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**THE IMPACT OF POSTMODERNISM ON REFORMED PREACHING
IN THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN PRESBYTERY OF
THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA**

BY

CHRISTOPHER A. FARIA, Ph.D.

A PROJECT/DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE
FACULTY OF COVENANT THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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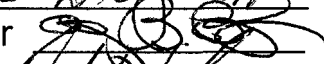
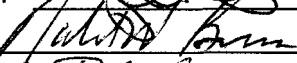
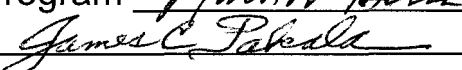
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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to discover the impact of postmodernism on Reformed preaching, and especially on Reformed preachers in the Rocky Mountain Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in America. Postmodern authors in the secular and religious arena have noted a significant change in Western culture. These changes are said to affect world view and specifically deny the existence of an over-arching explanation of reality known as metanarrative. Reformed preaching is challenged by a world view that is offered as counter to the metanarrative of Scripture.

This study employed a qualitative research design interviewing twelve Teaching Elders of the Presbyterian Church in America. These interviews were conducted with both set and follow-on questions. The literature review was conducted with a two-pronged approach. Firstly, it ascertained a working definition of Calvin's view of Reformed preaching to provide a baseline definition of preaching in three areas: the role of the Scriptures, the role of the pastor, and the role of the congregation. Utilizing this paradigm the second prong of literature review was conducted with reference to postmodernism.

The findings with reference to the role of the Scriptures in the preaching of Teaching Elders of the Rocky Mountain Presbytery revealed a strong commitment to the Reformed value of "sola scriptura," that scripture alone is sufficient as source material for the content of the preachers' sermons. They did not substitute narrative or story for the metanarrative of Scripture.

The study revealed a less clearly defined view of the office of the pastor. The Teaching Elders generally held that they were fellow sojourners with their congregations and did not clearly articulate their role as a herald and called ambassador of the gospel. The pastors were in unanimous agreement about preaching expository or exegetical sermons. All the pastors agreed that they struggled in communicating to their congregations but this was not viewed as an issue generated solely by postmodernism.

The study also revealed that the Teaching Elders did not think postmodernism had affected their congregations. They felt that the larger challenge for the pastors were the effects of moralistic preaching upon their congregations' views as it was being heard outside of the church by their parishioners.

The study concludes that within the Rocky Mountain Presbytery postmodernism has not negatively impacted either the preachers themselves or the preaching of these Teaching Elders. A stronger sense of the redemptive historical metanarrative would assist the pastors in providing a framework for their preaching.

Table of Contents

Abstract	IVV
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Statement of the Problem and Purpose	3
Significance of the Study	4
Definition of Terms	5
Chapter 2: Literature Review	8
Introduction.....	8
Calvin and Reformed Preaching.....	9
Postmodernism	34
Reponses to Postmodernism	43
Chapter 3: Method	58
Introduction.....	58
Design of the Study	58
Interview Design.....	59
The Interview Process	60
Interview Questions.....	61
Limitations of the Study	68
Chapter 4: Findings	70
Overview	70
Awareness of Postmodernism.....	71
Awareness of Postmodernism's Impact	71
Biblical Preaching and Postmodernism.....	79

The Role of the Congregation in Preaching.....	81
The Role of the Holy Spirit.....	82
The Role of the Church in Culture	84
Chapter 5: Discussion and Recommendations	88
Summary of Study.....	88
Discussion of Findings	97
Awareness of Reformed Definition and Reformed Preaching	100
The Preacher and Postmodernism.....	100
Biblical Preaching and Postmodernism	103
Role of the Congregation.....	111
Role of the Holy Spirit.....	113
Role of the Church in Culture	114
Recommendations for Further Research and Practice.....	116
Summary and Conclusion	120
Bibliography	1234
Appendix 1: Interviews	1367
KL.....	1367
EI.....	1489
DP	1612
EF.....	1734
EC	1889
MS.....	19900
RS	2089

ST.....	21920
FG	23233
AB	242
QR.....	25859
TU	26667

Chapter 1: Introduction

A search of the American Theological Library Association database yields over 1250 references on the topic of postmodernism. Searches of library stacks yield comparable numbers. The term “postmodernism” has been bandied about for about fifteen years but for preachers it remains an elusive topic. This is not unusual since it takes time for any philosophical viewpoint to wind its way through and to popular culture. Millard Erickson, professor of theology at Western Seminary in Portland, Oregon, and an open critic of postmodernism, writes,

Consequently, the views that theology responds to ten years from now may not be the philosophy, for example, which is new at that point but, rather, the philosophy which is new today. The reason is that it takes time for new ideas to be accepted in any field, and those outside the field will respond to them later than those within it. In that sense, theology, as an outsider, is not necessarily out of date in the psychology or anthropology which it adopts and utilizes; it simply is not among the avant-garde. Generally, a given cultural movement reaches theology only after it has surfaced in philosophy art, music, and other areas.¹

And postmodernism is said to have arrived in the sanctuary since Christians bring their (postmodern) world with them.² Rod Casey writes in *Preaching* magazine advocating the task of the preacher is to deliver an experience in his sermon,

“These authors suggest that people want and expect ‘ing’ in the events and activities of their daily lives,” Greg stated
 “... I said they want to ‘ing’ the activities and events of their lives. Authors Joe Pine and Jim Gilmore note that for pleasure, people do ‘ing’ things like skiing, skating, hunting and camping. They propose

¹ Millard J. Erickson, *Where Is Theology Going? Issues and Perspectives on the Future of Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1994), 54.

² See Craig Detweiler and Barry Taylor, *A Matrix of Meanings: Finding God in Pop Culture, Engaging Culture* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2003).

that in ever-increasing ways, people want and expect their daily purchases and routines of their lives to be 'ing-ed' by having an experience that engages the senses and builds a them around the sale or service offered, as well as providing a quality product." "...Churches that understand adult learning needs will do more than just 'teach truth.' They will create 'learning' experiences. They will develop what I call 'experience preaching.' Experience preaching is participatory and image rich. It might involve movement, discussion, food and activities."³

But since the culture has radically changed this cannot simply be an "in-house" issue of how we reach both Christians and non-Christians with the gospel. There is a significant challenge by this new culture.

Leonard Sweet is a United Methodist clergyman and currently holds the chair of the E. Stanley Jones Professor of Evangelism at Drew Theological School. Sweet is and has been a proponent of postmodern values Publishing over twenty books and one-hundred-twenty articles addressing the issue for those within and outside of the postmodern religious movement. He writes, "Distinguished literary critic George Steiner calls postmodern culture the 'afterlife' of religion, dominated as it is by 'the malignant energies released by the decay of natural religious forms.'"⁴ The modern church seems, in this afterlife of religion, to be expending tremendous energy on the form of the expression of Christianity. Mega-Churches, "seeker-sensitive" churches, "purpose-driven" churches, small-group churches, and emergent churches are expressions of attempts to deal with the changing culture. Multi-media large screens are the order of the day. But the

³ Rod Casey, "Experience Preaching: How the 'Blue Man' influences the Development and Delivery of Sermons," *Preaching* 23, No.3 (Nov/Dec 2007): 7, 8. As we shall see below, experience plays a key role in postmodern thought. See Erickson, *Where Is Theology Going? Issues and Perspectives on the Future of Theology*, 55, 56.

⁴ Leonard I. Sweet, *The Church in Emerging Culture*, ed. Leonard Sweet (El Cajon, CA: EmergentYS, 2003),17.

issue may not simply be a cosmetic change, an external change to an internal and spiritual set of complex problems. The answers to the postmodern challenge of preaching are multifaceted as well.

If we are changing as a culture, it would appear that cosmetic changes to form do not address the heart of the problem. But one may ask how far the church is to go in order to reach its culture via the medium of preaching. Christian postmodernist writers are saying that the church needs a fundamental internal change, not only in the form of the sermon but in the function of the sermon as well. Therefore we shall discuss the issue of preaching by way of defining modernism and postmodernism. Following this we shall review selected studies and a theological framework of responses to postmodernism and preaching with its accordant problems and purpose. We shall then discuss the significance of the study in terms of the impact of postmodernism on reformed preaching by proposing a set of research questions. Finally we shall discuss the limitations of the study.

Statement of the Problem and Purpose

The problem may be stated: given what we know concerning postmodernism and Reformed preaching, is there an erosion of the Reformed commitments to the redemptive-historical metanarrative? Further, has postmodernism in the Rocky Mountain Presbytery adversely affected the

Biblical/Reformed views of the role of Scripture, the preacher, and the congregation in practice preaching?⁵

Therefore the purpose of this study is to discover the impact of postmodernism on Reformed preaching and Reformed preachers in the Rocky Mountain Presbytery. It is an attempt to discover the breadth and depth of their knowledge of postmodernism, their view of the preacher and the sermon, and the impact postmodernism may have made on their preaching, and especially changes to the form and/or function of the sermon as it is delivered.

Significance of the Study

Jesus commands His church to make disciples (Mt. 28:19, 20). Part of the obedience to that command includes preaching the gospel with Christ's preachers as the heralds and ambassadors of the good news (Rom.10:15; 1 Cor. 5:20). Postmodernism would have us believe that this is imperialistic, oppressive, cultural strangulation of the receiving culture. Yet it is very clear that we cannot choose any cultural expression of Christianity as *the* expression of Christianity. But the charge of Christ and obedience to Him remains. Therefore, it is important to discover how Reformed preachers are communicating the propositions of the Scripture without communicating propositionalism, being obedient without being oppressive and preaching His story rather than their own. In addition, it is important to ascertain the impact of postmodernism upon the Reformed sermon. It is also very important to ascertain the influence of culture upon the Reformed preacher and his congregation. Is the congregation a mixture of consumers that

⁵ See Chapter 2: Literature Review and especially the diagram concerning these three facets.

treat the sermon as if it were a product to enhance their personal agendas of experiences as Casey would have us believe? Further, if we view the three main areas of preaching; i.e., the scriptures, the preacher and the congregation, then to what degree has each area moved away from the foundations of Reformation Christianity?

This study will benefit the church, and especially the Reformed preacher in articulating in a much clearer fashion, in terms of our receiving culture, Christ and the gospel. Also, it will not only assist the Reformed preacher in being faithful to Christ (and His command- Jn. 14:21), but being faithful to the body of Christ, both past, present and future. As Michael Horton has noted, the body of Christ, the saints of the Old Testament and New Testament are organically connected, regardless of time, and it is imperative that the witness of the saints be faithful to Christ and the historical witness of Scripture.⁶ In addition, we must be faithful to the once-for-all-delivered to the saints faith (Jude 3). If we are in a paradigm shift of cultures then it is crucial for us to discover how Reformed preachers are dealing with this shift in their struggle to be obedient to their call as preachers and to reach those to whom they are called.

Definition of Terms

The following key terms will be used throughout this study:

1. Modernism- The philosophical term to describe a world view that states given enough time, either rationally or empirically, we can discover truth

⁶ Michael Horton, "Better Homes & Gardens," in *The Church in Emerging Culture*, ed. Leonard Sweet (El Cajon, CA: EmergentYS, 2003).

and that truth is all-encompassing for everyone, everywhere, in all cultures and time. Therefore truth can be known absolutely. Modernism maintains the philosophical posture that begins with the absence of God from the philosophical system and proceeds from there to make subsequent statements which encompass all of life.⁷

2. Postmodernism- the philosophical term used to describe, "... the rejection of truth as correspondence to an objective, mind-independent world. The truths of postmodernism...cannot be considered truths at all, because the notion of truth implies universal validity."⁸ Truth is constructed by the individual out of his experience and the individual is constructed by the community.

3. Deconstruction- based on the presupposition that all language is arbitrary, and that each individual and community/culture brings his/her experience to any given text/event. The meaning of a given text must be "deconstructed," if authenticity is to be maintained.

Its meaning is grounded neither in "reality" nor in texts per se. Texts will invariably be interpreted against the backdrop of the social "home" and the historical conditioning of the language itself. Granted this interpreted independence from the text, it is entirely appropriate and right for the interpreter to take bits and pieces of the text out of the framework in which they are apparently embedded ("deconstruct" the text), and refit them into the framework ("locatedness") of the interpreter, thereby generating fresh insight, not the least which relativizes the text itself.⁹

⁷ For a comprehensive discussion of modernism see Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There: Speaking Historic Christianity into the Twentieth Century* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1968).

⁸ Raschke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2004), 18.

⁹ Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing), 21, 22.

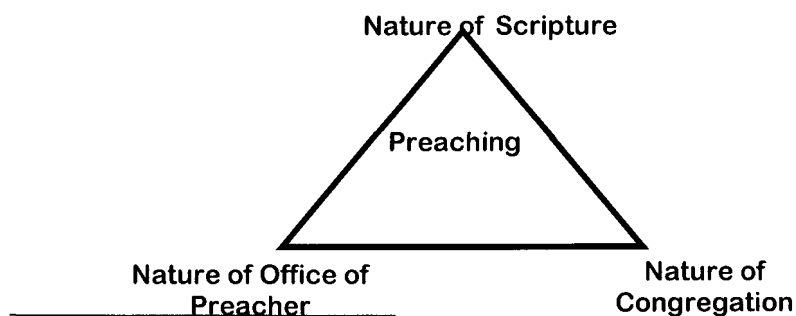
4. Proposition and Propositionalism- a proposition is a statement that is designed to express a particular position or point. Propositionalism is the use of a proposition to impose one's world view upon another.¹⁰

¹⁰ Henry H. Knight, *A Future for Truth: Evangelical Theology in a Postmodern World* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 90-96. Knight notes that postmodernists are not anti-proposition. They are against propositionalism which the postmodernist holds to be an oppressive imposition of one world view upon another person with no warrant to do so.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

In order to ascertain the impact of postmodernism on Reformed preaching in the Rocky Mountain Presbytery it is imperative that we establish several baselines from which we may discuss such possible effects of postmodernism. Firstly, we must endeavor to establish a working definition of a Reformed sermon and Reformed preaching. We will do this by using Calvin's view of Reformed preaching as a baseline. Next, we must ascertain what postmodernists are actually writing about postmodernism.¹¹ In this discussion we will cover the call of the preacher, the office of the preacher, the role of Christ and the Holy Spirit, the source material of the sermon, the purpose of a sermon and the role of the congregation. Thirdly we will discuss the responses within the evangelical community to the cultural changes that postmodernism is presenting to the churches and specifically to the preacher. This can be diagrammed as follows,



¹¹ The source material for assessing the content of postmodernism was drawn from several areas. First, the American Theological Library Database yielded (at the time of this writing) over 1250 articles specifically related to postmodernism. Secondly, these resources were examined for their bibliographies and resources were culled to include other articles and texts. Thirdly, using the Covenant Seminary Library, New Geneva Seminary Library and the Denver Seminary Library materials were further examined, drawing upon the bibliographies discovered there. Finally, using the computer program Endnote it provided electronic access to theological libraries and databases throughout the world.

By way of brief explanation, within both the redemptive-historical metanarrative and in postmodernism the three facets of preaching consists of the nature of Scripture, the nature of the office of the preacher and the nature or role of the congregation. As we shall see below both postmodernism and Reformed preaching theory and practice differ as to the nature of each one of these elements.

Calvin and Reformed Preaching

It is imperative for us to establish a working definition of Reformed preaching in order for us to later ascertain the impact of postmodernism on Reformed preaching. For the sake of brevity we will use Calvin's view of a Reformed sermon and intersperse those, who in the Reformed tradition, advocate similar ideas.

For Calvin, the preacher occupies a holy position. He must have a call to preaching akin to an Apostle being picked by Christ. Noted Calvin scholar T. H. L. Parker notes, "Those who preach the true Word of God, Calvin asserts, are in the true line of the Apostolic Succession."¹² A man would have to be trained but his call did not depend on his abilities. Calvin writes in the *Institutes*,

Therefore, in order that noisy and troublesome men should not rashly take upon themselves to teach or to rule (which might otherwise happen), especial care was taken that no one should assume public office in the church without being called. Therefore, if a man were to be considered a true minister of the church, he must first have been duly called [Hebrews 5:4], then he must respond to

¹² T. H. L. Parker, *The Oracles of God: An Introduction to the Preaching of John Calvin* (London, Redhill: Lutterworth Press, 1947), 57. There is some confusion about how far one is to take Calvin's understanding of "Apostolic succession." It is clear that he did not hold to a *Papal* succession, but he seemed to believe that God appointed and called certain men that would occupy the position of an Apostle in order to reform His church.

his calling, that is, he must undertake and carry out the tasks enjoined.¹³

Calvin notes that the minister must have both an outward call (from the Church) and an inner call, where the minister senses the sincere desire to build up God's church, but he does not address the inner call, save to note that he "passes over" it.¹⁴

The called pastor possesses the authority of God in his office. Calvin writes,

For by this means he first declares his regard for us when from among men he takes some to serve as his ambassadors in the world [cf. 2 Corinthians 5:20], to be interpreters of his secret will and, in short, to represent his person. And by this evidence he proves it to be no idle speaking that he often calls us his temples [1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19; 2 Corinthians 6:16], since from the lips of men, as from the sanctuary, he gives his answers to men.¹⁵

That God calls men does not diminish God's authority. Calvin writes,

We yet know that men are not raised on high by God, that he may resign his own authority. He indeed commits to men their own offices, and they are rightly called the vicars of God, who purely and faithfully teach from his mouth: but the authority of God is not diminished when he makes use of the labors of men and employs them as his ministers. We hence see that the priestly charge is this — to rule the Church according to the pure Word of God.¹⁶

The pastor, for Calvin, was an ambassador, a herald of the Word of God.¹⁷ The pastor has absolutely no business propounding himself or his own ideas, as was common in Calvin's day,

¹³ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II:55.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 56.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 46.

¹⁶ Calvin, *Commentary on Zechariah*, trans. J. O. Thrustrington (Albany, Oregon: AGES Software, 1998), 79.

¹⁷ Calvin, *Commentary on the Psalms*, trans. James Anderson, vol. 1 (Albany, Oregon: AGES Software, 1998), 804.

For there are other ways in which men preach themselves, than by arrogating to themselves dominion, as for example, when they aim at show, rather than at edification — when they are desirous in any way to have distinction — when, farther, they make gain of the gospel. Ambition, therefore, and avarice, and similar vices in a minister, taint the purity of his doctrine, so that Christ has not there the exclusive distinction. Hence, he that would preach Christ alone, must of necessity forget himself.¹⁸

We can summarize Calvin's view to this point: the minister is called by Christ, much like he did the apostles, outwardly, through the church to be an authoritative ambassador and herald of God's message.

We have already seen that the preacher is an ambassador who proclaims a message. It is now imperative to turn our attention to the nature of that proclamation and the source of the message which he proclaims.

For Calvin, the preacher occupied the office of the ambassador of Christ.

In this sense Christ rules through the office of the preacher. Calvin writes,

Thus it is that we must now be assured that our Lord Jesus, being raised, wishes us to come to Him and that the road might be opened to us. And He does not wait for us to look for Him, but He has provided that we might be called by the preaching of the Gospel and that this message might be spoken by the mouths of His heralds whom He had chosen and elected.¹⁹

In other words, Christ is speaking His message through His messengers.

That the minister possesses the authority of Christ is clear in Calvin's teaching,

Therefore the whole substance of our salvation is in Christ's person; but inasmuch as he worketh by his ministers, by resigning to them his office, he doth also impart with [to] them his titles. Of this sort is the preaching of the gospel. He alone was appointed by the Father to be our teacher; but he hath put in his place pastors and doctors, who speak, as it were, out of his mouth. So that the authority

¹⁸ Calvin, *Commentary on 2 Corinthians*, (Albany, Oregon: AGES Software, 1998), 91.

¹⁹ Calvin, *Sermons on the Deity of Jesus Christ: Sermon 11*, trans. Leroy Nixon (Albany, Oregon: AGES Software, 1998), 163.

remaineth wholly to him, and he is nevertheless heard in his ministers.²⁰

For Calvin, when the preacher rightly exercised the office of preaching it was as if God were speaking by His own very mouth.²¹ It comes by the mouth of Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit:

Because our faith must be founded upon God and upon His truth, St. Luke here declares that Jesus Christ did not send His Apostles to teach what seemed good to them; but He put His Word in their mouths, and He gave them certain instruction in it, in order that they might bear a faithful message; indeed, of which we would have no occasion to doubt. So then, when today the Gospel is preached to us, we ought to be assured that it is the charge which God committed to His Apostles, and that we must receive it all as coming from Him; as in fact it proceeds from Him. Yet in order that we may have greater reverence for the Gospel, it is said not only that Jesus Christ gave it, but that it was by the Holy Spirit.²²

We may summarize our findings thus far. In Calvin's understanding a preacher was called by God to be an ambassador and herald of God who in the exercise of his office rules in Christ's stead. We now turn our attention to the content and source of the message preached by Christ's herald.

According to Dargan it is clear that the early (pre-Reformation) Reformers did use the Scriptures as their source material in sermons. But the Reformers appealed to the Scriptures in a unique way that had hitherto not been utilized to such a wide extent. He writes,

Historic justice, however, requires that two remarks should be made as to the use of Scripture by the early reform preachers. One is that they were

²⁰ Calvin, *Commentary on Acts of the Apostles*, trans. Christopher Featherstone (Albany, Oregon: AGES Software, 1998), 454.

²¹ Calvin, *Commentary on 1 John*, trans. John Owen (Albany, Oregon: AGES Software, 1998), 72.

²² Calvin, *Sermons on the Deity of Jesus Christ: Sermon 12*, trans. Leroy Nixon (Albany, Oregon: AGES Software, 1998), 165.

not absolutely alone in their appeal to the Bible and in their use of it. Others also recognized the Scriptures as authority, but not with the emphasis and finality that make this the distinctive and triumphant thing in reformatory preaching.²³

These two key factors, the emphasis and finality of Scripture, were the keystones in Calvin's approach to the source material for the preacher. For Calvin this is clear when he writes,

Therefore, to the end the ministers of the Church may agree with the prophets in their form of teaching, let them study by preaching to set forth Christ; let them continually testify that we must seek righteousness at his hands alone, which consisteth upon [of] free remission of sins.²⁴

Parker notes this aspect of the principle of sola scriptura when applied to the preaching of the Reformers,

The pulpit, instead of the altar, became the central point in the Lutheran, Calvinist, and Anglican churches. Preaching was bound to the Scriptures, both in form and in substance. The purpose of preaching, the Reformers held, was to lay bare and interpret the Word of God in Scripture... . Preaching was the hand-maiden of the eternal Word which God had once "uttered" and which was witnessed to by the words of the Prophets and the apostles.²⁵

There is some implication in Calvin's writings that the prophetic office, or the proclamational aspect of the prophetic office, clearly fell upon the shoulders of the duly appointed minister. He wrote,

It is therefore sufficient as to the ministers of the word, that their tongues be consecrated to God, so that they may not mix any of their own fictions with his pure doctrine... So also Jeremiah in this place, in order that he might demand to be heard, plainly declares that the words of God were put in his mouth. Let us, then, know, that whatever proceeds from the wit of man, ought to be

²³ Dargan, Edwin Charles, *A History of Preaching* (New York: Hodder & Stoughton: G. H. Doran, 1905), 316.

²⁴ Calvin, *Commentary on Acts of the Apostles*, 369.

²⁵ Parker, *The Oracles of God: An Introduction to the Preaching of John Calvin*, 21.

disregarded; for God wills this honor to be conceded to him alone, as it was stated yesterday, to be heard in his own Church. It hence follows, that none ought to be acknowledged as God's servants, that no prophets or teachers ought to be counted true and faithful, except those through whom God speaks, who invent nothing themselves, who teach not according to their own fancies, but faithfully deliver what God has committed to them.²⁶

Nevertheless, it is clear that Calvin was openly rejecting the preaching which consisted of allegory, fanciful tales of saints, etc.; i.e., all source material that was not rooted in the Word of God. To introduce other-than-scripture material was to usurp the glory of God, which He reserves to Himself alone and to place oneself in the role of the false prophet. Calvin can be no clearer regarding this than when he writes,

But a general doctrine may be hence gathered, — that ministers are to bring forward nothing but what they have learnt from God himself. For though Jeremiah was a great man and endued with excellent gifts, yet he was not to bring one word or a syllable as from himself: how great then must be the presumption of those who seek to be superior to him by bringing their inventions, and at the same time demand to be deemed oracles?²⁷

Dr. Bryan Chapell, president of Covenant Seminary and author of several books on preaching from a Reformed perspective, echoes this in a positive manner when he speaks on the definition of expository preaching,

That involves identifying a segment of Scripture- an expository unit- and then explain what it means; to demonstrate it if necessary- I believe that most of the time it is necessary to demonstrate what it means- and then apply it to the hearts and lives of the people to

²⁶ Calvin, *Commentary on Jeremiah*, trans. John Owen (Albany, Oregon: Ages Software, 1998), 47.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 860.

whom I am speaking. it is to say to them, 'This is what God says to you.'²⁸

Calvin has nothing but harsh words for those who would deem themselves ministers and yet fail to use Scripture alone,

This ought to be carefully noticed, that we may not at this day be too much disturbed, when we see the pastoral office assumed by ignorant asses, and that those who are called, and wish to be thought ministers, are so inexperienced in Scripture that they are deficient as to the first elements of religion. And we see the very thing happening at this day especially under the Papacy, as existed among the ancient people; for the Papal bishops are for the most part extremely stupid and presumptuous. There are to be found many husbandmen and artisans, who know nothing of learning, but have only heard what is obscure and indistinct, and yet they can speak better on the general principles of faith than these haughty prelates in all their splendor. How is this? even because the just reward for their sloth is rendered to them. They are verily ignorant of what should qualify them to be bishops, and yet they glory in the name! Yea, though they do not think that Episcopacy consists in anything but in revenues, and also in vain symbols, such as to be mitred, to wear an Episcopal ring, and to exhibit other like trumperies, they yet suppose themselves to be a sort of half-gods. Hence it is that God exposes them to the utmost reproach.²⁹

Calvin warns those who would introduce their own ideas and extraneous materials in their office of preaching in his comments on Joel 1:1-4,

We now see what is the lawful authority which ought to be in force in the Church, and which we ought to obey without dispute, and to which all ought to submit. It is then only that this authority exists, when God himself speaks by men, and the Holy Spirit employs them as his instruments. For the Prophet brings not forward any empty title; he does not say that he is a high priest of the tribe of Levi, or of the first order, or of the family of Aaron. He alleges no such thing, but says that the word of God was deposited with him. Whosoever then demands to be heard in the Church, must of necessity really prove that he is a preacher of God's word; and he

²⁸ Bryan Chapell, *What is Expository Preaching, Preaching with Power: Dynamic Insights from Twenty Top Communicators*, ed. Michael Duduit (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 2006), 11.

²⁹ Calvin, *Commentary on Jeremiah*, 139.

must not bring his own devices, nor blend with the word any thing that proceeds from the judgment of his own flesh.³⁰

The minister then, as he rightly executed his office, had to carefully guard the deposit of the Scriptures that had been left to him in his office.³¹

The purpose of expositing the Scriptures was not lost on Calvin. Parker writes,

The first part of the office of the pastor, say the *Ordonnances*, is 'to proclaim the Word of God, to instruct, admonish, exhort and censure, both in public and in private.' The reason for the great weight that the Reformers laid on preaching was not educational or social but theological...The force that drives the machinery of preaching is theological. The real reason is to be found in the Biblical concept of the Word of God.³²

In this sense, for Calvin, the preacher was much like a loving father dispensing food to his children,

As then the head of a family provides meat and sustenance for his children and servants, so also the Lord supplies us daily with spiritual food by true and faithful teachers, for they are as it were his hands. Whenever then pure doctrine is offered to us, let us know that the teachers who speak and instruct us by their ministrations are, as it were, the hand of God, who sets food before us, as the head of a family is wont to do to his children: this is one thing.³³

In his use of the Word of God the minister, though he was not to introduce extraneous material not sourced in the Word of God, he was also to not hold back but to bring forth the full richness of the Scriptures for God's people,

But in these words there is prescribed to the ministers of the word of God a common rule, that they expound and lay open plainly, and without color or dissimulation, whatsoever the Lord will have made

³⁰ Calvin, *Commentary on Joel*, trans. John Owen (Albany, Oregon: AGES Software, 1998), 12.

³¹ *Ibid*, 11.

³² Parker, T.H. L., *John Calvin: A Biography* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 89.

³³ Calvin, *Commentary on Amos*, trans. John Owen (Albany, Oregon: AGES Software, 1998), 225.

known to his Church; yea, let them keep back nothing which may make for the edifying or increase of God's Church.³⁴

In preaching God's Word then for God's people Christ is elevated in the pure handling of the Word of God. Calvin states this clearly when he writes,

For seeing that the pure and sincere handling of the Scripture tendeth to this end, that Christ alone may have the preeminence, and that men can challenge nothing to themselves, but they shall take so much from the glory of Christ, it followeth that those are corrupters of sound doctrine who are addicted to themselves, and study to advance their own glory, which doth only darken Christ.³⁵

Therefore, what set Calvin apart from the preachers preceding him, and those Roman Catholic Church preachers, was the aspect of sola scriptura that mandated one could not go beyond the Scriptures in one's preaching. To do so was to usurp God's glory and Scripture's authority.

To summarize Calvin's understanding to this point, the preacher was called by God to deliver, as a herald and ambassador, God's message in Christ to God's people. The Roman Catholic Church altar was replaced with the pulpit and the priest with the preacher. As such he was confirmed in his inward call by an outward call of the church to exposit, purely and simply, with no fanciful additions, the Word of God. The office of the preacher is akin to that of the Apostles and possessed authority commensurate with the call.

³⁴ Calvin, *Commentary on Acts of the Apostles*, 615, In this comment, by the way, we see another rule that Calvin held, namely, that ministers were not to dissemble from proclaiming doctrines found in the Bible, such as predestination. Since these doctrines were present then Calvin held they were to be preached, but with care and skill.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 674.

In general, the purpose in Calvin for preaching was to yield the knowledge of God and to reconcile us to Him.³⁶ For the Genevan Reformer the specific purposes of preaching are clearly stated when he writes,

The principal design of preaching the Gospel is, that men may be reconciled to God, and this is accomplished by the unconditional pardon of sins; as Paul also informs us, when he calls the Gospel, on this account, the ministry of reconciliation, (2 Corinthians 5:18.) Many other things, undoubtedly, are contained in the Gospel, but the principal object which God intends to accomplish by it is, to receive men into favor by not imputing their sins. If, therefore, we wish to show that we are faithful ministers of the Gospel, we must give our most earnest attention to this subject; for the chief point of difference between the Gospel and heathen philosophy lies in this, that the Gospel makes the salvation of men to consist in the forgiveness of sins through free grace. This is the source of the other blessings which God bestows, such as, that God enlightens and regenerates us by his Spirit, that he forms us anew to his image, that he arms us with unshaken firmness against the world and Satan. Thus the whole doctrine of godliness, and the spiritual building of the Church, rests on this foundation, that God, having acquitted us from all sins, adopts us to be his children by free grace.³⁷

By way of analysis we find that for Calvin, preaching first and foremost was salvific. Bryan Chapell writes, "This means I am not simply preaching for information; I am preaching for a transformative purposes. I am preaching for transformation."³⁸ J. I. Packer emphasizes,

The *purpose* of preaching is to inform, persuade, and call forth an appropriate response to God whose message and instruction are being delivered. The response will consist of repentance, faith,

³⁶ Calvin, *Commentary on John*, trans. William Pringle (Albany, Oregon: AGES Software, 1998), 445.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 657.

³⁸ Bryan Chapell, "What is Expository Preaching," in *Preaching with Power: Dynamic Insights from Twenty Top Communicators*, ed. Michael Duduit (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), 13.

obedience, love, effort, hope, fear, zeal, joy, praise, prayer or some blend of these.³⁹

Samuel T. Logan states, “The goal of the preacher, then, is to use language in such a way that the members of the congregation are themselves, individually and existentially, confronted by the invitation/demand that they ‘trust and obey,’ right here and right now.”⁴⁰

Secondly, Calvin by no means rejected *other* content that was present in the source material of Scripture but it wasn’t the primary purpose of the Scriptures.⁴¹ The Scriptural teaching on other subjects is that which flows out of the primary focus; i.e., Calvin called these “other blessings.” Parker notes that the preaching of the Word then is dedicated to this end and to which the preacher must direct all his energies.⁴² This ministry of reconciliation was absolutely and imperatively foundational for the Reformer’s understanding of the Reformed sermon.

The sermon, for Calvin, does not simply consist of “good news” announced to the congregation; i.e., that God loves you. Rather, in order for a man to be reconciled to God he must firstly grapple with his sin. Calvin writes,

It is a lively preaching of the gospel, when persons are not merely told what is right, but are pricked (Acts 2:37) by exhortations, and

³⁹ J. I. Packer, “Introduction: Why Preach?,” in *The Preacher and Preaching: Reviving the Art in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Samuel T. Logan, (Phillipsburg, New York: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1986), 9.

⁴⁰ Samuel T. Logan, “The Phenomenology of Preaching,” in *The Preacher and Preaching*, ed. Samuel T. Logan (Phillipsburg, New York: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing: 1986), 139.

⁴¹ In other words, Calvin would agree that Scripture addresses marriage, family, divorce, sanctified conduct, etc, but these are not the primary focus of preaching.

⁴² Parker, *The Oracles of God: An Introduction to the Preaching of John Calvin*, 60.

are called to the judgment—seat of God, that they may not fall asleep in their vices, for this is what is properly meant by adjuring.⁴³

It is the preaching of the Law which brings the sinner to the judgment seat of God,

As to believers particularly, we ought to understand that they cannot make progress in the Gospel till they have first been humbled; and this cannot take place, till they have acknowledged their sins. It is undoubtedly the peculiar office of the Law to summon consciences to the judgment-seat of God, and to strike them with terror; *but the Gospel cannot be preached in a proper manner, till it lead men from sin to righteousness, and from death to life; and, therefore, it is necessary to borrow from the Law that first clause of which Christ spoke.*⁴⁴

Calvin considered it the duty of the minister to preach the Law and Gospel, two sides of the same homiletic equation,

Now the ministers of the Word of God have here a norm: namely, that they ought to touch men to the quick, and show them their sins, in order that they may know that God is their Judge Who will not leave the obstinacy of sin unpunished; and by this means they will be drawn to Him in repentance, which they would not do at all unless they had been reprimanded and treated rudely. Therefore we must allow God to rule over us and to condemn us, in order to be absolved by Him. There are many who would surely wish that the Gospel might be preached, provided that it might draw them to their profit and fleshly desire, and that it might be for them a cover for their villanies. Now it is not to this end that we must preach; for our Lord Jesus Christ says that, when the Holy Spirit will come, He will rebuke the world of sin; He will be seated as a Judge on His throne and He will judge the world. So then, we shall not be able to treat faithfully the Gospel so that the world may not be led into this condemnation, unless each one knows what he is in order to rebuke himself. Therefore, may those who flatter themselves, groan; may those who are satisfied with themselves, be frightened; and may those who are persuaded that they are righteous in themselves, look at themselves more closely, in order that all may be led to this

⁴³ Calvin, *Commentary on 2 Thessalonians* (Albany, Oregon: AGES Software, 1998), 21.

⁴⁴ Calvin, *Commentary on John*, 535. Italics mine. This will become a significant issue; i.e., Law and Gospel as content of the sermon when we consider postmodern responses and answers to the homiletical dilemma.

knowledge of sins by which we shall be led to repentance and consequently to the grace of God.⁴⁵

When one preaches the Law, its purpose is not just to condemn the sinner but to bring him to cry out in despair for grace. Calvin writes in the *Institutes*,

Augustine often speaks of the value of calling upon the grace of His help. For example, he writes to Hilary: "The law bids us, as we try to fulfill its requirements, and become wearied in our weakness under it, to know how to ask the help of grace." He writes similarly to Asellius: "The usefulness of the law lies in convicting man of his infirmity and moving him to call upon the remedy of grace which is in Christ."⁴⁶

Calvin termed this the "first function" of the Law.⁴⁷ John Carrick holds that this methodology of Law-Gospel, or as he puts it, "indicative-imperative" is *the* divine biblical method of rhetoric. He writes, "It is evident, then, that there is a fundamental primacy and priority about the *indicative* mood in the preaching of the Word of God. The indicative mood has priority over the *imperative* mood; *proclamation* has priority over *appeal*; *explicatio* has priority over *applicatio*."⁴⁸ Its purpose is in reality two-fold. It demonstrates to us our sin in bringing us before the court of God's justice, but in doing so it brings forth God's righteousness.⁴⁹

Dr. John Carrick, Associate Professor of applied and doctrinal theology at

⁴⁵ Calvin, *Sermons on the Deity of Jesus Christ: Fifth Sermon*, trans. Leroy Nixon (Albany, Oregon: AGES Software, 1998), 241.

⁴⁶ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Vol. II: 118.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 119, The second function of the Law was to restrain men and instruct them in civil law, Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Vol.II: 119, 120. The third use of the Law is to instruct believers in the will of God, Calvin writes, "Here is the best instrument for them to learn more thoroughly each day the nature of the Lord's will to which they aspire, and to confirm them in the understanding of it." Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II:121.

⁴⁸ John Carrick, *The Imperative of Preaching: A Theology of Sacred Rhetoric* (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth Trust, 2006), 28, 29.

⁴⁹ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Vol. II: 115. Calvin writes, "The first part is this: while it shows God's righteousness, that is, the righteousness alone acceptable to God, it warns, informs, convicts, and lastly condemns, every man of his own unrighteousness."

Greenville Presbyterian Seminary warns, though, of the dangers of preaching “either/or” Law/Gospel, indicative/imperative,

If the indicative is permitted to predominate to the exclusion of the imperative, the preaching will inevitably tend in the direction of quietism or antinomianism. If the imperative is permitted to predominate to the exclusion of the indicative, the preaching will inevitably tend in the direction of moralism or legalism.⁵⁰

The secondary purpose of preaching, which flows from Calvin’s understanding of the first purpose, is our Christian growth. He writes,

For to what purpose is the Gospel daily preached unto us? It is said to be the incorruptible seed whereby we be begotten again to be the children of God. (1 Peter 1:23) Now when we come into the world, we grow by nourishment of milk, and from time to time become stronger, so as at length we feed no more upon milk, but use substantialer food, whereby we gather force and strength more and more, till we come to man’s state. Now then, what a thing were it if after we have been made new creatures by means of the Gospel, we will needs hang still upon the dugges [paps, utter of female animal], and have so little prospered, that we must still be lulled in arms, and be not able to swallow a piece of bread, but will needs be still muzzling at the teat? Doth this proceed of the nature of the Gospel? No surely: and therefore we must acknowledge the fault to be in ourselves.⁵¹

Preaching the Word of God often results in the regeneration of the sinner.⁵² But this in no way signifies, for Calvin, that one can be continually considered to be a spiritual infant. That fault is our own, or in other words, for Calvin, it is the result of unwisely failing to make use of the preached Word.

For Calvin, the goal of preaching was to be understood by the congregation. Parker writes, “The preacher’s primary aim is to be understood by

⁵⁰ John Carrick, *The Imperative of Preaching: A Theology of Sacred Rhetoric*, 146.

⁵¹ Calvin, *Sermons on Galatians: Twenty-Eighth Sermon*, trans. Arthur Golding (Albany, Oregon: AGES Software, 1998), 405, 406.

⁵² Calvin, *Commentary on John*, 573.

his congregation. That is obvious. He must, moreover ...treat his Gospel with the earnestness and urgency it demands and neither be pompous nor descend into nonsense.”⁵³

Thus in the reconciliation preaching of Calvin there existed a tension.

Parker illuminates,

As often as we come to the sermon we are taught of the free promises of God, to show us that it is simply in His goodness and mercy that we must trust, that we must not be founded upon our merits, nor on anything that we can bring from our side, but God must stretch forth His hand, to begin and accomplish all. This gospel is concerned, then, primarily with the relationship of God to man and of man to God. . . Calvin's idea of God is fundamentally that He is the Sovereign Lord...The essential relationship between God and man is therefore the paradoxical relationship of love-hatred, and Calvin never destroys the tension between these two by allowing himself to slip into an assured sentimentality in which God's love becomes unrighteous and indulgent, nor into a despairing paganism where hatred without love becomes a blind and tragic destiny.⁵⁴

This middle way of preaching, of reconciling man to God comes about, for Calvin, only by the bridge of Christ and His cross. Calvin writes concerning the exclusivity of Christ delivered by the sermon,

For the same reason Christ calls the office of teaching the word, (Matthew 16:19,) “the keys of the kingdom of heaven; “ so that it is idle and foolish to spend much time in endeavoring to find a hidden reason, when the matter is plain, and needs no ingenuity. The reason is, that ministers, by the preaching of the word, open the entrance into heaven, and lead to Christ, who alone is “the way.”⁵⁵

⁵³ Parker, *The Oracles of God: An Introduction to the Preaching of John Calvin*, 68.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 81, 82.

⁵⁵ Calvin, *Commentary on Isaiah*, trans. William Pringle (Albany, Oregon: AGES Software, 1998), 516.

It is important in light of our later discussion of postmodernism and Calvin's views to recognize here that to preach Christ was not necessarily to separate Him from doctrine or proposition. Calvin wrote,

Christ hath therefore been appointed by the Father, not to rule, after the manner of princes, by the force of arms, and by surrounding himself with other external defenses, to make himself an object of terror to his people; but his whole authority consists in doctrine, in the preaching of which he wishes to be sought and acknowledged; for nowhere else will he be found. He asserts the power of his "mouth," that is, of the doctrine which proceeds from his mouth, by comparing it to "a sword."⁵⁶

This is to say that the Gospel of Christ cannot be communicated apart from propositions that, when gathered together, form the doctrine of Christ and the content of the sermon. Calvin writes,

We cannot be partakers of the gifts of God for our salvation without previously having true knowledge, which is by faith. He therefore properly adds, the knowledge of God, as the foundation of all religion, or the key that opens to us the gate of the heavenly kingdom. Now, there cannot be knowledge without doctrine; and hence infer, that God disapproves of all kinds of false worship; for he cannot approve of anything that is not guided by knowledge, which springs from hearing true and pure doctrine. Whatever contrivance therefore men may make out of their own minds, they will never attain by it the true worship of God. We ought carefully to observe passages like this, in which the Spirit of God shews what is the true worship and calling of God, that, having abandoned the inventions to which men are too obstinately attached, we may allow ourselves to be taught by the pure word of God, and, relying on his authority...Much less is it lawful to attempt anything in the worship of God but what has been declared by his word. What kind of worship will it be, if the judgment of God has no weight with us, and if we yield only to the will of men? Will it be possible that it can please God? Will it not be ... "will-worship," which Paul so severely censures.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Calvin, *Commentary on Isaiah*, 298, 299.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 465, 467.

Thus for Calvin the objective of preaching was to reconcile men to God through the person of Christ by the preaching of Christ through the medium of the sermon. To preach this message of reconciliation was to preach the mighty acts of God in Christ.⁵⁸ This now leads us to the poignant discussion of how the Reformers, then Calvin, saw the praxis of preaching.

For Calvin it was *not* the act of preaching that made preaching the Word of God. It was the empowering of the Holy Spirit that made it so. Hughes Oliphant Old, theologian in residence at Princeton, terms this the “kerygmatic” presence of Christ when he writes,

Preaching displays the treasures of God's Wisdom, that we might rejoice in them. Calvin's understanding of the place of the Word in worship has deep foundations in the Wisdom theology of both the Old and New Testaments. God is glorified when his Word is heard by his people and they are transformed into his image... In the sermons on Micah we find a very clear statement of what we have called the doctrine of the kerygmatic real presence.⁵⁹

Assistant Professor of Homiletics at Covenant Seminary, Dr. Zachary Eswine, echoes this idea when he states,

The eloquence of God is not only Christ-centered in a triune interdependence, but, as has been hinted, it also leans always upon the Spirit for its power. God always speaks by the Spirit and always

⁵⁸ Cf. Sidney Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura: Problems and Principles in Preaching Historical Texts* (Toronto: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1970). It is worthy to note that Buttrick, while claiming that a sermon is “energized” by the Holy Spirit and comes from God’s throne, becoming the Word of God, when it meets God’s redemptive purpose, then surprisingly, in order to avoid the “then-now” split of homiletics, writes, “If we are to preach from scripture, we must banish the then-now splits that disfigure sermons, We wrestle with the Bible in contemporary consciousness and, in so doing, can encounter the God in our lives, Theology has already moved beyond the notion of “mighty acts of God” revelation.” Buttrick, *A Captive Voice: The Liberation of Preaching*, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 49.

⁵⁹ Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, Vol. 3, 132

demonstrates his power by the Spirit. It is by his Spirit that he reveals himself to his creatures (John 3:1-8; 1 Cor. 2:10-16).⁶⁰

Calvin writes,

And here we see that the external agency of men is joined with the efficacy of the Holy Spirit; for, although the Lord alone is the author and finisher of the work, yet he brings forward instruments which he employs for rearing the building of the Church.⁶¹

In his commentary on 1 Peter Calvin writes regarding 1 Peter 1:24,

There is here, besides, no common eulogy on preaching; for Peter declares that what is preached is the life-giving word. God alone is indeed he who regenerates us; but for that purpose he employs the ministry of men; and on this account Paul glories that the Corinthians had been spiritually begotten by him. (1 Corinthians 4:15.) It is indeed certain that those who plant and those who water, are nothing; but whenever God is pleased to bless their labor, he makes their doctrine efficacious by the power of his Spirit; and the voice which is in itself mortal, is made an instrument to communicate eternal life.⁶²

God deigns, then, to utilize the agency of human preachers joined with the efficacy of the Holy Spirit. The preaching of the Word of God as the Word of God is efficacious because of the Holy Spirit and His executing the efficacy of the Word to His ends. We find this is true in Calvin when he writes,

When Christ testifies that it is the peculiar office of the Holy Spirit to teach the apostles what they had already learned from his mouth, it follows that the outward preaching will be vain and useless, if it be not accompanied by the teaching of the Spirit. God has therefore two ways of teaching; for, first, he sounds in our ears by the mouth of men; and, secondly, he addresses us inwardly by his Spirit; and

⁶⁰ Zachary W. Eswine, "A Deep Sense of Dependence: Preaching Christ in the Power of the Spirit," *Presbyterion* Vol. 32:1 (Spring 2006): 6. Interesting to note is that Eswine advocates both the preaching of wisdom literature and general revelation in reaching postmoderns. Cf. "Creation and Sermon: The Role of General Revelation in Biblical Preaching," *Presbyterion*, Vol. 33: 1 (Spring 2007): 3-11.

⁶¹ Calvin, *Commentary on Isaiah*, 564.

⁶² Calvin, *Commentary on 1 Peter*, trans. John Owen (Albany, Oregon: AGES Software, 1998), 52.

he does this either at the same moment, or at different times, as he thinks fit.⁶³

For Calvin without the Spirit of God actively working within the praxis of preaching the act of preaching was simply words that beat in the air. Calvin writes,

For as preaching alone is nothing else but the dead letter, so we must beware lest a false imagination, or a show of secret illumination, lead us away from the word whereupon faith dependeth, and wherein it resteth. For many, to the end they may amplify the grace of the Spirit, feign to themselves certain inspired persons, that they may leave no use of the external word. But the Scripture doth not suffer any such divorce to be made which joineth the ministry of men with the secret inspiration of the Spirit.⁶⁴

What then, for Calvin, was “Spirit” preaching? He writes,

By the term letter, therefore, is meant literal preaching — that is, dead and ineffectual, perceived only by the ear. By the term spirit, on the other hand, is meant spiritual doctrine, that is, what is not merely uttered with the mouth, but effectually makes its way to the souls of men with a lively feeling.⁶⁵

With utmost clarity, then, Calvin writes concerning the Holy Spirit and preaching,

The true conviction which believers have of the word of God, of their own salvation, and of religion in general, does not spring from the judgment of the flesh, or from human and philosophical arguments, but from the sealing of the Spirit, who imparts to their consciences such certainty as to remove all doubt. The foundation of faith would be frail and unsteady, if it rested on human wisdom; and therefore, as preaching is the instrument of faith, so the Holy Spirit makes preaching efficacious.⁶⁶

⁶³ Calvin, *Commentary on John*, 498.

⁶⁴ Calvin, *Commentary on Acts of the Apostles*, 546.

⁶⁵ Calvin, *Commentary on 2 Corinthians*, 71.

⁶⁶ Calvin, *Commentary on Ephesians* (Albany, Oregon: AGES Software, 1998), 17.

The inertia of the Reformation, begun with the colorful preaching of the pre-Reformers such as Savonarola, Hus and Wycliffe and continued in Luther's sermons find as its theological pinnacle the sermons of John Calvin. What set Calvin and the Reformers apart was the focused exposition of Scripture. Dargan writes,

It follows from what has been said that the reformers gave to Scripture a better interpretation than that which had prevailed before. The petty and often ridiculous allegorizing which marred even the best mediaeval preaching finds little or no place in the sermons of the reformers, save a trace here and there in Luther and some of his followers...

Again, it naturally follows that among the materials of reformatory preaching the Scriptures held the post of honor and power. Tales of the saints and other stories are banished. The petty fables and impossible adventures which had formed so large an element of mediaeval Catholic preaching do not appear in the sermons of the Protestant reformers. Nor do we find in so large a degree the refinements of scholasticism, though this still shows traces of itself and leaves both in the structure and contents of the sermons permanent impression....But now the pulpit deals more in the exact application of Biblical passages to matters of doctrine: and above all, as we shall presently see, in the exposition of the Word as the homiletical form of preaching.⁶⁷

Calvin's sermonic form and style was a return, a leap across the centuries from the 16th century to the most ancient of homiletical style.⁶⁸ Parker gives us a window into the preaching of Calvin when he writes,

Preaching is also bound formally to Scripture, and that so closely that it must always be exposition of Scripture. This can be achieved by preaching on isolated passages like the Epistles and Gospels for the Church year. Following the practice of many of the Church fathers, but even more extensively, Calvin preached through whole books of the Bible Sunday after Sunday or day after day⁶⁹ ...Calvin

⁶⁷ Dargan, *A History of Preaching*, 378, 379.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 380.

⁶⁹ As we have noted above, this procedure was not introduced by Calvin but reintroduced by Zwingli.

preached without notes and, it would seem, direct from His Hebrew Old and Greek New Testament. He had little time for immediate preparation but his close knowledge of the Bible and his wide reading stood always at the command of his memory. Moreover, he had, after all, written commentaries on many of the books he was expounding. Perhaps all his preparation was to refresh his mind and give thought to the application of the passage to the congregation and the situation:.. The form of his sermons is determined by the exposition. In theory it follows the pattern of explanation of a clause or sentence and its application to the people, sometimes in the context of an immediate situation. In practice, the form is flexible, even loose. It is saved from being rambling by his capacity for keeping to the point and breaking the material up into short sections, usually with some formula as 'So much for that point', or 'So you see what the prophet [or apostle] meant to say'.

His manner of delivery was lively, passionate, intimate, direct, and clear. This is as much as to say that is the whole of Calvin. Like many reserved persons, he could forget himself in the pulpit and speak from the heart as easily as in print. He could be furiously and coarsely angry and he could be gentle and compassionate... His language was clear and easy. He spoke in a way that the Genevese could understand, even, it would seem, to the point of using some of their idiosyncrasies of French, some of which may still be encountered today. To clarity of sense and diction he paid great attention, carefully explaining unusual or technical words in the Biblical text.⁷⁰

Old illuminates,

He certainly did not originate the Protestant approach to preaching, but followed the older Reformers in emphasizing expository preaching. He followed them very closely by studying the text of Scripture in the original languages...Again Calvin followed the older Reformers in rejecting allegorical interpretation of the Alexandrians and adopting the grammatical historical exegesis of Antioch. The other Reformers had made tremendous progress in setting the Scriptures in their historical context, but Calvin had a mastery of the culture of classical antiquity which was more extensive than that of his older colleagues... Calvin was primarily an expository preacher. From the standpoint of homiletical genre, all his sermons are expository sermons.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Parker, *John Calvin: A Biography*, 90-93.

⁷¹ Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, 92.

For Calvin, we have seen that to preach the written Word of God was to consider the act of preaching the Word of God. Thus preaching is worship.⁷²

Generally speaking, for Calvin, no worship can occur without the Word of God. It proscribes the beginning and end of all worship of God. He writes,

...whence we infer how unsafe it is to rely upon the examples of the fathers without the word of God. The greatest care, therefore, must be taken, in treating of the worship of God, that what has been once done by men, should not be drawn into a precedent; but that what God himself has prescribed in his word should remain an inflexible rule.⁷³

Therefore any worship of God is delimited by the Word of God and maintained by obedience to it,

Hence we infer, that God will be seen and adored in his word; and, therefore, that all reverence for him is shaken off when his word is despised. A doctrine most useful to be known, for the word of God obtains its due honor only with few so that they who rush onward with impunity in contempt of this word, yet arrogate to themselves a chief rank among the worshippers of God. But as God does not manifest himself to men otherwise than through the word, so neither is his majesty maintained, nor does his worship remain secure among us any longer than while we obey his word.⁷⁴

We have previously stated that Calvin's goal for the sermon was to be understood by the congregation. But this is not to say that in the act of preaching the Reformed sermon that the congregation is passive. Further, we have stated that one of the objectives of the sermon was that prayerfully the Holy Spirit would both convict of sin through the preaching of the Law and Gospel, and bring men and women to Himself. Thus we enter our discussion of those obligations of the

⁷² Cf. *Institutes*, III:20, 13.

⁷³ Calvin, *Calvin's Commentary on Genesis* (Albany, Oregon: AGES Software, 1998), 511. Thus we find the Reformed understanding of the "regulatory principle."

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 88.

congregation, namely, faith and obedience to the content of what has been preached.

Calvin writes concerning our duty to receive the sermon and compares it to having our “sores rubbed,”

Furthermore, this warning serveth not only for the Ministers of God’s word, but for all men in general. Therefore if we desire to be Christians, let us learn to do so much honor to the son of God, that although his word be not very well to our liking, nor we find favor in it according to our natural wit: yet notwithstanding we may not cease to receive it obediently. And so when any man cometh to a Sermon, let him first and foremost make his reckoning to be rebuked as meet is, and let him understand that it is for his profit that he is not soothed. And if he have itching ears, let him lay them away from him, assuring himself that else he is foreclosed, so as he shall never receive the doctrine to his profit and instruction. Wherefore let us all suffer our sores to be rubbed, and ourselves to be condemned, and to be dealt with clean contrary to our liking. Thus ye see how every of us ought to be prepared, if we purpose to be scholars to the son of God, and to yield him the mastery which belongeth unto him. And we ought to endeavor this thing so much the more, forasmuch as we see our nature driveth us to the contrary way.⁷⁵

The reader will also note that Calvin considered congregational reception and obedience to the preached Word of God to be the path on which one became a “scholar of the son of God.” Further the process of listening carefully to the sermon with a view to obedience is a struggle, an inward struggle that is fueled by our opposing sinful nature that attempts to drive us in the opposite direction. In other words, when the Law is preached it presents to us two clear factors: the righteousness of God and our terrible sinfulness. The internal struggle occurs because, assuming the Holy Spirit enlivens such preaching, God’s righteous

⁷⁵ Calvin, *Sermons on Galatians: Fourth Sermon*, trans. Arthur Golding (Albany, Oregon: AGES Software 1998), 76.

requirements are set forth in front of His covenant people and likely the unbelievers in the congregation. Secondly, the Gospel is preached where the covenant congregation hears God's redemption in Christ, His gracious provision and Christ as meet for those requirements in our stead. Fellow Reformer Martin Luther held this as the simple truth we know of the gospel. Thus we have this dynamic, circular process occurring. God, in Christ, by the Spirit, presents Himself to the congregation in the preaching of the Word and we receive it, struggle with it, and then bow the head and heart to Christ's mastery. And as Calvin writes, the hearing of the sermon results in this recognition of Christ's authority,

Then seeing our Lord Jesus Christ hath obtained such authority when he was lifted up into heaven, as to have superiority over all creatures: let us learn to submit ourselves to him, and let the same serve to hold us in awe, that his word may be received of us, and we assure ourselves that he governeth us, and that it becometh us to suffer ourselves to be taught in his name, and [to understand] that although the word which is preached unto us proceed out of the mouth of men, yet notwithstanding it is by the authority of God, and our salvation must be grounded thereupon, as well as though heaven opened an hundred thousand times to show us the glory of God.⁷⁶

In other words, the Reformed sermon has as its goal not to simply understand the content of the sermon but to reform the parishioner. Calvin writes,

Furthermore forasmuch as God is willing to beget us by his word, to the end we should be his children, and in the end obtain inheritance whereunto he hath adopted us by our Lord Jesus Christ, and which he hath purchased for us by the death and passion of him that is the true and only heir: as oft as we come to Sermons, or any of us read the holy Scripture, let us consider to what end it serveth. And moreover, if we find not such power and efficacy in God's word

⁷⁶ Calvin, *Sermons on Galatians: First Sermon*, trans. Arthur Golding (Albany, Oregon: Ages Software, 1998), 36.

when we hear it preached or read: let us blame our own naughtiness or dullness for it, assuring ourselves that the world doth still hold us back and hinder us too much: and let us pray God that his word may not be unprofitable to us. Besides this, when we be once reformed by it, so as we are become his children: let us daily feed upon it, assuring ourselves that we have need of it all the time of our life, and that we be not yet come to the perfection whereunto we must tend.⁷⁷

We find then a comprehensive doctrine of preaching in the writings of Calvin. He taught, both in the *Institutes* and throughout his sermons and commentaries that the primary objective of the sermon was redemptive; i.e., to reconcile man to God. Within this process he taught that the Holy Spirit presents Christ to God's covenant people, on one hand, piquing the conscience, and bringing God's Law to bear on the sinful soul in a demonstration of God's righteousness and man's sinfulness. On the other hand we have demonstrated that Calvin taught the Spirit brings the grace of Christ's redemption to a soul in despair over sin. In the process a sinner may not repent but only harden his heart against the preaching of God's Law. In addition, Christ is present in the preaching of His word, as it were, as a commander and ruler, issuing forth His will and commands and thus in the preaching of the Word written, preaching of the Word becomes the Word of God. The duty of the minister is to rightly exegete the Scripture. He then presents the Word of God to God's people declaring the mighty acts of God for His people. Thus the second goal of preaching is to be understood by the congregation. God's congregation is not passive in the process but is presented with the kerygmatic presence of Christ as they struggle

⁷⁷ Calvin, *Sermons on Galatians: Twenty-Eighth Sermon*, trans. Arthur Golding (Albany, Oregon: Ages Software, 1998), 411.

against God's Law and reception of His grace. The Reformed sermon, for Calvin, then, is actually to reform God's people who are to respond in faith and subsequent obedience.

Postmodernism

There is a sense of unrootedness within Christian churches today.

Lutheran David Lose is the Academic dean at Lutheran Seminary, Missouri and holds the Marbury E. Anderson Chair in Biblical Preaching. He writes,

But traces of the de(con)structive force of the postmodern gale are felt in our churches and communities as well. Churchgoers report a greater sense of "homelessness" in this "post-denominational" age, and church leaders admit less confidence in their roles and responsibilities as the church's influence in society wanes.⁷⁸

Though there is a multiplicity of answers to "why" this is true, they can be summarized as the clash or transition of cultures between modernism (with its Enlightenment/foundationalist) roots and postmodernism.

