now to include Jesus in their conversation. That is still possible today, through prayer.

We believe that the people who live in our community need our prayers. So, each Sunday, we pray for different streets in Burnage, here in Manchester. We believe that it is helpful if people can share their problems with Jesus. So we often pray with individuals who want us to do so, after our services. A conversation is a two way thing. Jesus made it so, after he had listened, he spoke. He told what the Bible said about the things he had shared with them. He

was using the Old Testament Scriptures and he showed them from these how they could have learnt about his crucifixion and resurrection.

The Bible still has a funny way of getting it right. It continues to be the way Jesus talks to us. Sometimes when a person reads a some of the Bible, a few words, or a story seem to jump out of the pages. That's me, that's my situation, my problem. The Bible becomes relevant to that person at that point in time. Jesus must have made quite an impression on these two people. When they reached home, they invited him in. He came in and they had a meal, in it Jesus broke the bread and gave it to them. At that point, they recognised him, they could almost have kicked themselves at not doing so earlier.

As you listen this morning, can you imagine Jesus with you? He may be here in church, or at home or at work, in hospital, in a car, in a caravan or in the open air. That same Jesus who joined in the conversation of those two people could join in your conversation. That same Jesus who explained about himself to them, explained about himself in the Bible. That same Jesus who showed himself to them so that they recognised him can show himself to you. That couple said, "Stay with us." They invited him into their home. Even though the soon couldn't see him, he was part of their lives. Invite Jesus into your home, into your life to stay with you. He will. This then is who Jesus is. He is risen and alive, yes! But he doesn't push his way into our lives. He is prepared to be unrecognised, but he is also prepared to meet with us, even in the street. He is prepared to meet with us when problems perplex us. He is interested in our everyday concerns. He is listening and waiting. Jesus himself drew near and walked along with them. Jesus explained to them what was said about himself. He went in to stay with them. Their eyes were opened and they recognised him. We are going to sing together: "Open our eyes, Lord, we want to see Jesus." Make the words your own and reach out to Him.

9th May 1993

9.30 a.m. Morning Worship

Radio 4

Emmanuel Church, Croydon.

Preacher: Rev. James Jones.

No family, no home is the same as another. Our children are for ever making that clear to us. They come back with all sorts of stories about other families. "Dad, you'll never guess what the so-and so's eat for tea, or so-and-so's dad never does the washing up." You'll understand that there are laws that prevent me naming these people. Of course, I realise that there must be equally surprising stories circulating about life in the vicarage. Although every home, every family is different, we seem to live in the shadow of an ideal that seems to come from TV commercials. You know the scene; its breakfast on a bright sunny morning, the children have already combed their hair, unusual; the father is smiling, very unusual, and the mother has already been to the hairdresser by seven-thirty a.m., most unusual. And, wonder of wonders, the breakfast cereal actually float out of the packet in slow motion and into children's mouths passed shining teeth that have already been brushed, exceedingly unusual. As far as life in the vicarage is concerned, this sort of scene if it ever happened, would be a miracle. Well that's the romantic or at least the commercial ideal. The reality, of course can be very different. Homes or families given by God for love, for safety or healthy relationships can become stifling, almost like a prison for many people.

I think Jesus, at times, found his family stifling. The story from the Gospel shows Jesus being hounded by his mother and brothers. They're outside looking for you. They didn't understand him, his mother stood by him but his brothers didn't believe in what he was trying to do. It's that stifling, imprisoning feeling that led someone to describe the family as "that dear octopus from whose tentacles we never could escape, nor in our inmost hearts would wish to." Those tentacles can feel very strong and in their grip people can feel

manipulated in all sorts of ways. Emotionally you carry on, “No, no, don’t worry about me, so long as your happy, no its alright, please, please don’t worry about me.” Or financially, “Well, just look at you, after all I’ve done for you.” Or physically. Sadly some people use force at times with their children or with their partners to get their own way. It’s this sort of bad experience that led George Bernard Shaw to say that home life is no more natural to us than a cage is natural to a cockatoo. And it’s like Edmund Leach, the Reith lecturer said in those lectures years ago, “Far from being the basis of a good society, the family with its narrow privacy and tawdry secrets is the source of all our discontents.” However good or bad those experiences may be, the fact is that most of us are part are part of some sort of family and live in some sort of home. So I want to explore the impact and the difference that Jesus can make to our relationships in these situations.

If we go back to that scene in the Gospel, we have a picture of a crowd of people sitting around Jesus. Quite literally, he stands in the centre of that crowded circle, He looks at them and says, “Here are my mother and my brothers and my sisters.” He doesn’t disown his own family, he just extends it. He says that all his followers have a relationship with him that is as close and as personal as his own blood relatives. And that is as true today for all of us and for all of you in whose hearts the spirit of Jesus has found a home, who have sung, however tentatively, “O come to my heart Lord Jesus.” We find our minds influenced by the teachings of Jesus; we find our hearts inspired by the example of Jesus; we find our souls filling up with the spirit of Jesus.

Now there are two differences that Jesus makes for his followers in all their relationships. The one is to see Jesus in others, the second is to be Jesus to others. Learning to see Jesus in others is all about learning to find Jesus outside ourselves to love. Brian Keenan in his autobiography *An Evil Cradling* has written: “A love that cannot find an outlet turns inward and not being able to reach out and touch the thing it loves turns to anger and become confused.” In many homes, marriages, families friendships there are people who whose love shows itself in impatience and bad temper. For the Christian, especially when the love has

grown cold the way forward is to learn to see Jesus in the other person. To look at that person as you would look upon Jesus. For that person is his child, made by him and like Him. So often the love grows cold because the person disappoints us. Maybe the children not living up to our expectations; maybe the husband failing to succeed; maybe a friend letting you down. Learning to see Jesus in that person, is the way back to respecting them, valuing them and loving them. Sometimes the person turns away from us because our love is possessive, it is suffocating and as claustrophobic as some dark tunnel. Our love hems them in and drains them and they run a mile.

In turning to be Jesus to other people, we have to give the other people freedom, open spaces so that they can become their own unique person. True love sets people free, lets them go, even at the risk of losing them. That's the love that God loves us with, it's the love that filled the heart of Jesus to the point of breaking. It's the love that His spirit gives us to enables us to be Jesus to set them free.

There is a moving scene towards the end of Walt Disney's film *Beauty and the Beast*. Beauty is imprisoned by the Beast in his derelict castle in the hope that they would fall in love with each other, this is the only way to break the spell which hangs over the Beast and to turn him back into the handsome prince that he once was. The poignant moment of the story comes when the Beast, having fallen in love with beauty decides to let her go. His minions were appalled as they see their master now doomed for ever. "Why did you let her go?" they shriek. The Beast replies, "I had to let her go because I love her." True love gives people freedom. In learning to be Jesus to others we're to love in that unconditional and liberating way. That's the love that makes the safe and healthy relationships. That's the love that brings peace to all sorts of situations.

Recently on holiday in Norfolk several of us in the family wanted to go out in a boat and see the fields of Blakeny, but Harriet, my eldest daughter didn't. We tried a lot of persuasion, but to no avail. "Look," she protested "I don't like boats, just like you don't like cats. That's the way God's made you and me." Well it was a pretty shrewd argument for a ten year old to

put to vicar. What I had to learn and keep having to learn was to leave it at that. To respect her choice even when it didn't suit me. I could have gone on about it, badgered her, maybe even forced the issue.

But learning to be Jesus to your children means setting them free to make their own responsible choices. It's all about creating an atmosphere of love. That applies as much to people living on their own as it does to families. We can pollute that atmosphere for ourselves and for those who come into our homes with all sorts of manipulations. Or, we can keep it clean and healthy by valuing each other and by setting one another free. And so, in our final song we give thanks that through his spirit, Christ makes his home in the hearts of all who follow him; "Rejoice, rejoice, Christ is in you."

16th May 1993

9.30 a.m. Morning Service

Radio 4

St. John's Methodist Church, Llandudno, Wales.

Preacher: Rev. Keith Garner.

Road names conjure up all kinds of pictures. Mention of the M25 creates for me the frustrating image of endless traffic jams. Downing Street speaks of political power and Shaftesbury Avenue always reminds me of the exciting world of the theatre. This morning we consider two roads which are important to Christians. These roads will be remembered not so much for where they lead to and from, or the importance of the people who live on them, but rather because of what happened there two thousand years ago. They still have something to say to us today. The two roads are very different and yet they're worth considering together.

The first is the road of radical change. When we read the story of Paul's conversion to Christianity we're told of what happened on the Damascus road. Apart from the events of Jesus himself, there is probably no greater event in Christian history than this. One person spoke of the astonishing suddenness with which the persecutor of the church becomes the apostle of Jesus Christ. The importance of the event is underlined by the fact that Paul became the greatest evangelist of the church. And it is Paul who shares the good news of Jesus far beyond the narrow confines of the early Christian community. He, himself, was later to describe this experience by saying it was as if God had taken hold of his life.

The impact of this resulted in the widening of the scope of the Christian faith. And made certain that it didn't remain the private interest of select few, but rather became available to all. Paul was a person who clearly had gifts and abilities and God chose to use him. But it was only when Paul met Jesus, that his personality and many gifts were able to be fully used. In the hands of God in a quite remarkable way, his gifts, despite his obvious weakness would

now be used to the full. What happened on the Damascus road is interesting enough of itself, but the main point is that God can and does change things. Paul had powerfully wrong intentions, determined to hurt the Christian cause. Because God met him in Jesus he found himself to be commending the Christian faith to other people. However dramatic this appears it would be a mistake to see Paul's change as a one off. It has happened again and again, it can happen in our lives invariably more than once.

You might have noticed how easily in life we become tempted to be sceptical about even the best of things. Here we have great story of a man changed by God. We can spend our time examining the psychological and physiological impact of what was happening to Paul, but having done all that, we would still be left with the fact that he became so very different. And history teaches that the change actually lasted.

Worshipping in our congregation here are many people for whom the power of God has turned their lives around. In practical terms it has made them less selfish, more caring and certainly more ready to share the good news with others. Just as in a plant the roots matter to the general overall health of the plant, so it is with our lives. What is happening to Paul is that Jesus is dealing with the root problem and as this happens Paul becomes an entirely different kind of person. Even a cursory look around the world this morning reveals situations which seem to resist all helpful solution. In many cases we no that there needs to be change of heart. Such change is needed to confront our individual and corporate sense of stubbornness and bitterness. Not one of us is perfect and we all make mistakes. But God asks us as in Paul to recognise, that there is both the opportunity of change and the necessary gift of forgiveness made available in Jesus which sets us free to serve God and to love people.

The second road is the road of quiet transformation. This is an entirely different kind of road. Picture the scene. It's early evening and two friends are walking the seven miles to Emmaus. They're engaged in conversation when they are joined by a mysterious stranger. They experience something that we may all be familiar with, that is, they know this stranger, but somehow they don't. His name and his exact identity just for that moment seem to

escape them both. But that doesn't stop them talking because they feel that they know him well enough to at least continue the conversation. This story has inspired poets, musicians, artists and many others down the years and I'm not surprised. Luke the Gospel writer uses a very intriguing description of what happened when he said, "Their eyes were kept from recognising him."

Now my first reaction is that it seems almost incredible that they didn't know who it was. Especially if they had listened to him teach and seen him at work with people. But when I think about it. I suspect the reason for it could be this. They're caught up so much in their own sense of loss and disappointment of what had happened to Jesus that they couldn't break free from it. The journey provided them with at least the time to think and their childish illusions were shattered. They had been forced by the death of Jesus to think very deeply as to who Jesus really was. The futility of their experience leaves them with space for the Lord to enter in. He not only shares their journey but also the intimacy of their conversation. So much so, that when they arrive at Emmaus a couple of hours down the road, they persuade him to stay for a meal. There is still so much that they want to talk about. Even after such a long conversation with them, he is prepared still to walk on.

You see, Jesus never barges into our lives. He looks for invitations and not surprisingly these disciples offer Him one. Then in the atmosphere of hospitality and friendship, He breaks bread and the stranger becomes one whom they really do know. They're bound to recall how often he had broken bread with them and only a few days earlier, had taken bread in such a special way and taught that every time that they did it. They ought to remember him. Well, now they do. Their comment afterwards was, "Did not our hearts burn within us on the road when we talked with Him?" So many things seem to come together in that moment. It is a time of enlightenment and truth. The turning point was, that on the road. He had opened the Scriptures to them. Change for the two on the Emmaus road is seen to be very different than for Paul. Here, it is not sudden, but gradual, but none the less significant for that. For many people the road to Emmaus is their road. For it describes how they found

their eyes slowly opened to the light of Christ. I know like many others, I needed the sudden and immediate change that Christ can bring. But I am deeply drawn to the way in which Jesus comes along side people and reveals himself to them. When Jesus comes, it is with an almost dignified casualness.

Here we have two roads, very different and yet both are equally places where the risen Christ is discovered. The essential point about both stories is that Jesus meets people where they are. And he still does today. Whether it's the complete turn-around or the gentle presence along side us, we can count on Jesus being ready to meet us. Our experience in life could relate to one or other of these roads. For some of us there is the need to hear, see or sense in a new way so sudden as to fill us with hope in the midst of either our wrong or our failure and equally in others a need to discover how God comes along side of us and ensures us of being there.

Like those on the road to Emmaus, he can at first seem like an intruder. But he will come and deal with our disappointment and sadness. Paul often referred to the experience on the Damascus road as if it was the vital spark for everything he was to do as a Christian. For the two on the Emmaus road, their changes demonstrated in their about turn and a decision to go back to Jerusalem to share the news with the other disciples. Even though it be seven miles. When they got back the others already knew. And so it was a common sharing of exciting news.

Notice however, that they are not disappointed that the news is already spilling from the lips of the other disciples. The news is for all people so it doesn't really matter who knows first to find the road that leads to new life. I received a letter from a friend not long ago and his address included the word Jesus Lane. I like that very much. Whether it is the Damascus road, or the Emmaus road or any other road, for that matter, when it leads to Jesus there is always the possibility of new life. What matters is that we're on a road that leads to new life and know that Jesus Christ is risen. Because he is risen we can always be different. Our overwhelming sense of selfishness can be overcome and our deep concern for others can be

put to use because we step out onto the Christian way. There is a sense of invitation at the heart of the good news which calls all of us to respond to the risen Christ.

23rd May 1993

9.30 a.m. Morning Service

Radio 4

Service for the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland held on Wed. May 19th 1993 at St. Giles Cathedral to mark the 150th Anniversary of the Disruption.

Preacher: Rev. Professor Alec Cheyne.

My text is taken from the thirty second chapter of the book of Deuteronomy at verse seven from the Song of Moses in the new revised standard version of the Bible: "Remember the days of old, consider the years long passed." Remember. One hundred and fifty years ago on the eighteenth of May 1843, Edinburgh witnessed one of the most remarkable scenes in its long and eventful history. It was the opening day of the General Assembly. That morning in St. Giles the out-going Moderator Professor David Welsh of the University's Chair of Ecclesiastical History preached from chapter fourteen, verse five of the letter to the Romans: "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind."

In the afternoon the fathers and brethren reassembled in St. Andrews Church George Street. On the right of the Lord High Commissioner's throne sat members of the moderate party. Reasonable men, accommodating and down to earth, lesser descendants of those eighteenth century giants, William Robertson and his friends who had made Edinburgh the centre of the enlightened world. On the Commissioner's left sat members of the Evangelical party, enthusiastic, pious and crusading representatives of the revival associated with Wesley, Whitfield and Wilberforce. The revival that had transformed the religious face of Britain and drastically altered the balance of power within the Kirk. Excited onlookers filled the galleries and an expectant crowd waited outside. The proceedings began as usual with formalities, the ceremonial entry of the Moderator and the Queen's Commissioner and continued with prayer. But thereafter the customary order of business was dramatically

departed from. The role of members was not made up, the Assembly was not constituted in the usual way, the next Moderator was not called to office.

Instead Professor Welsh read out a long and carefully worded protest on behalf of more than two hundred members, who like himself, belonged to the Evangelical party. This wide ranging, hard hitting manifesto, declared that what most Scots, ever since the revolution of sixteen ninety, had known and valued as their countries' religious establishment was no longer acceptable. The age old partnership of Church and State together with much of the national life that depended upon it had been fatally undermined by recent decisions of the civil courts in both Edinburgh and London and by the failure of successive governments at Westminster to rectify the situation thereby created. In short, the marriage alliance of Church and State had broken down and the only course of action now open to the aggrieved party, the Church, was to effect a separation, what the authors of the protest preferred to call "a disruption." And on the afternoon of May eighteen forty three, professor Welsh read out his protest.

Immediately afterwards, translating speech into action he left both the moderatorial chair and the Assembly, thereby signifying his resolve and that of his like minded friends, to surrender the many privileges and perquisite of establishment and sever a connection with the State, which had become not only oppressive but maligned. He was followed by the leaders of the non-intrusionist party, Charmers, Gordon, Candlish, Cunningham and about two hundred other commissioners. Through crowded streets, surrounded by a multitude of well-wishers they processed to the Tanfield Hall in Canonmills, where they constituted themselves the Church of Scotland Free and set about planning for the future. For the ministers who came out, their decisions often meant really substantial sacrifices. They relinquished churches, manses, stipend and social status. For the members who followed their lead, it meant facing up to financial demands greater than any previously made upon them. For Scotland as a whole, it meant an accelerated decline, if that is the right word, a decline into an ordering of things where the State rather than the Church presided over such

essentials of community life as poor relief and education. For true religion, it meant both loss and gain. Loss because of the slow extinction of the ancient ideal of the Church as the focus of unity and service in every parish and because of the bitter animosities that divided old Kirk and free Kirk over many decades. Gain because of the flood of energy, enthusiasm and generosity which was released in the youthful free church. Leading at home to the building of hundreds of new churches, manses and schools as well as theological colleges of international renown and leading abroad to the development of missionary endeavour on a scale and of a quality scarcely equalled by any other communion in the English speaking world.

So we return to our text: "Remember the days of old, consider the years long passed." The words remind us that it is a religious duty to remember and that we do well to commemorate 'the disruption' this evening. Of course our remembrance is tinged with various emotions, as remembrance almost always is, a considerable measure of regret and even shame must certainly be intermingled with it. Perhaps church folk should be more aware of their lamentable proneness to bigotry, pharaseism, and the excessive love of power. Their tendency to identify the interests of their own particular group with the will of God and their fatal fondness for identifying piety with the privilege of being rude to everyone who disagrees with them.

We remember also with gratitude, pride and even a little envy, envy at the central place which the church and church affairs occupied in the life of Scotland one hundred and fifty years ago, as well as all the brilliant leadership. Could we equal it today? Given to the infant free church by Charmers, Candlish, Cunningham and Guthrie and to the much battered old Kirk by James Robertson, Norman McCloud and Robert Lee. Tried too at the heroic sacrifices made by ministers, especially country ministers in poor or remote places, who renounced comfort, security and an assured position in society for the sake of principle. Pride also at the unprecedentedly generous support given to the free church by rich and poor alike, generosity that still has much to teach us in the more affluent twentieth century about

Christian stewardship and even more value, the high ideal of spiritual freedom so often threatened in our day as well as theirs, an ideal whose eclipse would spell death for all our lesser liberties.

In the words of England's most eminent living historian, Sir Owen Chadwick, "The headship of Christ is that without which churches may as well be swept aside into heaps of rubble or converted into crematoria. In all the span of Christian history," he continues, "one can find no clearer demonstration of the sacred appeal to that headship in the realm of ecclesiastical politics than in the events of 1842-43 and the leadership of Thomas Chalmers."

But if our overmastering emotion this evening must be of gratitude, gratitude to our spiritual forefathers and gratitude to the God who inspired what was good in them, overruled what was bad in them and sustained them in all their conflicts and difficulties. That gratitude must surely find an expression in resolve. As we remember past divisions in the Christian community, we can hardly disregard the fact that there are still divisions among us, divisions for example about the relation between religion and politics, about the doctrine of baptism, about the ministry of women, about the language of piety and the patterns of worship, about our understanding and use of the Bible. We have noted the failings as well as the virtues of past generations. Can we avoid their errors as well as emulating their virtues?

In the fourteenth chapter of his letter to the Romans, St. Paul laid down four golden rules for Christian controversialists, among whom we must include ourselves. First, avoid censoriousness and be considerate of your adversaries, as he puts it in verse four: "Who are you to pass judgement?" And in verse thirteen: "Let us therefore cease judging one another but rather make up our minds to place no obstacle or stumbling block in a fellow Christian's way." Second, never cease to scrutinise your own convictions asking, "Am I absolutely sure about this and am I upholding my beliefs in an honourable way? As Paul puts it in verse five: "Let all be fully convinced in their own minds." And in verse sixteen: "You must not let what you think be brought into disrepute." Third, always give primacy to what is really

essential, Paul says in verse nineteen: "Let us then pursue the things that make for peace and build up the common life." And finally, put Jesus Christ to whom we are all answerable at the centre. Paul says in verse seven a and eight: "We do not live to ourselves and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord and if we die we die to the Lord." So there, whether we live or die, we are the Lords. In all our controversies and in all our remembering may the glory and the praise be His. Amen.

30th May 1993

9.30 a.m. Morning Service

Radio 4

Kensington Temple, London.

Preacher: Rev. Colin Dyer.

Over the last two thousand years, the Christian faith has grown from a few hundred believers in one nation into a global movement touching millions of people in thousands of different cultures in practically every nation under heaven. Today, over one third of the world's population claims a Christian allegiance and one in seven is personally committed to Christ in his commission. "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation."

And the church is continuing to grow. Every day more than one hundred thousand are added to the community of believers. In this first decade of the twentieth century, Christianity is growing so rapidly that within a few years time one in four of the worlds population will be active, committed Christians. In Britain too there are encouraging signs. far from the popular image of a dying church, church attendance in Great Britain is on the increase. Our own church, and there are many others like us, is rapidly growing. Week by week attendance is increasing as almost day by day people are rediscovering the claims of Christ and accepting them personally. Christianity is not dead, it is alive and well. But the question I want to ask is this. How can a movement which began two thousand years ago be flourishing today?

Indeed, as I've travelled the world over in my ministry, my belief is that the church is already entering its finest hour of growth and spiritual development. How can this be? We're obviously far removed from those early events in Galilee and Jerusalem, the scenes of our Christian beginnings. We are many miles away and many worlds apart from the culture of the lands of the Bible in which early Christianity flourished, but it seems that in every generation and every people group, whatever the race or culture, Christianity has flourished.

What fascinates me about all of this is that it has taken place in the years after Jesus Christ was taken from his followers. For almost two thousand years, the church and her Lord have been separated. Jesus Christ is no longer on this earth. Ten days ago we celebrated Ascension Day which marks the time when the bodily Christ left this earth leaving a relatively small numbers of disciples behind him. How is it then that the church has flourished in the era of the absent Lord? How is it that Christian teaching has found a place in the hearts and minds of people scattered across the globe? Millions of miles apart culturally yet joined together by a unity of understanding and belief.

Now at this point, many people refer to human factors that they say account for the spread of Christianity. There a complex historical and sociological factors that no doubt play a part. As human beings Christians are not divorced from social, political or even technological developments. Technology in particular has a part to play, printing presses of Caxton's day enabled the Christian message to be carried to many nations and now we have great telecommunication systems which allow my voice to be carried right into your very home. All these have played their part in the spread of the Christian message into today's world, but when all human explanations are tabled there is still a need for some further explanation because the Christian faith is not just about the ideas or philosophy of a man carried by human means. Jesus didn't just simply start a movement that somehow caught on. He himself said, "The words I speak to you, they are spirits and they are life." The message of Jesus had to do with a different kind of world, a world that cannot be explained away by sociology or psychology.

The universal testimony of Christians down through the centuries is that we are not just involved with a movement or a message, but with a person who is alive and who is with us every moment. And that is just the point, Jesus is no longer living on this earth in physical form. Our Ascension faith declares that Jesus Christ is ascended on high. He is seated at the right hand of our Father in heaven. All this is no accident. It was a deliberate action on his part. It's at the heart of the Christian faith. The exultation of Christ at the right hand of God

is the pinnacle of Christian belief. It was both the deliberate and necessary action on the part of Christ to leave his disciples on the earth. This was the subject of his last discourses with them in the upper room when he said, "I'm going to leave you behind, but in leaving you I am not going to leave you alone. I am not going to leave you desolate. If I go I will send another comforter, another councillor, one like me who shall be with you for ever. And in that way, though I go away I will still be with you now and forever."

Sometime ago, my wife and I were on holiday in Wales at Christmas time. We had arrived in a far corner of the country, cold tired and hopelessly lost. There had been hours of heavy snow and we couldn't seem to back on track. So we went to make enquiries at the local shop and on the way we met as jovial old gentleman driving a beat-up farm yard truck. "Follow me" he said. With that he flew into his vehicle and hurtled across the countryside. We could barely keep up with him. It seemed as if he was taking us on a grand tour of Wales. He cut across farms, went over hills and down valleys and suddenly he stopped by the sides of the road. "That's the road over there" he said. And with that he disappeared in a cloud of snowdust. Without his guidance we would never have made it and that is just like the ministry of the Holy Spirit. He has been sent by Jesus to be our helper, our friend and guide.

Today, on this day of Pentecost, this Whitsunday morning we are celebrating the coming of the Holy Spirit. The one who comes along side and brings to us the very presence of Christ Himself. The Holy Spirit is the living contact between us and our Lord Jesus Christ. And it was his coming on that first Pentecost that made all the difference to the infant church. Before he came, they were disillusioned, fearful and discouraged, but when he came they were filled with the mighty power, a power that flows from the presence of Christ himself. Afterwards the church rose up as a dynamic community made alive and sustained by the animating presence of the spirit of Christ. Indeed, it's the relationship with the Holy Spirit that is and always has been the driving force of the Christian faith. Today Christians everywhere are being awakened by the Holy Spirit. Without him we are formal, inactive and

dead, but with him we are a force that cannot be stopped. We have an authority and power that can never be overcome. With the Holy Spirit our weaknesses become vehicle of his strength, our darkened thinking is illuminated by his glorious truth and broken despairing hearts are made whole. It is no wonder that Jesus said, "It is good for you that I go away because if I go then the comforter will come."

