CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS: THE HOMILETICAL UPSHOT

Matthew Lamb's liberationist model stops short of this contextually robust presentation of the sagely dynamics of Black religious life and practice, and James Loder's transformational scheme carefully outlines the divine-human relation but seems to overlook the role of how contextually determined people work out their understanding of the incarnational presence of God in their midst. When Lamb, Loder, and Andrews are read and appropriated dialectically for thinking about African American preaching, creative dialogue can be fostered and African American preachers are provided a constructive paradigm to reconceive preaching more holistically. Taken together, they form a useful threefold cord for exploring synchronically the expressed nature and hermeneutical function of trivocal preaching.[47]

A critical appropriation of the rudiments of each—the revised praxis correlational, the transformational, and the Black church praxis-covenant interdisciplinary models—points the preacher as practical theologian toward a more authentic way of preaching and doing theology contextually. These models value the reflexive and introspective character of theory and the concrete realities of praxis in contemporary religious practice.[48] Hence, an approach to homiletics that emphasizes the prophetic, priestly, and sagely dimensions of Christian preaching is fertile ground for meaningfully addressing the state of health of the church's proclamation in our times, rising to the postmodern global homiletical theology challenge of speaking a message of promise to a pluralistic world, and moving us towards something well beyond the contexts from which it emerges, that is, towards a unified vision of *beloved community* and *koinonia* with our neighbor and our God.

47. Ibid., 75.
48. Ibid.

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The Spirit-Breathed Body

Divine Presence and Eschatological Promise in Preaching

—Ruthanna B. Hooke

"Who dares, who can, preach, knowing what preaching is?"[1] Karl Barth posed this question, and the question indicates the deep seriousness with which he took preaching, and his understanding of the awesome nature of the preaching task. Barth's sense of the daunting nature of the preaching task, and even (considered from the human standpoint) the impossibility of preaching, is closely linked to his sense of the promise of preaching, which is that preaching is nothing less than the Word of God, spoken through human words. This is truly an astonishing and even unfathomable claim—that God should choose to speak through human beings, that humans in all of their particularity, finitude, and brokenness should be channels for the divine presence and Word. It is amazing to claim that preaching represents an opening, a place for the infinite and the holy to make itself manifest. Of course, many have felt that this claim was far too exalted to make for preaching, and have argued instead that preaching is merely human words about God, not in itself a moment of God's presence and speaking. However, the claim of Barth and others that preaching is something more than this, that it is a privileged event of divine-human encounter, is ultimately a more

1. Barth, "The Need and Promise of Christian Preaching," 126.

hopeful position to take about preaching, even if it raises the stakes and makes preaching more daunting than if it is considered simply as human speech. It is a hopeful stance to claim that God really does reveal Godself to us, not only in the sacraments, or in the stuff of our ordinary lives, but in a privileged way in this moment when a human being seeks to speak true words about her interpretation of God's revelation in scripture and in life.

Not only is Barth's position a hopeful one to take, but it corresponds to what many preachers actually feel. Having taught many years' worth of beginning preaching students, I can attest that the fear that they feel about preaching, their sense of the awesomeness of the task, stems not only from its being an event of public speaking on matters of life and death importance to them. Rather, their fear (and also their excitement) comes still more from a sense that in preaching they are engaged not only in a human event of speaking and listening, but that they are presenting themselves and their words to be inhabited, used, opened up by God to becoming God's own presence and Word. It is this sense of preaching as an event in which God is active through a human body and human words—a sense perhaps not fully articulated as such, perhaps only obscurely felt—that is the fundamental theological promise upon which preaching rests.

Homiletical theology seeks to investigate how preaching is an exercise in theological reflection—not merely the application of theology generated elsewhere, but rather itself generative of theological claims. A homiletical theology of promise might explore the ways in which the practices, theories, and contexts of preaching generate theological reflection on God's promise. Such reflections might focus on how God's justice and grace are related, and therefore on the eschatological horizon of preaching and of Christian life. This essay, however, will explore not so much the theologies of promise that preaching generates, as the fundamental theological promise that preaching rests upon, which is the promise of God's presence in preaching. The embodied experience of this fulfilled promise in the event of preaching will be taken as the starting point for generating theological reflection on various aspects of God's promise.

God's fundamental promise, "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt 28:20), is true in all aspects of human life, but the claim of Barth and others is that this presence is particularly powerful, gracious, and effective in preaching. This claim—that preaching is an event in which God speaks through human bodies and words—immediately raises a whole host of questions, all centering around the basic question: how is this possible? How does it happen that God speaks and is present through the finite, fallible human preacher? To answer this fundamental theological question is to engage

various *loci* in Christian systematic theology, such as doctrines of revelation, theological anthropology, Christology, and ecclesiology. In this paper, the principal *locus* through which I will explore the question of how preaching is possible, how God keeps God's promise to be present through human words and presence, is that of liturgical theology, and sacramental theology as a subset of liturgical theology.

