Private life, book life, took place where words met imagination
without passing through the world – Annie Dillard

In the back of my mind, always in my preaching is, "How do I move our people forward whether its preaching the Scriptures or preaching contemporary issues, how do I help them to deal with that issue or that Scripture to move them forward in their relationship with God and particularly in the world in which they live, the environment in which they live. So if the Scriptures or our preaching can't help them in their context and it only just relates to the church then it's just a bit of information and we are no different from a university or any other place that is giving out information for knowledge's sake. – Indigenous minister

In the midst of a time of real and perceived change and challenge, preaching continues to be a primary means of communication in the church. In describing these times, Cowdell (1997:16) argues that in Australia like the rest of the Western world, the paradigm of Christianity as "Christendom" is collapsing. He argues the church has responded to this by either giving up its distinctive claims or retreating into a fundamentalist sectarianism. He sees the current situation as an opportunity for the Christian, "tradition to be unpacked to lay bare its core experiences, whereupon a new expression can be found more faithful to the original vision" (Cowdell 1997: 17). This call to lay bare the essentials of the gospel so it is amenable to new expressions is critical in exploring how the distinctive claims of the gospel can be effectively communicated in Australia. This need for a contextualised expression of the Gospel is based on the underlying thesis of this paper which can be stated as follows.

> Evangelical churches in Perth, Western Australia, operate predominantly with
> an applicational hermeneutical model in regard to preaching and hence
> communicate the gospel ineffectually to ordinary Australians.

Effective, contextualised preaching cannot be studied simply through a Biblical or Systematic Theological approach, nor if it is held that preaching communicates the Gospel of God, can it be studied simply through a sociological or communications theory approach. Preaching as one of the communicative actions of the church calls for a practical theological approach to its study and praxis.

1. PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

At one level preaching has always fallen within the domain of practical theology but in a narrowly defined manner. This narrower view of homiletics as a sub-component of practical theology, defines preaching in terms of the application of theological theory, relegating preaching or homiletics to the area of skills training. Hence this homiletic perspective is essentially pragmatic. Stadelman (1998: 219) writes of his concern that practical theology, particularly under the influence of American pragmatic concerns, is turning into pragmatic theology, governed more by the principle of "what works", with its theories and models being centred more in the social sciences and losing its historic theological roots. At the same time he is also concerned that his own European tradition stays too safely in the theoretical field and is not pragmatic enough.

At its broadest level practical theology has been defined as being concerned with all the religious actions that take place within a society (Otto 1975). Greinacher (1974) narrows the field of study to all the actions that take place within the church. Stadelman (1998: 222) similarly defines practical theology as "the theological theory of church practice." Pieterse (1990), following Firet (1990) and Habermas (1982), creates a middle ground where practical theology concerns itself with the actions that

take place in the communication of the Gospel. This definition allows for the study of communicative actions that occur outside the context of church and also means that some actions that occur within the church are not the subject of practical theology.

Heyns & Pieterse (1990: 10, 21) define practical theology as the branch of theological science that analyses praxis scientifically, determining the theories on which praxis is based and whether they are effective. Practical theology also goes beyond theory verification to shaping and determining practice.

That practical theology is also concerned with shaping practice is supported by Stadelman (1998: 220, 221) who argues that all theology is eminently practical and must be practical if it is to be true theology. As the life and practice of Christianity is grounded in relationship with God and each other, then its practices are essentially relational and therefore communicative. Practical theology is the theology of the relational transactions of the kingdom and church of God in individual, group or corporate contexts. The inclusion of kingdom in practical theology's definition broadens its focus beyond that of church and is consistent with Pieterse (1990: 223) who defines practical theology as "the critical theory of gospel-orientated communicative acts" which have the specific aim of "bringing about and maintaining a reciprocal relationship between God and human beings through the ministry."

While group and corporate contexts are obviously relational contexts it may not seem as obvious that the individual context is also a relational transaction. Operating from a theological perspective that sees humans as created, derivative beings who only have the reality and a sense of self in the context of an Other or others, our very self-

awareness is then a relational transaction. An individual praying is involved in a relational transaction in the prayer's content, as they reflect and meditate on relational transactions past, present or future, and in the prayer's perceived receiver – God.

Stadelman (1998: 220, 221) further defines practical theology as the theology between practice and practice by which he means it is the theology that informs and critically reflects on the current practices of the church which then leads to practice based on proper action measured against a norm. While the definition used in this research is broader than just church action, Stadelman's (1998) definition insists on a norm against which practice should change. The natural sciences acknowledge working with statistical norms or even pragmatic norms of effectiveness or efficiency. The idea of philosophically or socially constructed norms according to which things have to change is more readily acknowledged in the field of social sciences e.g. Marxist analysis or feminist critique. Christianity also has a long history of holding church or kingdom practice to a theistic and theological norm. Allowing philosophical, social and theological norms to be included in an empirical field of study is consistent with Habermas's (1982) broader socio-scientific perspective.

Riggs (1992: 1-21) acknowledges the place of values and presuppositions in scientific research. This is also consistent with Popper's (1994) view that no scientific endeavour is value free, that in fact the essence of scientific research is to have our biases open to collegiate scrutiny and testing. In refuting the idea that we can purge ourselves of prejudice Popper (1994: 86) states, "We always operate with theories, even though more often than not we are unaware of them. The importance of this fact should never be played down. Rather, we should try, in each case, to formulate

explicitly the theories we hold. For this makes it possible to look out for alternative theories, and to discriminate critically between one theory and another." He further states that "Experiments are constantly guided by theory, by theoretical hunches of which the experimenter is often unconscious, by hypotheses concerning possible sources of experimental errors, and by hopes and conjectures about what will be fruitful experiment…… What is called scientific objectivity consists solely in the critical approach: in the fact that if you are biased in favour of your pet theory, some of your friends and colleagues (or failing these, some workers of the next generation) will be eager to criticize your work – that is to say refute your pet theories if they can" (Popper 1994: 93).

Stadelman (1998) argues that quality practice is not absolute and self-evident and cannot be left to subjective judgement to determine. Quality has to be measured against a legitimate norm. He believes that norms of success, "what works", as well as historical norms or norms based on social sciences are inadequate. "As long as practical theology is really *theo*logy, neither human ideals, nor human traditions nor empirical human theories can be the norm, but only the revelation of *God* as given to us in the Scriptures. Only the biblical Word, rightly understood, can be the final norm which enables practical theology to determine the quality of certain church practices and to formulate legitimate instructions for action"(Stadelman 1998: 225). He does not articulate what he means by "rightly understood" and this creates a significant difficulty for theologies that either do or do not recognise that Scripture was written in and shaped by human traditions and empirical realities. While this does not negate or minimise the truth that is revealed in Scripture, how this truth is correctly discerned is not always clear. For example the truth is not easily discovered in a passage such as 1

Timothy 2:1-15 where certain human traditions and social realities shape the writing of the text.

Stadelman (1998: 227-229) advocates a three-step process for moving from practice to practice, which in its first step would appear to modify his insistence of God's word alone being the norm.

1. Analysis of the current environment using historical analysis, the empirical methods of the social sciences and theological insight.

2. Development of a thorough understanding of the character, structure and practice of the New Testament church.

3. Translation of the analysis and Ecclesiology into current and future practice.

I concur with the need for a theological norm but believe this theological norm to be broader than just that of Ecclesiology and do not share Stadelman's (1998) confidence that the New Testament reveals a clear ecclesiological structure. Ecclesiology is itself grounded in the very theology of God's incarnational communicative acts in giving Scripture and as recorded in Scripture. By this it is meant that God, who is outside of us, has created and entered the human world, ultimately in Christ. This incarnational movement is not only recorded in Scripture but that God speaks to us in and through Scripture is in itself an incarnational act. He reveals himself to humanity in the language and medium of humanity. Any ecclesiological norm that may be gleaned from Scripture rests in a larger context of Scripture as an incarnational communicative act of God.