How we need his influence today! As I speak to you, we look out onto a Britain that is torn apart by fear, violence and by a sense of despair. But the Holy Spirit, who is a spirit of love, joy and peace can come to you right where you are at this very moment. He can come and bring the testimony of Christ to your very heart. He is the spirit of truth and he can lead you and guide you into all truth. He is the spirit of joy, who can bring you out of despair into his peace and fulfilment. He can be your friend, who will never leave you nor forsake you in your time of loneliness and confusion. And to the carefree and comfortable he a divine disturbance that you can turn outward towards those who are needy and hurting and he can lead you into a life of dedicated service to others. Let him come to you today. Let him find a way into your heart for the Holy Spirit can come and breath life into you. The life of Christ.

6th June 1993

9.30 am. Morning Service

Radio 4

Celebrating the 21st Anniversary of the United Reformed Church at Carver Memorial Church, Windemere, Cumbria.

Preacher: Rev. Alan Gaunt.

Minister: What is it then that keeps the life of the streams that came together in the United Reformed Church flowing on together? One of the members of the congregation of Carver Memorial Church, here in Windemere is this year's Moderator of the United Reformed Church Ruth Clark. Her work as Moderator includes travelling around the family of churches here in Britain and also the wider family of Reformed churches. She is not able to be here today, but earlier I had asked her what is it in the life of the church that is precious to her?

She replies: The United Reformed Church is of the Reformed tradition it's a Church of the Reformation and the Reformation led great emphasis on the authority of the Bible, so that is the centre of our authority. And the United Reformed Church tries to approach the Bible responsibly and to interpret it in present day setting, within a relevant and perhaps sometimes, a lively form of worship. It also offers members opportunity to participate in planning worship and to making decisions about the kind of worship they want and also to help lead parts of the service themselves. I think it also offers a particular kind of pastoral care, not only by the minister, but by the elders' meeting where every elder has an intimate charge of members of the church or people who are active members of the congregation, you get a pastoral relationship with them so it doesn't all depend on the minister.

Speaker: Some say these are difficult times for the churches, in her travels as Moderator, what does she find to give her cause for encouragement?

Woman replies: I think those who are in good heart are those who have set themselves achievable objectives having seen a vision as to the direction that they want to go. I see

churches now in good, new practical buildings or well on the way to getting those buildings. I see more acceptance, though this is perhaps quite slow, more acceptance of women and men working quite naturally together in the church and breaking down the traditional gender expectations. I see local churches working very much towards trying to be an all-age community. I see churches that are very much in good heart because they are open to their local ecumenical possibilities and have either recently formed united churches and one in seven of our churches are actually united with Methodist churches. That's a very high proportion. And to sum all that up, I see the local churches being in good heart, where they are vision led, led by their vision, rather than led by their financial difficulties and where they're inspired by what they want to do in terms of mission rather than being weighed down by the maintenance.

Minister: This weeks' visitors to the Windermere centre from Fareham come from one of those churches that appeared to be in good heart. Their history in their town goes back three hundred years but a new town centre building means that the old centre is to go. They're in the middle of the building a new church. At their evening meal they talked with me about their plans.

Man: we have now started to seriously rethink our role in Fareham and what the church's mission should be, what we should be attempting to offer. we have ourselves got to knit ourselves together and concentrate our efforts so we may go outreach properly. It's not just a move from an old building to a new one, it's a new start.

Woman: I must admit as a mum with a family and job, I come to recharge myself here, that is this to me that recharging the batteries both physically, mentally and spiritually and then, and then we can perhaps go back. And the outreach is the thing we're going to look for and think of things other than just the church family because you can get very insular and inward looking and you sort of well, this is our church and this is us and we keep together and we care for each other, but you sometimes get, you can you get comfortable and in a rut and you forget the outside world and other churches.

Minister: But you presumably planned it. What, what was the vision that you planned around? The sanctuary, for instance what was it that influenced that decision?"

Another man: I think flexibility was the first one. Flexibility of worship. To be able to move things around, no fixed pulpit, fixed pews, though we did discuss pews. Yes, they were to be movable, but we wanted a building that could be used not just for a standard service but a musical tide or drama production, that kind of thing. So we wanted that flexibility, but on the other hand we did want it to have a pleasant appearance.

Another woman: Now we can actually see it beginning to grow. A lot of the work of course was doing the foundations, a lot of time was spent on those, but now we've got the shell of the church. And there's a cross on the top. There was a lot of partnership and team-work and a lot of time spent both by the elders and the architects and the church as a whole because we all care as to what is going to be the end result. Because it's got to last.

A different man: The planning of the furnishings, we do it in church meetings and we feel good in the church together.

Minister: I am now walking down the path to the lake, the stream is on my right hand side. Not a straight course as it bends round the roots of tree. It's diverted by natural obstacles, it gets turbulent as it cascades over the rocks in it's path, yet for all its bends and turns it still proceeds towards the lake getting deeper and deeper as it receives more and more water. For all it's froth it soon becomes a clear stream again in which life can prosper. It's an image of our church and of us, this is a stream which flows from a temple. Day by day, the stream of our life as God's people gets deeper in spite of divergence and turbulence like a million other streams it rolls on towards a God who is both its source of it's goal. In over eighteen churches, week by week, the word of God is sought and found, the word is found in Scripture, in silence and in song. I once discovered there, the word of God is found everywhere it becomes human words in poetry and politics and play. It's found in neighbours, newspapers and novels. Of course the purpose of our worship is to pay attention to God. The prayers we say, the hymns we sing, the Scriptures we read is the word that

comes alive in the preaching all aims to pierce the shell of indifference and self-concern that people create around them to keep out God. The silences of ours to float freely in God's presence and be upheld by it, like boats on the lake below. The sacraments allow us to touch and be touched by God.

When a minister holds a baby in his or her arms or stands in a pool and holds a believer and uses water as a sign of a new life beginning in them, we're reminded that we offer as of held in the arms of God that never lets us go and never lets us off. Bread is broken at the table and wine is poured out and we remember the one whose body is broken and whose blood is spilt for us and He is closer to us than breathing and nearer than hands and feet. Anger, despair, resentment and bitterness can be burnt up like mist in a morning sun. In the life of the United Reformed Church, the doctrinal tests are few. We ask people to share with us in a life long pilgrimage discovering what it means to say that Jesus Christ is Lord. We know how difficult it is to translate the will of the transcendent God into daily decisions which we all have to take.

That's why we believe in local church people gathering together in church meetings, so that they can share with each other their understanding of God, with their experience of the Spirit and their knowledge of Christ. None of us by ourselves know the height and depth and length and breadth of the love of God, but together there is some chance of knowing more of it. Living together as a body of people dedicated to God is precious to us.

Walking now, further down the path, I've come to a wood, mainly beech trees but over there is some ash and a few silver birch and pervading the atmosphere is a scent of wild garlic and round us the song of bird. Wherever the river goes it sustains life beyond itself. That's the stream that flows from the temple, the image of our church and others. It is because the humble men and women, who went before us, learned in their churches that they were not the dross of human existence, but they were in fact each uniquely precious in the sight of God. They had to learn how to read the Scriptures, how to conduct meetings and how to organise themselves. Equipped with such knowledge and skills, they went into their

local communities and educated children, demanded a free press and a place in higher education for all, challenging those in power, taking positions of political leadership, setting up factories, shops and industries. The river flowed from the temple and gave life far beyond itself. But still the river flows, still our people have message I believe for today's world.

And the message is, that there is a God and that God is like Jesus. On the basis of that they challenge all other authorities and the challenge is, are their words and their actions consistent with the reality of a God whose is like Jesus? Of course it's not always like this, but we do encourage each other to get involved and in our pilgrimage to see our daily work as a means of responding to the call of God and to see that the weakest in our communities are also children of God. And stand with them and articulate what it's like to be poor, or to be without work, or to be homeless, or what it's like to have Aids. Many local churches have set up day centres for the elderly, workshops for the unemployed young people, hostels for homeless young people, centres for exploring the arts, meals on wheels services. And they do these things not because they are just good in themselves, but because they believe them to be signs of the kingdom of God, in the community.

We know we're not the only ones, the only stream, we know it makes many streams to make a lake and many lakes to make an ocean, but this is our stream. We don't make exaggerated claims for it, but we long for the day when we can join fully with other streams, other churches and other men and women who have discovered something about God and about human life. It's about truth, justice, mercy and love. We long for the day when we can be part of that great river, which will bring life wherever it goes and healing for the nations.

13th June 1993

9.30 a.m. Morning Service

Radio 4

Gilnerherck Presbyterian Church, Belfast.

Preacher: Rev. John McVay.

I just want to know the truth. To the person who wants to know, that's a simple straight forward request and it can be very frustrating if it seems that the truth is being concealed. On the other hand, when the pressure is on you or me to give an answer it's never quite so plain or easy. And the consequences of what you might say may be a whole new chapter. "I only want to know who broke the window," says dad to the nervous footballers in the garden. "Well, it happened like this." That usually seems a prelude to a whole lot more words, trying to explain, trying to cover up. It only serves to make dad more angry when he just wants to know who did it, who's to blame.

"All the truth that's fit to print" was as a slogan of a newspaper some years ago. Nowadays there's so much printed, that with all the conflicting stories, we find it hard to know what the truth is. What the papers say covers a wide-range of views about how long the government is going to survive, or which football manager is going to resign, or whether the green shoots of recovery are really showing. We read and talk and debate to know what the truth is. Most of the time, we're left uncertain and maybe bewildered. Even the courts are finding it very difficult to establish the truth in some of the cases which come before them. And if you were to ask, what the truth is in our Northern Ireland situation, you would find plenty of people willing to tell you and at great length. But I suspect that you would find it rather hard to put it all together.

When I was at University studying philosophy, some of my friends used to tease me with the question, "Well, have you found it, have you got the truth, yet?" The stock answer was "No, not yet, but it will come out in the exams." We kept that game going, right up to finals,

when the last word was that, the truth would be presented to us with our degrees at graduation. You see, the truth covers everything from “yes or no answers” to deeply involved philosophical or religious or political responses to those issues which intrigue and perplex human beings. Our concern for truth has often been distorted by the assumption that there is one, simple formulation of the truth to be found. A bit like the crock of gold at the end of the rainbow. This notion of the truth as something which we could possess can be an irritant in our efforts to express and to live out our faith. We are burdened by the feeling that we have to know and uphold and understand certain doctrines in order to have faith. It becomes a matter of words and intellect. And many people are left feeling that they are second rate Christians if all they can manage is a simple faith unadorned by the long words of the preachers and by the obscure language of the theologians.

In the Bible we can read much about faith without having to go on a long ramble into philosophy. The Bible is full of imagery and stories, of pictures and parables. It tells us much about people, living people, and it sets out much about God and in the interplay of these, it leads us forward in knowing what is true without ever presenting a package deal. Sometimes it talks about it as wisdom and one of the outstanding figures of wisdom was Solomon, a king whose sole request was for the gift of wisdom so that he would be able to rule his people with justice. We’ve read the story of how he resolved that dispute between the two women who were claiming the one child. There was a clear conflict in their accounts of what had happened and of whose child had died. Direct questioning was never going to get the answer. Solomon’s way of solving the dispute sounds rather draconian in its mathematical simplicity: give half a baby to each woman. In that way, he drew out the maternal instinct which would not have the baby harmed even if it meant having to give up possession of her own child. The real mother, full of love for her child said, Please, your majesty, don’t kill the child, give it to her.” What Solomon did was a risky course of action, but it certainly got through to what was true.

The story helps me with the realisation that truth comes out of our human nature, not merely from our minds. If you want to know what is true, then don't play games with words that will only tie you in knots. Look at what you are doing, look at what people around you are living for, look at what their actions show. And those things will bring out the truths which undergird their lives and the truths that undergird communities and societies and whole nations with their traditions. And maybe those things will make us confront what we have tried to cover over with a web of words. Jesus had a keen sense of the nature of people and he got through the screen of their words and their public posturing. For he was criticised for spending too much time with the wrong people. But it was in those people he saw more of true humanity along with their rather publicly known human failings, than he saw in the harsh and dogmatic and arrogant pillars of society. Jesus often left people confused because he didn't fall into their preconceived views. But that's precisely how he spurs us on to discover more of what is true in the whole of life, in ourselves and in what is around us and in the ways of God. He has given us a strong indication that there is more to God than we can ever define by our words. He has given us a picture of the openness of God and of the love of God which greatly expands our love of life and of what is true and good within life. That's what we're going to sing of now in a hymn written by F. W. Faber:

‘There's a wideness in God's mercy
like wideness of the sea,
there's a kindness in His justice
which is more than liberty.

20th June 1993

9.30 am. Morning Service

Radio 4

R.C. Church of The Sacred Heart, Highfields, Leicester.

Ecumenical Service to celebrate BBC "Radio on Show." Congregation consists of 1/3

Europeans, 1/3 Afro-Caribbean, 1/3 Asian.

Preacher: Rt. Rev. Dr. Thomas Butler Bishop of Leicester.

May I speak in the name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Amen. Do you know what it feels like to go to bed hungry? Do you know that empty gnawing feeling at the base of your stomach that seems somehow to spread throughout your body? I expect that all of us have experienced that at least once in our lives for one reason or another. Even Bishops have that experience now and again. But for many people throughout the world hunger is a daily experience: when the rains fail or the soldiers burn the fields and kill the farmers, or the relief convoy is held up, or simply one child too many comes onto the scene. Millions of people in many countries know that experience of hunger. And not only overseas, in our own country, in Leicester, in Highfields, there's plenty of physical hunger about. Hunger born of poverty, ill-health, unemployment, debt. Hunger that gnaws at people's bodies.

But there's another kind of hunger too, which gnaws not at bodies but at souls. The hunger of communities which feel empty and dispirited, of families knowing emotional stress and disruption, of individuals who've decided that society has nothing to offer them, that their lives have no purpose. Again, we all know what that kind of hunger is like. We've probably experienced it ourselves. You may indeed be going through it now. Hunger is made all the worse when there is the feeling that all around there are well-filled people without any problems, indeed with all they could desire. In our contemporary society especially where we're daily bombarded with media images of plenty, success, happiness and satisfaction,

both physical and spiritual hunger can be particularly hard to endure, when seemingly, there's such wealth all around.

The five thousand people we heard about in our Gospel reading we heard about a few minutes ago, must have been experiencing that sinking feeling of emptiness in their stomach, as that realised that they weren't going to get a meal that evening. How could they? They were in a desert place far from any source of food and they had next to nothing between them. True, there was a lad who had five loaves and two fishes. But what use was that among so many? And then a miracle happened. Not only were they fed, there was so much left over that they gathered up twelve baskets full of scraps. This wasn't just meeting their hunger, it was demonstrating the abundance that God provides for His faithful people. I believe that Gospel story speaks to us today wherever we may be. To us certainly here in Highfields, to you listeners in your homes, to people all over the world. It speaks of the way in which, when our gracious God is recognised in our lives, He can satisfy our hunger by His abundant provision. It speaks in Isaiah's words of "good news for the afflicted, healing for the broken hearted, liberation for the captives, the Lord's favour." And there are three things that we must notice about the way in which this miracle happens.

First of all, in the Gospel story, it happens because of the faith of an insignificant boy. He was nobody special in the terms by which we usually judge people. He was the sort of lad who'd be passed over in a crowd but at this moment he was the decisive figure who made it all possible. We in Leicester are nothing special either, we too are ordinary people, but things of great moment turn on us. New possibilities depend on our having the child-like faith and confidence of that boy. If we really believe that situations of despair, poverty and broken-ness, can be transformed through us, then we are half way there already. Each one of us has a role to play in God's gracious provision, each one of us is special.

The second thing to notice is that the resources to feed the five thousand are already in their midst. The five loaves and the two fishes may not seem like much, but in reality it's enough, more than enough when touched by the Lord's gracious hand. What that surely says

to us is that the resources to address our problems are already with us, in our own lives, in our own neighbourhoods, in our own civic and national communities, in our own world. The credit-union that the churches together here in Highfields are establishing, is a perfect example of that. It provides an alternative to the commercial loans through which so many people sink further into debt. And the financial resources to combat such anxiety are here already. What's needed is a creative and visionary way of using them and hopefully the credit-union will provide that. In other ways too, a community like this has enormous wealth, particularly of human resources. If those resources can be used in the right way then we can expect signs of abundance to appear in our midst as in a miracle.

But lastly, that will only happen if we're prepared to share. The five thousand could only be fed because they were prepared to sit down together on the grass and share out the food fairly between them. Only then did they discover that there was more than enough. And so for us too. Our spiritual hunger, like the physical hunger of so many in our world can only be met if we're prepared to sit down together and share. Of course, life in a city is all about sharing. We couldn't really survive at all if we didn't depend upon one another for so many of our needs. We're knit together in a complicated web of relationships, but the churches right at the heart of the city's life are here to shed light on that truth, to show to our world a pattern of real sharing, to challenge our world to justice in its systems of distribution. To give to our world a vision of unity in its broken-ness. As Christians we believe that sharing is not only part of us but part also of the God whom we worship.

Earlier in this service in that beautiful Indian chant "Sharanum," we placed ourselves under the shelter, under the protection, under the refuge of the abundant life of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The three persons who endlessly share in one another's life and love which then spills over into all creation. We now celebrate our trust in that God and call upon God's name as we sing our affirmation of faith: "Our faith is in the One God."

27th June 1993

9.30 a.m. Morning Service

Radio 4

St. Mary's, Bideford, Devon.

Preacher: Rev. Paul Smith.

In the name of the living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen. Good morning everybody. It was not surprising that knowing I once worked as a shipwright in Devonport dockyard, one of my colleagues at Social Services asked me if I were pleased that the yard had been awarded the refitting contract last week. I had to reply, "Yes." But I was also concerned for what it meant for the people of Rosyth. They may possibly suffer as a result of it. The revelation from the minister in parliament last Thursday was received with great pleasure in this part of the country, but with disappointment and frustration in Scotland.

Of course, we are all used to hearing all kinds of revelations now-a-days. The television news service, the news papers, the radio all lead with a variety of revelations which for some appear to give pleasure, but for others a great deal of anxiety. What has always amazed me as a Christian is that the greatest revelation ever known to human-kind appears to have little interest to our news media.

Of course I'm referring to the revelation that God's Son Jesus Christ visited our earth. God is the Revealer as we heard in our first lesson read by Robert, the lesson from Hebrews. God has revealed himself through the ages, through the prophets who pointed to the coming of the Messiah. God has not left us to wander about as if in darkness. At His appointed time, God the Creator and Sustainer of this wonderful world in which we live, that God, sent His only Son Jesus Christ to live and to die for us, to bear away our sins as the hymn writer puts it. But God's revealing of His love for us did not stop there. He rose Jesus from the dead and gave us the gift of the Holy Spirit. God has revealed Himself to us in Jesus Christ. He wants

us to know him. He wants you to know him. He wants us to respond to him. He wants you to respond to him, to his love for us.

When Jesus spoke to Nicodemus in John chapter 3 verse 1 and following, Jesus told him he needed to be reborn. Born from above, born through the divine operation of the Holy Spirit. He went on to explain that he himself would come into the hearts and lives of his people. The wonderful thing is been over the years, nearly twenty that I've been here in this church, that a large number of people have taken that very step and have received Christ into their lives.

The other wonderful thing is that there are millions of people throughout our world who can witness to the fact, both young and old, rich and poor, can witness to the fact that our Lord Jesus is real. They have accepted his love. Having accepted his love gives us the freedom, the freedom that we are thinking about this morning. But it also brings with it responsibility. Christian responsibility is always conditioned by Christian love, which is itself a reflection of God's love. Christian freedom is the freedom to serve. It is only in Christ that the person is free from self, free from sin, free to be what God would have us be. Free to be what we ought to be. Freedom comes to us as we receive Jesus Christ as King of our hearts and Lord of our lives.

As a teenager, I asked the Lord Jesus into my life and I've never looked back. I can remember that day, it's over forty years ago as if it were yesterday. And although of course there have been times in my life when I've had problems, illness, disappointment and frustration, I've always been aware of God's presence to encourage, to strengthen, to comfort and to be with me. Whatever I may have achieved in my life is because of the knowledge that God in Christ is with me. What God in Christ has done for me, I believe he can do for you. If you're lonely, upset; if you're frustrated, even angry; if you have been ill-treated, abused let down; if you have suffered and are suffering at this very moment; if you have been thinking and wondering about the things of God, God is speaking to you, speaking to you at this very moment and He wants you to respond. He wants you to know and to love

Him. He wants to come and live in your heart and your life. He wants you to express the freedom which comes from knowing and loving Him. He wants to take away any feeling of guilt, of sinfulness, any feeling of rejection or bitterness, even unforgiveness that you may be experiencing at this moment and He wants to you a new start. Will you let Him do that? Will you do as I did, all those years ago, will you let the Lord Jesus into your life? He loves you.

I'm going to finish my sermon this morning with a prayer, a prayer when I first heard it spoke very deeply to me, a prayer which I say now for all of us in church and for all of you listening: May the loving and healing mercies of our risen Lord Jesus, present with us now, fill your whole being, body, mind and spirit. May He strengthen and heal you. May He take from you all that hurts and harms you. May He give you His peace, now and always, Amen.

4th July 1993

Radio 4

American Church, London. The Whitfield Memorial Church, 79, Tottenham Court Road, London. Founded in 1969, it now embraces at least seventeen different denominational backgrounds and twenty four nationalities.

Preacher: Rev. James Schmidt.

With my sister and brother-in-law visiting us from the States, my wife Dee and I have been wearing our British tour-guide hats lately. We're guests in a fascinating and beautiful country and I especially enjoy walking through the magnificent churches and cathedrals. On the one hand there's the stateliness and tradition that draws together all of the national consciousness and Westminster and St. Paul's. On the other are fascinating little parish churches in the countryside.

I wonder, have you ever visited Trinity Church in Stratford. As you look down the church and you see the choir slanted to one side, the architect was trying to remind us of how the head of Christ bowed on the cross. Or if you happen to cross the wonderful stain glass representations of the Christian life as serving the least of these my brothers and sisters in churches such as St. Michael's over in St. Albans. And continually impressed and fascinated by the builders and architects who used vast amounts of creativity to express their faith and to prepare something, not only their immediate use, but also for those who had come after them.

Moses was doing something similar to that in our first Scripture reading this morning. In it, we see him getting the people ready to receive Torah, divine instruction from God. What he was about to share with them involved the total shaping of their lives. It involved something that would make God visible in them, as other people looked at them. Whatever short-comings the Israelites had displayed in the exodus from Egypt and in the years of wilderness wandering, Moses was still convinced that they had been chosen by God for a

special purpose. Through them and through God's Torah all the people of the earth were going to receive blessing. There was so much at stake that there was an urgency to his faith, there was an urgency to his self-understanding. A confidence that he was doing something which was bigger than himself.

During colonial days in the United States, this same attitude, even the same exodus imagery was adopted by many leaders of the church. In 1670, for example, Samuel Danforth spoke of "New England's errand into the wilderness." "Simply getting to the New World, or to the New Promised land," said Danforth, "wasn't the end that God had in mind for these coloners. There was a larger purpose, there was the building of a whole new way of life." John Witthrop went even a step further, he talked about coloners being indentured servants to God who had made a covenant with them. They had not come to the Massachusetts's Bay colony merely for self advancement but rather to establish true religion and a style of government which would sustain the faith as they understood it.

As we look back over the centuries, there's tendency both to romanticise achievements and also to gloss over their more controversial aspects of self-understanding. But what really impresses me most about these earliest leaders of the church in North America was their sense of urgency, their sense of purpose in what they were doing. Religion wasn't an add-on for them, religion wasn't simply a Sunday morning activity for them. They carried their huge family Bibles with them across the Atlantic, through New England into the great Western Reserve and into the South and into the Plain States in the Pacific West. They read their Bibles and they understood themselves to be a part of God's story that was unfolding through the Scriptures. On the whole, they had just as many short-comings as we do and of course we can see theirs more easily looking back over the years. But at the same time, there was difference in the way that they expressed their faith.

Comparing present-day believers with them, a friend suggests that we, in the late twentieth century, tend to be a little brighter, a little cooler. As with nearly every field of knowledge there has been an literal explosion of information coming from Biblical scholars,

archaeologists, theologians and church leaders. But at the same time that we have gained so much in understanding, there seems to be more of an internalising of the faith and less of an outward sharing. More thought of the church as being a sanctuary apart from the world, rather than a faith which is the flaming centre of life, radiating beyond self to others.

I think that's worth considering on this fourth of July weekend as we celebrate our religious heritage. The rallying cries of the American past concerning separation of church and state and freedom of religion don't seem to carry the same dynamic meaning as they did for previous generations. For many in our time, they've become almost an emulisation against religion.

An old sea captain spotted a light on a collision course with his ship one foggy evening, instantly he had his communications man flash a message that the other should change degrees, change the course ten degrees to the north. Just as quickly a message came back, telling the captain to change his course ten degrees to the south. Now the captain wasn't used to having his authority challenged liked that and so he sent a message that he was a "full captain" and that the other should change course ten degrees to the north immediately. No sooner had he finished with that message, that another one came back stating that the sender was a seaman first class and the captain's ship should change course ten degrees to the south immediately. Really angry now, the captain fired back the message "I am a battle-ship, move ten degrees to the north." And just as quickly came back the reply, "I am a lighthouse, move ten degrees to the south." All too frequently, that's our story in the twentieth century, isn't it? We know all about the life of faith we're called to, but we're on another course.