Modernism can be defined as the philosophical result of the Enlightenment. Erickson writes,

We are all familiar with the modern period, which dates largely from the Enlightenment, and especially from Immanuel Kant and George Hegel...In the modern world there was still an expectation of rationality, but this rationality was within the observable world rather than being somehow transcendent to it. Thus both the character of things and the cause of what happens within the world were understood in terms of fixed laws of nature. This rational pattern had to be discovered and utilized if what was to happen in creation was to be predicted and controlled. This was the way of natural science, especially in the days of Newtonian physics. In the case of dialectical materialism, the philosophy of communism, although the direction of movement was dialectical or dialogical rather than

⁷⁸ David J. Lose, *Confessing Jesus Christ: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: WILLIAM B. Eerdmans Pub, 2003), 1. (See below for reactions to Postmodernism).

logistic or linear, it was the inherent patterns and tendencies of matter that caused what occurred. In all of these systems there were certain assumptions: the orderliness of reality, the rationality of human nature, and a connection between what happens and causal forces...Argumentation and debate were desirable. The offering of superior reasons for one's view and of criticisms of opposing views was the means to arriving at the truth. There was a belief in objectivity, or at least in intersubjectivity of the truth.⁷⁹

Modernism was and is based on the idea that there is an overriding, objective truth "out there" outside of our thinking in the "objective world of reality." And that "reality" was verifiable in the rational world.

In the 1960's French Philosopher Jacques Derrida' began a philosophical movement known as "Deconstruction." Essentially, the meaning of a text may well be intentioned by an author but when the pen is lifted from the page, he releases his hold on meaning. The readers bring to the text their experience, culture, and own sets of meaning. Thus a text has no intentionality other than what the reader brings to it.⁸⁰ To insist that the text has one meaning; i.e., that of the author, is to insist that it (the author's meaning) can be *the only* meaning. Therefore it is oppressive and imperialistic to maintain an over arching, one-meaning truth for any given text. It is the imposition of the author upon the reader to insist that his view is not only the correct view but that it is the only view. The reader, within postmodernism, has an equally valid and equally true meaning that he brings to the text. A text then must be de-constructed before meaning may be

⁷⁹ Erickson, *Where Is Theology Going? Issues and Perspectives on the Future of Theology*, 55-56.

⁸⁰ D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism*, 71ff. See also, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?: The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1998).

derived. This process of deconstruction is where the reader brings his or her own experiences, relationships, training, and expertise to the text.

This movement of deconstructionism broke out from the linguistic philosophical circles to affect the other disciplines of philosophy, literature, architecture, art and movies. For example, in the movie, *V is for Vendetta*, the tale surrounds two main characters of Evy and V, who at first is portrayed as a terrorist who blows up buildings in London. The viewer subsequently is introduced to V as an intelligent, albeit quirky romantic, who is seeking revenge for terrible things which the government has inflicted upon both him and the populace of London. Evy, and the audience, now must make a decision of whether V is a terrorist or a patriot. And the movie does not resolve the dilemma when the credits at the end begin to roll. It is up to the viewer to bring his or her own meaning to the experience of the movie and the portrayals of the characters. This philosophical inertia carried itself to the Western World and is now known as postmodernism.

Catholic priest and author Michael Gallagher teaches fundamental theology in Rome. His interest is in the field of faith and culture. He writes (humorously) of the 10 commandments of postmodernism:

1. Thou shalt not worship reason
2. Thou shalt not believe in history
3. Thou shalt not place hope in progress
4. Thou shalt not tell meta-stories
5. Thou shalt not focus on the self.
6. Thou shalt not agonize about values.
7. Thou shalt not trust institutions.
8. Thou shalt not bother about God.

9. Thou shalt not live for productivity alone.
10. Thou shalt not seek uniformity.⁸¹

We can analyze several issues concerning these commandments of postmodernism. Essentially those within the movement hold that the scientific model with its claims of being able to ascertain knowledge absolutely fails. It fails because it judges reason as a product of the Enlightenment to be presumptuous in its claim to know anything absolutely. Further, it fails because reason has failed to encompass the indefinable aspects of the human equation and has failed to yield any positive products of reason as evidenced by increasing violence in society, poverty, and the multiplication of nations warring on each other.

History is a failure in that there is no metanarrative (points 2 and 4) that is all encompassing for all people everywhere. For example, during the Civil War, in the North, Abraham Lincoln was perceived by some to be a uniter. In the South he was considered to be a usurper of state's rights. And history as a guiding metanarrative has no impact in solving one's personal problems.

Not focusing on self may seem to be a contradiction within postmodernism since it is the subjective experience of the self that is truth. Closely linked to this are points 6 through 8 in that each of these authority systems fail to yield meaning. In fact all of these systems are suspect in that what is one value for one person in one place is entirely different for another in another locale.

⁸¹ Michael Paul Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols: An Introduction to Faith-and-Culture* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1997), 88-90.

Ironically, point 10, "thou shalt not seek uniformity," is a both a metanarrative and a statement of uniformity. Nevertheless it is a dedicated value.

Erickson lists six distinguishing factors of postmodernism:

The postmodern period represents an abandonment of this basically optimistic outlook. Instead of reflecting reality, thought is believed to create it. Instead of there being a pattern of history which thought is to discover, there is a creative role for reason. William Dean has summarized the major tenets of what he terms the new historicists (Wm Dean, *History Making History: The New Historicists in American Religious Thought*)

1. *A rejection of foundationalism.* The new historicists deny the idea that there are some kinds of foundations beyond history, such as a transcendent God. They share this view with the modernists or the older historicists. They do not believe that it is desirable or even possible to return to a medieval or premodern understanding of reality and specifically of history.

2. *A rejection of realism.* The new historicists deny the existence of any realities independent of human experience. There are no objective universals for humans to discover and understand (*a universal in itself- my comment*).

3. *A rejection of the idea of universal psychological factors.* The new historicists deny the idea that certain subjective characteristics are inherent in all persons. This contradicts such widely different views as those of Immanuel Kant and Sigmund Freud.

4. *A radical pluralism.* This is understandable since there are no universals beyond the particulars of history to which to appeal. Although there are generalizations from experience, they should not be thought of as anything more than that. They are mere abstractions, attempts to describe the particulars of the world as one experiences it, but not actual objects that exist in their own right.

5. *Pragmatism.* Since there are no absolute or objective factors, verification in some absolute sense is not possible. Rather, pragmatism is the order of the day. With the elimination of realism, there obviously cannot be a correspondence theory of truth. That is to say, the truth is not a quality of ideas that accurately reflect that to which they refer; rather, the truth is whatever leads to the most satisfactory consequences.

6. *Interpretive imagination.* Almost as a corollary of the preceding tenets, there is what Dean calls, "interpretive imagination." Instead of simply discovering or abstracting ideas from something within or beyond history, the individual imagination creates its own ideas to

make sense of history. These ideas are a genuine contribution to history rather than something extracted from it.⁸²

Therefore we find that postmodernism is a significant cultural shift in the nature of truth, and its communication to those around us. And postmodernism has a significant critique of expressions of Christianity, presented as “the truth.”

The problem of Christian modernism is that as a child of the Enlightenment it has welded itself to modernism. Or rather, it has welded itself to the presuppositions of modernism, namely Enlightenment propositionalism. We must state here that though there are those in the Christian community that would hold postmodernists to be “anti-propositional” and therefore “irrational”- this is not the case and they should not be painted with such a wide philosophical brush. Dr. Henry H. Wright is the Donald and Pearl Wright Professor of Wesleyan Studies at Saint Paul School of Theology. He writes, “What postmodernists object to is the foundations of propositionalism and the subsequent claims to circumscribed truth.”⁸³

During the rise of fundamentalism and its descendant, evangelicalism in the 1940's, modernist ideas of rational arguments for the faith depended on the Princeton/ Warfield/ Hodge foundationalism which held the purpose of revelation is knowledge. Therefore this knowledge (“out-there” kind of knowledge) can be rationally reviewed, sorted, and categorized so that we can know truth. These, “... propositionalists often see themselves as the defenders of historic Christianity against the corrosive forces of modernity. Certainly that is their intent...They

⁸² Erickson, *Where Is Theology Going? Issues and Perspectives on the Future of Theology*, 55, 56.

⁸³ Knight, *A Future for Truth: Evangelical Theology in a Postmodern World*, 90-96.

[perceptive critics of rationalist propositionalism] are not against reason or rationalism...they do not oppose propositional truth but propositionalism." Their critique:

1. The propositional approach assumes a human rational capacity untouched by either sin or cultural context.
2. It mistakes revelation as information rather than relational.
3. It misunderstands the relation of language and truth. In other words, it apprehends truth only being an idea in its clearest form. It is truth as correctness, precision and accuracy, rather than the biblical view of "fidelity, integrity and constancy."
4. It exalts individual interpretation at the expense of the Holy Spirit and the Christian community.⁸⁴

For the postmodernist it is arrogant to claim that one can absolutely know absolute truth. Yet for the modernist Christian, he presents the claims of Christianity through apologetics, propositions, and "timeless truths extracted from the exegesis of the text."⁸⁵

To summarize our findings thus far we have discovered that growing out of the discipline of the linguistic philosophical movements the central idea arose in that each person brings their experience, their "reality" to the cultural table. And at that metaphorical table is a pluralism which is to be equally valued by all with the common denominator that each has no right to impose his or her reality upon another. To do so is to be morally and philosophically oppressive. This leads us to our discussion of the metanarrative.

More importantly, for our discussion, is the rejection of "metanarrative" by the postmodernist. A "metanarrative" is a story or proposition offered as an all-

⁸⁴ Knight, 96.

⁸⁵ See Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1980).

encompassing, truth-explaining, and therefore “meaning- yielding” hermeneutical thread that explains “reality.” Gallagher writes concerning the fourth commandment of postmodernism,

4. Thou shalt not tell meta-stories. In a similar way modernity lived out various mythic stories of human heroism, such as Prometheus stealing the fire of the gods; but postmodernism rejects 'meta-narratives' as 'logocentric', that is to say, deceived by the inevitable human urge to find one central meaning for existence and to express this meaning in some story form. In so far as Christian faith seems an example of a 'meta-narrative', it comes under critique from postmodernism as 'totalizing': claiming that it can encompass everything and offer meaning for everything.⁸⁶

Thus it could be understood that if a Christian preacher proclaims a covenant-redemptive “metanarrative ” he is then understood within postmodern perspectives to be oppressive. Knight continues,

It is also the very heart of the Christian "metanarrative." The postmodern ultra-critics find any such overarching understanding of reality intrinsically oppressive; since no metanarrative can be universally true, it amounts to the Christian imposition of one particular view of reality on everyone else. Now it is clear Christianity has a metanarrative of the most comprehensive sort, beginning with creation and the fall, culminating in the eschaton, and having at its very center Jesus Christ. As we have seen, the Christian claim for truth of this metanarrative rests on the very particular even of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. How, then, does this truth claim avoid imperialism?...

However, the ultra-critics have more in mind than violence when they oppose metanarratives as imperialistic. They mean as well the subtle manner in which one group of persons define reality for another, such that those who are dominant conceptually enslave those who are not. To only argue that, rightly understood, the Christian metanarrative exercises a relatively more benevolent dictatorship is to have a dictatorship still.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols: An Introduction to Faith-and-Culture*, 89.

⁸⁷ Knight, *A Future for Truth: Evangelical Theology in a Postmodern World*, 77.

It is clear that the denial of a unifying truth or “metanarrative,” as a result of all-encompassing, absolute truth claims from a Christian pulpit, could be viewed as devastating to the proclamation of the gospel. Lose writes,

Driven by its dread of totalizing modernist truth-claims and metanarrative, postmodernists seek to alleviate their anxieties by encouraging an endless plurivocity of local narratives and perspectives. Ironically, the resulting cacophony silences all claims to truth, making it extremely difficult to offer constructive critique or proclaim a universally liberating word.⁸⁸

The question, generally speaking, is what is the Christian response and specifically how does one preach a sermon from the Reformed perspective which claims covenant redemptive history as the metanarrative with the nexus as Jesus Christ? We shall now turn our attention to the results of and responses to postmodernism. We shall first discuss two general observations concerning the responses then turn our attention to several specifics.

Generally, first response of some within the evangelical community is that postmodernism to be a spiritual wasteland. Gallagher writes,

Most commentators would agree that the postmodern self suffers from a new isolation. The old supports of a cohesive society have almost disappeared. The anchors in religious belonging have lessened drastically for many people. We live in the wake of multiple fracture, where the individual's various languages of searching are themselves cut off from one another. If this is so, then postmodernity- even in its lived or everyday forms- suffers from an incapacity for roots. This shows itself in the decline of social commitments concerning justice. It also shows itself in a diminished sense of the past, a kind of cultural amnesia. If this is valid, then judgmental “isms” are unworthy; it is not just a question of narcissism, hedonism, nihilism, post-materialism and so on. It is a question of suffering sensibility, of lostness, of a handicapped quest within a culture that offers few connections with others or with history.

⁸⁸ Lose, *Confessing Jesus Christ: Preaching in a Postmodern World*, 29.

This picture seems at first to be a cultural desert. If faith, ever since we emerged from the easy inheritances of premodernity, has had to be a decision against the tide (as in the early centuries of Christianity), then this landscape seems even more a formula for paralysis. Because of such little cultural support and such little attractiveness in the mediations of religion, faith options become harder to reach, and when one adds in the pressures of trivial postmodernity, this faith dimension can often fade into unreality.

But everyone seems agreed, paradoxically, that a spiritual hunger is stronger than in modernity, more acutely so because of the new cultural desolation. The spiritual hunger is real but with so much religious rootlessness, there is a danger of ending up with a floating spirituality very far from the definiteness of Christian faith and one which can even be a form of postmodern unbelief.⁸⁹

Secondly, therefore, there is tremendous spiritual hunger. Christianity is considered by many postmoderns as one-among-many religions. It is comparable to the first century when there were hundreds of gods and goddesses that were viewed as pragmatic equal claimants of spiritual truth and worthy of devotion. In the twenty-first century, though “post-Christian,” there is a greater likelihood of someone listening to Christian claims than within a modernist framework. There is also, thirdly, a greater spiritual opportunity for preaching the gospel.

Responses to Postmodernism

The responses to postmodernism from the Christian community to the change in culture fall into three main categories: “cursing the darkness,” “holding your ground,” and “embracing the movement.” Erickson notes that David Wells and Francis Schaeffer fall into the first category. Doug Groothuis also falls into

⁸⁹ Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols: An Introduction to Faith-and-Culture*, 95-96

this category. David Wells has been an open adversary of postmodernism and its encroachment into all fields of Christianity but especially into the local church. In his books Wells writes that postmodernism is an abandonment of truth.⁹⁰ Wells maintains that pastors have acquiesced to the societal pressures of prestige and opted for one of respected professions: that of the therapist/psychologist. The crash of the scaffolding of modernism has left us with *No Place For truth*, as Wells writes in his aptly titled book. This reveals his overall thesis that the church must return to the truth. Postmodernism, according to Wells, is essentially hostility to God.

Francis Schaeffer was a Presbyterian pastor and theologian. He went on to establish L' Abri in Switzerland that attracted people, and especially young people, that were searching for answers to their issues. During that time he published several books and though he did not term the cultural movements he was describing as "postmodernism," correctly felt its current and analyzed its sway and influence in art, history, politics and culture.⁹¹ His solution was, like Wells, a commitment to the historical truth of the gospel, but to challenge postmodernism on its own terms of rationality. In other words, stretch the postmodernist's (ir)rational thought processes to their logical conclusion and the illogic of their position will convince them of the absurdity of their belief, and they

⁹⁰ See David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth, or, Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1993), David F. Wells, *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1994) and David F. Wells, *Losing Our Virtue: Why the Church Must Recover Its Moral Vision* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1998).

⁹¹ See Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There: Speaking Historic Christianity into the Twentieth Century* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1968), and Francis A. Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live?* (Gospel Communications International, 2005).

will turn to Christianity as the most comprehensive and cohesive system available.

The middle ground response to postmodernism is occupied by those like Michael Horton, J. Gresham Machen Professor of Systematic Theology and Apologetics at Westminster Seminary, California. Horton is one of those representing the Reformed position and is very vocal and critical in his writings.. Horton wrote concerning what he perceived as the drift of the evangelical church from the historic faith of Protestant Christianity and the Reformation. His early material denounced much of Christianity as essentially Gnostic and called for a return to historic Protestantism.⁹² His most recent book on postmodernism and the church is *A Better Way: Rediscovering the Drama of God-Centered Worship*. The problem, in Horton's view, is not found in identifying a cultural movement as either modernism or postmodernism. The problem is we are not thinking in biblical categories. The theological problem is that culture, apart from Christ, is an attack upon God.⁹³ And for practical purposes,

It is not so much the modern versus the postmodern but the capitulation to pop culture that John Seebrook identifies as the "culture of marketing and the marketing of culture." Evangelicals obsessed with family values in vaguely moral context often reflect, the opposite values in the practice of their faith, as niche marketing breaks up the generations, entertainment drowns out catechesis, and the attraction of the customer edges out the communion of the saints across all times and places.⁹⁴

⁹² Michael Horton, *In the Face of God* (Waco: Word Publications, 1996).

⁹³ Michael Horton, "Better Homes and Gardens," in *The Church in Emerging Culture: Five Perspectives*, ed. Leonard I. Sweet (El Cajon, CA: EmergentYS, 2003), 107.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 111.

Postmodernism is not, therefore a new cultural movement but rather it is a failure to see the clash of kingdoms: the kingdom of God and this "evil age." Our response, then is that we are to hold our ground,

God has promised that by his Spirit working through Word and sacrament, he will slay us and raise us up to newness of life. If the age to come is breaking into even this present evil age through the preaching of the cross and the Resurrection, we really are in the presence of the one who has the power to disrupt our vain plot, to rescript us and take us "nowhere" people- "aliens and strangers" - and give us a place around the Lamb's table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as well as with the covenant people of today and tomorrow. And if not everybody likes us (perhaps our greatest insecurity these days), that might confirm we are on the right track again. Oddly enough, it might even attract a new generation to take the Christian faith seriously, as fake and cloying attempts to impress those who are "dead in trespasses and sins" give way to genuinely satisfying richness: that gospel which alone is "the power of God unto salvation."⁹⁵

In other words, we are locked in a battle of sacred propositional truth: the kingdom of God versus the kingdom of this world. We are to hold our ground, reemphasize word and sacrament via the metanarrative of the covenant outlook of the Scriptures.⁹⁶ Horton also maintains the clear Calvinistic understanding of Law and Gospel without falling into the error of mistaking indicative (what the Scriptures are saying) with the imperative (what the Scriptures are saying we must do). Otherwise one falls into the moralism that plagued modernist preaching. In other words, the postmodernist horse does not have an equal voice with the rider as to which pool the horse can drink from. Thus the preacher's office as a *called* herald is not compromised. He maintains the law-and-gospel, or judgment-and-justification paradigm. Andrew Crouch, Frederica Matthews-

⁹⁵ Ibid, 114.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 129.

Green, and Thomas Oden are also among those who advocate this middle ground and/or call for a return to a classical Christian Orthodoxy.⁹⁷

To summarize thus far, the first group of respondents typified by David Wells are those that maintain postmodernism is a compromise of objective truth and our response must be to continue doing what we have done in the church thus far; i.e., preach the truth. The second group maintains that postmodernism as a cultural phenomenon is nothing new and is more of the issue of a conglomeration of views that clash with the view of the kingdom put forth in Scriptures. The response, then, for those in the middle ground is to maintain a classically orthodox view infused with the covenant metanarrative of the Scriptures.

The third group responding to postmodernism are those in the Christian community advocating an embrace of postmodernism. Some have termed them “Emergent” while others call them postmodern. Among this group are Leonard Sweet, Brian McClaren, Edwin Raphael McManus, Stanley Grenz, Rick Warren and for some, Thomas Oden.

Leonard Sweet is an author who has pointed out the coming postmodern cultural tide in his book *Soul Tsunami*. Further, Sweet advocates that there are multiple gospels for multiple contexts.⁹⁸ In other words, the church has classically held that there is the singular objective truth of the one single gospel.

⁹⁷ See Thomas C. Oden, *The Rebirth of Orthodoxy: Signs of New Life in Christianity*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper, 2003) and Thomas C. Oden, Kenneth Tanner, and Christopher A. Hall, *Ancient & Postmodern Christianity: Paleo-Orthodoxy in the 21st Century: Essays in Honor of Thomas C. Oden* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2002).

⁹⁸ Leonard I. Sweet, *The Church in Emerging Culture: Five Perspectives*, ed. Leonard Sweet (El Cajon, CA: EmergentYS, 2003), 18-20.

But postmodernism has exposed the multiplicity and fluidity of the culture and that the church must respond in kind. He uses a gardening metaphor to describe the responses to postmodernism and clearly advocates the “meadow” metaphor versus the Garden, or the Park metaphor.⁹⁹ The “meadow” is wild, woolly, and often is mowed under and reseeded to give new growth. There is no need to recapitulate the past since that is not where the culture is. It requires radical new content and methodologies.

Carl Raschke, professor and chair of the department of Religious Studies at Denver Seminary maintains that evangelicals must embrace postmodernism since it is closer to the faith of the Reformers than modernism is. Raschke writes that modernist Christianity abdicated *sola fide*, faith alone, for a redefinition which really meant *reason alone* in order to meet rationalists and empiricists on their own ground.¹⁰⁰ This cannot be if we are to hold to faith alone. Thus it requires the regenerate to understand not only *sola fide* but *sola scriptura* as well. This is well founded in the tradition of the Reformers, especially Calvin who was not interested in spending much space in the *Institutes* “proving” the validity of the scripture. Raschke calls this the Reformation arc. Raschke ends his material with the idea that Christianity is best expressed within the relationships of the faith community, a strong and positive value expressed by the Christian postmodernists.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Ibid, 18-22.

¹⁰⁰ Carl A. Raschke, *The Next Reformation*, 99-114.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 159ff. Raschke wholeheartedly endorses revivalism and the Charismatic perspective as the expression of personal relationships in the postmodern ministry context.

We have thus far discussed the presuppositions of postmodernism and its rejection of “objective” truth, and its subsequent use of propositionalism. In order to understand the Christian community response, specifically with preaching, we now turn to discussion of the methodologies of communicating the gospel within that context.

Bryan Chapell, in *The Necessity of Preaching Christ in a World Hostile to Him*, notes that in a pluralistic world we must hold true to the evangelical foundations of the faith.¹⁰² Though he addresses the need and necessity of communicating the faith by means of the sermon, he does not address the *form* that the Christ-centered sermon takes within the postmodern context.¹⁰³

In the same work cited above, both Haddon Robinson and Donald Sunukjian essentially hold to their modernist inductive/deductive methodology without addressing the issues of ideas of postmodernism. Robinson is slowly moving towards a postmodern view when he advocates the sermon as a conversation rather than a lecture.¹⁰⁴

In the late 1990’s a group of Christian leaders and pastors formed the Leadership Network and out of this arose both McClaren and McManus, advocates of a new type of leadership within Christian churches. It was Brian

¹⁰² Bryan Chapell, “The Relevance of Expository Preaching,” in *Preaching to a Shifting Culture: 12 Perspectives on Communicating That Connects*, ed. Scott M. Gibson (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2004), 59-77.

¹⁰³ It is true that Dr. Chapell addresses some of the issues of form in his *Christ Centered Preaching*, but it does not interface with postmodernism.

¹⁰⁴ Haddon Robinson, “Expository Preaching in a Narrative World,” in *Communicate with Power: Insights from America’s Top Communicators*, 158. Several Christian writers such as Calvin Miller, Eugene Peterson and Ronald Barclay Allen advocate a change from what they maintain has been a traditionally one-way activity of the preacher to a stronger dialogical conversational model.

McClaren and Erwin Raphael McManus that advocated using the “narrative” and especially the Gospels because they are human stories. McLaren’s *A New Kind of Christian*, is written almost entirely in a narrative style.¹⁰⁵ The gospels have to be “de-propositionalized” since they are not propositions, mechanisms, or universal concepts.¹⁰⁶ The gospel is a call, not a proposition, to discipleship, a breathing relationship with Christ.¹⁰⁷ And it is this power of relationship that changes. McManus writes, “The power of the gospel is the result of a person-Jesus Christ- not a message. The gospel is an event to be proclaimed, not a doctrine to be preserved.”¹⁰⁸

Knight answers as to why the narrative is put forth as an alternative methodology in preaching within postmodern contexts,

Persons characteristically understand their lives in terms of a story; narrative is at the heart of human nature...In contrast to this [liberal use of narrative] is the postliberal approach represented by Frei, which begins not with human experience but with the biblical story. It does not seek to understand scripture as an aspect of human history and culture, but to understand human history and culture in light of the biblical narrative. It does not ask if the biblical narrative is relevant to our life story, but invites us to rethink and reinterpret our life story in terms of the biblical story.

The first advantage is that the biblical narrative depicts a world which it claims is the only real world, a universal history which reaches out from the text to interpret the world in which we live...” Frei criticizes the modernist method of interpretation which, by using

¹⁰⁵ Brian D. McLaren and Leadership Network, *A New kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends On a Spiritual Journey*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001). McClaren has since become a very vocal advocate for the Emerging Church movement and now calls himself a Christian activist. See <http://www.brianmclaren.net/archives/news/brians-new-book-1.html>.

¹⁰⁶ Brian D. McLaren, “The Method, the Message, and the Ongoing Story,” in *The Church in Emerging Culture: Five Perspectives*, ed. Leonard Sweet, 198.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 215.

¹⁰⁸ Erwin Raphael McManus, “The Global Intersection,” in *The Church in Emerging Culture: Five Perspectives*, ed. Leonard Sweet, 248.

the, "...criteria of Enlightenment modernity are used instead to evaluate the narratives...The biblical narratives invite us to understand our world in terms of their narrated reality of God and God's purposes, and to live our lives accordingly.

This last point about God's purposes points to a second advantage: a narrative approach provides a way to bring together the diverse components of scripture into a single story without thereby losing their particularity. It allows a unity which preserves diversity... The third advantage of narrative is that it has a unique capacity to convey the identity of a person, to render an agent. This is most evident in realistic novels where, through the interaction of character and circumstance, we come to know something of what those characters are like...Biblical narratives provide descriptive access to the identity of God. Through the story of God's interaction with Israel and the church over time, we come to know the character and purposes of God...

It is the nature of narrative to involve the reader in its world. These three advantages- the depiction of a world, the telling of one story of God, and the portrayal of God's character- are advantages insofar as one participates in the narrative, that is, enters that world, permits oneself to be incorporated in the story, and comes to know the God who is portrayed...

Similarly, George Stroup argues that the interpretative framework we use to make sense of our lives and give us our personal identity is not an individual possession but a communal reality- it is provided by a social context and rooted in a narrative tradition.

Thus the postliberal form of narrative theology is an attractive alternative to both liberal and conservative theologies which are rooted in modernity.¹⁰⁹

Thus we get a bit closer to a postmodern methodology in preaching. They are human stories in narrative that do not claim all-encompassing truth as propositionalism is. But they provide a certitude of God's kingdom breaking into the "now." One discovers the identity of God, not in proposition; i.e., God is

¹⁰⁹ Knight, *A Future for Truth: Evangelical Theology in a Postmodern World*, 98-99. Further study must be done as to the use of a narrative methodology in preaching; i.e., substituting a story as source material for *the* story of the covenant metanarrative and whether this is widely practiced among postmodernist Christian preachers.

“infinite, eternal, unchanging, etc., “ but in relation with His people. It is the kingdom come into the now.

David Lose comes very close to articulating an encompassing theory of preaching in a postmodern context.¹¹⁰ Firstly, he refuses to adopt the questions that underpin the impasse of objective truth versus subjective meaning and propositionalism. The route he takes is to offer key elements of postmodernism, and especially the confession of the Christian community as the *via media*, middle way. He discusses the term *homologeō*, to confess, in different biblical contexts and arrives at the meaning that it is the individual and collective confession of identity of the Christian who is inseparably lodged and within the community of faith. He slips past the liberal and postmodernist who want to consider confession simply on the horizontal plane that leaves out the scriptures or the claims of scriptures to create a meaning and content from the community alone. It is a confession that is rooted in the Bible's witness. Therefore it is a Christian *tradition* that is being confessed.¹¹¹ This confession is the biblical witness as it unfolds through the scriptures and is centered in Jesus Christ, the cross and the resurrection. In other words, the communication of the faith has content, and it is communicable. Drawing from Volf, Lose notes that it is in the proclamation/confession of the church through sacraments, sermons, prayers, hymns and witnessing, and daily life that the church confesses its faith in Jesus

¹¹⁰ David Lose, *Confessing Jesus Christ: Preaching in a Postmodern World*.

¹¹¹ Lose, 78. Note that this is very close to Raschke's conclusion that Christianity is best expressed within the Christian community.

Christ.¹¹² This is what Knight hints at in the integration of Word and Spirit, and Raschke proposes.¹¹³ It is a contextualization within the community of faith.

Knight writes,

This two way interaction in which primacy is always accorded to scripture occurs only where there is a body of believers who engage in worship and discipleship. True contextualization is not the translation of abstract principles into a new language but the emergence of a new community which (in Newbigin's words) "remembers, rehearses, and lives by the story which the Bible tells"; this occurs "through the continual reading of and reflection on the Bible and the continual repetition of the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist," as well as the living out of this new life concretely as it seeks to be faithful in its particular situation.¹¹⁴

According to Lose, this confession(al type of preaching) is that which is the historical possession of the church and was lost in modernity but is being rescued in postmodernity.¹¹⁵ Building on the work of Volf, Lose writes,

Volf then specifies the three dimensions a confession that make it central to the life of the church. First, confession is *declarative*, in that it announces what the community believes about Jesus, thereby specifying the cognitive element of the faith. Second, confession is *performative*, in that it transforms cognitive ascent into active commitment and thereby commits the confessor to the life and values of the community....

This comes about by confessing faith in Christ through the celebration of the sacraments, sermons, prayers, in hymns, witnessing, and daily life, those gathered in the name of Christ speak the word of God both to each other and to the world... this comes about, or rather "the presence of Christ does not come into the church through the "narrow portals" of ordained office, but rather *through the dynamic life of the entire church.*¹¹⁶

¹¹² Ibid, 86.

¹¹³ Knight, *A Future for Truth: Evangelical Theology in a Postmodern World*, 83.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 134-136.

¹¹⁵ Lose, *Confessing Jesus Christ: Preaching in a Postmodern World*, 75.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 82.

We must clarify that Lose is *not* calling for a return to modernity's methods of preaching. He is reaching past modernity to the confessional history of the church as a faith community. It is a dynamic interchange between the preacher and the congregation.¹¹⁷ Lose continues,

I contend that the narrative quality of much of the biblical witness, while significant, become secondary to its character as confessional, assertive, or serious discourse.... space that is, we are not so much drawn into the narrative world of the Bible as the Bible (in its narrative and not narrative sections) addresses us in our worlds by making assertions to which we are called to respond.¹¹⁸

Thus though Lose advocates narrative, it is narrative that draws us through a variety of discourse to encounter in relationship, both God and each other. But this is not narrative for narrative's sake. He elucidates further,

At the same time, it is important to recognize that preaching for the biblical narrative, and allowing that narrative to shape decisively the sermon, has several distinct advantages. At a minimum, it teaches his hearers the Bible, grows them in the narrative identity offered by the New Testament, and helps them to perceive the connection between God's work confessed in the text and God's work in their lives.... but the central task remains to relate the biblical narrative-including its non-narrative portions!-and our experience so that the hearer can perceive and appropriate a manifestation of God's power akin to that represented in the cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.¹¹⁹

Finally, in addressing postmodern preaching, Professor of Preaching & Communication and Dean of the Chapel at Bob Jones University, Jeffrey D. Arthurs brings us to three key questions in "leading a deconstructed horse to water" that can be summarized as follows,

1. Deconstruct the water; i.e., concede objective truth, deny the

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 138.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 164.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 219.

metanarratives. 2. De-construct the horse (Francis Schaeffer's approach), and 3. Use deconstructed rope- change the communication methods. Arthur is not willing to concede truth but to patiently teach the truth.¹²⁰ Secondly, the form of our speech, (number 3- Deconstructing the rope) must change to personal preaching; i.e., conversational and disclosive.¹²¹

In other words preaching is not so much about God breaking into our world but it is a presentation of our story.

In summation, the Christian responses to postmodernism are strongly divided into three groups. Those who reject postmodernism; i.e., those who curse the darkness, understand postmodernism to be a compromise of rational, objective truth and the church must hold its own against the encroachment of any philosophical territory. To do so is to compromise the very fundamentals of the faith.

Those in the second group which we have termed the "middle ground" do understand postmodernism to be a collection of culture movements that can affect the church. But they believe that postmodernism it is not a cultural problem. It is a problem that transcends all cultures in all times and the answer to the postmodernist is the same as the answer to other cultural movements. They hold that the church is to continue to present, with no equivocation, the preaching of the word of God and to continue to be the church Christ has called it to be, confessing faith both as preachers and as a community of faith in Christ as the ultimate answer to man's redemptive problem.

¹²⁰ See William H. Willimon, *Peculiar Speech: Preaching to the Baptized* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William. B. Eerdmans, 1992).

¹²¹ Jeffrey D. Arthurs, "The Postmodern Mind and Preaching," in *Preaching to a Shifting Culture: 12 Perspectives on Communicating That Connects*, 189.

The third group responding to postmodernism has embraced it and maintain that the church has largely not kept up with the changes in culture. They complain that the church has welded itself to modernist expressions of Christianity and mistaken the Bible as is informational when it really is supposed to be relational and non-propositional expression of our relationship with God and Christ. They advocate a greater role for the congregation in the expression of faith that hitherto was largely reserved for the preacher alone. The congregation's role is then demonstrated through drama, skits, dance, media and the arts. The postmodernist maintains that the forms and structures of the modernist church are no longer conducive to ministry and mission in a postmodern culture.

Having surveyed Calvin's understanding of the preacher as a called herald and ambassador of God we concluded that a Reformed sermon uses the Bible as the preacher's source material announcing the covenant metanarrative of God redeeming his people. The sermon announces the good news of redemption in Christ through the pronouncement of the Law-Gospel or indicative-imperative model. For Calvin, the sermon is the Word of God preached and the Spirit delivers this message to the congregation which is to respond in faith and to obey what God announces.

We have seen that the cultural streams that have coalesced following modernism have been termed postmodernism. It values the individual's experience and dignity in avoiding the imposition of any number of other metanarratives upon another person. This has presented a challenge to the

Reformed covenant metanarrative and there have been three major responses to postmodernism. The first denounces postmodernism, the second response is to maintain classical orthodoxy since postmodernism is really a clash of the culture against the kingdom of God. The third response to postmodernism is to embrace the changes present in culture while seeing preaching, not as a set of propositions extracted from Scripture but the proclamation of a relationship with God. And this proclamation focuses on the confession of the faith community's relationship with God. We now turn our attention to the method for assessing the impact of postmodernism on the preacher within the Rocky Mountain Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in America.

Chapter 3: Method

Introduction

In this chapter we shall discuss the design of the study, the interview design and the limitations of the study.

Design of the Study

The design of this study is a qualitative case study of Reformed pastors currently preaching in Reformed churches on a weekly basis in a variety of settings (urban, inner city, suburban).

Qualitative research best fits this type of study. Quantitative research requires skills beyond my capability and the results can be skewed simply by asking the wrong questions or leading questions.¹²² Sharan B. Merriam writes concerning the qualitative research process, "The decision to focus on qualitative research stems from the fact that this design is chosen precisely because researchers are interested in insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing."¹²³ I was interested in discovering the depth, if at all, that postmodernism has penetrated the Reformed churches in the Rocky Mountain Presbytery in the opinion of their shepherds, the pastor's understanding of the issues of modernism and postmodernism and possible conflicts with Reformed

¹²² Quantitative research has as its focus a quantity that is revealed through statistical study, is experimentally verifiable with theorizing about a particular control group or groups. And it is conducted within an artificial setting (such as a laboratory) using data collection instrumentation such as scales, tests, surveys, etc.) and is narrow in its perspective. Qualitative research is focused upon the nature or essence of a question and data is collected through field work, in a natural setting, and the instrumentation is conducted by means of interviews and observations. See Sharan B. Merriam, *Case Study Research in Education: A Qualitative Approach*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1988), 18.

¹²³ Sharan B. Merriam, *Case Study Research in Education: A Qualitative Approach*, 10.

theology, and what efforts in the crafting of their sermons, both in content and in form, they have made in order to deal with postmodernism.

Interview Design

The questions that formed the basis of the interviews were drawn from the literature review. Having formed a basic definition of modernism, postmodernism, Reformed preaching, and the commensurate values within each of these spheres of thought and cultural movement, the readings were formed into a basic set of questions designed to assess the breadth and depth of several factors.

My first goal was to assess how broad an understanding of postmodernism the preaching pastors possessed. Those that are writing from a postmodern Christian context seem, on the whole, to be fairly young or at least middle aged. For example, Brian McLaren, deeply influential among postmodern and emergent churches is middle aged and wrote his seminal work, *A New Kind of Christian*, from the perspective of a middle aged minister. Also important in this section of the questions was to assess how well read the pastors were and how much they may or may not have been influenced along these lines.

Secondly, I wanted to determine the degree to which the preaching pastors understood preaching in a Reformed context. Specifically I wanted to understand that despite one's ordination vows how much postmodernism might have loosened the moorings of their Reformed heritage.

Thirdly, I wanted to assess how the pastors articulated the process of preaching a biblical sermon. This included preparation, crafting, delivery and effects of their preaching. In addition, I wanted to understand how their preaching

as Presbyterians and Reformed pastors differed from evangelical pastors and their sermons.

Fourthly, depending on the degree to which the pastors were aware of the issues concerning postmodernism I was interested in ascertaining their understanding of the ebb and flow, and the causes of postmodernism's influence on them and their congregations.

Finally, I was interested in assessing possible solutions to any postmodern dilemmas that they may or may not have perceived.

The Interview Process

All pastors that I interviewed were spoken to at Presbytery meetings of the Rocky Mountain Presbytery, except for one of the respondents who is a member of the South Coast Presbytery in California. This respondent I had previously had a correspondence with over a period of several years. The decision was made to keep the interviews "closer to home;" i.e., within the Presbytery as much as possible in order to understand the cultural influences that may be affecting this region. Following the conversation with the respondent they were followed up with an email to them, in addition to several others within the Presbytery. The target group was twelve pastors and these were the ones that responded positively.

Two of the respondents asked for the interview questions ahead of the scheduled interview. Though the questions were sent as requested I purposely attempted to avoid any preview of the questions in order to receive fresh insights and spontaneity in the interviews. This is due to the presupposition that the

respondents would speak without preparation and in a fashion that is similar to how they interact with their congregation. In essence, this is akin to keeping the field of study pristine and untainted.

Two of the interviews were conducted face to face. The remaining ten interviews were conducted by telephone and recorded digitally. All of the interviews were then transcribed and formatted allowing easy access to material for citations later on in the study.

Interview Questions

The questions that were asked of the respondents are listed below. The rationale for each question follows the question itself.

General Information

- How long have you pastored and preached?

This question is designed to assess the pastor's experience. The question is intended not just for information gathering purposes but to assess whether or not the pastor's experience, or lack thereof, had significant bearing and weight upon his views.

- Where and when did you attend seminary?

This question is designed to assess the influence of the pastor's training on his views of preaching. In addition it assesses any correlation to the time the pastor has been out of seminary and whether or not this was a factor in his beliefs about preaching.

- How old are you?

This question is designed to determine whether or not one's age is a factor in his views on postmodernism and preaching.

- Have you had any post-graduate work?

My own experience in the Doctor of Ministry program yielded training in preaching and issues in contemporary theology. But the training in postmodern influences upon homiletics was absent. This question is designed to assess if their post-graduate education included influences that informed their understanding of preaching and postmodernism.

The next set of questions is designed to assess the breadth and depth of the pastor's understanding of postmodernism and possible understandings from various quarters of the Christian community.

Cultural Awareness

- How do you understand the term "postmodern"?
- How do you understand the term "modernist" or "modernism"?

These two questions assess the degree to which the pastor is familiar with the broader scope of postmodernism. I was interested in discovering whether or not they had read in one or more of the areas that was discussed above. For example, had the pastors read David Wells' denunciation of postmodernism and if so, had they gone beyond that reading? Had the respondent read among the postmodern Christian writers that openly advocated models that are in opposition to Reformed preaching? Follow up questions were also used, depending on the respondents answers, to determine whether or not the respondent was more or less open to postmodern expressions within his congregation.

- How has your congregation, if at all, changed over the past years you have been preaching? What cultural impact have you noticed upon your congregation?

These questions are designed to build on the first two but to expand the area of inquiry beyond just the pastor's reading and training experiences. These questions also reveal whether or not the pastor has worked through some solutions to apparent or possible problems which postmodernism engenders.

- Cultural problem- Is postmodernism a loss of sense of community and roots caused by acquiescing to culture or an inability to incarnate the gospel and culture? Should the church feed only on its own resources or should it draw from the world's wells?

This question, as well as the one that follows were taken from the writings of the postmodern writers, especially Leonard Sweet.¹²⁴ The cultural problem question reveals the degree to which the pastor senses a change in the community of faith whether or not he answered in the affirmative that his church was being impacted by postmodernism. The first part of the question echoes some of the sentiments of David Wells while the latter part of the question reflects the sentiments of Brian McLaren and Brian McManus.

- Moral problem- Is it a loss of a sense of biblical authority or a culture of individualism and its creeds?

One of the stated tenets of postmodernism is that we cannot know absolutely the "truth out there" objective truth, the "true truth" of Francis Schaeffer. Again the first part of the question reflects a summary of David Wells' position while the latter half reflects that of the postmodern Christian community. Two more of the tenets of postmodernism are a hunger for community and an aloof, radical individuality of non-conformism. The question assesses whether or

¹²⁴ Leonard I. Sweet, *The Church in Emerging Culture: Five Perspectives*. Interestingly enough Sweet tends to bifurcate the issues in postmodernism into two polarized positions, setting the modernist church against the postmodernist church. As we shall discover below many of the respondents did not like the two options.

not the pastor is not only familiar with the issues but where he stands. Granted, it is an artificial bifurcation of an answer to the problem of postmodernism but it does provide information as to why the pastor believes this discussion is even taking place.

Theological Awareness

- How do you understand the term “Reformed?”

While on the surface this question may seem to be superficial but it allows me to understand how great an influence the Reformed perspective has upon the pastor. In addition, follow up questions were asked depending on their response to this question. For example, one respondent defined “Reformed” as a 16th century theology that had nothing to do with his preaching. The follow up question was to probe the influence of postmodernism and how it might affect the views of the pastor when it comes to preaching.

- What do you believe “biblical” preaching is? How do you do it?

This question is formed largely from the literature. Specifically, there is very little written on the subject of Reformed preaching. The question assesses the correlation or disjuncture between what they perceive as biblical preaching and how Reformed values inform their understanding of preaching. A follow up question, though not listed, was posed as to how the preacher understood the difference between a general evangelical sermon that might be heard in a local church in his own community and a sermon that he preached and understood as Reformed. Based on these questions some of the preachers were also asked how they would define moralistic preaching and how that differed from their

perception of a Reformed sermon. I also hoped that I would be able to ascertain whether or not the preacher understood any purpose and goal of the sermon compared with our understanding of Calvin's view of the purpose and goal of the sermon.

- What is the role of the preacher?

Our baseline for this question is Calvin's understanding of the preacher as called by God, an ambassador and herald of the good news. Inherent within that office is the rule of Christ through the preached word of his people. The question would reveal any apprehension by the preacher of these factors in Reformed preaching. Also it was designed to reveal whether or not the preacher would include aspects of shepherding and pastoring by means of the pulpit.

- What is the role of the Holy Spirit?

Calvin has often been understood as the theologian of the Holy Spirit. And as we have previously noted he held that the Spirit enlivened the preached word to the position of the Word of God. These elements of what a biblical sermon is, what the role of the pastor is and what is the role of the Holy Spirit are all designed to attempt to assess the pastor's understanding beyond the simple position of the Spirit illuminating the written word of God.

- What is the role of the congregation?

The role of the congregation in the sermon is key in Calvin's thought and Reformed thought, as reflected in the Westminster Shorter Catechism (Q.89, 90). The question is designed to assess how the pastor is in harmony with Reformed thinking or has there been the increasing influence of postmodernism affecting

his understanding.¹²⁵ In other words, has the role of the congregation become more active or participatory in the delivery of the content of the word of God replacing or supplanting the sermon? Or does the pastor understand the congregation along the lines of Calvin's Reformed understanding of its passive/active role, prayerfully preparing and attending to the word preached in faith and obedience?

- Has postmodernism affected your preaching?

This question is designed as a contrast to the preaching pastor's intellectual understanding of postmodernism with any possible increase in postmodern influence in the congregation.

- How has postmodernism affected your congregation's understanding of the sermon?

This is essentially a follow up question to the previous question. It allows us to trace the origin and avenue's of entrance of postmodernism into the congregation as well as a check and clarification of the question on the role of the congregation. If the congregation has a greater role in the sermonic event then it would therefore be theoretically detailed in the preaching and the congregation's understanding of the sermon proper.

¹²⁵ Fred B. Craddock, *As One Without Authority* (Enid, Oklahoma: Phillips University Press, 1971), 55. Craddock writes, "And this is precisely the authoritarian foundation of traditional preaching, whether that authority be lodged in the church, the Scriptures, the ordination of the clergy, or in the exclusive ability of the clergy, by virtue of their training, to handle aright the eternal truths. this [sic] was the movement appropriate to it... [regarding the deductive outline] There is no democracy here, no dialogue, no listening by the speaker, no contributing by the hearer. If the congregation is on the team, it is as javelin catcher." As we shall see in chapter 5, in the trinity of options within postmodernism, postmodernist writers reduce the role of the pastor and increase the role of the congregation.

- Are we dealing with the loss of a sense of objective truth or a change in the understanding of what truth is?

This is another “checking” or “calibrating” question. It is designed in another form to assess what the preaching pastor believes to be the case in his congregation measured against what both the modernist and postmodernist Christian writers have written. It also prompts greater consideration of the issue by posing an either-or proposition which the respondent may or may not agree with thus fostering a more detailed exposition on the problem.

- Spiritual problem- Is postmodernism’s impact in the church the result of a crises of faith (creeds and doctrinal content) or a crisis in the language of faith (words we use to convey doctrine and creeds)?

Again, this is another “checking” question. It is taken from the postmodernist Christian authors’ assertions. It assesses the nature of truth and language. It poses the dilemma of objective “out there” truth as opposed to subjective experiential truth, one of the key lynchpins of the modernist-postmodernist conflicts. It is also designed to assess the preachers understanding of being Reformed and Reformed preaching from another perspective. It is important to pose questions in different ways to illumine the respondents understanding.

- Ecclesiastical problem- Is the church itself the problem, with structures not conducive to ministry and mission in this new world, or is the church failing to be a church, less true to itself than true to its time?

This final question is also taken from the conflict reflected in the modernist and postmodernist Christian literature. It assesses the areas of how much the church should draw from the world in order to reach the world as well as assessing the present structures within the church. It assesses whether or not

the church itself is distinctly Reformed (a walled garden with specific paths as noted by Sweet¹²⁶) or is the church like an open field, open to whatever blows into the field, ever open to what chose to grow there?

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of the study have to do with the preacher's perceptions of himself and his church. It then follows that the study would be more comprehensive if members of each congregation were able to be polled on the same questions. Then the results of both interviews with the pastor and the congregation could be correlated against each other to measure their perceptions of each other and postmodernism's apparent effects upon both.

Secondly, in order to manage the amount of material, interviews were largely limited to the geographical area of the Rocky Mountain Presbytery. Only one interview was done with a teaching elder outside of the Rocky Mountain Presbytery. The geographically wide dispersion of PCA churches within the Presbytery is a mitigating factor in assessing the impact of postmodernism on Reformed preaching. There are 25 PCA churches within the Presbytery. 19 are in Colorado, 3 in Wyoming and 1 in Nebraska. At least half are considered to be rural churches. A cross section of the type of church; i.e., rural, suburban and city, was selected to achieve a more balanced perspective. Time available and geographical dispersion of the churches within the presbyter limited the study.

Geographical and urban-suburban factors also posed a limitation and problem. Several of the pastors shepherd churches that are in college towns.

¹²⁶ Sweet, 18-20.

Several of the pastors worked with congregations that are located in very suburban or “country” areas such as Montana and Wyoming. Those factors all have an impact on the degree to which certain views and cultural values are possessed by their congregations. In other words one might propose further study beyond this dissertation of the impact of postmodernism on rural-country churches within the Presbyterian Churches in America. One might also group the churches we surveyed into college-university locales such as Boulder, Colorado and Denver, Colorado.

Finally, taking these last factors into consideration, the study is limited by the task of identifying the causes of particular viewpoints that the pastors hold and whether or not these views were formed as the result of the locale they were in (such as a college or rural town). For example, one pastor fondly quoted David Wells and went to a Reformed seminary but ministers in a rural setting. Another pastor was open in his embrace of postmodernism but was educated in a conservative seminary and pastors in a conservative, urban seminary. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to study each of these causes and correlate them to their sources.

Chapter 4: Findings

Overview

In this chapter I will discuss the findings of twelve interviews with Reformed preaching pastors in Presbyterian Church of America congregations. Interviews were conducted over a period of three months with twelve preaching pastors. Eleven of them are active Teaching Elders in the Rocky Mountain Presbytery. One of the Teaching Elders is from the South Coast Presbytery, California.

The educational background of those interviewed is as follows:

Seminary	Graduated
Covenant Theological Seminary	4
Westminster Theological Seminary	2
Reformed Theological Seminary	2
Sangre De Cristo Theological Seminary	2
Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary	2
No Graduate study	1

Of the twelve Teaching Elders interviewed five have advanced Doctoral degrees (Ph.D. or D.Min). Two are currently working on their Doctor of Ministry degrees, one at Covenant Seminary and one at New Geneva Seminary. The age range of those interviewed is the youngest at 36 years old to the eldest at 71. The median age was 46. All of those interviewed are currently senior or preaching pastors at their church. Their experience in preaching ranges from three years of active preaching to forty-six years of preaching with an average of eleven years.

Awareness of Postmodernism

Generally speaking most of the Teaching Elders interviewed were aware of the basic presuppositions of postmodernism; i.e., rejecting absolute truth “out there,” propositionalism, the role of objective truth versus the role of experience, the validity of personal experience as truth, etc. The same can be said of their working knowledge of modernism; i.e., the scientific rationale that begins with a system of thought that leaves God out of the equation, places scientific findings and propositional truth at the head of the philosophical system. Only one teaching elder framed his understanding of modernism in terms of the liberal-fundamentalist debate.¹²⁷ One of the Teaching Elders interviewed openly embraced postmodernism.¹²⁸ Many held that postmodernism had something to do with the rejection of absolute truth.

Awareness of Postmodernism’s Impact

Given our understanding of modernism and postmodernism (above) the study interviews were conducted to ascertain how aware were the preaching pastors of any impact of postmodernism upon their congregations. The responses, generally speaking, were widely varied.

Two of the ministers interviewed held that postmodernism had definitely impacted their preaching and their congregations. This is likely due to the location of their congregations; i.e., a Colorado suburb, the other in a suburb where the University of Colorado is located. As one of the values in

¹²⁷ EI Interview, 142:1. Note: All interviews were transcribed and given a line-number format; i.e., each sentence is assigned a line. The first number “3” refers to the page, the second number, “1” refers to the line number on the particular page.

¹²⁸ EC Interview, 182:6.

postmodernism is an emphasis upon community both of these pastors held that they were doing much better at forming a community of faith than they had in the past. The implication was that the rise in cultural awareness of the value of community in these locales brought the ministers to focus upon the building of biblical community. By way of reminder, postmoderns are described almost paradoxically in that there is a radical individualism while being on a quest for community.¹²⁹ For example, Brian McClaren, since the publication of his book *A New Kind of Christian*, notes that the church is “about three things: community, spirituality, and mission.”¹³⁰ It seems, then, that a value (greater emphasis on community) that arose within secular culture was and is being addressed by Christian pastors from both the modernist *and* postmodernist viewpoints.

Almost unanimously those interviewed maintained that the composition of their congregations had changed. As a result they could not assume the congregants would know the terms they were using; i.e., justification, sanctification, regeneration, etc. One pointed out that the “in house” language used by churches and ministers previously was presumptuous. It wasn’t just the unchurched that were unfamiliar with these terms but also those who were long-time Christians had to be re-acquainted with them. They held that it was those who were Christians that didn’t know “the story” of the Bible. This was the case in both “modernist” oriented churches and those who were being impacted by postmodernism. As we have mentioned above, the causes of these changes

¹²⁹ Graham Johnston, *Preaching in a Postmodern World*, 26.

¹³⁰ Brian McLaren, *A New kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends On a Spiritual Journey*, 155.

cannot be directly attributed to what the pastors understood as postmodernism. Some held that it might be due to their locale but they were unsure.

Very few, only one or two, held that they had sensed a pressure to be more postmodern in their preaching. By way of definition a postmodern sermon might appear to be more story oriented, more experientially oriented and make use of media clips or promote changes in the form of delivery of the sermon.¹³¹ The proposition is that since our culture has moved to a more experientially based cognitive process and is more visually oriented then churches might make increased use of these means of communication. By way of a short review, we have previously stated that one of the values held by postmodernism, in general, is a strong emphasis on experience of the individual and the community.¹³² This is not to say that all uses of “media” within a sermon are necessarily postmodern.¹³³ Thus we find the stated need to “deconstruct” propositions that assume an objective reality which is being imposed upon others.¹³⁴ Returning to our findings we discovered the pastors unanimously agreed that the structure of

¹³¹ Casey, “Experience Preaching,” 7, 8. See also Erickson, *Where Is Theology Going? Issues and Perspectives on the Future of Theology*, 54, Brian D. McLaren, *A New kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends On a Spiritual Journey*, Brian D. McLaren, “The Method, the Message, and the Ongoing Story,” in *The Church in Emerging Culture: Five Perspectives*, 198, Erwin Raphael McManus, “The Global Intersection,” in *The Church in Emerging Culture: Five Perspectives*, 248, and Ronald J. Allen, “Preaching and Postmodernism,” *Interpretation* 55, no. 1 (Jan 2001): 35.

¹³² See Casey, 8, Raschke, 18. Raschke notes that from a postmodern perspective truth is constructed out of one’s experience.

¹³³ See Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*. (New York: Viking), 1985. Postman argues that every form of technology or products of technology; i.e., printing press, books, movies, television all have a set of presuppositions attached to them whether we are conscious of them or not. While I agree that this is true, I do not necessarily agree with his proposition that the (implied) purpose of all movies and television, and therefore media clips, are *only* for amusement and designed to induce an experience. This would be akin to stating that all paint is only used for houses and not works of art.

¹³⁴ D.A. Carson, *The Gagging of God*, 71.

the delivery of the sermon; i.e., a time in the worship service reserved for preaching, the delivery of the sermon from a pulpit or lectern, etc., should not be changed. This is in contrast to some within postmodernism that advocate the sermon should be more familiar such as a fireside chat.¹³⁵ A follow up question was asked of a few of the teaching elders as to whether the form of the sermon should be changed. Unanimously they stated that they preached “expositionally” or “exegetically.”¹³⁶

A few of the preachers interviewed though that their congregations were being impacted by postmodernism through the venue of television and movies. They held that relativistic values portrayed in the movies were having an impact in the form of unbiblical ideas about the way the world is rather than how the Bible portrays it. But most said they do not purposely preach against postmodernism to counter this. Rather, they held that preaching through books of the Bible or a relevant series was the path that was preferred.

Definitions as to what constituted “Reformed” were widely varied. This question; i.e., “How do you understand the term ‘Reformed?’” was designed to assess a baseline understanding of Reformed preaching as compared to Calvin’s understanding. Two of those interviewed held that being Reformed essentially was an emphasis upon God’s sovereignty. One interviewee held that being Reformed was essentially holding to the five “solas;” sola fide, sola gratia, sola

¹³⁵ Graham Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World: A Guide to Reaching Twenty-First-Century Listeners* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2001), 121. Calvin Miller affirms the value of a relational and casual approach, declaring, “The good healthy sermonic ‘I’ says, ‘Draw up your pew and let’s have a coffee-and-donuts communication.’” Quoted in Calvin Miller, *Marketplace Preaching: How to Return the Sermon to Where It Belongs* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1995), 114.

¹³⁶ As we note below, the respondents tended to use these terms interchangeably.

Christus, sola scriptura, sola Deo Gratia. Interestingly one of the pastors defined Reformed as being creedal, but the creeds were a landmark and not a boundary.¹³⁷ Another pastor stated that "...Reformed with the 'ed'" was becoming more a passé' cultural understanding of old theology.¹³⁸ One pastor stated that the postmodern culture did not understand the language of the creeds and therefore would have difficulty understanding the biblical doctrine behind them.

A majority of those interviewed felt that the impact of postmodernism upon their preaching was coming through the avenues of other evangelical churches in the area. This was divided between the doctrines they held were being preached there; i.e., individualism, dispensationalism, and others, to the type of sermons they held to be typically "evangelical."¹³⁹ As Christians and the unchurched visited their churches, and as the Teaching Elders visited the general evangelical churches in their areas they sensed a growing culture of individualism. In other words they discovered that Jesus was being preached but it was a message of how God loved them in Jesus and how Jesus could be their friend. One Teaching Elder described it as messages to help "my agenda;" i.e., how to get a better job, parental success, etc. This is not to say that these messages are particularly modernistic or postmodern. One would have to prove a high correlation between

¹³⁷ EI, 145:3. Interestingly this respondent was the oldest in the twelve teaching elders interviewed. In other words one cannot say that only young ministers are postmodern.

¹³⁸ EB, 179:10, 11.

¹³⁹ This is not to say that sermons which focus on individuals or dispensationalism are postmodern. The respondents felt that any postmodern impact was coming from churches that preached these type of sermons.

messages focused on God's love and individualism were higher in either modernist or postmodernist churches.¹⁴⁰

A majority held that the sermons from outside of their churches that were negatively impacting their congregations were essentially moralistic.¹⁴¹ They described these sermons as disconnected from any metanarrative. They believed these sermons to be founded on the theological basis that God had done thus and such for us in Christ and now we had to respond by proving our faithfulness to God through our works. Only one of those interviewed was adamant that he had not heard any of these kind of sermons and certainly hadn't heard them in the PCA.

One respondent believed that the congregations he had preached to were deeply impacted by the Second Great Awakening. The pragmatism of Charles Finney and pragmatism in general had significant impact upon his congregations view of the sermon.¹⁴²

The respondents were asked "what is the role of the preacher?" Further, they were asked, "If someone were to hear you preach and ask themselves,

¹⁴⁰ An interesting study that provides such a model for this kind of research is Marcia G. Witten, "Accommodating to Secular Norms in Preaching," *Homiletic* 19, no. 2 (Winter 1994): 1-3. Witten studied Presbyterian and Southern Baptist preaching over a one year period on the pericope of the Prodigal Son. She discovered the Presbyterian preachers tended to attribute the problems of the prodigal to emotional issues; i.e., redefining sin, while the Southern Baptist preachers statistically used a traditional definition of sin as rebellion more than their Presbyterian counterparts. She attributed this to an accommodation to secularism.

¹⁴¹ See George Barna, "New Statistics on Church Attendance and Avoidance," Barna Organization. <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdateNarrowPreview&BarnaUpdateID=293>. Barna notes several categories of church-goers that are not simply Christian or unchurched, but "unattached," and the "intermittents." It appears that the pastors which were interviewed were being impacted by these groups attending sporadically at other churches then entering the PCA churches.

¹⁴² AB, 235:46, 47.

'Why is that guy up there? My opinion is as valid as his. So how would you respond?' These questions were designed to reveal how the preacher understood his role as a Reformed preacher. They were also designed to assess whether they were more in harmony with postmodern Christian writers that tended to deemphasize the preacher/preaching as a one way activity.¹⁴³ Again, by way of reminder, Calvin held that the preacher was called by God to the office of the preacher. He is an ambassador and herald of Christ to announce the good news of the gospel. Further, Christ is said to rule through the office of the preacher as he proclaims the good news by the power of the Holy Spirit. And like a father teaching his children, so too does the pastor shepherd the congregation through the sermon.