HOMILETICAL THEOLOGY AND LITURGICAL THEOLOGY

It is appropriate for homiletical theology to enter into conversation with liturgical theology because preaching is fundamentally a liturgical act. From the earliest Christian liturgies, the sermon was considered integral to the liturgy, and the two-fold structure of the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Table is attested as early as the time of Justin Martyr. Although there is preaching that takes place outside of liturgy, the primary home of preaching is the corporate worship of the Christian assembly. One of the notable features of the liturgical reform movements of the twentieth century has been a renewed recognition of the essential two-fold structure of the liturgy.[2] While Protestant churches have tended to emphasize the Liturgy of the Word at the expense of the Liturgy of the Table, and Roman Catholics tended toward the reverse emphasis, the twentieth century saw a recognition that from earliest times these two parts of the service were meant to be in balance and serve as a counterpoint to each other. As a result of this recognition, Protestant churches began to reincorporate the Eucharist as central to their worship, while Roman Catholics placed a greater emphasis on the sermon than heretofore. As part of these developments, liturgical theologians began to incorporate theological reflection on the sermon as part of the liturgy, and as having its own distinctive role in the liturgy. Homileticians, however, have tended not to place much emphasis on the relationship of the sermon to the rest of the liturgy, and tend not to theorize the sermon as a liturgical act.[3] Homiletical reflection on the sermon as an event tends to view it as standing alone, having its meaning in relationship to Scripture or to the congregation, but not to the event of worship.

There are several benefits to placing homiletics theology in conversation with liturgical theology. First, liturgical theology is fundamentally akin

2. Lathrop emphasizes this two-fold structure. See Lathrop, *Holy Things*, 43–53.

3. Notable exceptions include Rice, *The Embodied Word* and Greenhaw and Allen, *Preaching in the Context of Worship*. See in particular the essay by Wilson in this volume, entitled "Preaching and the Sacrament of Holy Communion."

to homiletical theology because both are reflections on a practice. Liturgical theologians describe this method of theological reflection by making a distinction between "primary" and "secondary" liturgical theology. Primary liturgical theology, as Gordon Lathrop defines it, is "the communal meaning of the liturgy exercised by the gathering itself."[4] The assembly uses words and signs to speak of God, and thus engages in theology. Secondary liturgical theology is reflection on these words and signs; it is "discourse that attempts to find words for the experience of the liturgy and to illuminate its structures."[5] Alexander Schmemann outlines the tasks of secondary liturgical theology as finding the theological concepts that will express the fundamental nature of the liturgical experience, and then connecting those concepts with systematic theology, those ideas by which the Church expresses its doctrine and faith.[6] Thus liturgical theology stands between worship and dogmatics, and aims to explain the ancient rule of the Church: *lex orandi, lex credendi*. Liturgical theology emphasizes the *causal* nature of this relationship, that it is not just that the law of praying and the law of believing are related, but that the law of praying *dictates* the law of believing. Thus, Schmemann, Lathrop and others insist that "the ongoing tradition and actual performance of the liturgy [is] the primary source for the Church's theology," and see their task as liturgical theologians "to make the liturgical experience of the Church again one of the life-giving sources of the knowledge of God."[7]

Homiletical theology is a natural conversation partner to liturgical theology because it rests on a similar practical-theological method. Homiletical theology takes as its starting point the "primary theology" that emerges from sermon preparation and delivery, from which "secondary theology" is derived. From the primary theology expressed in the practice of preaching itself, homiletical theology develops secondary theology that reflects upon the practice in relationship to the doctrines of the Christian faith.

In addition to this similarity of method, sacramental theology as a subset of liturgical theology engages similar theological questions and *loci* to those raised about preaching as an event of divine self-revelation. Sacramental theology wrestles with the question of how God can be made known to us through material means. Even though the material means are not the same (bread and wine versus the human person and words of the preacher), the

4. Lathrop, *Holy Things*, 5.

5. Ibid., 6.

6. Schmemann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, 17.

7. Morrill, *Bodies of Worship*, 5. Schmemann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, 23. Aidan Kavanagh also argues for the liturgical event as primary theology. See his *On Liturgical Theology* (New York: Pueblo Publishing, 1984), 73–95.

theological claims made and issues raised are similar, and engage the same doctrinal *loci* as homiletical theology engages. Theologies of the sacraments wrestle with questions at the intersection of doctrines of revelation and theological anthropology, since they consider how it is that God is made known to humankind through material means. These questions open onto christology and ecclesiology, since what makes the sacraments a privileged place of divine self-revelation has to do with their grounding in God's primordial self-revelation in Christ, and in the commissioning of the church to be Christ's body in the world, and hence the primary sacrament of God's presence.[8] Homiletical theology can be in fruitful dialogue with sacramental theology in part because much of the work of wrestling with these questions and synthesizing these doctrines is already being done there, and the conversation in homiletics can build on such a synthesis.

Recent developments in sacramental theology make this conversation yet more fruitful, since there has recently been a shift toward thinking about the sacraments not primarily as objects that dispense grace, but as personal encounters between God and people. Relatedly, there has been a shift toward considering the entire liturgy as sacramental. Russian Orthodox liturgical theologian Alexander Schmemann maintains that the whole liturgy is a sacrament in that it reveals the essential sacredness of all creation and of human life; it is the fulfillment and manifestation of this world as God's world, of our life as participating in God's life. In this understanding, "a sacrament is primarily a revelation of the *sacramentality* of creation itself, for the world was created and given to man [sic] for the conversion of creaturely life into divine life."[9] A sacrament is both cosmic, referring to the world as God created it, and eschatological, looking forward to the fulfillment of this world in the kingdom of God.