There are so many other demands, so many competing demands placed upon our lives and we don't want to change. We desperately need something to move us and that's what we find in our Gospel reading this morning. There are some important differences between our Lords words and the teaching in Deuteronomy, but there's the same urgency in both of the readings. Over and over again for example, Moses compares the new way of life from God with other ways of living and then calls upon the people to choose what God is giving to

them. Our Gospel reading certainly has all of that urgency, but Jesus doesn't tell us to choose his way, to change our priorities, to get our lives all together, to change the course of our ship.

Instead, Jesus tells us that we have been chosen, that he has taken the initiative. His disciples didn't choose him, he chose them. It's not just a happy coincidence that we're all gathered for worship this morning, it's Jesus Christ who has called us and who has brought us together. What's more, Jesus didn't simply give his disciples new law. First, he gave them himself.

Over in the shadow of St. Paul's Cathedral, there's a little green area called Postman's Park. If you go down there you'll find a wall that has tiles on it, that have the names of various people in this area who lost their lives while trying to help or to save others. Inspiring acts of heroism are recorded down there. One person jumped into the river Thames to try to pull out a friend who was drowning, another rushed in front of a wagon to push a youngster out of the way. Inspiring acts of heroism.

But John's Gospel goes even further, making it clear that Jesus, not spontaneously, but quite deliberately gave himself for us on the cross, in order to reveal the fullness of God's love. To show us love which gives of itself for the benefit of others, to show us love which forgives even the unforgivable. He loves with abandonment, putting flesh on the teachings of the law so that we can see this new life that God is giving to us. The enemy is given a face, the outcast is called by name. He takes the time to listen, He looks deeply into life and He calls us to this same way of loving. He calls us because this is where the joy is, He wants us to have this kind of fulfilment in our lives. That's just how much he loves us. He calls us His friends, that's remarkable, the great God whom we worship, the God who made us and who became incarnate in Jesus Christ calls us his friends. "No longer do I call you servants," he says, "I call you friends, because I have made known to you everything."

There was nothing demeaning in Biblical times about being called a servant of God, Moses was a servant of God. There was the designation given to Joshua, even to King David.

The apostle Paul called fellow believers “servants of God.”⁶ It was an honour to be called that, but Jesus goes much further. He calls us friends and he promises that God’s blessing reaches through us to others in simple acts of love and caring. The living out of our faith is of extreme importance. This is the fruit that really endures and this is something that each and everyone of us can do as God gives us opportunity. Jesus has chosen us and he sends us out so that all people can experience his love through us. This is how he would have us use our freedom.

In the Scriptures, freedom isn’t freedom from certain things, rather it’s freedom for, freedom for service to the living God. What we have is sheer grace, the exciting and urgent call to be part of something that is bigger than ourselves. What we have is sheer grace which gives purpose and meaning to life, both now and throughout all eternity. Amen.

11th July 1993

9.30 a.m. Morning Service

Radio 4

St. Oswald's Church, Filey, North Yorkshire.

Preacher: Rev. Chris Humphries.

There's nothing quite like a life-boat launch this time of the year to attract people to the cobble landing at Filey. That's the area on the sea front where all the fishing boats are. No matter where you are in the town you'll hear the tremendous bang as the first maroon goes up, followed by a second if the big off-shore boat is needed. Lives to be saved, the dangers of the sea to be faced. But the call to man-the-life-boat can just as easily come in the depths of winter when a gale is blowing and waves as big as a house crash down on the valiant boat and crew. The sheer power of the North Sea. It's interesting to see how the psalms often mention the power of the sea and affirm that God's power is greater, mightier than the thunder of many waters. The question is, what does God's power do? And how do we get plugged into it?

Michael Ramsey, that wise Archbishop, once said, "There is nothing about God that you cannot see in Jesus." And the reading we had from St. Luke's Gospel certainly tells us a lot about God's power at work in Jesus. Power first in his preaching as the people crowded round to listen to the word of God. Power in his presence and the way he spoke. Power that still needed Peter's words of trust to be the trigger for God's action.

Night fishing is the trick of the trade well known to fishermen in Filey and can be a big help in ensuring a worthwhile catch. Peter had fished all his life and his instinct told him it was a waste of time to continue fishing in the daytime. I wouldn't presume to tell the Filey fishermen when or where to fish, but something in Jesus enabled Peter to put his own knowledge and skills to one side and simply to trust, "Master we've worked hard all night, we've caught nothing, but if you say so we'll cast the nets out one more time."

And then an extraordinary kind of power is revealed in the huge catch of fish. Rather like changing water into wine or feeding five thousand people, here Jesus gives a sign that God's kingdom has come in power. Two boats laden with fish struggling to get to shore, no EEC quotas to worry about, plenty of money to be made. But by this stage Simon Peter's thoughts are elsewhere. When the power of God is that close it highlights our own helplessness and frailty. "Go away from me Lord," he says, "I am a sinful man." And notice that whereas earlier on Peter had called Jesus "Master" now he calls him "Lord." But here's the most marvellous turn in the story, when Peter, this rough-and-ready man of the sea is quaking in his boots. Jesus assures him there's nothing to fear, "Don't be afraid Simon. From now on you'll be catching men, helping people to be caught up and transformed by the power of God."

Christians believe that Jesus still calls people and enables them to share his love with others. If you want to know more about the power of God in your life, it's all about letting go and letting God. We feel safe holding onto our own way of doing things and it can seem pretty risky to ask God to take control. What will happen to our job, family, plans for the future? It comes down to whether we can really feel we can trust God with our lives. Simon Peter had to realise the limits of his own power and let the power of the spirit of God within him give him the strength and courage and wisdom he needed. He had to learn that lesson many times during his life time.

But in this story of the marvellous catch of fish at least he was open to what God was doing. It hit him with a bang that there was more to Jesus than even the teaching and preaching and healing. Here was someone different, someone worth following to the ends of the earth. Following Jesus today is still about recognising who he is. Not just a holy figure of history, but the living Son of God. Following Jesus is also about recognising who we are. Like Peter we may well feel we're not good enough for God. That's right, we're not. But if you hand over to God those worries, doubts and fears that keep you bogged own, then He can lift you up and fill you with His power.

Once we filled up the family car with diesel instead of petrol. To its great credit, it kept going, sort of chugged like a tractor down the main street. Life without God's power is as different as having the wrong fuel. Not only are we going at half speed, but the engine's getting clogged up as we try so hard to make it on our own. What a difference when we fill up with the power that Jesus offers. If you're open to God then you're already at the petrol pump. You can fill up by praying, through inspiring worship, reading your Bible, sharing with other Christian folk. These things strengthen faith and the fuel, the resources for Christian living can flow in, like high grade petrol, five star love caring, sharing and giving. Then we can really start to motor. Let go and let God, just like to the very first Christian followers did. There was a cost in letting go, they left their nets and boats and everything to follow Jesus. There were risks in letting God lead and guide them, many of them died cruel deaths for their new found belief. But their letting go has in fact let God into our lives, their handing on of the Christian faith in the end crossed the English channel to our own land. The costs and the risks are still there for us, but so is the mighty power of God to transform us with His life and love.

18th July 1993

9.30 a.m. Morning Service

Radio 4

United Service from Mount Pleasant Baptist Church, Pembroke, West Wales.

Preacher: Rev. Robert James.

Where will it all end? I've lost count of the number of times my mother's asked that question. Probably as often as she's said, "I don't know what the world's coming too." And she's had good reason this year; even some newscasters have said we don't hear enough good news. We've seen terrible pictures from places like Bosnia and Somalia and at home too we've been sickened by events like the bombing in Warrington. I've seen a tabloid headline screaming, "Shoot the lot, a trials too good for people like this." I've heard a church leader say he had difficulties squaring his feelings and his faith at this time. People everywhere are asking some very relevant and very searching questions, such as, "How can things like this happen? and where is it all going to end?"

Like many people I've been horrified too, but I don't have any problems squaring my faith with my feelings. In fact, I'm sure that the Christian message has answers. Answers that satisfy, answers that offer realistic hope in the face of it all. I can imagine they were asking similar questions in Jesus's day: The world was just as needy, pain, suffering and atrocities were as much a part of the human landscape then as they are today.

Now here in Luke I see Jesus proclaiming an exciting message. He takes words originally given to encourage and inspire Jews suffering in captivity and he says, "I've come with good news for troubled people and it's for now not just the distant future." Sadly, he didn't get a good reaction for long. In fact, they tried to murder him. Indeed, as time went on the reaction to his message became more and more violent until he was crucified. The reason is very simple. His message was not the one they wanted, it was too disturbing. It's often not a

popular message. But it was relevant in first century Palestine. It's been just as relevant throughout this town's history and we need to hear it today too.

Jesus doesn't change and neither does his message. He began by saying that fundamentally our problems are spiritual. Jesus took words the Jews of His day understood well, by captivity and release. And in its mission too, the church has to oppose evil in all its forms. Including those structures, institutions and practices which oppose God's will for this world. But having said that, Jesus announced that primarily we need to be set free from spiritual oppression. For he believed we'd been trapped between two terrible spiritual enemies, sin and Satan.

I've not long returned from Croatia. And I've seen at first hand some of the appalling things people can do to each other. One of team couldn't even come to church, he just walked around Reaca crying. But while I can be shocked I can't be surprised. Long ago I concluded the Bible was right. The heart of man is desperately wicked, human nature is flawed and twisted, we can't escape it. This is what led the apostle Paul to cry out finally, "Miserable creature that I am, who is there to rescue me? In my unspiritual nature I am a slave to the law of sin." Jesus said anyone who sins is a slave to sin. Human nature by itself however, doesn't fully explain human history.

I talked about this with a Croatian pastor. We were trying to understand the speed, the craziness and the depravity of all we'd seen happening. We need to remember that behind it all there are malignant forces of evil, operating at all levels of society. Now when I speak of the devil, I'm not thinking of some crude image, but rather those mysterious dark powers the Scripture calls the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realm. Yes there's human sin, but remembering the powers of darkness will help us understand how groups of people made in the image of God behave as they do. You can see it in the Balkans.

But it's happening in Britain too. We're seeing a society emerge where selfish and injustice are encouraged. Promiscuity and adultery are accepted. Divorce on an ever increasing spiral and a society where our children too are increasingly under threat. Honesty

and a respect for others and their property is fast disappearing. And it's all caused by a destructive combination of sin and spiritual evil. But tragically, people can't see it. It's always easy to see the wrong in others, the tabloids thrive on it and national hatreds feed on it. The hardest thing to admit is that we're made of the same stuff, that we're sinners who fall short of God's standards. And that given similar circumstances we could all do the same thing. To use Jesus's metaphor, we are spiritually poor or poverty stricken. It's hard to admit because we can't see it, we're blind to it and that's the real tragedy. Until we realise that we'll never understand this world or appreciate why Jesus brings good news. After all, he said, "It's only those who know they're sick, who are in need of a doctor."

G. K. Chesterton once wrote a letter to the Times responding to the question, "What's wrong with the world?" He replied very succinctly, "Dear sir, I am." When we see that, then things can begin to change. And the good news is this: Jesus came to give sight to the blind and he still does. He can still free people from their spiritual blindness. For instance, forgiving someone is never easy. In fact it can prove the most costly thing we're ever asked to do. I've been humbled by Gordon Wilson's forgiving spirit for those who killed his daughter in Inniskilling. And I've been humbled too by examples I encountered in Croatia. Like a young mother who had seen her father and two brothers murdered in Bosnia. Forgiving people in such situations is difficult and there are atrocities on all sides. But I know this, when people see how much it cost Jesus to forgive them, when it dawns on how much he loves them, then it becomes easier to forgive others.

We do have good news, people can be forgiven anything and they can change. Cycles of hatred and bitterness can be broken, Jesus can not only forgive anyone, He can set them free to love others even their enemies. I can truly say that I have seen again this year even in the worst of conditions, our God is a faithful God. I've never felt more proud of the good news of Jesus. The hymn writer is absolutely right when he says, "He gives pardon for sin and a peace that endureth. Thine only presence to cheer and guide. Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow. Blessings all thine and ten thousand beside. Great is thy faithfulness."

Later on in the prophecy that Jesus quoted, there is also a reference to the day of vengeance. Good news to the poor and oppressed must always involve the overthrow of evil and the provision of justice. And in a world like this it's often impossible to know the truth and it's desperately frustrating when people get away with their crime and terror. Tragically in the world as it is criminals do get away with their crimes, terrorists can avoid capture and criminals do die peacefully in their beds.

It's natural to want revenge. But we need to remember the Lord has promised, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay." No one put it more clearly than Studdard Kennedy, Woodbine Willy of World War 1: "It's 'im, it's 'im that's the judge of blokes like you and me and boys I'd rather be frizzled up in the flames of burning 'ell than stand and look into 'is face and hear 'im say 'well?'"

Scripture tells us, this world is not going to end with a bang or with a whimper, but with a trumpet blast when the dead in Christ will be raised and he will wipe every tear from their eyes. What a thought, it will end with this world passing away and God creating a new heaven and a new earth. I'm so glad I've got good news. Even when that phrase seems like contradiction in terms. And so we're called to do all we can to help those in need. We are to feed the hungry and to work for justice, peace and freedom, everywhere. But above all, we have a Gospel to share that makes a difference both in this world and the next. Amen.

25th July 1993

9.30 a.m. Morning Service

Radio 4

St. John the Baptist, Crowthorne, Berkshire.

Preacher: Rev. Brian Spence.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen. It's strange how unexpected things can trigger memories. A couple of weeks ago I'd gone with a group of school-children to walk part of the North Downs Way, only to find that we were actually on the Pilgrims Way, that old, old road that led to Canterbury. And I was immediately reminded of a verse from Chaucer's Canterbury Tales of how the better weather of spring inclined men's hearts to go on pilgrimage. But today on this feast of St. James, the patron saint of pilgrims, we remember how his symbol of the scalloped shell has been the badge of pilgrims for hundreds of years, right down to the present day because Christians still go on pilgrimage to holy places like Glastonbury or Lourdes or Walsingham.

A group from our own parish has recently returned from a pilgrimage to the Holy Land itself. And one of the things that I find so moving there, is in St Helena's chapel, in the church of the Holy Sepulchre, a nest of hundreds of crosses scratched into the walls centuries ago by the men and women who had actually made it. They'd endured goodness knows how many dangers and hardships and now they'd finally reached their goal, the Holy Sepulchre itself.

But why do people go on pilgrimage? Besides the fun and camaraderie they have, just like Chaucer's pilgrimage, it reminds us of two very important things. First of all, we all have to make a pilgrimage, a journey through life and secondly that God should be part and parcel of that journey. In the Gospel, Jesus tells us that the most important thing about that journey is how we make it. He said, "Broad and easy is the way that leads to destruction and many

there be that follow it, but straight and narrow is the way that leads to life and few there be that find it.”

We all have to make that journey through life, we don't have any choice about that. But we do have a tremendous choice in how we follow it. We're so free in this country that we often take the freedom of choice for granted and instead of actually making a choice about which way to go we simply let ourselves get carried along with the flow of things around us. But even doing that is really a matter of choice. Time and again in his teaching, Jesus speaks about crisis, literally reaching a cross-roads, a point where we have to choose which way to go in life. We choose if we're lucky, what career we follow. We can choose where we live, and who we marry and so-on. Those are, of course, major choices on the journey of life. But we also have to make choices day-by-day on what we eat or what we should wear and also the more important choices on how we react to another person. Whether we put ourselves out to help someone, or whether we bite back the angry word, every day choices that will actually affect our eternal future. To go on pilgrimage reinforces the point that we are on a journey and that journey is finite. And that what happens then will be affected by all those choices we made along the way, that's the first thing.

Secondly, these pilgrimages are to Holy places, places closely associated with God or Holy people, which immediately brings God into the equation and reminds us of just how important it is to us to have that dimension present in our lives. The broad and easy way spoken of by Jesus is usually marked by a two dimensional approach to life. The “here-and-now” view that is concerned with things that affect us materially, now, whereas the straight and narrow always lets God in and so adds an extra dimension to the way we look at things, which will affect our attitudes to work and life and will then reflect Christian values and Christian judgements. And the importance that we give to other people will also be coloured by this dimension of God. It doesn't make the boring chores any less boring. It doesn't make pain any less intense. But letting God into the situation does actually change it. The mundane everyday chores offered as an act of prayer help us to be aware that God is there with us in

all our everyday things and His presence makes them worth while and could even bring meaning into those difficult situations like pain and suffering. Letting God in, being aware that He is with us and is in it with us helps us to identify with the Jesus who suffered on the cross.

And so in a very special way we are caught up in his love for our suffering world. Jesus never promised that it would be easy, but he did promise that he would be with us, and we find this in the fact that by letting God in we have also let in that strange and mysterious quality of joy. Not an emotional thing that makes you jump in the air and shout “Alleluia,” but a deep, deep awareness that God is there, there with us in those day-to-day situations. And we find that not only are we able to cope, but we also have a quality of life that can bubble over into the lives of other people. But that joy cannot come unless we choose to let God in. And so we come back to the theme of this feast of St. James. James the fishermen chose to follow Jesus, James the disciple chose to be sent out as an apostle. A choice which tradition says took him to many places, possibly even to Spain which today houses his relics in the town of Compostella. But, some eleven years later, he was back in Jerusalem where as our New Testament lesson told us he was martyred on the orders of king Herod Agrippa.

Today all of us face choices as we make our journey through life. We can if we choose, simply go along with the flow of life around us, content with our lot but probably not achieving much in eternal terms. Or, if we choose, we can make that journey into a real pilgrimage, a journey to God. And if we make that journey into a pilgrimage, we will find that like all the church pilgrimages that I’ve been on, that not only is there a lot of fun and friendship along the way, but those other two great elements will be given to us as well. First, that life will take on a purpose and a meaning, because we actually have a goal. We are going to God, but as we will discover not only that, but that God comes to meet us along the way, in the mundane and the every day. And we find secondly that gift of joy comes into our lives. It won’t immunise us against pain and suffering, it won’t protect us against life’s

problems, but it will give us the reassurance that God is there and help us to know in the words of St. Paul that “All things work together for good for those that love God.”

So this morning, on this feast of St. James, the patron saint of pilgrims, let us reaffirm the way that we want to go in life. And like St. James, choose to follow the one who called Himself the Way, the Truth and the Life. Amen.

1st August 1993

9.30 am. Morning Service

Radio 4

Church of St. Martin with St. Peter, London Road, Worcester.

Preacher: Rev. Michael Lewis.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. I've been thinking to when I was a curate, just a year in and working with a first-rate training vicar. What I remember is waiting impatiently for his summer holiday to come. I wish he'd just go away, I prayed, I do it better when he's not watching. I couldn't, of course, at least not straight away. When he'd gone, it was harder than I'd guessed. I wanted him back, to do it for me, to show me again. I am not good at being taught and trained. I don't like being watched. It was the same when I was learning to mend a puncture on my bike at the age of nine or ten. I listened to my father as he carefully explained it. He taught me by showing me, but after a while I just wished he'd go away and let me do it better when he wasn't watching. It wasn't better. When he'd left, it was harder than I'd guessed. I wanted him back, to do it for me, to show me again. But slowly I learned to mend punctures without him around, by remembering the way he went about it.

And fifteen years later as a curate, I learned to do something of a priest's work, even when my training vicar wasn't around, by recalling what he tried to do and how. Good teachers, good trainers leave a memory of their purpose and their style, where they're going and how they get there. Joshua's teacher was the great Moses, Moses who'd led the people out of Egypt for the long search for the promised land. But just as they glimpsed it Moses died. Now Joshua heard God telling him to take over, take the people on and cross the Jordan. He needed reassurance. I think he'd longed for the chance, but when Moses went and the chance came, he wished Moses would come back and show him how to carry on.

Then he listened to God and God said, "I shan't fail you, I shan't desert you, go where you may the Lord your God is with you." So Joshua was given the strength to carry on where Moses left off. If you put Joshua into Greek, it comes out more or less as Jesus. More than twelve hundreds years after Joshua and Moses, Jesus of Nazareth taught escape from slavery, freedom from the enslavement of sin, by the way he lived and the healing He brought. He started to let freedom reign. Who was his teacher who trained him? God, His heavenly Father. And as his Father taught him, he taught and trained disciples to follow him, to carry on.

Listening to St. John's Gospel, we overheard him telling them to get ready for what is it come. He's going to leave them, but they wish he wouldn't go. They want him to stay and teach them always but he's got to go. So they must continue what he started and that is to lead the people, God's people back. Moses and Joshua were leading God's people back to a half forgotten land of plenty and promise. Jesus and his followers must lead people back to God's will. To what God longs for, to the way that in creation God set things up to be. Jesus and his disciples must lead people on a journey, out of slavery through the wilderness of being misunderstood, or rejected or ignored. To real freedom in a land of plenty and promise called the Kingdom. A place where God is God and human beings can be most fully what they're created to be.

But it's not another country, it's here if only we'll see it. It's not an escape from the world but a vision of the world transformed. "I'm not asking you, Father" says Jesus "to remove my disciples from the world. They don't belong to it, any more than I've belonged to it; if belonging means being its slaves. But just as you sent me into the world, I'm sending them into the world. I make myself holy that they may be made holy. Holy in truth."

People made holy in truth. That's the way the world becomes the kingdom. Good teachers, good trainers leave a living memory of their purpose, their style their spirit. No one taught better than Jesus. We Christian disciples today, every bit as much as his first followers often wish he'd stayed to show us again how to live. Sometimes we even wish he'd do it for

us, but armed with his spirit we realise we know it for ourselves. We've grown up, or at least we're on the way. He's taught us and we must pass it on. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

8th August 1993

9.30 a.m. Morning Service

Radio 4

The Episcopal Church of St. Thomas, Edinburgh.

Preacher: Rev. Paul Taylor.

Sermon 1

Summer is the time for a break. Not everyone can get one, but many of us aim to get away from our usual routines at this time. We want to do something different, have a change, take a rest. That's what Jesus is doing in Mark's Gospel here. For he's been travelling for quite a while and he chooses now to take break to go back home. Perhaps you're doing that this summer, going back to your family or back to familiar surroundings, in someway back to your roots. Maybe, like me, you know people who are researching into those roots, they're digging around to discover the story of your ancestors, the origin of your family name. But when you do that, you take a risk, which is, that you can get stuck. My own uncle, digging into our own family background tells me he's now very frustrated because he's got so far back into the earliest part of the nineteenth century even, but now the records have let him down and his search has ground to a halt for the moment.

In a sense that is exactly what happens to Jesus here. He takes a break from his travelling to go back to his roots, but he finds himself stuck as a result. Don't get me wrong, it all started very well, very well indeed. Mark tells us that as he spoke many of his hearers were amazed. Jesus was a much more compelling speaker than anyone they'd ever heard. He was clearer, He was sharper. He was funnier. He was more powerful. And above all Mark tells us, more real. When he spoke, what he said rang true and he spoke as if he knew God personally, not just knew about Him but really actually knew Him. Unlike the politicians and the lawyers of the time. Yes, and lets be honest unlike the preachers too.

If I were banished to the Desert Island, I think one book I would take would be Steven Pile's book, *The Book of Heroic Failures*. Amongst this catalogue of fascinating failures is the world's worst preacher, one Reverend Frederick Dennison Morris. Of his sermons, someone once said, "Listening to him was like eating pea-soup with a fork." Like the members of his congregation, Steven Pile tells us, "we shall never know what his sermons were about." Doctor Benjamin Jowett, a leading academic at the time, summarised the Morris address when he said, "All that I could make out was, that today was yesterday, and this world is the same as the next." Or perhaps the Scottish minister who comes to mind, about whom it was once said, "For six days he was invisible, on the seventh day incomprehensible."

Some of us, if we're honest, who preach are like that. But not Jesus Christ. When Jesus spoke, the atmosphere was electric, clearly the regulars in this synagogue had never heard anything like it. And they quite naturally began to ask questions, but a very strange thing happened as they asked those questions. As they tried to work it out, the atmosphere changed very quickly. What starts as a fair question soon becomes an inquisition. Where did this man get these things for their question? Where did this man get these things becomes an inquisition. What's this wisdom that has been given him? Who is he, that he even does miracles? And they start to work it out, you see. Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't he a tradesman? Isn't he just one of us? One of our community? How come then, he's making himself out to be different like this? And as the questions continue, the atmosphere gets worse. They dig around into his past. They remember there is some suspicion about his birth. Surely Jesus is illegitimate, isn't he? They say, "Isn't this, Mary's son?" And to cap it all, they look around them and say, "No, his brothers and sisters are here, no he's not special, he's just one of us, that's all he is." As they listened, they were amazed, but as they tried to work it out, amazement soon turned to animosity. Curiosity turned to cynicism, so within a very few minutes we find them taking offence at him, literally, they were scandalised by

him. Their conclusion was that he was an impostor. He couldn't possibly know what he was talking about. After all they knew him, didn't they?

It's a familiar experience for many modern believers. They often find that when they get going as Christians, the people who know them best, are the ones who are the most hostile to them. This whole incident must have been an enormous shock for Jesus. We're told he manages to heal a few people, he knew their need and Jesus could help them, But for the rest, he found himself stuck, blocked. In the end he's the one who is amazed. More than that, Mark tells us he marvelled at it. Mark only uses that word once, it's such a strong one. It's that same kind of fascinated horror we would have when we hear new evidence of war crimes or pointless suffering, or needless violence. Why did Jesus find it so hard going home?