Two of the respondents mentioned that the preacher has a call and is an ambassador. The remaining twelve were silent on the issue. One mentioned that due to postmodernism the respect for the office of the pastor has waned but that it had been the case ever since the apostles preached. When asked the second question, almost unanimously, the respondents appealed to two facts. The first was to appeal to their personalities. In other words, they would say that they believed the gospel, Christ, or the resurrection, and that it was the foundation of the faith. And that they would sit down with the person who struggled in this area

¹⁴³ Fred B. Craddock, *As One without Authority*, 55. Craddock, though not postmodern per se, held that the pastor basically throws the sermon to the congregation like a javelin. See also Ronald J. Allen, "Preaching and Postmodernism," 35. Allen presents a model of "transgressive Preaching," which advocates displacing the preacher for congregational participation in the form of dance, drama, music, and testimony.

and demonstrate that they would listen to them and dialog with them to show that their own view was held by a nice person.

The second approach offered was that the questioner was invited to study the text for themselves, to become a "Berean," or to show them the illogic of their position. The one respondent who took this approach also mentioned that the preacher was an ambassador.

One of the respondents spoke at length about the ambassadorial role of the preacher. He stated that it is the weight of the message that determines the role of the preacher. He noted that the conversational, fireside chat style being advocated by some in postmodern circles is out of concert with the seriousness of the message. His belief was that if the United States were to deliver a message to Iran about possible future war that ambassador would not sit down in a polo shirt and loafers to have a fireside chat with the president of Iran. He would dress and conduct himself in concert with the seriousness of the message. His comment was that, in Marshall McLuhan's words, the medium is the message and the messenger.

One respondent held that though many of the Teaching Elders in the PCA were Reformed in their theology they were pragmatic in function as they integrated their sermons with the life of the congregation. Basically his view was that the preacher is a declarer and not a changer.¹⁴⁴ When the preacher becomes a changer, in his opinion, he mistakes the indicative for the imperative. When such a preacher does so he is squarely in Finney's camp as a moralistic

¹⁴⁴ AB, 236:45, 46.

preacher. But he did not hold that was either preaching the gospel or Reformed preaching.

Only one of the respondents spoke concerning the pastoral aspect of the preacher and preaching. He maintained that the role of the pastor was to pastor the congregation through the sermon. He felt that the congregation would tolerate bad preaching if they knew that the pastor loved and cared for them.

Biblical Preaching and Postmodernism

The question was asked, "What is biblical preaching and how do you do it?" By way of review, Calvin held the purpose of a sermon was to yield the knowledge of God, to reconcile us to God. Anything else was considered to be a blessing. The content of the sermon was the announcement of Law and Gospel where the respondent was to wrestle with the mandate of obedience and the enablement of grace. Thus the sermon truly reformed. The content of the sermon and its source material was to be solely the Bible with no personal illustrations.

Many of the respondents used the terms "exegetical" and "expositional" interchangeably. Some went to the original languages in the beginning of their study in order to give their congregations a fresh look at the material. All twelve interviewed stated that they would never use anything other than scripture as the source material. This is in contrast to some of those in postmodern circles who advocate other materials as sources of preaching content, such as movies, drama, dance, etc.¹⁴⁵ None advocated the use of story as being the exclusive

¹⁴⁵ Ronald J. Allen, "Preaching and Postmodernism," 36-41. This is not to say that all postmodern Christian preachers advocate this. One of the respondents in this study who openly advocated many postmodern views was a staunch advocate for expository preaching and

source content of the sermon. Rather they held to a more traditional view that a story was an illustration designed to illumine the main point of the sermon at hand. One respondent noted that he felt the multiplication of story in sermons was not necessarily a postmodern value or a response to postmodernism but a lack of training in the preacher's seminary experience. In other words it was the result of the pressure to fill the void that the preacher was sensing.

Most of the respondents did say that they were to communicate the text clearly to their congregation and "unpack" it for them. Rather than any authority residing in the preacher one mentioned that he emphasized the weightiness of the scriptural text through phrases such as, "...when I read God's word, I'll say "this is the word of the living God." "So ends the word of the living God." And something, again, that I say very frequently in my pulpit ministry, I'll just extol the fact that God speaks."¹⁴⁶

Only a few mentioned that the sermon had to contain either Law/Gospel or indicative/imperative. Most of the interviewees stated that they preached the gospel and a message of grace. Though none defined what they meant by "grace" they did mention that the sermon had to contain what God has done for us that we could not do ourselves. They were clear that they preached about sin and its effects upon us. One Teaching Elder stated that he consistently has a "fallen condition focus" in his preaching. Another stated that he only emphasizes what the text states. In other words if the passage is mostly indicative that is what

transparently admitted that he had made some mistakes. See EF interview regarding "pickle illustration," 175:17.

¹⁴⁶ DP, 158:37-39.

he preaches. If the passage at hand contains mostly imperatives then he follows suit and proclaims the imperative.

One-third of the respondents mentioned that the sermon was to preach Christ. One specifically mentioned that the sermon had to be Christocentric versus moralistic. The example that was given was that in moralistic preaching Abraham is an example of faith and thus we needed to be like Abraham. But Christocentric preaching meant that Abraham is an example of God redeeming a people for himself and that ultimately resolves itself in Christ.

Two or three mentioned that the framework around their preaching was the covenant redemptive history of the Bible. This, in essence, was the metanarrative that controlled, hermeneutically, the material which they preached. One respondent noted that within moralistic preaching which seemed in his opinion to characterize postmodern preaching there is no metanarrative. And that the postmodern congregant is looking for a story, a metanarrative, despite his or her denial that there are no metanarratives..

The Role of the Congregation in Preaching

The respondents were asked, "What is the role of the congregation in preaching?" By way of review, Calvin held that the congregation was to understand what was being preached. Further, they had to respond in obedience and faith to the proclamation of the word of God. They were to conform and reform their lives to the proclaimed word. Only one respondent stated that he did not know and that he didn't know if the congregation knew whether or not they had a role. Overall the respondents stated that the congregation was to listen to

the word of God as it was preached and to consider the truth of what was being proclaimed.

Two of those interviewed clearly stated that their sermons were not for unbelievers but for believers. One respondent stated that he preached to the unbelief in everyone's heart. Overall the respondents stated that it was the responsibility of the congregation to listen to Christ being proclaimed, to be open and prayerful. They are to prepare themselves to hear the word of God preached.

All twelve interviewed rejected the postmodern idea which promotes relationalism over propositionalism.¹⁴⁷ In other words they granted that many postmodernists like David Miller juxtapose the Bible as relational against propositions but it is a false dichotomy. One respondent pointed to coffee café's and internet café's. He noted that all the young (and presumed postmodernists) are all chatting on the internet and text messaging. One cannot communicate without propositions. But many also responded that they agreed with the postmodernist value that information or propositions cannot be used like a club, wielded against the congregation, in an arrogant manner.

The Role of the Holy Spirit

Respondents were asked, "What is the role of the Holy Spirit in preaching?" Calvin held that the Holy Spirit makes the preached word the Word

¹⁴⁷ We must be careful to distinguish propositions from propositionalism. Many of the Christian postmodernists do not reject propositions. They reject wielding propositions as interpersonal means of gaining power over another person. This section (above) treats the understanding of the respondents as to what they felt postmodernism was saying. We will analyze this in chapter 5.

of God. And assuming the preacher has been diligent to be faithful with the text the Holy Spirit uses the preached word to regenerate some to eternal life, to condemn the sins of others, and to use the preached word as a means of Christian growth.

Generally speaking the respondents were unanimous in their belief that from the point of sermon formation to the delivery and beyond the efficacy of their preaching was totally dependent upon the Holy Spirit. Some were clearer than others that the Holy Spirit guides them and illumines them from the selection of the text to the illumination of the study at hand. Two of the respondents stated that many of our problems in addressing the issues of postmodernism would be solved by being more Trinitarian in our belief and practice. They stated that Trinitarianism solves problems of existentialism, community, and authority. Others said it is the Holy Spirit that brings the experience of the text to the parishioner. It is the Holy Spirit who has inspired the text so we already begin with a text held in high esteem, regardless of whatever postmodern values may be present.

In the delivery of the sermon many of the respondents noted that it was the Holy Spirit who gave weight or import to their words. A few of the respondents noted that the Holy Spirit often used their sermons in ways that they did not expect. It was the Holy Spirit that brings Christ to us in the sermon and meets with us on Sunday. Several related stories that they had preached a particular sermon and discovered after some interval of time that the Spirit had

taken that message and driven it home in a much more powerful way than the preacher remembered.

One particular respondent noted that the role of the Spirit did not end with the last “amen.” He stated that the problem of postmodernism is really nothing new and that the Spirit has been guiding the church for 2000 years. He felt that both modernists and postmodernists have been wrongly criticizing the church and thus, in turn, the Spirit has been doing in the churches.¹⁴⁸ He held that God is faithful, by his Spirit, to bring a people to himself.

The Role of the Church in Culture

The questions that were asked in this category were, “Is the church itself the problem, with structures not conducive to ministry and mission in this new world, or is the church failing to be a church, less true to itself than true to its time?” They were designed to ascertain the postmodern impact upon how the church does what it does, especially in reference to preaching. Further questions were, “Is it a loss of sense of community and roots caused by acquiescing to culture or an inability to incarnate the gospel and culture? Should the church feed only on its own resources or should it draw from the world's wells?” These were taken and summarized from both quarters of the critics of the modernist churches and the critics of the postmodernist churches.

Generally speaking the respondents stated that they were uncomfortable with the either-or propositions. Most felt that the church, at some point, had acquiesced to culture in its struggle to be relevant, and even in reference to

¹⁴⁸ EF, 176:45, 46.

preaching. Many felt that the withdrawal of evangelical churches from culture from the 1930's through the 1970's resulted in the church losing its voice and cultural impact. Therefore the present day preachers were inheriting a set of problems that were generated before they arrived on the scene.

Secondly, many of the respondents did not see this as a modernist or postmodern problem; i.e., that the church is either at present redundant in its forms and structures or acquiescing to culture. They felt that the attempt to reach the congregant is a moral or spiritual problem that has existed from the time of Adam to the present. In other words unbelief is trans-cultural. Most sensed that they had a need to explain terms in a clearer fashion than they had previously done. One respondent integrated Trinitarian theology to answer the either-or question. He noted that it is not an issue of accommodation or incarnation but an issue of addressing the postmodern issues theologically. In other words objective truth versus subjective experience is a neither-nor, both-and proposition. God is both truth-transcendent and truth-immanent, in the person of Jesus Christ. Thus we are brought full circle back to Christocentric preaching.

Those who did sense that the shift to postmodernism was a case of the church failing to be a church and acquiescing to culture noted that it is most directly experienced within the drive to deconstruct or de-propositionalize the gospel. One respondent noted the analogy of a football game. The commentator had his own vocabulary and indicated five very clear points as to why a particular team was doing what it was doing. He felt that those who were watching did so because they wanted to learn what the commentator had to say. Therefore the

reason why some of his congregants were pushing for non-propositional subjective experiences was because they did not want to learn the content of the propositions. Another stated the same thing when he noted that some wanted God to bless their agendas.

A majority of the respondents stated that it was important to contextualize their messages. Though they stated that needs of men and women have not changed the cultural expressions of those needs have. And the key to contextualizing is understanding the mindset of their congregations. Almost all of the respondents were able to delineate age groups and occupational cross-sections of their congregations.

The respondents generally stated that they needed to be careful of the degree to which they integrated culture into the church at large and specifically into their sermons. All were asked if they would use movies and clips as source material and all stated they would not use them. But they would use the material as illustrations.

When asked whether or not the church that was integrating postmodern values into its preaching and body life was the same mistake that modernist churches had made one respondent categorically admitted that could be true. But he stated that all churches integrate particular cultural expressions to a greater or lesser degree. The solution was not only the regulatory principle but that God stood in judgment over cultures via the redemptive historical metanarrative.

To summarize, most of the respondents were very well versed in understanding the issues surrounding postmodernism. There was a general baseline understanding of information versus relationship, objective truth versus individual experience, and emphasis on the value of community whether that was modernist or postmodernist. Most of the respondents did not sense a strong impact of postmodernism on their churches nor were they being pressured to move to more of the postmodern distinctive models of preaching or preaching substitutes. The respondents felt that some of the questions that were being asked in the interviews were not the questions that their congregations were dealing with.¹⁴⁹ The role of the congregation, they felt, was to prayerfully prepare for the message preached, to listen, and to respond in obedience. The teaching elders held that there was an indefinable and often unexpected result of their sermons due to the ministry of the Spirit. Finally, they held that the church, generally speaking, had to contextualize its message, not just to postmoderns but to every culture.

We will now turn our attention to a discussion of these findings and recommendations for further study.

¹⁴⁹ See chapter 5 for assessment on this issue.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Recommendations

Summary of Study

The purpose of this study has been to assess the impact of postmodernism on Reformed preaching in the Rocky Mountain Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in America. From the outset this purpose presented two difficulties. The first difficulty was in defining Reformed preaching. There is very little written from a Reformed perspective in recent years that treats the subject in any depth. What is written tends to treat the subject from a “biblical perspective” of preaching rather than to define from a Reformed perspective the Reformed sermon.

The second difficulty in this study is that much of what is being written on postmodernism does not originate from Reformed circles. What material is present tends, by in large, to bifurcate the issues into modernism, along with its Enlightenment-rationalist perspective and its opposite, the postmodernist subjective-experiential perspective.

In this section we will deal firstly with some general observations concerning modernism and postmodernism in relationship to preaching. Then we will discuss in a more focused manner the specific areas and findings related to our interviews. We have discovered from the survey of literature some of the following factors. In general terms *all* representatives of both the modernist and postmodernist Christian community hold that there has been a significant cultural shift where the modernist paradigm is either waning or is dead. Christian writers disagree on the nature of the changes within the culture and from both modernist

and postmodernist perspectives there are those who believe that it is not a just a cultural but a spiritual problem. Most would also agree that Christianity made a significant error in attempting to meet the philosophical and epistemological demands of the children of the Enlightenment using its own tools of absolutism in its rationalism. In fact, most agree, that if Christianity is welded to any particular cultural expression and therefore equated with that culture, is a dangerous road upon which one should not venture. On the other hand it is equally dangerous to assume that one can be above one's own culture and critique it from a thoroughly objective posture.¹⁵⁰ One must use the tools of one's own culture to speak to and in that culture.

The postmodernist is correct in his criticism that modernism held to the presupposition that given enough time and the right tools that one could come to an absolute knowledge of the truth. But the modernist is incorrect when he states that the postmodernist rejects truth. That is a broad brush stroke that over-generalizes the postmodernist. What the postmodernist rejects is propositionalism. This is qualitatively different than rejecting propositions. Knight offers the following corrective,

It is important to state this because propositionalists often see themselves as the defenders of historic Christianity against the corrosive forces of modernity. Certainly that is their intent... They [perceptive critics of rationalist propositionalism] are not against reason or rationalism...they do not oppose propositional truth but propositionalism.

¹⁵⁰ See Allan David Bloom and Saul Bellow, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988).

Their critique:

1. The propositional approach assumes a human rational capacity untouched by either sin or cultural context.
2. It mistakes revelation as information rather than relational.
3. It misunderstands the relation of language and truth. In other words, it apprehends truth only being an idea in its clearest form. It is truth as correctness, precision and accuracy, rather than the biblical view of "fidelity, integrity and constancy."
4. It exalts individual interpretation at the expense of the Holy Spirit and the Christian community.¹⁵¹

Froelich comments,

With the demise of central decision-making in politics and religion during the two centuries following the Reformation, the flight from authority was an accomplished fact. The alternative, a Cartesian reliance on self-evident rational truth or its scientifically derived approximations, however, has proved to be equally elusive. Stout concludes that no "foundationalism" will work any more in the future. What is needed is a "holistic" approach to moral discourse that must proceed pragmatically and must be geared toward consensus both vertically (among inherited ethical traditions) and horizontally (among different cultures).¹⁵²

The point is that while some postmodernists might well be hedonists and radically anti-proposition, as a movement postmodernism doesn't reject propositions. That would make communication impossible. They reject absolutism and its commensurate abuse through wielding a philosophical absolutism designed and executed to exercise power over another human being.

The danger is also very real that the postmodernists are equally guilty of doing what the modernist has done. They attempt to meet postmodernism on its own grounds and use its own tools. It is likely that whatever cultural shift occurs

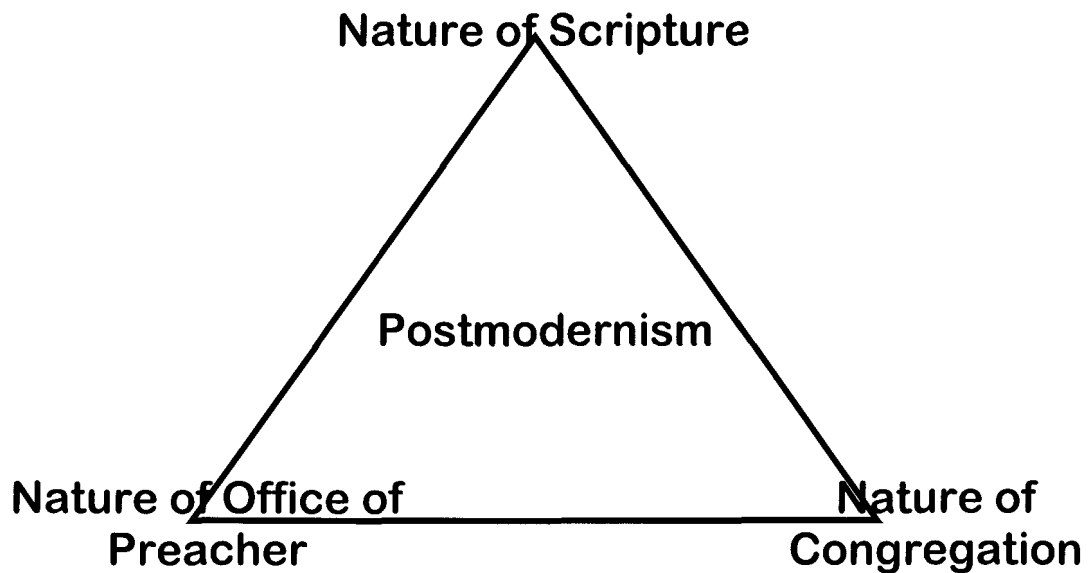
¹⁵¹ Henry H. Knight, *A Future for Truth*, 90-96.

¹⁵² Karlfried Froehlich, *The Bible as Word of God: In a Postmodern Age*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 11.

in the future, those in that future will look back on the postmodernist and critique his error of attempting to meet postmodernism using postmodernism. In other words, modernism *and* postmodernism are equally guilty of equating cultural expressions of their particular cultures with Christianity.

Thirdly, there is a very real danger in looking for a “homiletical savior.” The challenge of reaching the postmodernist is as real as reaching any congregant throughout church history. But to search for a particular homiletical methodology and to make that methodology “the” key tool for preaching is to undermine both the ministry of the Holy Spirit and the relevance of the Christian scriptures. Again, this is a mistake that both expressions of Christianity within modernism and postmodernism make. In other words, generally speaking, modernism attempts to use information as the key to reaching the congregant while postmodernism relies on individual experience and narrative story telling (apart from the story of the text) as its key(s) to reaching the congregant.

Therefore in order to do this, postmodernism errs in that it must do one of three things in its search to locate this homiletical savior. The writers we have surveyed tend to do one of three things with some doing more than just one. The spheres of the changes may be diagrammed as follows:



In the figure we find those changes diagrammed. One must change (from either pre-Modernism, Modernism or postmodernism) the nature of the scriptures, the nature of the office of a preacher or the nature of the congregation in relation to the sermon. The postmodernists tend to deemphasize the ontological nature of scripture in order to make it “relevant.” One’s personal story, for example, becomes the source content for preaching rather than supportive or illustrative in its use. Therefore the church stands in danger of losing the preaching of the entire counsel of scripture. Further, in doing so, it moves towards a moralistic and exemplary homiletical form. The difference between this and the redemptive-historical-exemplary battle that occurred within the Dutch Reformed churches is that the exemplary “camp” in those churches kept the source material as the Bible, whereas the postmodernist church is in

danger of exegeting the preacher or the congregant.¹⁵³ One is left with the question as to why bother with the scriptures at all if one's purpose is to "connect" with the congregant in the pew. Why not simply exegete the Napoleon or congregant? Greidanus writes,

Van Dijk remarks: "This preaching method degrades sacred history and places it on a par with profane history; Appealing to the normative pronouncements of Scripture, I would as well preach on the death of Prince William I in this exemplary manner as I could on, e.g., the death of Jacob; I could as well hold up Napoleon as a deterrent example as, e.g., Nebuchadnezzar because in both cases the normativity must be carried in from elsewhere."¹⁵⁴

Further, the postmodernists bifurcate the scriptures into narrative, which is "non-propositional", and indicative, which is propositional. Postmodernism makes an artificial distinction between the two and essentially denies the scriptures as the *kerugma* of God's mighty acts.

Secondly, the postmodernist deemphasizes the nature of the office of the preacher. Most do not speak of the office of the preacher as Calvin does. Rather, within a culture where pluralism is strongly valued the preacher is on the same level as the congregation. It is Christianity by democracy.¹⁵⁵ By association, then, the sermon is devalued. It is no longer Christ ruling through His word, the kerygmatic presence of the covenant King with His covenant people. It is the opinion of the preacher who is simply one among many. One can readily see then that one must jettison, logically, the call of the preacher unless the

¹⁵³ Sidney Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura: Problems and Principles in Preaching Historical Texts*, 35, 86-89.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 54.

¹⁵⁵ See Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*.

congregation accepts his experience as valid. The sermon has no intrinsic value since the preacher's office no longer possesses any value above that of the congregation. Whether one uses media, dance, drama, puppet shows or an informal conversation, discussing a text makes little difference in a "service" where there are many voices and all are equally right. Thus the preacher in postmodernism is left with searching for a homiletical savior; something that will appeal to the congregant. But assuming these values means that the preacher, and therefore the congregation, can never be sure of what was said. Communication apart from propositions is impossible; the congregant takes away an experience but the pastor cannot ever be sure that he has communicated his intent.

Thirdly, the postmodernist elevates the congregation to a position of absolute authority while denying the proposition of authority in his stance against propositionalism. There is a significant broken link between the postmodern value of the univocalness of plurality (each person is equally as right as the next) and the univocal congregation. If the preacher has no voice, no authority inherent in the office, then logically neither does the congregation. The authority of the congregation is assumed while denying the authority of the office of the preacher. The congregation becomes the oppressor in postmodernism wielding its authoritarianism demanding that the sermon serve its ends and meet its needs on its own ground. It is no longer a situation of the intrusive Word of the kingdom of God claiming absolute exclusivity in the praxis of preaching. It is an assumption of some in postmodernism that sin has not affected the human mind

and the truth for the congregation is jettisoned for the views and experience of the congregation. What is truth for the person in front pew is not truth for the person sitting behind him. Thus in elevating the congregation communication becomes impossible. Meaning is evacuated since there is no intrinsic meaning apart from that which the congregation assigns to it, despite its lauded value that must be communicated to the congregation in the sermon,. The congregation then becomes not a community of faith collectively confessing along with the preacher their mutual faith, nor are they the covenant people of God, but a collection of individuals searching for meaning and left with only their own experience. Ultimately, the elevated congregation is left in homiletical and theological chaos.

To alleviate the difficulty of determining the definition of a Reformed sermon we have used the Reformer John Calvin and his writings on the subject of preaching to provide a baseline from which we may both define and evaluate Reformed preaching. We have discovered that the preacher is called to the office of the preacher by God and the congregation. This office is inherently authoritative, not because of the man occupying that position, but because of the nature of the office.

The nature of the office of the preacher is to be a herald and ambassador of Jesus Christ. The preacher bears the message of Christ to the congregation. In the Reformed understanding God meets with his people in Word and therefore Calvin held that Christ then rules his congregation as their king through the preached Word of God. For Calvin, the preached word then is the Word of God,

not in the Roman Catholic Church sense of the papal see speaking “ex cathedra,” but in the sense that God is speaking with his people. Therefore the preacher, for Calvin, has no interest in presenting personal illustrations or extraneous support material that would detract from the ambassador delivering this message. The boundaries of the message are the text of Scripture itself.

The role of the Spirit in the act of preaching is to empower the preacher to deliver the message of Christ to his people. Thus preaching is an act of worship. The Spirit enables the preacher to deliver the Reformed sermon whose purpose is to yield a knowledge of God as revealed in the Scriptures.

For Calvin, assuming that the preacher has sufficiently prepared his message and accurately represents and presents the message of God, the congregation is subsequently obligated to respond not only in attentive hearing of the Word of God (preached) but to respond in faith and obedience to the delivered message as if from God himself. The preacher is to be like a loving father instructing, exhorting and disciplining his children as God would as our father.

The primary purpose of the sermon is to yield the knowledge of God and to reconcile us to Christ. This may be further broken down into a presentation of the text as Law/Gospel or indicative/imperative, as the text requires. In this message then the Spirit presents to the hearer the requirement of God, by his nature and character, along with the subsequent announcement of both its fulfillment in Christ and grace given to the hearer to enable him do to that which God requires. A second purpose of the sermon is Christian growth. Anything else

Calvin said was a blessing. Thus the Reformed sermon truly reforms the hearer into the image and likeness of Jesus Christ.

Discussion of Findings

In our findings we discover that both modernist and postmodernist writers tend to bifurcate the church along the lines of the modernist church versus the postmodernist or emergent churches. They also bifurcate the message of the gospel and the preacher as an either/or proposition; i.e., informational versus relational.¹⁵⁶ They maintain that the present day conservative churches have capitulated by welding themselves to an Enlightenment-rationalist culture that absolutizes truth. In one sense they rightly judge the idolatry of Enlightenment thinking with its atheistic grounding and roots. But using a wealth of propositions they then proceed to denounce propositionalism, all the while wielding the club of judging their brothers and the bride of Christ; i.e., the very thing they accuse the modernist churches of doing. The danger, then, is in reproducing the same inherent errors that Enlightenment-rationalist-modernist churches have done.

Those who hold to a middle ground; i.e., Michael Horton, David Lose and others, note that this is not a cultural problem of modernism versus postmodernism. It is a spiritual problem, or rather, a problem of the spirit of the age versus the age of the Spirit. God stands in judgment over all cultures. He does speak into cultures and utilizes them and those living within them to announce his covenant redemption in Jesus Christ. It is this message of the kingdom and therefore the subsequent messengers of the kingdom that cannot

¹⁵⁶ See Donald Miller, *Searching for God Knows What* (Nashville: Nelson Books, 2004) as an example.

and should not be compromised for any cultural expression. With these general observations we now turn our attention to a discussion of our findings within the preachers of the Rocky Mountain Presbytery.

In general I did not find gross encroachment of postmodernism upon preaching within the Rocky Mountain Presbytery and among the 12 teaching elders that I interviewed. There is the growing influence of a postmodern culture at large coming mostly from the entertainment mediums of movies and television, and its influx in the congregation through the influence of the general evangelical experience of the congregation. Forming the questions largely from the postmodernist material I gathered I discovered that, as two Teaching Elders noted, congregations are not asking “these kind of questions.” Though most of the preachers had a basic understanding of postmodernism this vacuum of postmodernism’s influence within their congregations may well be the reason why the preachers had not delved deeper into the issues concerning postmodernism. This is likely the reason, then, that many stated that postmodernism was not having the same type of effect on their congregations that the postmodern writers have written about.

While we may be tempted to consider the geographical location as a determining factor in the presence and degree to which postmodernism had affected the churches and the preaching we cannot make a specific correlation between the sources of the respondents views and their locale. Four of the churches were located within cities that had ready access to university

populations but only one of them had a postmodern presence and that had not deeply affected the particular church.

Almost all of the respondents stated that they had to spend considerable time explaining the terms they were using such as justification, regeneration, etc. They felt they could not assume that the Christians knew what they were talking about or even the story of the redemptive history of scriptures. In this none of the respondents held that there was the bifurcation of relationship versus propositions of which the writers tend to speak of. But again the changes in culture that require a greater amount of time to explain Christian terms cannot be equated solely with postmodernism.¹⁵⁷

That many were deeply concerned about moralistic preaching among some PCA pastors and many evangelical pastors was a surprising find. This was unexpected. They seem to hold that this was a much greater threat than postmodernism. By way of analysis it seems that if general evangelical churches are moving in the direction of postmodernism then moralistic sermons would fit very well into the postmodern framework. They would do so because moralistic sermons are not only pragmatic but they are subjective and experiential as well; i.e., two very strongly held postmodern values. Moralistic sermons would also fit well within the modernist type of churches that value information since they tend to give the hearer greater responsibility in the redemptive process.

¹⁵⁷ One respondent felt that this is incorrect and directly attributed the changes to postmodernism. See FG interview, 227.

In summation, it is not postmodernism that has made inroads into the preachers and congregations of the Rocky Mountain Presbytery but there are significant changes in culture of which they were aware.

Awareness of Reformed Definition and Reformed Preaching

Generally, most of the preachers were “fuzzy” at best on the term “Reformed.” They held that it had something to do with sovereignty. Some said it had to do with Christocentric preaching. One stated that it had to do with “TULIP.” One rejected “Reformed” as outdated and irrelevant to his preaching. Only one stated that being Reformed had to do with the “solae” of the Reformation.

As we discussed above Calvin did not clearly articulate what later became known as a covenant metanarrative.¹⁵⁸ But Calvin was very clear that the God had revealed himself in this framework and was redeeming a people for himself, using those who were rightly called to the office of the preacher.

The Preacher and Postmodernism

Only three of the respondents spoke of any call or ambassadorial role of the preacher. I gathered the sense that many were either reluctant to firmly state that they occupied the office of the pastor-teacher as one called by God, or they had been so deeply impacted by other factors, and possibly postmodernism, that they were recalcitrant to present themselves as possessing the authority of the office. I come to this conclusion because of respondents’ answer to the question

¹⁵⁸ This is not to say that Calvin did not have clear ideas about Covenant theology. See Peter A. Lillback, *The Binding of God: Calvin’s Role in the Development of Covenant Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Michigan: Baker Academic, 2001).

regarding how they might respond to someone who felt his or her opinion was as valid as the preacher's. As previously mentioned, one teaching elder stated he would have sat down and discussed the issue so they would not be seen "as a jerk." Another interviewee appealed to modernist, empirical data that with enough time he could become the expert on the passage. One respondent hinted that it was the text that held the authority and weight of the problem.¹⁵⁹ At the time of this writing I conclude that the remaining nine respondents might feel they would either be seen or see themselves as oppressive and authoritarian if they firmly held to the authority inherent in the office of the preacher. Another explanation of this might simply be attributed to several other factors; i.e., simple humility, a lack of training on the office of the pastor from a Calvinistic point of view, or plain pragmatism.¹⁶⁰ On this aspect of Reformed preaching it seems that postmodernism could hold sway, not so much upon the sermon itself, but upon the preacher and offer an explanation for this phenomenon. While the postmodernist Christian writers are desperately looking for a homiletical savior in the weight of a story that communicates (and therefore should be accepted) the Reformed preacher must take a strong stand in being true to his ordination vows. One can conclude that in our "triangle" of preacher, scriptures and congregation, the majority of the respondents had been possibly influenced by postmodernism in that they had reduced the role of the pastor and subsequently (and likely

¹⁵⁹ This is what is reflected in the writings of Dr. Bryan Chapell. See below.

¹⁶⁰ See interview with AB who holds that many of the Teaching Elders in the Rocky Mountain Presbytery are Reformed in theology but "channel Charles Finney" in practice.

inadvertently) increased the role of the congregation in how the pastors viewed themselves.

The solution is to emphasize both in our seminaries, internships and ordination exams the key role of the pastor as one called by God to be an ambassador of Christ. He is set apart by God, not to revel in any supposed inherent authority in himself, apart from the congregation to be the ambassador-herald and shepherd of the people of God through the preached word of God.

While ten of the respondents were largely silent on the preacher as ambassador and herald all of them stated that they held there is no problem with personal stories and illustrations. Calvin held the exact opposite teaching that the herald does not tell his story but the story of the king. I believe Calvin to be in error on this point. All of the respondents held to a form of sola scriptura and as such rejected any source material other the scriptures. And holding to sola scriptura we find that the Apostles, and specifically Peter and Paul, both told a personal story of what they had experienced. The difference between their story and a postmodernist story is in the center of the story. Namely, the apostles subordinated their experience to scripture and to Christ himself. Their personal story did not bear the weight of the gospel but provided the means with which to tell the story of Christ. The gospel itself was the content and bore the weight of their testimonies. In other words, the apostles' personal witness was supportive material but not source material. Therefore if we define Reformed preaching as a covenant metanarrative in framework, then there is story that either prefigures or points back to Christ within that framework. Therefore we can conclude that

postmodernism had not affected the preachers of the Rocky Mountain Presbytery in the corner of the homiletical triangle that maintains the supremacy of the scripture and the Reformed value of sola scriptura.

Biblical Preaching and Postmodernism

As we have previously mentioned the redemptive historical hermeneutic becomes the metanarrative of the gospel with Christ at the center. And the content of the Biblical or Reformed sermon had a Law-Gospel paradigm to it that “rubbed our sores” as Calvin stated. This would cause the hearer, by the power of the Spirit, to long for the Gospel side of the sermon.

Many of the respondents spoke of preaching about how we are broken, how we are in darkness, how God saves us in Christ. But there was very little about “calibrating” the gospel with either the Law/Gospel paradigm or indicative-imperative. One respondent clearly articulated the “fallen condition focus” that Bryan Chapell advocates.¹⁶¹ Chapell further comments,

The first question is, "What does this text reveal about the nature of humankind that requires the deliverance of God? What does it tell me about the character of mankind?" The second question is, "What does this text tell me about the nature of God who provides for the deliverance of humankind? In essence, what does this tell me about the nature of God?"... The bottom line of *Christ-centered* preaching is always showing people that they are not the instruments of their own healing.¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1994).

¹⁶² Bryan Chapell, “Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon,” in *Preaching with Power: Dynamic Insights from Twenty Top Communicators*, ed. Michael Dudit, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2006), 14, 15.

Chapell, then, clearly teaches the Law/Gospel paradigm as a way of demonstrating the depth of our fall from God's perfection and the grace of the gospel's restoration of the sinner. It seems that many of the respondents have replaced this with an emphasis upon grace that is not set against or contrasted with the Law. In the interviews it seems that though the respondents talked about sin they did little to define what it is, at least in Reformational terms. (It is unclear whether this is due to postmodernism alone). Both William Willimon and David Wells clearly write that sin has become psychologized and this occurred on the "watch" of the modernist church. Nevertheless, this is a call to return to the Reformational values of sola gratia, sola fide and sola Christus. While there is much discussion about grace, grace must always be tempered with Law as viewed by the scriptures. We must allow the Law to do what it was designed to do (Rom.8:3ff). We are thus brought to despair, within ourselves, and become hungry for the grace of God which is then presented to us in the sermon through Jesus Christ.

As we have discovered the respondents held that biblical preaching was largely thought of in terms of exegetical or expositional. A few mentioned a controlling hermeneutic of God's sovereignty. Others responded that they felt often they were working against a general evangelical model of moralistic preaching that was engendered with Christianity at large. One respondent specifically held that within the PCA at large there was a failure to integrate Reformed theology; i.e., the sovereignty of God, with their applicational practices

and therefore became pragmatists after the fashion of Charles Finney.¹⁶³ One respondent spoke at length about this failure to integrate preaching with practice from a Reformed perspective. His perception was that those who had been brought in to work with the college age and to also work on a new church plant were enamored of pragmatic techniques. The result was a split in the church leadership and a polarization. He felt that if he and the leadership did not approve of their techniques that they were viewed as “dinosaurs.”

The result of this section of the interviews appears to be a subtle, yet tangible influence of postmodernism upon the Teaching Elders that is outside of their awareness. Christian postmodernists write that some of the tenets of postmodernism are subjectivity of truth and the elevation of personal experience. Though many stated that they did not sense pressure from the congregation to move towards a postmodern model of preaching that emphasized subjective truth and personal experience the respondents tended to argue against postmodernism from its own basis, as well as from an Enlightenment-rationalistic perspective.

The respondents were very wary of being perceived as being authoritarian in their preaching. This surfaced in the comments that the preachers made concerning themselves. Some spoke of being “transparent” in the pulpit. Others spoke concerning their own faults and foibles, that they too were sinners and “broken.” In other words to counter their self-apprehension from the pulpit they used the bridge of personal experience and transparency to underscore their

¹⁶³ AB, “So that we are all in essence channeling Charles Finney to some degree.” 232:23. See recommendations below for further discussion.

messages. In dealing with their apprehensions they spoke of “living out the truth” of the gospel within the community, both the faith community “inside the walls,” as well as the unbelieving community “outside the walls” of the church. This is clearly non-propositional, experiential harmony with the tenets of postmodernism. This is not to say that this is a negative. Nor is the conduct of the disciples of Christ inconsequential. But as one respondent noted the unbelievers as well as believers do not know always know what our “itch” is so that we must trust the Spirit to use the delivery of the sermon to affect behavior where applicable. As one respondent noted, it is biblical to understand the sermon not ending with the last “amen” in the service but pushes the sermon out of the church and into the community. What is important to note here, as we briefly mentioned above, postmodernism has exposed the idolatry of many aspects of the modernist expression of Christianity in our churches. Further study will have to be made as to the failure of the modernist church to be more of a Biblical community of faith rather than a collection of information gatherers. In other words, being the community of faith is neither a modernist or postmodernist issue but an issue of being called to be the Church (Eph.4:1ff).

As mentioned briefly above only a few respondents understood that Reformed preaching begins with a hermeneutical framework that we understand as redemptive-historical. The Bible itself yields this perspective and as such, negatively speaking, keeps the preacher from moving into moralistic boundaries. It is to the credit of the Teaching Elders of the Rocky Mountain Presbytery that they all were intentional in avoiding moralistic preaching. In a positive aspect the

redemptive historical framework details for us the over-arching “metanarrative” that ties all of scripture together; i.e., the story that God is redeeming a fallen people to himself. The Reformation and holding a “Reformed” homiletical perspective not only deals with the historical event of the Reformation but consistently reflecting the redemptive historical framework of the scriptures. Many of the respondents knew that being Reformed was related to the Reformation but failed to grasp that being Reformed *informs* one’s homiletics. A few understood that they bounded the scriptures hermeneutically with the redemptive historical framework but failed to understand how that impacted their preaching. One grasped this in the illustration (above) about Abraham and that moralistic preaching has no metanarrative. It would seem then that many of them did not receive or did not remember the training they received in seminary that emphasized the historical-redemptive framework of scripture and the hermeneutical-interpretive issues that are brought to bear upon the act of preaching.¹⁶⁴ Greidanus writes,

The redemptive-historical approach wishes to apply the *sola Scriptura* consistently in hermeneutics and homiletics. Holwerda says, “The Bible does not contain many histories but *one* history—the one history of God’s constantly advancing revelation, the one history of God’s ever progressing redemptive work.”¹⁶⁵

Therefore Reformed preaching is not simply being exegetical or expositional though many of the respondents held that this was the best way to preach. It is approaching the scriptures with the redemptive-historical framework and

¹⁶⁴ One respondent specifically stated that he wanted to move away from the “Chapellian” method he was taught.

¹⁶⁵ Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura: Problems and Principles in Preaching Historical Texts*. 41.

consistently communicating the great and grand acts of God in redeeming his people in the past (Scriptures) and in the present (congregation), as he will in the future.¹⁶⁶

I believe that the redemptive historical or covenant metanarrative that is a distinctive of Reformed hermeneutics and homiletics is key to Reformed preaching. It is essentially the distillation of Calvin's understanding of Reformed preaching albeit in shorthand. Without this controlling factor the preacher then is left to fall back on his understanding of the sermon as exegetical, expositional or "Christocentric," whatever they may be. Cornelis P. Venema writes concerning what he calls "biblicism" and provides insight when he states,

Though it may seem an odd thing to say, the first challenge elders in Reformed churches face is the spirit of biblicism that pervades evangelical churches in North America. Reformed churches may historically be confessional churches, but this is not true of most Protestant churches today. Many of them are committed to the principle of the Bible's supreme authority in the church. But few of them regard the historic creeds and confession of the church as authoritative summaries of what the Bible teaches...

The reason "Biblicism" represents a challenge, however, is that it opens a door to all kinds of innovation and doctrinal faddishness. When the confessional summaries of biblical teachings are shunted aside, the empty place is quickly filled by a variety of new interpretations of the Bible's teachings...Furthermore, no individual's reading of the Scriptures has any more standing than anyone else's.¹⁶⁷

What the Teaching Elders of the Rocky Mountain Presbytery called "moralistic" preaching was what Venema calls "biblicism." In other words, they noted the

¹⁶⁶ We will discuss the redemptive-historical hermeneutic as metanarrative below.

¹⁶⁷ Cornelis P. Venema, "Why the Elder Needs to Know, Love, and Defend Reformed Doctrine," in *Called to Serve: Essays for Elders and Deacons*, ed. Michael Brown, (Grandville, Michigan: Reformed Fellowship, Inc, 2006), 93.

effect of moralisms and other material intruding from the sermons preached in many evangelical churches in their area.¹⁶⁸

While exegetical or expositional sermons in themselves are acceptable they are but a beginning to preaching the Reformed sermon. One can exegete the text correctly and unfold the meaning of the text all the while pointing to Christ. But so does the general evangelical pastor as a product of his training in biblical preaching if so taught in his seminary. The controlling motif of the redemptive historical metanarrative allows the preacher to thread the message together and keep it in harmony with the whole counsel of God. If we understand the Reformed sermon as differentiated in some way from the general evangelical sermon the redemptive historical metanarrative is absolutely essential to the Reformed preacher.

That the church has struggled with this issue is clear from church history.¹⁶⁹ In the 1930's the Dutch church struggled between the two poles of redemptive-historical preaching and "exemplary" preaching. Exemplary preaching was the effort to take the historical figures of the Bible; i.e., Abraham, etc., and draw life lessons from their journey. The former maintains the redemptive-historical objectivity, while the latter turns ones world view from the external to the subjective and internal experience. Greidanus writes,

In the first place, the "new direction" objected to the *anthropocentric* viewpoint: "The mistake of many people is that their lives are ruled by a cultus of their own salvation instead of a culture of God."
(Quoting from *Lourens Ingelse* (1932)p. 18. The attention is focused

¹⁶⁸ Further study could be made of the impact of Christian radio ministries that feature sermons from evangelicals and how they affect the local PCA congregations.

¹⁶⁹ Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura: Problems and Principles in Preaching Historical Texts*, 37, 38.

on man and not God and his redemptive work...Against this background the emphasis on a theocentric viewpoint, on God's covenant, on redemptive history, comes into more prominent relief...Under the same heading one can also hear charges of neglecting history: only the internal counts; "The attention is turned away from the world outside and the eye is closed to what God has wrought and will work on the broad highways of redemptive and revelational history; all that remains is God and the soul embracing each other."¹⁷⁰

While the respondents seem to avoid any semblance of moralistic preaching it was clear they were longing for a way to connect with the congregation on a deeper level of the experiential while using the language about Jesus "fixing us" or "fixing our brokenness."

The respondents were very conscious of attempting to keep their sermons Christocentric in focus. But none of them went into any depth on the issue. One respondent noted in visiting a local community evangelical church that the preacher did speak about Jesus, "But he doesn't get a lot into who Jesus is. Again, he will say he's the Son of God, but he doesn't get deeper. And he [the preacher] definitely attracts people."¹⁷¹

The respondents said little concerning the exercise of the pastoral-shepherding office in the act of preaching. As we have mentioned Calvin held that the preacher was to pastorally apply the sermon for his own specific congregation. While the respondents did mention their methods for beginning with a particular text, translating it, reading commentaries and shaping the message, they said little about tailoring the message for their congregations. Perhaps this was assumed on their part. But within postmodernism the tenet of a

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. 34, 35.

¹⁷¹ DP, 162:31, 32.

strong community and community interchange is very strong. In contrast the respondents noted that a more modernist church, specifically mega-churches, allowed the congregants to enter anonymously and exit in the same fashion with little interaction, if any. Fred Craddock anticipated the postmodern movement and very clearly emphasized the need to prepare the sermon with the congregation in mind.¹⁷² One respondent declared that he specifically didn't do this.¹⁷³ I conclude that this is not a modernist or postmodernist issue but one of trans-cultural spirituality. While the sermon does not end with the last "amen," it does begin with the end in mind.

Overall there were elements of Calvin's view of Reformed preaching within the larger body of the preachers interviewed. They held to preaching Christ and grace but little was said about Law-Gospel. The pastors stated they were expositional or exegetical but again, little was said about a covenant metanarrative. They were strongly aware of the inroads that moralistic preaching was making in their areas. What they did embrace was a strong sense of preaching and the community of faith and to that we now turn our attention.

Role of the Congregation

The respondents, generally speaking, echoed the content of the Westminster Confession of Faith as to the responsibilities of the congregation in hearing a sermon. These are also in harmony with what Calvin held as the role of the congregation. Ronald J. Allen remarks,

¹⁷² Craddock, *As One without Authority*, 129.

¹⁷³ KL, 133:40. It must be noted that the context began with preaching to individuals and moved to using the pulpit to bring up frustrations.

The postmodern preacher, recognizing that every act of awareness is interpretive, is called to help the congregation interpret interpretation. When members of a congregation are cognizant of the interpretive lenses through which they perceive congregational life, deeper (and more respectful) conversations often result.¹⁷⁴

While Allen notes that all preaching is conversational from a Reformed perspective we would change that phrase to “all preaching is confessional.”¹⁷⁵

Lutheran author David Lose writes,

I propose that preaching that seeks to be both faithful to the Christian tradition and responsive to our pluralistic, postmodern context is best understood as the public practice of confessing faith in Jesus Christ. Preaching, to put it another way, is a particular *type* of confession, made in response to the reading of the biblical text and the particular context and circumstances of the hearers, and set within a pattern of corporate worship...I suggest that "confession" has functioned in the church to describe (1) a summary of the "essential" faith and (2) the articulation of that faith in response both to the proclaimed word and the present needs and circumstances of the community and world.¹⁷⁶

In other words, not only is the congregation required to prayerfully prepare prior to the sermon, to attend to the delivery and content of the sermon, and to respond in faith and obedience, the confession of the faith of the congregation, both of the preacher and the congregant, is a worshipful response of obedience. It is the “amen” unthreaded in the heart and conduct of the congregant after the sermon. It is the confessional response of faith applied where the congregant can confess that God has spoken to him in the sermon. It is worship as communal confession. The postmodernist Christian writers have rightly exposed some of the lack of depth among modernist churches and have called for a return to

¹⁷⁴ Ronald J. Allen, “Preaching and Postmodernism,” 35.

¹⁷⁵ Allen, 35.

¹⁷⁶ David J. Lose, *Confessing Jesus Christ: Preaching in a Postmodern World*, 3, 4.

biblical community. The teaching elders in the Rocky Mountain Presbytery largely agree on this.

Role of the Holy Spirit

All of the respondents were very biblical in their answers concerning the role of the Holy Spirit. As we have mentioned Calvin held that the Holy Spirit takes the preached word of God and makes it the Word of God in hearing. In other words, the very ontological nature of the sermon delivered demands a response to God. The respondents did not view the sermon as delivered as the Word of God as Calvin did. Rather one respondent typified the general consensus when he stated that he prayed in the invocation that the Spirit would use his words. Granted this exhibits humility on the part of the preacher it could reveal the underlying presupposition that the delivery of the sermon and the work of the Spirit are two separate and unmixed activities, though the respondents would largely disagree with this proposition. This is not necessarily a modernist or a postmodernist issue. Calvin's position on the preached word as the Word of God, enlivened by the Spirit, was one made with stressed humility.

One respondent noted a marked trust that the Holy Spirit would affect what he chose to do with the sermon. He felt that the congregation would reject any sermon identified with postmodernism and that the Holy Spirit would generate a hunger in the congregant to seek spiritual nourishment elsewhere.

The respondents generally did not delve deeply into the authority of the office of the preacher or their role as heralds and ambassadors and combine that with a thorough exploration of the role of the Holy Spirit. As we have noted,

Calvin held the Holy Spirit delivered the Word of Christ, through the preacher, to the congregation. Postmodernism does reject the absolutism of the scientific method and tends to be more open to mystery than do modernists. But many of those interviewed stated that they experienced unexpected results from their sermons. One pastor that was interviewed stated,

Had someone come into my office the other day was fairly new to Village 7 and I was preaching there for the last twenty-six months, and they came in, and had just moved here, and anyway, the first time I've really had a conversation with him, and I preached a sermon back in January of 07, and he said that when he and his wife went out to the car after hearing the sermon, they said they were both literally weeping because of what they'd heard. I didn't know that. I didn't write a sermon to get people to weep. The focus of the sermon happened to be on worship and it talked about the grandeur of God and our response and how it works and so forth and so on.¹⁷⁷

Raschke is likely correct when he notes that the postmodern church is likely closer to the Reformation ethos than it is to the modernist framework. But these two points stand at opposite ends of the spectrum; i.e., the call, office, and commensurate authority on one end and the results engendered by the Holy Spirit on the other, with nothing in between. I suggest the Reformation value of the mysterious work of the Holy Spirit fits well in the middle as he enlivens the preached word of God as the Word of God.

Role of the Church in Culture

It is clear that many of the respondents did not accept the either-or proposition that the church is either acquiescing to culture or drawing within itself, drawing upon its own resources. They were very conscious of the need of the

¹⁷⁷ AB, 240:34-37.

word of God to be intrusive into the cultural world that the congregation brings with them into every worship service. This bifurcation is likely an artificial construct created by many of the Christians writers who are advocating postmodern values as well as those who are reacting against what they perceive to be irrationality on the part of Christian postmodernists. Some correctly identified the solution that God stands over the culture judging it as “the world.”

Unfortunately the interviews concerning the question of culture tended to be focused upon the subject of music and music styles in worship as the entry point for unacceptable cultural values. It was difficult to bring the discussion back to how culture impacts one’s preaching. In a positive note many of the respondents rejected alternatives being offered to the source material of preaching, namely drama, skits, dance, music and the encroachment of media. Some felt that those venues may be appropriate for other events within the life of the community of faith but were unacceptable for what they termed as worship.

But what is clear is that the respondents, on the whole, had not struggled with postmodernism’s culture encroaching upon the pulpit, or at least the claims being made by Christian postmodern writers. One respondent was very clear in that he accepted postmodernism’s judgment upon the arrogance of modernist culture and its presuppositions concerning our ability to know truth absolutely. Several others were quick to mention that the postmodernist culture was more akin to the culture of the first century than the modernist culture is and was. They confirmed what the Christian postmodernist writers said about the now-present clarity of the gospel amongst a variety of religious options.

Christianity is likely much closer now to the first century culture, religiously speaking. The danger occurs when Christianity aligns itself or identifies itself with any particular expression of culture and subsequently claims that the expression itself is Christianity. The respondents did not feel that the forms of the sermon; i.e., the pulpit, the act of one person delivering a message, etc., were aligned with any particular cultural expression. The danger though is that those within the postmodern Christian camp are doing the identical thing that the modernist church has done in that it welds itself to the postmodern expression of worship.

Recommendations for Further Research and Practice

There is always a negative aspect to interviewing preaching pastors and their perceptions of postmodernism. One of those negatives is the silence of the congregation. A more thorough approach, and outside of this survey, to have synthesized the comments of the respondents and taken that as a baseline with which to interview members of congregations. At this juncture we are held hostage to the perceptions of the preachers.

Further it would be valuable to correlate the findings of both sets of interviews with several factors affecting the congregations. Those factors include demographic studies of the congregations. Elements such as the mean income, educational levels, age levels and spiritual experience are all factors that deeply affect the perception of the degree of influence that postmodernism may or may not have on the particular preaching occurring in those congregations. As we mentioned earlier in the section on the limitations of the study, it would be valuable to do specific studies of the cities surrounding the churches of these

PCA pastors. For example, Colorado Springs is a large city but it is different in its urban sprawl than Denver, being comprised of a large contingent of active duty military personnel, civilian military contractors, military support agencies, and four military bases. In addition there are many Christian organizations such as Focus on the Family, Compassion International, The Navigators and a host of others. These factors deeply influence both the evangelical churches of Colorado Springs and the five PCA churches present here. Studies could be made of the demographic factors and correlate them with specific educational training and experiential issues germane to each of the Teaching Elders interviewed.

Further study needs to be made in the broad spectrum of churches that are both Reformed and non-Reformed but are holding to strong biblical values and using non-traditional language to communicate in preaching. Namely, Rob Bell is among the next-generation of postmodern preachers that attempts and succeeds at communicating strong biblical truth in his sermons. Bell could become the model, a “via media” for the solidly Christian postmodern communicators.¹⁷⁸

In addition it would be valuable to collect the syllabi in homiletical training from the various institutions in which the Teaching Elders were trained. Using Calvin’s understanding of Reformed preaching as a baseline one then could determine the degree to which postmodernism has affected those institutions which are producing these teaching elders by comparing the syllabi with each

¹⁷⁸ See Rob Bell, *Velvet Elvis: Repainting The Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing, 2005).

“Calvin factor” and the subjective impressions of both the congregants and the preaching pastors.

Further study is needed both geographically and philosophically analyzing the collective views of the presbyteries which are ordaining the preaching pastors. One respondent noted that he felt the disconnect between the theology held by the preaching pastors in the Presbytery and their commensurate applications and practices. Specifically he held that most of the newer preachers were pragmatic and failing to integrate their theology in a Reformed manner. For example, a Presbytery normally examines candidates for ordination as to their theology.¹⁷⁹ But little is examined in the way of the integration of that theology. A further study should be made as to making this a practical part of the trials of examination and specifically in the area of preaching.

Further study should also be made as to the impact of the preaching pastor’s ecclesiastical background and its influence upon their homiletical theology and practice. Over the past decade there has been a rise in the number of transfers of ordination from non-Reformed ministers to the Presbyterian Church in America. Some of these are coming from denominations that would not be considered in any way to be Reformed. This was the case with several of the respondents that I interviewed. As part of a more well-rounded study it would be valuable to ascertain their views of preaching prior to their entrance into the PCA and compare those against their views that they currently hold. In addition,

¹⁷⁹ *Book of Church Order*, 21:4-a 4, The Office of the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America, 94.

it would be valuable to supplement this study with an examination of the Teaching Elders' views on eschatology. One's view of end times and how it affects present interpretation of scripture, and therefore one's preaching, would be a significant contribution to how postmodernism is affecting Reformed preaching.

While it is true that the pastor must protect the flock the congregation has a valuable part in the body life aspect of the pastor's preaching. It would be valuable for the session of a PCA church and select members of the congregation to undergo training on the subject of postmodernism with its positive contributions and pitfalls. One congregation of an interviewed respondent did just this. Following this training the newly formed committee then would be furnished with a form that they periodically fill out over the course of a year evaluating the pastor's preaching and content. This would accomplish several goals. While not being a "witch-hunt" to ferret out postmodernism this practice would help the pastor's objectivity. Further it would assist him in evaluating his own view of his sermons, his beliefs about the sermon as revealed in the sermon, the content, and application. In a post-evaluation meeting or meetings there could be valuable discussion as to the influences that are unconsciously bearing down upon the Teaching Elder.

It is clear from the interviews that many of the Teaching Elders do not receive supplemental training in homiletics after their seminary experience. Many of the respondents felt that they wanted to explore other methodologies in preaching than the expository sermon while at the same time holding to an

expository sermon model. While five of the respondents did have doctoral degrees from reputable seminaries those at Covenant seminary received only one class. None mentioned any integration of their training beyond seminary. One respondent clearly articulated what he called the “Chapellian method.” It would be valuable for Reformed seminaries to offer advanced doctoral degrees that focused upon postmodernism and homiletics.

Summary and Conclusion

We have discussed the Reformed sermon from Calvin’s viewpoint. A Reformed preacher is one who has been called by God to the office of the preacher. As such he exercises the authority of that office within the context of a sermon. Christ rules his congregation through the delivery of the sermon and as empowered by the Holy Spirit it becomes the Word of God. The purpose of the sermon is to yield the knowledge of God in Christ. The message is that God is gathering to himself a covenant people and this is revealed in the content of the scripture via the redemptive historical metanarrative of the covenant. It is a message of reconciliation to God through Christ and growth in grace. The content of the sermon is couched in the Law-Gospel or indicative-imperative that announces God’s perfection and character and our failure to meet his requirements. The preacher announces the good news of the grace of the Gospel in Jesus Christ. Rather than the congregation being passive they are prayerfully prepared, actively listening and responding in faith and obedience. This is their mutual confession; i.e., pastor-congregation. Therefore the Reformed sermon truly reforms us into the image and likeness of Jesus Christ.

It appears that in the churches of those Teaching Elders who were interviewed that postmodernism has not made the headway that Christian postmodernists contend. It does have a marked influence upon the general evangelical churches in the same geographical areas and those Christians who enter the PCA congregations from the general evangelical quarter present the greatest challenge to the Teaching Elders and their sermons. The general evangelical churches were perceived to be steeped in moralistic sermons that focus on the Christian's personal agenda and how God may assist them.

Postmodernism may have affected the Reformed preachers in that they have little sense of the authority of the office which they were called to and occupy. Of this we cannot be certain because there are several other factors that could be brought to bear on this aspect of the Reformed preachers. Namely, one might attribute their apparent lack of self-awareness of the office of the preacher to humility on their part or simply a lack of training. One cannot immediately jump from the findings concerning the office of the preacher to blaming postmodernism. Very few of the respondents had the sense that they were ambassadors and heralds of Christ. Rather, there was a sense of egalitarianism that is coming from the pulpits. In our diagram of the pastor, the scriptures, and the congregation, there is greater drift towards the congregation than the other two areas. The pastors want to be seen as a fellow sojourner with no greater authority than anyone else. When posed a hypothetical challenge to their office and authority rarely did anyone mention that office. Rather they appealed to apologetic arguments concerning the text. One appealed to the postmodernist

value of relationships as truth as the reason why the challenger should believe the truth of the sermon. Again, this cannot be attributed solely to postmodernism since there are other possible factors in play.

In contrast there is a strong sense of the authority of the scriptures among those interviewed. The postmodernist value of one's personal story as metanarrative was absent from among the respondents. In contrast any story that is offered in the body of the sermon is supportive only.

It appears that there is a great and marked dependence upon the Holy Spirit to make the word of God effective to the hearer. This is refreshing in that the Charismatic wars of the late 1970's and early 1980's have not adversely affected the biblical teaching concerning the Holy Spirit. While not specifically a postmodern value there appears to be greater flexibility and room among those interviewed for the work of the Holy Spirit from the initial creation of the sermon to its delivery and beyond. And there is great trust that the Holy Spirit is overseeing the lives of the congregants of his church.

It does seem that the preachers interviewed struggle with communicating effectively to their congregation. But this had been the struggle of every age to expound and explain the word of God effectively to the congregation. The overarching metanarrative of the redemptive historical scriptures can be of great comfort for these preachers when they fully grasp its hermeneutical and homiletical implications. And it is the story of redemption by God in Christ that they are seeking to communicate.

Semper Reformanda.

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Appendix 1: Interviews

The Interviews conducted for this dissertation are appended here for research purposes and validation of the data collection.

KL

Interview Transcription

Interview Date: 6 September 2007

Interviewee: KL, PCA

CF: Tell me how long have you pastored and preached?

KL: Oh, goodness, since August of 1979. So I don't know what's that make?

CF: Thirty years?

KL: Actually 28 years.

CF: Yeah okay, good. Where and when did you attend seminary?