The upshot of this argument is, first, to move away from ontological or metaphysical arguments about how material objects in the liturgy can become sacred. For Schmemann, the whole of the liturgy is sacramental not because some change or transubstantiation occurs in the physical elements of the service, but because in the liturgy the Church willingly participates in something that has already been given—namely, God's new life. This argument also emphasizes that the whole of the liturgy is sacramental, and that its sacramentality cannot be reduced to one moment when a material object transforms from being profane to being sacred. Rather, since all of the liturgy participates in the reality of God's kingdom, all of the liturgy is sacramental.

8. See Rahner's description of Jesus Christ as God's primordial sacrament, and the Church as God's basic sacrament, in *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, 412.

9. Schmemann, *The Eucharist*, 33.

All the rites of the liturgy are a progressive manifestation of the realities of Christ's saving work—not an accomplishment of these realities, since that has already been done. Thus Schmemann, in his volume dedicated to exploring the Eucharist, explicitly labels each section of the liturgy as a sacrament: the first chapter is the "sacrament of the assembly," followed by the "sacrament of entrance," and so on through all the sections of the service, including preaching, which he labels "the sacrament of the Word."[10] He entitles his chapters in this way so that throughout the book he can demonstrate how all parts of the liturgy function sacramentally, in that all parts of the liturgy reveal God's new life which has been given to us.

These shifts in understanding of the sacraments have the effect of including preaching as a sacramental event, inasmuch as it is part of the liturgy as a whole. Furthermore, this redefinition of what sacraments are holds promise for thinking about preaching as an event of divine-self-revelation, since one can theorize this event not according to metaphysical principles for how profane objects are transformed into sacred ones (the old way that sacramental theology operated), but rather in terms of how God enters into personal relationship with us (the new approach of sacramental theology). Since preaching is invariably personal, as God reveals Godself in relationship to the person of the preacher, this new emphasis on sacraments as events of personal encounter provides a helpful framework for analyzing preaching as sacramental.

One aspect of this shifting understanding of sacraments that is particularly helpful for theorizing preaching is the increased emphasis on the human bodies who participate in worship. Considering the liturgy as a whole to be sacramental means that the focus shifts from the mechanics of what is happening to the bread and wine at the altar to what is happening in the bodies of worshippers throughout the liturgy. How are the embodied selves of the gathered community being transformed, made holy, brought into relationship with God? Contemporary liturgical theologians emphasize that sacramental grace always comes to us through our bodies, and that liturgy emphasizes and enacts this truth. The recent volume, *Bodies of Worship*, for instance, focuses explicitly on the body's experience in worship, based on the premise that the body's experience in worship helps us to understand what worship really is and what is happening in it—how it is that worship connects us to God and to each other.[11] As Bruce Morrill, the volume's editor, notes, this focus on the bodiliness of liturgy brings liturgical theology into alignment with a growing interest in the body in post-modern scholarship, an interest generated in part because the body's "resistance to abstraction" serves the philosophical

10. Schemann, *The Eucharist*, 65–80.

11. Morrill, *Bodies of Worship*, 1, 3.

and political interests of this scholarship. Part of this scholarship has involved a critique or even rejection of the ways in which the Christian theological tradition has denigrated or discounted the body. However, liturgical theologians insist that the body is central to the Christian faith, because God in Jesus Christ became flesh and dwelt among us, accomplishing our salvation through the life, death, and resurrection of the very human body of Jesus of Nazareth, and thus that "God saves humanity right in our very material actions and circumstances," that is, in our very bodies.[12] As Louis-Marie Chauvet expresses it, "Faithful to its biblical roots, ecclesial tradition has attempted to discern what is most 'spiritual' in God on the basis of what is most 'corporeal' in us. This is especially the case in the liturgy. But it is more widely the case in the whole of *Church life*."[13]

As Morrill notes, the insistence that liturgy constitutes the Church's primary theology is consistent with a greater focus on embodiment—i.e., it is precisely because liturgy is a set of embodied practices that it is the basis for our theology, because it is above all in our embodied experience that we are brought into relationship to God: "there is no disembodied realm where we are being saved."[14] Thus, while contemporary liturgical theologies focus less on the mechanics of how material things are transformed to be bearers of grace, these theologies put great emphasis on the material and embodied nature of liturgy, operating from the principle that, "for Christians, the most spiritual of realities can only be experienced or known in and through the materiality of our bodies," and that this principle is powerfully encountered in sacramental worship.[15] The mystery of the sacraments is that material things, bread and wine, oil, water, can become bearers of God's grace. Sacramental grace always comes to us through our bodies, through eating and drinking, being washed, being anointed. Morrill also makes the crucial point that to focus on the body is inevitably to recognize that the body is never merely a physical body, for that body is embedded in and shaped by the various bodies of which it is a part, such as the Church as the body of Christ; the liturgical body, the community which participates in the worship together; and the cultural body, which is made up of various social relationships that influence the body's experience of itself.