The clue comes from that change in his hearers being amazed on the one hand to being scandalised on the other. And the trouble starts when they stop listening to him and try to work it out themselves. You see, they think they know him. They think they understand who he is and what he's about. They have a clear idea of who he is for them. So clear, that they end up refusing to listen to discover who he actually says he really is. In these few verses there is an invitation for all of us. Mark writes, first and foremost, to explain who Jesus is and what he wants from us. And the question for us is very simple, will we listen? Will we read? Will we see what it is that Jesus has to say about himself?

Never mind what others say about him. Those who do listen find it immensely worth while. They're the people who find a new dimension to their living. They're the people who find a new perspective on their lives. They're the people who find a new ability to cope with all that they face. It's like moving from listening to mono to listening in stereo. To listen to Jesus is to discover a whole new way of living. For those of us who are already interested in Jesus, there is an invitation here to go further in that interest. His home visit shows us that with a family connection with Jesus is not enough. It has to be a much more personal involvement with him. These people thought they new enough, but they wouldn't listen to

him. And he wants them. And he wants us too to move from curiosity to commitment. From an idea that Jesus is a special kind of person, to a clear willingness to trust him with the details of our lives, our decisions, our relationships, our money, our future, everything.

And for those of us who are already convinced Christians both here in church and listening today, the invitation is the same. No matter how much we think we know of Jesus Christ, there is always more to learn. More to learn about his ways, more to learn about his thoughts, his hopes, his fears. More to learn about trusting him and living for him. Here at St. Thomas's we're about to celebrate a hundred and fifty years as a congregation here in Edinburgh. We'll look back with gratitude, but the real invitation is to go on with Christ, for there is much, much more to learn and much, much more to do.

Sermon 2

We left Jesus a moment ago marvelling at the lack of faith in His own community. You know how frustrating it is to have a holiday that doesn't quite work out. Something goes wrong with the arrangements perhaps, or the weather turns against you, or somewhere upon the line people let you down. You end up coming back much less refreshed than when you started. That's something of what seems to have happened to Jesus. What's his response going to be? What will he do now?

Well, there are two strands to it. Strand one, he goes back on the road again. He gets back to work himself. Back to his travels and back to his teaching, patiently working his way from group to group. Jesus had been shocked by the reaction from home, but he knows there are others more receptive still to be found. So, he goes back to work. He continues his search for people who will listen. So that's the first strand, he's back on the road again.

The second strand. He gets back to training his disciples. Mark's Gospel is written for people on the one hand who want to find out who Jesus is. If you like, a book of explanation for inquirers. But Mark has another purpose too. He's also writing for his own church, the first generation Christians and those who will follow them and he is writing a book which is for training for Christians. So Jesus picks up where he left off. Jesus puts his disciples to

work. He starts a new course for his followers. These are the people he can count on for the moment, so their training continues. And when you read it and when you hear it, its amazing.

It's real hands-on training. The priority is clear, they have to go out and they have to tell what they know. They have to go and they have to meet people. They have to inform the people that they meet of Jesus Christ. And more than that, they have to invite those people to repent, to change their way of living. I suppose the thing you notice most is that Jesus sends them out, even though they don't know much. After all, we're only a third of the way through Mark's Gospel here. And Jesus sends them out to speak for him. It's incredible, but it's a vital pattern. It's a vital pattern for somebody considering becoming a Christian. If you want to find out about Jesus Christ, you have to be prepared to put into practice what you discover. And that same pattern is a vital pattern for growing as a Christian. If you want to know more about him you have to be ready to do what you already know.

So away these disciples go, with Jesus's instructions ringing in their ears. And in those instructions are five very powerful words to those of us who are Christians. Firstly, Jesus sent them two-by-two, for company, yes, for security, for encouragement. They were not to be loners. We too are not meant to go it alone. To be a Christian is not intended to be an individual thing. It is possible to be alone as a Christian and not be involved with other people, but only in the same way that it is possible to play football alone. You can do it, you can take a ball and find a corner, kick it against a wall, or even find a football pitch and run around on it on your own, you can do it. But it is not meant to be like that. It's intended to be played as a team game. We are meant to be together, to support each other, to guard each other, to encourage one another. They were sent, two-by-two.

Secondly, he sent them with his authority to tackle evil. They were not asked to tackle hard things and difficult people on their own. And again, as for them, so for us. For there are immense forces of evil in our world, threatening both individuals and nations. We are painfully aware of them as we hear of them and read of them and see them around us. We are called to face them. We are called to challenge them. We are called to be involved in

releasing people from them and from their consequences, but we are not to act alone. And we are to recognise that only the authority of Jesus Christ Himself is strong enough to deal with them. He sent them secondly with is authority to tackle evil.

Thirdly, although he sent them to travel, He also told them to stay put when they found someone who would welcome them. For as long as people were ready to listen they were to stay put. They were not to make comparisons all the time. They were not to be always seeking a better situation. They were not always to be looking for a better base. If you are anything like me, you might get caught with this one. You promise yourself for example that you'll use the summer to get sorted out a bit. It's so easy, isn't it? To think if only the desk were clearer, if only I had a better office, if only the house was tidier, if only my life was more organised, then I'd really get some work done. And you spend all your time organising yourself and never achieving anything. "No," says Jesus to his friends, "don't waste your energy like that, work on and until you know it's time to move, stay put and do what I've given you to do."

Fourthly, you notice, that they were travelling very light. They were to take as little clutter as they could get away with. I joined a huge queue of people at the dump the other day of people removing clutter over the summer. These disciples were to be deliberately dependent on other people, they were not to be self-sufficient with all their own things. Not for them the camper-van or the four star furnished tent. Instead they were to seek out the receptive people, they would be welcomed by them, they could depend on them, but they themselves were to travel light.

The fifth word for them and I suppose above all of them, is this, the disciples were to be prepared for mixed-responses. This is the most striking piece of training of all. For just as Jesus Christ himself had found some people ready to listen and others refusing him so would they. Some groups would welcome them, others would turn their backs on them and it could go either way. The receptive people wouldn't just say that they agreed with what they were saying, but would put themselves out in hospitality to Jesus's disciples.

Many years ago now, I had the privilege of working for a while in Lebanon. My strongest memory of my time there was of impressive hospitality to me as a stranger, even when I was introduced to those who were the poorest refugees in the midst of what was then a disintegrating country. They would provide a lavish spread for me as a visitor, even whilst having so little for themselves, for not to provide that hospitality would be a disgrace, a shame to them. Jesus warns his friends that they might well find that. Some of those hearers would be so hostile to their message as to not to offer hospitality. Very well, says Jesus, when you find that, they've heard, move on to find others who might listen. The disciples' responsibility was to tell people about Jesus, the results were the responsibility of the hearers. They were to be prepared for mixed responses.

I guess the first generation Christians struggled with this. After all, they had come to know God personally, through themselves, through Jesus Christ. They had ordinary lives to lead, yet nothing would ever be the same again for them. And they exactly what Christians have since discovered, when you've made a wonderful discovery for yourself it's very hard to find that others are not interested. Yet the Christian job description remains quite clear. Go and tell. Away you go. See who you meet. Find ways of telling them. Engage with them, you'll find them at home, you'll find them at work, you'll find them on holiday. The villagers won't come to us, we have to go to them. And these people will be absorbed in their own lives. Yet we have to be ready to go. To find who's interested. To find who's open. To find who's ready to welcome the message.

15th August 1993

9.30 a.m. Morning Service

Radio 4

International Presbyterian Korean Church, Kingston-upon-Thames.

Preacher: Rev. Puk Yom Kim.

If you read the article “My Kind of Day” at the back of your Radio Times, you may recall Mr. Keith Floyd admitting to being a radio freak and that Sunday would not be the same without Alistair Cook and the Archers’ omnibus. I find myself wondering what people do during the programme in-between. I’m going to start by asking you a question. What is the driving force in your life? Some people seem to thrive on work, some on other peoples’ problems. As for Paul, he did all these plus more. Before his conversion, Paul’s life was motivated by religious zeal which produced hatred for Christians. Driven by murderous bigotry, this fanatic chased Christians from Jerusalem all the way to Damascus to have them put in prison. But why did he hate Christians so intensely? He says in verse sixteen, that once he mistakenly thought of Christ merely as a human being like himself. However, after his encounter with the risen Lord on the road to Damascus, he was transformed into a new man. His view of Jesus was revolutionised. Christ became his Lord and Saviour. From then on, whatever he did he did for Christ’s sake, because as we have already heard in our reading, Christ’s love compelled him.

When Paul wrote his letter there were certain false teachers in the Corinthian church who had their own agenda. They were more interested in wealth and success than in preaching the Gospel. Apparently, some Christians were gullible enough to be taken in by them. In his letter, Paul sets out to correct the situation and reminds them how and why they were converted. He pleads with them not to toss aside the Gospel message they originally received from him. Christ’s love was to be their controlling motive as it was for Paul. What then made Christ’s love so irresistible for him? Here he points us to what Christ did. “We are

convinced,” he says, “that Christ died for all.” When Paul found out that Christ died for all, including himself, it must have been a staggering revelation. Not only that, Christ sacrificed his life for someone who was totally undeserving as he recalls in Romans chapter five: “While we were helpless in our sins, while we were yet sinners, while we were God’s enemies, Christ died for us.”

It is reassuring to know that someone cares for me. It is mind-blowing to discover that there is someone infinite and all-powerful who cared enough to die for my sins. It is this love that Paul found so irresistible. At this point someone might object and say, “It isn’t necessary for anyone to die for me. I’m alright Jack.” However, Paul continues, “Therefore, all died.” Translated thus, “If one died for all men, then in a senses, all died.” In other words, the fact that Christ died for all men implies that all, without exception, are spiritually dead. Therefore, the whole human race is in need of a new life. Everyone has fallen short of God’s standards and has sinned. Man’s sin has alienated him from God and from his fellow man. The result of alienation is universally recognised.

Freud describes the dark side of man in his book *Civilisation and It’s Discontents*: “Men are not gentle, friendly creatures wishing for love,” he says, “homo homini lupus: man is a wolf to man.” He continues to describe the atrocities of the early migrations, the invasion by the Huns or by the Mongols under Ghengis Kahn, the sacking of Jerusalem by the crusaders and indeed the horrors of the last World War. We don’t even have to look what’s been happening in the former Yugoslavia, the seed of evil is deeply rooted right within our hearts and minds.

Let me put it another way, our fundamental problem is the spirit of independence within us which cries out: “I want to live life on my own terms, I can get by without God’s help.” C. S. Lewis makes this point in his autobiography *Surprise by Joy*: “What mattered most of all was my deep seated hatred of authority, my monstrous individualism and lawlessness. No word in my vocabulary expressed deeper hatred than the word “interference,” but Christianity placed at the centre, what then seemed to me a transcendental interferer.”

Does this have a familiar ring? Although man has a spiritual need and tries to find fulfilment he nevertheless wants to keep God from interfering in his life. The Christian God does interfere with our lives as Paul says in verse eighteen: "God reconciled us to Himself, through Christ." Again in verse nineteen: "God was reconciling the world to Himself, in Christ, as our creator." He knows that only He, the infinite but personal God can fill our spiritual vacuum. He would not and did not leave us to our own destructive devices.

You see, although God was the offended party, He made the first move towards man. This is the God the Corinthian Christians believed in and was saved by. And now, Paul appeals to the world: "Be reconciled to this. God saith, He only has provided the solution to the human dilemma of sin, suffering and death." It is now our responsibility to accept the gift. Dr. Francis Schaeffer often said that we have to bow before God twice. We bow once to acknowledge God as our creator, we bow a second time to acknowledge Him, not as a cosmic force out there or as a spirit in stones and trees, but as a personal God who came in Christ.

Finally, Paul pleased the Corinthian Christians not to misuse God's gift of salvation, by adhering to a prosperity Gospel, which teaches that if you believe in God you will prosper on earth now. No, says Paul, see what we have gone through; much patience, afflictions, hardships and difficulties. "Open your heart to us," Paul beseeches, "don't put off the time while you have the opportunity to accept His pardon. Make peace with God today." As Paul was entrusted with a message of reconciliation, so are we. It is our privilege as well as our obligation to take the love of Christ to where there's hatred and strife, to bring unity and harmony to the place of conflict and division.

So let us make Paul's prayer in first Timothy ours. I urge then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone. For Kings and for those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

22nd August 1993

9.30 a.m. Morning Service

Radio 4

Ballygilbert Presbyterian Church, Co Down, Northern Ireland.

Preacher: Rev. Derek McKelvie.

If you know Northern Ireland at all, you've probably heard of at least two places; the Giant's Causeway on the North Coast and the Mountains of Mourne which sweep down to the sea, as the song puts it. Yesterday we had to go to Newcastle, it's a town that sits at the foot of the Mourne along the shore. A few miles from the town as you approach it you come round a long bend and suddenly in front of you is Dundrum Bay. Yesterday the tide was fully in, so that the waters of the Bay were reflecting the perfect shades of Sleepdonit, the highest mountain in Northern Ireland, as well as the trees along the shore. You settle for the magic and then the view again changes. For a brief moment, you could really believe that the whole earth is charged with the grandeur of God here.

From that moment, like in many other special ones for instant when a baby catches your wee finger in his tiny hand and you wonder at the marvel of the perfection of God's creation, in those moments it's easy to praise God. You can feel yourself longing to sing, "I just want to praise you, lift my hands and say I love you, you are everything to me and I exalt your Holy name on high."

Yet, in those moments there's no difficulty in following Paul's instruction in the letter to the Collossians which Hilary read for us. You are the people of God. He loved you and chose you for His own. Be thankful, sing psalms and hymns and sacred songs. Sing to God with thanksgiving in your hearts. Everything you do or say then, should be done in the name of the Lord Jesus, as you give thanks through Him to God the Father.

Yes, in those special moments we can do just as He suggests, but their specialises consists in their rarity. I certainly don't live in a permanent state of euphoric bliss, always aware of

God's presence and perfectly content. I doubt if anyone does. Far more often, I am as just now, far more caught up by the microphone in front of me than by the presence of God beside me. We don't often admit it. We keep our feelings well hidden, but we're rarely totally content. You know what I mean. It goes something like this: "How are you dear?" "Fine thank you." "Keeping well?" "Wonderful" (wretched, actually, but I've no intention of telling you, for you wouldn't understand.) When we feel like this, we cannot praise God. For to be able to praise Him, we have to be able to forget ourselves and concentrate on Him whom we're praising, focusing on Him and giving Him is worth. But if we're locked up in ourselves, consumed in our worries and seeing everything as negative, we cannot praise.

"So how are we meant to cope with that, Paul?" "Well, actually when I wrote that letter to Collossi I was in prison." "Prison, doing what?" "Awaiting execution, actually." "Well then, you must have written it because your life had been fairly smooth till then." "Well, no, not quite. I was shipwrecked twice, beaten up, flogged, thrown out of several towns and this is the fourth time I've been in prison." I can still hear you saying it's alright for Paul, he's one of God's buddies, he's got a special relationship, I'm not Paul and I can't feel close to Him, still less praise Him. Will you allow me for a few moments to give you just a few reasons why you can.

You can praise God, because you are special to Him and He loves you. I find this one very difficult. I never had any difficulty in believing that God loved other people. There were lots of people who were so obviously close to Him, so spiritual. I didn't have any difficulty in preaching about God's love, after all the Bible said God loved the world and I told people so. But I knew what went on in my mind, I know the real me but I knew God couldn't love me and often I couldn't praise Him because I was left out. But I was wrong, totally wrong, for God does love me.

For when Jesus died on the cross and said, "Father forgive them," he didn't attach a list of conditions to the foot of the cross. When he said, "anyone who comes to me I will not turn away," he didn't attach a list of conditions like the small print on the last page of a tour

company's travel brochure. He doesn't, thank God keep a special relationship for Paul, Billy Graham and Cliff Richard. He wants to have a special relationship with you and me. He includes us in, as we are. His Holy Spirit comes to everyone who turns to him and brings His love. One of our elders put it like this: "I always believed God loved the world in a vague, general sort of way and me in among the rest of it, but now, now I know he loves me." You can't praise God because you are special to Him and He loves you, but you can praise God because you are special to Him and He speaks to you. God loves to hear from you, He loves to hear what you want to say to Him, what's going on in your heart. But much more, He wants also to speak to you.

The Bible's had a very bad press. Most people regard it as dull and boring and maybe haven't looked at it for along time. But God can use it to speak directly to us. Here's a passage that spoke to me, when I felt God couldn't love me. It's from Isaiah chapter forty three: "Don't be afraid I will save you. I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through deep waters I will be with you. Your troubles will not overwhelm You. The hard trials that come will not hurt you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One who saves you. I will give up whole nations to save your life because you are precious to me and because I love you and give you honour. Don't be afraid, I am with you."

Those are God's words to you and He hasn't stopped speaking because Jesus is no dead Saviour, but alive, and in the power of His Holy Spirit He is with us every day. Perhaps you don't recognise His voice. Can't you think of a moment when as you were talking with someone you found yourself saying something that was just right, that you had no intention of saying. Haven't you experienced a voice somewhere in the middle of a conversation saying, "Ask that"? Or suddenly revealing to you what's really going on in someone's mind?

A few months ago at a healing service a couple were praying here with a lady with a very bad back. And as one was praying, the other kept hearing in their head the word "disappointment." He tried it out on the lady who burst into tears and confirmed that an operation promised to cure her back had left her sore as ever and she was bitterly

disappointed and resentful. God wanted to speak to her about the disappointment and the resentment as well as about her back.

If when you begin to praise God you listen carefully, He may bring to you something He wants to talk about with you. He may even ask you to deal with that, before you praise Him. But there's even better news, He not only loves you and wants to speak to you, but you can praise God because your special to Him and He wants to make you whole .

I used to think that the healing miracles were only for the New Testament, for the Apostles and God's special people. As we reread the Acts of the Apostles that tells the story of those first disciples. We find a set of people just like ourselves, frail, fallible human beings, praising God together preaching the good news and healing the sick in the power of God's spirit let loose in the world. We've begun to pray for people and have seen God working to make people whole. One has lost all the pain she had in her arthritis. Another has found freedom from haunting guilt from a teenage relationship. Another has had remission from cancer and much more.

We found no magic salver changes what has happened in the past, but God who is the same yesterday, today and forever, can change the past's hold on us and it's effect on the way we are today. Problems and worries are inevitable, misery is optional. God wants to make us whole. And even when for some that wholeness has come through death, God has transformed for them the illness and the bereavement. That journey with all its pain becomes a walk into the dark holding the hand of a well-loved friend.

We praise God because He loves us, He speaks to us and He makes us whole. But sometimes we find it's exactly the other way round. It is, as we praise God we discover His love, hear Him speak and can let Him make us whole. It's a bit like a chicken and egg situation. We praise God because He loves, He speaks, He makes us whole, but we discover that, when we praise Him, those are the very things He does. You've probably heard the old fable of the sun and the wind having a competition to take of a man's raincoat. The wind

blew for all of its worth, but the man only buttoned it tighter, but when the sun shone with its heat, the raincoat came off.

So often when in praise God's love shines into our hearts, we change. One lady whose husband had died of a heart attack after refusing to go to the doctor with chest pain found it hard to forgive his failure to think of her and her future, until one weekend end in the praise of a communion service suddenly she could forgive. Her praise was the key that unlocked the door for God. This is what Paul had in mind when he called us to be the loving, forgiving, tolerant people of God, living constantly in thankfulness and praise. And I can hear you say, "Yes, but how, how can we do it?"

May I make a few simple practical suggestions? Later on today, sit down quietly and open the Bible in the Old Testament at the book of Isaiah chapter forty three. Read those first eight verses that I read earlier. And as you read imagine that God is holding you in His arms, that your being encircled by His love. Look up and see the loving face of God as He says those words to you and as you accept the love He offers, praise Him. Or take a pen and paper and make a list of all the good things in your life and then read them slowly praising God for each one.

Then write another list of all your problems and difficulties and this time as you read each one say to yourself, "God knows this and is here with me," and praise Him that He is there. Or find at least one other person or a small group in your local church with whom you can share your pain and His praise. For He said when we get together in His name He is always there. You will find acceptance from His people and you will know yourself accepted and loved by Him.

And will you join us to praise God now? Will you set aside whatever you're doing for a moment or two and praise Him with us? And as you praise with us will you allow Jesus to come close to you and touch you with His love? We will praise Him along with you using the old Latin words "We adore you, O Lord: Adoramus Te Domine." We sing it to a chant that comes from Taizé in France. And some of our members are going to speak out their own

reasons for praising God in situations in which they have found themselves. Will you too speak out within yourself your praise within your situation? And may you find God faithful in His promise to love you, to speak to you and to make you whole. We Adore You O, Lord: Adoramus Te Domine.

29th August 1993

9.30 a.m. Morning Service

Radio 4

Mass from the Cathedral Church of St. Anne's, Leeds.

Preacher: Father Philip Mulger.

It's not a very pleasant experience to be told off, especially by a friend. And if we are, for doing what we thought was a good turn, it's even worse. So, put yourself in Peter's place. Not long before, Jesus told him that he would give him the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, then, all of a sudden it's, "Get behind me, Satan, you are an obstacle in my path, because the way you think is not God's way but man's." How would you feel? Confused? Did Jesus really believe that his friend was the Devil in disguise? No. What calls them to see things so differently? Was Jesus tempted not to go to Jerusalem, where suffering and death awaited him? Peter's instinct told him that Jesus was the man he believed to be the Christ. "Heaven preserve you Lord," he said "this must not happen to you." Peter has an inkling, not only of what Jesus's fate is but also his followers', including his own. Peter was crucified too.

So, does that mean that all of us have to share the same fate? Jesus said, "If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me." So, what is my cross? Is it the same as Peter's? Well, no, because it's particular to me and it may be that we don't have to go very far to find it. From getting up in the morning, which could itself be a cross for some, to going to bed at night. Things happen to us every single day over which we have no control. But what matters is our response. For instance, our response to dealing with difficult relatives, being passed over for promotion at work, being made redundant, coping with personal illness. How did you respond to last week's multiple murders in Oxford?

It's easy to feel hurt, cheated or angry, but it doesn't actually solve anything. Jesus's response to Peter holds the key to our response to all these problems whether large or small.

Man's way is to be angry, to be unable to take a long term view, to feel helpless. God's way, Jesus's way, is to confront the situation head-on, with love. The Christian response is always love. We know that because Jesus could never have begun or completed His journey to the cross without it. We share this journey everyday. And if our response to what we meet is love, then we really carry the cross.

5th September 1993

9. 30 a.m. Morning Service

Radio 4

Choral Matins from St. Mary and St. Nicholas, Wilton, Wiltshire. Celebrating the 400th anniversary of the birth of George Herbert.

Preacher: Canon B. Cooper.

Speaking as a former Merchant Navy Officer, I sometimes wondered what the passengers on board the Titanic felt about music being played by the ship's orchestra, especially as the deck began to tilt. There are those today who wonder why we bother with music or poetry when society seems to be sinking. Why waste time with arts' festivals, or poets like George Herbert, just to while-away an hour or so as the world slides deeper and deeper into chaos? But while the world has always had its suffering, always had its famine and flood, the barbarities of war with the suffering of the mother and her children, while always, behind too many front doors there has been abuse and violence at the same time, there has always been creative genius at work.

For example, during the second world war, books were written, plays performed, musicals enjoyed, films produced. I'm told, the Windmill theatre never closed. And are not artists often among the first to use their talents in time of need and crisis? Bob Geldof performed wonders for famine relief in Africa. Art has so often come to the help of humanity in need. Show me the problem and I'll show you those trying to solve it. Show me the suffering and there you'll find the comforters. Show me the evil and I will show you the good.

Why is there this constant determination to help wherever required, the struggle to make things better, the unending battle against evil? It is because there is something of God within us all. Something of the God who never gives up on people. Something of the God who keeps on caring and loving and forgiving, even when there is a nailing and a dying under a darkening sky. Something of the God who keeps hold of life, the God who cannot know

defeat and the people this God has created have something of that God in them. So, when people are being creative, and caring and helpful and loving, there is the gleam of God in our dark world.

I don't imagine for a moment that we can ever make the world perfect. Perfection is only to be found, I suppose in heaven. Then all earth's' struggles will be over, the struggle of goodness over the world's evil. But that's heaven, that's not yet. In the meantime, here on earth, all who believe in the undefeatable God and in the undying love and power of that God, all such believers can never rest. No, nor will ever rest, until some of the glory of heaven is found on this tired old earth.

So, take heart, lets the arts festival strength and resolve build up a better world, God's world. As George Herbert wrote, "Teach me my God and King in all things thee to see." Yes, in the suffering and wickedness and waste and a crucifixion. But also in the kindness, and in the bravery and in the love of people which rises constantly above the madness of people. And one day may we know that our labours here on earth were not in vain when we come to the Eternal Festival in heaven. Amen.

12th September 1993

9.30 a.m. Morning Service

Radio 4

Trinity Methodist and United Reformed Church, Porthcawl, South Wales.

Preacher: Rev. Colin Richards.

You may remember a song of many years ago: "It ain't what you do it's the way that you do it." A line which springs to my mind from that song is: "It ain't what you say it's that way that you say it." Style is very important. Sometimes when the pressure is on and other things interrupt what I have to do, I can, so my wife tells me, be very abrupt. She's quite right when she tells me off. I tend to go on the defensive then and ask, "What have I said now that's wrong?" And she will reply, "It's not so much what you said, the way that you said it." Nothing wrong with the content, but everything wrong with the presentation. Both the song and my wife reminding me that it's not just content that matters.

Lord Soper used to help some of the ministerial students at Richmond College, London, where I trained, in the art of open-air speaking. I remember clearly one of us asking about the very quick and clever answers which he is so skilled with. We used for illustration, his answer to the person who complained that Christianity had been in the world for two thousand years and didn't seem to have done any good. To which Lord Soper had replied, "Well water's been in the world a lot longer, but your neck doesn't look very clean." Lord Soper warned us about the danger of such answers. "Remember," he said "it is so easy to win the argument and lose the person." It's not always content, or even truth, that governs people's response. The Church or the individual Christian may say all the right things, but say them in such a way that no-one hears. I must admit that to me in both religious teaching and practice there is a strand of meanness in the way we proclaim God's love. It may well be unintended but it is there and is very destructive.