CU: Okay, I went to Covenant Seminary from, lets see, September of 1975 to May of 1979. Took a year off to get married and do you want more?

CU: Just kind of the background, yeah.

KL: That's where I got my M.Div.

CF: And how old are you?

KL: 60.

CF: And you did your D.Min at Covenant as well.

KL: Right.

CF: Kind of dive into this. How do you understand the term "postmodern?"

KL: Postmodern. Simple definition. I think it's the success of moral relativism percolating in our culture for the last sixty years so... the term I would say the loss of any concept moral absolute. All you're left with is opinion, you shape your own reality with the way you think about things. Its nuts, but that's I think...

CF: So would you understand, by contrast, the term “modernist” or “modernism?”

KL: Uh, modernists probably would not be as extreme. But would like to tout or promote the idea that there are no moral absolutes. And at the same time I’m not sure they would jettison the concept an objective world out there.

CF: So there would be some real truth is out there and we can apprehend it.

KL: I’m not sure that they would even say truth in an objective fashion, but because I think even the term “modernism” has a sense of postmodernism in it, where you...its illusive. Truth is illusive. Its certainly from the classical, its in contrast to a classical view for example, in our, what is it, in the Declaration of Independence, we hold these truths to be self-evident. That’s certainly not modernist perspective.

CF: So, how has your congregation, if at all, changed over the past years you have been preaching?

KL: Oh, they’re more sanctified! They’re growing into Jesus! How has the congregation changed?

CF: Yeah, so what kind of impact, if any, have you noticed in your congregation, in relationship maybe from modernism to postmodernism, or from something else?

KL: That’s a hard one to answer. I think the places where I’ve ministered this particular location is, you know, conservative. The people are conventional, they are typically...

CF: Here in Colorado Springs.

KL: Yeah, typically predictable in a lot of the way they live their lives. So in terms of the greater culture I’m not sure that, I’m sure they’re watching TV and being impacted by what’s the... all the sitcoms, you know, Friends, and Arrested Development, and you know I know some of the names, but I never watch them so..., but are they seriously impacted? I subtly impacted by the greater culture. This postmodern notion. But I’m not sure that I can put a finger on how they’ve changed in the time that I’ve been preaching and teaching. That’s a bad answer.

CF: Depending on who you read, whether it is David Wells, or Michael Horton, or Leonard Sweet, or Bryan McClaren, they’re looking at the shift in modernism to postmodernism and they have different answers. Do you think, and we’ve talked about you know, this relativism that kind of boils down to experience in postmodernism, do you think that this is due to a loss of a sense of community and roots caused by acquiescing to culture or maybe it is an inability to incarnate the gospel and culture?

KL: Repeat it again.

CF: It is a loss of the sense of community and roots cause by acquiescing to culture? In other words if we see postmodernism in the church have we acquiesced to culture? Or is it a loss of a sense of our community and roots, or is it we just failed to incarnate the gospel to the changing culture?

KL: I'm not sure how to answer that. Probably both. I think its true that when the covenant is not, the covenant promises are not embraced by the future generations there's a loss of incarnation of Christ in some way and in the significant way with the parenting to the children, to the next generation. Its also true that the culture has a tremendous impact on us and so we end up, sometimes in a reactionary mode, so we don't have TV because everyone else is watching TV. Or we don't ipods because, you know, sometimes Christians simply are in a reactionary mode because the culture is doing it I'm not going to do it, which is a thoughtless, its just reactionary. That's not helpful either. At the same time is there infil..., you're asking about infiltration of postmodernism into the church and I just say that's got to be happening. Stinkin' thinkin' all around you is going to affect you. And it's the rare person that can see through that, it's the frog and the kettle syndrome as the water starts out room temperature and the frog doesn't recognize difficulty or danger. We're in the midst of this culture and apart from God's Spirit which, I think he does give us insights. He does lead and direct us in the truth, not postmodernism, but in the truth, so that we can see some contrast, but boy... yeah I'd say both.

CF: And when a lot of these writers will talk about how the church has responded to cultural change they have come up with a lot of different solutions, and part of that is characterized a lot of different ways. One of them is that the church should only feed on its own resources. Or some others have said that the church should draw from the world's wells. What do you think? Should the church feed only on its own resources in dealing with people being influenced by postmodernism or should they just, they say well you've got to be able to tap the culture. We can draw from the worlds wells?

KL: Well I think, from my perspective, there's not a good, you're not teaching the truth if you're not making it relevant to the context in which people live their lives. You know, every preacher fails so we do pretty poor job... I would say most of us, but you have to come to grips with the ideas that are in the market place out there. And then contrast show them what the truth is and make it palatable and understandable. That's a huge challenge. John Stott in his book, on preaching, I've forgotten the name of it..."Between Two Worlds," I remember him saying that a good sermon or a good preacher has one foot firmly planted in heaven and one foot firmly planted on the earth, and brings the truth to bear of heaven. And in context of his life. In that sense nothings changed. We're just dealing with a little more slippery animal in postmodernism. Its silly but that's where we are.

CF: Some have said that this is a cultural problem and a failure of the church to adjust to cultural change, and there are others that say that it is a moral. And within that kind of framework it is a moral problem, is it a loss of a sense of biblical authority or a culture of individualism and creeds?

KL: Well, I think its too profound to be simply a culture problem. It's a moral problem at root. But that's symbolic of why we preach and teach. Everyone is estranged from God and that's a moral issue. What was the...

CF: Like I said, some have said that when we, let me kind of phrase the question like this one, that we talk about a sense of loss of biblical authority. In postmodernism you would lose that sense of biblical authority, or is it not really a loss of biblical authority but the rise of a culture of individualism? Or both?

KL: I'm going to say both again. When the Bible loses its authority in the life of an individual that's a moral issue. You know. People, the Law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul. The testimony of the Lord is sure, all these attributes about Scripture... if they're not recognized for the benefit that they are to an individual's life, then that person is going to be far poorer because of it. But I also, there is rebellion in us which seeks to assert myself over any other authority. So it seems to me that postmodernism fits into a desire to be God in my life. To have no other authority but myself. And so I will shape my world for myself to my own desires and ultimately to my own detriment.

CF: We'll shift a little bit to some theological kind of questions about questions. How do you understand the term "Reformed?"

KL: Reformed, I would say, the way I use it refers to a particular Calvinistic theology which may or may not be Presbyterian. Which emphasizes the sovereignty of God, it's the keystone, or capstone of Reformed theology and of course, it has Calvinistic soteriology as its outworking. And you'd have Presbyterians largely, and Dutch Reformed as well, that would be those promoting that perspective. Names like great Princeton, Hodge father and son, Warfield and Machen, and Abraham and Kuyper and the Dutch community, Southern Presbyterianism and Thornwell, Dabney, Morton Smith. That's the way I would define Reformed.

CF: What do you believe biblical preaching is and how do you do it?

KL: What do I think? I think every sermon biblical explains the text. Now, the text can be grouped together by subject that's sort of a topical approach. I find that extremely hard and so I've always gone for the most part with preaching through passages of Scripture and letting the immediate context of Scripture be the argument that I want to present to people.

CF: How do you do it?

KL: How do I do that? You're talking about personal....I always translate the text from the original language, whether its Hebrew, or Aramaic or Greek. I feel like that's important to see the original language and try to get a sense of that. And then I read commentaries, read articles and various books that may bear on the subject of the text... try to come up with a sermon outline that's intelligent and telligible. Not intelligent, because most of the time they're not. And then I always write them out. Write pretty much... I read the sermons.

CF: What is the purpose of a sermon?

KL: Well, in a broad statement which I heard, it's a platitude. Comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. That's maybe too general. Build up God's people and challenge unbelievers in their unbelief I think, byinlarge. You want to console, comfort, and encourage, and exhort, and challenge. And you speak the truth in love.

CF: So you know you'll see some material, we talk about Reformed sermons or Reformed preaching versus, you know a sermon you might hear over here at New Life. What might be the difference, if any, between Reformed preaching and the evangelical church at large preaching?

KL: Boy, that's a good question. I'm not sure... I guess I would hope that a Reformed sermon is biblical. That a Reformed sermon in some way reflects the truth of God to a world in darkness. And I don't, frankly, I don't listen to a lot of other people's sermons. I'm not one that regularly is listening to anybody's, whether it is Reformed... . In my PCA affiliation or not, I've got enough work to do without spending an hour listening to someone else. So I really don't know. Trendy stuff like "seven habits of a godly man," or "how to be happy in your marriage," you know those kind of sermons don't...I just don't know what to say. I do think that maybe in...even in my own preaching, just thinking about it, as conscious as I am that sermons ought to be in some way Christocentric, I'm not sure that mine always are. But the danger, one of the dangers is just moralisms. Heaping more work and more duty on people when grace is what energizes and encourages God's people. I would say... I just wrote this to a student, "A grateful heart will lead to a faithful heart." But if you're preaching moralisms you're preaching duty and responsibility and that just leads to bitterness, resentment, inability, I can't do this, I need help and which is why should preach Christ, because we need to repent of our self-sufficiency and find our sufficiency in him. Did I answer that?

CF: So what do you think the role of the preacher in preaching process?

KL: Well, I think we make too much of ourselves just to...I mean, I see that a lot at Presbytery. I see that at General Assembly. We are afflicted with a sense of

self-importance. Having said that, Scripture says, how beautiful are the feet of the ones who preach the good news. Bring the glad tidings. So that is, it's a message of hope and it's the only message of hope that people have. And so, what's my part in it? I'm not sure if you're asking what the Holy Spirit's part in it...

CF: That's actually going to be my next question.

KL: Okay. I don't know how to sort that one out. Except that I know, I know that I am not typically preaching to individuals. I avoid bringing up things that are on my plate personally, conflicts that I have with people or frustrations, or whatever. And bringing them to the congregation for illustration is I think that is taking advantage of the authority of the pulpit in a way that you just ought never do. I realize that we can be very frustrated in this job but we must never do that.

CF: What do you think the role of the Holy Spirit is in the act of preaching?

KL: Well, I said earlier, he is the one who guides us in all the truth. So he takes the word of God which is hopefully what you're explaining as a preacher and applies it in I guess mystical is the only word I have, in the hearts and minds of those people who are listening. And he's the one who produces the increase. It is not the... anything that takes place in terms of a change or a transformation in the heart and mind of individuals that are listening to the sermon. To God be the glory. It is by God's Spirit that that has occurred.

CF: What role does the congregation have in the praxis of preaching?

KL: "Amen brother, preach it!" Well they should be praying for themselves and for the preacher and for others that God would have his way in their lives through the truth of God's word. And its not a passive role at all. Its very active. Note taking, you know, having something... I like to take notes, I always take notes, I'm acting like a student when I'm listening to a sermon. I want to take that role because I am being taught by God and I want to learn.

CF: Some of this might sound redundant but there is a direction I'm going with it. What's the role of Scripture in your preaching?

KL: Scripture is the foundation. Scripture is the platform, the truth, its what, you know, nobody wants to hear 30 minutes of opinion, they want to hear scrip... If they're truly Christians they want to hear Scripture taught. Explain this to me. Explain the idea that God has given us in his word. Without Scripture you're out of work.

CF: So in those areas of the role of the preacher, and the role of Scripture, and the role of the congregation, kind of a three-sided triangle, has postmodernism in

your opinion affected any of the ways you address those three areas of the role of the preacher, and the role of the congregation and the role of Scripture?

KL: Yeah, it's the context in which we live. The Germans would say "sitzenleben," situation in life. And that's the situation in life that's so how we make God's truth relevant in an age of opinion is important. So its important to say not beat that drum constantly, but its important remind people. That's not the world in which we live. When God says, "Thus says the Lord," the world is saying, "There is no Lord." "Its me, its what I think, you know, I'm the sum of what's important." You know, I think ...

CF: Have you sensed over the years, because you've got a goodly number of years of preaching under your belt, that in the past maybe in a more modernist culture, they said the pastor is kind of the authority, you know about what the Bible says, and now in a postmodern culture they say who's this guy telling me what he thinks? My opinion is just as good. So there's a lowering, theoretically, of the role of the pastor and the raising of the role of the congregation. Have you sensed anything like that?

KL: Not but it certainly fits. I haven't personally seen that but I, just knowing something of the postmodern culture, that's one of the implications is a loss of appreciation of the preacher and his task. And an elevation maybe conscious, maybe not conscious, of my own opinion. Having said that I would say when we're sinners that isn't unusual. It isn't unique to this age that preachers are sometimes discounted. They ran Calvin out of Geneva. And you can site all you need to do is look at minutes of our Presbytery records from the colonial days of ministers. Jonathan Edwards who was run out of Northampton. So godly men have not been accorded the honor that God's word gives them.

CF: In some non-Reformed circles they're reducing the role of Scripture. And in a "worship service", and so rather than the preacher using the source material of the Bible, there are some, for example, I just saw recently, they're doing the gospel according to the Beatles. There was another one, its called "Blockbuster sermons," and they're essentially showing not just a two or three minute video clip but a huge chunk of a movie or something like that. And within both evangelical, although non-Reformed churches, and Reformed churches there's been an elevation of the role of story and storytelling. What is kind of your take on that?

KL: First of all I'm a lousy storyteller. I've never been good at telling stories. And well, my classmate at seminary, who is now President, Bryan Chapell is a gifted storyteller. He's incredible in the way he can unfold a story and unpack it for people. I think that I'm probably out of step with the culture in that sense. If you look at my body of sermons that I've preached, what, 28 years I guess, that's probably the one area that's... I don't tell stories. And yet stories are very popular. We had a summer intern this summer who told stories. And the stories

were riveting when he did that. So I guess my comment is... I'm an old school guy. I'm probably not being very helpful to young people.

CF: In that advocating of sermons or clips or movies, and things like that, people the reason they've said, at least in some of the scholarly circles, is that they've said we have shifted a modernist society who emphasizes objective propositions about things to a postmodern society that emphasizes a subjective, non-propositionalism, read "experience." So if that is true have you sensed within the congregation any pressure to move into kind of a here's how you experience God this week non-propositionally, that sort of thing?

KL: I haven't. But I'm not sure that our congregation is typical. We're in a very conservative part of the country and in particular this congregation probably doesn't reflect a typical Reformed congregation in say, downtown Philadelphia or somewhere in another area of the country. I don't know. That may be an excuse.

CF: William Willimon talks about preaching to congregations. He divided it between, his one book is "Preaching to the Baptized," and how you deal with sermons with people that are largely Christian and his other book is called, "The Intrusive Word," which is essentially preaching to non-Christians. If there has been this shift into postmodernist types of values and experiences have you noticed any changes in the way that you've had to communicate to the congregation, that they are in greater need of learning or being taught things and words and concepts like reconciliation, propitiation, redemption, justification, things like that.

KL: I would say that... language, the cultural ghetto we live in as evangelical Christians is something that I'm not conscious enough of. I tend to fall back on scriptural terms instead of breaking it down; you know reconciliation, sanctification, justification. These terms that are rooted in scripture I think it's a good idea to make it plain. And to break it down so, and I've thought that for a long, long time, just wouldn't I say I'm very adept at communicating that. But I think its an increasing need. It is something more necessary today than it was five years ago and much more so than ten years ago.

CF: Any reason why? You want to unpack that?

KL: I just think it's the cultural influence and growing ignorance of scripture. Those two things.

CF: Even within Reformed Christian circles?

KL: Yup.

CF This kind of dovetails with something you said in the beginning. We talked about within postmodernism there is a sense of a loss of the objectiveness of

truth and truth is outside of us, but in postmodernism its my opinion, result of my experiences, of my perceptions. Are we dealing with a loss of objective truth or is it a change in the understanding of what truth is?

KL: Well, the fallout is a loss objective truth. And the word isn't used much anymore, so I guess the concept is Harvard's motto, when Harvard was founded, was Veritas, Latin for truth. On the door of the elementary school where our kids went to school in Wyoming, was truth. And that's not a word that gets much use today.

CF: Kind of putting this in the perspective of spiritual problems, do you think in postmodern world and the Reformed preaching response, is this a crisis of faith which is, in other words, our creeds and doctrinal content is no longer fitting our world, or is it a crisis in the language of faith? In other words, the words we use to convey doctrines or creeds, like for example, if you look at the Westminster Confession, the Catechisms, the Longer or Shorter, or the Heidelberg catechism, the Augsburg confession, these tend to be, at least around Reformed circles, pillars of the expression of our faith, and yet is it today that those are answering questions that nobody's asking today? Or is it a language problem, the language of faith; i.e., a crisis of the language of faith? Or is the words we use to convey doctrine and creeds?

KL: Well that's, I'd say, its good language, and so I guess my thought on that is that the culture has become ignorant of the language of faith. So, its not the instruments themselves that are at fault. Its professing to be wise we've become fools. I mean its some sort of progression of rebellion that has led us into this. And there is a spiritual crisis, actually I think, in the lives of a lot of young people more thoughtful ones and you can see that movement somewhat reflected in our own Presbytery with some of our younger ministers wanting to have in the worship services historical, either choral responses, or creeds, or other historical anthems that are sung, which gives a sense of connectedness of these young people to something greater than the moment, something greater than the current day.

CF: In that, I think that's an important issue, especially in preaching. And as you from the time you began 30 years ago to the present this sense of connectedness, how do you bring that in a sermon? Especially in what we talked about, the scarlet thread of covenant redemptive history in preaching, does that show up in your preaching; i.e., something that is greater and outside of the moment?

KL: I don't know, more or less I'd say, it does. You certainly have historical, biblical examples to look at. But also a sort of a biblical, theological development of redemption or instances, I guess, of God's sovereignty, that give this sense of being part of something greater than the moment. Church history examples, too,

I think, examples from history probably do help us get that. But singing hymns; we do sing hymns and reference to the historicity of the faith. I don't know.

CF: In postmodernism we've said that one of the quintessential values is experience. And a large number of evangelical churches you'll see, "Come and experience God this week," or something. And we said in Reformed circles we experience God in word and in sacrament. How might somebody who is more postmodern experience God in the preaching your sermons?

KL: Well, you know, the thing that comes to mind is that they are having to deal with the ideas that I present which ultimately lead us to the triune God. And so, whether I'm addressing the issue of pride and our need for repentance, that's not in a vacuum. We're repenting of something and its ultimately in relation to the Creator of the earth. And may have impact as well, horizontally with other folks, but that's just... I would hope that people would come and get engaged in the ideas that I am attempting to explain and express from Scripture. And meet him and meet this God.

CF: Just toss out an idea here, Fred Craddock who really did not write in a sense or was an advocate of postmodernism, but he sensed it was coming. And when he wrote his book, "As one without authority," he said that one of the goals of the pastor, the preacher, in the sermon, and Fred Craddock is not necessarily Reformed, he's church of Christ, professor at Erskine, and other places, but he said the goal of the pastor is to have the preacher lead the congregation to experience the text. That the congregation is not just a javelin catcher for the sermon. And for the postmodernist that would be right up his or her alley. Is that a goal, what do you think of that? Is that a goal of a preacher in the sermon, to experience the text?

KL: I certainly... I wouldn't say maybe experience. I would use the word engage, become engaged personally with the text. I think in terms of mentioning pride a while back, if the Corinthian church, which is what I'm currently preaching through, was guilty of pride, that that subject would somehow become personal to the individuals listening to the point where they would say, "Lord, am I guilty of this failing in the church of the church at Corinth?" "Have I been arrogant?" "Have I been divisive, in terms of my relationship with other people because of my pride?" So I'd say more, I'm not sure why I am reacting to "experiencing" the text, but I would rather experience the person, engage myself with text, and then experience the author of the text.

CF: So assuming that you're preaching or coming from the motif that when we look to scriptures this is the telling of the tale, they are essentially sermons about how God has dealt in a covenant redemptive way with his covenant people, then now God is still dealing with his covenant people. There is no schism there.

KL: Right.

CF: One more question. Thinking in terms of sermon as one of the structures of the church, is the church itself the problem with her structures not conducive to ministry and mission in this new world, or is the church failing to be a church, less true to itself than true to its time? So in other words, the structures we've got in place, which have essentially been in place for, you know, generally speaking, since the Reformation.

KL: Yeah, but even Ezra stood and preached. And Moses...

CF: So we have these structures, are they conducive to ministry and mission to this new world, or is the church failing to be a church? In other words, should we plant the flag down, and say, no, this sermon is a staple and its not going to go away. We're not going to get rid of it in favor of the gospel according to the Beatles or Blockbuster videos or...?

KL: I think maybe I was going to say obviously, but that's a loaded word. What God has given us in Scripture is forever relevant in a fallen world, because we care, doesn't matter what era. So worship, and the elements of worship ought not to be cast aside for any sort of improvement that would be more culturally relevant.

CF: Quotes around "improvement."

KL: Yeah, yeah, because its not a good...

CF: So, faith comes by hearing, hearing by the word of God, and within that context Paul is speaking about preaching, specifically preaching.

KL: And that's the medium, I don't want to say as some have said, evangelism only takes place... there are some who say evangelism only takes place from the pulpit. That's way more than what we should say. Having said that, that's certainly an area that God has ordained where the gospel is to be proclaimed.

CF: And the gospel is much more than trust Jesus as your Savior.

KL: Well, that's certainly some of

CF: The beginning...

KL: Yeah. What was the last part of your question?

CF: Is the church failing to be a church, less true to itself....

KL: I think that's true too. I think we're, yeah, I think we're less than what we ought to be. We have compartmentalized our Christian faith so that there were

certain areas in the past that we didn't involve ourselves. Probably the easiest to see is politics and now we're in politics. Christians no longer seen that as taboo. Having said that, a lot of Christian politicians are not very appealing. Their Public persona is not one that... they look mean and angry.

CF: In reference to preaching, though, it seems that... we've said before the interview, there's a lot of folks within the church, and even within the Reformed church, are looking for some homiletical savior. That there's some way to connect with this postmodern pew sitter, and they said well, "Let's just jettison the sermon," in favor of a play, a dance, media clips, music, "we'll become a music church." And is that a failing for the church to be a church and not being true to itself?

KL: It depends. I wouldn't think, I would think if the forms that we're holding on to are stylistic versus substantive, then we're in trouble.

CF: SO you wouldn't be adverse to the idea that Eugene Peterson put forward which is to sit in a chair, a cup of coffee at your elbow, and deliver a conversation to the people sitting at little tables?

KL: I don't know. I'd have to think about it.

CF: He says the sermon ought to be more... And Haddon Robinson, who's not Reformed, but still says that it should be more of a conversation.

KL: Its hard to have conversation. I think that's, the preacher needs to anticipate a conversation. What are going to be the responses to the ideas that I am saying, anticipate that with further comments and clarification so that as the monologue continues its not done without some thought for the congregation. But

CF: It really is a dialogue even though they are not speaking.

KL: Yeah. I'd say, you know, from a sound point of view, its monologue. But hopefully if the preacher is doing his job there is very much a dialogue that's encountered.

CF: Well, any last thoughts?

KL: I'm not sure how to distinguish stylistically from substance. And your comment about Eugene Peterson has me in a comfort... posture: should the sermon be preached standing up? I think it has to be declarative, it declares God's word. Can he hold a cup of coffee? I've got near the pulpit...

CF: Let's go ahead and end there.

EI
Interview Transcript

Date of Interview: 19 September 2007

Interviewee: EI

CF: Okay, why don't you go ahead and tell me your name and where you pastor.

EI: My name is EI, and I pastor at ..., Colorado.

CF: Okay, and how long have you pastored and preached?

EI: Totally in ministry wise or just here?

CF: Yeah ministry wise.

EI: I began ministering in 1961. That was Youth for Christ in Cheyenne, Wyoming.

CF: And how much of that time was spent preaching?

EI: The last 46 years I've been in a church-related ministry for 42 of those years.

CF: Wow. So how old are you now?

EI: 70 years old.

CF: You're still young.

EI: Let's hope.

CF: Have you had any post-graduate work?

EI: No.

CF: Where did you go to, where and when did you attend seminary.

EI: I came into this whole thing slightly different, because I came into it from a fundamental Baptist background, and I had the basic qualifications I had were a couple of years of Bible college and then a correspondence course. Which then in the independent movement was all they requested. When I was preaching through the gospel of John in a church in Buffalo, Wyoming, back in 1974, I was preaching in an Arminian Baptist and got arrested by the passage in John. John, that's a dangerous book for an Arminian to preach through if you're an expositor. And that was and is my style of preaching. I would tell my folks that I came to the pulpit on Sunday morning, now what I'm going to preach today, I don't believe.

Now I don't know why I don't believe it because its in the word, but this is what God's calling us to believe. And by the time I'd gone through John's gospel, I was a convinced Calvinist.

CF: That's a great story.

EI: When I realized what I was I also realized that there was nobody, this is a strange animal. There was no one like that around me. I did remember back in my Youth for Christ days back in Colorado Springs, that some kids from what's now Grace Presbyterian, came to some of my clubs. And they would talk about election and predestination and things like that. So I called Bill Leonard who was the only card carrying Calvinist I knew. And then asked him the strangest question he's ever been asked, I said, "Bill, do you consider yourself a Calvinist?" And I don't know if you remember Bill Leonard and he said, "Huh, huh, huh. I think you could say that." And he and Bernie Kuyper got in touch with me there in Buffalo, and invited me to go to Presbytery meeting with them, which was in Lander, Wyoming, then, back in 1976, 77, and I remember it was this was an exciting time, standing in a circle in Donovan Cook's living room, singing "And can it be," that I realized for the first time in my life I was singing that song surrounded by a group of guys that really believed that. And then Bernie kept encouraging me to stand the trials of ordination. And I explained to him, I did a lot of studying on you know, on my own, as well the scant study I had. I went to the University of Colorado and majored in classical languages. So they encouraged me to take the trials of ordination so about 1978 or 79, at Presbytery I was grilled and they accepted me as a transfer from whatever the official language is, transferred from another church, or faith, or whatever it is. So that was my jump into the Presbytery. I suppose that KL, J and I probably have been in this Presbytery longer than anyone else, and I can't remember whether I was a formal member before he was or no but we both came in about the same time.

CF: Great. What I am going to do is to kind of jump into these questions and you can be as eloquent as you want. A couple of guys have, a couple of the fellas that I've interviewed got a little nervous, when I wasn't making or responding to their comments, and the reason why is mainly I'm more interested hearing what you have to say. And then maybe when I turn off the recorder I'll tell you what I think. But you know, I don't want to influence your responses. Okay?

EI: Very good.

CF: So how would you understand the term postmodern?

EI: My exposure to it has been I guess to simplify it a new kind of hermeneutic where nothing is certain, or there are no absolutes. Where Christianity is marginalized simply because if we hold to any kind of absolute final position that is considered politically incorrect today.

CF: Well, how would you understand the term “modernist” or “Modernism?”

EI: Well, modernism was what hit when I first become a Christian in high school which had the whole drift of, basically doubting the inspiration of scripture, but a different slant than what postmodernism would have, in that they doubted something specific, where postmodernism believes there is nothing specific in my understanding of it. So it was a new slant, modernism was a new slant at doubting the authority of scripture. Basically because it wasn't something that could be examined with the five senses. Science had kind of taken over and science was to be the absolute, and would finally give us the star to guide our ship by. And we couldn't count on the scripture and doctrines such as the virgin birth of Jesus Christ, and the atonement, and things like this. It went down the drain with the discounting the scripture.

CF: Okay, how has your congregation, if at all, changed over the past years that you have been preaching and perhaps, what cultural impact have you noticed on the congregation? Have you noticed the shift from modernism to postmodernism?

EI: I think I haven't noticed it as remarkably because when we came, first of all, I was sent here by officers and churches 7 years ago to put out a forest fire here that the church was in a state of real upheaval. Mainly because it had gotten a reputation of being a “PR” or “Purely Reformed,” that the Westminster Confession and the book of church order had then come to mean more than the biblical fundamentals of the faith. So when I came in my first exposure the first time was to go through the gospel of John but to emphasize the Trinity. The relationship between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and all the absolutes that come out of their relationship. So the congregation, then, we were jumping right into all the things that counter postmodernism today, beginning with what I think is the most essential part of Christian theology which is the Trinity. So I didn't see, our people are aware of that. We have engineers and people in higher education, things like this, personally exposed to it. But I didn't ever see it had made any sizeable inroads, other than people were aware of it. And wanted to know how to relate to it. And then at our Sunday School class I began immediately to begin to go into different slants on apologetics and to give people some approach to apologetics that each one would feel comfortable with.

CF: In a lot of the writings, there's a considerable amount of discussion going on in both with the modernists and the postmodernist, and they're fighting over the issue of causes of postmodern influence in the church. And one writer asked the question, “Is this a loss of community and roots caused by acquiescing to the culture, or is it an inability to incarnate the gospel in culture?”

EI: Give me that quote again, would you?

CF: Yeah, as the church tries to deal with postmodernism, they ask the question is the influx of postmodernism a loss of community and roots caused by the church acquiescing to the culture, or is it an inability of the church to incarnate the gospel in culture?

EI: That's a good one. I'm going to give just a slightly different spin on it. That a lot of the duress that we've faced here has been that no sooner had I come and then they decided to plant a church here. And of course I was excited because I had never really worked in conjunction with another PCA pastor from within the framework. I had labored out of bounds, would be the term used for all my ministerial career until we came to Fort Collins. This is the first time I'd ever been in a mainline PCA church- we'd always been independent churches, or something like that. I guess my concern or my concern on postmodernism it looks like a lot the thing that's impacted us the most, it looks like a lot of the church planting efforts have gone, I think have been kind of that direction. They've been influenced in that they're trying to exegete the culture and come in with the culturally acceptable ways of doing things. I don't have any particular problem with that other than if you don't follow that particular pathway, you're kind of considered an albatross or dinosaur or something like that. So the technique of a lot of the church planters, that's here in the Rocky mountain region, has really been more of a problem, or a concern to us, than anything that's coming in from the secular world, the outside in that when I came in here, you know, a lot of people had been the PR variety of people, and everything was upset, so there were a number of families that were ready to leave when we got here. And I didn't know that our Presbytery had sent me here with a backhoe to have a mass burial. I thought we were to, you know, salvage the church and God in his grace has done that. The first thing that happened here was not only the church planter come in, but also RUF came in, and they came in together, to work in conjunction with one another. And it wasn't my understanding of how, you know, of how RUF worked. So while the church, while the two church plant was getting on its feet, or whatever church planters do the first year or two, the RUF guy had come around, and then I essentially turned our college ministry over to him because I was excited about having somebody working on the college campus. But in the process of that when the new church began we practically lost the whole college group because they had thought I had handed them off to the RUF guy, who put the pressure on and encouraged them all to go into the church plant. And we were labeled as dinosaurs because, you know, we still sing hymns that aren't boring hymns. Is there really hymn life outside of the RUF hymnal? I think so. And our idea wasn't to be old-fashioned or anything like that. But I do think a lot of the hymns are great teaching devices. And I want our young people coming up to be aware twenty years from now, of some of the great old hymns of the faith. And don't I want to see all those things lost. So I, what I saw was oh for in the RUF ministry this year ended this year with a keg party. And you know, some of our kids over there saw that and left because of that. And again, that makes you look square if you're not, you know Jesus turned the water into wine, why aren't you doing that kind of thing. So my real concern

about postmodernism, and I'm not accusing anyone of this, but it looks to me like at least in the Rocky Mountain region here, we've got a lot of capitulating to the culture. Which I see is the main problem that postmodernism poses to the church. My concern is more parochial, than secular.

CF: Okay, so you'd probably say that with the next question, Is this battle with postmodernism is it a loss of a sense of biblical authority or is it a culture of individualism and its creeds?

EI: We're a creedal church and I think that's a good thing. One of my concerns about creedalism in the church is that the Westminster Confession is a wonderful document. They don't need me to stand in their gap. But it's a landmark, its not a boundary. And I think what has happened before is that the Westminster Confession has been regarded as kind of a boundary and you bound yourself by what the divines did several hundred years ago, rather than saying this is where the church was at that day and these are our roots, and these are things that are valuable to us. As a result the church can slide into quoting the Westminster Confession which really doesn't mean much to the modern people today because creedalism in a postmodern age, if you don't believe in absolutes, then that's one of the absolutes you don't believe in. And you know, I think we missed it by not being Reformed. Ad Fontes, back to the fountain. Back to the source. Let's make sure everything that we believe is established in scripture, then if it is articulated in a creed somewhere, that's a wonderful thing. But let's make sure that we know where we came from as far as our base and our source. And I see that as a problem. I don't think God's word is ever going to be out of date. I don't think we ever need to apologize. If there's anything more exciting than the death and resurrection of Christ, I don't know what it is. And I think it is impossible to bore people with the truth. So this attempt to capitulate by saying we're a creedal church but we're not going to hit you over the head with this has kind of shifted in the wrong direction, rather than saying we want to tell you what is behind our creed, why we believe the things we believe. Then you get back to the, you know, the inspired word of God and the Holy Spirit's promised to make that a seed. So I guess I don't know exactly, I would say the church, the creedal church has created a real problem for itself, in that they don't want to be quoting the Westminster Confession to people today, so there is a tendency to soft peddle around those things. It seems to me the essence of the Reformation it was a very confrontational thing. And there wasn't, there just wasn't the situation where you were afraid you're going to offend somebody, but in you tolerance you said we tolerate each other because we disagree. We don't tolerate each other because we agree. There are some things we markedly disagree on, that doesn't have to keep us apart as people. But lets be honest and lets talk about the differences we face. And I guess I don't see, sometimes I don't see that willingness to have the cross be the offense. People are coming to Christ because he is their best friend, and he's their counselor and he's the one who helps them walk through the night, put their hand in the hand of the man, things like that. But at some point, the cross is a wonderful confrontation because it shows a stark contrast

between the way the world is moving and the real reality of our world, which I think is centered in the person of Christ, especially at the cross. And those seen especially at the cross, the cross and the Trinity have been I guess what I hear people interviewed over the years at Presbytery I usually ask a question, "What do you think is the most significant aspect of the Christian faith?" I've never heard anyone say the Trinity. Its been several years now, and I'm wondering why that is. So I guess, my answer to that would simply be the Reformation was all about getting back to the original source, and I don't think we do that very well.

CF: So then that raises the question then, how do you understand the term "Reformed?"

EI: My, I'm just very simple at that point. I go back to the "solas." Reformed means by grace alone, by faith alone, scripture is the authority alone, and it centers in Jesus Christ, and particularly at the cross. I think everything Reformed that was the essence of what they were talking about. But they defined it very carefully in terms of the solas.

CF: So how would, as we kind of narrow our subject now, what do you believe biblical preaching is and how do you do it?

EI: Well, Nehemiah I think was the one who said that read it, explain it to the people. I think biblical preaching in my own personal conviction, my own personal constraint, its got to be expository and it needs to be consistent. We need to be doing what the Reformers did; preaching through books of the Bible, so people get a flow, and yet a sense of the continuity of what's happening, rather than taking detached portions of scripture and doing, almost turning it into a topical reference book, rather than a consistent flow. So in my thinking it's the first time I ever heard expository preaching, I was almost 20 years old, and thought wow, why haven't people been doing that all my life? And if I'm ever in ministry that's what I'll do.

CF: So let me ask if we have a kind of a general evangelical model of preaching, and I know that's a big generalization, how would Reformed preaching be different, if at all, from the local church down on the corner that is not Reformed?

EI: I would hope that these guys are based in scripture. They're, they read the book like it was a letter, and they're consistent in the way they handle it. They don't try to get around a sticky issue, that I think part of Reformed preaching is declaring the full counsel of God. Unless a person is consistently working his way through a book of the Bible, there's a lot of things that are never going to be touched on. And sooner or later people have to deal with some of those very real issues. So its just, to me its declaring the full counsel of God by I think, expository approach to scripture, at least to my mind, its taking the book seriously.

CF: So how would you define the role of the preacher?

EI: I think preacher is someone who every Monday morning looks at the next passage that he's going to deal with and submits himself to its authority, in preparation, and then in exposition and then you encourage people to do what you've done. You submit yourself, it's like modern science. Modern science doesn't go in with a lot of fixed, closed ideas. There's too many exciting things happening in the universe. They go in with their eyes wide open and say whatever we see and observe we're going to pay attention to. But I think that God's word is the most dynamic and exciting reality the world has ever seen. If we go into it with the idea that it's contained within our little thimble, it's contained in our frame of reference, then the expansiveness of it doesn't happen though it should. And I think God's word is convicting. And I think it is expansive, and I think it is purifying. So that would be my approach to the preaching.

CF: So what is the role of the Holy Spirit in preaching?

EI: It's the sine qua non. You can't do it without... He wrote the book, and Jesus promised he would help you understand it. And he energizes it as you go along. And he works first through the life of the preacher and then to the words that are preached. I don't believe that preachers have prophetic power in that, Isaiah would say that this is the word of God, you accept that. I don't think any preacher is so infallible that there's to say, take these notes and those notes will be infallibly the way you interpret the scripture. But I do think there's something preaching that's one of the gifts that is mentioned over there in Ephesians chapter 4, and it's a means by which, it's a dynamic by which God is calling the world to himself today.

CF: There have been a lot of churches would be described postmodern, both within the Reformed circle, and outside. And they are doing sermons, for example, during the summer, for example, one church basically had a series called "The gospel according to the Beatles." And another had, would show video clips, or large chunks of a movie, and it was called "A Block buster Summer." So what's the source material for a Reformed preacher, and how can we kind of guard it against postmodern encroachment?

EI: Well, the source has got to be the scripture. And one of the things that, you know, that I've noticed over the years is that part of the ordination exam... we never examine a guy as to his proficiency in handling the biblical languages, but at least we ask for a transcript of a seminary, that would say that somewhere along the line he's dealt with that. It would seem to me that we are taking seriously the fact that a guy who is supposed to get into the original languages of scripture, tear it out the truth of the word and expound it. Nehemiah 8. Yeah that would be pretty much my approach to it in that, and I don't think God's word is boring to people. I'm sorry, I'm 70, that should make you a dinosaur, but I think I relate as well to high school and college kids today as I ever have. I don't have

any problem having a conversation with a group of these kids, because the truth is the dynamic and it has nothing to do with the personality or things like this. The attempts to do some of these things I can appreciate what's behind it, people saying we really want to reach out. But all those techniques, every five years, those techniques fade and we're doing all kinds of seminar things now to try to make up for it. We have a seminar on the family, a seminar on witnessing, a seminar on peacemaking and all those kind of things, rather than those things flowing out of the word itself. And I think the word is sufficient.

CF: What do you think the role of the congregation is, in the hearing of sermon?

EI: I couldn't answer for everyone, but what I say to my people is, this is the passage that has worked me over, that I've had to bow before this past week, and I want you to do the same thing of being responsive to what the scripture says. Struggle to understand it, and then to apply it in your life in a practical way. So I think the... Timothy thing. Paul told Timothy that the these you've heard pass on to others. So I think the congregation is the institutional Timothy, and okay, here's what has been presented to you. Now articulate this, articulate it in your family, articulate it to your Christian friends at work, and articulate it in your attempts to witness and evangelize people around you.

CF: Has postmodernism affected your congregation? And if so, how?

EI: Only in the sense that there's... its like being a Denver Bronco's fan visiting Oakland and going to the coliseum there when the Bronco's have to be playing. Everybody there is basically going to be a Raiders fan so you're surrounded by it, but it isn't your own. And you have to remember who you are and what you are and who you're rooting for. I think this postmodern attitude, whether I don't think society realizes its postmodern. But I think this whole aura has so flowed over into it now, that a Christian is constantly surrounded by, wow, man, I'm really glad you've found Christ, and he's turned your life around, and that its working really well, and you've taken drugs, and you've been out of prison now for 5 years, and you're doing a good job. You know that's not exactly, that's not the way I look at it, but I'm really happy you found that. I think that atmosphere so surrounds the Christian that it can become a discouraging thing if you say, you know, the consensus is certainly not in our favor anymore. And I can present the gospel as clearly and passionately as I know how, and it doesn't seem to me to be just making an impression. And I think sometimes Christians doubt themselves. I don't think they doubt the word. They think I must be doing a terrible job of witnessing because I don't see people being brought around. And what they need to be reminded of it's the whole thing of agriculture. You have to break up the ground and do all kinds of things. I think though the people in, the other thing is the non-Christian today aren't hearing what we say. So sometimes we get a nod of the head, where think well everyone is agreeing with us. But when they hear the cross they don't think it is the same thing we meant by it. When they hear, you know, the authority of God's word, they hear the Holy Spirit,

they're hearing those words, but I think they've got a different lexicon on most things. The other thing that affects people more than they realize it is, sometimes we think people are in agreement with us but all they've agreed to is that we're willing to use the same vocabulary, but it doesn't come down to defining terms.

CF: Have you found that you've had to spend more time defining terms in your preaching?

EI: Well, what I've done, for instance, when I go through the Psalms which we're getting into again now, I do a fresh translation of the Psalms, I've done a fresh translation of every book that I've worked my way through. Not because I think I'm a great translator, but it puts the truth of scripture in a slightly different words. And I think that's been helpful to the congregation in that they're saying, this isn't what the NIV says, or the NEV, or the NASB says. This is our pastor's thing and we know that he's dealt with the original languages. So here's another way of saying it. So I think by doing, actually all the sermon is doing anyhow is translating, and so when you're honest enough to say, here's the way I would translate these verses, it gives them a broader definition probably. If there's anything I've learned the Greek that I studied especially at the University of Colorado, and I learned the language. I learned it as a language, not as a tool. And I realized that, you know, one word doesn't another word in English. Where I think the tendency is sometimes in theology is to pin one definition on one particular word, and there's a whole family of words out there. These words were all thrown around, and used in the street and in the libraries, and in the bars, and the grocery stores everyday in society. They didn't come to us with the smell of perfume on them.

CF: Going back to somethings that people have been writing about, they've been, like I've said before, they've been trying to come up with answers as to how and why this is affecting the church. And one of the questions they ask is are we dealing with a loss of a sense of objective truth or is it a change in the understanding of what truth is?

EI: In Psalm 53 begins with "The fool has said in his heart that there is no God." I think atheism back in the days when the Psalms were being written had a different spin than it does today. There people were denying the existence of any kind of God at all. Today what people are denying the existence of God, I think it is more an insidious thing. They're pushing you into the margins. Or they're defining him out of the realm of potency or things like this. I don't know, the surveys I read, most people are saying they believe in, you know, the fundamental things of the Christian faith, the birth of Christ, all these kind of things. Then one of the surveys get down to asking the significance of these things, they don't see what is significant at all. So you can subscribe to all the right things but those things have no significance. I think that's the problem with the whole idea reality being significant outside of the realm of the scientific-empirical community, is a different kind of atheism today. I preach from Isaiah 53,

I'm going to say the moderns form of atheism, here are ways that people are denying the existence of God.

CF: So, its kind of, you kind of, if I can sum that up, since that both in the congregation and within at least the Rocky Mountain Presbytery, there is somewhat of a bifurcation. There's a base line understanding of the significance of some theological or scriptural term but they're almost standing as a judge over that, and saying, "I will determine what its significance means for me."

EI: I don't know if it is really that Chris. I think all these things came falling out of the same pipe somewhere. And I think there's an approach, for instance, it seems like church-planters, at least here in the Rocky Mountain region, seem to have a fairly... at least the ones up north here, seem to have a fairly uniform approach, that was taught somewhere. And may think that they're doing what they feel like is the thing that really should be done because someone espoused, you know, that particular philosophy. I don't think there's an intention to compromise anything away. And I doubt if any of these guys would think that they're compromising things away. But there's just been a different approach. Here's what you've got to do. You've got to go in and do a demographical study, you've got to be a spiritual McDonalds, and you've got to figure your traffic pattern, and you've got to figure the demographics of your society, and you've got to figure your target audience and all those things. How are you going to do that in a culture's diverse as ours? Think of picking a target audience when every day your audience is whatever it is. They can run the range from a college professor here in Fort Collins, to a guy that just got out of prison, kids that are messing around with dope, potential gangsters to people that have been in a church all their life, that have never done anything significant. That's what I think is the problem. I think that people are getting circumscribed by a philosophy, and as a result of that... you asked a question earlier, what was the essence of the Reformed faith? I thought that here, at Fort... anywhere, but especially when I said okay, I'm finally going to step inside a mainline PCA church. The solas are going to be a wonderful bond between churches. We have no connection whatsoever with the church plant idea, the RUF ideas, and all those kind of things. Because the things that are important there aren't the solas, but it's the technique in which you minister now. And the technique, that technology, the shibboleth to cross the bridge is a lot more important than the solas. And that's, I don't want to say discouraging but I've really been amazed that we can call ourselves Reformed and the very things they construe are Reformed are not the things that pull us together. But it's the methodology, the machination with which we carry these things out.

CF: Thank you. Some have discussed that for example, Michael Horton, in his books, he, as well as some Lutheran writers, say that this is not a postmodernism [problem] in the church and in preaching, and especially in Reformed circles, is a failure of the church in the sense that it has historically identified, at least after the Reformation, with modernism. And now its doing the same thing with

postmodernism. And his response, and some of the postmodern writers are saying, or asking the question, is this a crisis of faith in our creeds and in our doctrinal content, which is related to what you just said, or is it a crisis in the language of faith, the words that we use to convey the doctrines and creeds?

EI: I think there is almost a I don't know if you would call it a citadel mentality, because its not a real legal thing, but maybe like a gymnasium or a lab mentality, where people who have memorized these creeds, I mean they can give them to you verbatim from the Westminster Confession. And that becomes your articulation of faith, of reality. And anything that doesn't measure up to that is somehow fallen short of that. And that would have been more of a problem that I think we ran into when we first came here in that... people were coming to prayer meetings bringing the book of church order. And it came that if something were a little bit out of way, and the most recent spate of people that we had leave, you know, a year and a half ago or something, were people that thought John Frame didn't know anything about worship. Robert Rayburn was probably the last guy that God had ever really revealed anything to about worship. And if you weren't connecting all the dots just so then you weren't even worship. So that became an issue of not the authority of God's word, not the illumine of the Holy Spirit, but if you were doing, if you had an Arthur Murray dance steps on the floor, and you weren't dancing to those steps, then you weren't dancing. I thought of that as more of a problem from our, you know, I don't know how broad or pervasive that is, I think again when you go back to the creedal statements and we use those as boundaries, instead of landmarks, and don't get back to the sources and say here's what we believe. The creed would have said this, here's the way I would articulate that, I think there is just a failure to think of different ways of saying those things. And when I found most Christians, they think five minutes, the same Holy Spirit that's inside Isaiah or Paul, inside of them, there's John says, "You have an anointing. You know all things. You've got everything you need. Its time to think about these things. How would you say this to a guy at work, who may not understand, you know, when I go into a gym, the gym I go to the guys wear crosses. I kind of walk over to the guy and fondle his cross and what not, and say, "That's a pretty little thing. Is that a statement or a you know, a symbol of some kind?" They'll stop and think a minute and say, "Yeah it's a symbol." They don't realize they're wearing the cross around their neck as a religious symbol. It really isn't saying anything. Its not making a statement. And I think as our people become aware, more and more aware of that, what's going on in the world, people aren't really rejecting faith, they've pushed Jesus to the margin where he really doesn't matter. And all the symbolism, all these things still go on, but they just don't have any significance in the lives of people. The key question is, how significant is this thing really?

CF: You had mentioned about the kind of enamored attitude of some of the church planters in the Rocky Mountain Presbytery, and that they were more looking at technique than they were looking at some sort of Reformed roots. Is the church itself the problem, with structures that are not conducive to ministry

and mission for this culture, or is the church simply failing to be a church, less true to itself than to its time?

EI: You know I don't know, I've talked to the guys back, when I get really confused I call back to and talk to Rod Mays back in Atlanta about RUF, what is it supposed to be doing? We've got really close connections with several campus ministries here that but not with our own, and wonder if MNA, call back to Jim Bland at MNA, and say, What's MNA, what's a church plant supposed to be doing? I thought we're going to find some allies here. We're going to find some people to work alongside of us, and they think they're going to come here and kind of replace us. We've had a spate of people who, it wasn't my fault then, I take the blame for a lot of things but not that, who were in the process of leaving when we got there. And they kind of floated around for several years. And actually some of them came to our church on Wednesday night, and I would have Bible study with them, but they wouldn't come back in on Sunday, because you know, they had their own little hang-ups about what problems were and all this. Church plant comes in and all those people are over at the new church. And there's not going to be any fellowship because they left Cornerstone. So Cornerstone is not what they want to have anything to do with. Now to your question, I think there's an approach that these guys are being given about what's necessary to do and at least in my understanding, and I'm sure its an imperfect understanding, it doesn't center on the fact that, hey guys, here's something that we all agree on. There's some solas that are attached to our faith back here. And that makes us brothers. That makes us [unintelligible] in the water. But the technique is so emphasized that I thought Presbyterianism was connectional. And what I've found in Rocky Mountain Presbytery here, you can ask Jim Urish about this, we talked about at length one day, there's not much of a connection. There's so many different things, and different directions that people go in, as far as fellowship, encouragement and solidarity and all those things, they just don't have them. And I don't think it's a coincidence that it is that way. I think there is a philosophy that is espoused that causes people to come into, you know, into a situation and there's, you know, there's certain things that they're looking for. And if you don't know those certain things... the guy up in Boulder now has cheese and wine parties. Well, some conservative Christians, who are not stick in the muds, but who have never drank, seems like kind of an extreme thing. And you would think, you know guys like moderate a little bit and say, "You know in reaching out, I still want to reach to my brothers, and I want to be aware of them as well." Kind of a Romans 14 thing, some where along the line. But it just seems more like if you disagree with you are really off base. And if I'm relating at all to your question, I think it goes back to some kind of philosophy that is being espoused. And all of our church planter guys here. Most of them came from the south. And are bankrolled by churches down in the south. And those guys down there I don't think they have to report once a month what is going on. It seems like Joseph Wheat was kind of like the bishop of the Rocky Mountain region. And if there was any direction that they looked for sanctions and approval, and it seemed like it was that. And there just wasn't the, it doesn't

seem to be the awareness of all the guys of going on around them. This is something that we all need to work on. And if the Reformers didn't hang together they hung separately and they didn't do a very good job of it did they? Look at all the diverse strands that came out of the Reformation. So what I try to figure out, what is really important enough to these guys that they're willing to stand there kind of like Athanasius, contra mundo, against the whole world. That weren't really throwing anything out, they're saying lets just be who we are.

DP
Interview Transcript

Date of Interview: 27 October 2007

Interviewee: Dr. DP,

[note- first part of recording cut off- DP pastors, attended Westminster Seminary and has completed doctoral work).

CF: How do you understand the term "postmodern?"

DP: Postmodernism is kind of a corporate irrationalism in the sense that the modernism, you know it is Descartes thinking that's starting with man we can build a foundation of the truth. And that's ultimately collapses. You have the rise ultimately of that anti-philosophy. You probably begin with Nietzsche. So I would say pretty much the whole modern philosophy apart from logical positivism, Voltaire and the like, has largely a despair over truth. And postmodernism is in its attempt, it's a critique of modernism, it's a critique showing how much of modernism is using theological terms, I would say it really critiques the idolatry of modernism. And it ends up itself of course, of not offering much, but in its general critique it is an excellent critique, man starting himself ends up with nothing. And most of what we correct, our idols, our power idols, and our control of our universe control, our country control, so that our people control, our lives to get what we want. And so in that sense postmodernism is, what is it... the incredulity of the metanarrative. John Prince Alleotard, his little shtick there, its postmodernism in saying there's no metanarrative. And modernism is saying there was a metanarrative but it's a metanarrative without God. And so I think as Christians we can go postmodernism is correct, there is no metanarrative without God. They're correct in that there is a metanarrative. We're not just isolated islands of ourselves.

CF: Do you think that not necessarily modernists but modern expressions of Christianity mostly here in the united States has essentially welded itself to modernism?

DP: I didn't get that last phrase.

CF: Do you think that American Christianity has welded itself to modernism and become almost indistinguishable?

DP: Welded itself. Yeah, I think in various ways. American Christianity is, I forget exactly who is that said it but, if there is any philosophy that America has given to the world its pragmatism. Which is just, I think, very postmodern. You know that's William James of course, is the great pragmatist and philosopher. Richard Roherty, would be the more contemporary expression of that, of pragmatism. So I think that's solely been largely intellectual, its not so much anti-intellectual as

much as do what it takes to do what you think needs to get done. And there's very little reflective thought on doing that. Therefore American Christianity, particularly I would say evangelicalism is pretty pragmatic. We're not stopping and saying what is the Scripture really say and teach. We're not looking at the larger metanarrative or how does it really suit a systematic view. It has certain goals that we want to meet and we'll do whatever it takes to get those. I would say for a large part of the 20th century evangelicalism has been pretty postmodern.

CF: Okay, how has your congregation if at all changed over the past years you have been preaching and has there been any cultural impact of postmodernism on your present congregation?

DP: Yeah, you know I would, it's a little difficult, I think I may have even written this in an email to you, I've had three congregations, and they... and I spent 8 years in Eugene, Oregon, which was very postmodern, back in the 80's where most of evangelicalism was pragmatic, still believed pragmatic. This was very atheistic and there truly was no metanarrative, there was very little, very few people that knew the big story. We would minister to the college students at the University of Oregon, and graduate students. It was always a surprise how little they actually knew of the basic Judeo-Christian heritage. So even the Bible they were ignorant of. And coming to Billings, Billings I would probably say is more modern than Eugene was. But as I've looked at it, its largely where it affects the people, its through those, you know you've probably done, familiar with sociology of knowledge stuff, if you want to know where people are, look at the little things on there, their cell phones. Their cell phones is a theology you might say of the life. And as our technologies have developed and increased over the past 30 years, you know I see the strains upon the culture as what we definitely have become more privatized. People don't even have to go to the movies anymore, you can do everything within the home. It really has this isolating effect, if I've seen anything, a greater isolation in many ways in the culture of the people. Even when they're getting bruised there is still a pretty superficial level that they're meeting. Of course this is what's wonderful that the church is just the answer for that. God has made us to be social beings. If the church can work on having good relations, and deep relations, and real caring, that's very winsome. And surely it makes preaching more poignant to say the least, you can act out your preaching.

CF: So do you think that the shift is due to a loss of a sense of community caused by acquiescing to culture or do you think it's the church's inability to incarnate the gospel to the culture?

DP: Yeah, well I'd say its probably both. As we grow isolated from one another my need of my neighbor grows a lot less. I don't have to interact with my neighbor. I don't have to interact with my colleagues at work. That takes it at a very superficial level. And so I think that's in one sense the culture promotes this

isolation, and as we become isolation and self sufficient in our isolation we are not reaching out as much.

CF: Okay. How would you understand the term "Reformed?"

DP: You know that its, I'd say that Reformed is a powerful work that God does the life of his people through the gospel, the life-changing, so the powerful life changing work that God does in the life of his people. And touching all aspects of the human life. So the individual he reforms my mind, and emotions, and will, and actions. He reforms our relationships as we more and more understand ourselves as the family of God, the body of Christ. He reforms our understanding of the world as we seek to be salt and light in the culture.

CF: So what do you believe biblical preaching is and how do you do it?

DP: Yeah, biblical preaching first of all is saying that there is a message from God and he has ordained the means of getting this reform, this life-changing message through his Son, Jesus Christ. He's ordained the church, he's ordained the day, the Lord's Day, particularly, he's ordained that particular means of preaching and teaching. Its biblical in the sense that its from the Bible. And so the aim of the preacher is again, probably think more as a pastor than a preacher, and what I mean by that is that it's got to be a 360 kind of teaching. We need to teach people what the Bible says. We need to teach that grand metanarrative . And if its anything that's probably again, when I was in Eugene, I kind of learned that early on, I couldn't assume people knew if I made an allusion to the Old Testament they would not know that. So just trying to through the Sunday School, teaching great swaths of biblical narrative, and story. And preaching, I preach in terms of methods, I preach through books, I also do topical studies. Hopefully everything is expositional, but I do preach through a book. I'm very well aware of taking larger swaths of portions of Scripture. So instead of preaching a sentence I'll preach a paragraph or two. Sometimes its even a lot more than maybe, I would just say I just finished preaching from Mark and some sermons took three, or four, or five, even, I think that was the largest pericope in the gospel. So getting the flow of the story. I preach topically always trying to right now preaching a series on peacemaking in our church. And that touches in on the whole issue of isolation, the whole issue of relationships, how do we have strong relationships. But even then I started off with a sermon on the grand metanarrative is really and literally a, from creation in Genesis to Revelation with my text, I focused a bit on Genesis 3, talking about peacemaking in terms of the, and typically for most of my times at preaching, I try to have an apologetic aspect to it. That is, a critique of the culture, the bankruptcy of the culture. So I talked about the kind of the big bang view of things, beginning with an impersonal world, versus a personal God. Beginning with order versus chaos, I just went through creation and fall, redemption and then consummation. How much more do you want?

CF: Well, I want to build on one of your statements that postmodernism does reject an over arching metanarrative so how do you deal with that in terms of your preaching. I think you kind of answered that just now, but is there any more specific on there...?

DP: I think, you know, I'm always surprised how God uses his word and truth through such a rusty vessel. A while back I preached through Isaiah and one would think that's going to kill the congregation. Or your people will like it, and it was a season of probably our greatest evangelism. We had some of our guys basically going to the local café's or local bars, shooting pool and having relationships with people there largely college students or in their twenties. And people that were very ignorant of the gospel, they're ignorant of the Christian faith. One guy in particular, probably the most dramatic conversion, a guy who's mother had six husbands. He has his masters in feminism. He is a superb writer. And there's about six of these twenty-somethings coming to church. And there I am preaching, they came in the middle of preaching Isaiah. And over a period of over, about, two years I think I preached that. And they said it was, when they got converted, I said that must have been strange coming to our church, and here you are in the eighth century B.C. And again, I was trying to preach it as crossing those horizons. But they said it was the sense of transcendence, which of course is why I love Isaiah, I think that's why we all do, and they said, in a world where postmodern world as well as the modern world, it's a very immanent-tistic world. And there is no grand metanarrative, there is no something greater than we are, and its more than just an immanence, but it is really a transcendent greatness. And through preaching, and of course as I said, Isaiah I think you might say would be a good postmodern preacher, he's dealing with all the idolatries. He mocks the idols. He shows how ignorant they are. And I sought to do that in my own way, how just bankrupt our culture was and how this great and grand, and glorious, and of course the contrast is here are these people who are supposed to have faith, and still Christ is 700 years out. How much more should we esteem Christ. I'd say we can look back to what Christ's coming, his life, death, resurrection and ascension. So you know that... I forgot your question.

CF: Really dealing with the issue of metanarratives.

DP: Yeah, yeah. So that was it. Here's this God that is the same in history, and he is transcendent and he is immanent. Its not that he is transcendent, but he is the God of the fiery bush who is right next to you and you know he is other than you. And that's what... I had that preaching in Mark. Who is this Jesus who was just right... rubbing shoulders with us, and he healed people, stilling the storm on the sea of Galilee, raising the dead. Its shocking stuff. And yet it is very attractive.

CF: What do you think the role of the preacher is in biblical preaching?

DP: Are you thinking in terms of edification, evangelism, the goals...?

CF: It could include that, just the role, the office if there is any, that sort of thing?