Liturgical theology's methodological commitment to treat embodied practices as a primary wellspring of theological knowledge finds a parallel in much other recent theological scholarship, in which there is evidence of a

12. Ibid., 3.

13. Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 111. Emphasis Chauvet's.

14. Morrill, *Bodies of Worship*, 4.

15. Ibid., 3.

"material turn." Formulations of doctrine, or theories of religion, increasingly take as their starting point not texts, but embodied and material existence.[16] This turn to embodied experience forms the basic methodological premise underlying the recent dogmatic scholarship of Sarah Coakley, for example. In her recent work on the doctrine of the Trinity, she argues that prayer, and especially contemplation, is the indispensable "matrix for trinitarian reflection," that "a particular set of bodily and spiritual practices (both individual and liturgical) are the *precondition* for trinitarian thinking of a deep sort." Putting the point negatively, Coakley insists that "if one is resolutely *not* engaged in the practices of prayer, contemplation, and worship, then there are certain sorts of philosophical insight that are unlikely, if not impossible, to become available to one."[17] Coakley points out that this is an "anti-foundationalist" position, in that her claim is that a secular, universalist rationality is not the uncontended basis for making theological claims, but rather theological claims rest on the knowledge gained through embodied spiritual practices. As Coakley puts it, "What distinguishes this position, then, from an array of other 'post-foundationalist' options that currently present themselves in theology, is the commitment to the discipline of *particular* graced bodily practices which, over the long haul, afford certain distinctive ways of knowing."[18] Coakley's methodology is similar to that of Morrill and other liturgical theologians in that she insists that theological knowledge arises from embodied spiritual and liturgical practices, that there are aspects of God's relationship to us, and of God in Godself, that we simply cannot know except through the body's experience.

Adopting this methodological priority given to embodied experience, I argue that the "primary homiletical theology" that takes place in the event of preaching is embodied theology, and that preaching experienced as a bodily action involving voice, breath, self, community, liturgical rite and liturgical space is a fruitful starting point for secondary homiletical-theological reflection on the meaning of preaching. Moreover, it is not only that the body's experience of preaching reveals what preaching is, but also that preaching, as a liturgical and therefore embodied act, is an event of primary theology that can become the basis for secondary theology in which we arrive at doctrinal truth about God, ourselves, and the two of us in relationship to each other. Just as Coakley argues that there are core Christian doctrines such as the doctrine of the Trinity that we only fully grasp through embodied practices and

16. Note, for instance, the "material turn" in studies of theology and religion, as noted in the 2015 AAR Call for Papers.

17. Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 16. Emphasis Coakley's.

18. Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 19. Emphasis Coakley's.

embodied knowledge, there are essential dimensions of Christian doctrine that we understand most fully when we experience them in the embodied event of preaching. In terms of a theology of promise, we come to understand and believe in God's promise to be present with us through the embodied experience of that fulfilled promise in preaching. This primary theological experience then becomes the basis for a secondary homiletical theology of promise.

Despite the fact that preaching is clearly an embodied activity, in which the preacher communicates her message through the engagement of her body in voice, movement, gesture, and by the body's presence on display before others, it is striking how infrequently the body is included in theorizing about preaching, or even in training for the practice of preaching. If the body is considered at all in most textbooks on preaching, it is in a late chapter of the book on techniques for "delivery" of the sermon. The starting point for theorizing about preaching is never the body; it is usually the biblical text, the tradition of the Church, or the incarnation of Jesus Christ. However, following liturgical theology's method, I argue that it is preaching experienced as a whole, as a bodily action involving voice, breath, self, community, liturgical rite and liturgical space, that ought to be the starting point for secondary theological reflection on the meaning of preaching. Preaching needs to be theorized as embodied and performative knowing of God. Out of that experience of God arises secondary reflection that seeks theological concepts to describe God accurately. Theologies of promise would thus take their starting point from the body's experience of God's fulfilled promise in the preaching event itself.

THE SACRAMENTAL STRUCTURE OF PREACHING

What, then, is the body's experience of God's fulfilled promise of presence in preaching? One way to answer this question is to look at the physical processes of speaking—that is, to explore what is happening in our bodies when we speak, and how in this speaking we may experience God's promised presence. For the outline of the physical steps involved in speaking, I am drawing on a method for training the speaking voice developed by voice teacher Kristin Linklater, which is widely used in the dramatic arts.[19] This method of vocal training takes students through a progression of physical and vocal exercises that are designed to free and strengthen the speaking voice. The fundamental premise of this method is that each person is born with a voice capable of ex-

19. Linklater's approach to voice training is outlined in: Linklater, *Freeing the Natural Voice*, and *Freeing Shakespeare's Voice*.