The Old Testament story of Jonah provides us with one of the clearest illustrations of this. Jonah, we should remember is the representative person for his nation. They are unwilling to share the good news of God's love. First he tries every trick he could think of so that he does not have to go to Ninevah. Then, when he is driven by God to declare God's love in Ninevah, he complains bitterly, because God spares the city. And the story tells us how Jonah felt. Jonah was very indignant and fell into a rage. He prayed to Yahweh and said, "Ah, Yahweh, is not this just as I said would happen when I was still at home? I knew that you were a God of tenderness and compassion, slow to anger, rich in graciousness, relenting from evil." To Jonah, such forgiveness was unacceptable. People should get what they deserved. I think that Jonah might have found a lot of support from many people today if he could have applied for the job of Home Secretary. A cry of "just deserts for all offenders" would be popular, because it strikes a cord within each of us and rightly so. There is clearly in the Gospel as in the Old Testament, a demand for righteousness and justice. A compassion for the victim which cannot be ignored and which will not be ignored by God. But there is another side to the story, the hospitality which we see again and again in the Scriptures and is expressed supremely in the love that took Christ to the cross.

Almost a year ago, I had the pleasure of leading a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. It was an experience of a life-time. I had been so used to the difficulties of that land, being presented in news reports, for more years than I care to remember. But I was delighted by the hospitality which we experienced. We had the assistance of two delightful people. One was Abbet, a Palestinian Christian from Bethlehem and our coach driver. He was always ready with a smile and nothing was too much trouble for him. The other, Edna our Jewish guide, whose parents came to meet us and wanted to know why we, when we were near their home, all forty six of us, had not dropped in for a cup of tea. We could not have been better served. We became very fond of both of them. When we arrived at a stopping place, Edna would tell us what to expect, or what we ought to know about the place. And then she would say, "Bring your cameras, bring your money, all are welcome." Just before our final communion

service, Edna asked me if she could join us and it was my pleasure to say with real feeling, "All are welcome."

One evening she taught us an Israeli folksong "Evenu Shalome": "Peace be unto You." We entered into the singing and a few of the dance steps. Some Christian words had been added to it, but on that occasion, the same tune and some of the words drew together three very different groups of people. Illustrating for me the point that the old song makes: "It ain't what you say it's the way that you say it." Hospitality has always been important in Jewish teaching, to the stranger, to children, to the insignificant and the vulnerable. It is at the heart of that religion and it is meant to be heart-felt.

When our family did an exchange with an American minister and his family, some years ago, we experienced something of the culture shock most Britishers used to experience on arriving in the USA. "Have a nice day" was not part of our vocabulary then. I remember asking one of the young people from the church, who worked in a Burger bar, if they ever got fed-up with being pleasant to people and saying, "Have a nice day." I thought they might have discovered some secret we did not have. However, she told me she felt anything but nice to some people especially the very rude ones. But she added, "You can't be any different, for if they complain, you would be sacked on the spot."

When a church or a Christian says "Welcome," it is not enough for us just to be polite. It is not enough for us to think that we have done the proper thing just because we have said the proper thing. There needs to be real meaning and real feeling in the words if they are to have the effect we desire. If you're to have any kind of conviction, the kind of conviction I am talking about in your welcome, then the meaning behind what you say is also very important. All are welcome for instance.

What was Jonah's problem with the inhabitants of Ninevah? He did not want them included in God's love. They were not Jews. They were foreigners. Not his people. He did not want them as God's people. There was more than a touch of the them-and-us syndrome. but there is more than a touch of it in most of us. We prefer to keep outsiders in their place.

We can identify something of that spirit in the British Isles. There is a certain amount of feeling between the Welsh, Scots, Irish and English and that's not to mention the French when the rugby grand-slam is up for grabs. And it's not just the fun of a sporting occasion either. We see it range from simple rivalry to open hostility. Each one of us must look with alarm on the rise of racial violence, of which we have had such a terrible example in London, this week. It should cause us anger and dismay. It is the substance of which wars are being made across the world. Palestinian and Israeli, Croat and Muslim and the continuing conflict in Ireland. And something fundamental in our nature is at the root.

Even in the church those who have been involved in ecumenical work know how much protectionism there is. How much rivalry between traditions and congregations. There is great concern today with presentation, with patients' charters and customer relations. But what we need is something that goes much further. It's one thing to have a doctor, or a nurse, a shop assistant or a representative of the church who behaves properly, but it is very different and far better when you have one who really cares. That caring is a communication in itself. We have to say to people that they are important. The relentless drive for productivity has led to a feeling in many people that they are no longer valued for their own sake. You may be valuable, good at your job, an asset because you are cost-effective, but not because you are a person.

A report out last week accused all European countries of not valuing workers of over fifty years of age. But our value is not to be measured by our cost-effectiveness, but rather by our very existence. The readings from Isaiah and Mark, the hymn we sang just before the sermon, all declare what we find so difficult to express and perhaps believe, that the most vulnerable, the least valued in society are central to God. God really does say, "All are welcome."

A week ago, my wife and I were invited to a Silver Wedding celebration and at one stage we thought that, due to pressures and uncertainties on that day, it would be better to make our apologies rather than to have to leave arrangements hanging in the air. When we

expressed this to our hosts, it was said to us, "You must be there." To know that it was really meant, to be wanted for our own sakes, was a precious experience. So, back to the beginning, shout it in the street, "All are welcome." We do mean it, or I hope we do, because it's true that God declares, "All are welcome to His celebration." We now sing a hymn that declares this in the words of Jesus:

He sent me to give the good news to the poor.

Tell prisoners that they are prisoners no more.

Tell blind people that they can see.

And set the down-trodden free.

26th September 1993

9.30 a.m. Morning Service

Radio 4

St. Mary and All Saints' Church, Checkley, Staffordshire.

Preacher: Rev. Mark Vidal-Hall.

You will be blessed, in the city and blessed in the country. You will be blessed when you come in and blessed when you go out. We are surrounded by the evidence of God's blessing which makes Harvest Festivals such joyous and meaningful occasions. Great bundles of carrots with their greenery still attached. Fresh eggs cradled in a nest of vegetables. Earthy potatoes. Shiny apples with rosy cheeks beaming down on us and asking to be eaten. Crisp, and tasty and nourishing. Pints of milk. Tins of every shape and size. And flowers are everywhere glowing and scented, bringing alive the gentle, pink stone of this centuries old building and reminding us of the sheer beauty of harvest as well as its provision of the necessities of life. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over.

The wonderful thing about harvest is the way it draws us into the mystery of life and restores our sense of wonder and joy and being loved. Think of the potato in all its myriad forms from King Edwards to pink, fur apples. Rough and knobbly with a pink tinge to the skin and a wonderful flavour. What endless and new possibilities of richness the world has in it. New strains of wheat, new machines, new varieties of vegetables and flowers. God does give generously. He must love us. It's true the gift of life itself. We've all been blessed in the past year. The very fact of being alive means we're continually receiving blessings. A new child, falling in love, a problem shared, exams passed, a relationship healed, a new skilled learnt, sickness cured or overcome, a loving word in a midst of trouble, the food we eat.

And within this area too, we've been richly blessed. We've seen the discovery and development of many gifts we didn't know were there a year ago. How often people have surprised themselves as well as others. We're learning that God gives to every local church

all the gifts we need to be His church and to do His work, however small. We're beginning to develop those gifts of encouragement and support that we all require in order to develop and grow and be fruitful. But this is only part of the story. The harvest didn't fall into our laps. It came after ploughing and sowing and hard labour and the use of patience and skill. Many people and professions have worked together to bring in this harvest, from farm labourers to agricultural scientists.

It's the same with our own blessings and the blessings showered on our area. They require hard work and the willingness to take risks and to face fear and at times pain and suffering. It seems that God loves us so much that He insists on treating us as fellow workers with Him. That means struggle and pain and sacrifice. The generous giving of ourselves and our love. But we have so much more to learn about love. There are so many mistakes to be put right. Not only ours, but those of other people and of previous generations. That's why, while we celebrate, others mourn. War, famine, disease, poverty, unemployment. The world and each one of us is infected by a deep malaise that prevents us from making the most of God's generosity.

In a moment we'll retell the story of the one person who gave himself utterly to life and love, who responded to God at every moment. For most of his life, that resulted in immense blessings for himself and those around him. People crowded to listen to him. He healed the sick and brought the dead to life. Not because of any superhuman powers, but because he understood what God wanted and did it. No rule book. He was so close to God that he knew what had to be done. And this led to Jerusalem and to the Last Supper.

On the night he was betrayed and his closest friends ran away and didn't want to know him, he shared with them a meal of fellowship. He even washed their feet, so that they would understand that whatever they did, they would continue to be loved. He knew that what God wants more than anything else in all the world is for us to remain in fellowship with Him and to share in His work with love. As this communion is celebrated and whether we receive the outward signs or not, let us accept the gifts of Christ's body and blood. His life and love and

with it the power that sets us free from the past and restores the original blessing God gave us, the ability to love generously. And then we will be able to join with Him in giving good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over. And to receive all the blessings that God desires to pour into our lives.

3rd October 1993

9.30 a.m. Morning Service

Radio 4

Queen's College, Taunton, Somerset.

Preacher: Rev. Ed Standhaft.

A school is a living community. There is nothing so strange, so weird, as walking through these buildings in a school holiday. Empty buildings, classrooms without noise, which have temporarily lost the reason for their existence. The long, almost ghostly corridors. Now for some, the holidays are the best part of going to school and I don't just mean the students. The school's finance officer will say that it is in the silence of the holidays that vital repair and building work can be done. Books balanced, future plans made. But quite obviously without students there would be no school. Because a school is a living community, one of its characteristics is always the unexpected, the surprise remark that challenges and provokes. A few months ago a student was asked, "Which disciple betrayed Jesus?" The reply without hesitation, "Judas Asparagus." It stays in the memory, as does the comment a student made just a few days ago, "I've been in this school eleven years and I haven't found God." It's comments like this which make me ask myself, "So if he hasn't found God what has he found?"

I want to talk this morning, briefly, about a hidden school curriculum, as vital as any lesson in the classroom or in the laboratory, as important as any sport or recreational activity, or work experience as a preparation for life. I don't want to talk about the three R's of reading, writing and 'rithmetic, or about a fourth R, the academic study of religion, which I believe has a rightful place within the life of any school. But I do want to talk about another three R's and the first of these is respect for people. And I want to say very clearly that I believe there's a direct relationship between the respect students learn to have for other people and the respect that society as a whole gives to its teachers. Anyone who enters the

teaching profession goes through a lengthy process of selection and training. And society then entrusts them with the great responsibility of the care of its children. Unless teachers are treated with a practical respect by the wider community and the contribution of the teaching profession openly acknowledged by everyone in society, then it is very difficult to see how pupils in schools will learn the fundamental lesson that the recognition of the gifts and worth of other human beings is a foundation stone of our life in society and in a wider world.

When St. Paul writes in the New Testament, “Do not let many of you become teachers,” it’s not a word of caution designed to say there are better things you could be doing with your life. It’s in fact a statement of the high responsibility that teachers have and a warning of God’s judgement on them if they take that responsibility lightly. But it is also a clear judgement on a society which so often seems to undervalue those with a teaching vocation. Respect for people. A clear mark of true education, which is seen in the basic recognition of the worth and dignity of all people. The commandments which Jesus said were the summary of the Jewish law, which we heard in the Gospel reading, centred in love of God and in the love of our neighbour as ourselves, have practical consequences that we must never forget. This school, alongside side so many in Britain’s multi-racial society, is a meeting point of living communities of different races, different cultures and different faiths. It’s so easy to brush aside a British National Party election victory in a local council election, and say it is of no significance.

The fact is, that if education is founded on respect for people and in a Christian understanding that we are made in the image of God, who commands us to love our neighbour as ourselves, then respect for people demands a stand against any individual or group that would deny basic respect to others. I believe that respect for people defined in terms of listening to what others have to say, taking seriously when they complained of injustice, standing along side them in times of need. I believe that this a key part of being a full human being created in the image of God. An image seen supremely in the life of our

Lord Jesus Christ. And if respect for others is a vital aspect of our being whole, integrated people, then respect must be a guiding principle in all education carried out in this country.

The second R is responding to need. It may surprise you, I hope it does not, if I say it is possible to have highly intelligent, highly academically qualified, very selfish people.

Sometimes human need stares us in the face. The pictures on our television screens, the radio news and a newspaper make that painfully obvious. But if I say, such need is on our doorstep here, in the affluent South West of England, there are some who might find that difficult to believe, especially if you live anywhere near Taunton, where an air of prosperity seems to be all-pervasive. And yet, and yet, there is poverty within this community.

Two years ago, students from this school joined with students from other Taunton schools and beyond, to raise money for the work of the Taunton Association for the Homeless. There are young people in this town with nowhere to live and in a wider context, there are the concerns of inner-city poverty of unemployment, of frustration and boredom. That word “boredom” perhaps the greatest enemy of all, a word used so frequently by teenagers to express the fact that even with the latest technology and computers, videos, walkmans, and teenage raves, life does not excite or satisfy. In the end, the problems which confront us in Britain today are life and death issues. Certainly in the sense that the New Testament understands the words, where the emphasis is always on life in its fullness. And fullness implies concern about the conditions under which people live, the adequacy of schools to meet the needs of young people, and the possibility of jobs and job satisfaction when they leave school. No community, which considers itself to be educated, can simply retreat into a mythical castle, pull up the draw-bridge and ignore the responsibility. But it’s not only our own society which demands a response to need.

Some students from this school have taken part in schemes to help in third world countries between leaving school and going on to further education. Two of them went to Zimbabwe and worked in a children’s home just outside of Harare. Another student, whom I met in Taunton two days ago, has just returned after spending three months in Mozambique,

teaching in a remote area. The experience had a very deep impact on their lives. One said to me, that for her, things would never be the same again, she was now determined to do her part to build a society in this country which would respond both to human need and poverty overseas and to work for a just society when no one felt excluded and where people of all races had a part to play.

The idea of justice and practical concern for people is found throughout the Bible. The Old Testament prophet Isaiah said, "The kind of fasting I want is this: remove the chains of oppression and the yolk of injustice and let the oppressed go free." I happen to believe that in the end the greatest threat to education does not come from material under-investment in education, but from moral under-investment. A conscious lowering of our horizons in society as a whole, so that the global concerns of war and peace, poverty and injustice, abuse of Human Rights, cease to be seen in Britain as our concern and the vision given by politicians is that the world ends at Dover.

The first sign of a young persons response to need often begins by writing off to charities for information. then they take part in a door-to-door collection for Oxfam, or Christian Aid or Amnesty International. And then slowly it begins to dawn upon us that our way of living, that the way our society is organised, may mean that we are a part of the problem, whether it's war, or poverty, or injustice, the very problem that we are hoping to remedy. Depressed at the thought?

Quite the reverse. Our obedience to Christ and His kingdom, doesn't mean that we give up the fight for justice and freedom for people. It commits Christian to radical action, sharing our food with the hungry, clothing the natives, providing the wanderer with shelter. And above all, asking the question, "Why is there hunger and poverty?" And being willing to listen to third world countries as they speak to us about blame and remedy. And always alert and if necessary, deeply critical of any attempt by whatever government, no matter how well disguised and no matter how plausible the reason, to reduce an Aid budget to third world countries. This vigilance is a key part of the life of faith, a statement that we have a

responsibility to care for others. The lesson of looking beyond our limiting horizons and to see a world perspective is of course sometimes very frightening, but it's a principle of education which we neglect at our peril. Respect for people, responding to need and the third R, reverence for God.

Earlier on, I mentioned a student, who had said to me a week-or-so ago, "I've been in this school for eleven years and I still haven't found God." But in that same week, two other students came to me and said, "We are Christians, we want to meet together to pray, to understand more what it means to be committed to Christ, can you find us a room?" It is this joyous sense of discovery of the majesty and the mystery of God, seen in Jesus Christ, which is at the core of education in its widest dimension.

And Paul pleads that his converts at Ephesus will understand that dimension to life in all its fullness. He speaks of it as God's love in its breadth and length and in its height and depth. To revere God, this is far more than just an outward act of formal acknowledgement that God exists. To revere God is to affirm with our whole being, but it is God who is at the foundation of all we are, our intellects, our personality and our capacity to show concern and love.

The Old Testament says it is the fear of the Lord which is the beginning of true wisdom. If you like, the most radical approach to education begins when God becomes the focal point in the search for the making sense of life which in the end is what education is about. The fear of the Lord does not mean that we can't get near to God, that in some way He's always been and will always be totally remote and beyond our reach. Not at all! The fear of the Lord must always mean that we go on searching for Him, seeking Him out, picking up and decoding the signals of His presence and activity in the world. Reverence for God means that education and searching for the truth, a launching of the enquiring mind, will reach its fulfilment when we recognise Jesus Christ as the Way and the Truth and the Life.

But this reverence for God doesn't only begin when we search for God, though search for Him we must. It's not so much us seeking for God, rather the reverse. It's the joyful

discovery that God has been seeking us throughout our lives and the proof of this is in Jesus Christ, God's greatest gift.

The search ends when we accept, when we are willing to receive what God offers us in Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ? Yes. Because His life was centred in respect for all people. His life was centred in responding to human need. His life was centred in reverent obedience to God, His Father. And that life lives on, it remains both the challenge and the choice, the demands for justice, the discovery of joy. It is summed up in the hymn we now sing: "The kingdom of God is justice and joy."

10th October 1993

9.30 a.m. Morning Service

Radio 4

Haddon Hall Baptist Church, South London.

Preacher: Rev. Steve Chalke.

A young preacher fresh out of college stood up to give his first-ever sermon. to the congregations' surprise, he opened up with these words: "This is the first time I've ever done anything like this and I'm not sure I'm going to be that good at it. My goal is to become a really good preacher as soon as I possibly can be, but to do that I'm going to need your help, so please feel very free to give any advice you'd like to give. If you don't like this morning's sermon let me know what the problems are with it." With that, he launched into his talk.

At the end of his service an old man came up to him and said, "Son, I'm afraid to tell you that there were three things wrong with your sermon this morning." Bravely the young preacher smiled and said, "Oh, what were they?" "Well first" said the old man, "You read it." The preacher looked down. "Yes," he admitted "I know I did and I shouldn't have. It's just that this morning, when I got up, I felt so nervous that I panicked, because I suddenly felt I'd never say all the right things unless I had a full script written out in front of me. I'm sorry, I'm sorry. But, but what was the next problem?" "The second problem," said the old man "was that you read it badly." Again, the young man looked down. "Yes, I know I did. But you see, the problem was this, I wasn't going to read it at all and so this morning I when I panicked, I scribbled it all down on bits of paper and then I found I couldn't read my own handwriting. I know I should have typed it, but I didn't have time."

Then the young preacher stopped and thought, well, if the first problem was that I read it and the second problem was that I read it badly, I mean that covers everything, doesn't it? What else could have possibly been wrong? And so he asked the old man, "You said there

were three problems, what was the third?" The old man looked at him, paused and then said, "Ah! The third problem was this, it wasn't worth reading in the first place."

We live in a world where we're bombarded with words everyday and to be honest, many of them just aren't worth reading, or paying any attention to. That's why, when God said He made the world, He gave us more than cheap words to prove the point. God loved the world so much, that he didn't produce a report on its problems and then hold a seminar to explore possible alternatives for addressing them. Instead He took real and costly action. He sent us His Son. In fact, the Bible says, that through Jesus, God's Word became flesh. Or, to put it another way, Jesus did not come simply to bring the good news that God loved us. He was the good news that God loved us. Jesus's message is more than his words and more than his sermons, it was Him. He was God's Word. That's why, in Nazareth, he stood up and read from the Old Testament the words: "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He's anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He sent me to proclaim freedom to the prisoners and release the oppressed."

Jesus was making it clear that His task was to be God's word. It wasn't just what he had to say, it was who he was and what he did as well. While Jesus was on earth and wanted to prove that God's love was real to a particular individual, he had a very simple way of doing it. He spoke to the woman at the well, a social outcast and transformed her world. He had time for a tax collector, who was despised by his whole community. He had compassion for a prostitute that nobody else would take the risk of being seen with. Jesus got involved with people as he met their needs and in that way he proved to them that God's love was real. But when God wants to demonstrate His love in the same way today, how does He do it? It's the unavoidable claim of the New Testament that the church is now the body of Christ. In other words, we are Jesus for our friends our families and communities.

So when God wants to bring good news to either the spiritually or physically poor today, when He wants to set out and meet the needs spiritually or socially of those who are oppressed, it is the church which is His chosen instrument to do so. But the church is people,

to be exact it's those of us who are Jesus followers. It's not the old Victorian building up the road with a spire and dry rot. The one that we say, "Oh, it's over there opposite the pub." In fact, the church isn't a building at all. The term church is simply the collective noun for Christians. So, just as we talk about a herd of cows, or a flock of sheep, really we should refer to a church of Christians. That means if it's the church's task to preach good news, if it's the church's task to set the oppressed free, if it's the church's task to be good news, instead of just talk about it, then it's every Christians tasks to do these things. It's every Christians personal responsibility to be Jesus for a watching world. And of course, all of that starts right where we live. It starts with our families and our friends and our work-mates. The people that we meet down at the shops, or at the bus-stop. We have to go out of our way to demonstrate that God's love is real, if you don't, they will never ever know. But the problem is, that none of us are what we want to be. We're all aware of a huge, an enormous gap between what we'd like to be and what we actually are.

But that's just where the good news that Jesus came to preach, comes in. The heart of Jesus's message, of all that he said, was that God loves us. And more than that, He longs to forgive us for all the times that we've failed to be the friends, failed to be the dads, the sons, the daughters, the mums, the work-mates, the neighbours that we should have been, and that He wants to make us. In fact, the heart of Jesus's message wasn't anything he said at all, it was actually something he did. It was his death on the cross, because through his death on the cross, Jesus took the blame for all of our failures, all our wrongs and short-comings. The good news that Jesus came to preach is that a Christian is simply someone, in fact anyone, who reaches the point in life where they recognise that fact and then prays: "Lord, I've not been what I should've been, but I thank you, that instead of holding it against me, you chose to forgive me through your death on the cross. Therefore, I give you my life from now on. Use me from now, to bring and to be good news to others.

One morning a business man sat on a train opposite two Americans dressed in suits. Suddenly, one had some kind of fit and threw himself off his chair onto the floor. The other

promptly pulled him up, loosened his shirt, collar and tie, opened his mouth and got him to swallow two small tablets. The business man asked if he could do anything to help. "Thank you, but he'll be OK in a moment," said the American about his friend, "he often gets these attacks, it's just one of those things." "Are you sure?" said the business man. "Sure, I'm sure" replied the American. "Look it's my job, I've given up my career to travel with this guy. I'm his assistant. He'll be OK, thank you." "What," said the business man, "do you mean to say you spend your whole time just being around for him? That's commitment if I ever saw it." "No, you don't understand," came the reply. "You see, this man and me, we fought together in Vietnam. One time I'd been left for dead. Shot through both of my legs, but this man came back to get me and carried me to safety, he got me help. I'm only alive today because of him. So you see, what I'm doing for him is nothing in comparison to what he has already given to me. All that I have, all that I am isn't enough to begin to say, thank you."

Jesus gave his life on a cross for you and for me. All that I am and all that I have, all that you are and all that you have is only a beginning of saying thank you for His gift to us. So let's invest our lives, so that we would be good news for others.

17th October 1993

9.30 a.m. Morning Service

Radio 4

St. Patrick's College, Armagh, Northern Ireland.

Preacher: His Eminence, Cardinal Cahal Daly, Archbishop of Armagh, Primate of All Ireland.

Today's first reading is from the prophet Isaiah. Now it comes from that part of Isaiah which is known as the Book of the Consolation of Israel, chapters forty to forty-five. And here, God is speaking to His people in exile, at a time of their deepest humiliation and despair. They had been defeated by the armies of Syria, Jerusalem, the holy city of God were sacked. The temple was wrecked. That temple where God had lived among them and where they had felt so secure in His presence, so protected by His love, but now, they were in exile, on unholy ground weeping for a long-lost Zion. Their pagan masters taunted them and jeered at the God who'd deserted them and now was powerless to help them. This was a time of deep national and spiritual depression. A crisis of faith. Now that's a mood in which many in Ireland could identify as we look back in sorrow and in shame at twenty-five years of bloodshed. And look on with helplessness at daily scenes of murder or attempted murder. People in England, Scotland and Wales have not been spared either. They too, have had murder and destruction, grief and bewilderment inflicted on them.

God spoke to His people two and a half thousand years ago. And at that time of dark despair He spoke some of the most tender words of love in the whole Bible. He gave them some of the strongest assurances for hope that He'd ever given. In their depths of their hopelessness, He tells them again and again to trust in Him and not to be afraid. "Do not be afraid I am with you, do not be afraid I will help you." Fifteen times in fifteen chapters these words are repeated, "do not be afraid." Don't be afraid, "I am with you." Stop being anxious and frightened, I give you strength. I bring you help. I the Lord your God am holding you by

the right hand, don't be afraid, Israel, you poor wee thing, Israel, my tiny, little mite, I will help you. It is your Lord who speaks, the Holy-One of Israel is your Redeemer. Do not be afraid. I have redeemed you, I have called you by your name, you are mine. You are precious in my eyes, you are honoured and I love you. You are saying, "God has abandoned us, the Lord has forgotten us."