DP: I think its, I see it as the chief means that God has given to us for any of us to come into the kingdom. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. How will they call upon name of God, as you know those scriptures; Romans 10. Many years ago when I was in Eugene, Jack Miller said something very, very important to me. We had him out and he was talking to our elders. And at that time, it was like 1986, at that time the question in Reformed churches were, do we preach evangelistically or do we preach to edify? Do we preach to the unbeliever, or do we preach to the believer. And very wisely he said we preach to the unbelief in everybody's heart. And that just, that was, yeah, that was exactly, that's what I... he articulated what I thought I was doing, and articulate more clearly to keep me, to keep my feet to the fire, to keep preaching like that. Not to make assumptions of your people. That you shouldn't make just because they're coming to church regularly and they can talk a good a deal theologically. There's unbelief in all of our hearts. And that unbelief is only rooted out by really bringing them face to face with God as he has revealed himself in his Son, Jesus Christ. So I would say it has had a strong... my own background was in religions. Religious studies. So I've always had a sense as I sit, painting the metanarrative in terms of the culture, particularly in terms in the more global culture, the other religions. We had Sikh's in Eugene. Billings is a lot more homogeneous. But (we) still continue that way just because we do a lot of work in missions. And I find my own people ultimately, you know, for example, I did some stuff on Islam. I said the fact of the matter is that Americans are more like Muslims, than they are like Christians. And that really shocked our people. It woke them up. And American civil religion is really just another way about Islam. And it made the gospel all the more distinctive. So

CF: So what do you think the role of the Holy Spirit is in the act of preaching?

DP: Yeah well if he doesn't show up... you might as well stay at home on Sunday. One of the things we do, my elders, we get together every Tuesday morning. We pray for our people and we pray for our upcoming service. And the two are intimately connected. We pray for the life of our congregation. Just from my own gifting and my wife is like my chief musician. As I said at the beginning Sunday is such an appointed means. The thing I keep telling my people is that if God were to come to Billings and say I would like to meet you at City Grill, or at Starbucks, at 9 a.m. on Tuesday, would you be there? And most of us would raise our hands and say of course we would. And I said, well God has actually said that. He's said its on Sunday. And he's going to meet us and that's his promise. And we need to pray that our hearts may be open to that. That's the work of the Holy Spirit. So you know we pray for the Holy Spirit to open our hearts, to illuminate our minds, to draw us from darkness into the light, to put within us a greater burning, love for Christ and to expel the sin from us, our ungodly affections.

CF: So what is the role in your opinion of the congregation in the act of preaching?

DP: You know we, as I said, we pray for our people. You know I try to on an individual sermon, people will say, "Thank you so much for the sermon." I typically will say like, "You know, while I love preaching here at Billings, you're desirous of God's word. And the more you desire God's word, he'll give you more." So it is a real active listening, as our catechism should say. I tell people [they] are to prepare themselves to attend to God's word. We, you know, use several helps. Oh, maybe 12 years ago I started using notes for our people. And to help them to just follow the outline. You might say some of that effect might be because we are becoming more sound-byte people, just because again our culture affects us in very subtle ways. People don't read as many books as they used to. Or don't read books at all. Instead of giving in to that I still preach around, a long message comparatively, 40 or 45 minutes. I've done 50 minute sermons. Hopefully those are rarer than the 40 minute sermon. But I don't want to preach a shorter sermon. And I've found that people's own attention is, if it is a good sermon if its short. And if it's a lousy sermon its long. And its not so much the actual time, but it is the perceived sense of time. Originally God's been gracious to me, I've had good sermons. Our people don't labor. And I'm saying these are not only our people but we're always checking with the new believers or the unbelievers; that's the people we invite. And sometimes they're surprised at the length of the service. We go about an hour and a half, hour and 40 minute service. And if they've, if they're expecting something like the university, an hour and 50 minutes, they're coming out of the university or they're coming out of the seminars that you typically go to, or if they have any kind of religious background, its an hour service. So they're just surprised, I get into the pulpit at about an hour. But we keep finding that our people are saying, "Yeah, I can understand." And that's just really God's goodness, "I can understand the message." They might not understand it spiritually, until the Holy Spirit opens their eyes. I try not to use technical language. Typically I open my sermons with a contemporary illustration. This Sunday is Reformation Sunday. Last Sunday in this peacemaking I'm dealing just with the confession of sin. And September 21st, 2007, Wall Street Journal headlines "confession of sin is making a comeback." So you know in an illustration like that they'll hear Wall Street Journal, they'll hear time magazine, they'll hear something on the news and maybe this is, if I was in Europe it would be different. But in the U.S. I've never found a lack of illustrations. That religion has a presence of some sort in our culture as modern or postmodern as we can be we are so religious. And so just having an illustration like that.

CF: Do you think that change in from really modernism to postmodernism is, are we really dealing with a sense of objective truth or is it, do you think it is a change in the understanding of what truth is?

DP: Yeah that's a great question. And again those are, that's, you're putting it in a way that most people wouldn't put it. People don't just talk about objective

truth, they may talk about truth, what is truth? I think again, for a long time, again, pragmatism says look at your experience, from your experience. Kind of go with what you think is true. *I would say it probably is that latter one where you say it is not so much people are thinking there's objective truth. Its their sense of truth, what's right for me is what we're dealing with. And that's a great issue. It shows you that I don't want to have to think too, too hard about modernism and postmodernism. I've read up on the philosophers but the fact of the matter is that is what Adam and Eve did. They ultimately chose their own experience of the forbidden fruit over against God's word. That's always a problem. Israel did that. And I think in many ways the medieval church did that and we do that today. And its, so the role of the pastor, the role of the preacher is speaking in such a way that we emphasize, if I emphasize objective truth its probably, I don't frame it that way when I preach, when I read God's word, I'll say "this is the word of the living God." "So ends the word of the living God." And something, again, that I say very frequently in my pulpit ministry, I'll just extol the fact that God speaks. Francis Schaeffer said, "He is there and he is not silent." I've always loved that. He is there and he is not silent. And I'll make mockery of those who say, you know, he is silent.

CF: So, going back to some of the values that people who or either inadvertently or purposely have been enculturated into postmodernism, they value their experience and reject any sense of objective truth as kind of a form of violence. And then I think perhaps maybe he or she might come into a church and say, "Oh, why is that guy up there and why is his opinion so important. You know I've got my own opinions and I think they're equally valid." How do you deal with that as preacher?

DP: That's great. If the preacher is preaching, if we're preaching rightly and that, and by preaching I mean the whole demeanor of the preacher. Two guys can probably preach the exact same words. And one comes across arrogant, one comes across as a know-it-all, one comes across condescending to the stupid people who don't know what this word means, then it will look like it really is. It is a Decartian objective truth- its this guys opinion. He thinks he is Moses on Sinai. And rightfully I would challenge that even if he were speaking the truth. I'd say go elsewhere. The same message can be preached in a manner as that the preacher is a recipient of God's word and hopefully a faithful messenger of it. And I am as amazed as they are when we hear what Jesus says, when we hear what Isaiah says, when we hear ultimately what God says in his word. So you know, I'll say things like, "Isn't that amazing what God has just said?" I mean there's James that says, "What causes quarrels and fights among you?" Isn't it wonderful that God knows where we are and he speaks, exactly, directly and concretely into our lives. So if you preach it that way versus you know, "The Bible says what month does, what causes fights and quarrels among you, let *me* tell you people. This is what, you know, and you preach it kind of arrogantly, I think you are actually communicating against scripture. So we are, we're to be vessels. So I will myself, how that affects my own preaching, is I know that

contrary to some of the great Reformed preachers who think that it is not wise to be, to bring personal illustrations into the sermon, I think its very important to bring personal illustrations, not that you're preaching your illustration. But that your illustration should be just that, an illustration. And particularly an illustration of one being gripped by grace, by the gospel. And often what that looks like is how I've erred, how I've sinned. Or the doubts I've had. And how the gospel then opens our eyes, clears our doubts, strengthens our faith, comforts our sorrows. And in a sense what I am doing is saying it is something objective. It's not just Alfred spouting off his own ideas. Alfred is himself a recipient of God's word.

CF: One of the things that the writers, or guys who are advocating a more postmodern approach, they say that the modern church has mistaken, in fact this was David Miller, who wrote in his book, *Searching for God knows what*, he says, the Bible has been mistaken for informational, when it is really relational. And so they really balk any idea of propositionalism.

DP: Right. I think that's just foolish. I don't know of any human relation that's not an exchange at some level of lots of information. I mean you're doing that. I mean get a bunch of 20 somethings together, with all their ipods at Starbucks, and I'll tell you they're exchanging lots of information. They're relating. They like to hang together. In fact they're not silent- they're talking. And they're talking about things, propositions that you can write down. Look at my new Ipod. Look at the new song by naked bare women. So I guess I have always found those sorts, a false dilemma, whether to be relational or propositional. I think what maybe they're getting at is, I mean I think the critique, or even that false dilemma rises out of seeing something that is true. You can preach a message that is dry, lots of information, doesn't touch people where they are. But they really don't speak to the unbelief in their heart. Is interesting, sounds like a very an enlightening lecture that you get at the university. I think whenever we are preaching that way, we are surely we need to ask is this what preaching is? Preaching is speaking God's word to people that they may come to faith in relationship to him. They need to know a lot about him. So we do need information. But its more like a marriage, a husband speaking to his wife, wooing her, pleading with her, loving her, encouraging her.

CF: So do you think in this shift that the church itself has been the problem with structures not conducive to ministry or mission, or is the church failing to be the church?

DP: Yeah, in terms of preaching, when I have had opportunity among other pastors, I think there is a demise of preaching. Often under the guise of we want to reach out to people. And some of it is, one its not just seeing it's a means that God has given, believing the lies. There's been how much in communication theory that, you know, dialog increases one's comprehension more than monolog. That if you can hit all five senses and have a very sensory communication it tends, its going to be more meaningful and long lasting than the

“monolog.” So the sermon is looked upon as just that, as a dry monolog, talking, talking head. And so you’re seeing the shorter sermons, you’re seeing guys that will go overboard on personal illustrations where they’re just, its not personal illustrations, they’re just talking about their life. They’re not illustrating anything. Or they’re illustrating rather vapid notions. And we see a lot of that. Pastors, I just don’t run into a lot of pastors that have a high view of preaching in the context of the body of Christ. They’ll talk a lot about trying to have body life, but they don’t connect it to their preaching. And preaching and teaching and seeing the word of God really as the center of the body life, shaping our views of ourselves and of God.

CF: So you would probably just disagree with Rick Warren when he says, and I’m not making this up, he says, “I believe in confessional preaching. I believe in confessing about what happened to me this week.” And essentially he goes on to say that his sermons are essentially this is what Rick Warren did, this is what Rick Warren said, you probably wouldn’t be right up there with that. I say fascisty.

DP: No. On the other hand I have over the thirty years, I’ve had people really clue into when I shared my own struggles, I’ve had guys, go, you know, wow, I didn’t know you struggled with that. Or I didn’t know that you despaired at times, you got depressed, I didn’t know that you had a fight with your wives...wife (Mormon country here). So I didn’t pastor that, I thought you know the whole Bible, and you said this passage you really don’t understand.

CF: You’re really talking about the difference between source material and which is the Bible and illustrative material which is supportive.

DP: Exactly. That’s a great way to put it.

CF: Do you think, you know, so, let’s talk a little bit about that part of it. I noticed as I have been doing these studies, and of course you mentioned you talk about drama, you talk about in some places, dance. And one church back East is doing a thing, or did a thing called the “blockbuster video” rather, and it was the gospel according to movies. Their argument is, “Well this is what people get in their daily life. And if the church doesn’t address this we’re going to be left out in the cold.”

DP: Yeah, you know, I can, actually I’ve seen that done that really well. Bryan Clark up in Bozeman will often use movies. He doesn’t preach the movie. Again, he uses that as the illustration supporting. That’s been very helpful. I’ll do that at a very minimal level, Lord of the Rings type of thing. But I think that the duty, I think its also a capitulation of the preacher because he opens the Bible and he finds a foreign world and he doesn’t know how to preach it. He doesn’t know really how, he doesn’t see it as the living word of God, and he hasn’t been equipped. And he hasn’t just done the hard work. Good preaching comes from a lot of failure. And I can attest to my failures. But I’ve tried to preach. How do I

preach Joshua? And my people here and now, what's the bridge? So I think, that's for me, those are capitulations, where pastors ultimately say, "I've run out of sermons, there's not a whole lot, the more I look at scripture the less I see relevant to where people are." And I think that they are just being lazy at that point. Lazy or unequipped or both. Its hard work. There is an equipping. But the fact is if Christ is there, this is again where the good redemptive, biblical historical preaching, and I mean that in a very, very broad sense, really getting us to see Christ in it all, to see the issues of scripture as Paul says, they're for examples for us. They're not archaic. Human nature has not changed all that much. It hasn't changed. The same issues that an Iron age man faces is the same issues that 21st century man faces. And if you can do the work, here's a little example. I did a series a while back on Genesis, it was quite a while back on Genesis. And it was on the Abraham narrative. And what I did is found a way to open with a wonderful complaint that a student from Ur of 2500 B.C. writes down, that we have on a cuneiform. And he's writing down, and he says, "Oh, man, I go to school," and I started this series in the fall, of September, where all the kids were going back to school. And I read it and I edited it a bit so that any archaisms would be removed. But the fact is that I didn't have to do a whole lot to change it. And granted that means I'm having to read the history of Sumer, history of Ur, I'm reading background material in preparation for Abraham. But I wanted to get a sense of what was Abraham's culture like? You start realizing, at least in the last two cities I've been in, they've been about a 100,000, about 180,000. Ur, surrounding area of Ur some put at as 200,000. So I'm saying here's a city of 100,000, he's complaining how much he has to work, how little time off he's had, its just the weekends. And you know and its back to school again. And you know, I read it, and all the parents are laughing, and the kids are smiling because they're going, yeah we know it exactly. I said, where would you place that? Where do you think I got that? And when I told them it was from 2500 B.C., it was 4500 years ago, a young boy who's learning to be a scribe in UR, the town Abraham's growing up in, a town of 200,000, their eyes were just like riveted. And then there's a couple and they have no children. And you know your people well there are people, if they had children, they've at least had miscarriages, and they feel for this couple. And it's a pagan couple; they're unbelievers, your nice next door neighbors to you, Abraham and Sarah. But they have no children. You wonder what's wrong. And then God does something amazing to them. So its again furnishing those gaps but it takes, it really does take time. So what it looks like for me, my day off which is Monday, I'm doing a lot of reading and prepping. So its hard work, but its sure is enjoyable. Its enjoyable for me.

CF: So do you think then other than the idea that you said, they either don't want to work hard, or they've run out ideas, do you think that they're...

DP: Or they haven't been equipped. IF you try to preach, if they're being taught how to preach moralistically... what were the seven habits of a successful warrior, its going to fall flat. It just doesn't carry. That's just not how the Bible is written. So you're always, in a sense, at cross purposes with scripture itself. But if

you preach scripture as God intended it to be preached, if we have a concept of human nature and of God, how there really is unchanging, so the guys who have not gone to good seminaries, particularly Reformed seminaries, typically give you a redemptive historical approach, seeing all things in the light of the New Testament, seeing all things in the light of Christ, and laboring hard there, its no wonder that my fellow pastors run out of ideas.

CF: What would you think would be the difference between a "Reformed sermon," and let's say a general evangelical type of sermon? Would it be the difference between covenant redemptive metanarrative and moralism?

DP: Yeah, I think that's one. But when I get to go to another service in town, I go to two churches in town. One is the guy, who is very good at just talking about largely what is going on in his life and Jesus. And he gives the very structured, it's the largest church in town, its about 6000 members. So he's definitely connecting to a lot of people. I go mostly not so much for the edification but just to see what is attracting people to this church? And I have my own theories. But it is largely moralistic, it is largely pretty general. You know, keep trusting Jesus. And in that sense that's good. But he doesn't get a lot into who Jesus is. Again, he will say he's the Son of God, but he doesn't get deeper. And he definitely attracts people. So, yeah I would say its kind of a Christian moralism, its is what's going on.

CF: So do you think in some of the churches that struggle with postmodernism is it, in the church when they deal with this, is it a loss of community and roots acquiescing to the culture, or is it an inability to incarnate the gospel in culture? In other words, have we drawn into our own holy huddle and ignored the culture, then that's really our problem?

DP: Yeah, yeah, that would be one way of putting it. Again, I've been here for 15 years and I'm trying to think of other churches. In Billings I don't find asking those kind of questions. Most of the questions you're asking me, I don't find them. I been in a number of pastors studies and they're not studies. They have maybe two shelves of books and they're largely programmatic books; i.e., how to run a church and what not. They'll have a few devotional works. So very few people are actually wrestling with postmodernism, wrestling with how is our culture changing. And those sorts of things. Those that do seem that the culture is changing pretty much then try to be good at what the culture does well. So another church that started up just maybe four years ago, went to 1200 people, about 2000 now, they utilize their website, they put videos up on their web site. They use videos in their sermons. He does preach a sermon. He's a Dallas grad. They're very involved in the community. In terms of right now they're trying to fund and get funding for a community pool. So in that sense one would say they're very successful. But when I've gone, when I've had people go there the kind of pastoral care that you would think would be done is not done. I've had people on their own tell me, "Yeah, I tried that but its like, wow, they're just too,

they're trying to be really so with it." They're trying to do the things of the world sometimes they're pretty good. But the fact is that the world is always going to beat us; they've got better movies, they've got better music. So...

EF
Interview Transcript

Date of Interview: Tuesday, November 06, 2007
Interviewee: EF, Colorado.

CF: Tell me how long you have pastored and preached?

EF: Well, 20... 20 years as a senior pastor.

CF: Tell me about all the places where you have pastored and preached.

EF: I was ordained Boca Raton, Florida, Ice River Presbyterian church, there with David Necklace as the senior pastor. And I was there 7 years on the staff. So my preaching experience there was on Sunday evening and I would say maybe a half a dozen times a year on Sunday mornings, something like that. I came here in 87, started our worship services December of 87, so I've been preaching on Sundays ever since.

CF: Okay, so where and when did you attend seminary?

EF: I went to Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia. Let's see, when did I ... I was there in I believe it was in 1988 we went to Boca. I was still doing that last year. I guess it was still from 76, no 77, from 77 to 80, 1980, we were in Philly. And working on an M.Div and also working full time. And then I finished however in 80, I finished by extension in 81, I think. It was 1980, 81. I don't remember, sorry. That was through their Florida theological extension program they had at that time. That was an early attempt at a campus somewhere else.

CF: So how old are you now?

EF: Fifty three.

CF: And you've had some post-graduate work, you've got your D.Min don't you?

EF: No I don't.

CF: No?

EF: Wish I did but I don't.

CF: Well I can let you have this one. Take over for me. Just finish the research.

EF: Where are you doing this by the way?

CF: Covenant.

EF: So let's jump in. How do you understand the term postmodern?

EF: That was something that I was going to ask you. Because it is a very squirrely term, that seems to, even authors I've read seem to use the term either by art or in literature or architecture or they whip over into the area of philosophy. And then you've got Christian authors or guys who would call themselves Christians, calling themselves postmoderns. So you know it's a response to modernism. It's a response to the intellectual, what I think its perceived as, the overemphasis of the intellect, the tight systems of thought, analytical thought, analytical philosophy. It's a negative response to that. Which honestly to the best of my ability to understand it I think takes us to relativism. So while no postmodernist that I know of would want to say, and certainly no Christian would want to say they're a relativist, and the result is in their theologizing they almost become that. Open theism things of that nature. There's maybe spin-offs of this type of thinking. So my definition of postmodernism, I can't give you... all that stuff I just said somehow relates to postmodernism I think.

CF: So how would you in contrast understand the term modernist or modernism?

EF: Modernism is I guess what comes more out of, again, if we're talking philosophy, if we're talking theology, or what have you, faith and communities of faith during modernism, what we wanted to, and during the Enlightenment, we wanted to articulate as clearly and carefully, this is what we believe, this is what we think the Bible says. And we would codify it. Here it is. Let's be confessional if you will. And a response, or a postmodern response to that is, you know, to really call into question whether you're capable of doing that. It's a celebration of mystery and what we don't know, almost more than what we do it seems to me sometimes. And what was your question again?

CF: Yeah, how do you understand the term modernist or modernism?

EF: Yeah, just that through analysis and careful study, you know, we can, there are things we can know. And modernism has expressed itself, and the scientific movement and the use of the scientific method believe that apparently we can know certain things. And postmodernism is definitely a calling into question some of those assumptions I think.

CF: So let me ask you, how would you understand the term Reformed?

EF: Well, it describes those individuals who sought to Reform the church. And the 16th century and even earlier, trying to bring about a more biblical understanding of the Christian life and practice and history itself, the priesthood of believers, the role of scripture. So, it was an attempt, it was a movement to Reform the church and bring it back to its biblical roots.

CF: So let me ask you, what do you believe biblical preaching is and how do you do it?

EF: Okay. Well, biblical preaching you know is rooted and grounded in the scriptures. It is a retelling of the truth. Its an attempt to retell the truth of what scriptures teach; the stories that it tells. And so its, you know, its not something where you try to become creative with the Bible, and seek to entertain with it. You know its just a retelling of the story, the narratives, the history, the didactic passages, what is it teach, it's a retelling of those things. And trying to be very careful accurate about what the Bible says. And then you carry that forward perhaps the whole thing. You know you've got what it meant back then, and you've got to make the cross over or cross the bridge to what does it mean today, in terms of the modern world. So biblical preaching is endeavoring to being very faithful to what the scriptures say.

CF: So that kind of leads to kind of what is the role of the preacher?

EF: Yeah, you know I resonate with Craddock in that he talks about the idea that the preacher does have a prophetic role, and that prophetic role is preaching the truth, its delivering the truth of the word of God. Certainly there is the interpretive process which is always the tricky part, but it's the role of the preacher is to say what God says. And where it starts to get tricky is in the application: here's what I think God says and here's what I think it means for us today. But, so that's the I think role of the preacher, to call people to faith, to repentance, to lift up Christ, because none of that is going to happen except through him. To set Christ before the people.

CF: What would be the difference between, if there is any, between a sermon that I would hear at your church, knowing that its affiliated with the PCA, versus a general evangelical-type of sermon, if there is a difference?

EF: Theologically there would be differences at times. You know, we, obviously, give our views of the atonement because of our, even in our, sanctification through the word and through the Spirit. I think that some times is different in a Reformed setting than it is in a broadly evangelical church. I've heard sermons in the broad evangelical context that are to the best of my ability that sound like do this, get that. And that's my way of thinking. A Reformed understanding of, you know, the application of the gospel in a person's life. So how else would it be different? I would say most of the time I'm fairly exegetical in my preaching style, but not all the time.

CF: What other styles do you have other than an exegetical or expositional type preaching?

EF: Well, I will preach topically. And when I do that I will also try to think in terms, you know, what are the key passages addressing the issues. So it is still textual. But it is not an exegetical study through a book. Its really based on topic or series of topic(s) that I perceive as being related, and therefore we're going to study what the scriptures have to say about the topics. So that's a little different than a purely book-style trip through the text.

CF: But you're still doing the exegesis on the passages that are you are preaching in a topical aren't you?

EF: I am, yeah.

CF: Yeah.

EF: You know, I will depending again on where we're studying and even how I am having to perceive how relevant it is, I make decisions about how much I share in terms of original languages, or textual issues, versus, the narrative itself, if it happens to be a narrative passage. So.

CF: What, we'll probably come back to that in just a minute, but what is the role of the Holy Spirit in your preaching?

EF: Well, I on a variety of levels, on a personal level the role of the Holy Spirit, what I have to say, or what I might be learning based on my studies of a book, or if it's a topic or what have you, it entirely depends on what is going on with Him, if it be giving me an understanding of it, Him giving me illumination of it, giving me application of it in my own life, so a lot of times the passion, the understanding, the interaction that I've had with a passage, all of that is of course, the ministry of the Holy Spirit in my life. I will find that that frequently determines how engaged am I with this. And if I'm being deeply engaged because of what the Spirit is doing in my life and applying this to be giving the understanding of it that, generally speaking, improves my preaching. Because I'm talking about something that is happening in me. I'm clear, I'm very clear probably every preacher the longer they do it the more clearer they get. It doesn't matter what kind of message you put together so to speak. The Spirit sometimes use what you've prepared or thought about or maybe even not had enough time to prepare or think about, he'll use that in ways that you would have never predicted, or thought he would. And at other times you can be incredibly prepared and studied, and think that you've put together just a wonderful message on a given topic or text, and I don't know, you know, the sense is that was good information, thanks and so on. So I guess the Holy Spirit takes the preaching of his word and applies it in ways to his people out there in ways that I certainly can't predict. In ways often times, maybe most of the times, I don't even know, but trust he's doing that. And whatever he does with it is the only thing that matters.

CF: I was going to ask you so what is the role of the congregation in preaching?

EF: Recipients, making themselves up to think, to hear what the word of God has to say, to let the Spirit give them understanding or illumination, frequently say to people here this is what I have been led to believe this says. Now what your job is to consider whether I've been given light and understanding on this or not. And you know the Spirit does that as they read and study and think. So they should be as engaged in a sense as the preacher is. Asking the Spirit to teach them.

CF: So how has your congregation, if at all, changed over the past years that you've been preaching and what cultural impact may you have noticed on your congregation, has there been any significant changes?

EF: I think our church over the years has certainly understood the importance of loving on each other, of being a community, not just because that feels warm and fuzzy. Actually a lot of times it is anything but warm and fuzzy. But because the scriptures teach us and tell us to be that. That also has translated into a growing desire here at among the people to engage with and interact with their community, to serve it, and in the process trying to get clearer what that looks like, here in Littleton and Denver. And be servants of our community trying to add value their in the name of Christ. So its cultural in impact and having impact along those lines, that's come out of things that we've studied together, and texts we've studied.

CF: So going back to the role of the preacher one of the things in postmodernism is that has been written about as a value is that my experience, or a person's experience is truth, for me. And so when somebody comes in and see you preaching, and if they were to say or to think, "Well why is that guy up there? My opinion is just as good as his?" How would you deal with that?

EF: I agree with your statement that that is, very much a part of a postmodern mindset, but I'm not sure that is radically different than any mindset in any era. That's one of my own responses to the thing called postmodernism. Its like there is nothing new under the sun. Gimme a break. You know, everybody in every era in every church always has people come into it that make that assumption. So why does what you have to say, why does it have any more authority than what I might feel or say? And the answer, you know, to that is it is not going to have any authority toward you or in you unless the Holy Spirit is at work. And so listen to the message and interact with it and engage with it. I'll walk with you on it, and listen to the preaching, and the answer is you'll know it when it is that you'll know it. You'll get it when it is you get it. It will be the Holy Spirit making this clear to you. I'm convinced that, I'm absolutely convinced that the Spirit does exactly that, and those hardened postmodern or whatever, kind of individual living in any age can be converted because of what the Spirit does with the word that he's inspired.

CF: SO what you're really saying its not something that is particularly germane to a movement that has been labeled as postmodern?

EF: I don't think so, I really don't. Postmodernism is an extreme form of self-centeredness. And there's not been an age when there hasn't been, philosophical, or cultural, or artistic expression of self-centeredness, its just you know. No I don't think so. I really don't think it is anything new under the sun. But I don't you're radically changes the way you preach. You know, what it does mean is that if you're going to use media in any of your preaching, or in other words, if you want to illustrate something by virtue of a film that's got wide popularity and viewing and what have you, a lot of times its expressing a very self-centered or there you know, truth, whatever. But the irony of it is that I find in a lot of media today all of the same issues, longings, brokenness, they're all still there, they've always been there. So the postmodernist hasn't found any answer to any of the dilemmas of people, and you and I know, it's the gospel, its Jesus Christ, it's the truth of God's word that does.

CF: So you know I was reading one of David Millers books called *Searching For God Knows What*, and in it he says that, he doesn't say the word modernist, but that's what he's talking about, he says they've mistaken the Bible for informational, but it really is relational. What do you think of something like that?

EF: Well, something I appreciate that has come out of a lot of the postmodern dialog is the emphasis on narrative and story. WE have our story. The Bible of course, its God's story and our interaction and so, yeah, there's a little bit of truth in that, that's important for us to hear, but I don't, the Bible is God's inspired word that the Holy Spirit uses as he will to teach us truth, to connect, to change our heart, to regenerate us and so on. He does with good preaching and bad preaching, good teaching and bad teaching, he does it just however he wants to do it.

CF: What would you consider bad preaching?

EF: That's a good question. Probably something that's Bible-light, that's really not engaging with the scriptures might be extremely entertaining, might be oratorically phenomenal. But if its real Bible-light, if its not really engaging with the narratives that are there, with the teaching that is there, and so on, that's not going to be good preaching. You know.

CF: One of the things of those who are writing in postmodern venues are saying that they absolutely reject propositionalism. That we really can't know anything with certitude, well not certitude, we can know truth absolutely, and so I'm curious what you think about, do you think that this is a loss of truth in the culture or is it a loss of the understanding, or a change in the understanding, rather of what truth is?

EF: You know, I guess what I want to believe it is on the part of some of these guys, you know there, once again there's something there that I actually appreciate and that's a sense of wanting to be humble in the conveying of the message about Jesus to our culture, you know. What's McLaren's series called? I read two of three and I can't remember right now.

CF: One of them is the *Incredible Christian*.

EF: And you know the guy shares his faith and he is very willing to admit, I don't have all the answers. You know, what about this, think about this, he'll share some little piece of the gospel, sometimes in a winsome sort of way. And I guess the lesson for me in that is to realize that when I talk to people the less insistent that they get exactly what I'm talking and that they bow the need to it immediately, probably the more opportunity I'm going to have in dialoging with them. But you can't throw the baby out with the bath water and that's what they've done. They've given up any sense of saying that there's no certitude, there can't be any absolute truth. That's nonsense. If that's true then we're really in that wash of relativism that puts us in the same boat with everyone else. You know Jesus came to save us from that. He came to save us from relativism. He came to speak the truth to us about ourselves and about our world. And man if I can't lock on to that and go, "This is objective, certitude, its absolute truth." If its not that then I really don't have anything else to offer anybody else. It's just my opinion versus their opinion and so on. But I give them credit that they've had dialog with some and in certain areas largely because of what it is. Maybe it is just a perceived, you know, if you are giving up, if you are throwing the baby out with the bath water you've got nothing to offer them, as I said but sometimes we err on the side, "Here's the truth, its very simple, and its very logical, and if you think it through you'll get it." And that's humanly speaking. But I mean, and we probably shut doors of opportunity in conversation like that. And they seem to sometimes be responding to the dogmatism that comes out of some evangelical circles and probably out of our own. I don't know if that really answers your question Chris.

CF: Yeah, so going back to what you were talking about with bad preaching, a lot of the guys I've interviewed have said, and they almost seem to universally in agreement, that there's a tremendous of moralism going on in PCA sermons that they have heard. How would you understand moralism in preaching and what is it, how do you avoid it?

EF: First of all I'm not sure I agree with that there's a lot of moralism in PCA churches, I probably don't agree with that statement. I think a lot of PCA churches there's a love and appreciation for truth and we can't just get caught up in loving truth, and not necessarily loving Jesus. How's that for a dichotomy?

CF: I hear what you're saying, one of the guys said when he arrived at his

church to be the senior pastor, people were showing up on Wednesday nights they were showing up with the book of church order under their arm.

EF: For what purpose?

CF: Because they elevated it, the Book of Church order, more than they were elevating the scriptures.

EF: I mean, that you know, that was whoever's experience, but that has not been my experience. You know, I'm not born and bred in the PCA. My first experience with the PCA was with Spanish River church in Boca Raton, Florida, which is in the left quadrant, you know its contemporary style of ministry, worship styles, and so on. I mean, you know, its not probably typical of southeastern part of the United States. And maybe what the roots of our denomination are. I've never experienced that. I don't experience that in our own presbytery. Does anyone show up with the book of church order and be confused about its authority versus the Bible? I've not experienced that. Maybe somewhere in the south and the east, somebody is having that experience, man. I can't speak to that, I've just never seen that. Moralism, I suppose there's not a preacher among us, I don't think, is there, hasn't at some point just said don't do that. The Bible says don't do that. Is that a sin to say what the Bible says, I don't think so. You do have to go back to the gospel, we do have to remind ourselves even in the context of preaching, "I fail at this." Whatever it is I'm not supposed to do I fail at it. I get it wrong, if its not committing adultery. Have I lusted? Well, yes I have. And I need Jesus to save me from that. So we've got to rehearse that over and over and over. When can you ever rehearse that too much? But to say its just as biblical to preach the fact that thou shalt not commit adultery. That's biblical. So I wouldn't call that moralistic. I suppose that to use every teaching, preaching opportunity to say to stop doing this, don't do that, you know. Read your Bible more. If it just ever got around to hey we fail at this don't we? Boy, we just need the Lord God, we need Jesus Christ, we need this forgiveness. My experience is that PCA people get that. We all get it more or less, in any given day, week, what have you. So I would be real careful of accusing the PCA or you know, I would be real careful about wanting to accuse any group of us of being moralistic or something.

CF: Okay. Assuming that there is a shift in the way people are dealing with things in culture to experience versus objective, somewhere out there, have you sensed any change in your congregation and if so, how have you dealt with it?

EF: You know the great thing about the scriptures are that it points out the fallacy of saying, the fallacy to us, of saying I believe this but I'm living like this. We don't get, if you're reading the Bible, and making an honest attempt to understand and live it, you don't get to live very long or at all if you're understanding the teaching of it. And it gets pointed out clearly in your life, you're not living it. So the notion that in the postmodern as our culture drifts, it is drifting

in a more postmodern direction, experience becomes the big deal. Well, that to us in the church is an invitation to simply live it. If we live it, if we live the truth about who Jesus is, the way he went after those who were sinful, the way he broke down the stereotypes, and he broke down this culture, our culture is just saying show us. Let me see it. And I agree with is it McLaren's, no its not McLaren's, this future present, or the future present, have you ever heard of that book?

CF: Uh huh.

EF: Yeah, you know the one thing I think out of that book that was of value, to me, was his statement that churches are going to have to engage with their cultures. But you know, I mean live the gospel. Or live the truth. And when has that ever not been the case? When I read a book like that I said that's a good point, you know. Its not about what programs your church has, for the believers. Its not about what we do inside these walls as much as how we live outside these walls.

CF: So what you're saying is the sermon really doesn't end once you said Amen.

EF: Preach it brother. That's great. I agree whole-heartedly with that. If it does then what we have going on is that we've got our church thing going on that was, is largely irrelevant to the culture. Its largely irrelevant not because many people in the communities around us are wrestling with what theology to believe. And so they're not coming to your big church going, "Gosh, we want to know what your theology is." Now Christians will come and ask that, but unbelievers aren't asking that. So it is a living part that creates the bridge and the connection, you said it. The sermon continues when you go out these doors and what we do out there matters most in terms of advancing the kingdom.

CF: So do you think then that church then itself in many ways has been the problem with the structures not being conducive to ministry or mission, or is the church failing to be the church, maybe acquiescing to the culture?

EF: I'm not sure I understood that question.

CF: Well, what I've done is taken the questions, well, I've taken statements that have been made by a lot of the guys who are writing in postmodernism and I've turned them into questions and I'm trying to access, part of it is, is what they're saying actually happening in churches, or is or are they are just writing because it is happening in their church? You know, because it is easy to look out of an office and then write a statement like, "the church itself has become the problem," and you can kind of fill in by saying, "We've kind of acquiesced to the modernist culture with kind of doing data dumps for sermons instead of being relational." In other words in its structures and its forms are really out of date and then you've got people on the other side that are saying, "No, if you go in that

direction you're really failing to be a church, a biblical church." I'm not saying that I necessarily agree with either one, but this is what these guys are saying.

EF: Yeah. Yeah I think every, you know again, the head of the church is Jesus Christ. The power, the driving force of advancing the kingdom is the Holy Spirit. And so with Jesus as the head of the church, the Holy Spirit as that third person of the Trinity advancing the kingdom causes, he has not screwed up. And he's always, in every age, I mean from the first century forward, you know, he's always correcting, you know what at times becomes pretty atrocious imbalance, or even unbiblical kinds of activity, but its still his church. And so my take on those kinds of things that while there are... I think some of these guys, McLaren's of the world and what have you, they make some good points that ought to help us to correct course a little bit, to remember the importance of relationships, to remember that and even be told our culture is not asking, necessarily the same questions they might have been asking in 1950. But you know what? Having said that I would say that all their needs are the same. Their needs haven't changed one bit. They still want and need the community, friendship, relationship, the Bible would call it *koinonia*, they still need to deal with their own brokenness. People all around us are getting divorced, that's not anything new. They still need an answer to why that happens. And is there any hope of that not happening in the future. So, I look at that, and say that's a good point you're making out there. We need to refocus and think about that. For us, you know, it comes down to are programs just all about us? You know those of us who gather in this building, is what we do about them out there, connecting with them, finding ways to serve. You know there's one of the criticisms is that the large, mainline denominations, liberal mainline denominations are nothing but social organizations, self-help groups or what have you. And then the criticism of the evangelical community is that we're nothing but these places that teach, preach, and articulate dogma, and what have you. And probably both of those stereotypes are extreme and we need to learn something from bringing the social gospel, in other words living the gospel out in our community needs to become more and more real and true about us. But take here Deer Creek church; we're twenty years old. There's never been a time in our twenty years, when we weren't connecting with the community on various levels, trying to serve it, trying to help it, to address needs. But we are more focused on those things today than we were twenty years ago. So I think that's a correction in us. That's a good heads-up call for us. But I don't think it has changed our preaching or our teaching, or our even, our sense of how important those things are. Those things are still vitally important. We have more going on today in terms of clear, solid, Christian education than we had twenty years ago. Because when people come visit they know less. They know a lot less than they used to know. And I don't know if it quite gets at what your point.

CF: It does. So going to that you know, often the extreme is set forth as the norm in that it is almost like a straw man being set up. But you know you have sense or at least I've heard you have a sense that your source material for

preaching the scriptures. There are some churches though, for example, they've said, we need to update the way that we communicate and so for example this summer there were a couple of churches, that basically said, we're going to do a block buster summer where we are going to talk about the gospel in movies. And so they really didn't do what we would consider to be a formal structured 20, 40 minute sermon. They would show, not just video clips, but they would show huge chunks of movies. There was another one that did a thing called "The gospel according to the Beatles." And what's your take on that kind of thing?

EF: I think that stuff would be great as a, I don't know. That would probably be better to do that for a Sunday evening gathering, not a worship gathering. Let me emphasize that. Sunday evening gathering to engage the culture. What is the culture's message? What are the issues the culture itself are identifies? What does our belief say and the truth that we embrace have to do with any of that? That would phenomenal. But to put that in the context of what we would consider worship is a travesty in my opinion. That is not what the church... the church ought to, you know, in the context of worship is a gathered community to do just that, worship. And part of worship our own Bible tells us is reading of scripture. And you know we infer from that the study of scripture and understanding it. So that to me would be a travesty. I use media clips once in a great while in the context of a sermon. And I try to only do that, I have erred before and done it when it didn't make a clear and powerful point and regretted it. But when it does really underline and emphasize a point that I'm bringing hopefully out of scripture it can be very powerful as an illustration. But I would never, I always, even there, you know, if you're showing a clip a minute, longer than a minute or so, you're going out on a limb. You know, I mean you're dedicating a significant amount of time in a message to a thing that is only illustrative. It is not the text. Its just illustrative. I would object to, I think that's a mistake. And you know what that will produce eventually? What that's going to produce if people where ever that church is, wherever that gathering is, if there are people coming to know Christ, but that's going to create in them is just, the Holy Spirit is going to do this. There's going to be a hunger among those people. They won't be able to hang with that for the long haul. They'll find it entertaining, engaging, maybe even insightful. But the time will come in their spiritual lives where the Holy Spirit is going to redirect them somewhere to get fed. They just won't be able to hang with that. While I would see that as a great apologetic approach in connecting with culture and therefore, do it on a Wednesday night, do it on a Tuesday night, do it on a Sunday night, I don't care. And to do it sounds like a great idea but don't call it a worship service. Call it something else and recognize, frankly, that it is something else.

CF: So kind of building on that going back to narrative and story. That is a very strong value in a lot of postmodern and emerging churches where they consider, in fact, Eugene Peterson has said the sermon needs to be more of a conversation. And one fellow said that the congregation, we've got to stop having the congregation being a javelin catcher for the sermon. What is the difference in

your mind between, if there is one, between story carrying the sermon versus using illustrations, or is there a difference? For example Brian McClaren's first book is really kind of a good example of what he's trying to get at, and he's basically telling a story, between himself and an imaginary pastor-type of thing, rather than, David Miller does that in all of his books. You kind of get about 30 or 40 pages into the book and you wonder, you know, what's the guys point.

EF: That is the point right there to me Chris. I think those are great vehicles... I thought McClaren was ingenious in the first book. I thought this is interesting but it raises lots of questions for me. That's exactly what I think the Holy Spirit will do at that church you were describing. Its meeting on Sunday morning and looking at media. They're going to ask questions. Where are they going to get answers to these questions? The time will come when that genre, venue, etc., won't work for them anymore because they're a human being and they want answers. So I don't think its an either or as much as it is a both-and. But its also, while I would celebrate what that one church is doing, in a different context, I can't celebrate it if you're going to try and call it worship. And so you know, a large part of scripture is narrative. But a large part of it is didactic. Can you do one or the other? I don't think so. I do not think so. If you're only didactic in your sermon delivery or what have you you're probably not being very balanced. You know, so its both-and, isn't it? I tend to think so. You know, but if all I'm doing is getting up and preaching and telling them fantastic compelling stories and making people weep. I'm not saying the Holy Spirit can't use that, I'm sure he does use that but eventually those people that hear that all the time are going to say, "Okay, wow, my emotions are engaged, I'm moved, I want to love God more, serve God more," but it just seems when I talk to people that don't have the right answers and I don't know what to tell them, what about this, what about that? And the next thing you know, if they keep hearing, you know that doesn't matter, or you know we're really not sure, or oh they're going to find somewhere where the answers are clearer. Why do I say that? I think the Holy Spirit will do that. The Holy Spirit will not let us live in ignorance.

CF: So should the church in dealing with changes in cultures, for example, you know you'd mentioned that you're doing Christian education better, and I would assume that because you're answering questions that are now, rather than then, should the church feed only on its own resources or should it draw from the worlds wells, you know, how do you judge, or how do you discern where you draw the line if there is one?

EF: For example using media...

CF: It could be that, I'm kind of focusing a little bit more on preaching. For example, visiting a lot these churches that would probably consider themselves to be postmodern or emergent, they've discarded a lot of form of what people have come to expect in churches, you know, in other words, a pulpit, chair-type things, and there was one, for example, the whole area was used as a stage and

there were Ferrari's on stage. And the guy had a little chair and a little table and he had a coffee cup up there. So the essentially...

EF: It had to be Willow Creek if they had Ferrari's.

CF: I don't think it was Willow Creek. But yeah, I hear what you're saying. But I guess what I'm really asking is a lot of the argument or discussion merely about the form or is it about the content of a sermon?

EF: Well, I don't know if I've got any answer to that. The line to cross where you go from content into mostly about form or its mostly the use of media, or its mostly the use of creative, illustrative material and has become too much, you know, I might draw that line in a different place than you. But we all have to wrestle with it don't we. I mean if a preacher is not concerned in the least with relevant illustrations, maybe the use of media, maybe how they're going to communicate what they think the scriptures are teaching, if you're not concerned about that at all, you're only going to connect with those who want a particular teaching form that you can provide. How much you'll connect with those who are on the margins or not in the community, the believing community at all, its probably questionable perhaps. But we both agree that where that line is its important to try and discern it. Because there is a line and you can go over it, and it can no longer be biblical teaching. It can be entertainment. It can be a lot illustrative nonsense. It can go too far. So I guess every preacher has got to in his own conscience that is led by the Spirit and the word of God say, you know, I have preached messages when I was all said and done, I regretted using an illustration that took too long, that was too distracting, that didn't get to the point the way I wanted it to. And I so I sort of repent of that. Why did I do that? I was probably thinking this would be very entertaining and engaging, and in retrospect, I regret that I did it. It didn't really serve the purpose. But where churches are resetting the table to be everything is soul foods, or soft pillows, or this that or the other, I'm not very much concerned about some of those kinds of things. Teaching is teaching with or without a pulpit. I think or at least it can be, you know, you can have very distant textual preacher who, you know, the forms that they use on a Sunday morning, at least in the way they dress it up, and where people sit, and how they sit, this that and the other, can all look very different. And I don't think that's very relevant. And you know, changing all of those forms of that kind you just have to make sure that preaching is still happening and worship is still happening. It has to be about the word of God and the teaching of the Spirit of God and the sacraments being there. If you're neglecting those kind of things, if your text for the morning is six different movie clips and yes, you're going to talk about the gospel, you're going to talk about Jesus, its going to be largely about how its revealed in these movie clips, that's not the text. That's never been, not in 2000 years, the text of worship when people gather. You know, we have some history in the church. And the history of, and we have some specific instruction in the word of God about what we do in our worship services. To neglect that, to think that those things can be changed is striking at the vitals

of what the church should be doing. But how creative in communication, all that stuff I've already said, I won't repeat it, those are tricky questions that any one of us, as I self-confessed here, there have been times when I know that I've gone further than I want to go. And I regret doing that with an illustration. I did a stupid pickle illustration one time that I regret doing. It was wildly creative- I lit up a pickle. I was in the context of a series we were doing on the Holy Spirit, and I was making a stupid point, for goodness sakes, if you can light up a pickle with current, you know, imagine what can happen in our lives if we would let our lives be the light of the world as the Holy Spirit ignites and works in us and so on. It took too much time. Everybody was laughing and having a good time. I would never do it again, not ever. I lost too much momentum of what the real substance of the text was of what we were talking about. It was very entertaining and probably very unproductive. That would be an example of one of my transgressions. You know, I made bad choices.

CF: Any closing thoughts on postmodernism and preaching?

EF: You know, cultures do change and the seasoned cultures change but people don't. So the value of what I've read from postmodern people I've already emphasized, some of those or mentioned some of those things, the need for community, the need for connecting, the need for living out the gospel really serving, and finding ways to, in the name of Christ, to really care. Those are all good messages, but they're not new messages. And I think that needs to be made, they're not new messages. These guys are not, they say that the church has become the problem- that to me is the same as saying the Holy Spirit has become the problem. To say that the church needs correcting and the Holy Spirit will do that is where I would like to come from. Yes, the church always needs correcting. The Holy Spirit will do that, but how? He'll do it through his word, and he will do it probably in response to the developments in the culture. But you know, people in that culture are not any different than they were 2000 years ago. All the same issues confront us. So preaching therefore is preaching. Its taking the Bible and retelling it hopefully very accurately. And as we do that we are lifting up Christ, that's the answer, he's the answer, as people hear about him, their lives will be changed. They'll want others to know about it. I don't think part of the problem that some of the things that I've read with these postmodern books and ideas and what-have -you, they go way too far in criticizing what the Holy Spirit is doing. And they're, they have a naive approach to things that the Holy Spirit needs to do a 180 with this church. Or that he needs to do, what you're saying is that we the church has got to do things radically differently , you're really saying that the Holy Spirit who has got us to this point, you know, went too far down a path that was incorrect, or he should have saw this coming or should have made corrections way back. That to me is just stupid. I just don't resonate with that at all. And I'll just switch gears here entirely. That's just part of the gospel Keller taught. And I'm not saying that it comes from Tim, because I don't believe that it does come from Tim as much as it comes from followers of him. It's the same thing there this gospel within a gospel movement that I just

think its silly. Its stupid. Its like saying that other parts of the church aren't doing what it is supposed to. The Holy Spirit...how can you possibly say that? And so I think the postmodern stuff goes too far frankly, Chris. I think God himself is at work in his people. Yes, his people get things wrong, but tell me something I don't know.

EC
Interview Transcript

Date of Interview: 15 November 2007

Interviewee: EC, Colorado

CF: So, EC, tell me how long you have pastored and preached?

EC: As a senior pastor, or church planter? I've been serving either as the assistant or the church planter for 8 years.

CF: Okay, where and when did you attend seminary?

EC: Covenant seminary from 95 to 99.

CF: Alright, have you had any postgraduate work?

EC: Nothing after seminary, no.

CF: Okay so how old are you now?

EC: 36.

CF: Okay, so let's jump right in. So how do you understand the term postmodern or postmodernism?

EC: I understand that term to be a broad umbrella for reality that our culture is leaving some of the historical modernistic Enlightenment views of reason and rational thought as well as optimistic views of the ability of science and technology to save us, become far more diverse and muddy. Its not as I want to say monolithic a culture as it once was.

CF: So how do you understand in contrast the term modern or modernism?

EC: Historically those are views that held an optimistic understanding of what could happen with the people being educated in the right way, technology providing the tools necessary to live. That the innate goodness or at least the belief that goodness of humanity would be able to succeed on the basis of reason and science. And then the church that had certain effects mostly in reaction to it. So you had to realize this eschatology of the liberal church and then reaction of evangelicalism so went to premillennialism and a very negative view of whether or not life inside of the kingdom could have a positive effect beyond personal salvation.

CF: Okay, so how would understand the term Reformed?

EC: Reformed is the reaction Catholicism, to a lot of Presbyterianism believes, which you already know but in my own view and understanding that because of the nature of scripture being revealed by an infinite God that our understanding and study of scripture is going to continue to require us to go deeper, have our presuppositions and cultural understandings challenged by the gospel, by all of the... what I mean by that, all of the implications of scriptures that Christ is king, and his kingdom moves forward. And so its you know my... that's my view of it. I think there's also another sense in which it is a static look back on history particularly narrow view of theological positions which has allowed it to become less and less relevant because it is not dynamic in the same way scripture is. And therefore Reformed especially with the "ed" on the end has become less and less useful force for the kingdom and more and more of a passé cultural understanding of old theology.

CF: So what do you believe biblical preaching is and how do you do it?

EC: Biblical preaching is the unpacking reality of Christ in the text, the reality of how it is that either God is showing how he will redeem and therefore we see it fulfilled in Christ, primarily in the Old Testament texts. Or in the New Testament who Christ is or the implications of Christ and the resurrection one of those three points. You're showing our need and looking forward to Christ, the reality of who Christ is within the Godhead and again, Trinitarian preaching there is important. The Father is the one who has the plan of [unintelligible] his creation, the Son in his acts as the redeemer, and the Holy Spirit is our assurance. And all of those things need to be brought out of the text when the text dictates. And I think it should be fundamentally about the reality of what God is doing in and through for his creation. And so I think... its not biblical preaching if it stops at personal salvation. Because personal salvation is not quite, primary point of God's work. God's work is to redeem his creation which has both personal and corporate reality.

CF: Tell me what you mean when you use the phrase "unpacking the reality" in reference to preaching?

EC: Because of time, space and culture certain aspects of scripture require us to see them in light of their first hearers. But at the same time be able to translate that into the current circumstances. Because nothing is new under the sun as scripture tells us its an issue of translation not an issue of coming up with more ideas. And so in any given text there is kind not in the sense of allegory, but in the sense of nuance and emphasis different aspects of the kingdom, different aspects of the work of God, or the personality of God has in those texts. And so it's the preacher's responsibility to unpack those in light of his culture, his congregation, what they are needing to hear, what emphasis in that particular moment that congregation needs to hear from that text. And again, that's why I will use a biblical text for that being just the reality that you have four Gospels. There are four different emphasis that allow us to see the reality and the beauty

of the Gospel from different perspectives. And so I see God's truth as a diamond and as you turn it slightly you get a different perspective; it catches the light slightly differently, but it's the same truth, the same reality. And so in any given text you have to unpack what the author by the power of Spirit is trying to get at when he describes certain truths or certain realities in a narrative, or poetic, or prophetic, or Paul's didactic.

CF: So in your opinion what is the role of the preacher?

EC: Well that's not fair, for me I tend to be kind of prophetic in my preaching. So my personal style is one to portray, to unpack God's word, here's the situation, here's how it applies in our lives and in our hearts, and here's how the church has often traditionally missed the boat. Here's the dangers of missing that boat. And then here's the assurance we have in Christ that if we have him as the center of our lives and willing to look both at our culture, our church, and the culture within the church is again, that's what the Bible's oriented towards. Its not oriented towards a non-believer, its oriented towards the believer. We need to make sure the first applications as preachers of the text within the walls of the church. So I don't, I think that the church needs different kinds of preachers. There are those who are encouragers, encouragers of the heart and although I do that at times, its probably not my strong point. There are those who tend to be more teachers in the style of unpacking the language and more theological knowledge as opposed to applied theology. All those folks are needed within the body and one minister is not likely to be good at all of them at the same time. I tend to focus more on the historical theology aspect, redemptive history, learning from the lessons of scripture, church history, American church history, and then seeing how they then apply in our culture today as it changes and evolves and God's word continues to be miles ahead of any cultural change. The problem is the church is usually not applying scripture in that way. So that's what I see as my role as the preacher is to look down the road and to see how God's word is already ahead of the curve.

CF: Okay, so what is the role of the Holy Spirit in your preaching?

EC: I don't prepare my sermons ahead of time. I just wait for him to tell me something. It is clearly in the preparation and through prayer regularly asking God to help me understand this text in light of what my congregation needs to hear, what is it they need to be, encouraged, admonished, or challenged to do, or whether that's... everybody thinks... anyway, whatever that means. In any given situation Lord I believe, help my unbelief. Hence the need that most of us have in our lives. So how is it that God that I can have the insight by your Spirit that how can people be believing but not believing. How is it that they need to be shown that from a given text. And that really, that only happens as the Holy Spirit gets inside and works. And then when I preach, as I do the prayer of invocation, not prayer of invocation but prayer for the sermon, I pray that the Holy Spirit would

guide my words and whatever words are useful for his people to be remembered, and everything that is not of the Spirit would be quickly forgotten.

CF: So what would be the role of the congregation in preaching?

EC: The role of the congregation- its not primary. The word is primary. And as we go through texts I tend to preach exegetically through books of the Bible or large sections. So I just finished a series on Genesis where we did large chunks. We have a very young congregation so far as their spirit. A lot of new converts and people returning to the church after a long period of time. So a lot of them need redemptive history. But at the same time also recognizing that the long term believers think they know the stories. But often times we don't know them the way that we should. So there's certainly those needs that come up. But usually you know, congregation is a group of sinner and so is the minister. So aside from the need to continually address that and that reality, you know and that's about all. And thankfully scripture is about that human condition certainly a factor in the preaching to say the least. But at the same time I'm not inclined to run around and do topical series based on a particular concern or need of the moment. Although those things may find their way and often do into the sermon, if the text allows it and that's a proper application or insight.

CF: You know within postmodernism one of the... there's kind of a set, and kind of sit down and take a look at the ebb and flow of the currents of postmodernism, one of the values that, or principles that they have, is essentially they're propositionalism because it is often used as a club over people's head. And they will say that instead some sort of objective truth out there truth is what I perceive it is. So if somebody were to come in to your congregation and they were to say or to think "Well why is that guy up there? Why is his opinion any more important than mine?" How would you deal with that as a preacher?

EC: Well that doesn't happen regularly. By God's grace we have quite a bit of contact with people of that opinion, with people of that opinion, and or that persuasion, that cultural tendency. If you're asking me how do I address it outside of the context of a sermon the first answer would be pretty direct. I'd say that a model for my ministry is Jesus who I believe embodied absolute truth. And yet at the same time he was most attractive to those who lost and probably very vague sense of what truth was. And they were seeking him. And they were looking for it. And they had an exceedingly secular culture. First century Roman and Jewish culture was one of a lot of different opinions and the only thing they valued in Rome was as long as you were for Rome you were left alone which isn't too different from our own current culture. So there are parallels there and I'm able to say because of what I believe Jesus is, an embodiment of truth, it also tells me that believing in truth shouldn't make me a sanctimonious jerk. Those are not mutually inclusive. It should be believing in truth should make me more attractive. If we use Jesus' ministry and look at the early church. And if people get terribly excited or they are religious zealots they get pretty mad. So that's the

way I do it on a one-on-one basis. In my sermons I'm pretty up front with the fact that this is what we believe. This is what distinguishes Christians from other faiths, it is unique, it is different than other faiths. And certainly different from religion. And religion tells you the higher you get to God. The gospel tells us how God got to us. And so being able to draw that distinction and believing that that is significant so whatever we're talking about, the reality of the resurrection, or the return of Christ I'll be honest that I know that doesn't sound terribly rational. But it's the foundation of what we believe as believers. So I can understand if you don't believe it. But at the same time, you know, this is what we believe. There're good reasons for it. And if you want to sit down and talk about it outside of this sermon I'd love to talk to you about it. So again I try and be gracious about it. There's not a jerk-mental tone in what I say. I'm saying I believe this to be true, I believe it to be true for all people. But at the same time you don't have to believe it from me to be my friend. You don't have to believe it to sit down and share a meal with me and talk about what it is that you have concerns about. What is it that you believe is true.

CF: So if I were to go into, and I'm generalizing just to be able to talk about it, to go into let's say a general evangelical church and heard a sermon there, and then I come and hear you preach is there any difference between what you were saying and what they're saying?

EC: Yeah, I'll be careful here. Generalization, well there's a couple of things. I shoot at people in the church as much as I shoot at people outside the church. That is to say we're pretty honest about the reality that for God there is no grades of sin. Self-righteous evangelical materialist is just as probable as a homosexual. So I'm pretty clear about that. So I define that to be the only safe place is the gospel. And whether you have an irreligious view or religious view of the world both those are wrong. The only right one is the one that's dependent upon grace and not upon grading sin as what is acceptable, or more or less acceptable in the walls of the church. I hit that a lot.

CF: Would there be a difference between "Reformed" preaching and kind of general evangelical preaching?

EC: I'd like to think so. I mean I believe that that gives us a view of the kingdom, in a way that is more compelling than the sort of myopic inward focus personal spiritual life that came out of the third great awakening which has been the greatest impact on general American evangelicalism. The exceedingly self-focused personal view. I think there the Reformed has a greater opportunity because of its theology to be more kingdom oriented less exclusively personal and a better of the wholistic which is God is intensely personal and he's also intensely about creating a people. And neither one is more important than the other. It's a both/and. And only God can hold that tension. And I do think there's an advantage to the Reformed faith. I think however by Reformed preaching the proclamation in sort of bold faced didactic form, Reformed theology I don't know

that, that's certainly not going to be helpful. We have to be able to weave our theology through the text, through our exposition of the text. But if you begin to present it in propositional truth in the sense of sanctification is.... And then spelling it out, that doesn't get as much traction as saying here are the implications of what it means to be in the process of this thing called growing in Christ which we sometimes term sanctification. Here's what God's doing. You begin to play that out, unpack it and they... less Enlightenment sort of scholarly fashion, you'll get traction because the theology is true. But if you teach it in boldfaced seminary style- this is what sanctification is, now believe it, live it. It... that does not make much progress with the people ministering to. And near as I can tell the people who get off on those sermons are usually just what they believe is being reinforced as opposed to being challenged, the iron sharpening iron. I think that Reformed preaching in its best sense is the application of Reformed theology which is the best thing that is out there as far as understanding the implications of God's truth.

CF: So assuming that just for the sake of argument that there has been some significant shift in culture from modernism to postmodernism how has your congregation, if at all, changed over the past years that you've been preaching and what cultural impact, if any have you noticed on your congregation?

EC: As a church plant we started in this cultural shift. I embraced it. I think that church history we best in times like this. I mean the early church thrived in culture where every town that you had had a different god. And nobody would say that one god was better than another god. And so the pluralism and the secular humanism and the things of that nature you know this is where we do best as the church. And so I'm in one sense I'm very excited about the shift away from modernism. I think that was a false trail. And its reaped what it has, right? The church is dead in Western Europe and is dying here in the United States. So incredibly it hasn't been the most effective thing that we've ever done or embraced as a culture within the church. So I'm looking forward to it in the sense of being able to realize that its applied theology. It is working out our sanctification in this community, love one another, that actually gives real life to the doctrine. Which is exceedingly wonderful first of all. Whether its about the doctrine of the Trinity, of people beginning to understand it in a way that affects their daily life, which we can and should do. Moving from the head knowledge to the heart knowledge which are apart, and we sort of stop at, has been talked about for years but I think we have an opportunity in postmodernism to see that motivated to even greater degree because the effectiveness of pure head knowledge is decreasing at a rapid rate. So I think the ability and the motivation to move our head knowledge to our hearts gaining.