pressing, through a two-to-four-octave pitch range, the fullness of her thought and feeling. The way the voice works is that the speaker feels a need to communicate, the brain signals to the body, the need to communicate stimulates breathing muscles—abdominal muscles, diaphragm, rib muscles—and they expand to let breath in to communicate her thought and feeling; breath comes in, goes out, makes contact with vocal chords, vocal chords vibrate and sound results, amplified by resonators, articulated by lips and tongue. That is how the voice works when the speaker is a baby, where the voice expresses life-and-death need, and where the voice is intrinsically connected to the body. However, as the speaker grows up she learns that it is not always socially acceptable to express herself from the place of life-and-death need, so she learns that when she feels the desire to communicate, instead of letting that impulse travel down into the body, where deep need is felt, to reroute the impulse to a more socially acceptable place, the upper chest and throat. Through social conditioning, trauma, and the tensions of daily life she learns to detach her impulse to communicate from the diaphragm and abdominal muscles, and to express that impulse through the throat and face. The voice becomes disconnected from the body, unsupported by the breath, and is squeezed out by overworking the throat, jaw, and tongue muscles. Such speaking leads to the divorce of words from meaning and emotion, such that words describe rather than reveal their content. The speaker whose voice is thus distorted is no longer fully present in her communication. The range of the voice shrinks from 2–4 octaves to 3–4 notes of speaking range.

The purpose of the Linklater method is to rectify this situation by reconnecting speakers' voices to their bodies and emotions. Linklater's method of voice training takes students through a series of exercises which teach physical alignment, diaphragmatic breathing, relaxation of throat muscles, connecting voice with breath, and the use of the body's natural resonators to amplify the voice. The goal of the method is fully embodied communication, in which the voice and body are free, in which the words spoken exist not only in the head but are connected to and expressed through the whole body. When we speak with this freedom and connection, we are not just speaking words, but the words are living in our bodies; the meaning of the words is communicated in the words we speak. Our whole selves are communicating the words, and we are fully present in this act of communication.

This physical process of speaking, as it takes place in preaching, is not merely physical and technical, but is itself an event of primary theology, which can give rise to secondary theological reflection. One way to enter into secondary theological reflection on this physical process of speaking is to flesh out the implications of the claim that preaching is sacramental by comparing

the liturgical action that takes place in preaching with the liturgical action that takes place in the Eucharist. Gregory Dix famously proposed that the action of the Eucharist was fourfold, corresponding to Jesus Christ's four actions at the institution of the Eucharist. The four actions were: to take the elements, to bless or give thanks to God for them, to break them (or pour them out), and to share them.[20] These four actions are embedded in the words of institution in contemporary Eucharistic prayers: "On the night before he died for us, our Lord Jesus Christ took bread; and when he had given thanks to you, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples and said, "'Take, eat.'" Although the specifics of Dix's construal of the four-action shape of the Eucharist have been critiqued and revised, the essential fourfold shape of the Eucharistic action remains influential in liturgical thinking and practice.[21] I argue that each of these four Eucharistic actions in turn can be compared to a particular aspect of the physical process of speaking as outlined by Linklater, and that exploring this correlation illuminates how God fulfills God's promise to be present with us in preaching. The fourfold action of the Eucharist is the outline of the steps by which God is present to us in the Eucharistic meal; likewise, four aspects or steps in the process of speaking suggest the steps by which our voices and bodies become vessels of God's presence.

Of these four moments, the second moment is a focal point in the fulfillment of God's promise of presence. This moment, the *epiclesis* or blessing, is the moment when the Holy Spirit comes upon the elements, sanctifying them to be Christ's body and blood. Although, as liturgical theologians argue, the entire liturgy is sacramental, this moment crystallizes or brings into focus something that is happening throughout the liturgy, which is the meeting of the divine with the material, the heavenly and the earthly. It is significant that this meeting is accomplished through the coming of the Holy Spirit in particular. The Holy Spirit, in the Eucharist as elsewhere, is the person of the Trinity that draws us into relationship with God. Sarah Coakley describes the Spirit as breaking down the ontological gap between God and humankind, not by abolishing difference, but by investing it with participative mystery.[22] The *epiclesis*, the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the elements of bread and wine, is the paradigmatic liturgical event of the bridging of this ontological gap.

If preaching is sacramental, is it possible to locate an *epiclesis* in the preaching event? I suggest that the *epiclesis* in the Eucharist is analogous to

20. Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, 78.

21. For a critique of Dix's four-action shape of the Eucharistic meal, see Wainwright, "Recent Eucharistic Revision," 332–33.

22. Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 330.

the preacher's moment-by-moment experience of the breath in the body, the breath that supports the voice. According to the Linklater method, the breath is the crucial element that forges the connection between the thoughts, feelings, and impulses we seek to communicate, and the authentic communication of these thoughts and feelings in the voice. It is the breath fueling the voice that brings this communication about, giving our words the ring of truth, making our words flesh.

This experience of breath in connection with the voice is a profound, often unconscious experience of primary theology; it is the lived experience of our relationship with God, of God's fulfillment of God's promise to be present with us, out of which we craft our secondary theologies of promise. It is not a coincidence that the Spirit is consistently described and imagined as the *ruach*, the *pneuma*, the very breath of God that moved over the face of the deep at creation and breathed the breath of life into the first human, the same breath that the risen Christ breathed on his disciples when he said, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22). Generally speaking, we tend to think of the connection of Spirit with breath as a metaphor, but if we consider the experience of breathing, especially in connection with speaking, as an actual experience of our relationship with God, this becomes a moment of primary theology, giving rise to secondary theological reflection on the nature of our relationship with God and God's promise that is revealed in this embodied experience.