A practical theology that primarily focuses on the right theological *form* of an action seems inconsistent with the purposes of God as revealed in His self-revelatory acts as

recorded in Scripture, in His incarnation in Christ, and in the very nature of Scripture

as an incarnational act itself. The primary focus of practical theology needs to be on

that which brings about relationship with God and human beings. Scripture is replete

with the notion that God's primary intent is not correct form but relationship between

God and humanity, e.g. Genesis 1, 2, 12, Exodus 3, Psalm 33, Isaiah 43, John 17,

Romans 5, Romans 8, Ephesians 2, 1 Peter 2, Revelation 21. Heyns and Pieterse

(1990: 10) argue that practical theology's, "focus is particularly on those religious

actions designed to mediate God's coming to humankind." Firet (1990) also argued

that "practical theology is the theological theory of those operational or action

systems that help to mediate God's coming to people in their world" (quoted in Heyns

and Pieterse1990: 39). The focus of church practice is not primarily on right form.

Ultimately kingdom/church practice reveals the character of God as seen in Christ as

we act and relate in the world (Matthew 5, 25, John 13-15, 2 Corinth 4, 5).

Stadelman's (1998) model assumes there is a biblically derived measure that can

determine if communicative events are authoritative and effective. Certainly both the

content elements and delivery aspects of communicative events can be measured

against understandings of the Gospel. But while this may serve a primary function it

does not fulfil a total function. While the content may be determined from scriptural

categories, deciding what content to include and leave out may be shaped by a social

analyses of the target group using instruments derived from the social sciences rather

than Scripture, or from personal familiarity rather than Biblical paradigm. The

delivery of the communicative act will have greater effectiveness if it is delivered

with humility, conviction and dependence on God. We know this because Scripture

tells us so and this is true to the Gospel. But even so what is effective and appropriate

communication in a traditional Indigenous Australian community compared to a non-Indigenous, middle-class, suburban church may be determined by scientific research and methods or subjective awareness that has no "Biblical" grounding.

It would seem therefore that a more complete model than Stadelman's (1998) is needed. Zerfass's (1974: 166) model offers a clear procedural method for moving from existing praxis to new praxis based on both theological and situational analysis and the development of a practical theological theory and model.

FIGURE 1.1 Practical Theology Model (Zerfass 1974: 166)
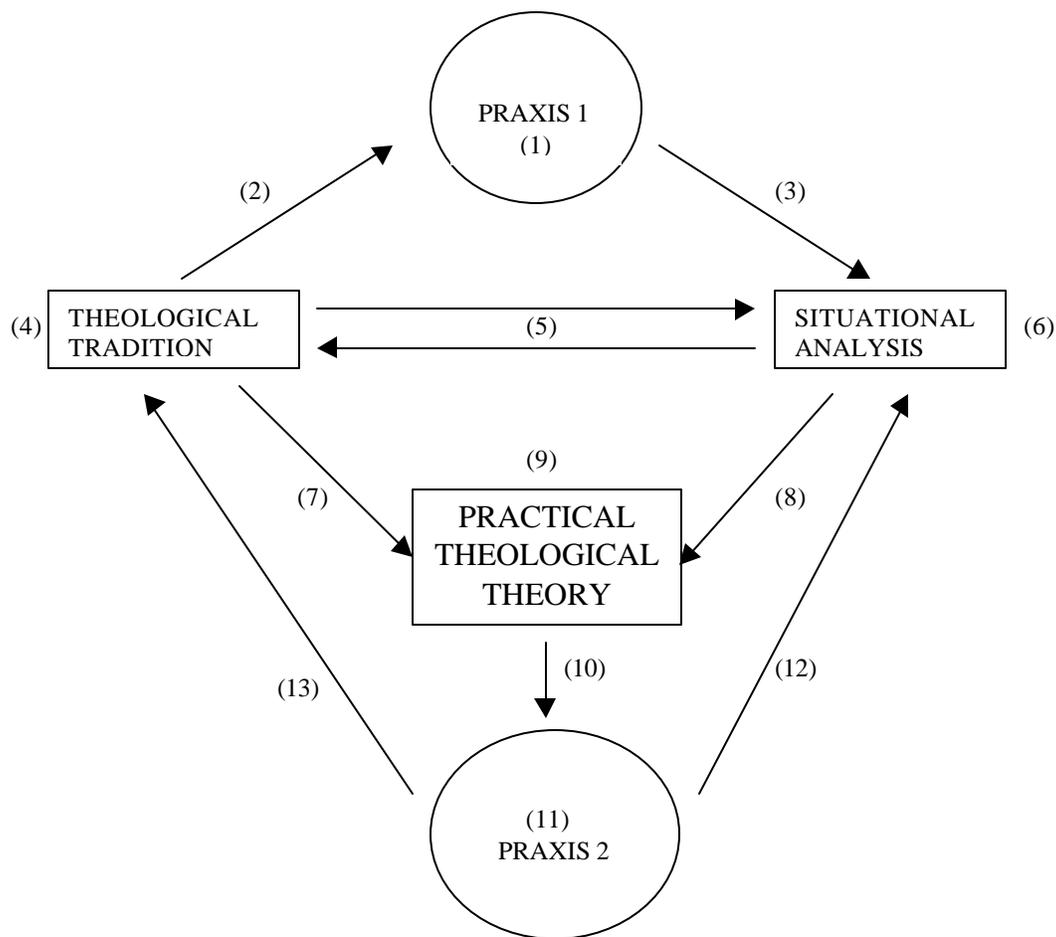
This model requires the study of and interaction between the praxis, theological tradition, situational analysis and practical theological theory to develop new praxis.

The aspects of situational analysis and theological tradition are similar to Stadelman's (1998) model but Zerfass (1974) presents a distinct category of practical theology theory that more clearly provides an operational process by which to incorporate theological tradition and situational analysis into a practical theological approach. Zerfass's (1974) practical theological theory is developed by the interaction between theological tradition and situational analysis. Theological tradition includes church history and tradition, as well as all of the other theological disciplines, while situational analysis allows for measures and theories outside of Biblical revelation and theology to inform the praxis evaluation. The practical theology theory is a means to evaluate praxis and move from praxis to praxis.

While Zerfass's (1974) model offers a more complete analytical tool than Stadelman's (1998) three step process, Zerfass's (1974) category of theological tradition raises two concerns. One is of a minor semantic nature. Tradition can suggest that which is traditional and overlook new thinking in the theological disciplines. If this error is guarded against, it does not have to be a major concern. The other concern is more significant. To delineate between all other theological disciplines and practical theology suggests a distinction between academic fields of theological study and theology which has practice as its focus. This seems to perpetuate the distinction between the scholastic and the spiritual that is more a phenomena of modernism than traditional Christian scholarship. Allen (1997) points out that the division between the spiritual, by which he means the relational and practised elements of faith, and the academic for the sake of gaining knowledge, is a relatively recent shift. He writes, "Only relatively recently have doctrinal and spiritual theology been pursued in isolation from each other; for most of the history of

theology they interacted richly. To make progress in doctrinal theology it was essential to mature one's spiritual life, because theological understanding and spiritual progress went hand in hand…..the notion of spiritual progress without increased knowledge of God or doctrinal inquiry without spiritual fruits was inconceivable"(Allen 1997: 19).

The connecting of all theology to practical theology is based on God's activity in history. God's revelation of himself in Christ is incarnational and has a direct and unavoidable impact on how life is lived. God's intent in revealing Himself in Christ and in Scripture is to change people. A theology that does not have the goal of encouraging some kind of change is not consistent with the ontological and economic claims of the Gospel on which it is based. All theology attempts to communicate something and therefore as a communicative act intends to have an effect. As such it is both a practical theology and subject to practical theology. Practical theology can undersell itself by either seeing itself as the applicational arm of the more academic theologies or see itself as one academic theological field among many and hence speak more theoretically than existentially.

Torrance (1999) argues that theology is never divorced from empirical realities. He grounds his thinking in the idea that theology apart from the objective reality of God is impossible. In speaking of John Duns Scotus, Torrance (1999:21) he writes, "He recognized that authentic knowledge of God must be in accordance with the nature and mode of his divine being and must therefore involve a *real* and *actual* relation to God as its proper object, but he also held that we cannot have a knowledge of God cut off from the conditions of our present life in this world." He writes that, "Everything

hinges on the reality of God's *self*-communication to us in Jesus Christ, in whom there has become incarnate, not some created intermediary between God and the world, but the very Word who eternally inheres in the Being of God and is God, so that for us to know God in Jesus Christ is really to know him as he is in himself" (Torrance1999: 23). "We do not and cannot know God in disjunction from his relation to this world, as if the world were not his creation or the sphere of his activity toward us……we may know him only within the field of relations actually set up by God in his interaction with the world he has made"(Torrance1999: 24, 25). Theology cannot operate outside the created order of God and therefore is to be subject to God's purposes which include transformation. This breaks down hard and fast distinctions between the different fields of theology and allows practical theology equal footing with other disciplines while inviting other theological disciplines to think of the communicative activity of their theological endeavour through a practical theological perspective.