Does a woman forget her baby at her breast? Or fail to cherish the child of her womb? "Yet, even as these forget, I will not forget you. Look, I have carved you on the palms of my hand." But God's people aren't allowed to know when or how the Lord is going to fulfil His promises, or to answer their prayers. "Look," He says, "I am doing a new deed, you'll see something never told before, you'll witness something never heard before." They have to trust and wait. Wait patiently in confident hope.

These words of the Lord are addressed to us today, just as directly as they were to a broken people two thousand six hundred years ago. We too have often been near to despair. Now at last there does seem to be a faint glimmer of hope. Hope of a change of heart, hope of a new deed. A glimpse of something our young people have never seen before in their whole lives, a future of peace. But the Lord has not at anytime abandoned us. He has been with us through it all. And in today's first reading we heard Him say, "I am the Lord unrivalled. There is no other God besides Me."

Maybe God was testing our faith and our trust, perhaps waiting for us to be ready. To be ready to accept His offer of reconciliation, forgiveness and peace. Are we ready now? Are we ready to accept one another, to trust one another, to forgive one another? And there's so much to be forgiven. So much for each of us to forgive. Each of our two communities in Northern Ireland has much to repent of, much to ask forgiveness for and much to forgive. The Irish people have need for repentance. We've much to repent of and our attitudes to Britain and to the British people. But, the people of Great Britain, too, have much to repent of and their attitudes to Ireland and their treatment of the Irish, in the more recent as well as the more distant past. There has been much misunderstanding, there's been much hurt, much

pain, much wrong, disfiguring relationships between all of us in these islands over many centuries and over recent decades. It's time for us all to implore the Lord to hasten His great new deed and to do for us what we fail to do for ourselves. Across our divided communities in this island of Ireland and across our part peoples in both these islands, the lines of repentance and reconciliation must run. And where the lines intersect is a cross, is a cross which hurts, is a cross which heals.

The Gospel reading today called on to place God above all our other allegiances. Caesar of the state deserved a tribute in his proper domain, but we give our ultimate allegiance only to God. We owe our supreme loyalty only to Him. The state of the nation must never usurp the place of God. Nationalism, Irish style or British style or Ulster style must never be given priority over the Law of God. Only God is absolute. All the rest, the state, the nation, the kingdom, the republic, the union, independence, all these are relative. We must away with all false gods, apart from God, all is nothing. God alone is God. Him, alone, we must adore. And if we let God be God, and if we let God be God, then as He promised he will show kindness to those that love Him and keep His commandments. He will do on our two estranged sister islands, His new deed of a new creation of love in the place of danger. He will grant us the peace for which we long.

24th October 1993

9.30 a.m. Morning Service

Radio 4

John Field Parish Church, Dronfield, Derbyshire.

Preacher: Rev. Malcolm Lyles.

The story of creation we've just heard telescopes millions of years of evolutionary development and asserts the fundamental truth, that humanity is of the earth, that we and it are mutually dependent. Mutual dependence doesn't spring to mind when we survey the world around us. The world on which we open our eyes at birth is very artificial. A world where we're the centre of everything and all is for us. The homes we're born into cost us nothing, but cost our parents a great deal.

Sooner or later, like Nicodemus, we have to be born again. Our eyes open to the real world, in which good things aren't on tap, but we have to be worked and prayed and struggled for. The world we live in our early years is selfish, but in the real world selfishness means the death and destruction of all that makes us human. The trouble is that many of us have not yet grown up, we like to think, "I'm the centre of the world." So we draw the circle of the world around ourselves. A different perspective is given by those who've seen the earth whole. An American astronaut looking at earth from space said, "Now I see earth and mankind more as a whole than individual races, religions and nations."

One world week is an opportunity to look at the world from different perspectives, to listen to others, to put other people in your picture of the world. The creation story puts people in the picture, people who have knowledge of good and evil. The crucial question is, what we do with that knowledge? For with knowledge, we are like God. With the complex mass of communications around the world, we can know within seconds of assassinations in Haiti, an earthquake in India, of people starving in Angola.

We have knowledge to end homelessness here, we have knowledge to aid children dying in Iraq for lack of medicines because of sanctions. We have the knowledge of good and evil and ultimate freedom to choose or not, the things of God. God has entrusted this world to us, it's our mission to make real in it God's will and purpose. It seems a long way off. Our view of world affairs is like a TV cops-and-robbers story. After a long drawn-out battle, the baddies will be caught and get what is coming to them. We, having identified ourselves with the cops, glow with satisfaction at having put the world to rights again. Reducing world affairs to simple terms helps us to cope with it in the short term.

But we need to go further than making rescues and binding wounds, beyond sensational stories and simple solutions and innocent victims, to know more about the people behind the media headlines, to be able to know them as fellow human beings with stories, experiences, skills, hopes, fears and triumphs. Who is listening now, to the people whose crises were in the news last week, last month, last year? Are they still in our picture? We are one world, like it or not. Our thinking needs to change to fit that reality. Hearing the bells sound to indicate that somebody had died, John Donne wrote, "No man is an island entire of itself, every man is a part of a continent, apart of the main. Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind. Therefore, never send to know for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee."

Today the bells sound out for the dead in Bosnia, over victims of floods in Bangladesh, over a fish shop in Belfast. They sound for us too. We're all made in God's image. Christ died for each one of us. He doesn't need labels; foreigner, black, disabled, immigrant, single-parent. Each, is an individual. a brother or sister in Christ and we have the knowledge to put them in our picture. But do we? Like Nicodemus, I'm deeply disturbed when I go beyond the surface of a situation and face the truth. Jesus's teaching for Nicodemus was disturbing and true. It didn't fit in with the commonly accepted world view. It doesn't fit in with assumptions fed to us by media and governments today, which we to our shame lap up so uncritically. Jesus challenged what Nicodemus thought and the way he thought it. Unless you

are born again, you cannot see the kingdom of God. Jesus was asking him, as he asks us, to question all that we've assumed and begin all over again in a process that amounts to no less than a rebirth.

Those receiving first communion here this morning, made a commitment to such a pilgrimage on Tuesday. Let us all make it for ourselves in this Eucharist. We think we know it all, but in Jesus's terms, we're mentally and spiritually dead. We don't really want to know about the brothers and sisters we put out of picture of the world. We don't want to be disturbed to think it out all over again. We need to be open to the spirit of God and search the new truth. Jesus presents us with our world, but in a new light in the light of God's truth, a new kind of knowledge which requires active response, not mere a sense, to change our way of life. To be born again, to put other people in the picture and open our eyes to God's good creation.

31st October 1993

9.30 a.m. Morning service

Radio 4

Trinity Presbyterian Church, Wrexham.

Preacher: Rev. Elfed ap Nefydd Roberts.

I would never have believed it if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes. We've all at some time or another expressed our amazement at an unusual or extraordinary event, which but for the evidence of our own eyes we would find almost impossible to believe. What we believe most firmly is what we have seen for ourselves and what has been verified by our own senses. At yet religion seems to expect us to believe in that which can't be seen. We can't see God. We know that the splendour of God's glory is such that human eyes can't possibly look at Him face to face, and that if we could see Him, then He would cease to be God, for we would then have reduced Him to the status of an object in the world.

But then neither can we see Jesus. There have great Christian mystics for whom the curtain has been pulled back and who have been granted a vision of his glory. But for most of us, all that we can see is the imaginary picture of Jesus which we carry in our own minds. Now, because those things we profess to believe can't be seen, we tend to think of faith as a leap in the dark, as an acceptance on trust, of that which can't be verified, or as an unquestioning submission to what some external authority tells us is true. Indeed we often describe it as blind-faith.

But in the New Testament, faith isn't depicted as a blind, passive submission to the unseen, but rather as a joyful eager response to that which can be seen, to those visual signs or pointers to the mystery of God, which can be discerned around us. The writer of the first letter of St. John in the very first verse of his letter says this: "That which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon concerning the word of life, we proclaim to you." The good news we have to share with you, he says, is based on what we have seen for ourselves.

Now it isn't altogether clear that whether he is saying that he has himself actually set eyes on Jesus. He may well have done so, although the scholars tell us that the letters of St. John were written to second, perhaps even third generation Christians at the end of the first century, which would make it highly unlikely that this John had seen literally seen Jesus in the flesh. But what he is clearly saying is that the word of life, that is the mind and purpose of God, which had existed before the beginning of time, has been made visible. Made visible in Jesus, but also made visible in those things which we can see, which point us to Jesus. John Oxenham, in his poem "A Te Deum of the Common Place" gives thanks to God for those times when we are able to discern God's nearness and His handiwork in the world around us:

For all things beautiful and good and true,
For ears to hear the heavenly harmonies,
For eyes to see the unseen and the seen,
For vision of the worker in the work,
For hearts to apprehend the everywhere,
We thank thee, Lord.

And the starting point of faith is to glimpse the unseen in the seen and to become aware of God in everything that is good and beautiful and true. Now is this sensitivity granted only to a few? Or are we all able to recognise the signs which point us the God's love in Jesus Christ? Where is Christ made visible for us today? Well in the first place, He can be seen in people. Many of us came to our Christian faith, through the example and influence of Christ-like people. Those in whom we saw something of the beauty of Jesus.

Tomorrow is All-Saints Day. The day on which the Church celebrates its oneness with all the saints of God in heaven and on earth. And the story of the Church is the story of the saints of the ages, of those extraordinary and ordinary people whose lives pointed to a reality beyond themselves and who reminded others of Jesus. There have been famous saints, those who have been granted official recognition, a special day on the Christian calendar to be

reminded of them by and have churches named after them. There have also been thousand upon thousands of lesser known, unsung, ordinary saints of God, who have reflected Jesus to their friends and neighbours and acquaintances. Their transparent goodness, their unfaint humility, their kindness, their joy, their devotion, their inner tranquillity, as well as their practical compassion and service to others, all pointed to a deep personal relationship between them and God, which spilled over as it were into their relationship with other people.

Jesus called His first disciples into a relationship of mutual in-dwelling: "Abide in me and I in you." And they were called into that kind of relationship in order that the world might see him and know him through them. Someone once said that the greatest problem for the atheist or the agnostic is the existence of the saint, the sort of person who can't be explained without reference to God. What the Russian writer, Nicholas Berdyev once described as, "The inexplicable and compulsive attraction of the holy life." And it's still through people of that kind, people whose lives are grounded in their Christian faith, people for whom Jesus is real and in whom his love is enfleshed, that others encounter Him and come to believe in Him.

And in the second place, not only is Jesus made visible in the lives of individual people, he can also be seen in the fellowship of the church. The very existence of the world-wide Christian family of every nation and language and tradition extending over five continents, and in some parts of the world growing rapidly, is in itself a visible witness to the Gospel. But it's not primarily the size of the Christian community across the world that makes Jesus visible, but rather the fellowship that exists among those who believe in him and who meet together to worship Him. Jesus once said, "Where two or three meet in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

And there are people who have encountered Him in the company of those who believe in Him and worship Him. And it is the awareness of the presence and power of the living Christ that makes the experience of worship so special. St. Ambrose of Milan, a great Christian

leader who lived in the fourth century said, "That the church, like the moon has no light or glory of its own." As the moon reflects the light of the sun the church reflects the glory of its Lord.

But we've got to honest and acknowledge that the church doesn't always succeed in reflecting Christ, as the moon at certain times eclipses the light of the sun, the church too can come between Christ and the world and can even hinder people from seeing Him. Too often it has been corrupt, oppressive, immoral, more concerned with power and prestige than with ministering to people. And yet, where people have encountered a warm, open and welcoming fellowship of believers, where they have felt themselves accepted and valued, where their worth is recognised and where love, friendship and support are extended to them, there they have become aware of the presence of the love of Jesus.

Let me quote to you from a letter from a young man, whose discovery of faith began when he was drawn into a welcoming and accepting Christian fellowship. "I will always be grateful," he says, "to that small group of friends who persuaded me to go with them to church one Sunday morning, during my second year in college. I went expecting to be thoroughly bored and irritated, but was amazed to find how I was made to feel welcome and put at ease. I went again the following Sunday, and again and again. And I gradually became aware that what made that company of people so different, and for me so special, was that I came to know that Jesus was alive among them. That was the first significant step in my Christian pilgrimage."

Now unfortunately, not everybody's first experience of the church is as pleasant and as positive as that. But when people do find themselves as part of an authentic Christian fellowship, centred on the awareness of the presence of Christ, sensitive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, bound to one another in friendship and acceptance and open to the world in compassion and service, there people find that Jesus becomes real to them. They see the word of life at work in the world and in the lives of people.

And that brings us to a third way in which Jesus can be seen. He can be seen in his influence on the world and on the lives of people. The word influence in this connection is a very unsatisfactory umbrella covering a range of personal and spiritual experiences, as well as formative social factors. It does refer to the strength and comfort which people find through their trust in Christ. It refers to the experience of salvation or liberation from sin, sorrow, anxiety and all the other things that militate against our well-being. It refers to the impact of the Christian conscience on situations of injustice, oppression and cruelty. It refers to the creative impact of the Christian tradition on the progress of civilisation, the growth of freedom and the recognition of human dignity and the worse.

In short, we're speaking about the difference Jesus made and still makes to the lives of people and to the world. The countless numbers who over the centuries who've found their lives totally transformed by the influence of Jesus. Whether they describe that transformation as new-births, being-saved, being set-free, or finding fulfilment and whether its experienced as a sudden conversion or as a gradual process, a changed life is a visible witness to the impact of Jesus Christ. And not only are lives changed by his influence, social structures are challenged and oppression, tyranny, injustice, poverty and racism are overcome as his kingdom goes forward. Jesus spoke of the tiny, unnoticed beginnings of the Kingdom.

He compared it to a tiny mustard seed, or to leaven, hidden within flour. And that by today Christ's Kingdom is not hidden, its a potent force on earth and its effects and to be seen. William Wilberforce writing about the abolition of slavery at the beginning of the last century said, "That it is through the power of the Gospel of Christ, that this cruel abomination is being uprooted and destroyed for ever." And wherever Christian people today take part in the struggle against hunger, poverty and disease, through agencies like Christian Aid; wherever they work for the eradication of racism; wherever they seek to build bridges of understanding and reconciliation; wherever they express their solidarity with the oppressed, the marginalized and the vulnerable, there they are making Jesus visible to the world.

The word of life became incarnate in a human life and people saw His glory, the glory of the one and only Son of God. The same word of life can be seen today, reflected in the lives of people in the fellowship of the church and in the continuing influence of Jesus on human life and history. And with all the saints, with all God's people of every age, we are called to make Jesus visible to the world and to make known that which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, concerning the word of life. Amen.

7th November 1993

9.30 a.m. Morning Service

Radio 4

Truro Baptist Church, Truro, Cornwall.

Preacher: Rev. David Rhymer.

That song reminds us, perhaps uncomfortably, that there is a gap between the safe, soft easy kind of Christianity, that we may all be too familiar with, than the kind of Christianity which begins to have an impact on the real world on which we live. That's one reason why we need God's mercy and forgiveness. And we also need His help if we are to change, as the soft clay that once came into the old Truro pottery was transformed by the hand of the potter and the heat of the kiln, so we need to be changed into something tougher and more useful, if we are to be authentic disciples of Jesus Christ. The process by which clay becomes pot suggests that this kind of change may not be very comfortable for us and perhaps we need to read the small-print of the Gospel before we commit ourselves to following Jesus.

Luke, chapter 14 verses 25-33: Now large crowds were travelling with him and he turned and said to them, "Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. For which of you intending to build a tower does not first sit down and estimate the cost to see whether he has enough to complete it, otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him saying, this fellow began to build and is not able to finish. Or what king going out to wage war with another king will not sit down first and consider whether he is able, with ten thousand, to oppose the one he comes against with twenty thousand, if he cannot then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. So therefore, none of you can become my disciples if you do not give up all your possessions."

Does Jesus really mean it? That's a question that I have to ask when I read a Gospel passage like this. Even allowing for a bit of poetic licence, I can't imagine that someone who urges me to honour my parents really wants me to hate my family. I'm still left with the feeling that following Jesus isn't meant to be a particularly easy or comfortable position. It's as though He's saying don't commit yourself until you've read the small print, which is rather a contrast to the way in which the Christian package is often sold today, a something that appeals to our most basic self interest. You know the kind of thing, "Give your life to Jesus and he'll solve all your problems and guarantee you a front row seat in heaven." Who'd refuse an offer like that? But the trouble is, it doesn't quite match what Jesus said to those who wanted to follow him. It seems rather strange that the individualism and rampant self interest that Christians so often condemn in our society, is precisely the basis on which those same Christians invite others to join them. Too often Christianity is advertised as the ultimate short cut to health, happiness and heaven, which isn't exactly what Jesus is reported to have said in Luke chapter fourteen.

There have always been men and women however, who have held on to the authentic message of Jesus Christ and to a Christianity that has a radical, uncompromising and unsettling edge to it; an uncomfortable Christianity that challenges our narrow self interest. Even in the early centuries after Christ there were those who felt that the church was selling out to the prevailing market forces of the day and they broke away, looking for something that was closer to Jesus's own words and example. And like the Old Testament prophets and John the Baptist and like Jesus himself, they went out into the desert to learn about discipline and self-sacrifice, and to train themselves into single-minded uncompromising obedience to the demands of Christian discipleship.

There was this kind of authentic, radical Christianity that began to develop in Egypt in the second and third centuries after Christ and gave birth to what we now know as the monastic movement. In fact, the original hermits were eremites, or desert dwellers. Western Turkey, or Asia Minor, was another area that kept in touch with the Christianity of the New

Testament. This was the land of the seven churches of the book of Revelation, entities like Ephesus, Sardis and Laodacia, places in fact that have close links with St. John. And here again we're in contact with a Christianity that would have been out-of-step with the acceptable religion that was gaining ground with the more sophisticated parts of the Roman Empire. All very interesting. Well I think it is, but how does it connect with Cornwall?

The answer is tin. There was a flourishing trade between the Eastern Mediterranean and Cornwall. The Cornish tin, in return for wine and olive oil. And where there is trade there is travel. And it was the ancient Western seaways that first brought Christianity to Cornwall as early as the end of the second century or even before. Ancient writers like Tertullian and Origen provide evidence of this, as do fragments of oil and wine jars from North Africa and Western Turkey, which have been found in many places around the Cornish coast. There's good evidence, too, for trading connection between Cornwall and the rest of the Celtic world, especially Ireland. And so it was from Cornwall that Christianity first spread into Ireland, Wales and Southern Scotland and perhaps Brittany too.

So, when St. Patrick, a Roman missionary went to Ireland in the year 321, he found primitive monastic Christianity already established. And this was certainly the distinctive characteristic of Celtic Christianity. An austere and strictly disciplined kind of Christianity, which not only survived but flourished in the most inhospitable places in the wild Atlantic coastlines of Western Europe. Yes, sometimes it was taken to extremes of almost masochistic self-denial. Standing up to your neck in icy cold water with your arms outstretched for hours on end while you recite the psalms in Latin, may seem a bit over-the-top to us. But it certainly produced tough Christians who could challenge and influence the pre-Christian pagan culture of the Celtic world.

So, where do our Cornish Celtic saints fit into all this? Pyron, Petroc, Samson and Pauleralion and the great saints of the late fifth and sixth centuries whose names are to be found in so many villages and churches around the county. In fact most of them weren't Cornish at all, but were wandering Welsh and Irish monks who passed through Cornwall on

route to Brittany and mainland Europe. And on the way, they revived the old Cornish-Celtic Christianity which was getting a bit tired. They must have made quite an impression, armed only with a staff, a Gospel book and a leather satchel and a small, portable stone altar. Oh, and that's probably how St. Pyron gained the reputation of sailing across the sea on a mill-stone.

Mind you, it was their hair that would have made people stare, shaved at the front and long at the back was the traditional Druid style preferred by Celtic monks. There's a popular tendency today, to see the Celtic saints as gentle, nature-loving mystics sitting in their little wooden huts in a woodland clearing with only the wild animals as companions and helpers. While this might be a suitably green picture it does rather distort the truth. They were tough, uncompromising men and women who took Jesus literally when he said, "Give up all your possessions and carry the cross and follow me." These were men and women who were able to engage with the culture of the day and transform it, as the later poems, carvings and illuminated manuscripts demonstrate. And here in Cornwall their ancient granite crosses and their curious names have left an indelible mark on the county.

It seems to me that contemporary Christianity makes very little impression on the society in which we live. I believe we need men and women today who can challenge our so-called post-Christian culture and transform it. For example, the early Celtic Christians adopted a life style of austere simplicity, which raises uncomfortable questions today in a society which describes people as creators and consumers. We need Christians who break out of cosy, self-centred individualism and rediscover a Christianity that is radical and uncompromising and unsettling. And we need Christians who will take the risk of being a disturbing presence within the culture that surrounds us, rather than retreating to the safety of a Christian sub-culture, that is largely irrelevant to those who don't belong to it. We don't challenge our culture by standing outside it and preaching at it, we have to live authentically Christian lives within that culture, as our Celtic Christian ancestors did.

Above all today, we need men and women who like the ancient Cornish saints hear what Jesus said and decide that, in fact, he really meant it. Our Celtic Christian heritage challenges us here in Cornwall and I hope all of us to consider the depth of our discipleship and the cost of our commitment. And this is the theme of this familiar prayer: Teach us good Lord to serve thee as thou deservest, to give and not to count the cost, to fight and not to heed the wounds, to toil and not to seek for rest, to labour and not ask for any reward save that of knowing that we do thy will. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

21st November 1993

9.30 a.m. Morning Service

Radio 4

Matins from Durham Cathedral.

Preacher: Rev. David Nickin.

May the words of my mouth and the thoughts and meditations of all of our hearts be now and always acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

My daughter is eleven months old today and of course my wife and I have started to think about how to mark her first birthday. We shall probably invite a few of her friends around with their parents for a little party. Mind you, those of you who know what a gathering of even a few small children is like, will realise that this is not a decision to be taken lightly. The party is likely to be great fun for the children and probably fun at times for us as well. But I'm sure that there will also be much which we find excessively noisy and which we shall find excessively stressful. And all that we're likely to want to do at the end of the day is to collapse in a heap.

Tatiana, our daughter might well be about to mark a special milestone in her life, but her anniversary seems to pale into insignificance when we set it alongside the nine-hundredth birthday of this great cathedral. The birthday here as just come to an end and, over the months since March the twentieth, St. Cuthbert's Day, the day on which the celebrations started, we have seen some splendid occasions, organised by both the cathedral staff and by the surrounding community. Great services, concerts, children's picnics and pilgrimages, canoes on the river, exhibitions and competitions, to name but a few. This magnificent building has inspired a huge out-pouring of affection from those who know it and it has been both a privilege and a pleasure to be here during this special year. But it has to be said that, just like a children's party, the cathedral's birthday has left us feeling both happy with what has happened, but ready for a rest. The temptation is for us to sit back a little, to rest on our

laurels and to remember a job well-done. But just as a child continues to need attention even after a birthday party, so we here in Durham have to accept that our work goes on. We are lucky that we belong to a long line of people, who through nine hundred years have made a contribution to the life and witness of the cathedral, and far from being able to look at our celebrations as the end of an era, we have to see them as a new beginning.

That feeling is appropriate today, since our readings clearly guide us to think about new beginnings. There are times when we all get things wrong. There have been times during our celebrations when all has not been as we might have liked it to be, although mercifully they've been few and far between. But we appear to be in good company, because even God, if we take our first reading from Genesis at face value, seems to have made a mistake. He regretted creating mankind because of the wickedness that He saw and so He decided to almost completely obliterate His creation in order to allow a new start. The promise which God makes at the end of the story of the flood, suggests that new start. The promise that never again would God send such a flood to destroy all living things. And so here we see hope arising out of what appears to be disaster. So God made a promise to Noah and there was a new start. God also made a promise to Abraham, which gave new hope. And we as Christians celebrate the promise which God gave through our Lord Jesus Christ, which brought new life. Again, where out of apparent disaster, we were given new opportunities. But, with promises like these, the promises which God has made to us, we have to accept that we are given a certain degree of responsibility. We have to accept that we cannot allow the out-pouring of love to be a one way process from God to us. We are given a series of ground rules, a series of tests against which we can judge our actions. We are, as Jesus told us, to love God with all our hearts, with all our minds, with all our souls, with all our strength. We are to love God with our whole being. And so that one commandment deals with our relationship with God, since there isn't very much more that could be said.

The same is true of the second commandment given by Jesus. That we are to love our neighbour as ourselves. What else is there to know about our relationships with other people?

All that St. Peter tells us about our obligations as Christians in our second reading, flows out of those two commandments. Christ in His willingness to go to death for our sake showed us the meaning of the love of which He spoke. A love which is willing to risk total self-sacrifice. And it is to that love which we are called. In so many ways, however, we have not answered that call. If we watch the news on the television, or listen to the radio and day after day see or hear terrible images of the terrible conflict in Bosnia, of the senseless killings in Northern Ireland, of the starvation in Somalia, or wherever, of the homeless, the unemployed and the hungry in our country, then we are seeing the consequences of our inability to love. What is hard for us to accept is that it seems impossible for us to do anything about these conflicts or these problems. But what we have to realise is, that everytime we are quick to criticise, or to argue or to be angry, then we are opting out of the new start which has been won for us through the cross and the resurrection. And that is something which we can work at changing.

In Noah's days as Jesus tells us, men and women were living their lives oblivious as to what was to happen and the flood came and swept them all away. We all have to take seriously the need to live every day as if it were our last. This building has stood as a witness over the past nine hundred years to the power of the Gospel. But it not only stones, however wonderfully they are laid, or however much strength they can convey, which carry the message. We have to take charge of our own lives to ensure that all that we do is acceptable in God's sight. So that we are doing what we can to bring an end to conflict and what we can to participate in the work of the Kingdom of God in spreading the Gospel to a world which desperately needs to hear it. When that happens, then there truly will be cause for celebration, not only of special birthday for this building, not only of an approaching birthday for my daughter, but celebration each and every day of our lives in thanksgiving for the fact that we have offered the opportunity to look ahead, with new hope to a new life, working in the power of the Spirit to the glory of God. Amen.