CF: Do you think that some of the shift in culture then is it a loss of a sense of community and roots that the culture, or people have acquiesced to the culture or an inability of the church to incarnate in culture?

EC: Yeah, certainly when you see them withdraw of evangelical from culture you know, following the third great awakening and certainly the pietism of the early 20th century, evangelicalism rejected the world. And so our impact in the culture was greatly reduced. So I think the incarnational living of it from the evangelical standpoint has been almost completely missing. And then when we started to try and do it again in the late 70's and early 80's over issues like abortion, we're like a bull in a china shop. Just running around and telling everybody that they were going to hell which wasn't very helpful. We're getting better at it. We're learning the nuances of what it means to live truth in the world. And not being like the world and what all that means. But yeah, I think you can definitely point to the church's embracement, embracing pietistic separatist movement as being a significant factor in our reduced impact on the culture.

CF: So do you think we're dealing with a sense, or excuse me, with a loss of a sense of objective truth or is it a change in the understanding of what truth is?

EC: I don't think we've lost objective truth. I mean some areas of Enlightenment categories, and I don't if there necessarily the Jewish first century, you know, Jesus' culture and the culture that the scriptures which were written are true don't necessarily use the word the same way the Enlightenment philosophers and theologians did. So some degree it may be apples and oranges question. But I think that you're certainly losing the Enlightenment truth and fact and I don't know if that I think was a bad think. I think one could definitely argue that it's a human construction.

CF: Okay, so do you think that what we're experiencing then is a crisis of faith of creeds and doctrinal content or is it a crisis of the language of faith; the words that we use to convey these doctrines and creeds.

EC: I don't know that there's any crisis. I think that the established American evangelical church is in crisis. But I'm not sure that's the same thing as the gospel of the kingdom being in crisis. We've always had the tension between the visible and invisible church. I certainly think there are aspects of the visible church in its incarnation and culture which feels like it is in crisis, but I don't think that that's likely to be more of a human issue of what we would like to see maintained, what we're culturally conformable with. But it has little to do with any crisis of faith or crisis in the kingdom. And I don't know that again I see huge opportunities. I see this is our playground. We took over the Roman empire when it was like this. This is where we do well. I mean I taught a breakout session at a Horton conference where my breakout session was called Why postmodernism is great for the gospel and bad for American evangelicalism. You know the gospel does great in this kind of a setting because people are desperately looking for something that is real, that is true. But they're not going to hear it in the language of Enlightenment logic and rationalism.

CF: Do you think there is a danger that if the church welded itself to a modernism and the Enlightenment that the postmodern Christian is doing the same thing and welding itself to a postmodern expression?

EC: Absolutely I think that's human nature. That's absolutely why we have to know our history. I was a history major in college so I'm biased. But when you look at the first three centuries of Christianity when you look at places where the gospel has done well since then in more isolated pockets here and there one of the characteristics of the church in those situations what are the common realities that have impacted or allowed the church to impact the culture in the way that it has and seen it transformed and renewed by the power of Christ? But I think we need to look at those things because we're not in a new circumstance. I think the part of the reason why people will weld themselves to something new is because they think it's new. And there's nothing new. This culture has happened before and it will happen again. And so our best bet is to look at what the church has done well when it has been in these kind of cultures. And how it's been effective. And I think that will then tie us back to always the roots of our theology and the great thinkers that have proven themselves over time to be useful throughout church history so that we don't have to reinvent the wheel. There's no need to do that in my opinion. I think we need to understand our history and then it gets a lot less spooky and a lot less scary. We've been there before. And quite frankly this is how it brings out the best in us, here's how it brings out the worst. Let's be wise about these things. There's nothing novel here.

CF: Over the years as you've been preaching have you sensed a change in your congregation and has postmodernism, how has postmodernism affected your preaching? Do you find that you have to, in other words, explain more terms or do you explain them in a different way? That sort of thing. I'm looking at what is the bridge in your preaching between the cultures because culture is fluid; it's not just a static thing. How has it affected your preaching if at all?

EC: You certainly can't assume people know the stories and the theological terms are of course are out in the sense of you know using that language. That's in house language. It's short hand for us as ministers. But that you know when you go through a passage like Romans 8 you have to unpack those doctrines. You have to really explain them. But it's also where sanctification is present in the life of David in Psalm 51. So you've got to still live out that preaching. I know its [unintelligible] that particular doctrine. But I mean its hidden doctrine. Yes there is... you can't assume any longer what I frankly is assuming, you know, 30, 40, 50 years ago got us into the problem where we're at right now to some degree. We didn't assume anyone to show up to church who didn't know this stuff. And if you didn't know it you felt uncomfortable. So there's certainly an aspect of teaching that is required. But I don't know I would call it a basic level because I think what I am preaching and expounding on from lives of some of the saints of the Old Testament or what have you you get helping people understanding the point of Abraham. This is my own understanding of Reformed redemptive

preaching but the point of Abraham is not of a life example. The point of Abraham is to see God's work in redemption and that Jesus is the greater Abraham. And so even for my believers that's a learning process. What I am finding that for some Christians in the evangelical culture that's extensive. And its offensive to take away from what they understood was, you know, was their righteousness. So I've seen a shift in the fact that preaching in a what, I don't know if I preach postmodern, I don't even think about those terms, very often, but I think that I have seen that certainly people strongly committed to the evangelical sub-culture find postmodern preaching exceedingly difficult to swallow. How about that?

CF: So how would you define postmodern preaching versus evangelical preaching? It sounds like you're really talking about moralism versus something else?

EC: Yeah. I think that that's... and something else is just letting, again, if we take as our premise that we can't save ourselves then the goal of the minister is to read the text and understand how God is saving us by exposing a sin, or an idol, or by showing us his power to do so, or by showing us because of his power this is what we've been set free to do for him in his kingdom, bringing him glory, and helping to restore creation as instruments of his hands to do that.

CF: So when you do that you know one of the things that postmodernists will say is whether they be a Christian or not, is that there's no over-arching metanarrative. And what you're really talking about if I think I hear what you're saying is a covenant redemptive metanarrative versus moralistic metanarrative.

EC: Absolutely. Because interestingly enough moralism has no metanarrative. There's no story in it. Its just you should be really good so God doesn't get mad at you and doesn't let you into heaven. Redemptive history is absolutely the metanarrative that allows us to fit all the rest of it, and quite frankly, everybody needs a metanarrative. I just preached a sermon series this last spring and summer on that. That's part of the whole idea of preaching through Genesis. What is our story? What is the Christian story? What is the metanarrative? And yes, postmodernists will argue that it isn't one. But I haven't met one that hasn't been exceedingly interested in willing to talk about the fact that, you know, we all have a story. And you do a little bit of presuppositional apologetics with them and you get them down to the fact that they have a story. And their story does it help? I mean obviously I don't... anyway... those are long conversations over time. But yes, definitely that always, I think that's the problem, right? Is it postmodernist's don't want to hear disembodied exegetical, theological truth. And they've rejected that in modernism. And they are looking for a story. They are looking for the.. THE story.

CF: The bridge between modernism and postmodernism is really not an issue of accepting either culture but its really allowing the word of God to be intrusive in

your preaching and judging both cultures from a covenant redemptive historical perspective? IS that what you're saying.

EC: That's exactly what I'm saying.

CF: Yeah, Okay. Well that solves a lot of the problems so. Do you think has the church been itself with structures not conducive to ministry and mission or is the church failing to be a church?

EC: What are the two great commandments? Love God and love your neighbor. And I don't know that the church has done a terribly good job of taking care of those very well. I think that the... ask the question again because I'm about to launch into something so I'm not sure that I'm launching.

CF: Well me tell me you a little it of the background quickly here. What I've done I've formed these questions out of statements that both modernist and postmodernist or trans-cultural writers have talked about. I've turned them into questions that I'm basically assessing whether or not this is actually true. And you've got a group of people that tend to be more postmodern that are saying that the church itself is the problem, that they have forms and structures are simply are not connecting in its ministry and mission to a postmodern culture. And then you've got guys on the other side that are saying, no, the church is essentially failing to be a church, being true to what the scriptures say the church is, and essentially they're acquiescing to culture in order to be pragmatically connected. And so I'm kind of curious where you would stand in those either/or or both/and or neither?

EC: I would tend towards the position that the church needs to be Reformed and reforming. The church is not the problem obviously in any organization you can implement structures that are less helpful. And so you work on them. But you know in some ways I certainly believe that scripture has particular structures to the church that are needed for the body to function well. That's what you see in Ephesians and other places. Its not a blob. It is a structured body and but at the same time I think that the church in the United States, and we've had this problem in other places as well, has confused sort of middle class Judeo-Christian/Victorian values and culture, with right living. And so we have become increasingly less useful as a church because we find ourselves defending things that we have tried to wrap up as being biblical or godly. But in fact aren't. And so we find ourselves actually as a church being more about defending certain cultural norms or positions which have little or nothing to do with scripture. They are either some kind of perversion or overemphasis on one particular passage or line of thought or another. And again we're all inclined to do that. Its absolutely, you know, humans can't handle the way God does things. And so we grab on to one side of it or another. Usually to the exclusion of the other side. And we can't live in that tension. And so you know the American church has in large part lost its voice because it has become more about the particular cultural norm. And

there's been of course failed to speak the needs and the reality of sin within its own culture.

CF: You mentioned story. You know that is one of the things as kind of a homiletical savior that some postmodernist preachers and Christians are saying that we need to get away from propositions and propositionalism and use story. What's your take on that?

EC: Most of scripture is a narrative. I mean we're.. our tradition gets kind of excited about Paul because he seems to be more like us and our Enlightenment logical, sequential truths, so Paul's pretty attractive because of that. And yet my point is you've got to teach the text the way the text is written. If it is a narrative you preach a narrative. There's truth in it. But you know you don't make a narrative into a syllogism and you don't take Paul and turn him into a story-teller when he is telling certain kinds of truth in a particular way. You have to respect the text and the type of language, the type of literature that it is, and have that impact your teaching. And the reality is that the vast majority of scripture is narrative. But I don't know that taking that you know mathematical equation, a greater percentage of narrative means that we need to try into a narrative. I think that would be absolute abuse of the text.

CF: Okay, so lets see... that's pretty much it.

MS
Interview Transcript

Date of Interview: 10 September 2007
Interviewee: MS, CO.

CF: Go ahead and tell me your name.

MS: Mark Spellman

CF: How long have you pastored?

MS: For 14 years now, since 92. Graduated from RTS in 92.

CF: So are you from Florida?

MS: No, Jackson, Mississippi.

CF: That's kind of a big change.

MS: Well, we're from Mississippi anyway. But I, yeah, we moved across the south, southeast, southwest, and now west. But now so I was in Marion, Alabama, Taylorsville MS was my first church. First Pres of Taylorsville, then Marion, Alabama. Marion Pres in West Alabama. I was the organizing pastor for New Life Presbyterian Church, a PCA church in Midland, Texas. And moved out here for a sabbatical, to get my head screwed on straight, after those few years in ministry I needed to figure out what I was doing, where I was going, where God wanted us to be so I took on the chaplain position out here at ECA and taught Bible classes and became an administrator and assistant principal. And I, just in the past, within a year of being there, began to preach down in Pueblo. An interesting history of the group down there is another time and another place.

CF: How old are you now?

MS: Just turned 56.

CF: Do you have any post-graduate work?

MS: Other than the master of divinity beyond that, no. I mean I teach at New Geneva two classes, pastoral theology and also Pauline epistles; its coming up this year. Help teach Hebrew over at RTS, so I've worked post-gradually but not toward a post-graduate degree.

CF: So how would you understand the term "Postmodern?"

MS: You know, I was going to ask you the same question. Because postmodernism is one of those terms, it seems, that is defined differently depending on who you're reading, who you're talking to, you know, whether it's a layman or somebody that's been trained in education. You know, from architecture to literature. My background's in architecture. You know postmodernism means one thing there.

CF: That's actually the first use of the word. It was in architecture Back in the 1930's. But as a cultural movement.

MS: Obviously, just the term itself, you mean by assessing the impact of postmodernism on Reformed preaching, there are the two terms, I was curious how you, not that to put that question off on you, but how you defined that... those two terms. Reformed preaching definitely has an idea about what that looks like in the context of a church. Postmodernism is a term that I personally have difficulty defining. And look more at I guess the generation we live in, what truth is. And it seems as we get to this idea of, you know, the definition of truth, of the relativity of it of what it means to me as opposed to, you know, the next person down the street. I don't think, and I'm coming from Pueblo now, and from Pueblo West, if you threw that term out to anybody other than those who might be attending a Reformed and Presbyterian or right now in Pueblo West, they wouldn't know what you were talking about. You know, it's a term that I think that has been defined by academia, well by, architecture as you say it started in the 30's beyond modernism, which in a sense had in architecture at least a modernist, there was some truth in materials and construction that, you know, we found in steel and concrete and in building materials that when we went into postmodern era in architecture, we began to see a deconstruction of you know of what was true. So buildings sort of taking on a free-form type of appearance that defied the laws of logic and the laws of material and truth and honesty and materials. So you know when I consider postmodernism in terms of truth there seems to be a relativity and a defiance of what is true. So when we come to Reformed preaching which is, you know, solidly grounded in the word that is absolute truth... you know there's a relativity to that. It, I have not, maybe I'm sheltered down in Pueblo, really have not been confronted with it except someone saying, "What is this postmodernism that I'm reading about it. We're not experiencing that. I don't think in the context of that culture and that church plant.

CF: You talked a little bit about Reformed preaching. How do you understand the term "Reformed?"

MS: Obviously it goes, the term "Reformed," harks back to the Protestant Reformation where, you know, there was this idea of giving the truth to the people, you know, in a way which it was understandable. That there was not the clergy and the way people division of course that.. whether or not Calvin and those guys intended, or Luther intended to go where it did. I mean it did. You

know, there was an effort to maintain the truth of the... to present the truth of the word expositively, clearly, you know, with direct application, I mean the people it was being given to. When I think of Reformed preaching I think of not only the act of preaching on Sunday mornings for worship, but everything it involves that revolves around that. And that's the approach to worship. You know the dialog of worship. I have a difficult time separating just here's what we do for preaching and exclude that and take that away from the context in which we are delivering that preaching.

CF: What would you [unintelligible]... how do you understand what biblical preaching is?

MS: Well, we go back to Acts, beginning of the church in the New Testament, the church as God's called out people existed in the Old Testament and it was made manifest there at, in the early chapters of Acts. There was a gathering together of God's people. Even I've found over the years, the reading of the word in the context of God's people is the message in itself. Yes, you know, God is certainly called and gifted certain men to be teaching elders in that context to explain, to edify, to build up the body for the work of the church. But, you know, expository preaching and Reformed preaching has its heart and focus in the absolute truth of the word of God. The 66 books of the Bible, English Bible that we have, that truth from Genesis to Revelation is at the heart of Reformational preaching. I think Reformational preaching is also covenantal in its approach that... you know, it appeals to the child as well as the octogenarian. It appeals to... it should you know, appeal to the teenager as well as the 30-40 year old. So that when you know we worship and when we preach we're preaching to multi-generations in the context of the covenant.

CF: So would you say that the difference between Reformed preaching and let's say down the road is an Anabaptist or Methodist church, what would the difference be if any between Reformed preaching and let's just say general evangelical? I know that it is a big brush to paint that with, I know that it is a big brush to paint that with.

MS: There too, Chris, when we use the word preaching we think of Baptist preaching as opposed to Presbyterian preaching. The general population has this idea of you know very animated sort of person, and the Baptist church who's preaching using a lot of stories and embellishing things, and maybe, sometimes not even opening the scriptures. And when we think of Reformed preaching, you know, there is the word that is at the center of what we have to say. Its not my word, its God's word. You know, I can't separate the act of delivering that sermon from the order in which it is delivered. So therein lies the difference whether it is Roman Catholic liturgy or whether its Reformed Baptist or Evangelical Baptist, or EPC, or you know, or PCA or USA. You know it's the giving of the word is given in the context of that order that is different for the most part, is different for the Baptist, for the Vineyard and for Reformed Presbyterian.

It's the approach, you know, and the preaching of the word is the culmination of the approach.

CF: How would you define, or how do you understand rather, the role of the preacher?

MS: That's a multifaceted word too. For me with the background that I've had and personally the call that I've had to the ministry, preaching cannot be separated from the act of pastoring. That a pastor is by virtue of his call one who administers the word of grace by explaining that word in the context of the covenant community, but also ministers that word on an individual basis as he's pastoring and leading the flock that God has called him to. You know, it's just been my experience in the context of a PCA churches from, you know, the deep South to Colorado and Pueblo that the sheep put up with a great deal if they know that the pastor cares. That doesn't mean they won't listen, you know, they will listen to wrong teaching, or to heretical preaching, but if they know that you care that you're there with them, and every day in a sense, teaching them Reformational interpretations of scripture, living that, that, you know, preaching on Sunday is more effected then too. So, there again, as I can't separate the Reformed preaching from the liturgy, you know, from the order and the context that we're delivering it, I can't separate it, you know the Reformed, whatever the question was back there, the Reformed preacher...

CF: What is the role of the preacher,

MS: the role of the preacher and the role of the Pastor. You know the role of the preacher is the pastor who may direct, not only individually but corporately the people he's called to lead as a pastor to the word as their sole interpretation of life. And I guess that's where I see maybe personally postmodernism differing than, you know, postmodern approach, as opposed to Reformational and covenantal approach to the scriptures is that the postmodern, you know, will propose to have to have answers that are not tied to necessarily to absolute truth, I mean, you know. I know that once we start talking about absolutes, you know, and saying there is none, then we have one. You know its, Reformational preaching is contextualized preaching. You know its putting, not in the context of today, although we get there, you know, its giving the history, giving in the context, rather than a pretext, its giving it, you know, a time and a place, its giving it a reason to be spoken to the original audience, that transcends to today so that the preacher and the teacher is able to bring that. I'm preaching through Zephaniah right now, you know? Mainly because there, I think, in order to come to this idea of worship on Sunday, we have to appreciate who we're coming before. And yes, the world says, postmodern worlds says, you know, if you want to accept there is this other greater being outside of us, you know, that we are in a sense spiritual and modern, you know, modern creatures that, you know, the world says he's a God of love, you know, scripture says that the reason he's a

God of love is because he's God who hates sin, you know, who hates wrong, and he is a God of absolutes.

CF: What do you think the role of the Holy Spirit is in preaching?

MS: The sole motivator and sole interpreter, you know, the sole... there the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, Spirit, we tend to have, he's not first, he's not second, he's third. I'm not putting the position and the role of the Holy Spirit, but it's like something we can't see God, but we can see his work. You know, we can't see Christ but we can see, you know, in the New Testament the word pictures and the reality of Christ. We hear about the Holy Spirit we can't see him. But we do see him, you know, if we submit to being faithful to our call, being truthful to the word, being and as pastors and preachers submitting to, you know, the role of the Holy Spirit, we see him working I think in ways that man cannot work. And that's a mystery that I can't explain. You can't, and other people can't sitting in the congregation, just evidence by Reformational preaching, you know, I consider one aspect of that too, is expositional preaching. And my interpretation of that has become more narrow and narrow the longer I stand in the pulpit and pastor people... often I spent, you know, one week on one verse, putting it in the context of history and bringing it in the context of our time. So, you know, it is something that I think as the Holy Spirit, you know, leads the pastor to do such as that I find the congregation putting pieces together, not because they, they're convinced necessarily by the eloquence of the person standing in front of them, which I'm not however, but the Holy Spirit, you know, drawing things from Sunday school that was said unbeknownst to me, drawing things from the children unbeknownst to me these things begin to fit together so that the work of the Holy Spirit is evident by our submitting to what we're called to do faithfully and truthfully without compromise. And you know, that too, in postmodernism tends to be one of the factors of postmodern world although they would, you know, probably say there is no compromise, there is a chipping away of the reality of truth from slanting façades in architecture that seem to defy gravity to defying the word of truth and thinking there are no consequences.

CF: What do you, how do you view the role of the congregation when they hear the sermon? Or do they have one.

MS: Certainly they do. Worship and Reformed preaching in the context, is put in the context, right context of worship. Yes, they have a role. They ought to have a response, they ought to be participants and dialogue in the context of let's say Sunday worship, that they're listening, they're responding, they're praying they're thinking, they're being confronted with the silence, they're being confronted that the truth of God's word and the Holy Spirit is bringing conviction to them through the word, that is explained, you know, as truth. The role of the congregation in context of I think Reformed preaching is to listen and to and you know to respond as appropriate to wherever they are. There's a role individually they have too, I think, to encourage the one who is preaching, to be faithful, to maintain, you

know, truth and integrity and honesty and, you know, to not that the pastor needs, you know, should want that or need that, but I think, you know, the one who stands in that Reformational preaching position often stands in the face of, you know, the culture, and is, has to be counter-culture, and its not easy.

CF: So then you would say postmodernism has affected both how do you say what you say and also affected the congregation's role in their understanding of the sermon.

MS: I don't know that postmodernism has affected it. I think I grew up in high school, went to college during maybe pre-postmodern times. As the thought as a philosophy, I've never really thought about it. And I don't preach to defy the tenets of postmodernism.

CF: You're not culture-driven in your preaching?

MS: No, I would say I'm not culture driven. Although I'm sensitive to the Hispanic culture, the middle-American, upper middle class cultures, we're obviously sensitive to that, we're located in a place where, I mean, Pueblo West as opposed to Pueblo itself. But I don't go in every morning thinking, "Oh, this is the way these postmoderns are thinking," and I want to counter that concept of truth by the way I present the sermon on Zephaniah 1:2-6.

CF: You have a real powerful illustration when you talked about postmodern architecture appearing to defy gravity. In modernism there's the value that says we can not only if we're given enough instruments, and enough time, and enough talent and enough resources we can know the truth absolutely. In postmodernism that kind of defiance of gravity is, no that's arrogant. We can't know truth absolutely. Truth is what I experience. And would you say that, this may be an artificial distinction, are we dealing with a loss of the sense of objective truth or a change in the understanding of what truth is?

MS: That's a good question. Dealing with a sense of, dealing with a sense of a loss of objective truth as opposed to dealing with what truth is?

CF: Or an understanding of... one of the things they'll do, for example, to use an example like, Jacques Derrida', more of a philosopher linguist, talks a lot about deconstructionism. They'll use the illustration of an Inuit has 63 definitions of the word snow, whereas for us, we might have two or three. We have to use an adjective; its brown snow or dirty snow, or yellow snow, or slushy snow or dry snow. And they'll say there's no such thing snow-ness. Its just our apprehension of what this thing is, we assign these categories. And so the postmodernist is saying that, and I'm generalizing to discuss, but the postmodernist says that its always been what the person brings to the table, their experience is the quintessential truth for them.

MS: So what I experience is affirmation to me that is true.

CF: Right

MS: That there is no absolute truth.

CF: Jay Budziszewski is a legal scholar and theologian down in Austin, Texas, teaches down there. He says the old classic liberal verses conservative, in their discussions, would say, here's five reasons why you're wrong Mr. Conservative. And the conservative would say here's five reasons why you're wrong, Mr. Liberal, but they're both appealing to a truth outside of themselves. Now in postmodernism will say the conservative whatever that is, would say well here's five reasons why you're wrong and the liberal will say, okay, I'm happy for you. Let's go have coffee. Is it loss of objective truth or is it a loss of our understanding of what truth is?

MS: I think maybe that it could be both. I mean there is a sense in this age of information where I can go to wikipedia and add my two cents to the definition of postmodernism and it becomes truth.

CF: Especially when someone looks up your definition.

MS: Yes, because its there its on the world wide web, and because its there its truth. There becomes so many absolutes that there is no objective... I mean, you know, it's a multifaceted sort of thing...you know. And its an interesting condition of words that has evolved and I've never really thought about it until you asked that question. It seems to have come along since the age of technology, you know, with the advancement of the computers that the world through MTV, through the world wide web, it has become so much smaller from America to China, and Japan, and we're in a sense speaking the same language and are seeking to understand one another by establishing some sort of basis for truth. And you know it becomes subjective.

CF: Alvin Toffler, years ago, wrote a book "The Third Wave." And using his analogy he says there are a lot of different reactions to the change of culture. And he talked about the change from the "first wave," from cave man to agriculture. Second wave was change from agriculture to industrial, third wave from industrial to info age. And when this cultural wave crashes or is on the horizon the reaction to our absolute resistance, no we're not going to acquiesce to that, that's new fangled. Then there is the fellow that stands back and says, I'm going wait and see what happens. And then there's the third fellow who jumps on the wave and he surfs it and says, Great, this is wonderful. In the same way there's been a lot of reaction against the shift in culture, from modernism to postmodernism, and some are saying this is a real crisis of faith. That our creeds and our doctrinal content is no longer fit in the world we live in. And there's those who say, no, it's a crisis in the language of faith, that we need to change the

words that we use in our doctrine, like the Westminster Confession of Faith or Heidelberg Catechism, both formed in the 16th century, 17th century. Is it a crisis of faith or is it a crisis in the language of faith.

MS: I think that the language is driven by the people to crisis in the people of faith whether that faith is, you know, in grounded in the Reformation, or whether that's faith is focused on the world and humanism. I mean its still a question of *faith in something*. You know, and granted the Westminster Confession has a particular kind of language, the content, you know, as, I'm not equating Westminster Confession with the inerrant word of God or scriptures, but you know still the content is a summary of the scriptures. And because it is there's a summary there that transcends and I think words so often, I mean, we will in worship use questions of let's say the shorter catechism or the ten commandments as we go through them, well, I have liberty to change, you know, pronouns, reference thee's and thou's to something that is a little more comfortable for people to grasp and to understand without changing the content. And I think we... it's a crisis not of... it's a crisis of words. I mean God has given us, spoken to us, through word, not through pictures, not through getting rid of the Bible, you know, which is kind of bibliolatry, you know its still that the presence of that picture, let's say of the Lord's table, alone is not sufficient by itself. You know the word comes alongside it. It's the interpretation and understanding of the word that I think we have to deal with as we preach in a Reformational way that is counter-culture to the world around us. You know, whether people sitting in my pews or chairs understand postmodernism they're still confronted by it when, you know, they have friends in the community who attend a church who is saying, well, this is what it means to me. What does it mean to you? And we're training our people to take those words and put them in the context of the time that they were given in order to bring some meaning to, rather than personal experience.

CF: So when we move to dealing with how the church deals with this, especially with looking at this flag that we've planted you know we call preaching, has the culture kind of just, is the church itself the problem that it has structures and forms that aren't conducive to ministry and mission, or is the church failing to be the church. There are those like Leonard Sweet, that talk that uses the metaphor of a garden or park. He says that traditional church, whatever that is, is kind of like a park that has finely trimmed hedges around and you stay on the paths, and that's how you work. But the postmodernist is like this open field, there's no fences, there's no paths, its just a field it changes with the wind and so there are those who say the church is really the problem. It needs to change with the culture. And there are those who say, no, the church is failing to be a church, and it needs to be true to itself rather than true to the time. How would you....

MS: I would fall in the latter position. I think for the most part the church has failed to be the church which is a counter-culture, always has been. God, you know, from the time he called Adam and Eve came out of the garden, with

Abraham, and the people in the wilderness, and Egypt. There's a remnant, there's a group of people he's calling out of the cultures by way of being consistent to his word, and faithful to his word. You know, it doesn't mean you can't contextualize things, but when you begin to do that to the point of looking no different than this community in Pueblo, I mean, we are different. And bring it back to my experience there, we are different from anything down there. Is that bad? You know, it has its downside because we are different, but its good because we are different.

CF: You wouldn't do a... for the next 10 weeks we're going to go ahead and do a series from the gospel according to the Beatles. I'm not making this up. There's a church back east doing that. Or another one that they said we're going to look at these... its called a blockbuster summer. They're going to look at all these movies...

MS: There's a time and a place to do that. And, you know, I think the church is a great place to do it. But worship on Sunday morning is, it ought to evangelistic even though we may be preaching to 99%percent of the people in the congregation who proclaim faith in Christ, who say they're trusting in him alone, its still can be confrontational and call for, you know, looking once again at our lives, but it also, not assuming that everybody out there is not what they say they are, calling for Reform. For change. There's a place to do the movie thing. You know there's a place to be cute about the gospel of the Beatles or whatever it might be. But I think when we start to compromise the fear of the Lord, the position that we have before God, and do that in the context of Sunday morning where we're gathering with, not only the saints that are there, but saints of all ages, tasting that which we'll do in eternity. If we're not expressing that and teaching that, and bringing a congregation along on Sunday mornings in that way I think we're doing just like the Vineyard might be doing down the street with audio visual, just a great production. We're feeling good. We've sung, we've clapped our hands, we've danced, we've done whatever. But have we been confronted with the truth of the word? I don't think so.

CF: Is there anything else you want to add?

RS
Interview Transcript

Date of Interview: 24 October 2007
Interviewee: RS, WY.

CF: So how long have you pastored and preached RS?

RS: I began preaching in seminary, you know, for the courses. And then I believe God called me to vocation and began preaching church plant up here in Big Horn, Wyoming in 1994. And I preached for 3 years there and then did the church plant a year here in Sheridan, Wyoming. And I was preaching at that till 99', I took 18 months off. And then came back to Sheridan and started my own business, and began to, God began to call me back into the ministry preaching in 2004. So all in all about 13 years preaching God's word.

CF: Okay, so where did you attend, where and when did you attend seminary?

RS: God called me to Sangre De Christo seminary in Western Colorado in 1992. So Sangre De Christo is a small Reformed Seminary located in the heart of the Rockies. It's a very small but it's main mission is to train guys to preach and teach the word.

CF: Okay so how old are you now?

RS: I'm 47.

CF: Okay, so have you had any post-graduate work?

RS: No. Other than, no post graduate work that I've been called to yet.

CF: Okay, let's just jump right in. How do you understand the term "postmodern?"

RS: Postmodern is a, I guess it would be a philosophical, cultural dialog that people engage in to talk about modernism, the truth is relative and that it can move from culture to culture, it can change terms, its meaning of traditional terms, and that preemptive meaning, it's a cultural persuasion. And it can affect finances, spirituality and churches, common law, things of that nature. So what we have had of foundational truth or changed because we can change the definition of it.

CF: Okay, so in contrast to that how would you understand the term modernist or modernism?

RS: Modernism, modernist is a person or a people who take contemporary I guess, cultural philosophies and shape them and mold them, and they evolve according to their whims, what they want to do. So the modernist would reject traditional values, traditional meanings, or historical foundations of our country, the significance of the battles, you know the meaning of freedom, things of that nature. And would say that their views to fit their ideological and their agenda.

CF: So with all of the preaching experience that you have, has your congregation if at all changed over the past years that you have been preaching and what have you noticed, what kind of cultural impact have you noticed on the congregation?

RS: Here in the West Arminianism is a very I guess it has made tremendous inroads into the culture and into the thought of a lot of the people who come to our church. And the Reformed message is not known.

Note: Recorder cut off and restarted. A brief review of the 2 minutes lost follows.

CF: We were talking about biblical preaching and how do you do it. You were talking about doing the hard work of exposition.

RS: Yes. Yes, that discipline I learned in seminary and you know sometimes you're in a hurry and there's times where you can do that, as you know as an Army chaplain. That you can't always do that but when you're called into a regular pastoral preaching situation where you need to do that, I think that makes a whole lot of difference in your message, there its preaching from one verse or topical, whatever, but doing the hard work of you know, getting the message right.

CF: So when you do this kind of preparation, what is it about, is there anything different about the delivery of the message that is particularly Reformed?

RS: Well, not every... like I preaching through the book of Romans and it doesn't get really Reformed until, you know, about the eighth chapter to the eleventh chapter, but in between there, you know, I don't make it overtly, I don't say Reformed terms, are not necessary because then the Reformed message comes out eventually. But I don't make it you know, every message a Reformed message in the traditional sense. But definitely when the Scriptures cover that then I relate to it. I believe that, you know, the message of God's sovereignty is throughout the Scripture but there's some particular points its more obvious than others, so that's what makes it Reformed is when there's Scripture really talks about those particular issues; sola gratia, sola fide, you know, sola Scriptura, sola Christo, all that stuff.

CF: So if we were to compare a Reformed sermon with or Reformed preaching with a general evangelical sermon, would there be any differences, and if so, what would they be?

RS: The big difference for me is like the active and passive voice in the Greek is amazing to me. Whenever we're talking about the issue of salvation, it is always the man who is being acted upon by God; passive voice in the Greek a cool tool to bring out the people. And the active voice, the cooperative voice when you get to Romans 12 it talks about things you're supposed to do, you know, love what's good, hate what's evil, be kind and affectionate to one another. Then that talks about the cooperative voice. So a standard evangelical message is probably not going to talk about God acting upon man in the sole sense, that he has nothing to do with it. He simply recognizes as a child begins to recognize their own birth. A person who is awakened by the Spirit recognizes that it is all salvation. And you know the issue of you know, I run into this all the time. I ask the question does faith cause regeneration or does regeneration cause faith? And seventy to eighty percent of people say that faith causes regeneration and that's what you get in a standard evangelical message, is that your faith was the active component in producing the salvation or any kind of spiritual gifts. So... which is totally not true. And the Reformed message, what that really brings to people, this is what God's word says and this is what actually happened. It awakens them to, you know, the reality and the awesomeness of God, versus, the you know, the deadness of man. They're not used to that. They haven't heard that before. So you don't really find that in standard evangelical messages.

CF: Okay, so let's expand this a little bit. What is the role of the preacher in Reformed preaching?

RS: I think the role of the preacher would be to explain to people I think more in teaching, there is the role of teacher, this issue of the Reformation, because if you try to preach that from the pulpit, you don't get a good response. People are interested in hearing God's word. And if you start talking about Luther and all of his stuff, and Calvin in the pulpit a lot people get tired of that. Where you find the best results is in the classroom, the Bible studies, Sunday Schools. That's where you teach the reformation to people. And I do that mostly when we have new members come in- we go through this in detail. But the role of the preacher in the Reformation for me is to really emphasize that God is sovereign and that he knows who are his. And that he has a working plan to bring his elect to salvation. And when you receive that that's the best gift you can have. So the role of the preacher in the Reformation is to continually be faithful to expository because when, if you are doing that it will come out, it will come out. So I think the biggest thing is to be faithful to what the word says.

CF: Okay, in the act of preaching what is the role of the Holy Spirit?

RS: The role of the Holy Spirit begins when the preacher sits down with the text and I always begin reading on Monday the text in the, you know, two or three different versions. God begins to shape my mind, what the verse is saying. And then as we go into the Greek, the use of the Greek, brings up nuances, and then what the Holy Spirit does is to relate to me, you know, this would be a good illustration. This would really help, be really helpful for people to know. And then once you get your meal all prepared you have to serve it. I always compare preaching with cooking. So you know, you don't just cook a good meal and throw it at people. You make the dinner table attractive. The Holy Spirit has allowed me the last few years to preach without notes. And so I don't ever have any notes unless I'm quoting from a book or something. I come out from behind the pulpit and the body language, the eye contact, that's what the Holy Spirit gives to me. I get to look the people in the eye. And I know what I believe. And by the time I get there I know what I believe. And you know, that's the act of the Holy Spirit to engage me, to teach me, and help me deliver it to the people.

CF: So what is the role of the congregation in preaching?

RS: Well that's a big question. I think the role of the congregation is to be prayerful, to receive God's word. We have what we call a scripture reading and then we have a prayer before the sermon. So before the sermon we ask that God will allow us to open up our hearts by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. And so I think the role of the congregation is to be respectful and to, you know, show that this has impacted them in this way. Talk about it to, encourage me, and I meet with, you know, elders of the church and we talk about the sermon and stuff like that. And so they tell me, well this sermon's, you did this and that, maybe not the right way this time. So I think the role is to be listening, attentive, and ask God to help them understand the passage.

CF: Okay, this may or may not be applicable, but has postmodernism affected your preaching and if so, how?

RS: Last year the Sunday School class went through a postmodernism study in the Sunday School. And it really opened up the eyes of myself and the people (who) attended. And I think the biggest impact is the terms, today's terms, traditional meanings. And what I like to do is do a Google search of what a term means or has meant, or look in dictionaries today and go through and see some definitions, and then go back and see what the meaning was, you know, in the 15th century, 16th century. And say, you know, this is what it meant now, what's the cultural is saying about this word now and what is it said in antiquity. So I'm always keenly aware now of postmodernism changing the terms, and changing the meanings, of reductionists, of historical reductionists and it is a fascinating thing because we get to see it unfold in our news today. I think a lot of people are impacted by terms that used to mean this, now they mean that. And you know, in preaching it its really comes out, especially when it comes to the application portion of the sermon. And this is what we need to do. This is what the word

means, to love your neighbor as yourself. So you know, I said that study in postmodernism really helped me and keeps me aware of what is going on.

CF: Do you find in your preaching that you have to explain terms more than when you first started?

RS: Definitely. Definitely, oh yeah. You sure do. And terms that are not in the Bible, you know, that need to be explained today, you know, like, terms like the Rapture, that's not in the Bible. But people have jumped on that in the last, you know, hundred years. And what did it mean when Darby first, when it went into dispensationalism talked about that, what does it mean today. So its amazing to see that, you know, the term back then and the term today is not the same. So that's just one instance of a term that's evolved and grown because of culturisms, and philosophies. So those terms that are familiar Christian lingo need to be explained in light of what scripture says and in light of what our culture is saying it means.

CF: So kind of building on that, do you think it's a loss of a sense of objective truth, in other words people are saying there's no such thing as truth anymore, or is it a change in the understanding of what truth is?

RS: Definitely, the subjunctive has replaced the objective. And as you know our culture has gone to more of this subjectivism, the spirituality, that's why our Charismatic churches are growing tremendously. But I think the role of the preacher is to bring out the objective, faith, and to explain to people, your feelings can trick you. They're not 100% percent correct. And you can bring that out in the text, you can bring that out in the experiences of today. And so that role of the objective and the subjective is very huge in preaching, and keeping your congregation informed as to what the text says.

CF: So you know one of the values in postmodernism is this very thing about the objectivity of truth or the subjectivity. Have you dealt with anything , or how would you deal with when a person says, you know, he is just giving his opinion up there. My opinion is just as good? How would you deal with that?

RS: Well, mostly that opinions of men change through history and preachers as well. I tell people to be like the Bereans in Acts 17, where what they did was tested the spirits to see if they were from God. And so, my big thing is to test scripture with scripture. And I'm very cautious of bringing out one verse and isolating it and saying this is what it means. There's no, none of the Reformed doctrines are dependent upon one verse. Whereas you get whole denominations, I think its Acts 2:38 I think it's the church of Christ, they're depending on one verse in the Bible. And so that's the huge thing is our Reformed message is replete throughout scripture. It does not depend on one scripture, on one opinion. And the best thing to do is to go back and see, well, this is what Augustine said. This is what Luther says, this is what Calvin says.

This is what Edwards says. In contemporary terms, you know, Sproul, and Kennedy, and other Reformed people of today, this is what they're saying. And it makes you see the continuity of it. Whereas you get a Charismatic message and the message of the rapture and you don't find that in the first century, second century. You don't find that till the 18th century. And people find that amazing. So opinions of theology can crop up. I think if you can span that unity from, you know, the first century to today and see what people are saying now then the opinions gradually disappear and people can see this is what the text says. That's a great tool.

CF: One of the things seems to be affecting a lot of the churches that are either seeker sensitive or emergent church or postmodern churches, they seem to be doing a lot of things other than preaching. So for example, they'll do drama or they'll do dance, or media. And there was one church for example, this summer they did a series of sermons that were called "blockbuster sermons," and it was basically the gospel in movies. There was another one that did the gospel according to the Beatles. So what really is the your opinion on that and source material that a preacher should use, that sort of thing?

RS: yeah, that's a good question. You know churches are trying to bring people in a pragmatic way and pragmatism has gone to extremes in cases where you've got the drama, you've got the dance, you've got people doing Sunday school using the Andy Griffith show. My suggestion there is that is not a precedent that has been documented in church history. It is only in our mode of entertainment, in the 20th century, where the church has done that. And so my opinion is that its not a biblical approach to preaching. Whereas you look at the apostle Paul in his letter to Timothy, telling him to be, to preach the word, to be faithful to the word, rightly applying it and so forth. There's no text in the Bible that teaches that we're to engage in drama. The people are not an audience, they're not to be entertained. Preaching is solely different, it's a singular activity that the church does that is set apart by the authority of the word itself. There's no authority entertainment. There's no authority for dance, there's no authority for drama. There's no authority for teaching the gospel in movies. Those things would be like third on the list to be used as an illustration, but to bring them to the forefront would be like to substitute your main meal for, you know, dessert. So what you are doing is giving the people substance, meat and potatoes and vegetables. What you are doing there is giving them strawberry shortcake and asking them to have a sustenance of life on dessert. So that's my opinion.

CF: Okay, do you think that some of the conflict is due to a crisis of faith; in other words that people are having difficulty in believing creeds and doctrinal content, or is it a crisis of the language of faith; that the words we use to convey the doctrine or creeds, just doesn't fit the culture anymore?

RS: I think that's part of it; the culture has definitely turned away from objective truth and creeds are foundational. They have the test of time behind them. We

use them in our church and you know, a confessional church. They're not overly populated, people are not attracted to them in an immediate sense. And we're working with people is that they have been in churches for a long time, different evangelical churches and then they get tired of the entertainment, they get tired of the things that are going on, they're not getting fed, they're not getting the substance. So like a body that does not have a proper vitamin content, and it begins to break down and so we get people in our churches like that. And we get to teach them substance and truth; the confessions. That, you know, really hits hard. But the culture has definitely turned away from that. Its beginning of our country Reformed church, you know, Calvinistic churches were the main thing. Calvin's Institutes were seminary texts for all of the seminaries. And now the opposite has come on, and Calvinism is a dirty word. And so you just have to, the preacher really has to his thing, you really have to explain what Calvinism is. Because that is a postmodern term today, Calvinism is this, it is not actually that. Exactly, what you said there, the culture has turned away from that stuff.

CF: So do you think that because the culture has turned away is the church, then, become the problem because its structures are not conducive to ministry and mission to this culture or is the church failing to be a church? Kind of acquiescing to culture.

RS: Well, you know, you have to ask yourself how far should a church go in terms of identifying with its culture, to the point where you can't really tell one from the other. Church is for God's people. Its not for the unbeliever, its for the believer. And God brings people in to the church. Their first experience is very important. So when they see someone preaching the word of God out of the text and they go to a different town and then they see a woman pastor, maybe even a gay person, giving a philosophical story they're going to make, they're going to form an opinion, and I don't think the church can embrace totally. It has to have its arms out but at the same time I'm finding more and more and more that you have to guard your doors. You look at the marquis of a lot of churches, "everyone welcome." And that used to be a main thing. But the church is not guarding those who are coming into those church doors, they get carried away very quickly. So it's one thing to say everyone welcome but it is another thing to say, well, you are only welcome here if these things are true about you. Because the first century church did not say everyone welcome. The casting of the word of God, people are coming, but they had certain standards, there were certain restrictions. So if the church is going to relax that, then the culturisms are going to be part of the church and its really not a church anymore, it's a social gathering.

CF: What challenges have affected where you are pastoring, in this sense? Have you felt any pressure to change the way that you preach? For example, there's a website that really kind of pays a lot, of monitoring of the purpose driven church, that sort of thing. And they are very clear that they consider it to be a compromise. But if you look at that site, they will, they'll have a, in fact just

recently they did kind of an expose' of how you manage your time. That was some of the sermons that were being done at Rick Warren's church; how to manage your time, how to do goal setting, things like that. Have you sensed any pressure in that direction?

RS: Not really in a small town like I live in. I think the biggest source of challenge is to change the music. And that is such a huge struggle. I'm not sure how to answer that. I mean there's good music, contemporary music out there. And a lot of good Christian people embrace that. We sing hymns. And once in a while we will do a contemporary hymn. But most of the music today is totally different in its approach and its designed to engaged the feelings and not the theology of the scriptures. So that to me is a big one. And the other one is to conform to the Arminian doctrine, to not give in to that. And I understand, you know, that churches can do how to manage your time and so forth, but when I come across that in the text I'll preach about it. But I don't see that too often in the text. Use your time wisely for the days are evil. One text in the Bible talks about that, but you can talk about that, but to do a whole series on it to replace that as the main meal. Again, you're changing the substance of the meal to the dessert issue, and not giving the people the substance they need.

CF: So do you think that because of this, well let me put it like this. One of the arguments that I heard was that people, for example, are listening to whatever contemporary music they're listening to, and they come into the church they get music that they simply can't relate to. So if we kind of apply that to the area of preaching, have you had to do any, first of all how do feel about that in the area of preaching, and then second of all, have you had to change anything in your preaching to try to reach people that are becoming more enculturated to postmodern culture.

RS: That's a big one. You know, you go on all the Christian stations, and there's no traditional hymns sung anywhere. In fact there have been lots of times where I've turned the radio on and flipped it to a station and I hear a song that is like a rock and roll song and it turned out it was a Christian station. And I'm amazed. And when people hear that, they grow up with that on the radio and now the church has. And they come to my church and we're singing hymns, they don't know how to relate to that. It turns them away so that's a constant battle. And in the scripture Paul says to sing hymns, spiritual songs, so you know, what does that mean? I think that the preacher has to say well, the music has to be different, it has to involve God equally and you know, the Reformed hymnals, the Trinity hymnals, they have such great theology in them. I think the biggest thing is to test them against the contemporary theology of the songs they're using. If you look at them, I call them 7-11 hymns where you sing the same verse seven or eleven times, over and over again. And again, I just try to explain to people, well, you know, we sing hymns because the theology in them, and because that's what, you know, the churches have survived on, and grown on, and thrived on. And a lot of people in my church they like the hymns and that's why they're there

for a lot of reasons. One of the reasons they're there is because of the hymns. They don't like the contemporary stuff.

CF: So if we slide sideways to preaching have you been pressured, or do you feel any pressure to move to a more practical topics, or at least what they would call more practical topics?

RS: No. No, my congregation, I tell them in the membership class that we go through and they get oriented to our church, we preach through books of the Bible. And once in a while we'll go into a topical series, but we'll be preaching right through a book of the Bible. And when they understand the philosophy behind that, then, I've never got someone or anybody who said, "You need to swing this way or that way, let's do this and that." Of course my congregation is smaller, between forty and fifty and maybe in the bigger churches you might get that pressure. But as for me the smaller church is, smaller congregation, I've never had that type of pressure.

CF: One of the values in postmodernism is they will say, for example, in Daniel [David] Miller's book, *Searching for God knows what*, he says that the Bible has been mistaken by modernists as informational whereas its really relational and one of the things they really dislike within postmodernism are propositions, or propositionalism. What is your comment on that?

RS: Yeah, again scripture warns us against those who just love to have their ears tickled. And I think postmodernism does not embrace the traditional meaning, biblical authority as in the founding of our country. Its been a slow drift away from the authority of the Bible and what you've got now is you've got people who've got agenda bibles. And these agenda bibles thrive on the footnotes. They all begin to show people, well I'm reading God's word, but this is what it says about it on the commentaries. So the agenda bibles bring people away from the authority of the Bible and is going towards more to the opinion of the editor of those bibles and so postmodernism is thriving that way. That's one of the ploys I think of the devil to give people these agenda bibles, the rainbow Bible for instance. Giving people, you know, what was originally thought of Jesus' words, actual words, and now they've, I think they've gotten rid of 70 to 80 percent of that, and saying that these are not what Jesus' words were. And so now they're just comments; they're not from the words of Christ.

CF: Another one of the values of postmodernism is rather than stating a proposition, they'll say, you know the Bible is stories, so that is what we need to be doing. We need to be telling stories. This is a little bit different than illustrations. What's your take on that?

RS: Jesus was the, I think, he is the best illustrator of relating people's lives to their culture. I mean, he talked about fishing in which was very apropos to people of that time. And so what I think we need to watch out for is stories. Stories are

philosophical in nature. And whereas illustrations are more of what the Holy Spirit gives to me. If you live in New York city, or you don't live around water and agricultural, those terms are going to be very hard for people to understand so you are going to have to do a good job of explaining to them what it means, you know, about the sea and the storm. Now for instance in Revelation it talks about the sea and a river; to the Jew the sea meant troubling whereas the river was refreshment. It doesn't matter whether it's the sea or the river, those things are going to be very difficult for people to understand, so you are going to have to illustrate. And an illustrator is like an artist who draws a horse. There's a main theme in a picture. But what a story does is gives generalities. And people need a main theme to proposition. A proposition, what's the proposition of your sermon? You know, what's one sentence you can say that this sermon should say. So an illustration should give people that basic one thing that the scripture is talking about and not dance around it in generalities where they can leave and just, you know, a whole bunch of stuff but nothing in particular.

CF: So one of the things a lot of the guys who I've been interviewing have said is that they sense within the PCA rather than doing anything that is really along the lines of Reformed preaching, that they've sensed its been more moralistic. Would you agree with that and how would you define moralism in sermons?

RS: Well, I try to stay away from moralisms because the emphasis is on what you do for God. And that is a philosophy that I had adopted that need to be changed, because, you know, for instance you take the book of James, and you take the book of Romans, and if your philosophy is, let's preach the book of James as moralistic, push on people. Well you can do that, but I've found that if you continually push the moralisms, you can drive people away because unless you balance that with grace, moralisms will drive people away. Whereas if you're preaching grace you will bring people more and more to the reality of the gospel. And so the PCA has got to face this challenge like every denomination. I think its going to be tested, because when the numbers aren't coming in, and the church plants aren't going well, then we're going to be tempted to adopt practices that other churches are using and a lot of them are using moralisms. Baptist churches are known for preaching moralisms over grace. And so you end up in, what you end up in if you continue is legalism. And that's the one thing you want to stay away from. And so we're going to be challenged like everyone else in that area.

CF: So how would you define moralistic preaching, what is the difference between that and let's say Reformed preaching?

RS: Moralism, moralistic preaching is taking and saying that the overall philosophy is okay, this is what God has done for you. Now this is what you have to do. You have to do this, you have to do that, you have to be here, you have to, you need to, you can't watch this, you can't go here. You know, and so, the whole philosophy of the church turns to behavior and then because we're sinners, people are going to realize that, you know, I'm not living up to this. And

this is what's happened. I've got to do better. And so the emphasis is to drown out the cross. And moralistic preaching if its taken to its logical end will actually put the Christian on the cross to embellish what Christ did. What Christ did is not good enough, so my works are going to produce what eventually is pleasing to God. Whereas grace, preaching grace is teaching people the beauty of the gospel, and to teach them you cannot please on your works. And God completely pleased by what his Son did on the cross. So you don't obey to be accepted. You obey because you are accepted. And that's the difference between moralistic preaching and the preaching of grace.

CF: Do you have any kind of final comments on postmodernism and preaching?

RS: Well I would say that postmodernism is going to continue to evolve. Terms are going to be challenged and I think that as the preacher you have to be engaged in your culture to the point where you're watchful of the terms being changed, you're watchful of the attitudes that are being changed. You've got to *keep up on news, you've got to keep up on, you know, books that are coming out, sermons, movements that are coming out.* And then as they affect you and as they affect your congregation, you've got to be able to stand and fight that battle. Because if you just allow them to come to you and say we'll fight it once it gets here. We won't worry about it. You're not going to be prepared. Its just like in the Army, you do recon. And you find out about the enemy, you find out what they're doing. The nuances of their weaponry. We've got to do the same thing. We've got to find out what liberal churches are doing, what's their trend, what are postmodernist churches doing, you know. Because people will ask the question and if you really engage people as Paul did, you've got to be ready. So I would think that if you're going to be a pastor and preacher you've got to, you cannot be a hermit in your own congregation. You've got to engage the culture, and not become part of it.

ST
Interview Transcript

Date of Interview: 9 September 2007
Interviewee: ST, CA

CF: Go ahead and give me your name and where you are ministering right now.

ST: My name is ST.

CF: How long have you pastored and preached there.

ST: For 13 years.

CF: Was this your first pastorate?

ST: No. My first pastorate was in a Dutch speaking congregation in Holland. And I was there for four years. After I'd finished my doctoral studies and degree at the University of Amsterdam. Then after that I was in Toronto, Canada for ten years. I've been out here for 13.

CF: So where did you attend seminary?

ST: Gordon Conwell. I did my M.Div at Gordon Conwell theological seminary.

CF: And you had doctoral work in Holland, you say?

ST: Free University of Amsterdam. I also have a Ph.D. from Westminster East.

CF: Okay, so how old are you now.

ST: 62.

CF: Okay, well, let me just jump right in. How do you understand the term "postmodern?"

ST: Postmoderns are typically the people who are strong on community, they're visually oriented, who do not like the certainty that they believe that modernity/the Enlightenment thinking provided a very suspect tradition and they're highly individualistic.

CF: Okay, how would you by contrast understand the term "modernist" or "modernism."

ST: The modernist and modernism... there are a couple of ways that I would understand them. One of them would be you would have modernism being the

tenets of certainty and biased methodology, that type of things that you do have what the postmodernist would call a “metanarrative,” and you have something that holds everything together. Within the context of the Christian church, using that same term, I would say that there are certain aspects of modernity that the Christian church has taken over, but those are those aspects of [unintelligible] that really dovetail with what scripture says. In general the Christian church has been highly critical of the Enlightenment thinking, especially that aspect of Enlightenment thinking that has been jettisoned, the whole God hypothesis, and has placed all the emphasis on reason. So I would say that modernity apart from Christianity is that which places a premium on certainty and knowing and sometimes I get the reaction by the postmodern has been they know too much and so again, to contrast the two you’ll find that postmoderns are very uncertain about knowing anything. They’re more on a journey, and they kind of pick up things as they move along. But modernity has more of an emphasis on coming to a settled idea of knowledge.

CF: I was recently reading a book called, “Searching for God knows what,” and it was written from a postmodern perspective.

ST: Was that Miller?

CF: Yeah, it was Miller’s book. And he makes kind of an interesting statement, and I would be interested in your opinion. He says that modernists have mistaken revelation for information rather than being relational.

ST: Yeah. That’s a very good and telling statement about being postmodern. So there’s a lot you can say about that. In the first case you can say we do get a lot out of the fact that you can know certain things because Jesus says that you can. You can know the truth and the truth will set you free. I think that the relational aspect is probably a valid criticism. The modern church especially in its mega church format was highly lacking in that area, in the sense that you went to church, you showed up, did your thing, and then walked away, got out before the traffic got too bad so you could get home and do whatever you wanted to do. And there were very few relationships. There was no connection, if you will, the people were just in and out, they were part of a faceless mass and never got to talk with the pastor, never got to talk to any church leaders, and probably didn’t want to anyway. Whereas the emphasis now, in lets say the emergent church, and Miller is certainly one of the lynch-pins in that whole scenario, is back to the concept of community. The problem with them is that community based upon what. What the postmoderns don’t want, and McClaren would be guilty of this and so would Padgett, probably Mark Driscoll to a lesser extent, is the whole idea that the scriptures contain propositional truth. To that end, by denying propositional truth in scripture, they align themselves with liberal scholars of the 19th century. Their shift, their slightly different approach to it is to focus then on relationships. Like anything else in the Christian life relationships have to be tempered and formed by what scripture teaches. Otherwise you can have some

pretty bad relationships. So for example if I'm in a relationship with a girl and we're not married, and we're having sex together, in the postmodern way of thinking that's our deal and nobody is supposed to come along and say, "Hey, you know what, that's wrong."

CF: So, how has your congregation, if at all, changed in the past years that you've been preaching? Have you noticed any cultural impact from postmodernism upon your congregation?

ST: No, I think we talked about it. I've written a lot about postmodernism. Our congregation in the past three years, probably the average age has dropped 15 years. We have a lot of diversity and people back in Atlanta constantly ask me "what do you do to bring all of these Asians, and Mexicans and everybody else and the short answer is "I hate to disappoint you but we don't advertise anything but its simply the preaching of the Word. And the people come for the preaching of the Word, so our impact upon postmoderns...although because we do have a lot of young people we spend a lot of time talking about this. We also have a new Christian college very close to us, less than a half hour away, Sunday we get a lot of students from there. But we talk to them about that. We talk to them about the good things and the bad things of postmodernism. We understand a lot of these kids... I was just talking to my granddaughter, as a matter of fact she is going to that school that I was talking her to meet her ride on the way into the office this morning. And she was telling me about a certain biology class where the professor wanders all over the place, I'll bet we've all had that kind before, everybody sits in class with a computer and text messages, and they do these things. We were just up in Canada. I was watching my grandchildren with the computer. They are just amazing with the way that they are into this technology, that we don't have. But the other part of it is that it draws them away. So rather than speaking to someone face to face, or calling them on the phone and having a conversation, they would prefer to text message. And do that type of thing. And you do begin to see that there is an element in the impersonal that is coming into this even though ironically, they're desiring to have more community.

CF: Kind of raising that issue, do you think kind of the influence of postmodernism and/or emerging church movement is due a loss of sense of community and has the church kind of acquiesced to culture in its ability to incarnate the gospel?

ST: Yes to both. I think there has been as I mentioned earlier, there has been a decided lack of community with the mega church movement. The mega church movement if anything, promoted anonymity. And you can get in and out of there-nobody knew who you were, there was no such thing as discipline, because you never knew who the people because you never who the people were that showed up, whether they were living together or just friends, whatever else. And that has been a huge problem. What was the second part of the question again?

CF: As the church has tried to deal with this ...

ST: Yeah...okay right. I think what has happened, again, if you go back and look at since, say, from the 70's at least, you've had a accommodation factored, and the church, I think David Wells calls it spiritual consumerism, where people like Hybels and others went out and did their polls and found out what the people wanted and decided to give that to them. And so you find that there has been to a very high degree, I believe, the marketing of the church, and this marketing factor has taken on looking more like the world than looking like the church. And so you find a church today that truly looks like the church and acts like the church it comes as a shock to many people's systems. It seems so far out and off the radar, that this is something they're not used to because they've been accommodated by the pastors, by the leadership team, whatever else. You can see that in the music, you can see it in the liturgy, you can see it in the preaching, if you can even call it preaching, and those types of things. There is most definitely I think that has happened.

CF: Do you think then that in answering this that the church should draw only on its own resources or maybe draw from the world? I mean what kind of interaction should it have?

ST: I think typically if I understand the New Testament that the members of local congregations are to use their gifts, to have those gifts discovered, encouraged, nurtured, within the context of the local congregation. Now that presents some kinds of problems if you keep it to just the congregation. We're doing three church plants out here and sometimes there's a problem getting a pianist and playing. And if you have a small, small group of people, and the probability of getting a good pianist is maybe miniscule. However we've got in one of our church plants they use guitar and I don't have any problem with that, but I don't think you have to go out and hire bands and things like that. We've been blessed in our congregation. We have a congregation of about 200 and we have an excellent harpist, we have a concert flutist, we have a professor of music from Cal State, Fullerton, we have pianists, we have... my daughter is dramatic soprano, and we have another soprano who sings with the Opera Pacific, so we have... we can do those types of things with regard to music. I think the music needs to be seen as somewhat of a sidebar. I think that pastors in small churches like that, at least that's what we've emphasized, that they should be out training men to be effective elders. And then you start looking for these other things. I'm pretty much... we haven't done much at all of bringing in ringers or extra singers or whatever else. We are just trying to keep it pretty local.

CF: Do you think that there's a loss of a sense of biblical authority or is it more of a rise of a culture of individualism?

ST: I think it is probably both, Christ. There has certainly been a loss of biblical authority. And you would see that in the 'po-mo's' today. You would see that in

McClaren's writings, clearly, and he just passes that along to those who would walk in lock-step with him. I think you'd see that in Miller, I think the first book I read by Miller was "Blue Like Jazz," book, and near the end of that book, apart from the goopy and loopy things he'd said, he talked about the fact that he was living with these people that sounded like this kind of burned out hippies, they worked at this really prestigious probably trendy, yuppie-type of restaurant that served gourmet foods. And they would just steal the food. And they thought it was their right to do that and rather than saying this is an unbiblical approach to life, he kind of passed it over or just had a, you know, gave it a pass and said, you know, this is what I did all summer, I just ate their food, and laughed it off.