Torrance's (1999) perspective also breaks down some of the suspicion within evangelical circles between the natural sciences and theological studies. Torrance (1999: 25) argues that theologically speaking the universe and humanity belong together and together constitute what is called the "world". Humans have a special function to play within the world and that is as God's vice-regent. Torrance (1999: 27) says that we are the "priests of creation". In this position we are to steward and order the world. "With this priestly function which man exercises for the creation, scientific inquiry becomes a deeply religious duty in man's relation to God. So far as theological science is concerned, then, it is evident that we must operate with a *triadic relation,* God/man/world or God/world/man, for it is this world unfolding under

man's scientific inquiries which constitutes the medium in which God makes himself known and in which man may express knowledge of him"(Torrance1999:27).

This highlights the necessity for the consideration of existential reality in all theology, in practical theology and in praxis. Torrance (1999:27) argues that without consideration of the "world", "we are not really engaged in theology in the proper sense, and are not scientifically engaged with theology, if we restrict it to the God/man or man/God relationship." Torrance (1999) presents an incarnational basis for this thinking. He states that "since the Word of God by whom all things were made and continue to be upheld became incarnate within the contingent, rational structures of space and time, within which theological science and natural science alike pursue their inquiries, there must be a much closer connection between the concepts deployed by theology and by natural science than is often realized" (Torrance1999:34).

That "theological concepts and statements, at whatever level they are organized and defined, must be correlated with empirical concepts and statements grounded in our actual day-by-day knowledge of God is inescapably implied by the interaction of God with us in the universe of space and time which he has created and endowed with its rational order, and which he continues to sustain by his immanent presence and power." (Torrance1999: 36)

Torrance (1999: 36) concludes that this "is the universe to which by creation we belong, and it is within it alone that God makes himself known to us and summons us to obedient response in life and knowledge." Torrance's (1999) perspective calls all

theology to operate with connection and relationship to the world in mind and for such incarnate theology to have praxis as a consideration in its formulation. In this sense Stadelman's (1998) remark that all theology is practical theology is the true outworking of an incarnational Gospel.

In Torrance's (1999) argument there needs to be an acknowledgement of both the impact of sin and brokenness on the created order and the work of God's Spirit in renewing creation and humanity. The God who has revealed himself incarnationally as subject, in the same revelation also reveals himself as the One who is above and beyond the created order and who exposes, speaks against and restores that which is fallen in the created order by His Spirit. A practical theology based on an incarnational perspective not only speaks within the created order but also speaks at times against it, ultimately for its restoration. Likewise contextualised preaching does not take its ultimate authority from the context and so speaks not only within the created order but at times speaks against it.

Despite these concerns regarding Zerfass's (1974) category of *theological tradition,* this research will follow Zerfass's (1974) *methodological* model to a great extent, as can be seen in the overall structure of the chapters. At the same time a critique of the binary element of Zerfass's (1974) approach will be forwarded with the thesis leading to the presentation of a model based more on continuity than binary tension.

This research, in recognizing that the evaluation of preaching praxis can simply lead to a rearrangement of the form and structure of preaching, will also explore how an evaluation of situational factors may shape the message of the preaching itself. This is

not saying that the situational truth discovered is then immediately and uncritically incorporated into the Gospel message. Rather it is saying that situational realities allow us to revisit the Gospel text and message and with new lenses discover truths that were always present but may have not been seen before or have been neglected. That this is a threatening idea to many evangelicals is surprising as the history of theological and praxis development in the church is full of such examples. Luther's "discovery" of the doctrine of grace was enmeshed with his personal, social and political situation. The churches reshaping of its theology regarding slavery and race was heavily influenced by the situational context of the times, leading people like Wilberforce to re-explore the biblical text. Likewise in the current era the feminist movement has led evangelical scholars to see in Scripture themes of equality and mutual submission not previously acknowledged.

Gadamer (1975) argues that while there is an objective meaning in the text there is also a dialogue with the current world of the reader that shapes meaning. While the truth of the Gospel challenges and stands opposed to certain situational realities, i.e. there is a truth outside of us that we are to yield to, a decontextualised message robs preaching of incarnational authority and capacity. What aspects and themes of the Gospel are to be preached and how this message may be shaped to both confront and connect with a particular group of listeners will be explored. The possibility that situational analysis may raise new questions which when brought to the text may yield fresh understandings of the Gospel, will also be explored.

This perspective seems consistent with the multi-themed nature of Scripture itself. I would suggest a single propositional thematic statement of the Bible is impossible.

All themes may be coherent and find fulfilment and resolution in the person of Christ but that these themes are multiple and multi-dimensional suggest that certain aspects and themes of the Gospel may be more appropriate than others for certain times, places and listeners. For example biblical themes of liberation may be stronger in African-American churches than in Australian due to a unique history of slavery and racism in America (and an often unacknowledged history of forms of slavery and racism in Australia). This may be contextually appropriate though it should also be acknowledged that biblical liberation themes are not only true for African-American churches but also for Australian. Because liberation themes are often ignored in Australian churches, groups in Australia who have been oppressed, such as the Indigenous population, have been related to in ways that miss key needs in their context that the Gospel addresses.

Indigenous Minister 'B' (see Appendix A) highlights this tendency as part of an interview conducted for this thesis.

Many of our people have been evangelised, I think that there has been a lot of doctrinal truth taught to our people but not the opportunity to apply a lot of those truths that they learn given the responsibilities and the gifts God has given to them. For instance, I think the teaching of gifts just hasn't been taught in the history of our people. There are a lot of things in the years that have passed, in the mission circles, that just have not been touched on and that is disempowering. Allowing people to use their gifts, teaching them to fulfil God's will in their lives, using gifts in the church and in the community are only just new things that we are teaching our people. It has been said that Aborigines are the most evangelised people on earth. We know a lot about the Gospel, we know a lot about Jesus, the compassion of God, salvation but the issues that our people face each day of their lives in the community have very rarely been touched on in the past.

Over that time I have changed some of those things as you talk about issues and raise issues. A lot of the issues like justice and reconciliation and some of the other contemporary issues, our people now are pretty well open to that because I've struggled with some of that in the early stages……, learning in college and other places that there is more than just what our people have been taught in the past, 'Its important to know God and a few doctrinal things and that's all you need to know.'

I have endeavoured as much as I can to change the way of communicating to include story so it's not just preaching doctrinal truth. Previously that was the way it was done in Aboriginal circles, you are seen as the teacher and the hearers had to get this truth. And most of our people have missed out on some of the fundamental truths of the Scriptures because it has just been coming from a doctrinal point of view without any relevance.

Indigenous / non-Indigenous relationships in Australia is just one area where the contextualization of the Gospel would challenge the existing cultural order. It would support the idea that a sound practical theological approach and model would acknowledge and facilitate contextualization that operates both within and against culture.

Zerfass's (1974) model may be effective in empirically researching a problem but it does not in itself develop or formulate the research problem. The practical theological approach of Heyns and Pieterse (1990: 62-70, 74,75) not only uses and develops models to assess praxis (its scientific research methodology) but also as part of its operational method involves developing a research problem. Consistent with Popper's (1994) view and the underlying theme of this research, the development of a research problem occurs in a context. In the next section the underlying theoretical and personal presuppositions that have shaped the development of this research problem will be outlined. The research problem will then be stated and the chapter will conclude with an outline of the subsequent chapters using Zerfass's (1974) operational model.