28th November 1993

9.30 a.m. Morning Service

Radio 4

Advent Sunday service from St. Peter's Church, Boughton Monchelsea, Maidstone, Kent.

Preacher: Rt. Rev. Gavin Reed, the Bishop of Maidstone.

Our Father, we pray that the voice of your spirit may be heard speaking in and to all of our hearts, for Jesus's sake. Amen. I start with a question. If Jesus Christ was to make a state visit to this country in the coming week, how would you feel about it? More to the point, how do you think He would feel about it? Centuries ago, a Jewish prophet spoke poetically of a voice crying, "Clear a road through the wilderness for the Lord, prepare a highway in the desert for our God." And why was he calling for these special preparations? Because he said, "The Glory of the Lord will be revealed and all mankind together will see it." Now, of course it's the poetry of a bygone age, but it's a powerful picture all the same. Think about it. If the Lord of Glory decided to make a state visit to us today, would we be excited, or distinctly uncomfortable?

Today is Advent Sunday and a start of a short season in the Church's year when we think towards the coming of Jesus at Christmas. It's also the time, when we remind ourselves of one of the teachings of Jesus when he said, that he would come again, and that this second coming would not be like the first. The first coming was to bring forgiveness and help, the second coming would be about judgement. So, although the founder of Christmas is at the end of our Advent period, we put ourselves through a pretty searching time. We ask, are we ready to meet that One person who is totally pure and just and holy, that One person whose goodness makes our best efforts look pretty grubby? So, back to that question, are you, am I and the country ready to come into contact with Jesus? And if not, why not?

One of the writers in the Bible who also had a touch of the poet about him, describes the first coming of Jesus into this world in these terms. "He was in the world," he wrote "but the

world though it owed its being to him, did not recognise him. He came to his own, and his own people would not accept him.” If you read the accounts of the life of Jesus in the New Testament, those words I just read, pretty well sum it up. We read of a man who talked of God, not of some remote figure, but as a loving Father. Time after time, he spoke of this Father as one who cares for each one of us. He said that we matter to that Father, what ever we may be like and what ever we may have done. He actually healed people. When somebody stood in front of him, suffering from the most feared disease of the day, leprosy, He put out his hand and touched the untouchable. And just as he touched the untouchables, he mixed with socially undesirables. The prostitutes found that he treated them like human beings who mattered to God. And the reason for that was simple: such people did matter to the loving God and they still do. Then there were the swindling tax collectors, who collaborated with the Roman occupying forces, they were among those who hated people of the day. But Jesus said that God loved them too.

Last week, I spoke at a service attended by mainly prison inmates. I told them that they mattered to God and in saying that I was only quoting something Jesus himself said. And what about some of the other things he taught, that children were important in the sight of God just as much as anybody else. He said that if anyone hurt a child or any powerless or disadvantaged person, they would have to answer to God for it. He talked about not fighting back when people are aggressive; of forgiving; of turning the other cheek; and above all he talked of putting God first; of seeking first what God wanted and finally that when you do, the things you really need are added to you. What an amazing and wonderful person and yet the people of His day found reason to have him arrested and put to death. He was just too uncomfortable to have around.

So, I come back to my question. How would you and I feel if we were told that same Jesus was coming back to see us? And how would people generally feel if they heard on the news that this same Jesus was coming back to pay a state visit beginning tomorrow? And the news report goes on. Jesus will be visiting our prisons. He will walk the wards of our

hospitals. He will sit at the back of our school classrooms listening to what is taught and watching how the children behave. He will sit in the gallery and observe Prime Minister's questions in the House of Commons. He will study what is written in our national newspapers. He will attend the board-room meetings of some of our big companies. He will sit in on a police interrogation and go out on the beat to see how an officer is regarded by the people he is trying to serve. He will join a dole queue and see how unemployed people are treated. He will attend some of our cinemas and video-shops and study what we regard as entertainment. He will visit an old peoples' home and count the number of visitors. He will slip quietly into our homes and watch how members of families treat each other. Oh, and I almost forgot, he plans to attend a meeting of the House of Bishops. Nasty. I have a feeling that a newscast telling us all this would make most of us feel very anxious. I'll be frank, he would make me feel very anxious. Are we ready to have the Lord of Glory come and have a look at us? You and I have just lived through a harrowing week with the trial of those two boys. And in a strange way, it seemed that many of us felt that our whole way of life was in the dock with them.

I remember some years ago, a friend of mine suggested that I might like to invite another friend of hers to join me for a round of golf. I said, "fine," only to find that he was a one-handicap player. Now, in case you don't know what that means, it means that he was very, very, good. I was, and still am, very, very, bad. All round the course he was hitting the ball straight and long and putting marvellously. Meanwhile, back in the rough, I was hacking around hopelessly. Now this other player was really very nice, he even tried gently to make a few suggestions and that just made thing worse, you see, all I wanted was for him to go away. Faced with his excellence, I just wanted him somewhere else. I have feeling that if Jesus was to come and visit us to today, we would all feel pretty ashamed of the standards we settle for, the way we treat each other, the lack of respect which we show to God, I think we would just want Him to go away.

Well, we can all relax, we don't have someone shouting, "Prepare a way for the Lord," at least not yet. But perhaps the thought of that possibility might prompt us to take a long look at ourselves and the Britain we're helping to create. Perhaps, you and I ought to be making a few apologies, mending a few fences, giving an extra hug to someone we've been taking for granted, writing a generous cheque, changing a company decision. And above all, saying a big sorry to our merciful God, for living as if we never expected Him ever to turn up and check us out. Because one day, in some way or another, Jesus has said, that he intends to do just that. I hope we'll all be ready. Amen.

5th December 1993

9.30 a.m. Morning Service

Radio 4

Church of Ascension, Stirchley, Birmingham.

Preacher: Professor John Hull, Professor of Religious Education, Birmingham University.

During Advent, we prepare for the coming of Christ, the Judge over our individual lives and upon our society. The theme of this service during the second Sunday of Advent is Christ as the Lord of Money, Jesus as the Judge of my cheque book. Jesus said, "You cannot serve God and mammon." In many of our English Bibles the word "mammon" is given a capital letter as if it refers to the name of somebody. But there is no indication that mammon was looked upon as a god in the world of Jesus's time, there are no shrines or temples surviving dedicated to the god "mammon." The word actually comes from the Aramaic language which Jesus spoke and is simply the ordinary word for money, or possessions or wealth. It was four or five hundred years before mammon was personified and became a mighty, divine power.

In Milton's *Paradise Lost* there's a famous part where the fallen arch-angels are debating their future down in hell and one of the mightiest and most despicable of the fallen angels is 'mammon', the god of money, of gold and silver. We can trace this development of the personification of money back to Jesus. His saying "You cannot serve God and money" supposes a similarity between God and money, and it is surprising, when you think about it, how profound and striking the similarities are between God money. For example, God is often spoken of as the concrete Universal, the one who is present everywhere and yet to be found in a particular place.

The same is true of money, it is more universal and yet it's concretely here in this coin which I have in my pocket. Money is an unusual commodity, it is the commodity which links together all other commodities. It represents the relationship between all other things.

In a somewhat similar way, God is not a thing like other things, an object amongst others, God is the one in whom the relationship between all things is grounded. Moreover, God and money are similar in that they exercise a profound drawing power upon our emotions. Money fascinates us, if we don't have much of it, we need more because money becomes our life. If we have lot of it, we're never satisfied, the more you have of it, the more you want of it. Money is rather like language, language and money are two of the great social institutions which mould our lives. Of these, language is far the older and perhaps the more profound, the history of money only goes back about two-and-a-half thousand years. During that time, however, money like language has grown to be a vast complex social network entwining every aspect of our thoughts and personalities. We are so deeply embedded in language that we hardly notice language upon our thoughts and personalities. The same is true of money, embedded deep within it, we hardly even notice the effect it's continually having upon us.

Of course, this doesn't mean to say that money or language are evil in themselves, on the contrary, language and money are two of the most brilliant achievements of our human species. Money and language infinitely increase the flexibility, the adaptability, the power and range of our human relationships and of our human capacities. Jesus used money, Jesus paid his taxes, Jesus found his tax money on one occasion we read, in the mouth of a fish. The disciples had a treasurer, there was one of their number who kept the bag. Jesus spoke a great deal about money. Although he used it and in a sense approved of it, he was also profoundly aware of the power of money to become demonic, of the strange way in which money takes over our lives. And so it was that Jesus taught a great deal more about money than He taught about prayer.

How are we to respond to the Lordship of Christ over money at this Christmas time? In a strange way Christmas and money go together. Father Christmas, as the Commodity King, the lord of High Street with his flowing bag of presents seems to sum up in us all that we long for at Christmas time for ourselves and for our children. It's at this time we become even more acutely aware of our need of money, of our desire for money. It's hard to enjoy

Christmas without money, but turn our eyes more widely to our society as a whole. Now we find that the whole of our society is in grip of a profound spiritual and ethical crisis. At the root of this, lies our failure to grasp the power of money and to use it for the general interest of the people as a whole. What are we to do about it? How are we to respond to Christ, the coming Advent King as Lord of Money?

I suggest a number of approaches. First, we have to study money, we have to read books about money, we have take the understanding of money on board as a theological task. Just as Jesus taught about money, we also must study money. We must also take money seriously as a source of our emotions. We must learn to disentangle the close connection between money and God and to realise that sometimes we are deceived into thinking we are worshipping God and all the time we are worshipping money. Above all, we must take a social view of money. There is no private language and there is no private money. Language like money is social. Until we can re-gather until we can regain a social understanding of money, we will never learn in our society to get rid of the spiritual sickness which afflict us. Not that we need to leave off generating wealth, but we need to emphasise more, the sharing of wealth. Each one of us needs to take on a personal discipline, for one person it may mean contributing to the one or two percent of our income to Oxfam or to Christian Aid. Other Christian parents or people will want to give as much to Children in Need as they give to the education or the clothing of their own children. Each one of us needs to take on a discipline to ensure that money becomes our servant and not our master.

And so, to our money crazed world, Jesus calls out, "Money is for sharing." The sharing of money is part of the Kingdom of God. Christ, the coming Advent King calls out to each one of us, "Seek first the Kingdom of God and His justice and all these things will be added to you." Even so, Lord Jesus come. Amen.

12th December 1993

9.30 a.m. Morning Service

Radio 4

Parish Church of St. Andrew and St. George, Edinburgh.

Preacher: Rev. Johnson McKay.

One of our problems with the Gospels today is that a lot of the time they were written in code. A code which was easily read two thousand years ago, but today it isn't so easy to make sense of. For example, when Jesus was baptised in the river Jordan, the moment which marks the beginning of his public life, the hidden years now behind him, the years of his waiting now over, when Jesus was baptised in the river Jordan, St. Matthew tells us that the Spirit of God descended on Him like a dove. It conjures up the sort of picture you sometimes see on television, when a magician produces a dove from his hat or from underneath his cloak and the dove flutters around for a while and lands on the magician's head. It's too comic a way of picturing something as important as the start of Jesus's public ministry. But if that's the picture Matthew's description conjures up, it's only because we've taken it literally. But this dove is a theological dove. Matthew is writing in code.

In the old story of Noah and the flood, it was the dove which Noah sent out from his ark, three times. The first time the dove came back because there was nowhere to land. The second time it came back with a twig in its mouth. The third time the dove didn't return. In that old story of Noah and the flood, the dove was the sign that the flood was subsiding and that creation had a future after all. So, when Matthew says that the spirit of God descended on Jesus like a dove, he's spelling out in a code which his readers would have understood: that because of Jesus there is a future to be realised.

But something else. Countries become identified with particular animals, the Russian bear, the Australian wallaby, the Scottish lion rampant. Two thousand years ago the symbol of Israel was the dove. The dove represented the nation of Israel, but Israel wasn't just a

nation, it was a religious nation. Its laws were religious laws, its institutions were religious institutions, its ceremonies were religious ceremonies. Not so much a nation, more a religious system. And when Matthew says that the Spirit of God descended on Jesus like a dove, he's spelling out in a code which his readers would have understood, that because of Jesus the system has been personalised. You have heard that it was said Jesus was to remark later on, "But I say to you."

But something else. Someone once wondered how the writers of sentimental songs would ever have managed if the word "moon" hadn't rhymed with "June." And you could ask how the writers of hymns would have managed if the word "love" hadn't rhymed with "dove." But there's something quite appropriate about that, because in the Old Testament the 'dove' is a symbol of the deepest affection. Read the Song of Solomon, which is a love poem and you'll see how often it is literally lovey-dovey. "My dove" he says to his lover "let me hear your voice." And she says to him, "Your eyes are like doves besides brooks of water." And so, when Matthew says that the heavens opened and the Spirit of God descended on Jesus like a dove, he's spelling out in a code which his readers would have understood, that because of Jesus the idea of heaven has been revolutionised. A future still to be realised, systems still to be personalised, heaven to be understood revolutionised.

This Advent, my expectation of Jesus is that with him there is still a future to be realised. And maybe that will sound hollow if today you're in the grip of sadness or anxiety and you can't see a way out of it. Maybe it will sound cheap, if today you're watching someone suffering and you doubt if there's any future at all. But sometimes those who follow Jesus of Nazareth have to cling on by nothing more substantial than their finger-nails to their hope that the future is with God because God has taken out a stake in that future. He's made an investment in that future. Put a down payment on it. Jesus expresses God's faith in our future. And what we have done is take God's faith in our future and organise it into our churches and dogmatize it into our creeds. And we so easily forget that what infuriated the

religious people of Jesus's day, was that he cut through the systems of religion and belief and insisted that now they had been personalised.

Personalised in Jesus. That might just be acceptable. But personalised in a bunch of fishermen and tax-collectors and the lunatic political fringe was too much to swallow. But Jesus believed that God's Kingdom was personalised in anyone who had been made whole. The blind see, the lame walk, the deaf hear and the poor hear the Good News.

And so this Advent, my expectation of Jesus is that he will be most at home, not with those who are very comfortable in the world of General Synods and Assemblies, and not with those who think that what matters about Jesus is to have the right words to describe him, but with people who need to be made whole. Because that is the way God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven. And because of Jesus we can no longer tell ourselves that heaven is remote and distant, unfeeling and uncaring. After Jesus, the idea of heaven has to be revolutionised, because at the river Jordan the heavens opened to reveal the symbol of love, which means that at the heart of heaven there is love. Not the inscrutable mind of creation's Maker, but the broken heart of the world's Father. If at the heart of the world there is matter, at the heart of all that matters, there is love. And so this Advent, my expectation of Jesus is that He will once more reveal to me that God is love. The veil of the temple torn in two and heaven's veil ripped apart by a cross. For the heavens opened and the Spirit of God descended on Jesus like a dove and there was a voice, "This is my Son."

The Matthew who told the story of the Spirit of God descending on Jesus like a dove and the voice of God saying, "This is my Son," was a Jewish disciple of Jesus and not a Greek philosopher of religion. Greek philosophers wondered how someone could be human and divine. How anyone could possibly be both and if Jesus was, if that meant something of Him had existed from the very creation of the world. And it was the world of Greek philosophy that produced the church's creeds. But Matthew was a Jewish follower of Jesus. So maybe, if we are to get a clue by what he meant, to what he meant by calling Jesus the Son of God, we'll find it not in the wordy language of the creeds, not in the sorts of questions that

interested the Greek philosophers, but in the sort of things that the first century Jewish people believed about their sons.

Two thousand years ago, a Jewish son owed his father absolute obedience. Child psychologists hadn't then discovered the damage that authoritarian parents can do. But even if they had it, wouldn't have mattered, because two thousand years ago Jewish sons weren't dominated into obedience, they took absolute obedience to their father in with their mother's milk. And so, to say that Jesus was God's Son was to say that he was perfectly obedient to God. Not because he was afraid of what would happen to him if he wasn't obedient, because Jesus knew that God isn't a God who issues threats or threatens sanctions, but because Jesus simply believed in being perfectly obedient, not out of fear, but out of faith. And two thousand years ago, a Jewish son was instructed by his father. Educationists then hadn't discovered that schools were the place to learn. So first century Jewish fathers taught their sons. Sons became apprentices to their fathers, which is why, without any real evidence at all, people assumed that Jesus was a carpenter, just because Joseph was, and what else would he have taught Jesus but carpentry.

And so, to say that Jesus was God's Son was to say that he had perfectly learned from God. That great Scottish teacher of the New Testament, William Barclay, put it like this: "There are," he said, "aspects of God I don't see in Jesus. I don't see God's omniscience, for there were things Jesus didn't know. I don't see God's omnipotence, for there were things Jesus couldn't do. I don't see God's omnipresence, because Jesus could only be in one place at any one time. But in Jesus, I see perfectly and completely and finally and once and for all, the attitude of God to me. The Jesus who had learned God's perfect way of love."

And two thousand years ago, a Jewish son was entitled to act as his father's agent. If you wanted to expand your business, you needed agents to act on your behalf, as business grew you needed an agent you could completely rely on and a man's son was his best agent, his best representative. And so, to say that Jesus was God's Son, was to say that he was perfectly entitled to act on God's behalf. which means that when people saw Jesus forgiving the

apparently unforgivable, it was with the authority of God. When people saw Jesus accepting the apparently unacceptable, it was with the authority of God. When people saw Jesus trusting the untrustworthy and relying on the unreliable and promising his kingdom to the most unpromising of failures, that too, was with the authority of God.

To call Jesus God's Son today, need involve no more than Matthew believed it involved. The Greek spin-doctors of the church made Son of God their code for a whole lot more. God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, being of one substance with the Father by whom all things were made, who for us and our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost and was made man. It's a far, far cry from what Jesus's first disciples meant by calling Him God's Son.

And there's nothing wrong with us using that sort of language today, so long as from time to time we remember that it is simply our way of expressing how significant Jesus is for us. But in truth, to call Jesus God's Son today need involve no more than his first disciples believed it involved, but no less. For it is only by following Jesus in obedience to God's will, in believing that the way of the world isn't the only way for the world to work, in rejecting the easy option that might is right and strength is power and vulnerability is the same thing as weakness. It's only by following Jesus in obedience to God's will that there is a future to be realised. And it's only by joining Jesus in learning from God that love, fragile, vulnerable, exploitable abused love, love lies at the heart of everything that matters, it is only that by joining Jesus and learning the divine secret of love that we will ever see our imperfect systems personalised. And it's only by acting with Jesus for God in this world, alongside the poor and the rejected and the despised and the ignored. It's only by acting with Jesus for God in this world that anyone will ever grasp the truth, that after Jesus the whole idea of heaven has been revolutionised. John Robinson, the Bishop of Woolwich in the sixties put it very simply, "No one will ever find a gracious God unless they meet a gracious neighbour." And to those who say all of this isn't enough, it isn't sufficiently orthodox, it doesn't do justice to

the historic faith, let me close with two signals from the sort of people I covet for the Christian faith, but who are so often frightened away from it.

The first from a conversation I once had with a very wise, but very blunt man. “You preachers have got it all wrong,” he said, “you seem to be saying that Jesus was the Son of God and that’s why we should follow him, maybe you’d be better telling us why we should follow him and then leave us to discover if he’s the Son of God.” And the second signal from that incomparable religious journalist Gerald Priestland. “One morning” he said, “as I was coming home from my daily contemplative stroll, I found myself saying, if Jesus was not God, he is now. I can’t believe that Jesus intended his followers to say you are the second part of the Trinity. What I do believe is that the company of his followers has come to see God almost exclusively through him, has come to see God is like this. God is so like this that as far as we can tell, God is this. For we’re not likely to come any closer.”

To believe that may not for some be close enough to orthodox belief, but it’s too close to God for comfort. There’s a saying attributed to Jesus in one of the Gospels which wasn’t considered orthodox enough to be included in the New Testament: “He who is near me is near the fire.” Too real an experience and expectation of Jesus for comfort too.

19th December 1993

9.30 a.m. Morning Service

Radio 4

Chapel of The Royal Foundation of St.Catherine, Lime House, London.

Preacher: Rev. June Osborne.

May I speak in the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen. Some of us just can't wait for it to be here. We love it, it's the best part of the year and we don't want it to end. Oh, never mind about the shopping, and the expense, the organising. Think of the parties, the lights, the excitement. Then some of us can't wait for it to be over. We want to be back to normal life and we'd rather be rescued from all this hype. The unnatural expectations simply remind us that we have no close family or we feel the loss of times gone by. But whether you love it or dread it, we're all now waiting for it, waiting for Christmas, waiting for Jesus.

The story James read just now was a promise of waiting. The angel Gabriel told Mary that she was going to carry a child. It was to be a unique a God child. And Mary had seen God do remarkable things, but she'd have to wait for them to take place, for pregnancy's waiting experience. It starts with waiting as you count your way to your last period, you then count the days until you're likely to get to the end of morning sickness, or until a miscarriage is less likely. You wait anxiously until the time the baby could survive outside the womb. Then the serious business of waiting begins as the magical date of arrival comes and usually goes, and as you go passed that date you've been anticipating for so long, the waiting becomes that much harder.

My eldest child, Megan, was due to be born on Christmas Day, so I remember how all of life became a waiting game that year. We tried to speed her up. I dug the garden and walked up and down Greenwich Hill, which you can see just across the Thames from here. We tried every remedy known to old wives in our attempt to hasten her arrival and none of them worked. I still have something of a guilty conscience about allowing her to be induced when

she was seventeen days overdue. For the process of giving birth suggested she wasn't ready to face the world yet. Perhaps I should have waited longer and not given vent to my impatience.

And now we're all impatient for Christmas and the celebration which surrounds the birth of the Christ-child. But today I want to ask you to ponder the pregnancy which brought about that birth and the labour which delivered the baby Jesus into our world. Mary's pregnancy. Mary is thought of as one who is called by God to a special future. God had a purpose for her life. He even sent an angel to announce it and her, "Yes", her acceptance to that calling has been revered throughout Christian tradition.

The story James read to us just now was a promise of waiting. The Angel Gabriel told Mary that she was going to carry a child. It was to be a unique child, a God child. And Mary had seen God do remarkable things, but she'd have to wait for them to take place, for pregnancy's waiting experience. It starts with waiting as you count your way to your last period, you then count the days until you're likely to get to the end of morning sickness, or until a miscarriage is less likely. You wait anxiously until the time the baby could survive outside the womb. Then the serious business of waiting begins as the magical date of arrival comes and usually goes, and as you go passed that date you've been anticipating for so long, the waiting becomes that much harder.

So what was it, this highly esteemed vocation? No more and no less than to be a mother. And this is where most of us get sentimental, because having babies fills us with a sense of Wonder and hope. I never see a broader smile on the face of people in this community when they tell me they're going to become a grandparent. And I know an old lady who always manoeuvre so that she spends Christmas with whichever bit of her family have a new baby. It's true, new born babies, specially draw us like bees to a hive. We gape and admire. We sense that the presence of God is there in every newly created life.

But Mary's pregnancy was to bring the presence of God even closer. The foetus that grew in her womb was the very being of God taking on human flesh. "You are flesh of my flesh

and bone of my bone, but also my Lord and my God.” On the other hand, this God-child was no different from any other pregnancy. He may have the very embodiment of God, but He too kept his mother waiting, waiting whilst He grew within her, waiting to arrive, waiting to be delivered. He subjected His mother to the fate of every parent.

For it seems to me that as a parent, you never stop waiting. Once they’re here you wait for them to grow, you wait for them to learn, you wait for them to come home, you wait for them to ring. You search for the signs, you hold back your frustrations with them, you try not to intervene and you wish in your heart that you can find a short-cut in their pain of growing. Mary had a calling from God to be a mother and thus she had to learn how to wait. Now I’m quite sure that I don’t expect this of God. So many of the hard things of my life have to do with waiting, but I would like Him to be an instant God offering quick action. If God was to live as human as we do in the world, in my house or in my neighbourhood, then I think I’d be rather put out if He kept me waiting.

We have no doubts about what we want, we may not have the courage to ask, but most of us are sure of what we’d like God to do. We want to make someone we love well again, we want the self-respect of a decent job or a bit of extra cash. We want to live in peace. We want a relationship to mend or some pain to be cured. Oh yes, we know our hearts desires, and it’s the waiting, often with the uncertainty of what the future holds, which makes life difficult. So surely, if God is part of our life, in the way Jesus claimed to be then the least we can expect of Him is some immediate solutions. He promises to be there for me, I’d like it to be right now please as soon as I need Him. But it’s not like that, is it? Jesus, the normal baby grew in a womb and took his time in coming. And when He did come, it was inconveniently, whilst His parents were away from the safety of home. This normal baby warns us that God may take His time in being present to our life. The voice of God needs to break through a cacophony of sound. The sounds of busy lives with too much pressing in on us, or the sounds of all too empty lives when we long for someone to call and break the echoing of our loneliness. The reasons we struggle to understand, we can’t honestly say that we sense God’s

presence. And it isn't because we've obstructed God, on the contrary it takes faith to trust God when we don't feel Him close. But the other great thing which pregnancy illustrates is that waiting needn't be a passive or a compliant time. No mother ever feels that she is a mere receptacle for her infant child. What you do physically affects the child and there are shifts of focus.