THE EPICLESIS IN PREACHING: THE FULFILLMENT OF GOD'S DIALECTICAL PRESENCE

Three aspects of the experience of breathing in particular provide grist for secondary theological reflection on the nature of God's promise. First, to breathe is actually a *passive* experience; rather than making ourselves breathe, it is more accurate to say that we *are breathed*. Most of the time, of course, we breathe without consciously focusing on the breath; and even when we bring awareness to the breath, if we simply relax the breathing muscles, the breath comes and goes of itself, in its own natural rhythm. We do not make it happen, but more accurately allow it to happen. Theologically, the passive nature of the human breath reminds us that the fulfillment of God's promise to be with us, to animate us moment by moment, is something we allow more than something we create or make happen. Relationship with God is a gift of grace, God's making good on God's promise to be with us, rather than a human creation.

In addition to being an experience of God's fulfilled promise, the breath in the body is also a primary theological event of connection and communion.

Experientially, the breath connects us to each other; the word "con-spiracy" literally means "breathing-together." Emmanuel Levinas develops the idea that speaking is a signaling of one's ethical responsibility to the other, and argues that in the signaling of this responsibility, God, the transcendent, "passes by." Levinas describes breathing as a crucial moment in the opening of the self to the other: one "frees oneself by breathing from closure in oneself," and "breathing is transcendence in the form of opening up."[23] For Levinas, any attempts to enclose ourselves in our inwardness, separating ourselves from the call of the other, are disrupted by the breath itself, which intrinsically opens us to the hearer, and to the transcendence that is inherently signaled in this relationship. In terms of a theology of promise, the primary theological event of breath-empowered speech leads to secondary theological reflection on the communal nature of God's promise. The eschatological fulfillment of God's promised reign of justice is not a fulfillment promised to individuals, but rather to a whole community, the whole commonwealth of God.

The inherently communal quality of the breath helps to alleviate the risk that sacramental presence in preaching is limited to simply the body of the preacher. If God's presence were realized only in the preacher, the charge of Donatism could readily be made against this argument, for the argument would seem to imply that the preacher, through the indwelling of the Spirit, becomes nothing less than Christ. To claim this would be to posit an idolatrous elision of divine-human difference. One way to counter this risk is to point to the graced nature of the encounter with God that is inherent in the passive nature of the breath. In addition, to claim that preaching is sacramental, without collapsing the person of the preacher into the person of Christ, it is crucial to grasp the radically relational subjectivity that the breath instantiates and even creates. It is this relational subjectivity that Levinas develops, in which the subject is never enclosed in a separate subjectivity, but is radically open to the other; moreover, as Levinas notes, it is the breath itself that signals this openness to the other. When this understanding of the Spirit-breath is applied to preaching, it becomes apparent that the body of the preacher serves as an icon, by means of which God's sacramental presence is realized in the entire assembly, which is the body of Christ in its totality. Indeed, the Spirit-breath, breathing in the preacher and in the listeners, is the agent that unites the assembly into the one body of Christ. It is not the preacher in herself that is the sacrament of God's presence, but rather the preacher in her intrinsic connection to the listeners who witnesses to the sacramentality of the whole congregation.

23. Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being, or Beyond Essence*, 180, 181.

In addition to being a lived experience of God's gracious presence, which is inherently communal, the breath can provide an embodied experience of the dialectical nature of God's promised presence. When we allow the breath to drop deep into our bodies, and to connect with our words, this experience can lead to a sense of calm, but can also connect us to thoughts and feelings that we tend to leave unexpressed. To breathe is to connect to a fuller sense of self than we might often be aware of; as the Linklater voice method demonstrates, to connect breath deep in the body is to connect to what we need to say from a primal place of life-and-death need. Again, from a theological point of view, this is not surprising. The Holy Spirit has brought disruption, challenge, and a goad toward prophetic utterance as often as She has brought calm and serenity. The disruptive effects of the Holy Spirit in the body of the preacher are analogous to the disruptions the Holy Spirit brings to worship in general, and to the Eucharistic celebration in particular. As Matthew Myer Boulton argues, the work of the Holy Spirit in worship is to intervene into the destitution of human worship, which is of itself unable to fitly glorify God. The Holy Spirit breaks into this human incapacity, functioning as a divine adversary that opposes and transforms the poverty of our worship.[24]