2. RESEARCH PROBLEM

2.1 General area of concern.

Heyns and Pieterse (1990: 1) say that, "Practical theology is the branch of theology that considers those actions designed to ensure that God's word reaches people and is embodied in their lives." Preaching in the form of sermons continues to be a primary means used in churches in the hope that God's word reaches people and will be the focus of this research. Heyns and Pieterse (1990: 13) summarise the religious actions of the Christian church as being preaching, instruction, care, celebration and service. The church's service of worship is the operational field in which the research will be conducted as in the Australian context the sermon in the church's service of worship continues to be one of the primary means of communicating the Christian faith. The sermon generally remains either exegetical or topical in nature, communicated in a 30 minute block, in a non-interactive (at least at the verbal level) lecture format with a directional intent, calling listeners to action or application. As previously stated the underlying thesis of this paper is that Evangelical churches operate predominantly with an applicational hermeneutical model which I will argue inhibits communicating the Gospel authoritatively and effectively to Australians.

For any kind of empirical research there is a need to move from the abstract to the concrete so that concepts can be measured and assessed (Heyns & Pieterse 1990: 76). Hence how terms such as evangelical, applicational hermeneutic, effective and authority will be used in this research need to be explained. These are both operational terms and also pre-suppositional in nature in that they reveal underlying presuppositions that have shaped my understanding of these terms and hence will shape the research. Popper (1999: 279) argues that if definitions are not abbreviations,

"they are Aristotelian attempts to 'state the essence' of a word, and therefore unconscious conventional dogmas." He therefore tries to avoid definitions and calls them "proposals". While agreeing, "that our criterion must not be too sharp," (Popper 1999: 280) the stating of the presuppositions and understandings of critical aspects of a thesis allows the process of collegiate scrutiny which is the basis of the critical approach to science.

2.2 Evangelical

Australian theologian Stuart Piggin's (1996) perspective on Evangelicalism will provide a foundational understanding of the term in this research. Piggin (1996: x) sees Evangelicalism as more a movement than a theology or an ideology, and as a movement particularly concerned with three major elements – Spirit, Word and world. He argues that Evangelicalism has been the commonest expression of Protestantism in Australian history (Piggin 1996: vii). This tradition holds that personal relationship with God is possible, that this comes through faith and holds that this gospel comes through the authority of Scripture. The creation of this relationship is seen to be a work of the Holy Spirit that transforms not only the individual soul but also changes society and culture. Piggin (1996: vii) writes, "Evangelicalism, then, is experiential, Biblicist, and activist. It is concerned with the Spirit, the Word and the world. It aims to produce right-heartedness (orthokardia), right thinking (orthodoxy), and right action (orthopraxis). It calls for the consecration of heart, head and hand. All Christianity is, of course, concerned with Christ, but evangelicalism is passionate about three of Christ's concerns: his Word, his Spirit, and his mission."

This evangelical focus narrows the field of study to a particular Christian group. But it is a group that emphasises experience and effective praxis both as a duty of the

preacher and the responsibility of the listener. Josipovici (1988) points out that two important insights critical to the evangelical tradition are the centrality of saving history and the primacy of event. This is the matching of a redemptive story with event, reality and the here and now. While evangelicalism may have a mixed history of bringing the Gospel message to situational realities, it at least claims that saving history rests in a situational context.

Torrance (1999: 9) consistent with the view that sees the historical incarnation of Christ as central to an understanding of *evangelical,* petitions, "that Christ clothed with his gospel may be allowed to occupy the controlling center of the church's life, thought and mission in the world today. This is what evangelical theology in the proper sense is about, in its ontological commitment to the incarnate presence and activity of God in Jesus Christ within the objectivities and intelligibilities of our human existence in space and time. Evangelical theology serves both the reality of God's articulate self-revelation to mankind and the reality of the creaturely world to which we belong, in the integrity and wholeness of the life, teaching, and activity of the historical and risen Jesus Christ."

This incarnational and narrative view of evangelical is not often the way Australian evangelicals understand themselves. The next chapter will highlight how many evangelicals define themselves on the basis of their perceived correct and distinct understanding and handling of the Bible. Identifying preachers and churches who participate in this research as evangelical may therefore be problematic. Either their self-understanding can be measured against an incarnational and narrative

understanding of evangelical or the question could be asked of how a preacher's understanding of themself as being evangelical effects the nature of their preaching.

2.3 Applicational hermeneutical model

Riderbos (1975) offered a simple but useful principle in approaching the letters of the New Testament. He delineated between text that describes how God has acted on our behalf (the indicative) and text that calls us to respond to God's actions (the imperative).

It would seem that sermons in Australia tend to have either a focus on the indicative or a focus on the imperative. An applicational hermeneutic is a way of reading and communicating the Biblical text which focuses on how we should live as Christians. It focuses on the imperative of Scripture and the imperative or works aspect of Christian faith. Communicative action that focuses excessively on the indicative or excessively on the imperative runs the risk of distorting the message of Scripture and the nature of faith.

While imbalance between the indicative and imperative can lead to distortion there is another danger in this binary approach. This dichotomy does not sufficiently acknowledge the existential. Therefore it does not encourage exploration of how the existential shapes the communication and understanding of the indicative, and how the existential shapes the understanding, communication and enacting of the imperative.

The applicational hermeneutical model is linked to conservative evangelicals'

tendency to operate from a biblical hermeneutical basis (Heyns & Pieterse 1990: 40) that assigns an applicational role to situational context. Preaching takes the meaning of the text, which we discover in an historical context and it is applied, in a current context. This tends to deal with the text as an object, existing in the past tense, basically lifeless, needing to be brought to life in the present through the skill of the preacher. Paradoxically this is a low view of Scripture that minimises its God breathed immediacy, authority and impact.

In this approach, current situational context may be incorporated to allow application but seldom does it play a more informative and shaping role. Currently sermon content and style may be modified via populist responses to situational contexts such as the church's understanding of postmodernism and how it influences culture. But these shifts seem to be more reactive and fashionable (mimicking the culture) than based on stringent analysis of the effectiveness of past, current or new praxis, the consistency of this praxis with the message of Scripture or how praxis may be shaped by studying theories of communication that acknowledges how the reader or listener influences meaning.

The applicational hermeneutical approach perpetuates an exemplary homiletic (Warren 1999: 344). This may fit a certain pragmatism that is true of Australian culture but ethics that are divorced from theology, an imperative call divorced from an indicative grounding will paradoxically produce a culturally bound gospel that cannot move with cultural and generational movements.

2.4 Effectiveness and Authority.

Sermons can be measured in terms of effectiveness if the message content and delivery are consistent with the epistemological basis on which they are developed. Effectiveness then is measured against a theoretical norm. Effectiveness can also be measured against an operational norm in terms of sermon delivery and outcomes for the listeners. Preaching can be deemed effective if the listeners respond with the outcomes that the preacher intends or if the listeners deem the sermon effective in terms of outcomes they desire.

This thesis will attempt to analyse effectiveness in terms of both the preacher's intent and listeners' response measured against an epistemological norm, that being the message of the Scriptures according to an evangelical tradition which is also open to theory and research.

Authority may be a harder quality to measure. It will be argued that preaching is authoritative when it is recognised that it is God's message and voice that is being communicated and heard. This occurs when the truth about God intersects the reality of the listener's life. The word of God then is "living and active. Sharper than any doubled-edged sword, it penetrated even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12, NIV)

To repeat, the underlying thesis of this research is that the typical sermon method used in churches in Perth, Western Australia is not effective in communicating either directly to the broader cultural context or indirectly through the congregation to the broader culture. Sermons may be effective for those within the church system who

have been enculturated to a directive, passive recipient style, but if the church is intent on mission and engaging and influencing the broader community then its methodology needs to be examined.

2.5 Theoretical presuppositions

A number of theoretical presuppositions have shaped the identification of the original thesis, the development of the research problem and will continue to play a role in the research. These presuppositions need to be declared by the researcher.

a) Preaching is about faith development.

Faith in this sense is defined as trust and confidence in the character and purposes of God. Faith development is growth in that trust and confidence that sees growth, transformation and freedom in terms of the humanness that God created us in. This character formation in turn deepens faith. As Romans 5:1-5 states, character produces hope – a confidence in God. Growth is understood not primarily as linear but in terms of freedom and expansion.

b) Faith development only occurs when life experiences are interpreted in the light of Scripture and tradition.

Nelson (1989) argues in relation to faith maturation, that experience is vital to the process of faith. He states that, "a person's faith matures when life experiences are interpreted in the light of the Christian tradition in order to understand and do the will of God amid ongoing events in which that person is involved" (Nelson 1989:18).

Existential life experiences are brought to the text so that faith matures in the ongoing existential context in which the person lives.