CF: So how would you understand the term "Reformed"?

ST: I would... the short answer, without being snarky about it, is biblical. And I think that the Reformed view is the biblical view. I mean you can trace it to something like, you can name names, you can say Reformed is Calvin, Boolander, Edwards, Bobink-type, Kuyper, Berkof, Houkema, those types of things. OR you can talk of it in terms of a way of life, the biblical way of life, that in one sense has been defined for us in part, only part, by the Synod of Dort and their rejection of the Arminian five points, and their remonstrance. Basically I would say Reformed is something that gives you a total, biblical life and world view that affects everything you say, do and think.

CF: Okay, what do you believe biblical preaching is and how do you do it?

ST: I believe biblical preaching would include first a very thorough exegesis of either the Hebrew or the Greek text. I believe it is to be put together in a format that is understandable by their hearers...and that's going to be on a sliding scale. When I first took this church, out here, I preached no more than 20 minutes. And I kept things very, very simple because it was a congregation that was byinlarge that had come out of broadly based evangelicalism, so I tried to tailor the preaching that way. Now I preach usually about 40 minutes. And people are able to follow what I'm saying and keep up with it. So I believe it primarily should be the exposition of the text then. So I've always been, since I've been a pastor, whether it was Holland or Canada or here, I've preached series sermons. I preached through books of the Bible. I think the advantage of that is that it keeps you off your hobby horses. That you really do have to follow the text and say what the text says. I'm not a strong proponent of topical preaching where you just choose a topic like Stephen Covey's 7 Habits of highly effective people or 40 days of purpose. I know that there's been PCA pastors that have preached through Warren's book which I don't think you do. I think you preach through the Bible but you don't preach through that, you don't preach through the prayer of Jabez. You preach on the prayer of Jabez. What I tend to do I do series and in the summer months I've had the tendency to take another book of the Bible, to break up the series, and I will preach on...just last summer I just finished up, this Sunday Lord willing, I'm preaching a 14 series of sermons, a sermon series of

conformed to the image of Christ. I use various texts from the New Testament in particular for that. But typically I preach through books. In the past I've preached through the book of Jude, I've preached through the Sermon on the Mount, I've preached through Haggai, Obadiah, and things of that nature. But I think it is most important that you preach through a book of the Bible and try to do it in an expository fashion. And also from time to time, I will use pertinent illustrations. I try to stay away from personal illustrations because I don't think I'm all that interesting. But I try to illustrate things. We have a service where all the little kids stay in. So we have everybody stay for the sermon. And so I try to make sure from time to time to say a very particular word to the kids. I also doing in the other times during the year, I will break up my series and may preach a special sermon on Pentecost, I may preach a special sermon on the ascension of Christ. I've done it a couple of times I've preached through by Easter time, I've preached through the 7 sayings of Christ from the cross.

CF: How would you distinguish for example a Reformed sermon from a general evangelical sermon, would there be any differences if any?

ST: It would depend I guess. It would be the short answer there would be many times, look, I'm not one of these guys that preaches on predestination and election. If it comes up in the text I preach on it. If it doesn't *I preach what the text says. And that would probably be to me one of the most glaring and egregious differences, rather than explaining what election and predestination actually is, I think that the broadly based evangelical either ignore those texts or it would die the death of a thousand qualifications. Having said that I also think that within the context of those of us who are Reformed I've heard Reformed people who are more kindly leaning towards the women's movement preach some awful sermons on the text about women should keep silent, or attempt to explain them away. And rather than explain them.

CF: So what do you think within biblical preaching is the role of the preacher?

ST: To exposit the text, to edify those who are listening to the text and pointing them, just to qualify the answer, from the series this summer, to point them to the fact they are to be as Christians, we are all called by grace to be conformed to the image of Christ.

CF: So what would be the role of the Holy Spirit in the process of preaching?

ST: I think the Holy Spirit plays a key role. As a matter of fact, one of my summer series probably two years ago was on... I preached 14 sermons on the person and work of the Holy Spirit. And I think the Holy Spirit plays an integral role in the preaching of I think, the Holy Spirit plays a role even the delivery for that matter. There have been times when I have had my sermon clearly in my head and I believe the Holy Spirit will give you an insight in your preaching, actually in the process of preaching, in what you might not have thought, if you

like, in the preparing to deliver the sermon. I think the Holy Spirit not only works in the minister, but he also works in the people of the congregation. I think that is one of the ironies of preaching, one of the tough things to get your head around if you'll preach a sermon, you'll just agonize, uh, (and say) I just can't wait to get through this, this is awful, and people will come up to you and say "Oh, that was just exactly what I needed. Or it will be the opposite where you will have the situation where you will say, "This one is great. This is the best sermon I've ever made." And people will say, "You know you won't have to preach that one anytime soon." So the work of the Holy Spirit, in one sense, is incomprehensible to us. But he does continue to enlighten and illumine, and I think part of the illumination work of the Holy Spirit is to take a text and to make it clear to us on to how to live that text on a daily basis.

CF: You mentioned before a PCA pastor preaching through Rick Warren's book, so you would say then that the exclusive source material for Reformed preaching would be the scriptures.

ST: Absolutely. You can bring in an insight from a book, or you can bring in J.I. Packer, you can bring in a quote from Calvin, you can bring in a quote from one of the many Reformed confessions just to bolster that, or to show the congregation, you know, that these confessions are clearly based on Scripture, they are accurate summaries. I think you can do that, but byinlarge it should be the scriptures is the fountain from which you draw your material.

CF: Have you had to explain more over the years of biblical terms, like justification to your congregation?

ST: Yes, and I think that's the point because I think that the congregation is kind of always in flux. We have a number of people and we have older members who have lived out of state and come back with us and they'll say, "Oh my goodness, I don't know half the people here. We tend to get a lot of people that I would call Calvary Chapell burn-outs, for lack of a better phrase. And they come in and you really have to take time with them so the way we try to do that is that we have one new members class where we explain some of this stuff, what we're about, but that's only 7 weeks. And then we have adult Sunday Schools so we encourage the people to come to adult Sunday School, there's a lot of time where there's a Q and A. I just got through, I taught through the Westminster Shorter Catechism. That took me about a year. There were, every week they had an outline with key words and phrases, they had homework they had to do, they were supposed to memorize the catechism. [unintelligible]. And so we taught that. Or we have a Bible study or we'll have a topic in Sunday School. And we try to give the people all the opportunity they want to ask the questions. And then sometimes in the sermon if I note there are a lot of new faces there and there's a term, I try to explain the term in ways that its understandable for somebody that's just coming in off the street. The other thing we do is our home visits. We have our congregation divided into shepherding groups and the elders and I go out.

We visit and we call them, and it gives them an ample opportunity to ask their questions. So we go out and we ask them questions too. We ask them about their spiritual life, we ask them their prayer life, we ask them if there are things that they don't understand that need explanation of. So we find out key things like the Federal Vision in simple terms. We try to keep that in front of them as to why we having this discussion in the PCA, or the other OP's and URC's are having the same discussion; what are the main points, what are the problems, those type of things. So basically I think if you're pastoral in dealing you're your people, I just wrote an article which is going to appear in Table Talk soon, about the fact that you really need to deal with people and be approachable as a pastor. Everybody in our congregation gets a birthday card signed by me. They get, I know all the kids. I'm also the coach of the youth wrestling out here so the young guys know me. We don't shake hands we just give fists. That's about where its at. But I think those opportunities, what I call informal opportunities that you can have the time and sit down and talk. I have office hours, you know, people want to see me. The only time they really can't see me is Thursday, which is sermon making day. They can see me if they're having a heart attack in the hospital, but other than that I'm pretty well defended and closed off by my secretary. But any other time I'm in my study and people can either drop by and say hello or they can make an appointment and we go to lunch or whatever else.

CF: What do you think the role of the congregation is in preaching?

ST: I think they are... this is really kind of interesting because we have been going through our recitation of the Westminster Larger Catechism lately, and we just got through going through that. And we talked about how they are to prepare themselves for worship so with the electronic age upon us, the whole bulletin is up on our website by Thursday so everybody knows what we're going to be singing, and the number the parents teach the children, the younger children they start teaching the hymns at home, and they know that we're going to be reading; we typically do two readings at the first service of Scripture. And so I think it is incumbent upon the congregation to know that type of thing, to prepare themselves to read the verses, to prayerfully prepare themselves not only for that but for also having the sacrament, whether it's the Lord's supper or baptism, that they prepare themselves by prayer for that and to use the spiritual disciplines that God has given us in order that they may come to worship and really derive a lot out of that rather than coming in on empty, expecting the pastor to fill up their tank which is really not going to happen.

CF: Going back to talking about illustrative material, we were talking about J. I. Packer, and etc., you know one of the big values is being promoted by McClaren and McManus, and Miller, is because of their rejection of "propositions" they say that Christianity is not a principle but it's a story, so we need to communicate largely by stories. You know which is what McClaren does in his book on being a Christian.

ST: Look, I think what they did was they get a lot of truth. They say “Jesus told stories.” That’s true. But Paul didn’t always tell stories. I think what you have in the whole fabric of Scripture is that you have a whole multiplicity of literary genres. But what McClaren has done is that basically everything is storytelling. So I think that is one of the major shortcomings they have is that not everything is storytelling. Although there is storytelling that is there.

CF: So how has, I may have asked this before, I’m not sure but do you sense a pressure in the area that you’re in to move toward more of a postmodern model of preaching?

ST: Yeah, with certain people I think that that pressure is clearly there and that they’ve already done it. They...these are PCA colleagues I’m talking about. They’re not the run of the mill, generically you can say in evangelicalism there’s a lot of that. But within the context of the PCA there’s also a measure of that. And its kind of disturbing to me that they’re running off that way. Because what I’ve seen is that the substitute is not very helpful at all.

CF: Okay, what would you define as the substitute?

ST: It tends to be the easy, breezy, not very much content [unintelligible]. As I said before if somebody has just come in that’s where they are. And you take them at square one, but you don’t leave them there. What I tend to see is that a number of my colleagues who have been at this for a long time, their congregations are still pretty much at square one. And they’re not leaving...pulling them along. If you start off and everyone is at square one, that’s where you are. It is where it is. If after a number of years you haven’t taken them, humanly speaking, you haven’t take them farther, then there’s something dreadfully wrong. But I think a lot of it tends to be entertainment oriented. I have one colleague who refuses to use a pulpit. He uses a bar stool, he uses a bar stool and gives this little fire-side chat and I know there’s a lot of pressure to do that type of thing, because that seems more intimate, but at the same time I don’t think it comports to the New Testament idea of what preaching really is. I think preaching tends to be more than just sitting in an easy chair talking to folks.

CF: That idea’s is being promoted very much by people like Eugene Peterson, and surprisingly Haddon Robinson, you know, has said that we need to have more of a conversation than we do of talking at somebody.

ST: I was listening to Robinson preach, and he’s an excellent preacher.

CF: He is, and that’s kind of the model before I came into the PCA, that was presented and what is really surprising, at Dallas Seminary, Ronald Barclay Allen has written an awful lot in the area of postmodern preaching. And he has often said that preaching, and the act of preaching and the preparation has been the private purview of the preacher and that there ought to be more congregational

participation. And so he's moving more towards that. And of course he advocates drama, dance and several other things.

ST: I was going to say I would say that means that his approach is a pooling of ignorance, because I find for myself that there is just so many recurring themes as a Pastor. One of them is you talk to your people and you say to them, "You need to be reading your Bible daily," well, they know that, that they haven't been doing that, you encourage them to do that, you encourage them to pray. Now to get them, to get a congregation to prepare well, and to come in have a good discussion about these things, I don't know. You're opening up a can of worms there. What we do is we have a Wednesday night men's Bible study, and they get the material in advance, and we take turns presenting it. And everybody is supposed to prepare. And I would have to say at this point everybody has done their homework. Everybody prepares, and we have great discussions, we get together. We're having our first one for the new season tonight, and we're studying Calvin's exposition of the Psalm, and the idea is to first find out what Calvin said, and then to find out how, what we would get out of it, how we would present this in our home. So it kind of doubles up. Everybody has printed material and we get together, we study it, and ideas, and now you take this back and you prepare this. You take this back and you use this for your devotions at home with your family. But I think you can have those type of discussions, you can have agreements, you can have disagreements, in those types of situations. But I would be very hesitant, which is probably the best word that I would use, I would be very hesitant to do that for a number of reasons, not least is which I just think it is unbiblical. I think the context, the New Testament word for Kerygma, or keux, is substantially more than dialog, or sitting in a swivel chair having a fireside chat. And people like Robinson ought to know better.

CF: One of the interesting values, as you know in postmodernism is the idea that my experience is what I hold to be true. And a lot of the pressure that is coming from those guys who are writing will say, well the congregation's experience is as valid as the pastor's. So how would you answer somebody who would say that well, why is he up there preaching when my opinion is just as good as his?

ST: Well, yeah, I know that it is going to come across as a huge shock to people's senses and sensibilities, but I don't believe we are all equal in all things. Our own standards talk to us about superiors and equals and inferior. And that doesn't mean you're inferior as far as being a person, but it certainly does mean in terms of gifts. I think the man who is up there hopefully is a man who has gone to seminary, who has done well in seminary, believes that scholarship's best place is in the pulpit, and who is there to feed the people. He's done the work. He's dug into the original languages. He's looked at commentaries. He's prayed about this. He's tried to put it together in a sentient way. And it would be like him going after a sermon and going up to a bricklayer and saying, "Now that we've had this nice discussion, how about me coming with you and laying some bricks?" I'm sure people would not want me laying bricks for them. I don't

know... but I could probably learn, but I don't know the first thing about it. So a lot of it is this, I think, secular notion of egalitarianism. We're not all the same and I don't... the reason the person is up there the real reason better be is because the person and the congregation is convinced that God called that person to be there. And the calling means that he has the ability, the desire and the opportunity to do that. Not everybody is cut out for that. Not everybody is cut out to be an elder. Not everyone is cut out to be a deacon. Not everyone is cut out to be as hospitable with other people. I think the whole idea of diversity that we find clearly taught in the New Testament is locked into the concept of unity so we use our gifts, whatever they may be, for the benefit of the whole of the congregation.

CF: Okay, so in some of the writings there was a kind of a consortium that was put together by Leonard Sweet and he interviewed an awful lot of people and had them interact, Michael Horton being one of them, and then Brian McManus, and others, and he kind of came up with the metaphor of an agricultural gardening metaphor and he compared the church, or at least some of the Reformed churches, to a garden with a huge hedge that, "we're just going to be in here and maintain ourselves," versus postmodern church, which is like a big field full of wild flowers that is constantly changing and growing. So, is this really, do you think that postmodernism within the church and some of the areas that have gone in that... or some of the churches that have gone in that direction, is the church the problem with its structures not conducive to ministry to this new culture, or is it failing to be a church, and acquiescing to the culture?

ST: I think that it is the latter. I struggle with the simplistic answer, look. I became a Christian after I got out of the military. And it was probably early 1970's I became a Christian. I lived through a lot of this stuff that is going on now. And I saw that the church just did not function. It became anarchistic in a number of ways. That the church apart from that was not doing what it needed to do. It was trying to be like the world and the net result was that it was neither the world nor the church. And I think that the church ought now to do what the church does. As the PCA we have a directory of Public worship. We have a book of church order that is no by means infallible, as no book of church order is but you look at it and say, there is a lot there that teaches me what I need to do in being a church. This, personally, people are talking about their experience, and my experience has been, this church has grown and thrived when I preach the gospel to them. They grow in their life as people, and people are changed, lives are changed that way, whereas if you get together and everybody is just kind of doing their own thing or whatever seems to be good in their own eyes. I think you have more tendency to chaos than you do towards things being done decently and in good order.

CF: Do you think it's a problem that our creeds and the doctrinal content is no longer keeping pace with the culture or is it a problem or crisis in the language of faith; the words that we use?

ST: I'm not sure that its either. Let me just bat it back to you for a second. I've had this conversation in the bookstore a couple of years ago with one of the guys of the PCA who was advocating that we needed to change the creed. And I said like what? What is it that we would need to change? Can you give me an answer?

CF: Oh, me?

CF: The answer that is being at least offered by a lot of the writers is that the questions that the confession answering, people are not asking today. You know, in the sense that if we raise the issue of what is the role of women in the church, they're just astounded that we're even asking that question.

ST: Yeah, so there you have it seems like the church, rather than clearly delineating the scripture's teaching, has just said okay, we'll just capitulate. The society, you have feminism. I've been trying to write a lot about that lately. The feminist movement from the 60's to the present and we're just going to go that route. Then you're kind of saying that that feminist movement had an element of neutrality in it, vis a vi God, which I don't think that it did. I don't think that anybody that really thinks about it really thinks that it did. But that's kind of the concept that's being offered there, and so we have, the church literally is capitulating to the world and that type of thing. And I think that the church were to be the church in order to be the salt and the light that its called to be, has to remain church and do the things that God has called us to do in the church and leave the other stuff to the other people. I have had the privilege of knowing Hans Radmacher who was probably the preeminent church historian in the Netherlands and he would, he loved American students. We used to get together for lunch and he would give us these art history lessons. The man was just phenomenal. He's got a book out, Publishinglished a number of years ago by Intervarsity called, Modern Art: The death of a culture. And he was just brilliant. And you start to look around and you think here's this man who was probably the preeminent art historian in the Netherlands. And he was virtually ignored. And the reason he was ignored was because he was a Christian. When you stop and think about the other things that are going on in the New Testament, I would just take a book of Hebrews, there were those, I think cultural contextualization and this culture thing is way, way overrated way out of proportion, you just ask the simple question when the author to the Hebrews wrote to his audience, were there cultural things going on? You bet? Were there important cultural things going on? Yes, there were? And what was his message? His message was you are living in the last days. And basically he was saying be conformed to the image of Christ. Look to Christ for these things. And he didn't give in the midst of all that... the only time I find culture being brought to the forefront and engaged in any way was in Acts 17 with Paul in the Areopagus. But the rest of the time it is an underlying factor or course in these occasional letters in the New Testament and the Old Testament written to cultures and there were cultural things going on but for whatever reason God decided not to address those things. And I don't

think we should either necessarily. We can always hold symposia, we can do things that are along those lines and I think Christians ought as much as possible be involved in arts, and things of that nature, I think there is a calling for us there. Kuyper's lectures on Calvinism from 1898 are a classic case in point, but for the rest the main venue ought to be preaching the gospel and this other stuff ought to be sidebar.

CF: So basically what you're saying is that within those who are advocating postmodernism they've got, they've kind of capitulated to the spirit of the age.

ST: yeah, the short answer is yes. I think that not just the spirit of the age, but its kind of become the vogue thing to do in Reformed circles. I know my son, my second son was up in a PCA church plant in Toronto last fall and we were out visiting a few years ago, in the meantime thing's gone belly up. But the pastor, if I had to summarize his sermon, in the first place, he had a text, he read it. It had nothing to do with what he had to talk about. He never came back to it afterward. It was just a spring board for him to say what he wanted to say. And he must of said a 100 times in 50 different ways that we need to engage the culture. And I went up to him afterwards and I said, "I heard what you said. So how am I to do that?" And he had no clue. I mean, it was part and parcel of what's going on right now. Its kind of the vogue thing, chic to be talking about engaging the culture. I sat down with many of my colleagues at Presbytery meetings and asked them the same question, "So tell me what do you do?" And they give me these answers like "we get together with non-Christians and we drink beer and shoot pool." And I said, "I did that when I was a pagan." So do you give them the gospel? Where are you now? That can be pretty offensive. What are you doing other than networking by shooting pool and drinking beer? So you just go out and shoot pool and drink beer and leave the pagans out of it. That's the kind of thing...I'm exaggerating to some extent or another. But I think that is what is part and parcel of what happens is that we tend want to reach the non-Christian, which is a great thing, it is a biblical thing to do, but once we get them, and God has brought them into our presence what are we going to do with them next and how are we going to present the gospel." Because eventually you have to present the gospel. And I think by the same token a number of these PCA church planters eventually need to tell the people, we're PCA. Which means as Presbo's this is what we do, this is how we think, this is who we are, etc., etc., etc. And I don't find that happening. I've got guys down the road from me who have been at this thing for five, six years, and they don't have a clue what it is to be Presbyterian. And what we've found in our own Presbytery, we've had probably three church plants go belly up here. And in every one of those not one person stayed PCA. They just disappeared into the woodwork, went out to be whatever.

FG
Interview Transcription

Interview date: 8 November 2007

Interviewee: FG, Wyoming

CF: FG, tell me how long you have pastored and preached.

FG: I guess ten years. I was ordained in 97'.

CF: Okay, when and where did you attend seminary?

CF: Gordon-Conwell in Boston from, 90-94.

FG: Now was this a D.min, or Th.M?

CF: M.Div, and working on a D.Min at New Geneva, I have to write the dissertation.

CF: That's great, that was going to be my next question. So, let's jump right in, how do you understand the term postmodern?

FG: I agree David Wells and others that really postmodernism is really just ultra-modernism. Basically it's a denial that there's objective truth. And an attempt to deconstruct everything. So there is no truth. Every bit of communication, written or oral is about imposing power on someone else.

CF: Okay, so how would you define modernist, or modernism?

FG: Modernism is a belief that science is the savior, and that our reason is all we need.

CF: Okay, so when you were talking about postmodernism can you expand a little bit on what you were talking about in the sense of there's no objective truth. What is truth for those in postmodernism?

FG: Well whatever they feel strongly about in their own go-cart. So they're very happy with contradiction- your truth is not my truth. My truth is not necessarily yours. So there's no overarching metanarrative- I think that is the word of the language they use. Everybody has their own story.

CF: And so have you encountered problems up there where you're at with your congregation? Have they changed over the years that you've been preaching as a result of any of this?

FG: No, not that I've noticed. I have a pretty objective ministry. Somebody says, "I don't believe the Bible was true." Well I say, "The Bible says..." I basically preach the Word of God and pray, and seek to shepherd people. So I haven't noticed too much in the way of postmodernism creeping into my people. But then I've been at it in such a short time. Older folks certainly think differently than younger folks.

CF: In what way do you think?

FG: Well older folks are much more likely to believe that at least the Judeo-Christian way is correct and they're intolerant in that.... Believing there is only one way to God. Whether they believe themselves or not, they're much less likely to say to themselves, well, the Muslims have a lot to offer. Or those sorts of things. So [unintelligible] can believe whatever they want to believe, and I don't judge them in a bad unbiblical sense.

CF: How do you understand the term "Reformed?"

FG: Three ways, but generally it meant Calvinism and something like Presbyterian ecclesiology.

CF: Okay, so how would you understand "Reformed preaching?"

FG: Expository approach to the word of God. Usually continual reading, *lectio continua*, forgive the bad Latin. You know you start at the beginning of a book and end at the end of a book. Or you're doing something topical or theological, you at least attempt to cover the whole scripture teaching on topic.

CF: Okay. So how do you do it? I'm assuming you would believe then that is synonymous with biblical preaching, and if so, how do you do it? How do you prepare for it? How do you deliver it?

FG: Like I said, I take a book, ordinarily I take a book and I start at the beginning and end at the end. I prepare by studying the text, looking at the Greek and Hebrew. I don't start from the Greek and Hebrew and translate from the beginning. But from the commentary studies and reading the passage and look at what's relevant, textual, lexical issues, considering the theology. And then trying to put it into a logical arrangement usually suggested by the passage itself, three or four points. Three or four propositions if you will. And in terms of delivery I deliver those propositions and attempt to explain them. If they're hard to understand and apply them, help to apply them where the applications need to be driven home, and I illustrate if illustrations are helpful. Understanding, so actually, in our bulletin, I call it explaining and applying the word of God. Instead of saying "sermon" it says "explaining and applying the word of God." And then the old Puritan crucified-style, I attempt to be as lacking in distraction as possible.

So for me, you know, 1 Corinthians 2 equals faith not resting in the wisdom of men but in the wisdom of God. Just as ambassadorial as possible.

CF: So what would you consider to be a distracting kind of preaching?

FG: I think stories when stories aren't necessary. Obviously different people have different personalities but unnecessary, something around, unnecessary entertainment devices, personal stories that point to the preacher. And that point away from the word of God.

CF: Okay, that kind of takes us back to we were talking a little bit about metanarrative, and telling one's story. In as you said, in postmodernism there is a curious paradox. They say there are no metanarrative, which means that's a metanarrative. And but they're real keen on the idea of propositions and propositionalism versus stories and narrative. And so what is your take on that?

FG: You know I was in a preaching class at New Geneva and a fellow was saying people no longer can listen to propositions- they just don't know what to do with those propositions. You can't preach propositionally. I was surprised to find that at New Geneva. The fellow had written a D.Min dissertation on preaching and story telling. And I said look, yesterday I was watching football. I hardly ever watch football but Terry Bradshaw of all people was on the half-time show. And he said, "The packers (I think it was the Packers) want to win today. They're going to have to." And then he outlined five things that were clearly propositional that the Packers would have to do to win." I said don't tell me people can't understand propositional presentations. If its football they'll eat it up. Then whenever they have a short thirty minute half time show they, even Terry Bradshaw of all people, not the sharpest tool in the shed, becomes propositional. The fact is people can listen to propositions when they want to . Its just the fact, they ... if they [don't] want to hear the word of God, then they prefer stories. That's my take. I think people can receive propositions when its serious. Give you another take. If we declare the war on Iran or we're about to declare war on Iran tomorrow, and President Bush sent an ambassador to Iran, he wouldn't send an ambassador to act out a skit. And to tell them stories. And he would articulate clearly in propositional truth. If you don't give up your nukes we're going to invade you. Its not so much the issue of story versus propositions, its just that postmoderns I suppose prefer story, especially in the religious realm because they don't want to hear truth. Or at least our version of the truth.

CF: Yeah. That's interesting that you say this professor would say that. The people can't listen to stories and that in itself is a proposition. So what you talked a little bit about the preacher as ambassador, what is the role of the preacher do you think?

FG: Its to proclaim the king's message basically, to exposit the scriptures, to explain it, in whatever sense its hard to understand. So that the people

understand what both the chapter or the passage that was read means. Then too apply it to his congregation so then they can take away what shall I do about this message with them. And then do it.

CF: Okay, so, you mentioned that you tend personally avoid a lot of personal stories?

FG: I unusually tell a personal story if its appropriate as an introduction. I believe in an introduction briefly, if it helps people sort of get the main point of the passage. So I'm going to preach on, you know, the strong city of Isaiah 26, I might tell the story of, you know, about, God is our refuge, our fortress. I might tell the story of hay bales or I had a barn when I was growing up, and how the seven or eight year olds, it was a great place to hide. And feel safe in a thunderstorm. But the implication, the idea there is just to sort of draw people in, briefly, and then acquaint them to the overarching truth of that passage. But primarily that they know me, but just to provide an entrance, to prepare them to receive the truth. I agree there are good introductions and good introductions can do that. But if the whole of the sermon is one story after another story after another story then I find that distracting and potentially unhelpful.

CF: Okay, so what do you feel the role of the Holy Spirit in the act of preaching?

FG: If the Holy Spirit doesn't open people's heart to the truth either they'll understand it and not love it and not do it or they won't understand it at all. Then of course they won't love it because they don't understand it. The Holy Spirit without the Spirit then either they're trusting in the religion of man or they're not trusting at all, the more they go away unchanged. So its enlightenment would be the work of the Spirit. The hearers but not doers.

CF: Let's talk a little bit about that. What is the, some have talked about within the sermon at least in Reformed preaching between the dichotomy or the parallelism of law-gospel, and/or as John Carrick says the indicative-imperative. Content-wise what do you do in your sermons along those lines if at all?

FG: I'm always looking for the indicative and the imperative. Sometimes the balance is more indicative less imperative, sometimes its more imperative, less indicative. Depending on the passage, sometimes the passage is easy to understand and hard to apply sometimes its hard to understand and once you understand it then the application is easier or you just simply run out of time to make lengthy applications. So I don't, I guess I don't impose the rule on the question, I don't do the, I was a student of Meredith Kline, you or, and Doug Stort, and sometimes they just explained passages and didn't bother to make applications. So certainly I take the biblical-theological approach to preaching if you're familiar with that, the OP and other places can tend to be a little more indicative and less imperative. I think it really just depends on the passages. And long term I hope that my preaching has balance in terms all the subjects of the

word of God, all of the tones from comfort to judgement of the word of God. And all of the I guess balance between the indicative and imperative, theology, teaching, application if that makes sense. We can explore it if it doesn't.

CF: What is the role of the congregation do you think?

FG: Well they need to be Bereans. You know various Reformed folks have said that it is as hard to listen to a sermon or harder than it is to preach one. At least effectively. I'm trying to remember the larger catechism answer with respect to hearing the word of God. But they have the responsibility to study, to learn, to seek to grow, to commit themselves to the oral aspect of truth that they need to know the truth, they need to know who God is, they need to love him, they need to love what he has given them in the word. And they need to ask THE question if I haven't explained it in the sermon, They need to find me and ask. They need to give the preacher I don't know how to put, the benefit of the doubt. Because sometimes people don't hear you because, if they were preaching the text they would preach it a different way or tell a different story, or use different sub passages. There is a whole host of temptations to get sidetracked. But they need to listen to what you're saying and ask does the scripture teach this? And bring that to bear on all of their Christian experience, all their understanding. So it's a lot like they're private study of scripture in theology through the week will help them in the sermon so they need to be good students of the word in the sermon time and in their private study.

CF: So you know as we talked about before that some of the values within postmodernism are a rejection of external authority, experience, one's individual experience as personal authority and personal truth. So you know if a fellow comes in and hears you preaching and he says to himself, whether or not he is consciously affected by postmodernism, or not, but he says to himself, "Well why is that guy up there? My opinion about what he is saying is just as valid." How would you deal with something like that?

FG: Well first encourage him to be a Berean in a Berean sense. I mean the right of private judgment is a Protestant... Enlightenment, I don't know if it is an Enlightenment doctrine, but it is certainly a Protestant one in that extent that the Western world was impacted by Luther and Calvin and Protestantism. Our modernism was impacted but I think postmodernism is. The right of private judgement is a good thing. So I encourage him, yes, to study and to ask himself what does he believe about what I'm saying and what does he believe about what the scripture says. But to base that off of scripture. And before God to ask himself what's this passage teaching. And to believe it. I would then say to him the reason you should listen to me on this passage of scripture is because I studied it and considered it and you should at least give me the benefit of the doubt of knowing more about it that you do unless you're an expert on the text itself. But you're welcome to become an expert on the text itself. I would

encourage him to be a Berean and to not just to receive it by some as if I'd had some authority in myself.

CF: Does the preacher possess any authority?

FG: Yeah, I mean he possesses his authority as an ambassador of God. That authority is consistent with, there again, being good Bereans, so he doesn't have any authority in himself, he has an authority as the opener of the word of God. So the extent that he's presenting the word of God he has authority.

CF: Okay, do you think that we're dealing within postmodernism with a loss of sense of objective truth or a change in the understanding of what truth is?

FG: I don't know. I guess I haven't thought about that exactly.

CF: Okay, do you think that it might a spiritual problem that it's a crisis of faith, in other words that our creeds and our doctrinal content is not really answering the questions of a postmodern culture or is it a crisis in the language of faith, in other words, the words that we use to convey doctrines and creeds are no longer appropriate?

FG: Give me the question again.

CF: Yeah: in other words is this a crisis of faith, in other words our creeds and our doctrinal content is simply not answering the questions that the postmodernist is asking, or is it a crisis in the language of faith? The words that we use to convey the doctrines and creeds? For example within this church plant that I've been working on I probably had at least five to ten PCA teaching elders tell me that I can't use words Reformed, or Presbyterian, or Westminster, or Confession, because people aren't going to know what that means. They're saying it's a crisis in the language of faith. Whereas people like David Wells and Michael Horton are essentially saying, No, this is a spiritual problem that we're not communicating the creeds, the doctrinal content, that we need to do.

FG: I see. Well I don't think it's a matter of what words you use. William Willimon has argued correctly that every movement, school, every discipline has its own language. I go back to football. Football has technical language. If you came in and never seen football, American football before, there's a whole host of terminology that people learn. And Terry Bradshaw and the other commentators are not bothered at all using the technical language, first down, touch down, and you name it. And if you take a chemistry class the first thing you do is learn a vocabulary. So if people are driven to learn and to grow and to be disciples they pick up that language. And actually they appreciate it. I would say as you presented it initially, I would have said neither. As you explained it, I agree with Horton and Wells that its not a problem of the content of the creeds but that people just aren't getting it. Because they don't want to get it.

CF: Have you had to over the years do more explaining of content oriented words such as justification, sanctification, atonement?

FG: From the very beginning, like I said, I've been at it 10 years, I was convinced that the right thing to do was to use that language and then explain what it meant.

CF: what I was going to ask kind of going back you had mentioned William Willimon I think the book you were referring to was called *The Intrusive Word*. And is the church itself the problem that it doesn't have structures conducive to ministry and mission, or is the church failing to be a church, acquiescing to culture and less true to itself than true to its time?

FG: I think it's the second; that the church is failing to stand prophetically and to teach prophetically. You know its, the problem the church has is, you know, the 1950's, this is how I see it. In the 1950's and 60's the church attendance peaked in America. That's not to say the church was healthy or that the word was being proclaimed powerfully. Culturally and socially people thought they ought to attend church. And the children of the 50's and 60's, the baby boomers discovered quickly that the church was empty and powerless. And so now the church has been attempting, Willow Creek is illustrative of that, to hold on to the baby boomers give them a cheaper and cheaper version of what the church is. And so we are acquiescing to culture, acquiescing to edutainment, if you're familiar with that term, educational entertainment basically the church might be more healthy now than it was in the 50's and 60's, but our market share is declining. So it depends on how you feel about that. Every preacher, you know, feels the heart-pang of seeing first time visitors leave and never come back. The question is you know do you do something to keep them that is not consistent with a biblical approach to ministry. And for me the answer is no.

CF: Have you sensed any pressure from your colleagues in the Presbytery or within the larger PCA to change how you preach in order to keep that person from leaving, or to "reach that person?"

FG: No, I haven't. I mean I've been stuck in the backwater for 10 years. So I just can't say that too many of my colleagues have heard me preach. I attended the MNA assessment center in 97' and they liked my preaching. They didn't like the rest of me but they liked my preaching.

CF: Going back to the preacher's source material you had a very clear line between stating essentially the source material is the scriptures themselves and the commensurate responsibility to be Bereans. And any material that was story oriented was illustrative in support of your text. There are some churches in order to reach people that have been using things other than a sermon. For example Ronald Barclay Allen, and he's not reformed, but he's at Dallas Theological

seminary, has said that essentially the sermon has been within the private purview of the minister. And that he as well as Lucy Rose who is at I believe Erskine, have advocated a greater role for the congregation in things like doing dialogs and doing drama and so that it becomes more of a dialog rather than a monolog. What's your take on that sort of thing?

FG: There again I think its just not consistent with the seriousness of the proclamation of the king's message, not ambassadorial. Its not what a herald would do. The first century had categories of drama and dance and dialog. And near as I can tell on the scriptures none of the heralds of God used that language, used that approach because they're not consistent with preaching is. Preaching is proclamation. There again even in our Western culture that's not the way we deliver serious messages to people.

CF: So what you're saying is essentially one of the essential differences is the regulatory principle that draws the line in the sand and says this is what scripture approves, this is what scripture deny?

FG: Even if the regulative principle didn't apply, and I think it does, even if I were a Lutheran, or an Anglican, I would say look, preaching is the ambassadorial proclamation of the king's herald. And when we have a serious message to deliver even in our culture we do not do a skit. We do not do drama and dance to deliver that serious message. In fact to do those things diminishes by the receiver the impact of seriousness, the Marshal Mcluan, the medium is the message applies also. There again if I'm proclaiming war against Iran, delivering the message to repent or be bombed, if the ambassador comes out and two ambassadors come out and do a dialog, the people of Iran would wonder if we really meant what we were saying. Or skit. I think the reason why postmodern people believe or receive it because it so dulls the seriousness of the message that if you do a skit on the coming judgment the medium so dulls the seriousness of the message to their perception that they're willing to applaud.

CF: There's a fellow by the name of David Miller who has, is very prolific writer from a postmodern perspective. And he has said in his book , it's called *Searching for God Knows What*, that modernist Christians have mistaken the Bible as informational instead of it, what it really is is being relational. What would your take be on that?

FG: Well its both information and relational. It's relational because of informational. It presents us the God of the universe, tells us who he is and what he's done for us that we might relate to him. So that's a false dichotomy.

CF: So what I hear you saying kind of, in summation, to a lot of these questions is that Reformed preaching in your understanding is bound in a framework of a metanarrative of covenant redemptive history?

FG: Sure.

CF: Okay, and then, the preacher is a herald and an ambassador and has no latitude to change that role or to divest himself of that authority that has been given to him and to change the source material from scripture to other material. And this is essentially what if postmodernism were to creep in that it would be guard on your preaching?

FG: Well I mean yeah. I think if I understood you correctly, the answer is yes. But my preaching isn't going to change. I actually welcome postmodernism or the change of our culture, if you want, the paganism, the paganization, I actually think that would be a welcome thing. But it wouldn't change the way I preach. If America seems more and more to resemble first century Corinth, or Rome, then that was fertile ground for the gospel in the first centuries of the church. And maybe fertile ground than the empty religiousness of the 1950's and 60's in America. And if America begins to resemble more and more the first century Mediterranean world then I'll preach like Paul. It worked in the first century and it seems to me that even, there again if I want a regulative principle guy that I am practically if America is beginning to resemble more and more the first century Mediterranean world, then why not use the methods of the first century church?

CF: To what degree should the church draw from the world's wells and how far do we integrate what we do with culture, if at all?

FG: Of course every culture should have a distinct worship, a musical style that is consistent with the serious occasion. So in the worship wars over music I would say that because Public worship is the covenant renewal ceremony, is a covenant renewal ceremony, and that any musical style appropriate in that particular culture with a covenant renewal or coronation of the king, or inaugural of a president, any musical style that is appropriate in that culture for those serious occasion would be appropriate in worship. So in China that might look different or sound different than America. Any style of dress that would be consistent with an ambassadorial proclamation I would be willing to appropriate. There again, in 18th century China that would look different than 20th century America. For that reason I don't wear a robe. I think robes were consistent with what teachers wore in the 15th 16th 17th centuries. Teachers now wear business suits or ambassadors. So in terms of style of dress that's cultural.

CF: So kind of picking up on that are we really talking a issue of content or are we talking of the sermon, or are we talking about the form? For example Eugene Peterson says that the sermon should be more of a dialog than a monolog and he advocates, for example, sitting in a chair with a little table at your elbow and a cup of coffee and kind of sitting across from the congregation like a fireside chat. Are we really talking about form or are we talking about content when we do that?

FG: I think the form and the message are so intertwined there again you're back to the medium is the message. That you know of course regularly I read folks saying we're not trying to change the message. We're just trying to change the form that its delivered in. I think those two things are so intimately tied together that he's going to sit in a chair and deliver a fireside chat that its no longer ambassadorial proclamation of the herald. There's a time for that. But topical preaching is not that. There again, I mean, if I sit in a chair with a cup of coffee and deliver the message is to Iran, if you don't get rid of the nukes we're going to bomb you, you know, or if I'm delivering a notice of execution to someone the way I do that has a great deal to do with the seriousness with which the message is received.

CF: Okay do you have any closing thoughts on postmodernism and preaching?

FG: No, I think I'd just say it again is postmodernism is consistent with the re-paganization of our culture, its just making our culture look more and more like the first century world of Rome. And I would say that we ought to preach like what we read in the New Testament.

AB

Interview Transcription

Interview date: 6 September 2007

Interviewee: AB, CO.

CF: First of all, how long have you pastored and preached?

AB: 35 years.

CF: Okay, where and when did you attend seminary?

AB: I attended Reformed Seminary in Jackson, I graduated 1972.

CF: How old are you now?

AB: I'm 61.

CF: And you've obviously had post-graduate work. Where did you do your doctorate at?

AB: A Doctor of Ministry at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia.

CF: Okay. Great. Well just jump right in then. How do you understand the term "postmodern?"

AB: The way I understand it in terms that is traditionally understood is that it is a move away from the supposed modern view of looking things somewhat rationally with some sense of objectivity to putting it more, putting things through more of a subjective, experiential level, where we are talking about our story, and our life experience.

CF: Okay, how would you define, in contrast, modernism or modernist?

AB: Modernism, I think modernism, well, let me back up. Some of these terms are probably driven more by our particular time and culture, and so I'm not always necessarily in agreement with them, but in terms of how they're defined. But assuming those traditional phraseology that a modernist is someone who believes he can, basically, time and history starts with him. And that the past is interesting but it is not relevant. Modernism is a probably a continuation of that where the thought is that we have reached a pinnacle within the evolutionary thinking process man, and then we can look back at some modernist would say to the early church and call it, they call it the primitive church. They're somehow, they are not as capable, they're not as scientific, they weren't...they...in terms of how they process...they may even engaged in superstition. The modernist says we sort of have, we've arrived, we have a scientific method, we can parse things better, and therefore, we know better than anybody in the past.

CF: Okay, what do you think the change in postmodernism...how does experience, one's own experience feed into that.

AB: For the postmodern?

CF: Uh-huh.

AB: It becomes important because what there's almost a rebellion to the scientific model. That you can sort of have a thesis, and antithesis and synthesis, and so there, instead of there being a linear thinking, you know, there's a plus b plus c, at least c, there's more of a circular reasoning, and no matter where you start on that circle, you come back to whatever truth. And so truth is seen more circularly than linearly. History is seen that way. And therefore personal experience is also seen that way. And so everyone, each person has his own circle, and we need to honor that and it can't be validated necessarily through research or observation or rational processes. We just accept the fact that it is.

CF: Okay, so you know assuming that we really have a lot of these elements of modernism and postmodernism operative, in a congregations that you've pastored have they changed at all over the past years, in their thinking between modernism and postmodernism?

AB: I think that those debates that take place in culture do affect congregational life. And it affects it in different ways, or different degrees I should say. So I would say that most of the pastoring I've done in my last major pastorate, which was 12 years in Miami, where full time engaged in that, I did see it move from a clear desire to sort of...traditional expository preaching being looking at a passage of scripture, taking it apart, putting it back together, explaining it you know, and applying it, versus wanting a little more on the experience level now...tell me a story as opposed to parsing the verbs, you know, explaining and applying it, tell me the story. You know some of that, I would say that my position personally has been that the Scripture, I believe in objective propositional truth, and that God does work through the mind as well as the heart. And therefore we need the Scripture as objective truth and to dictate how we process information and truth. So I've maintained in my own being regardless of what is happening in culture. And then at the same time addressing the desire for more experience as opposed to propositional truth.

CF: Okay, so as churches kind of outside the Reformed circle and within Reformed churches have been responding to postmodernism, I'm looking at what you think the cause might be. Is it...as we deal with it as a cultural issue, is it a loss of the sense of community, caused by acquiescing to the culture, or do you think the church has a problem, an inability to incarnate the gospel with culture?

AB: The way I'm looking at there's a couple of tracks I want to take. One is that sometimes there's been a bifurcation of our theology and its application. My observation has been that some folks have in the Reformed communities, have been propositionally or objectively Reformed in their thinking but they somehow have been impacted by the culture in such a way that when they translate theology into practice of ministry they somehow gets bumped out of the way. Maybe there is an embarrassment, maybe they don't see it direct correlation, and then sometimes they practice ministry they, there's another philosophy that's undergirding it and that maybe bought into the culture norm is the way to put it. So something is happens in that, so that we're almost afraid, make that not almost, take that out, afraid sometimes to articulate historic Reformed thinking in a lively propositional form that will meet the needs of people and that will have application in ministry. Perhaps the one way...another way I would put it is that we tend to be culturally driven as opposed to theologically driven. Culturally driven is saying I'm going to go to culture and see what it says and then I will adapt what I believe to be the truth to that. Theologically driven says I want to see what Scripture has to say, how it deals with the reality of, not only with God, sin and salvation but also of human beings and then I'll translate that truth into the culture and address it culturally. In other words it doesn't avoid and doesn't leave out cultural issues, but it doesn't make culture the primary garment of validation. Its theologically founded but you still have to look at culture in light of that and how to speak that truth, the truth that Scripture has into that culture. But you don't go to culture tell me what you think the truth is. The third area...one is the embarrassment about being Reformed and how to translate ministry, the second is whether we are culturally or theologically driven. Third would be that in American Christianity I think the impact of the Second Great Awakening has done more to us and affected us more deeply than we recognize. So that we are all in essence channeling Charles Finney to some degree. In that we have this expectation now, culturally, [unintelligible] general culture that church has to grow as a demonstration of a proof that we are doing God's will. Now what we mean by growth is that we have to just open the door and people will come in and no matter how they get in there is okay because the end result validates the means. So we gone into then the...without realizing it, the whole idea of the seeker sensitive, seeker directed, seeker targeted, kind of thing, so the person who is not a member of the church whose supposedly a seeker, which biblically speaking I don't think there is such a thing, how God is the only seeker, but that what happens is that the agenda that is set for the church's ministry on the basis of what does that, those people out there think and how do we...what do we need to get them in here. And so we'll use any kind of method or means to accomplish that. And as a result we put aside theological reflection and theological thinking, and application, that would I think still speak very positively and very powerfully to culture, but we are given that liberty because we are so in evangelical and Reformed Christianity, more impacted by the Second Great Awakening style than we recognize.

CF: Sometimes within a cultural, you know cultural influences, both premodern and postmodern people may or may not be aware of, that, you know it is like getting a fish to describe water, do you think that the channeling of Finney and the coming up with new excitements is a conscious act on the part of the Reformed preachers?

AB: Conscious...being...I don't think they're conscious that they're channeling Finney. I think what they're doing is saying I have to prove myself in ministry. And the way you prove yourself is how your church grows. So whatever it takes to do that that's what I'm going to do. So that's why I'm saying they bifurcate their theological position and move over into the experience of just growing the church. And they tend then to play down, for the purposes of teaching, preaching, and application of theology in the ministry they play that down because they want results. So they, I think that's what drives it more than anything else because the way you validate yourself in ministry what is produced. And unfortunately that is the way our members think as well. Everyone [unintelligible] I can say every one in an empirical kind of way, just listen to people in general in the church, we need to grow. What do they really mean by that? They, I think they have the idea, well, we're supposed to get the people in. But then what are you willing to do? Well, whatever it takes to get them here.

CF: Okay, when people are addressing some of the answers or the reasons why especially in Reformed church circles one of the things that was said, and I'm reading from a quote here, "Is this a loss of a sense community and roots caused by acquiescing to the culture or do you think it is an inability to incarnate the gospel to a postmodern culture?"

AB: I'm not sure if I understand the question about community...would you give me again...?

CF: Well, for example, you know with the bifurcation that you talk about I think is really present, you've got these dual train tracks running, or at least I think they're running in the same direction, ...

AB: Right.

CF: Some have said, well, people kind of like Michael Horton, and R. C. Sproul, some of the others have said, this is just an acquiescing to the culture. Then you've got people like Leonard Sweet, Brian McClaren, McManus, and they're saying, no you're just saying you're unable to incarnate the gospel to this new culture.

AB: I think...let me back up to one other thing. There...one of my working operative philosophical commitments is what I'm calling the Trinitarian quotations for ministry. I believe we have lost sight of not only this, the doctrine of the trinity but the applications and implications of that because what that does then

philosophically is that the non-Christian mind unaided by special revelation is not able to put together that philosophical conundrum of which is more important, the one or the many. Now, what happens is that even Christians who are not thinking Trinitarian-ly, unfortunately fall into that same problem of saying, the more important is one, or the more important is the many, the unity or the diversity. But if we're really Christian, we don't have to buy either or context, we can buy a both and. Just as we have to say what is more eternal about God? His oneness and unity, or his threeness and diversity. The answer should be yes. That God being both and one and many indicates that it applies itself to which one is more important about our relationship with God, that he is majestic and transcendent or that he is immanent? Well, we don't have to make that choice. He's both. Now there may be a time in the Christian ministry or Christian life experience where a sense of the transcendence of God needs to be prominent at that particular moment in time in terms of our experience or our study. But if there a couple of weeks go by we may need to reflect on the tri-immanence of God his presence with us being the personal shepherd who cares for us and so forth. And so its not we have to make those choices, then in discussing the majesty of God and focusing on that in a particular sermon, or teaching in application to ministry does not mean you're automatically excluding the other at that moment. You're just saying at this moment because of the nature of how we function as people we have to talk about this but next week may talk about the other. And its always a movement between the Christian life and the Christian ministry, a rhythm between those poles, from a non-Christian view or an uneducated Christian perspective who doesn't understand the Trinity we're forced too, as one of my friends says, absolutize a modal sphere. That we say no, it must be community, no it must be accommodation, it must be incarnation, no it must be transcendence, no it must be immanence. We don't have to make choices like that. It may be like I said that there may be an emphasis here and there that we do make sure we do understand the principle by making that as an emphasis at a particular point we are not saying that its exclusive. That's our problem. Men tend to make things exclusive we get stuck in one area. And I think we've lost track of how God's nature as the Triune God speaks to this. It speaks to everything in life, I think. But specifically this area of ministry.

CF: Okay, as some have considered, you know, modernism, postmodernism, they've tried to deal with it on the basis of it on the basis of a moral problem, is this...if one's own experience has become in postmodernism the substitute for objective truth or even reality, some have said it is sense of loss of biblical authority or it's a rise of a cultural individualism. What do you think?

AB: Again, I'm going to go back to my Trinitarian comment, and then I'll answer that. See we don't have to make those choices if we really understand God as Trinity, we need both the objective truth and we need some subjective experience. But what I think has happened in postmodernism is that we tend to have these reactions to...you look at history, we have those reactions between the Enlightenment and you have Pietism. Then you have the reaction of

rationalism and then the reaction to that is personal experience. And you can plot the history because history tends to be written at both extremes with these kinds of reactions to whatever the last generation wants. So, postmodernism I think is that kind of thing where instead of being Christianly, you know, really understanding our theology and then evaluating you know the whole of what God is doing with truth he's given, so we can see that we don't have to be an either but we can be a both and. I'm saying that postmodernism is that reaction to modernism that perceived modernism, where the whole emphasis instead of being outside epic rationalism its going to be on personal experience, and narrative and story.

CF: Ok, we're going to come back to talk about story in just a minute but kind of a shift now. How do you understand the term "Reformed?"

AB: I understand Reformed in a couple of ways. One is the historic understanding coming out of the Reformation where there was a rediscovery of biblical truths especially in the soteriological form, where the focus was on how is sin made right before a holy God. Now, flowing out of that things happened but it starts out with a soteriological emphasis which for from the Reformed point of view that summarized with the five points, TULIP, five is not enough surely, but at least those five points are good hooks to be able to express an important distinction. Secondly, so it's a historic issue, that's theological in terms of a soteriological emphasis. And then its also a world view that helps to understand the full consciousness of God as the creation God who is...what he calls us to himself, gives us a moral view that is grounded in his truth and to use Calvin's phrase, its like giving us new spectacles so that we can see the world clearer as God intends for us to see it. It is a moral view aspect to it as well. And then those things should apply to the way which conduct ministry.

CF: So kind of narrowing it down now, so, what do you believe preaching is and how do you do it.

AB: Biblical preaching, I believe, is taking the, expositing scripture both in terms of whether its going through a book, going through a person in time, or even topically if necessary, but whatever the format would be that you would use, the main thing that it is God's truth that is being unpacked, explained and applied.

CF: Okay, so if we have a Reformed sermon that we listen to and then let's say kind of a general evangelical, I know that term is almost now pretty much emptied of meaning, what would I look for in a Reformed sermon that may or may not be present in a general Evangelical church.

AB: In the purest sense of a Reformed sermon being the unpacking, explaining and applying the Scripture, to both making sure we understand its context, making sure we understand its position in God's soteriologically as well as creatively, and then applying it to daily life, Christian relationships, community,

whatever. If that's what we mean by Reformed sermon, a lot of that would not be present in the "evangelical" sermon because the tendency in broad evangelicalism is to preach a moralistic gospel. If you preach in how I'm defining Reformed your preaching would take a Christ-centeredness that is always holding out the centrality of the cross and his resurrection. That his acts and deeds must be that which encourages us, that drives us, that calls us to confession, that calls us to adoration and so forth and change of life. In broad and wide evangelicalism it tends to be more of a "this is what you need to do," and so the sermons tend to be more on how to be a better father, how to be a better spender, how to be a better employee and so forth. And it becomes very moralistic in that while there are religious and biblical words that are used the emphasis is more on what you need to do. Maybe that also comes back to the application of theology in that a true Reformed understanding of our sin means that God is the one who is completely 100% percent taking the initiative to call us to himself so that we operate out of the grace model that all of life is a response to grace. The broad evangelicalism having been impacted by Finneyism, the second great awakening and a more Arminian theology is God has done his part now you need to do your part. And I think that comes out at about how you need to strive harder, you need to work more and try harder.

CF: So for example, within the larger Reformed framework we're saying that we're approaching our sermons a covenant redemptive historical paradigm, whereas the larger evangelical body may not have that. Within Luther and Calvin talked about Law and Gospel within sermon and John Carrick recently had a book out, he calls it the indicative and imperative.

AB: I think the indicative imperative is such a Pauline process.

CF: Right, so basically in larger evangelical circles you'd hear a lot more law without gospel.

AB: And they call it...they wouldn't call it...they think its more grace. Because they use the word. They think that if they use it that's sufficient. But by the time you get back to when the whole thing turns around its really calling me to be better, gooder, nicer, sweeter, work harder. And that's so, you know, how do you judge sermons? People say, "That was a rip-snorting sermon that the preacher gave today. He really beat us up." Now, you don't really beat people up if you're presenting the call of the gospel whether it is indicative or imperative, and I think I use the indicative imperative model concept, you know, all the time, because it is so good. What most preaching evangelical preaching and even some Reformed preaching who aren't careful [unintelligible], they jump over the indicative and we start to the imperative. We said you need to do this, therefore do this, as opposed to taking the time to lay the predicate. Now, Jesus did this, John did this, so forth, you know, you've got it in macro form in Ephesians 1-3, and 4-6. And you've got it in many forms because Paul does it, lets say in Romans 6, 8 especially where he will make a few verses, and then "therefore." There he will

lay out the indicative, therefore do this. So you have it both macro and micro. By the way I did a study when I was going through Ephesians a number of years ago in a Bible study at Village 7 it is interesting that to prove that point of indicative imperative, because everyone says that the first three chapters of Ephesians is in the indicative- Paul lays the ground work. And then for the last 4 the imperative. That there were 41 imperative verbs in Ephesians. One of them is in verse, chapters one, two and three. Forty of them in four through six. So that if just counting imperative verbs help us, and I'm saying imperative verbs in sentences just to make sure that not to just say imperatives, then that says something about it. Now if we jump and always preach from Ephesians 4, 5, and 6, without having laid the foundation of 1, 2 and 3 then that's a work oriented, you've got to try harder, be better type of gospel preaching.

CF: Okay, what is the role of the preacher in Reformed preaching?

AB: He is the spokesperson for God. He is the called by God to declare the grace of God in the [unintelligible] that we've spoken about, with holding up the beauty of Christ and the claims of Christ once he's expressed what they are. He is a declarer, not a changer. I think this is a probably different thing that most preachers go through- what I call blue-Monday. They wake up Monday morning and they're staring at the ceiling, said, "What did I just do yesterday that had no effect. Because they are buying into that Second Great Awakening, Finneyism- the idea is that I am the one that must change you. And therefore I write my sermon as if it were a silver bullet and I put that one silver bullet in the chamber and I shoot it on Sunday. And the idea is that it's the sermon that is going to have, to bring about the next great awakening. And then you finish the sermon and nobody's changed, there's no evidence of a new great awakening and you go to bed Sunday night and wake up Monday morning and you're blues says "What did I just do?" You get over it and start again on Tuesday and maybe I need to add a little more silver to the bullet. And, but the Reformed preacher is not, he recognizes he can't change a single person. I love the way the children's catechism puts it this way: it talks about regeneration and so forth, it talks about what is the change of heart called? The answer is regeneration. Who can change the sinners heart? The Holy Spirit alone. And so its said right there, its that simple. My job as preacher is to be clear, cogent, illustrative, to be winsome, to be biblical, to lift up, to make sure explanatory, and to be applicatory. The once it leaves my lips and goes to your ears as listener, then it's the Holy Spirit who takes that word and does something with it. I cannot change you and that's not my job. That's the Holy Spirit's job. And he uses the word to accomplish that. That's the reason why we have such a lofty view of preaching and why we should be preaching the scriptures clearly. Because that is our job. But in so doing my expectation is that God will work by his Spirit to bring about the change. I don't get up on Monday morning, on a blue Monday.

CF: That's a good illustration. So Fred Craddock, even though he's not Reformed, and really he kind of anticipated postmodernism in his book, One

without Authority, he says that the job of the preacher or the role of the sermon, and he kind of fudges between the two, is to help the congregant experience the text. So would you respond to that.

AB: No, no. The pastor's responsibility is to explore, exposit the text. The Holy Spirit is the one who will help, if any experience is to happen, will experience the text. Now, if he means by experience, that I need to be colorful and illustrative, and make sure that I'm using all my oratorical skills, I can accept that. But I take that to mean, using my illustration from before, the assumption is the pastor is responsible to change the person. Therefore I must use all my rhetorical skills that I have to get you to have an experience. That is not my job.

CF: So what would you say, we say in Reformed circles when we worship God, that we meet him in word and in sacrament, as we meet with God in word what is the purpose of the sermon?

AB: The purpose of a sermon is to declare the excellencies of Christ.

CF: So, and you kind of alluded, we're going to come back to the thing about story in a minute, so could expand a little bit more on the role of the Holy Spirit in the preaching of the Word?

AB: Alright. The Spirit of course, does a number of things. One is we are dealing with the Scripture that he gave to us by inspiration. That God breathed activity. So we're dealing with the text already that we hold in high esteem because of what God is as already given by inspiration. So secondly the preacher's job is to take that inspired text and say in what way does this text now speak first, understand it in its context, then will apply now because there is one true truth in every Scripture, and thousands of applications. So in what way now does God want me, as the preacher, to understand this text, explain it, and what applications can I suggest to the congregation from it. The Holy Spirit leads because he illuminates. He not only illuminates me as a person, personally, as a Christian, and also as a pastor as a preacher who is responsible to feed the flock.

CF: How do we avoid the postmodern value they say that we bring whatever meaning there is to the text, you know, multiplicity of experience, and the role of the preacher, his opinion is no better than mine.

AB: The reason for that I think is because of the, now this brings in the whole matter of calling, it is true I am a human being, everyone else is a human being. But in the process of God's planning, Ephesians 4: 11 Christ is the gift-giver, he gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, some to be pastors and teachers. And they are, in order that they would be the ones who were the equipping, preparing the people of God for ministry, so that he gave to the church as a gift those that are, as our Book of Church Order says, the

perpetual offices are elder and deacon, and the elder office being broke up into teaching elder and ruling elder. And so if we believe that it is Christ's gift to the church as he gifts men who will then exposit the word in order to prepare people of God for whatever ministry they're to engage in. So there is a biblical clericalism. And some people in evangelical circles don't like that but there is. And so in the old covenant it took the form of prophets, priest and king, and also the infrastructure of tribes, leaders of tribes, clans and families. So the same kind of structure also is comparable, but is not the same in the New Covenant. So that the job of the church is not done when its done evangelism. In other words evangelism isn't just collecting a bunch of Christians and they stand around talking to one another. Now there is an organizational structure that is a part of God's design. And so he raises up those men who would be qualified to give leadership to it and so you have Paul in Titus 1:5 and 6, the reason I left you in Crete, Titus, is in order that you might put in order the complete task of organizing the church and how do you do that? By appointing elders or ordaining elders in each church. They'd gone through the isle of Crete, they had done their work of evangelism, there are Christians here, they're everywhere. Now Paul says I've got to go, I'll write you a pastor's manual. That your job, and so Tim and Titus is a pastor's manual. This is what you do. You appoint elders in chapter 2. This is what you teach older men. This is what you do with younger, older women. Here is what you do with young men. Here is what you do with the younger women. And he just goes right through the, you know, giving Titus direction about how to put organizational structure in the church. That's your job because you're called in that, Titus, and so everyone who is going to be a pastor/preacher that's what he's raised up. And that's his calling.