The disruptive effects of the coming of the Spirit-breath into the body of the preacher highlight the dialectical nature of God's presence in preaching, and point to the dialectic in theologies of promise generally—the ways in which God's promise both has and has not been realized. In one sense the experience of the Spirit-breath in the body is the experience of God's promised presence fulfilled. Yet this same Spirit-breath points us toward an eschatological future that has not yet been fully realized, just as God's presence in the Eucharist is a fulfilled promise that at the same time points us forward toward a fuller eschatological realization of that promise. Bruce Morrill makes this point in maintaining that Schmemann's strong emphasis on liturgy as sacrament leads to a too "realized" eschatology, in that Schmemann understands liturgy as the place of pure *parousia*, pure revelation of God.[25] Conversely, Schmemann views the rest of the world as the place where there are no signs of the Kingdom of God, a place seemingly devoid of the sacred. Morrill argues that this position does not adequately take into account that God's presence in liturgy too is dialectical, that God can be hidden in liturgy (or *by* liturgy) as well as in the rest of the world.[26] Conversely, there are signs of the Kingdom of God in history and in human culture outside of the liturgy, signs that might be lacking in the liturgy itself. Chief among these signs are the cries of

24. Boulton, "The Adversary," 76.

25. Morrill, *Anamnesis as Dangerous Memory*, 192.

26. Ibid., 135.

the suffering and the oppressed, summoning the Church to do the work of God in the world by acting for justice. Liturgy can hide this aspect of God's reign precisely when it is posited as the place of full revelation, of the fulfilled promise of God's presence. This conviction turns the Church inward in satiation, not outward toward the world in longing for the complete fulfillment of the Kingdom of God in history as well as in liturgy. The collapse of the future into the present in Schmemann's doctrine of the Eucharist, his too-realized eschatology there, is apolitical in that it fails to take account of the suffering of the oppressed and the need to act for justice in history. It emphasizes God's presence as a promise fulfilled, rather than as pointing us forward to a fuller realization of that promise.

As a corrective to the over-realized eschatology he finds in Schmemann's theology of liturgy, Morrill connects Johannes Metz's concept of "dangerous memory" to the *anamnesis* that takes place in the Eucharist, arguing that to conceive of liturgy as *anamnesis*, a dangerous memory of Christ, is to maintain liturgy's eschatological thrust more fully than Schmemann does. *Anamnesis* is eschatological because it looks forward to the fullness of what God will do, based on the memory of what God has already done in Christ. Such memory interrupts the flow of evolutionary time and the hegemony of modernity, bringing to light the suffering of the oppressed through the memory of Christ's passion. In this sense liturgy interrupts the rest of life; but by the same token liturgy itself is interrupted by the memory of Christ, which is God's call to remember those who suffer today. Morrill, himself a Roman Catholic, notes that "the discussion of the Eucharistic celebration in terms of an intervening moment, an interruption in time, might come as a challenge to Roman Catholics, for whom theological and pious reflection on the sacrament has long been dominated by a narrowly focused notion of real presence." Sounding like Barth and the Reformers, Morrill maintains that real presence is not a static thing; rather, "the eucharistic celebration is an *encounter* with the saving presence of God."[27] *Anamnesis* is not mere memory of a past event, but the basis of a genuine encounter with God in the present, since "Jesus' words over the bread and cup, along with his command for his followers to perform this ritual, constitute a promise of presence to them, in the mutual act of divine and human remembrance."[28]

Morrill insists, moreover, that "Christians' genuine perception (and thus, appropriation) of the reality of Christ's presence in the Eucharist depends upon their (practical) awareness of the reality of the suffering in their

27. Ibid., 175.

28. Ibid., 178.

historical midst."[29] In order for the sacrament to be fully realized, in other words, it needs to be interrupted by the memory of something outside of it, so that, here again, real presence is not something statically given in certain physical elements, but depends on relationship—between God and the worshipper, and between the liturgy and the rest of existence. The presence of Christ in the sacraments is a proleptic presence, which points forward toward a reign of justice that has not yet been fully realized. The dialectic of God's promise, its status as both "already" and "not yet" realized, is instantiated in the Eucharist itself.

Analogously, the coming of the Spirit-breath into the body of the preacher is potentially also a moment of *anamnesis*, a dangerous memory of Christ's passion that also brings to light the suffering of the oppressed today. It is an encounter with God's saving presence, the fulfillment of God's promise of presence; this is never a static presence, but is always pointing us forward to God's promised reign of justice which has not yet been fully realized. In a sense, the sermon is interrupted by the Spirit's coming and by the dangerous memory She provokes of suffering and of redemption. This is one way to describe the disruptive effect of the Spirit breathing in the preacher, summoning her to speak dangerous words that stir up the calm waters of liturgy, preventing the experience of God's presence there from turning to satiety or complacency. In this way, preaching itself is interrupted by the Holy Spirit, and becomes in turn an interruption into liturgy.

The reality and memory of suffering interrupt liturgy, such that liturgy cannot be seen as pure *parousia*. Preaching is a primary place where this interruption takes place; it is a moment when *anamnesis*, dangerous memory can arise. Preaching can be an event in liturgy that breaks liturgy open, raising the cries of the suffering and giving voice to eschatological longing. Morrill argues that preaching is one crucial place in the liturgy where participants come to know and appropriate "the Christian faith in an 'anticipatory memory' of both crisis and consolation."[30] Preaching has an "anamnetic character," as it presents the congregation with scriptural "narratives which at times gently invite and at other times strongly demand a decision to enter into God's life, to take up the way of imitation."[31] The preacher's task is to "throw together the worlds of Scripture and the contemporary community in the unique moment of a particular liturgical celebration." This "throwing together," which is the root meaning of the term "symbol," constitutes the sermon as a liturgical act, symbolic in that it unites two apparently dissimilar realities (Scripture and

29. Ibid., 185.

30. Ibid., 201.

31. Ibid., 211.

contemporary life) to show their essential relatedness.[32] As Morrill's argument suggests, liturgy is not always self-interpreting; it needs preaching in order to jolt it out of a too-realized eschatology, a sense that the Kingdom of God has already come in its fullness. In this sense preaching is not only *part* of liturgy but an *interruption* into liturgy, or a *corrective* to liturgy.[33] Preaching thus becomes a signal of the dialectical quality of God's promise in general, how that promise is given and yet hidden, inaugurated and yet not fully realized, in liturgy as in life.