While Nelson (1989) is speaking about faith development rather than the task of preaching, preaching if it is to encourage faith maturation, needs to be linked to the existential context of both the immediate hearers and the broader culture.

Heyns and Pieterse (1990: 41) argue that "Scripture is always understood in terms of some experience. Experience plays a part even when we are not aware of it. If experience is not examined scientifically, our knowledge of praxis is pre-scientific and therefore less realistic."

c) Scripture is always analysed and interpreted in the light of the interpreter's life experiences and tradition (context).

Vanhoozer (1998: 242) proposes, "thinking of the God/world relation in terms of communicative rather than causal agency. The call exerts not brute but communicative force." If preaching is a communicative event and if God's primary action is a communicative action then it occurs in an existential context that informs and shapes the nature of that communicative event.

d) Scripture is thus only Scripture in its contextuality. We can only understand Scripture and give meaning to Scripture by constantly linking Scripture and experience.

Kraft (1978: 358) acknowledges the tendency of evangelical theology to interpret the Bible in a context that is defined by the Bible itself. The context that has been largely in view has been that of the whole Bible. "The Bible is its own best interpreter" is a

statement that is often made to emphasise the importance of this context. Kraft (1978: 357) consistent with Vanhoozer (1998) starts with the assumption, "that God communicates via culture and language in essentially the same way that human beings do……all cultures and languages……are potentially adequate vehicles for the communication of the Biblical message" (Kraft 1978: 358), and "words and all other cultural symbols derive their meaning only from their participation in the cultural context of which they are a part"(Kraft 1978: 359). Kraft (1978) is not saying that truth is simply culturally determined. He is saying that the words and symbols used to convey truth and other matters are contextual. God does not communicate outside of a culturally encoded language system. Scripture cannot be interpreted by situational context but neither can it be interpreted and communicated outside of situational context. Situational context, both historic and present, is needed to interpret and communicate Scripture. This is consistent with the 'storiness' of Scripture.

e) Such a linkage occurs when either the existential questions people have about life, either developed more informally or more scientifically, are brought to the text to discover theological categories out of which life-implications may be drawn, or the theological categories of Scripture are brought to bear on existential realities to shape the understanding and experiencing of those realities.

Existential realities are thus crucial in shaping what is communicated as well as the form in which it is communicated. The above pre-supposition is reflected in the work of Christian psychologist Larry Crabb (1987: 63) who developed an approach to counselling involving the following hermeneutical process.

Firstly there is development of theological categories. These categories are taken from

biblical themes rather than a proof-texting approach. From these thematic categories implications for counselling theory and communication are then developed. Crabb (1987) argues that central to this process of developing theological categories is the need to bring the questions of life to the text. Both the theological categories and their implications for counselling and communication are then more likely to be communicated in ways that are deeply linked to the existential realities of the hearers. At the same time there needs to be an intentional connection of these categories and implications to the existential realities of the hearers. In this approach Crabb (1987) acknowledges that existential realities are more critical in shaping both the content of what is communicated and the form of communication than evangelicals often acknowledge. This view is similar to that of Minister 'A' when asked the following question in an interview for this research.

Do you think there is ever a place where what is happening in the life of the congregation, or in an even bigger context, shapes the meaning of the text in new ways?

Yes. Because the sermon is the living voice of God, if it wasn't we would just read the text. The text opens a door for us to say in light of our contemporary society what God is saying for us now, which is not just a repetition of the text but a recreation of the text. But it is a recreation that is embedded in the text that wants to be true to the text in the different circumstances. So it just not the same as the text, it is just not a repetition, it is a new voice, a new word.

While not as comfortable with the idea of new meaning, Minister 'E' in his interview also gave a response that was open to something new in the message.

Do you think there are times in terms of what is happening in the lives of the hearers, or even in broader issues, that can bring new meaning to the text?

Yeah for sure. I probably would not call it new meaning, I would call it new application. For a year 12 student struggling with exams and for a husband and wife feeling a bit stale 10 years into a marriage, no sleep because of young kids, there are two very different stories. They are hearing the same word but there will be a fresh application for each. The principles will be the same but the application works differently. The same passage at a different time can have a fresh impact.

In thinking about issues in a congregation and allowing those to shape some of the discussion, one of the difficulties is the diversity within a congregation. So our 5 o'clock congregation is a good example. The single people and the married with kids have quite different issues and tensions. But it also helpful to hear that while it may not be my struggle it helps a person think outside their life square at that point.

In bringing those situations and issues to a text has there ever been the time when you have seen meaning in the text that you have not seen before?

Again I think I want to say not a new meaning but a fresh application, a fresh word. I would have to think about the idea of new meaning. I guess I want to protect the text so in principle it is the same word but I'm not sure that I would want to call that a new meaning.

What about an awareness of a meaning in the text that you had not seen before?

I'm sure that is true as a preacher. You can say, "Now I'm fifteen years married with four kids this passage helps me in a way that was different to me then when I was a young preacher without kids."

You had not seen that in the text before or you had not read that in the text before?

Yeah I am sure that happens – a new angle or a new thought. At any moment as a preacher coming to the text your time is limited and so each new time you come to a text there is room for insight to grow and new connections to make. There are even times when I think, "That was a dodgy sermon last time."

The theoretical presuppositions outlined above continue to develop in the following way,

f) To encourage faith maturation preaching needs to be linked to the experiential context of both the immediate hearers and the broader culture.

g) This hermeneutical circle is disturbed when the text is simply "applied" to the context of the day after the meaning of the text has been expounded, without the meaning of the text being discovered in a process which deliberately allows for existential experiences to both interact with currently recognised theological categories and to *generate* relevant theological categories for reading the text.

This is to say that to go beyond the private, abstract domain the text and the preaching needs to pass through the world.

Furthermore this hermeneutical process is grounded in the reality that,

a) God communicates incarnationally and narratively. He sets up an experiential base through which he shares himself in existential actions and realities.

b) All communication from God is mediated via the world and experience.

c) By not allowing the world, tradition / culture, and experience a significant and deliberate role in the structuring of the message, no true incarnational communication can take place in preaching. Neither the living God nor the grand narrative of God can be heard.

d) The biblical text has primacy of authority and narrative that the situational and experiential is subject to.

It is the argument of this thesis that God has entered dramatically into our existential reality - the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, involving himself in the existential and relational world. Thus sermons, topical or exegetical, that communicate the truth about God need to be deeply existential and grounded in the story of God and the story of people. Even those New Testament books that evangelicals consider more "doctrinal" were written in response to situations in life and speak of a God who is deeply and mysteriously involved in people's lives through Christ. This approach invites the listener to engage more dynamically with the sermon content and opens up the exploration of relationship with God rather than just asking the listener to collect ideas about God or make a decision about behaviour. The preacher may preach for 30 minutes uninterrupted but the congregation is in dialogue

with him or her, on the edge of their seat wondering, concerned, troubled, intrigued, questioning as to what direction is being taken. Ultimately they are taken to a place where relationship with God is more inviting and daring than was previously imagined. They do not leave as robots following orders but as either Christ-followers desiring more to be part of the grand story of God, more aware of the riches of their relationship with God and more committed to Kingdom purposes, or Christ enquirers and questioners intrigued by the person of Christ and the journey he invites us too

This concern for a contextualised message is consistent with Heyns & Pieterse (1990) view on theory in general and practical theology in particular. "Consciously or unconsciously, every theory is historical and is an extension of history. Every theory thus relates, directly or indirectly, to praxis and its formation is influenced by practical considerations. One could say that every theory develops historically and is socially determined. Practical theological theory is embedded in the events associated with Bethlehem and Golgotha, as well as being theories for contemporary society" (Heyns & Pieterse 1990: 27).

2.6 Personal Presuppositions

My own Christian heritage has been evangelical. I grew up in a church that had a strong indicative grounding and message, with an imperative focused on personal holiness and piety. It was not until the 1970's that it began to think more intentionally about how to bring the indicative to existential realities. I grew up with a Gospel that was generally decontextualised apart from the call to personal holiness, evangelistic witness or missionary work. This made it difficult for the church and myself to engage with the broader culture. In latter years I have also been involved in churches that predominantly have had an imperative bent – how we should be living as

Christians. The indicative is often assumed and not richly preached. This has appeared to me to feed a new type of legalism and behaviourism. While exploring how we should live as Christians in the world it has an emphasis on Christian distinctives, with an authoritarian flavour that prevents richer incarnational living.