Across the way from here, the London hospital, one of the chaplains is pregnant. As well as her demanding job, she is a person of wide interests and she is currently preparing to be one of the first women priests in this country. But the other day, she confessed to me that arrival of her child is such an intense experience that it is hard for her to concentrate on anything else and so it'll be until the other side of the birth when her horizons will again widen. We're active and absorbed partners in pregnancy, just as we're active explorers of God's will for us in all our waiting experiences. Active explorers of God's will for our lives. It's good phrase, but it's not always that easy is it? It needs us to believe that God is part of the fabric of our lives, even when the evidence is scant. We may wish He'd intervene, but does that mean we fail to see where He's already present? And it helps if we pray. Sometimes you know, we fool ourselves that we're still praying people, when we've long ceased to be. And discovering the direction of God's way for us is much easier if we belong to a worshipping community, it's there we'll find understanding and much Godly perspective.

One of the people who gaped and admired baby Jesus was an elderly man named Simeon, who was very much an explorer of God's will for his world. He believed God to be present in all things. He prayed and made worship part of his life. When he saw the infant Jesus, he said of him, "This child is destined to be a sign that will be opposed, so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed." And then to Mary he said, "And a sword will pierce your own soul too." Sombre words for the dedication of an infant. But of course Mary had already discovered the piercing of her body and soul in the giving of birth, for it's in pain we bring forth children. People used to tell me you forget the agony of child-birth once the joy

of the child is with you. Stuff and nonsense, I say, you never forget that indescribable pain, but the suffering is part of a greater reality and so you bear it. It only begins with the labour but it goes on in being a mother, intense effort, sometimes to the point of the unbearable. Yet if you're wise, you don't try to deny the pain or blame others, you carry it, for without that suffering for your child, you can't entirely know the wonder of loving them.

Again that seems to me to be the pattern of parent life to which God called Mary. It's also the Biblical pattern of God present with us in our world, in our hardest places, it's in pain we bring forth children and it can be in pain that we explore the will of God for us. He's rarely present with us straight away. There's silence. There's a harsh dawn and a fearful night and between we struggle on. We wait. God even keeps us waiting. He kept Mary waiting and His vocation for her involved a sword piercing her spirit. So before the sentiment of the birth overtakes us, we're warned by Mary's pregnancy that we don't always get what we want from God, a pain-free and spontaneous presence.

But can we follow Mary in her response? Can we have courage in the face of an uncertain future? Can we carry God's purpose in the hidden heart of our spirit? Nourishing it, allowing it to grow, welcoming it, being no victim but an agent of God's design, even as we wait. Can we be mothers of God's spirit, who bear pain for the immense joy that is in store?

Heavenly Lord, Son of Mary, you were born a child to share our humanity, as we wait to hear again the news of the angels, prepare our hearts so that we may receive you with faith and joy. And like Mary, may we in all our waiting and suffering know your Father's loving purpose. In your Holy Name, we pray. Amen.

2nd January 1994

9.30 a.m. Morning Service

Radio 4

Bula United Reformed Church, Rhiwbina, Cardiff, Wales.

Preacher: Rev. Ken Graham.

At the start of new year, we become very aware that time is on the move. 1993 has slipped into 1994. Time goes hurrying by, greedily eating up the hours. We wake up at the beginning of a new year and ask ourselves, "Where has it all gone?" It never lets up. It waits for no-one. We only get so much and when it is finished we don't get any more. The words of psalm ninety, set in the hymn we have just sung, seem to say it all:

Time, like an ever rolling stream,

Bears all our years away.

They fly forgotten as a dream

Dies at the opening day.

Time is such a precious gift, but it can also be a problem for us. How are we to use it creatively, rather than wasting it? Thomas Carlyle's hymn puts our dilemma in the form of a question: "So here has been dawning another blue day." Think, will you let it slip useless away? The French priest Michel Quoist, whose published prayers have helped millions of others to pray, has always been concerned with this problem of time. In an early meditation, this was reflected in a prayer in which he spoke of people, rushing, not to waste time, rushing, after time, rushing, to catch up with time, rushing, to gain time. In this fast moving rapidly changing world, we seem to be engaged in a continual race against time and the present moment drifts by untouched. More recently, Quoist has commented, "We are stuck between the past and the future." The past is no longer in our hands, neither is the future, it doesn't exist yet. The only time we have control over, is the present. It is now. It exists. The

past and the future. Those problems that make it so difficult for us to exercise control over the present, they must be reconciled if we are not to become victims of time.

Let us for the moment consider the past. Tradition, history, experience all have their place, of course they do. They are to be valued, appreciated, learnt from. What we must never do is live in the past. Nostalgia is a sickness that often inhibits, stifles new ideas and denies God's opportunity to work creatively with us. The church, itself, so often a victim of such narrowness. To clutch the past nostalgically, as someone has said, only falsifies the present. More than that, all too often, we carry around with us the baggage of our own past. There are the resentments harboured, hurts unforgiven, failures that rankle, opportunities missed. Nor must we misunderstand the part that guilt can play in tying us to the past. Other memories too. Christmas is such a sensitive time for families experiencing the loss of a loved-one. Particularly when a young life is involved. The pain of bereavement induces a sense of longing which is difficult to reconcile. Photographs constantly remind us of how things might have been, as faces from the past intrude on our celebrations. Long historical memories, like those in Ireland, or the former Yugoslavia. Memories of hatred, bitterness, recrimination and injustice. How are our memories to be healed so that we can find peace? How can we be helped to let go the past, so that we can live freely in the grace of the present moment?

And what of the future? Anxiety over it can so dominate our lives. The ageing process and the prospect of death, work opportunities for the unemployed, concern for a member of the family, worrying over what might never be, or indulging in unrealistic daydreams. Issues that can exercise such a control over our lives, that the present escapes us and can leave us wallowing in frustration. Truly, we are stuck between the past and the future. And our obsession, with the one or both, can blind us to the "now" of our lives. And it is to the "now" of our lives that God speaks, directly. "Today announced the angels to the shepherds there has been born to you a deliverer, the Messiah, the Lord." This must be good news, for in the birth of Jesus we recognise one who was identified with prophet Isaiah in proclaiming

release for prisoners and freedom for broken victims. As prisoners of time, this news must be of critical importance to us, for God comes in Christ to liberate us, deliver us, free us from both past and future. A past that through love can be forgiven and healed and a future that can be left safely in God's hands. It is both promise and opportunity. It leaves us with the responsibility of using our freedom to play our part in freeing others from their bondage.

As wise men of old came bearing gifts, we too can make the wise decision to come into the presence of God with the gift of our lives. Giving ourselves to live in God's time, where a thousand years are as the passing of one day, or as a watch in the night. There, to find peace and healing, unable to exercise control over the present, so that we can exist in the "now" of our lives.

A story is told of the Brazilian bishop Helder Camara. He was invited to say mass for a sister celebrating her sixtieth anniversary as a profession as a nun. Pretending not to be quite sure what anniversary it was were celebrating, Camera said to her, "sister, let me get this straight. Exactly how many years have you spent in the religious life?" Very humbly and looking around to make sure no-one was eaves-dropping she said, "I've only spent one day in the religious life, because every day I have to start all over again."

So, as an ancient writer said, now is the time for you to start all over again. So look to this day, for it is life, the very life, the very life-of-life. In its busy course lie all the virtues and realities of your existence. So let us now pray that in the words of Michel Quoist we may discover the value of time ourselves. Let us pray. Lord, I have time, all the time that you give me. The years of my life, the days of my years. The hours of my days, they're all mine. Mine to fill quietly, calmly, completely. Thanks be to God for the gift of time. Teach us to make wise use of it. Amen.

9th January 1994

9.30 a.m. morning Service

Radio 4

College of Ascension; Federation of Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham.

Training Centre for the Propagating of the Gospel.

Preacher: Rev. Colin Chapman.

When two mission training colleges are worshipping together at the beginning of a new term and can share the occasion with a wider audience through radio, we have an ideal opportunity to take a fresh look at this familiar story of the three wise men. Images of camels and stars are no doubt fresh in minds from the Christmas cards and carols over the last few weeks. But we can be hardly unaware about the doubts about the story which have recently been aired in public. So what difference does it make for us to reflect on it, once again, in this particular context?

The first thing that strikes me is that the main characters are a most unlikely group of people. Isn't it odd, that in the Gospel written by Matthew, a Jewish Christian, the first people who come from outside to visit the child Jesus are these foreign astrologers. People of wisdom and learning who observed the stars. Perhaps they have been intrigued by a particular configuration of the stars, like the coming together of Jupiter with Venus and Saturn which we know happened in 7 BC. Or they'd seen a comet or a supernova, we can only guess. But they're not the most obvious people that we'd expect to be making a long journey of many months to follow such a slender clue. All this is a pointed reminder to me that people of nationalities other than my own, people of other cultures and other faiths are seeking to understand the mystery of the universe and work out what life is all about just as much I am. They're longing to find something that satisfies the hunger of the heart and mind.

In an international setting like ours in these colleges, it's not just a pious hope for us to believe that our faith is for people of all races and to see Jesus as the light of the world. We've all experienced the same Christ but in different ways and we've found that He breaks down barriers of culture and race. So this story tells us that whoever we are, whatever country we come from and whatever language we speak, we too can make our journey as the wise men did to find the Christ.

A second major theme in the story is that the political and religious establishment of the day is blind to what is really happening. The puppet King Herod sees Jesus as a potential threat because the astrologers say they are looking for one who has been born King of the Jews. The religious leaders are able to give the correct answer about where the Messiah is to be born, but they don't understand the rumour they've heard and don't have the enquiring mind that makes them follow up the clues. These Pagan astrologers therefore, have more insight into what God is doing in history than the political and religious experts of the day.

No, I'm not taking this as a general invitation to knock politicians and religious leaders. In our mission studies here, we're intensely interested in world politics, and we spend a lot of time studying and trying to understand the different religions of the world. But often we have to wrestle with the fact that the most unlikely people sometimes have more insight into what is really happening in any situation than those in position of power and authority. Nameless people like these outsiders from the East can sometimes see the hand of God at work better than those who are being paid to make the big decisions, and those who think they know many of the answers.

So, you and I as ordinary people, don't need to feel completely powerless and blame the powerful for everything. Whatever our leaders in church or state are doing, or not doing, we've all got the power to follow up our hunches, to act on our convictions and to accept the challenges that are staring us in the face. Whatever Herod and the scribes and Pharisees are up to in Jerusalem, we can get up like the Wise Men and follow in the direction that God seems to be leading us and try to change what needs changing.

A third aspect of the story is, that when these seekers find what they are looking for, they offer the very best that they can. Christian tradition over many centuries has seen the gold as the symbol of Kingship, frankincense as something associated with sacrifice and therefore as a gift for a priest, and myrrh as a hint of suffering to come, because it was used to embalm the bodies of the dead. But the important thing in the story itself seems to be that these gifts are valuable, they're costly. They're gifts suitable for someone in authority, for a king. These people have come to believe that here is someone whose birth has significance, not only for the Jewish people, but also for the whole human race and the whole cosmos. The treasures of the Orient are being offered in worship to this new king.

In this service we're offering the very best of our different cultures from all round the world to God in worship. And we want to bring all our gifts, our skills and our experience as development workers, engineers, priests, secretaries or medics to be used for the benefit of others in a desperately needy world. And offering our best is something any of us can do wherever we are. In the process of offering ourselves to God, we soon discover that there's a kind of mutual enrichment that is going on wherever we're meeting with people from other cultures. Christians from the East and the South are helping us Western Christians to discover aspects of the Gospel that we've simply forgotten or never known before. Vibrancy and joy in worship, the ability to live and a tiny and apparently powerless minority and a passionate commitment to fight for justice and relieve suffering.

So, reading once again this familiar story of the Wise Men, I for one am not ashamed to believe that something like this really did happen. When the layers of tradition are taken away, we have a story that's consistent with the Christian understanding of human beings reaching out for God in the hope that they may find Him. And with belief in a God who longs to reveal Himself to all peoples of the world. This story of astrologers from the East, who saw the child Jesus, opened their treasures and offered their gifts, certainly leaves me and I hope all of us, to worship and to wonder, to offer all that I can and to act in very practical ways so that others can find the living Christ.

16th January 1994

9.30 a.m. Morning Service

Radio 4

Riverside Church, Dumbarton, Scotland.

Preacher: Rev. Alan Reed.

Let thy word, O Lord, be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path to lead us this day in the way everlasting, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. I suppose it's true of certain paintings and certain pieces of music, that rather than you discovering them, they discover you. To other canvasses, to other melodies you bring a searching and enquiring mind, little by little they reveal their qualities which at first were not apparent. But don't you find sometimes it's otherwise, you're laid hold of, you're arrested, all unawares. The process isn't so much like that of knowing as of being known. Personally, I find something very similar happening when I read the Bible. To great parts of it, one has to bring a enquiring, critical, listening spirit, to hear what's being said underneath the words. Other parts lay hold of the scruff of your neck, so vivid, so compelling, so immediate is the narrative, that you know without a shadow of doubt that the script that you're listening to is your own.

The few verses from St. Luke that we read this morning about ten lepers who stood by the roadside near the village at the border of Samaria seemed to me to be such a passage. I can't remember a time when I didn't feel shockingly present at this scene. Was it a good Sunday school teacher, or just a morbidly sensitive imagination? I don't know. Later on, I read lots of commentaries by wise scholars who told me what they thought was really going on in this passage. They told me in graphic detail about the dreaded and the dreadful disease of leprosy, about the priests being the public health authorities and about St. Luke's double motive in sketching this incident, partly to show that God's grace comes to Samaritans as well as Jews, partly to inculcate in Christians a sense of gratitude after forgiveness. None of this seemed to touch the heart of the thing for me at all. The heart lay somewhere in the

wretched impotence of the group and in their crazy improbable decision to go and do what they were told. In a book which never conceals either the glory or the tragedy of the human condition, you won't find anywhere in Scripture human beings so wretched, so isolated, so dehumanised as these ten men. Contaminated and contaminating, they huddled together twenty paces off any public thoroughfare, tinkling their warning bell, calling out, "Unclean, unclean." Ostracised beyond all society, stigmatised beyond all acceptance, alienated from all semblance of normality and estranged from any hope of cure. It's significant that they ask Jesus, not for healing, but for pity. And just as they tell me that in most prisons in our land, those ghettos of the ostracised, there are some prisoners whom all the others shun and ostracise.

So, in this group of ten there is one so far beyond the pail that the others have even sometimes the illusion of being ordinary. In this company of the damned, he's utterly at the extreme of isolated rejection and withering loneliness. He isn't only a leper, he's a Samaritan. And this is the group who stand by the road, and in standing there by the road in the Gospels, they stand for the hundreds and thousands of human beings on this planet who think themselves utterly unacceptable. Cursed in their differentiation from others, locked in the hell of some stigma and utterly afraid of contact with their fellow human beings.

Do you think I am over-drawing the picture? If you were a parish minister for a year you would see it clearly. The range, of course, of psychological, social, moral, political leprosy is indescribable. The ways in which we put certain people beyond the pail into unspeakable suffering are beyond counting. So they stand, those ten figures, for the great army of casualties of the human body and the human psyche, who feel they will never be able to form a proper relationship. Never be normal, as others are normal, who tinkle their bell and retreat from encounter and cry out, "All right you healthy, well-adjusted, normal people, do you know what it's like to be me?"

And then comes the heart of the story. The figure of Christ stops and looks at them with an extraordinary authority. It was the same look, the same authority which made two well-

established fishermen leave their business and their boats to get on to a road to an unknown future. These ten pariahs, who'd been twenty paces off the human road all their lives are asked, indeed they're commanded, to get back on the road and start walking towards a new and wholesome life. They have to trust that it will be so. They have no evidence of any change yet. A heartless joke? A cruel illusion? Well, somehow they do not feel that. They started to walk and as they went, they were cleansed.

That journey, when things change from death to life, from emptiness to fullness and you don't know how or why they changed is the greatest journey in the world. It's the Biblical journey of faith and all of us are to take it, the lepers leading the way. The Judeo-Christian tradition begins historically with one man in Err of the Caldees, sensing that life was stale and unhealthy and taking his protesting wife and family out on a journey, not knowing wither they went. And the boots were given and made for walking.

Now you know how it works out in practice. A young woman is widowed, divorced perhaps, in her thirties, she retreats into the hell of her dereliction, twenty paces off any human road, feeling that her life is smashed and that there can absolutely no future. When she does stick her nose outside, the whole world is going around in couples. One day a wise friend says to her, "Of course you're going to feel like that and maybe for a long time, but try not to withdraw from life itself. Put one foot upon the road to the future just one day at a time and remember, you're never really alone." Ten years later what was impossible has happened. Death has given place to a new awareness of life. Nobody else really knew her journey, how excruciating so often. And it came to pass that as they went, they were cleansed. It could only be healed that way.

A girl comes up to university, everyone else seems so confident, so well organised, so much as if they had a right to be there, but she's full of doubts and self-questionings. She looks at the reading list in her room and she says, "I'm here on false pretences, I'm not going to make it, whatever else it is that other people have I don't seem to have it." A tutor, a sub-warden, a sensitive lecturer picks up the faint tinkling of a bell, "Look here, those feelings

you have are very common ones at the beginning, in fact, most people have them if they're honest, at some time or another. Don't worry about the future, whether you're going to fail or pass, just do what you have to do this week as well as you can do it. Just a step at a time, you will be amazed how things get better." And when she looks back at her university course, it isn't a 2:1 that pleases her most, though that was achievement, it was the self discovery, it was the growing in confidence, it was feeling for the first time of taking responsibility for one's own life. It was the journey itself, the people you met who changed you, the way you were changing. It came to pass that as they went, they were cleansed.

And this young man would like to be a Christian, but he meets so many who are so effervescent, so confident in their faith they make him feel somehow guilty. He's got an idea that as a basic, irreducible minimum he ought to be assent to the Apostle's Creed. But most of the time, he's not sure, honestly, if he believes anything at all. How he would like to.

Well, I hope somewhere, feeling twenty paces

of the path, he meets someone wise enough to help him onto the road. Someone who says to him, "Look it's not a matter of sitting down and examining a set of propositions to see if you can believe them. The Apostles Creed is the accumulated experience of the church over centuries condensed into a highly concentrated form and it reveals itself at different stages to individuals and groups. But the Christian journey is much more like putting your hand in God's hand and taking the first steps out of Err of the Caldees not knowing where it's going to lead you. If you stay where you are, you'll get nowhere." It came to pass that as they went, they were cleansed.

Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. A new calendar year is well on its way for all of us. Nobody knows where it's going to lead us. The qualities we shall meet will be given to us if we throw the bell away and get onto the road. And perhaps, when it's over, like that one man who knew himself most beyond the pail, we shall want, before we do anything else to come back and say, "Thank you." And now unto Him

who's able to present us falling before the presence of His exceeding joy, the only Wise God, be glory in the church, throughout all ages. By Christ Jesus. Amen.

23rd January 1994

9.30 a.m. Morning Service

Radio 4

Collegiate Church of St. Mary's, Warwick.

Preacher: Rev. Gillian Sanderson.

May the words of my mouth and the thoughts and meditations of all our hearts be now and always acceptable to thee, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen. Jesus said, "I am the bread of life, whoever comes to me will never be hungry." An accusation often thrown at Christians ran something like this, "If there is a God of love, why does He allow innocent people to suffer? Where is the God who provides?" A verse of a modern hymn I like says this:

I, the Lord of wind and flame,

I will tend the poor and lame.

I will set a feast for them.

My hand will save.

The finest bread I will provide

Till their hearts be satisfied.

I will give my life to them.

Whom shall I send?

So, here we go again. "Finest bread, I will provide," says God. However, the crunch comes in the last line with the question, whom shall I send? For God can only provide through His people. And only if people's hearts and lives are open to His will and purposes, rather than their own. We all know that hunger is a terrible thing and many people in our world suffer the excruciating pain of the pangs of physical hunger.

But, I believe there's a greater hunger, spiritual hunger, something which a considerable majority of the world's population just fails to recognise in themselves and the excruciating hunger pangs this creates. The psalmist says, "The fool has said in his heart, there is no God." Many convince themselves that the only way to conquer the craving of spiritual hunger is to deny the very existence of God. They are fools. Others seek to satisfy that craving through other means, drugs, alcohol, over-indulgence of many kinds, new-age religion, spiritualism, etcetera. They too, are fools.

There is only one place to go for the satisfaction all of us deep down desire, and that is to God, Himself. And this is precisely the point of both our readings this morning. In the Old Testament we heard, "He humbled you and made you hungry. Then He fed you on manna, to teach you that man cannot live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord." We are dependent upon God for everything. Physical and spiritual needs are ultimately totally met through Him, alone. When we seek to satisfy our needs depending only on ourselves, or other people or things, we are fools. God alone can satisfy.

In our Gospel reading today, Jesus satisfies the physical hunger of the crowd, only later to point them to a higher truth, that He alone can satisfy their deepest needs, "I am the bread of life, whoever comes to me will never be hungry."

So what is your deepest need? I believe Jesus can meet it for you, if you allow him. In the Gospel story, it's Jesus who takes the initiative. He asks, "Where are we to buy bread to feed these people?" knowing full well what he was going to do. It was, if you like, a test, to see if the disciples knew where the source of all sustenance and satisfaction lay. God, through Jesus continues to take the initiative with us, whether we've been Christians for a long or short time, active or inactive. Whether we are Agnostic or Atheist, God continues to try and make Himself known to us, knowing that all of us have deep desires and longings which only He can satisfy.

Of course, we can make all sorts of excuses for not allowing God to be fully part of our lives, but I believe, and it's my experience of God, that He alone can fully sustain us through

the trials, temptations and troubles of our lives. He alone, through us can provide for the total physical and spiritual needs of all His people. But He won't be able to do that until we have thought about our own relationship with Him. Then He will be able to use us to make the world a place both He and us long to see. We all need to know an excruciating hunger for God, beyond anything we've ever known before. Then, we'll begin to get our priorities right and draw from the only source who can totally satisfy. Jesus, who said, "I am the bread of life, whoever comes to me will never be hungry." Amen.

13th February 1994

9.30 a.m. Morning Service

Radio 4

St. Mary's Church, Swansea, Glamorgan, South Wales.

Preacher: Rev. Ann Lewis.

Paul's words to the Corinthians, "The greatest of these is love." Tomorrow is Valentine's Day, when we send tokens of love to a beloved and seal them with an 'x', a kiss, a sign of love. The day got its name from St. Valentine who was put to death for being a Christian, staking his life on the Christian sign of love, a plus sign, the cross on which Jesus died. Two crosses, one at a tilt, one upright, and both to do with love. Valentine cards are a happy frivolity. One of my children sent her father a Valentine once, a fluffy bunny-girl rabbit with paws modestly folded together saying, "I love you." And when the card opened the paws shot out wide, wide and the message said this much. My own favourite is the card of two string mops with soulful eyes full of devoted promise and one mop is saying to the other, "Ours is a strange and wonderful relationship."

Our relationship with God is strange and wonderful. Each one of us, made in God's image is linked with a creator and whether we know it or not, this mysterious bond exists, indescribable, enthralling, with fulfilment beyond our dreams if we respond and build it into a living relationship. And of course, loving totally with arms outstretched wide, that's the boundless extent of Christ's love for us on the cross. And so the kiss and the cross are closer together than we might have thought. The kiss and the cross come together meaningfully in today's epistle about faith, hope and love. It's a reading used at weddings, a romantic, fairy tale moments in our lives, when we declare a sober, thoughtful commitment for life. Romance, which ideally and with a lot of hard work grows into self-giving love. A love which isn't selfish, jealous or rude, which doesn't take offence or keep score of wrongs, but which finds joy in goodness, which is patient, kind and which cheerfully bears all that life

hands out. It's God's love, seen in Jesus and offered us as the best way of living if we'd be truly happy. A challenging love, by no means easy, but richly rewarding.

I think back to my early married life, long before I was I was ordained and a fellow cleric with my husband. We had a row on Saturday evening and despite St. Paul's advice not to let the sun go down on one's anger, we said, "Bother the sun, never mind St. Paul," and the war went on. Next morning, at the Holy Communion, still both at odds, I was bidden by the celebrant, my husband, to make confession of my sins, after which he would pronounce absolution, which made my resentment boil over, because I knew that at least half the trouble was his fault. God's love, which puts its own interest aside, which bears injustices and still goes on with an open heart, is not easy. But there is joy in it and there is laughter.

Mind you, there is no sense in the love Jesus exercised. What sense is there in loving to the limit and letting yourself be crucified unjustly? But that's the thing about God's love, it is without limit, it is irrational. Like being in love, the delicious lunacy of romantic love sealed with a kiss, but which with effort and perseverance can grow into that equally reckless love shown by Jesus giving His life for us. All through life, we can find love in both a kiss and a cross. A mother cradling her baby, looks so lovely, serene, beautiful, a Madonna Mary of nativity scenes. Interestingly, no one's ever put on canvass a screaming night of teething or coughing.

Love on the surface belies very often the depth of love which goes on underneath. Like Robert, single parent, going round the supermarket hand-in-hand with his little daughter Lucy. A warming sight, full of rosy sentiment, until we chatted. This was their last outing for while, he said, he was due back into hospital and Lucy into care. The kiss and the cross run very close together. And the fact that Jesus put His life on the line to gather us into that divine embrace of restoration. That's a love, which indeed passes our understanding and gathers the whole world for all time to the heart of God.

And that's a Valentine all of us receive. Our Valentine from God. The symmetrical hearts on Valentine cards may be trivial, but not God's heart, nor the human heart. A Valentine

heart is uniform, the human heart is not. The real human heart is lop-sided, as if a small piece of it were missing, as if God designed it like that on purpose, to make us think He's kept that last piece safe in the great divine heart. A whimsical notion, to be sure, yet a suitable parable to reassure us even though Valentine's Day is uneventful for us, we are still loved by God.

I hope you have a happy day tomorrow. If you really want one, I hope you get a dotty card that makes you smile. Most of all, I hope you always keep that quiet security of knowing that God loves you without limit or reserve, and for ever. Amen.

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