Preachers experience this interruption that preaching is in the interruption that the Spirit-breath makes into preaching itself. Thus, in the very act of speaking we are drawn into an experience of God's promise, experiencing the dialectical nature of this promise. On the one hand, the Spirit-breath breathing within us is the fulfillment of God's promise to be with us, just as the *epiclesis* of the bread and wine is the fulfillment of God's promised presence. At the same time, this same Spirit's coming, both in the body of the preacher and upon the material elements at the table, disrupts any notions of static divine presence, connecting us back to the radical challenge of Jesus' person and work, and also driving us forward toward God's eschatological reign of justice. The presence of God in the preached word is always a proleptic presence that directs us toward a future fulfillment of God's promise. As preachers, we can sense this in the breath itself, perhaps especially in moments of the greatest destitution in our preaching, when the "sufferings of this present time" (Rom 8:18) seem like they occlude God's promise entirely. In those moments, Paul reminds us that in our weakness "the Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words." (Rom 8:26). These very sighs, even if they be sighs of weakness or despair, are the action of the Spirit in us, opening us to a future promise that we cannot perhaps sense, but toward which the Spirit is leading us. Thus, the Spirit-breath opens our words and our presence beyond our words to the sometimes wordless sighs of prophecy.

CONCLUSION

Homiletical theology begins from the premise that preaching is not merely the application of theological truths generated elsewhere, but rather that

32. Ibid., 211.

33. J. J.Von Allmen makes a similar argument to Morrill's that the importance of the sermon is that it turns the congregation outward, connecting the life of the Church to the life of the world. Thus, the balance of word and table prevents "liturgical escapism and anchorless prophetic activity." Allmen, *Preaching and Congregation*, 32. Quoted in Noren, "The Word of God in Worship," 42.

preaching is itself an exercise in theological method, and is generative of theological reflection. This paper seeks to apply this theological method to the embodied experience of preaching, and to tease out the theological claims related to God's promise that can be derived from this experience. Placing these reflections in dialogue with liturgical theology, I compare the event of preaching with the four-fold action of the Eucharist, and specifically focus on the experience of the breath as analogous to the *epiclesis*. The coming of the Holy Spirit as breath in the body of the preacher is an event of primary theology that gives rise to secondary theological reflection on several aspects of God's promise. First, the Spirit-breath in the preacher's body signals the graced nature of God's promise—that it is something we receive rather than something we create of ourselves. Second, the Spirit-breath in the preacher's body points to the proleptic nature of God's promised presence—that this divine promise is yet to be fully realized, and will be realized only as the sufferings of this present time give way to future glory. Finally, the Spirit-breath in the body of the preacher instantiates the inherently communal nature of God's promise, both as it is realized in the moment of preaching, and as it is yet to be fulfilled in God's in-breaking reign.

What I hope to have suggested in these investigations is the promise of homiletical theology itself. Homiletical theology takes preaching seriously as generative of theological knowledge. To do this is to take seriously knowledge of God that is embodied and performative—to ask what speaking bodies know about God's promise, for instance, and to take this knowledge as foundational to further theological reflection, rather than as tangential to it. Such bodily knowledge has the potential not only to confirm, but also to amplify, challenge, and significantly augment the claims we make about God's promise, as well as numerous other aspects of our knowledge of God.

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A Homiletical Theology of Promise

More Than One Genre?

—Paul Scott Wilson

Homiletical theology, of which this chapter is an example, has a form, content, style, and function—features that commonly mark a genre. The form is an academic essay, the content is theological matters relating to preaching and teaching preaching, the style is defined by *The Chicago Manual of Style*, and the function is to engage informed conversation. Homiletical theology is rooted in the Bible and European academic traditions and makes theological and ethical claims much like other theology and is written for preachers and academic peers. All of this is good and well, but from time to time most homileticians have also encountered another form (or forms) of what could also be called homiletical theology that has a different function/s. As a genre, it lies somewhere between the academic essay and the sermon, it borders the region of popular and devotional literature yet it is sophisticated, specialized, poetical, and theological, and for the most part lacks critical attention. It too relies on Bible and tradition and has some marks of academic writing. What makes it distinctive is that, unlike most of our formal writing, it follows the conversational style, language, and use of imagery and plot that homiletics in recent decades has advocated for the pulpit. Both types exist to serve and strengthen the pulpit, but this second genre pays special attention to clarity and simplicity, creativity and experi-