Since childhood I have also been involved in Indigenous communities and churches. My wife is of Indigenous descent. This has affected my outlook in that a significant number of Indigenous Australians who have heard the Gospel under missionary influence have heard a simple, individualistic indicative with a narrow but heavy imperative, focusing on personal holiness and devotion. This has often been divorced from existential realities of poverty, dispossession, oppression, discrimination and exclusion. As a qualified social worker I have also been involved with Indigenous communities addressing these latter issues which at times have been accentuated by church missionary work. As a consequence my own understanding of evangelicalism is more consistent with Piggin's (1996) views but it may be broader than that held by some in the evangelical church. Part of my own theological training has been through the Anglican church and I am currently a member of an evangelical Anglican church. This may also encourage a broader understanding of evangelical than in some churches which have a narrower Word and Spirit focus.

Through my work at Perth Bible College and through seminars, counselling and preaching in Perth churches I have formed the impression that an applicational hermeneutic is the predominate *modus operandi* for many evangelical churches in Perth. This approach emphasises the imperative, neglecting a richly articulated indicative base, is existentially superficial and measures effectiveness in terms of

behavioural obedience if not conformity. Because many churches are attempting to be contemporary and hence can appear to be moving with the times they might find my analysis overly negative.

At the same time this background and concurrent perspectives could set up an *apriori* assumption of ineffectiveness with a possibility of starting from an overtly critical stance. This may also be accentuated by my vocation as a counsellor, where the more problematic side of life and relationships is entered. With many of my client base coming from evangelical churches I may be more aware than many of both the troubling realities within their churches and some of the ineffectiveness of the churches in dealing with these realities.

This bias may be mitigated by my conviction as both a college lecturer and occasional preacher of the importance of the church and of preaching. What I consider poor preaching has troubled me for some time. The preaching approach I am concerned about is part of a more general concern regarding the message and practice of the evangelical church in Australia. This concern coupled with a belief in the importance and centrality of preaching in shaping the life and mission of the church, is the motivational drive to research this particular area.

2.7 Research Problem

Based on personal experience and perceptions as well as certain theoretical pre-suppositions, the thesis has been put forward that there is a problem of both indicative poverty and poor contextualization in regard to preaching in Australian evangelical churches. The research problem will use Zerfass's (1974) model to assess if such a

problem exists and if it does what new meta-theory for preaching and praxis can be developed. The development of a practical theological model of preaching will promote more effective communication of the Gospel message to Australians. This 'ideal' meta-theory can also be used as a research structure by which to evaluate existing praxis.

To objectify the naively stated thesis and make it accessible for inter-subjective evaluation, the research, consistent with Zerfass's (1974) model, will look at situational analysis, theological tradition, practical theological theory and praxis, working toward the development of a practical theological model. As part of the research a small illustrative study will be conducted, using an informal interview research methodology, to gain a picture of the process by which preachers develop their sermons and the intent of their sermons. This research will attempt to gain a picture of what meta-theory guides their approach, how the indicative, imperative and situational elements shape their sermon and sermon intent, and how dialogical elements may or may not shape sermons. The research will be used for illustrative purposes in light of the research thesis, library research findings, the proposed practical theology model and the ideal praxis that is developed.

As the interview research will be used throughout the thesis, Appendix A will outline the process of developing the informal interview questions and the criteria for selecting the five ministers interviewed. The larger research process will develop according to the following chapter outlines

3. CHAPTER OUTLINES

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 1.

3.2 Situational Analysis

Chapter 2. Australian Cultural Analysis

A study of Australian culture, secular and church, to identify what may be unique contextual factors that need to be considered in sermon content and delivery.

Chapter 3. Influence of Modernism and Post-modernism

Apart from what is unique in the Australian culture, Australia as a Western industrialised nation is affected by the philosophy of modernism and postmodernism. This influence on Australian culture and churches will be investigated.

3.3 Theological Traditions

Chapter 4. Theological Paradigms

The Bibles own hermeneutical framework will be explored – a framework that asks the reader to both stand outside the text as well as invites the reader into the text to be a participant and subject of the text. Fee and Stuart (1993: 115) write that, "In a certain sense, therefore, the Gospels are already functioning as hermeneutical models for us, insisting by their very nature that we, too, retell the same story in our own twentieth century contexts."

A theological and scriptural perspective on preaching will be addressed with Trinitarian, covenantal, textual, incarnational and dialogical focuses. Australian theological perspectives will be explored and tradition practice in regard to preaching will be analysed in light of the Australian context.

3.4 Praxis Theory

Chapter 5. Communication Theories

The perspectives outlined above on contextualised communication, under girded by the view that God's actions are historically contextualised communication acts, are consistent with elements in the theories of Searle (1969), Gadamer (1975), Ricoeur (1976), and Habermas (1992). Particular areas of exploration will be,

- Searle's Speech Act Theory in interaction with the work of Vanhoozer (1998).

- Gadamer's argument that we are natural interpreters as participants in life not objective observers and his view that the meaning readers get from a text is a result of a dialogue between tradition, meaning imbedded in the text and current meanings and understandings.

- Ricoeur's theory of distanciation and appropriation.

- Habermas's concerns about the use of power and ideal speech situations and ideal speech communities.

Chapter 6. Preaching in the operational field of the church

This chapter will further discuss the nature and act of preaching in the context of the church as it currently practiced in the Australia, exploring the question

of whether shifts in preaching praxis necessitates greater examination of and shifts in the praxis of being church in Australia. This discussion will occur through interaction with two authors, one a major 20th century figure in terms of preaching and the other a contemporary Australian author, who might question my orientation.

This chapter was not initially considered as part of the research plan but as the research unfolded one of its outcomes was the conclusion that you cannot examine preaching praxis without a more thorough questioning of the context in which it occurs.

3.5 Praxis Model

Chapter 7. A practical theological/ preaching meta-theory and model.

Practical theology is the theology that under girds and informs *the practice* of the church. In this chapter a practical theology model that is suitable for all communication acts of the church including preaching will be presented. Particular application to preaching will be offered in light of the theories and perspectives gleaned from the above research.

3.6 Conclusion

Chapter 8. Research discussion with theory and praxis implications

Implications of the research explored for current theories and future research will be. Implications for current and future praxis will also be discussed.

SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS – THE AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT

Rorty (1991: 13) argues that no "description of how things are from God's eye view, no skyhook provided by some contemporary or yet to be developed science, is going to free us from the contingency of being as enculturated as we are."

While the Gospel may grant us greater freedom from enculturation than Rorty would argue, to speak an incarnate gospel we need to understand the culture in which we live. Not only do we understand our culture and creation through and in the light of the redemptive order but as Torrance (1999: 27, 30) argues we need to understand the world in which we live, the created order, if we want to understand God's redemptive order.

In Zerfass's (1974) model, theological tradition and situational factors are studied to understand current praxis and to consider possibilities in regard to future praxis. This research is arguing that the current praxis of preaching in evangelical churches in Australia is not suited to the Australian context as it tends to an applicational hermeneutic in a non-dialogical form. As there are few specifically Australian *theological* studies or texts in regard to preaching, either from a practical theology or a homiletic perspective, this research will first look at situational factors that inform praxis and return in later chapters to consider theological tradition. The lack of research and critical writing in this area is important to note in itself. Even in situational research as critical and long-term as the National Church Life Survey there has been little in-depth focus on preaching.

This chapter will begin with an analysis of preaching research in Australia. However as the research on the specific praxis is so limited the analysis will have to broaden its vision. There are two problems with this. Broader analysis of factors that impinge on the Australian evangelical church can make for less precise observations and reflections, while in the broad scope of historical and sociological perspectives available support for *apriori* positions are more easily found. Aware of these potential causes for error, the rest of the chapter will analyse historical developments that have encouraged the current praxis and present historical themes that may be valuable in considering new praxis. Themes in regard to Australian's understanding of their own identity will also be studied to understand why current praxis is inappropriate, and to see if in the Australian quest for identity there are clues in regard to future praxis.