CF: What do you think, and there's a method in my asking the question, what do you think the role of Scripture is in the sermon?

AB: Absolutely, you can't have a sermon without scripture. It has to be the thing that drives it, because we're not there to give our opinion. Now the postmodernist would be right if all that preaching is me telling stories and giving my opinion, then anyone can do that. Anyone who can stand up and speak.

CF: So, you would probably wouldn't be real open, and I say this cynically, one of the churches back East I recently saw, they jettisoned the sermon for kind of some conversations the gospel according to Beatles.

AB: Right, exactly.

CF: Another one is having a series sermons that are essentially vacated of scripture although there is a little, but is called the Blockbuster summer, and they're talking about the gospel in movies.

AB: Right, no, there's a place in overall Christian exploration for us to...that's part of the Reformed world view, that we look at culture, but we do so with the lens of

Scripture. So we've first got to have that, the point if you're talking about what happens within the context of the people of God gathering for worship the focus because it is Christ-centered, that means that it is also word-centered. And so that its not what is culture saying about these things which in another setting would be okay to explore, but at this point this is not what this is for. At this point in time.

CF: We're going to come back to that in one of the questions, but what is the role of the congregation in the preaching of the sermon?

AB: Their responsibility is primarily to listen to trust, and believe that the Holy Spirit will lead through the word and for them then to be open and prayerful, seeking that the ministry of the Spirit will become obvious through the ministry of the word. So in other words the pastor, the preacher enters the pulpit with a high view of the scripture and the congregation needs to believe that high view of Scripture as well as God's word so that we're not here to have another entertainment...I'm not here to entertain you in the sense of making you laugh. That doesn't mean you can't have humor but that's not the primary focus. The primary focus is to direct them to Christ so the congregation says that's what I'm here for.

CF: I've kind of adopted the diagram of a triangle like Frame does in a lot of his work, where on corner you've got the role of the preacher, on another one the role of the scriptures, and on the third one the role of the congregation. Which do you think if any has most impacted in Reformed circles and Reformed preaching and diminished?

AB: Say that last...predicate again.

CF: Yeah, we've got role of the preacher, the role of the congregation and the role of the Scriptures. Which one has been most impacted in Reformed preaching?

AB: Which has been more impacted, you mean by that...

CF: By postmodernism.

AB: By postmodernism. (Laugh) All three! The role of the congregation probably has become more since the modern, sets the tone and they have to be taken care of and fed and directed, whatever and the role of preacher and word have been diminished.

CF: Okay, so you know going back to stories and media, and movies, and clips like that in a sermon....Some postmodernists say this is just a problem of the function, excuse me, the form of a sermon. Eugene Peterson says, which is kind of interesting, Haddon Robinson and even both Haddon Robinson is not

Reformed, a sermon should be more of a conversation as if a man was sitting there with a cup of coffee and a chair. Is it a problem of form in Reformed circles?

AB: You mean that its more of a conversation, you mean?

CF: Right, in other words the changes that are being done even within PCA circles, of you know, of large overhead projectors and movie clips, and the big thing right now in postmodern preaching, especially led by the likes of Brian McClaren and McManus, is non-propositional and experiential stuff most often communicated in the form of a story. What is your opinion on that?

AB: Again, it puts the emphasis, going back to your triangle, on the congregation, that the expectation is instead of just presenting the truth in a very systematic format you are going through a book or a theme or a doctrine or whatever, that you're saying we need that, that have something that scratches what we, appears to be what we think is the itch. And I think there is something like an eternal itch that we have and an internal itch which is always there which, the Spirit, when the word is preached, will have its effect. Had someone come into my office the other day was fairly new to Village 7 and I was preaching there for the last twenty-six months, and they came in, and had just moved here, and anyway, the first time I've really had a conversation with him, and I preached a sermon back in January of 07, and he said that when he and his wife went out to the car after hearing the sermon, they said they were both literally weeping because of what they'd heard. I didn't know that. I didn't write a sermon to get people to weep. *The focus of the sermon happened to be on worship and it* talked about the grandeur of God and our response and how it works and so forth and so on. But I believe...I never know what the response is going to be. I'm not responsible for the responses. But I am responsible as the preacher because I'll have to give an account for what I've done to make sure that I have explained scripture clearly and sought to make those applications that I think are appropriate and then it always boggles my mind and just amazes me that people come back to me and tell me and this is what they thought, this is the way they thought because the Spirit of God was making other applications that I'd never even considered. Because the word was out there and God takes truth and use it in the lives of people. And I think postmodernism in its true form and stereotypical way of preaching is trying to say we already know how it should be applied and they're manipulating towards that end. I think that we cut off opportunities for the Spirit of God, not that you can stop the Spirit from doing anything, but in the sense of our humanness we really truncate in our at least our mental process what the Spirit's really doing. OR tend to.

CF: So over the years that you have preached have you, what have you sensed, if anything, about how postmodernism has affected the congregation's understanding of the sermon?

AB: I think it goes back to what we said before that people are looking for, "give me the five steps, to be a better person or husband, giver, neighbor, whatever." And so that they have difficulty than making application because they're looking for something, some experience in their lives.

CF: So you would probably agree with the statement that talks about itches, that even as sinners we don't know what our itch is, and that the scriptures that which the Spirit is going to use talk about the real issues.

AB: Right. And so we lay out the Scriptures week by week, and not expect the Great Awakening through one particular sermon- God can use one particular sermon to create a Great Awakening. You know that's not- we need to go into it with my task is to feed. In other words, what is it that we do when we sit down to a meal? We are just going to eat a meal that is will nourish us right now. We're not expecting it, it doesn't have to be a gourmet meal. We just want it to be well presented, hot, tasty, nutritious, and that will fuel our bodies with the right and appropriate caloric intake. And so that we can live our lives in a normal fashion. Serving up the word of God should be presented well, it should be palatable, it should be hot, it should be tasty and it should have a spiritual caloric numbers that will help us live what we need at that time. God can then can use it in other ways beyond that so that is line upon line, precept upon precept and if I knew that then each sermon is a unit to itself but it also becomes a part of a whole. And so that I eat regularly and that keeps me and sustains me. If I don't eat regularly then I become emaciated. You know. My abilities to live well because I'm not staying nourished and getting all the vitamins and nutrition and 3every thing that a healthy meal presents.

CF: Okay, you're probably familiar with William Willimon, he's written a couple of books. One is called, "Preaching to the Baptized." Now he's a Methodist bishop. He was the chaplain for Duke University. And that book is largely directed towards preaching to Christians. His other one is called the "Intrusive Word," which is really talking about preaching to non-Christians. Some along those lines have said what we're going through in postmodernism is a crisis of faith. And some have said no, it's a crisis in our language of faith. So for example, we have the Westminster Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, etc., and the7y're saying those are answering questions that nobody is asking now. So that we need to, so we have a crisis of faith and there are others who are saying no, we need to update our language. What do you think?

AB: Well, again, I don't know if I even like the options. Because I don't think it is a crisis of faith. Here's a problem, and this is our lack of history. Every generation thinks it is living through the worst time that ever was in life. And so whether it is a physical effects, whether it is war or disease, mayhem, or whether it's the church with reference to how people respond to the Gospel, I think every generation has its challenges. And many of them are exactly the same, but it is hard for us to appreciate reading even historical books to understand and

appreciate of the way in which the church in that particular time, you know, went through, because we can read it but we don't necessarily sense it the same way we may sense it as we see a lack of obedience or lack of faith whatever the case may be. So I don't think it is a lack of anything. I think it is just our human sinfulness. One of my little bumper sticker phrases is "Remember the T in TULIP." That our propensity has first of all, in individuals, that we're totally depraved. And that and sin has so infected us and it affects every part of our being and every part of the world that we're in. So that we're fallen, the world's fallen, we're all broken. Now there are times that even as Christians and we recognize that we're redeemed, we have hope, and life because of Christ, but we still have, we're still in the broken down bodies, and to have to wait for the resurrection of the dead before they're fully redeemed. And so every generation faces the same kind of issue. It may have the little twist this way or that way. It's the same way. I don't see anything that's unique about our time that any other time didn't have. I don't think it's a crisis of faith. It's a matter of sin working its way out both in generally in culture as well as even in labors.

CF: So, there's those like Leonard Sweet, and again, he's not Reformed, who says that the church really is its own problem. It has structures that are not conducive to ministry and mission in postmodern culture. Do you think the church is the problem, in other words, for example, what we see in a lot "traditional churches" is pretty much what we've seen for the past 500 or 600 years. Or, is the church failing to be a church and not holding the standard.

AB: No, again, I'm going to just repeat what I just said. I don't like options. I don't think that is the way I would characterize it. You know, you go back to the first century church, it already had problems. I like to say that we're all looking for the perfect church so we go back to and sort of sit on Acts 2:42-47: This is what we need. This is what it should be like. We sharing together, we're fellowshiping together, we going from house to house, the Lord's adding daily to those who are being saved. It was just a glorious definition that Luke gives us there. And then we have to turn the page over to page 3, chapter 3. And literally all hell breaks lose. Because now Satan is trying come against the church so he uses the force of the government, the powers that be, then there's internal strife with that with [unintelligible] fire, division of the widows and so forth. So the...and then when Jesus writes through John the seven letters to Revelations. So whether you take an early dating or late dating you still are in the first century. So here is within 30 to 40 to 50 to 60 of the ascension of Christ where you would think that the closer proximity to Christ's earthly sojourn, death, resurrection and ascension, you would have had stickability and faithfulness. What does Jesus say to those seven churches? You know. Except for two of them he challenges five of them with regards to their faithfulness already. And two of them he challenges with regards to whether or not they are even manifesting true light. And he still calls them his church.

CF: You know we talked a little bit about, kind of the, one of the values in postmodernism is this idea rejecting propositionalism we see that kind of present folks, they talk a lot about story, and you know I've heard over the past, maybe, I probably listen to 50 sermons a month, and maybe 10 or 20 of those might be Reformed, but they're coming from Reformed people. I'm not going to say that they're Reformed sermons. And when you challenge them, well, you know, you cannot communicate apart from propositions, so how do you then, talk and defend the idea of personal experience and stories and things like that. And they'll say that Jesus told stories. How would you kind of address that issue?

AB: Well first of all, I think you're absolutely right. Even the stories, even though they're narrative, they're still propositional. Because you still have to unpack what did the story mean. And so you cannot, we can't speak because of the way God made us. Our constituent nature requires that we put a subject, a verb, a direct object, a predicate nominative, you know in a sentence form. We don't speak outside of the normal flow. Why? Because God ordered it that way. So you can't, I don't care who you are, even in telling the story, you're having to set it in a propositional truth. And the thing that really gets me in terms of, you know, if you want to be philosophically consistent, is those that are who are holding to a postmodern view are writing narratives and/or propositional truths about what it means to be postmodern. Then they'll always tell stories. They're writing them in indicative sentences, subject verb, direct object, and they're using paragraphs. Why? Because they want to communicate. How are they communicating? They're communicating propositional realities. So they're inconsistent. And no matter how you structure the, and also, whether we like to think linearly or circularly is that they call people to meet together. What are they doing? It's a linear meeting. There's a beginning, a middle and an end. No matter what you do between. So they, they're philosophically violating the whole thing. You know I was thinking about this with the current deconstructionists in the philosophical realm. The deconstructionists use propositional sentences to talk about deconstruction of propositional sentences.

CF: Ravi Zacharias has a very funny quip. He says, isn't it amazing that the philosophers will write such thick books about the meaninglessness of everything.

AB: Right. Exactly. That's the whole point. And that the fact we are created in the image of God manifests itself even in the most rebellious sinner. Because we cannot violate certain things that are true.

CF: I call a lot of this effort looking for a homiletical savior. And do you think then that without a redemptive historical framework around the Bible, that even Reformed churches, who say they're Reformed, are doing the same thing and supplanting the role of the Holy Spirit?

AB: Yeah. It goes back to my point about Finneyism. We are more inculcated, that the Second Great Revival, that the theology of that than we recognize. That, see, it takes us back to that. Back to a circularization. That's the whole point is that we feel that we have to, and I use the word feel purposely, is our responsibility, we must do it, because of the moralistic idea that God has done all that he can and we've got to do the rest.

CF: How would you guide, and I know you do this on a daily basis at New Geneva, but how would you guide a young man who is just getting into preaching and has been under this kind of umbrella of postmodern type of storytelling and that sort of thing? How would you guide him either to a more Reformed expression?

AB: We would teach, and do teach, some of the very thoughts that I'm giving to you now. We lay them out in terms of what does the Scripture say? In other words, I want to be led and directed by what said, not by every 'yay-hoo' the world has said about preaching or communication, or whatever. And I'm not, I don't want to be culturally driven when it comes to that.

QR
Interview Transcription

Interview date: 8 November 2007

Interviewee: QR, CO

CF: Well let's go ahead and how long have you pastored and preached?

QR: Since 1986. That's my whole ministerial career. Where I have been the primary preacher since 1995.

CF: Okay, where and when did you attend seminary?

QR: Went to Covenant Seminary in the early 80's. I graduated from there in 1984.

CF: Okay, so how old are you now?

QR: 51. Will be 52 next month.

CF: And you are working on your D.min at Covenant right now.

QR: I am.

CF: Okay, let's jump in, how do you understand the term postmodern?

QR: Postmodern describing a mindset towards world view and how we deal with propositional truth.

CF: Okay, so how, would you unpack that a little bit? Maybe how do they view propositional truth in your understanding, etc?

QR: Okay, when I hear the term postmodern I think one of a number of approaches to understanding propositional truth. Postmodern approach being that truth is not absolute, that there's not some transcendent standard by which we go by. Ultimately it goes by other standards. It can be personal, or tribal, or culturally conditioned. But if there is no ultimate truth I would truly our own propositions and in fact all, you know, all truth is said to be looked with suspicion and have to be deconstructed to really get down to what is being said, in that most propositional statements are power grabs.

CF: Okay, so how understand by contrast, modernist or modernism?

QR: Modernist, or modernism, modernity I look at that as being rationalistic.

CF: Okay, we were talking about how do you understand the term "Reformed?"

QR: Okay, again the word Reformed, my first thoughts go to the Reformation theology and 15th, 16th century, which I first think of Calvin, and Luther. And I think of applying the scriptures to their current situation, as Calvin did, recovering the meaning of the Bible, the truth of the Bible over against the just the traditions of the church at that time. And I think of it in terms of that, the historical theology that came out of the Reformation. Then I also think about it in applying to your current situation so that the church is not, you know, *in concrete*, that its unable to, you know, adapt to the culture because its adopting an approach twenty or thirty years ago. Being Reformed means to take the scriptures, that I can apply it to my culture, exegete it, interpret it to my culture, and to be able to do ministry in that culture while remaining true and faithful to the scriptures. That's what I think of Reformed.

CF: Okay, so how do you define biblical preaching and how do you do it?

QR: Biblical preaching is preaching of course which is based on the text, on the passage. And I find biblical preaching is not my thoughts, not my... its not taking a modern topic and then finding scriptures to support that or to flush that out. Rather it would be a systematic or organized approach to the scriptures throughout the year that I'm preaching through. And then taking up the topics as they naturally come up in scripture. Now how I it is for instance, right now I'm in the life of Joseph. I just finished up the life of Jacob. And I'm going through the life of Joseph. I'm taking up the themes and I seek to give an overall outline of the text, organize my thoughts with a key theme or key message here is. I try to identify the fallen condition focus in the text. And then how that passage then brings the grace of God to heal and to restore that fallen condition. And a part of the grace that is in that passage is showing how that grace resolves itself in the person of Jesus Christ. So then my basic thinking when I come to a passage is what is this passage telling me to do? Why can I not do it? How does this get done through Jesus, and then how can I through Jesus accomplish what God has called me to do in this passage?

CF: So you're really talking you approach the scriptures with what a postmodernist would call a metanarrative, and that's covenant redemptive history.

QR: Yes, or historical redemptive with application. Yes that there is an overarching story to scripture, the redemption of mankind and its fulfilled in Jesus.

CF: So if I were to hear let's say a general evangelical sermon and then I were to hear you would there a difference if any?

QR: Yes. One I would hope with me would be the Christian message because it would be about Jesus. The other would be a sub-Christian message because it

would be about some moralistic thing that we ought to be or that we're called to but without any reference to Jesus.

CF: How would you define a moralistic preaching?

QR: A calling to be good, to do good, do good, be this way apart from the enabling of Jesus Christ. And without reference to him. And preaching that would terminate upon man doing something without showing how the passage resolves or brings glory to Christ in the end.

CF: So what is the role of the preacher in Reformed preaching?

QR: Well the preacher for the congregation is to show them from the scriptures how each passage ultimately resolves itself in Jesus and how that passage is going to be about the Redeemer, which is the over-arching story of the Bible. So each... they should have another piece of the over-arching story of the scripture and understand its place in the scripture, and its impact on their life how Jesus is accomplishing that in their life.

CF: So what do you think the role of the Holy Spirit is in preaching?

QR: The Holy Spirit is to take that truth and to emblazon it on the heart of the hearer, through illumination, through making it real to them, not that its false, but that it takes on a weight, a gravity, it goes from a lecture to a sermon about Jesus. And he burns that truth into the heart.

CF: What's the role of the congregation in preaching?

QR: They are to listen to the sermon not for a lecture, understanding the covenant that God has entered into with them in which Jesus is the hero. And they're to open their hearts to that. And to receive his grace, to be happy in the Lord. And to come wanting to receive from the Lord, that's their part. Not as a lecture student, to gather information, to go home and to check off the list.

CF: So one of the values in postmodernism is the rejection of propositions and because they consider it to be kind of oppressive, that they're opinion is as equally valid as yours. So if somebody were to come in and hear you preach, and they were to think or to say to themselves, "Why is this guy's opinion better than mine? You know, I have my own, they're equally valid." How do you deal with that?

QR: Well, if I was to talk to them afterwards, this is a complex issue. The short answer is that they're imposing their belief system, that is that all opinions are equally valid. They're imposing that on me. They're doing the very thing they're accusing me of doing which is my opinion, my interpretation is correct. Well, their opinion that all opinions are correct they're imposing on me. So what gives them

the right to do the same thing they're accusing me of doing? I think that's the short answer. The longer answer is have you read the text? Have you read the gospels to see for yourself and to meet the person of Jesus who ultimately is the ultimate argument that's not just a dialectical argument. It is a relational argument. They have to meet the person then form their judgment.

QR: Okay, so going back we talked a little bit about a covenant redemptive metanarrative. Assuming that congregations are being exposed to this during the week, have you sensed that your congregation over the years that you've preached have they been affected by postmodernism? And if so, how?

QR: I would say that they have been affected by the moral ethic of postmodernism. That is whatever works for me that's what I'm going to do. Whatever my greatest happiness is that is what I'm going to pursue. Whatever I feel like doing that's what I'm going to do. And so everything terminates upon me. My happiness, my purpose, my desire. Absolutely. It definitely has impacted my people.

CF: Do you have to explain things more or if it has affected what kind of changes have you made in your sermon if any?

QR: I dialog. I raise more objections that I think that they're already thinking. And I answer them so I'm basically verbalizing the questions, the objections that can be going on in their hearts, whether it is going on in their own heart or that they're hearing throughout the week. And then I take those up and I will you know show how the text will answer those. That's one way that I do it. And in another way, that's kind of like argument type of deeper way to seek to make Jesus real from the passage, not just clear but real, so that and they come in contact with him again. And in the intellectual arguments pale in comparison to the love and grace and mercy that I feel from the Lord.

CF: Some of those within the postmodern camp are advocating not preaching a set of propositions; i.e., we're sinners, God condemns sin, he provided Christ as our sacrifice, you must receive Christ, those type of things for stories. What's your take on that?

QR: Without propositions I think there is no conversion. Its just enabling them through story to feel good, basically affirming their prejudices but not... You have to have propositions of transcendental truth that contradicts them. Through story alone without the extraction of principle there is no contradiction to their prejudices, to their own belief system.

CF: Okay. Do you think then that we're dealing with a loss of a sense of objective truth in culture or is it a change in understanding of what truth is?

QR: I think that there is...it's a both and. There is a loss of objective truth and then there is that truth has been redefined. What Francis Schaeffer says again, we've come back full circle to him, where he needed to say "true truth." Because of the redefinition of terms. And that was back in the late 60's, early 70's when he was speaking like that.

CF: So is this a crisis of faith that creeds and doctrines aren't really addressing postmodern needs or is it a crisis in the language of faith, the words that we use to convey doctrines and creeds.

QR: Can you give me what the first option was?

CF: Yeah, the first option is a crisis of faith where the creeds and the doctrinal content is really not answering postmoderns' needs, or is it a crisis in the language of faith, that the words that we're using to convey doctrines and creeds is just falling down. For example, in this church plant I've been told we need to get rid of the name Reformed, we need to get rid of the name Westminster, we need to, you know, excise anything that smacks of church words because those don't relate to postmoderns.

QR: Okay, alright. I don't believe in that first option. I think that in the second option you use whatever words that you want. You just have to explain what they mean. Even the worship service requires explanation. What does the word confession mean, why do we do this? Why do we have a call to worship? That takes explaining of the elements. We do that in our rubrics. That I will use quotes from Jonathan Edwards. Sunday I'm using a quote from Thomas Chalmers, the expulsion of a new affection, expulsive power of a new affection. I'm going to explain what he means by that. So I do not believe that the creeds are impotent to address postmodern needs. But I do believe that we need to use words whatever words we want to use as long as we explain what they mean. They don't have to be jettisoned anymore than common words that we use. You know, that they need to be jettisoned. We need to explain what we mean, define our terms.

CF: Do you find yourself having to explain more terms now than when you first started?

QR: You know I do, I do. But that's because of the makeup of our congregation. We have people who are definitely on outside of the PCA and the Reformed tradition and these are new concepts to them. But however its not like they come in, you know, they come from Catholic backgrounds and they appreciate more reverence, awe, explanation of... there's still a comfort factor because the liturgical furniture is still in place for them. Now its explained. But I do do more, we do do more explaining than we have, you know, ever before. And that is to folks for... we have honest questions like Schaeffer was talking about. I don't find

that baby boomers honestly want to learn. That's a pretty stereo-typical general charge I just made. But I don't. But I don't find they really want to learn.

CF: What do they want?

QR: They want, give me help on my agenda. And agenda could be you know, job achievement, parental success, help me feel better about myself.

CF: You know that, do you sense then a pressure to move from Reformed preaching to more of the moralistic, pragmatic/postmodern needs?

QR: Right. Not for me. But I do sense it hugely in the churches in our community that are you know targeting or draw people in my age bracket. Or that mentality, you know, give me something that is going to make my life more better. I'm to the point where I do not consider them churches any longer.

CF: So going to that, so do you think that the church is itself a problem that it doesn't have structures conducive to ministry that are for postmoderns, or is the church failing to be a church, not being true to itself?

QR: I think that the church is failing to be true to itself. If it is true to itself it will have being used to connect with the postmodern culture. But its not going to be worship services that in confession forms, and story telling time. That sort of thing.

CF: So you really wouldn't change the form in which you deliver the sermon? By that I mean, Eugene Peterson for example, said that a sermon should be more of a conversation than a monolog. So some churches have said that you eliminate the pulpit, you put a little table up there, you put a cup of coffee and have this little fireside chat.

QR: No, I don't hold to that. Romans 10: how shall they hear, but for a preacher. Faith comes by hearing, hearing by the word of God. How are they going to get that word of God? Its through preaching. And that form of preaching is from one man, you know, to the hearer, you know, bringing, you know, the good news to them. Its not a discussion. You know, I think that preaching can have dialogical elements, but, you know, you're answering objections, bringing how the word of God, you know, you're bringing, you know apologetics, you know, in your preaching. But you're still preaching. Its, you know, if someone wants to call it a monolog pejoratively, so be it. But that is how...you know the key central instrument that the Holy Spirit converts the heart.

CF: I have a little diagram kind of created based on what John Frame- use a lot of little triangles. At each one of the three corners I've placed, preacher, congregation, and I think the third one was scriptures. And in one of those roles. And those who are advocating different techniques to preach to postmoderns, or

to get the gospel across to postmoderns tends to reduce the role of at least two of those, if not three. For example, Ronald Barclay Allen down at Dallas Seminary has said that the sermon has been largely the private purview of the minister. And he advocates a greater role for the congregation. And so he tends to replace the sermon and/or scripture content with, and I am not making this up, dance, song, drama, puppet shows, media. We're not talking media clips. We're talking about replacing the source material. What's your take on that?

QR: Well, I mean I'm in total disagreement. But I think he's getting at that the sermon is not the central piece of the service. That the service itself is the central piece. And therefore it moves into the background and gets its source in all the other elements of the worship service. The whole worship service is the message. I think that is where they're going with that. Because the worship service is participatory. That's why you have such a redesign of the whole worship service. That's what I think is going on there. I've heard it said even in our own circles where the sermon is shorter, 20 minutes you know or less, because the whole service is the message. You know, which is still the scripture, which is wonderful. Its great. In other evangelical services the scripture plays very little role. But in the high church services what has been said is we don't... there's not this heavy dependence on the thirty minute sermon because the whole rest of the service is filled with the word of God being preached through the liturgical element. I think that is what is kind of going on in Dallas with that, that fellow you mentioned. I think that is kind of their take on it. So whether you're doing it through "contemporary expression" or more of a liturgical expression, the word preached is the whole service. Do you see what I'm saying?

CF: Uh huh. Are you saying the content of a sermon can be farmed out to other parts of the service?

QR: No. No. Not at all. I believe that the other parts of the service can pick up on the theme, but it can never substitute for the word preached. And that the other part of the service can be pick up on that theme, supplement it. It cannot be a substitute for it.

CF: To what degree, then, this kind of leads us to the subject of what elements that we should or should not use from culture. Should the church feed only on its own resources or should it draw from the worlds wells? What's your take?

QR: I think that the church has been fully resourced. And you know true, the means of grace, prayer, scriptures, the other "elements" of worship have been identified in the scriptures. I do think that we have enough there, you know... One of the questions that comes up is it wrong to show a movie clip? You know I am not going to die on that hill. I kind of look at the preacher as the ton of drama. That's enough drama to watch. He's probably gifted, installed, authoritatively preaching the word; that's enough drama in and of itself. So, but you know that's not a hill that I, you know, want to die on. If you want to use illustrative material.

That's not my cup of tea. And I, you know, I don't know what I think about that. But I just do think that the minister is enough of the dramatic element, preaching the word, you wouldn't have to rely on, you know, watching a piece of media.

CF: So when some in the postmodern camp for example, David Miller in his book called *Searching for God knows what*, says that modernists, modernist Christians have mistaken the Bible for informational, versus the postmodern who says that it is relational. So one of the applications of that within a sermon is rather than give propositions they're going to tell stories...so what kind of material...

QR: If a minister has transparency, that he is the chief among sinners amongst this congregation, that's one thing. But its another thing when that methodology carried out and also to have the spotlight unendingly on the minister, and not on hero: Jesus himself. And that's where I would have a, you know, difficulty with that. People want to hear what does God say about something? What is God saying to me? And that's where the, you know, the power and the engagement of the scriptures are. If the minister cannot bring it to bear on his people he's really missing his call. If he cannot see the power and the majesty and the engagement scripture brings to the heart, and he's having to resort to stories about his own life then he's ill equipped for his task. He's not had his homiletics training. And I do think that is a miserable let down in our seminaries, that homiletics training is just awful. Of course this is coming from a Covenant seminary grad. And I'm very partial to the way that we train our guys to preach.

CF: So you would not advocate then the telling of stories or narrative?

QR: I use them as, you know, to bring out an illustration. This Sunday I'm going to illustrate a principle of dynamic at work in temptation in the heart always looking to something that only Jesus can be. And that's going to arise out of the stories of the temptation of Joseph, after I've, you know, expounded that principle. And I'm going to illustrate it. And mixed in with that is also going to be the application. You know, exposition, illustration, application. It comes right out of my training.

CF: So your narrative is not going to be your source material but you may tell a story that supports the source material.

QR: Right exactly. That's much better put.

CF: Okay. I think that's about it.

TU
Interview Transcription

Interview date: 9/6/2007
Interviewee: TU, CO

CF: Go ahead and tell me your name.

TU: Okay. My name is TU and I'm a church planter.

CF: And how long have you pastored and preached?

TU: The length of time I'm been here...I came straight out of seminary, so I would say 3 years ago this month. And moved here in November of 04, so we've been here for about 2 years and 9 months. We started networking in the city and worshipping last September 16th so we're coming up on our one year anniversary of worshipping.

CF: Ok...you attended over at Covenant?

TU: I went to seminary at Covenant.

CF: Okay. What were the years there, do you know?

TU: Yeah, May 04 through May, excuse me, May 2000. June of 2000 through May of 04.

CF: Okay, so how old are you now?

TU: 44.

CF: Okay, and did you have any specific major there?

TU: M.Div student.

CF: Okay, any specialization there like New Testament languages, or homiletics?

TU: Apologetics.

CF: Okay. That's very apropos for a church planter.

TU: Yeah, I think that is what it was. I'd have to look at the transcripts, I'm not sure.

CF: Okay. So have you had any post-graduate work since then? Remember, some of these questions I'm going to ask I'm just because they are part of the

dissertation, not because necessarily that, you know, they necessarily may or may not apply to you.

TU: No. I haven't.

CF: Okay.

TU: I don't plan to have any.

CF: Not for a long time, huh? I hear you. So let me move on more to...do you preach every Sunday?

TU: I do. Yeah. This is one occasion where somebody fills in but it is just for a break.

CF: Okay,

TU: I'm the main guy so I preach, out of this last year I preached about 40, about 45, 44 or 45 out of 52.

CF: That's a good number. That really is a good number. So let me ask you what now that you are out of seminary, what would be your definition of a sermon?

TU: That would be unpacking any particular text that you have to preach, understanding and unpacking it as you are planning you are preparing it, as you are preaching it, understanding the context in which you are preaching, so that you're answering the fact, asking the same questions of the text and its implications and the people you are preaching to are asking. So that this beautiful message that we have really is able to be contextualized into any culture. You're actually unpacking it in a way and preaching it in a way that is relevant to the people that are hearing it. Because it is alive, active, and that is going to be true, it if is ever going to be true for people today. So, I think it is just understanding the congregation. Is it important in the presentation as is understanding the text.

CF: Okay, so let me backtrack just a hair. What would you say the role of the preacher is?

TU: Wow. You know, if you narrow it down to just the act of preaching it is to faithfully communicate the word of God to the people you happen to be preaching to. Of course I'm thinking of Acts 17 and places where you can see a nuance and how maybe Paul would preach to other people. But if you just, narrowing it down to the act of preaching it is being able to faithfully communicate the word of God to the people that happen to be sitting in front of you.

CF: Okay. And would you say that, how would you characterize your congregation. What kind of ages are they and where would you kind of put them?

TU: Young professionals with multiple degrees almost every one with some kind of graduate degree. Average age probably 30 to 31. So highly educated professionals. Yeah, there you go.

CF: Okay, so let me ask you how do you understand the term "modernist" or "Modernism" versus maybe postmodern or "postmodernist?"

TU: Yeah, you can get 150 different...

CF: Sure

TU: ...definitions for that. I would probably say that these other terms would have to be defined as well, but, because words...you could go on with that all day. I'll probably use some words that have a ton of meaning and a ton of weight. So if I need to unpack any of those I would. A modernist would be someone who sees the role of science, enlightenment, the kind of attitude of pursuing facts that at some point became all the things that we can observe and test and that's the only thing the modernist can say is truly true. Everything is personal values. And truth, things that are true, can be tested, would tend to be of a much higher value in the modernist mind than their own personal values. At least they would say that in an argument. Probably if pressed they probably would expose themselves at some point. For the postmodernist who knows what might be... I might be overstating this, it might be too reductionistic, but who knows what be ultimately true, what is maybe more important than anything else are my personal values which are expressed in multiple cultures. So mine, I would have a difficult time as a postmodernist saying my values are any better than anyone else's. So if you don't mind me making a couple of distinctions here...

CF: No, please do.

TU: ...Is kind of commenting on that. Those are both very reductionist kind of definitions, and are caricatures, I realize that. Postmodernists actually are more modern than they think with some exceptions, like Boulder, I think they are more exceptions than other places. But they really do hold on to truth and they are more modern than they think. And a modernist tends to think more postmodern than they think. Because it all becomes very, very personal, and you know, the modernist thing can go fly off the handle and be outraged with very personal values that they end up acting like, "Wow, that's ultimately true." So they kind of expose themselves. And for the postmodernist you can't truly live, I don't think, without some grounding in saying that this is ultimately true for everyone, and again, it tends to be the things we're outraged about. So they're cloudy, they overlap, I don't know if there is any one place where you can absolutely say the fears the postmodernist, but I think you can see postmodern tendencies, you

know, in varying degrees, depending on where you are at. In Boulder, you see this incredible, clear of line of demarcation of incredibly modern people and then incredibly postmodern, but then again, the tendency to overlap there. But in most places, I don't think it is quite as clear.

CF: Do you think that it is an age driven thing, or something else that is driving the train on that?

TU: Well, I think, yeah, yeah, yeah, I think you can clearly find that some age groups would fall into a modernist camp, then as you come down the age bracket, you know you would find that younger people might be a little more in the camp of what we would classify as postmodernist but I think it has to do with really education and the environment. I see some folks who are young who are scientists and they are as absolutely modern as anybody lived, who are 22, 25, 28. And then I see some folks who here at Boulder, in my context who are 65 and 70 who are incredibly postmodern. So yeah I think in most places and for most people you would say older people tend to be a little more modernist and the younger people tend to be more postmodern. Some people make the generalization caricature, but you know, after the baby boomers, the gen-x'rs are little more postmodern, baby boomers are a little more modern, but as long as your willing to be, to not be, not too hard and fast on the definition and willing to acknowledge that there is some bleeding over on those lines, then yeah, I would be comfortable saying older people tend to be more modern, younger people tend to be more postmodern. It all depends on context. On background, how educated people are.

CF: Let me ask you when you started doing sermons and then, from then until now, it has been about a year, has anything changed over the past year that in what you have preached and how you have preached?

TU: That's a great question. I actually started preaching quite a bit when I was in Seminary. I helped start a church when I was in seminary, and preached about 50% percent of the time for a year and a half. So I preached a lot then. Then when I first, when I was there in seminary I was very conscientious of the fact that I had learned the "Chapellian" method at Covenant.

CF: What kind of method you said?

TU: Chapellian, Bryan Chapell.

CF: Oh, okay, Bryan Chapell. Got it.

TU: I learned the Chapellian method of preaching and found it very hard to break away from that. Although it advanced they gave us the opportunity to break away from I didn't really understand it until I began listening...I didn't understand what a kind of different kind of preaching was until I started listening to other people

like Tim Keller, Randy Tron, Fred Harold, folks like that. There I cut my teeth on still Christocentric, in fact radically Christocentric, Christocentric as anything you would ever hear at Covenant, but much more free to... in the way that they design their sermons. I really am struggling with that now. We worshipped on Sunday nights for a while here as we were developing our launch team and teaching through our core values and things like that. And that's where I really began testing the waters and changing my approach to how I communicated it. There are times I don't have two distinct or three distinct or four distinct points, it is a little more free flowing. There are times there are very clear...there are times I have... I preached on Sunday and didn't have a single personal illustration. There are times where I will have three personal illustrations. It is kind of like what sets this text. I feel like I've maybe learned how to exegesis and contextualization, I'm even better than when I was in school. So this...I'm constantly asking the question now because I've preached, and getting better at this, what about my congregation? What question would they be asking here? I can't just assume that they understand everything that seems very basic. And what I've found is you can hardly repeat anything too often. You can't say hardly anything too often if its good, and it is true and it is about the gospel. You know, I, when I am planning sermons, wow, I just said that. I said that two weeks, or last week. You can say it every week, as long as you are creative in the way that you present it so, finding it... thinking more deeply about the people I'm preaching to, questions and issues of their life, being honest and having integrity, and saying "I'm thinking this too, and I've had this question too." Can you relate to this, trying to make it very personal, and so yes, I think I am learning to preach better, and as I become a little more relaxed and [unintelligible] for myself rather than trying to be anyone else. I can't be Tim Keller, I can't be Randy Tron, I can't be Bryan Chapell, I am called to be, I need to be me. I know my people at church better than anyone else. No one else is more qualified to preach to them, if that makes sense. I don't know, maybe I'm running around and not really answering your question. That would be...I think maybe I did but I'm not sure.

CF: yeah, going back to something you said, how would you define, or what did you learn as Bryan Chapell's method.

TU: Of course there is the FCF, the fallen condition focus, there's the expositional rain, there is the equal parts double helix having exposition, illustration, application. There's the great weight put on the introduction and the conclusion. And so those are the kind of the main things that stick out to me. Fallen Condition Focus I use every single time I preach. But I don't do all those, all the other ones in equal measure. Introduction I approach a little bit differently than maybe the way that I was trained. I don't think Bryan would say this is wrong, it is a little different. I see my job, what I want to accomplish in an introduction regardless of how long it is, I don't time things. I am trying to create cognitive dissonance. I want them to connect to the Fallen Condition Focus, and pardon my French, (you're not going to transcribe this) but I actually want them to be saying "Oh, Shit. Now what do I do?" I want them to be saying that in the

introduction. So from the get-go I want to hook them and its not through a story necessarily, it can be. You know, its, I just approach it just a little bit differently. I do a ton of what might be considered application or the question for application, I open that box very often early, early, early in the sermon. I want to create the great dissonance like, "I do feel like, what hope is there for me?" I don't know that it is counter to the Chapellian method- it's just that I'm a little freer to be creative and to make it my own, which I think Bryan is all for. I think that Covenant could do a greater job of having, they need to have one more preaching class, or earlier maybe in that middle homiletic glass, begin to let people get freed up, after they have taken the basic one. Now show them how to be themselves.

CF: Okay

TU: I don't know if that makes sense.

CF: There's a lot folks that are writing about postmodernism, they're looking at it from a lot of different perspectives. Some are saying, I'm not necessarily saying that I believe this, but they're saying postmodernism really is a cultural problem, and so it is a loss of community and roots caused by, there might be saying on the modernist side that we're acquiescing to culture, or we are unable to incarnate the gospel. Where do you think it is coming from.

TU: Where is postmodernism coming from?

CF: Yeah. Is this just something that is a change in culture, or is it, you know, or could it be a moral problem, or you know a combination of different factors.

TU: That's a great question. Every problem that has ever existed is a moral problem. Because we are all moral failures. Because no matter where you would fall across human history spectrum, it is always a problem as far as morality, because we're all sinners, and broken, and there is this existential angst that comes with that. The modernist tried to stem that all of your answers can be found in just in this theory of knowledge that we can just count on and they didn't have it spiritual, personal and existential kinds of questions. And I think that the postmodernist, they've reacted to strip everything from me that gives purpose. I mean, I hear what you're saying that there is empirical evidence and it is pure enough to hang my hat on, but at the end of the day I want to kill myself if that is all that's true. That is what you're giving me, then I am, I'm distraught and I am despairing. What I see in the effects of postmodernism, if that is what you want to call it is this despair, loneliness, asking questions that everyone maybe has asked that is actually saying, "I don't know if I can actually live without an answer to it. So they have bought into its my own personal truth, my own personal way- I really don't care how anyone else lives, and I can understand that. I mean, its got to, they've got to have something. They've been stripped of dignity, they've been stripped of purpose, and meaning if modernists are correct that you're just an accident. Something tells them there is something more, but they don't have

any answers for it, or where to turn, and without the gospel its despair. So, is it cultural? Absolutely. Is it moral, absolutely. Is it older than...not older than man, is it Adam's problem? Absolutely. I mean it, it's the same thing. I don't think it is ever any different. All the issues, all the problems, brokenness, lack of community, lack of trust, all of it is part of and problem of men. And I believe that you look at Pilate, standing with Jesus standing before me, what is truth? Wow! Postmodernists. He'd have the same problem. I don't think it is ever any different. I think that we, if we try to over categorize, and we try to overly reduce and I think I would reductionist understanding of postmodernism or modernism is...I think we really fail people there. We have to be able to talk to both and we have to be able to unpack the limits and limitations of science. The fact that this is personal faith- here is where you put it. Oh, but guess what, you have it too where you put it. I'm not saying that this is true for everybody. You just kind of weave it- Keller's the genius at this. He's the genius. He's off the charts. He is the best preacher for today in my opinion. And he talks to everybody, the modernist, the postmodernist.

CF: Okay. This is going to sound like I'm going to repeat some questions, but they're really not. How would you understand the term "Reformed?"

TU: I would say it is, well, I think that you can be Reformed and possibly have, you don't have to be a Covenanter, or that you have to be into covenant theology, or that you have to be Presbyterian and all that, I would say is to reduce it again, there is always a danger of being too reductionistic, but if you're going to do that I would say the doctrines of grace, and believing it wholeheartedly, not with kind of a wink-wink, "I'm reformed."

CF: Do you think a lot of guys do that? I mean they kind of do the wink-wink thing, and its convenient to get me where I want to go, but I'm not really "Reformed?"

TU: I think there are a lot of people who carry the name and they have tons of questions for themselves- I'm okay with that. We should have questions. But the other problem of the other side is that "I'm reformed, and butting out our chest," like we have all the answers, and we are absolutely foolish if we think we do. I think it's the best way, but do we have all the answers? Its impossible. We look through a glass darkly. Reformed? To reduce it is the doctrines of grace, believing it wholeheartedly, but maybe winsomely. And then in a way with some humility. Truly Reformed, and I don't mean, wow, that's a loaded term, isn't it? To go back to the Reformers, I think maybe that personally Calvin is having...believing the doctrines of grace wholeheartedly, embracing or acknowledging mystery, and having a sense of humility about things that you've done. Absolutely have answers to. Does that help...does that even...?

CF: Yeah. Because in kind of the paradigm that has kind of been put out there for years and years, I was kind of raised in the....even in the title of the book it says "biblical preaching," you know Haddon Robinsons stuff.

TU: Sure.

CF: And postmodernism kind of stands in judgment over a lot modernistic thinking so I guess the basic question I ask, is , well, we had a guy that was getting ready for ordination down here, and it kind of, really, informed a lot of my questions to him, which was ,"Okay, you're a PCA guy. You're going in to get ordained. What is the difference in your preaching if it is biblical, and the, you know, the guy over here, the brother in Christ that is a Southern Baptist dude."

TU: That's a great question. If I could answer that, I would say that I'm Christocentric regardless of where I'm preaching from. If I am in Leviticus 11, if I'm preaching from 2 Chronicles chapter 4, or if I'm preaching from 1 Corinthians 1, its all about Jesus. Because he is what its all about because Jesus said its all about him, in Luke 24. I would say that Reformed preaching, that you asked me that what is biblical preaching, what's the difference? Truly Reformed, its got to be about Jesus. Its got to be about the gospel of grace, of course that is what Jesus says, that was his entire message. I would think that would be a distinctive. I'm mentoring and walking with a guy who is at Denver seminary guy, and they use Robinson's book, and I went to hear him preach. He's been attending All Souls for a while- he preached there and his teacher and his entire class said that was amazing- you, you made it all about Jesus. How did you get that? And he was pretty much... he started unpacking it and was like, "that was amazing." You could see the lights come to them. I heard two other guys preach and, well, one of them mentioned Jesus once. It was not Christocentric. But he passed with an A I can assure you. That's the difference in that school. A lot of those people would call themselves Reformed. Because you wear the badge of Reformed, sometimes, I've heard some Reformed preaching from people who call themselves Reformed, its not worth a thing. It was just atrocious. It was a moralistic, stripped of Jesus and the gospel, and for some reason, man, we've really struggled thinking, we've got to give this to them or people aren't going to respond. Man, if we understand the gospel, we're going to want to change, and we're going to have a higher view, actually of God and his holiness, and our sin's going look bigger, the grave the cross is going to look bigger. Of course you are going to change. God loves you just like you are but he loves you so much he's not going to leave you like you are. So there are ditches on both sides. If you're Reformed where there's a ditch over here and Bonhoeffer would have talked about that one, there's a ditch over there and Keller wants to talk about that one. You know. There are ditches we can fall off of as people that have theology right.

CF: So you would say that probably one of the emphases that is in modernist preaching is trying to make sure theology is right whereas in postmodern

preaching, at least your understanding of it, it would be more of an understanding, "I may get it wrong but it still is going to be full of grace?"

TU: No, I don't know that it would be full of grace. I may get it wrong and I don't know...that's a great question. Modernist preaching, if you mean evangelical modernist preaching I would characterize it as moralistic. And if you were to characterize postmodern evangelical preaching they really believe who Jesus says he is. And the Bible is what he said it was. I would say its not that they're not concerned to get it right but a modernist- if you're suggesting that there is a ditch, and you're a postmodernist that gets it wrong, the postmodern could very well be moralistic too. I think all bad preaching is moralistic. And relativist are moralistic. It just happens to be their brand of truth-they're still moralistic.

CF: Okay.

TU: I wouldn't make, I don't know that I would... Keller talks about there is the moralist and the relativist ditch. There is the religious and the irreligious ditch, and the gospel is not just modifying those ways- it's a completely different way, it's a different road. So that's where I would want to come down. That preaching that has gone that route is completely wrong- its not even on the same road. To be Christocentric and gospel driven in your preaching and to understand the gospel is a completely different road.

CF: Okay. What do you think the role of the Holy Spirit is in the act of preaching for you?

TU: Yeah. That is a...what a great question. I've had some of the most moralistic people come to me after a sermon and say thank you. And it appears to me the sermon did nothing for them. And I've had in that same service, a girl who is a graduate of Neropa, who is into Lakota Indian spiritualism, new age, and kind of Christianity and Buddhism, she also came to me and said thank you. Well what is going on? Well something there that I said kind of connected with them. And it could have been the Holy Spirit but the only time there's ever any power is when the Holy Spirit accompanies the word that I'm preaching and he's the one changing hearts. The Holy Spirit is the one who does it all, from beginning to end, is what I guess is what I'm saying. From beginning to end, if he's not there, if he's not accompanying, he's not filled me, my words, preparing the hearts, I may never see the change in anyone, if he's not the one working on the hearts, who cares if they change. Its not going to be for any good.

CF: Do you think that a purpose of one of your sermons might be is condemnation?

TU: For me to condemn?

CF: No. I meant that the purpose of the Spirit may not be on that Sunday or whenever, it may not be salvation but condemnation?

TU: Yeah. Are you getting at, where the person is in the process? Is that what you mean?

CF: Yeah. Well,

TU: I think that the purpose of that one sermon could speak absolute thorough forgiveness to one person, and another person leaving like I'm doomed.

CF: So you don't feel like you've failed if they haven't come to faith?

TU: Absolutely not. Absolutely not. No the process of our soteriology. You begin looking at one of the steps. I have no clue where they are. Its not up to me. I rest in fact, if you truly are Reformed, and you believe the doctrines of grace, our theology is a great resting place for the people who maybe think that we care about souls, you know, and our call to care for souls, pasturing, leading, that kind of thing. It is a great resting place because it is his work. What is he doing in their hearts, so yeah, absolutely. They could leave...I had a lady get up and leave here about a month and a half ago- haven't seen her since, get up right about 15 into my sermon and she left- walked out. She was there as a guest of someone else. She was angry. I can't do anything about that. There were also people there weeping who don't come forward for the Lord's Supper. So, yeah, I just leave that where it is.

CF: Okay. So let me bring this up then. What do you think is the role of the congregation when you preach? Do you have any expectations of them or do they know what those expectations are?

TU: No, I don't know if its ever spoken, other then, ...I don't know. I'm thinking it would depend on where they're at on the map. We have such a strange congregation. We've got long-time Christians who are incredibly immature. We have very young, young Christians that are incredibly mature. We have long time Christians that are mature. We've got people all over the board- people that are there who love what we are doing that are atheists, who actually attend every week and work on our set up and tear down teams. Why are they there? I have no clue. I don't think they know what a role is. No I think it depends on where they are that map. Maybe they understand right now...I'll occasionally say the one time today that you're going to know God is talking is when the Scriptures are being read. With confidence we know that God is talking. Depending on where they are they may buy that or not, or they may. But something is different is happening. It seems like we call that time of the service a consecration. So its, yeah, as they move through the liturgy they see, ooh, something different is happening. That guy is going to talk for a while. Do they know what their role is? I don't have a clue. They know what it is because we go to the Lord's table every

week, so I'm guessing that it is "I'm here to engage with God and his word, and the preaching somehow is a little more forte. No, that's a great question. I don't know.

CF: Let me see here. So if one of the values of postmodernism is personal experience, I remember you said at the beginning you kind of said, well I have...I do talk about personal stories. There are stories, and they are big things right now and its fun to talk about stories in postmodern preaching.

TU: It was for Jesus. Jesus thought stories were pretty big, and Paul. And you kind of get a sense of Peter's preaching in acts, he thinks stories are huge. That is what biblical theology is. It is one grand narrative that makes sense of everything. And it is God's redemptive work. I don't think that is new with postmodernism. Now, many postmoderns, some postmodernists have attached to it and liked it, but that's not new.

CF: I think maybe the difference I'm kind of getting at within postmodern, rather, it is "This is my story. And you can take it or leave it. This is my personal experience versus when Peter gets up and says, or John says for example in 1 John, "What we have seen with our eyes, touched with our hands, etc." this one we declare to you." But Peter did not get up and say things like, "Let me tell me you how I was a really lousy fisherman and Jesus sent me to the half-way house and I saw all this really great stuff." Difference between not just a story for story's sake, and there is a reason I'm going somewhere with this.

TU: It sounds like you're saying that's wrong. And ...

CF: No, I'm just interested in what your opinion is.

TU: Let me back up a little bit. I didn't say, if I'm made to believe that that's how I...that preaching. That's not what I said. I said I share personal stories, like illustrations, those tend to be pieces of a two-minute illustration of how for instance, if my identity is now Jesus' identity, in other words, if I've made him who knew no sin to be made sin so that you may become the righteousness of God, I used an illustration of how my identity through a credit card...my sister in law's name that is almost exactly like mine, became my identity for about three months as far as the credit card company is concerned.

CF: Sure.

TU: That's a personal story that's not...I didn't mean that kind of ...I think that is a caricature of postmodernist preaching, I have never heard good preaching ever done the kind of way you were just ...

CF: I probably am breaking the rules of the interview, but I would agree with you. What I have heard is what I call preaching by niceness or salvation by niceness.

And that is if you realize through my telling of my personal story what kind of great guy I am then if you relate to that, hey, you can now trust Christ.

TU: I've never heard that.

CF: Oh man...

TU: I've never listened to that preaching ever...is that kind of ... maybe I need to clarify...

CF: No, you didn't hint at that at all.

TU: I'm wondering if I am somehow being put in that category, by this or are you assuming that is the kind of preaching that I would do? I'm not sure where that all came from.

CF: No. No, I'm just saying that I listen to about 50 different sermons a month and you hear the category you talked about, moralism, you hear that 75% of the time. But from guys that are reformed and tend to be more postmodern, the classic model tended to be Thompson's book of illustrations, and most of them from the Civil War. But I'm being facetious. But the postmodernist guys are tend to be more of ...and I'll just quote Rick Warren here, as an example. He's not Reformed, but he says "I believe in confessional preaching. I believe in confessing about myself, my sermons are essentially what Rick Warren did this week. What he did wrong, what he did right. That sort of thing. And then you'll get guys that are within the PCA that will pile personal story upon personal story upon personal story. In other words, it is their experience and you rarely hear outside of that, like, well an illustration, that they might have picked up from a book, you know, Old man and the sea or something. No your right on the money of what we're talking about, so, yeah, so no sweat there. There's a lot of guys, you probably read in your trek through seminary, David Wells, Michael Horton and guys like that. And they're talking about a postmodernism and they'll say are we dealing with a loss of a sense of objective truth or a change in the understanding of what truth is? What would be your opinion?

TU: I don't know that there is a difference. I would say that is too clouded for me to come down on one or the other.

CF: Okay. Some have said, Leonard Sweet, and some of the others, have asked the question about postmodernism, postmodern preaching, they say, is it a crisis of faith, in other words, that our creeds and our doctrinal content have failed us, or is it a crisis of the language of faith; the words that we use to convey doctrine and creeds?

TU: I don't know any of Leonard Sweet's stuff. I don't have a context for what...so those folks might be saying. He's certainly not Reformed.

CF: No, he's not.

TU: Is it a crisis of faith or crisis of the language of faith? I would...I don't know. I guess it could be both, again. I think, yeah, most people who are preaching today have no clue how to preach to the people who are sitting in their seats. Unless they're already Christians. It is possible that there are some language problems. They don't know how to bring it into, make it relevant. Probably see that in the way that we, that our services, byinlarge, especially in the PCA, we're just so backwoods, and out of touch, as if there was a one moment in time they got the music thing right. So I would say that might be... there is a crisis in the language of faith, we don't know how to talk about it without even asking, we're not asking the same questions and we're certainly not answering the questions people are asking. Yeah, I would say there is a crisis of faith, and there has been since the garden. So I would say both are true.

CF: Okay.

TU: And always have been.

CF: Okay, some have said that, and I'm going through a list here about, that what this really is an ecclesiastical problem. And the question is is the church itself the problem with the structures not being conducive to ministry and mission in the new world? Or is it the church failing to be a church, being less true to itself than true to its time? IN other words, you kind of put it like a snapshot in time and the world changed past the Polaroid, and we've missed that. So is this a church problem or a cultural problem or both? What would you say?

TU: A crisis of the church not being able to minister in a postmodern setting?

CF: Yeah, in other words, the structures we have in place, 11 o'clock on Sunday morning, row upon row of chairs, a pulpit...

TU: Yeah, yeah

CF: And some have said, for example, like, Eugene Peterson has said that a sermon should be more like a conversation with the guy sitting on a seat with a cup of coffee with you, not at you. So do we need to change?

TU: I'll tell you that Jesus preached that way a lot and it seems like.

CF: Decaf...he used decaf.

TU: I would say that the bride is ugly, Jesus loves her, and we don't get it all right, ever. But there are some things good about the church that are in place that somehow...we probably think it can't change at all, it always has to look the

same at 11 o'clock on Sunday was always the time to meet and you only use certain organ or piano, or always sang songs that were in stanzas, and you only sang songs that were written in the 16 and 1700's. Wow. Pretty tough plug for the church in the 5th century. So, yeah, I would say that the church is a little stodgy, we all wish to be looking at ourselves and saying, "Is this the only way?" I don't think these are bad questions. I do believe that we need to worship in the way that the Bible tells us to worship. We probably have a pretty narrow view of what is okay. I don't know if I'm answering your question, maybe that is just a soapbox.

CF: No you are.

TU: Us in the PCA we're so freakin' arrogant, its unbelievable. And we have so little latitude for people who do things differently. I wouldn't have a big screen in my church here in boulder, right now where I'm at in All Souls church for anything. But is there a setting where I would have it? Absolutely, absolutely. If I were in Nashville, Tennessee, I would have a screen. Its our Dallas, Texas. We kind of have this strange thing we just think, this is our way and its always been this way. That's just ridiculous.

CF: That might also mean your views about what actually or how you would structure not just the sermon itself but maybe also the way you would also present it would be different?

TU: Oh, probably there would be settings where that would be true. If I were preaching in Africa, or in an African-American church I would certainly preach differently than I do now. I were going back to visit and preach in my Dad's church, my Dad was a Free-will Baptist pastor. I preach similarly, but I'd preach a little bit differently. I'd wear a suit. And I'd have to preach being aware that my Dad is letting me come into his pulpit and come off on some of the things I'd say a little bit different. You always have to know your context. So yeah, I mean, my goodness, yeah I would always, I would think I would be able to modify how I preach. If I went to another guys church and he says look, I want you to sit on a stool, because I do. Of course I'd sit on the stool. Or "we don't use a podium, would you mind not taking your notes, would you just put it inside your Bible. I'd figure out a way to do it. Of course, absolutely. That doesn't affect the message doesn't change, the gospel I think we could...I would look and I would say, "It is the gospel you're preaching Paul, it is not a different gospel. And if he saw it he would say that's the same gospel.

CF: A couple of times you've used the term relevant. How would you define, what is relevant or what is relevant in the sermon?

TU: Yeah. I would say if people don't understand what you're talking about, you're irrelevant. They have to understand it. Then they have to believe it. They agree that you're using language and you are unpacking things in a way they

understand. That is what exegesis is. If we are to assume, and I think we should, and I think its right the people in Ephesus understood when they got the letter from Paul, the people in Boulder should be able to understand it. You have to dig through things and make it relevant. Here's what it looks like. Here's is what this is talking about. Here's the message. It is being clear and making it...we don't own slaves in Boulder. That's just a bad thing. So what would that look like to work, as if I'm working unto God. Would the guy who works at IBM and is a third-level management guy, what does that mean.

CF: Do you find with your congregation that you have to do a lot more explaining and what's behind the question Bishop William Willimon, who is a kind of interesting guy, being a United Methodist, he used to be the chaplain at Duke University and went on to become a bishop for the Methodist church, has a couple of books out. One is called "Preaching to the Baptized," and it basically is how to preach to a Christian congregation or somebody who is predominantly Christian, and then he has another one which is really preaching to people who are non-Christians. The name of that book is "The Intrusive Word." And do you find yourself having, as you are preaching now, have got to explain a lot more terms or do they kind of understand them already?

TU: No they don't. And the long-time Christians tend not to either. They forget it at some point, there's always something they're getting out of it. For instance, I started preaching through the book of Mark and I did background on why this gospel and not another gospel. And why this Christ not another Christ? And it starts with the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God. Wow...what a loaded term. And as I went back and unpacked it, did a little bit of early church history, it is church history that says, here's why we preach what we preach. Here's why this is right. I had people who were brand-new to Christianity say, "Thank you. I didn't know any of that." And people who were long time Christians, "Wow, that was fresh, I needed to hear that. I've never quite heard that before." So we assume way too much for the Christian and we don't think about the non-Christian enough. And what I find is that it is the same message for everybody. Tim Keller preached the same for Christians and non-Christians and he ... because the gospel is the same for both. The message that the Christian needs to hear, that my atheist friend Josh Martin needs to hear. The message Josh needs to hear is the message that I need to hear. It is never any different. Our sin is the same. And our belief is the same. So I don't change it. I keep in mind that Christians today are widely illiterate, and if they think they know a lot, they still ... even if they do know a lot, its constantly good to unpack what a Pharisee and a Scribe is, and what they'll understand what it means to be a tax-collector, and... to unpack that is a good thing. And so I would do the same...I preach the exact same no matter where am as far as the content. I am aware of the words I'm using, but yeah, I would say unpacking the same for both messages exactly the same to make a distinction is to hinder the gospel. I think that's true for everybody.

CF: You got any closing thoughts or anything you want to...

TU: I don't think I do. Maybe in the future maybe share your view, not necessarily which side you come down on. That might be helpful. As soon as you started talking I thought, uh-oh...

CF: No...don't worry about that.

TU: I am in a corner and he's trying to...

CF: No, not at all.

TU: As soon as you started talking I was like "Dude!"