Empirical evidence regarding Australian's attitude and relation to Christianity will be forwarded and finally Christianity's relationship with other religions will be analysed in order to consider current praxis in light of such attitudes and relationships to determine if these findings may also suggest directions for future praxis.

1. PREACHING IN AUSTRALIA

Kaldor, et al (1997: 90-92), found in the Australian context that the importance of preaching was significant when correlated with other factors measured as being critical to congregational vitality. Satisfaction with preaching was deemed to be a critical factor (the highest category) in generating a sense of belonging and growth in faith, rating higher than satisfaction with music (though still measured as critical) and style of worship (deemed important or of some importance). Considering the energies and tensions that revolve around music and worship in our churches that preaching

was deemed a more critical factor in creating community and developing faith is a welcome surprise. Preaching was also positively related to numerical growth. That preaching is critical to growth in faith is consistent with the theoretical pre-supposition, presented in chapter 1, that preaching is about faith development.

These findings are supported in the latest National Church Life Survey (2001: www.ncls.org.au/pages.asp?page=283&sao=4). A summery of the findings states that, "Preaching and teaching are a regular feature of most church services and are a central part of church life. Some 32% of attenders strongly agree and 51% agree that the preaching they hear is very helpful to them in everyday life. There are high levels of agreement with this statement across all denominations."

The 2001 National Church Life Survey (from here on referred to as NCLS) asked, "What is it that attenders most value about their church involvement?" The results reveal that, "Sharing the Eucharist is the most popular single option selected (49%), followed by Bible teaching and preaching (33%). Traditional worship (28%), contemporary worship (21%) and practical care for one another (20%) are the next most valued aspects. By comparison, more externally focused aspects such as wider community care (12%) and reaching the unchurched (12%) are valued by a narrower range of attenders" (www.ncls.org.au/pages.asp?page=285&sao=4).

Again the place of contemporary worship relevant to preaching in light of the amount of energy and resources this can consume is interesting. Perhaps an even more interesting, if not disturbing finding is the respondents focus on what happens within

the church over externally focused aspects, revealing an inward focused church rather than an outwardly focused one.

In another finding that may also be surprising, Kaldor's (1997) research analysis indicated that the length of a sermon was not a significant factor in congregational vitality, a conclusion paralleled by the analysis of Hughes et.al. (1995). 50% of sermons took between 15 and 30 minutes, 33% were less than 15 minutes, 16% took 30 to 60 minutes, with 1% lasting longer than an hour. 72% of sermons preached in Pentecostal churches are longer than 30 minutes while in Anglican services, 53% are less than 15 minutes. The type of sermon, whether exegetical or topical, had no relationship to congregational vitality. While 8% of services had no sermon, 45% of services had exegetical sermons and 47% had topical or thematic sermons.

The use of clear and simple language was considered important in creating a sense of belonging, of some importance in regard to numerical growth and of only marginal importance in growth of faith (Kaldor 1997: 83, 84). This is consistent with Lawton (1988: 23) who argued that Australian church services require a high level of literacy particularly of a written form and suggested that churches explore more oral and visual forms of communicating. This concern is similarly expressed by Minister 'A'.

Are there any other key elements that you want to develop in a sermon?

The visual element, it's a matter of seeing not just hearing.

How might you construct that in a sermon and when you say "seeing" are you saying actual visual images or what the mind's eye sees?

More in terms of using physical descriptions and a visual way of communicating your facts. We live in a world where people perceive and see reality. I want them to see the world, I want them to see the text, I want them to see something of God.

So you use the visual as you see that is part of how people……

Live.

Interviewee 'D' also spoke of a concern for communication that spoke to the whole person.

Another paradigm is the heart, mind, soul strength thing again. People learn in all those different of ways – kind of holistic I guess.

What's the strength element in the heart, mind, soul, strength idea?

Include your body, do *something about it.*

So the physical, sensual element?

Yes. And also action.

The reasons for this literary approach may in part be a reflection of the findings of the 2001 NCLS (www.ncls.org.au/pages.asp? page = 131&sao=4) which revealed that, "Education is an area where church attenders do not reflect the community as a whole. Some 19% of attenders have a university or post-graduate degree compared to 10% of the Australian population, while 13% have a diploma compared to 6% of the population. Interestingly, the education gap between the church and community is closing. The proportion of people aged 15 years and over with university degrees in the community increased from 6% to 10% between 1991 and 1996, while the proportion of university-educated attenders in Anglican and Protestant denominations increased from 17% to 19%."

Hughes' (1995: 46-49) findings reveal that people did not have strong opinions, either positive, or negative about sermons. About 10% of all surveyed felt strongly positive and 10% strongly negative about sermons, with a substantial proportion of the remaining 80% saying that they did not know. Such indifference to preaching may be of as much concern as strong criticism. 31% of *all* surveyed said that sermons were

tedious, and a similar number said they were boring, 36% said they were too long, 40% said that sermons were helpful and 55% said that the sermons were clear and made sense. Most *actual* attenders of church did not find sermons too long, tedious or boring but clear, helpful in everyday life and giving insight into religion. Of church attenders only 5% said the sermon was too long, 1% a waste of time, and 10% not clear. 7% said they were irrelevant to the problems of modern life and 2% said they were pointless.

The attenders of small Protestant denominations were strongest in their affirmation of sermons while at the same time most likely to say that the sermons were too long. Over 90% in this group said that the sermons were helpful in everyday life, compared with 78% of Anglicans, 77% of Catholics and 72% of Uniting Church attenders (Hughes 1995: 49). Of the non-religious who do not attend services 49% called sermons tedious, 51% boring, and 54% too long. 30% felt that sermons were pointless and 28% irrelevant (Hughes 1995: 52).

There were also significant gender and age differences in the results, with men and the younger being more critical than females and the older, though these criticisms were more to do with being too long and boring rather than of the message content (Hughes 1995: 52, 53).

The 2001 NCLS (http://www.ncls.org.au/pages.asp?page=283&sao=4) found that, "fewer 15-29 year olds (72%) find the preaching helpful than 30-59 year olds (83%) or attenders aged over 60 years (87%)." But that, " Further analysis would be needed

to see whether this difference has to do with some young people still developing in their faith or lower levels of satisfaction with the preaching."

The research findings make it difficult to draw clear conclusions about preaching in terms of faith development, a critical purpose in communicative praxis. Analysis would suggest that sermons tend to work best for insiders and contrary to the research thesis' concern about ineffective preaching, appear to be effective for faith development for regular church attenders. Though what the substance of this faith development may be is not revealed by the research. However this enthusiasm for sermons is not the case for those outside the church and as Hughes (1995: 53) states, "It would be easy for a self-reinforcing effect to occur. Attenders encourage their leaders to prepare services that fit their interests, likes and dislikes, and there is little encouragement for leaders to cater for those who do not attend". If this self-reinforcement is the case then this can cultivate a particular cultural expression of Christianity that would encourage an applicational hermeneutic that seeks to maintain that particular cultural expression. If, as Piggin (1996) argues, the evangelical church has lost its mission focus as a consequence of a focus on Word and Spirit, then preaching that only serves the "insiders" will not connect with the broader Australian culture. It may also suggest that the faith developed is individualistic and church specific rather than incarnational.

It can be queried whether preaching in churches should focus on those who are not there. If those who are not present are disillusioned Christians or enquirers who do not feel that the church and its current message equips them for life then there is a place for reconsidering preaching in the light of their absence. Otherwise the assumption

that those outside the faith will come to church, or to faith, if there was better

preaching in the church is spurious (Peterson 1992). Someone is more likely to come

to faith if someone from within the church has related to them in their own context.

Preaching needs to equip those within the faith community to reach Australians where

they are. Therefore preaching should keep the culture and the language of those who

are not present in mind. In this sense there is a clear applicational aspect to the

contextualization of the Gospel, though as further developed in chapter 4 this would

be grounded in an incarnational hermeneutic rather than an applicational one.

The existing research does not indicate which hermeneutical approach is taken by

ministers and preachers and so research is still needed to test which hermeneutical

paradigms are operational. In the analysis that follows the use of an applicational

hermeneutic is also not proven, though I would argue that the evidence is suggestive

of such and indicates the need of a dialogical approach based on the *story* of God.

2. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW - AN IMPORTED CHURCH

Australian churches have historically been rooted in a conservative British identity.

Smith, (1989: 212) writes, "The church is a subculture from abroad: it still has a

distinct colonial air about it."

But as Australia has formed and grown it has been seeking a new identity, one that is

separate from its parentage. This endeavour is not just a recent concern. Crowley

(1973: 172) quotes a visiting American named Gatten as saying in 1948, "The older

traditions do not quite fit the new generation in a very different land. As Australians

become Australian they sense a kind of foreignness in most of the influences that

come from overseas, and religion is no exception. The 'faith of our fathers' is no doubt a very good faith, but the time has come when the Australian is beginning to realise he needs a version of the faith he can feel to be his own."

Speaking in a uniquely Australian context Pickard (1998: 4) writes, "It is time to enter into a critique of prevailing forms of Christian life that fail to connect with our time and place." He cautions though that there cannot "be a cheap, local version of the gospel. It won't sell well. It will certainly have a short and ineffectual life and lead many astray." As Willimon (1990: 12, 13) cautions, we cannot pursue the desire for a contextualised gospel to the extent that the gospel then preached does not also confront the culture.

Pickard (1998: 4) argues that, "the quest for an authentic Australian voice of the gospel is a dangerous undertaking. We might end up speaking a lot about Australia and little at all that is gospel. Of course, one way to protect from this is to speak all gospel but one detached from the place in which the gospel is articulated. The presumption here is that the gospel is hermeneutically sealed and untouched by contact with the 'other' – people, land, culture, etc. The result is that people are saved upwards and out of this place, not horizontally and further into the world for which Christ died and was raised".

Pickard (1998: 4, 5) adds, "the quest for an indigenous gospel is an imperative of the gospel." It is not an optional extra. The Word did become flesh and dwelt amongst us. "If it was good enough and urgent enough for the God of this world and all possible worlds to be so enfleshed then we, in this time and place, should surely be willing to

follow. And this includes theologians, who do not have special exemption. The gospel we articulate will, if it is to be genuinely Christian for us, have to be enfleshed in this time, in this space, in this place".

As in imported church the need for contextualization is clear but it is also important to recognise as Piggin (1996) points out that as an imported church it had a strong evangelical flavour.

2.1 Evangelicalism in Australia

Piggin (1996: viii, 1-23) argues that evangelicalism was the official Christianity brought to Australia with the First Fleet and that this evangelicalism was of a robust nature with a concern for evangelism and social reform as embodied in the thinking of William Wilberforce and the Clapham Sect. Piggin argues that the vision of a reformed criminal class, a converted Aboriginal race and missions to the South Pacific from an Australian base was of a large and articulate scale.

Piggin's (1996) thesis argues that evangelicalism has been at its healthiest and strongest when the 3 strands of Word, Spirit and mission (inclusive of social reform and action) have been in balance. While external factors have shaped the nature of evangelicalism in Australia, he argues that explanations by the church as to why things have not unfolded as the church desires, tend to focus on these external factors rather than explore factors within evangelicalism itself.

Piggin (1996) argues that the evangelical synthesis was threatened from the beginning of British colonization when Word and Spirit were made subservient to a penal

45

experiment in social reform that while noble in intent, was threatened by the reality of a ruling class-culture and convict counter-culture. However a ruling class culture within the broader church was mitigated by the fact that apart from the Anglican church, lay people typically preceded the arrival of clergy in other Christian communities. "This pattern of lay people preceding clergy to Australia and taking responsibility for the establishment of their religious communities contained within it the seeds of future conflict when clergy and, especially, hierarchs arrived to assume control of their flocks" (Batrouney, 1996: 12,13).

While Word and Spirit took a subservient role at the beginning of colonization this trend did not continue as evangelicalism developed in Australia. Piggin (1996) argues that subsequently the predominant tendency has been for a Word and Spirit emphases to dominate over mission and social reform. From the 1830's with Catholic revival in Britain and increasing Catholic influence in the Australian colonies, Piggin (1996: 24-78) sees a predominance of the Word stream as evangelicals defended Reformation beliefs of *sola scriptura* and *sola fide.* At the end of the nineteenth century there was a preoccupation with the Spirit strand as evangelicalism came under the sway of a holiness movement, emphasising personal piety and millennial doctrines.

The focus on Word and then Spirit in the nineteenth century shifted the focus of evangelicals away from social action, reform and mission toward a personal devotion expressed either in private, or in the privacy of the church. While throughout this period there are important examples of evangelical participation in mission, nation building and social reform, Piggin (1996: 79-105) argues that there was an unravelling of the three strands that continued into the twentieth century. In the first third of the twentieth century certain evangelicals, in the face of theological liberalism

and cultural secularization, retreated further into a Word focus, while others withdraw into various expressions of "second blessing" spirituality.

This Word and Spirit focus became the evangelical norm in the mid third of the 20th century with suspicion of a social gospel and liberal theology. The Bible was studied and the private spiritual life cultivated. Evangelical activism was channelled into mission work overseas or with Indigenous Australians where evangelizing and converting took precedent over social justice and reform issues (Piggin 1996: 125-153).

The relationship of Christian mission's with Indigenous Australians was compromised and complicated though by cooperation with government policies of segregation and forced removal of children from their families (now known as the *Stolen Generation*) as part of a social engineering programme of a grand scale. These policies lasted into the 1950's and were then replaced with assimilationist policies that were just as damaging to Indigenous people and culture. Missions were also complicit in this assimilationist policy. When self-determination policies replaced assimilationist policies in the 1970's many churches simply abandoned indigenous communities. This complicity in unjust and oppressive policy has only recently been faced by Australian evangelicals. Other Christian churches have been quicker to face the sins of the past and have been at the forefront of leading an at times reluctant public to reconciliation with Indigenous Australians. Strangely evangelicals with their gospel of reconciliation have been comparatively recent in joining the movement. Nevertheless this movement for reconciliation is an opportunity for evangelicals to regain the world strand of their movement. (Harris 1990; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Bringing Them Home Report*, 1997).

The movement toward reconciliation would also appear to be an opportunity to join with the Indigenous church in a dialogue as to what an Australian church may mean. While most Australian cultural and religious expression has been imported there has been an often overlooked indigenous cultural and religious history.

The following is a lengthy excerpt from an interview with Minister 'B' who is a pastor in the Aboriginal Evangelical Church. It provides a small taste of what the non-Indigenous church can learn in dialogue with the Indigenous church.

What things can the non-Indigenous church learn from the Indigenous church about being church and about preaching?

I think some of the qualities of fellowship are things to be learnt. I think the biggest thing has been non-Aboriginal people coming Sunday night and seeing people pour their heart out. That blows away non-Aboriginal people more than anything. And that's been a real encouragement for a lot of non-Aboriginal folk who have come here. Most non-Aboriginal folk I invite to church I will invite on a Sunday night for that reason.

[Openly sharing in church] has only been there since Aboriginal people have really taken leadership of the church. It originated and came from the sing-a-longs. In those sing-a-longs you would have around the camp-fire in the old days, people would be asked if they would like to share something and somebody would share something. They might not have even been a Christian but they would share their struggle.

Further to that it came out of the cultural practice of sharing together, where if there is a death everybody is there, everybody's got a little bit to say, to encourage. Or if somebody has a problem with a kid then uncles and aunties are having their say and sharing together. So that's a strong part of our lifestyle, sharing one with another. It's therapeutic in that sense. You don't have to do a lot of counselling to some degree. A lot of it is done on Sunday night where people are able to express. From our history our people have always been honest and open about their struggles. If there is a break-up there's a break-up, if there's a fight there's a fight. Some people get up and I think, "Oh boy don't say it, we don't need that kind of detail." But the detail is good at times because it helps them to say, "Well people know my situation and they are praying for me and I've been able to share." Probably about 60% of my counselling, or the counselling that I haven't done, has been done on Sunday night during our sharing time. Not only there but on Sunday morning where people sit around and yarn and talk and share in that way.

The issues of time and seeing a way of worshipping God that does not have all this heavy structure to it and time framing of 25 minutes sermons. The evening has more of a timeless element to it. We pretty much start on time but we finish when we finish

and I think the non-Aboriginal church can learn what it means to worship God without time restrictions. I think to see the Aboriginal way of worshipping God and sharing from their heart is an important thing for non-Aboriginal churches. I think just to come and to meet Aboriginal people and see that there are a lot of Aboriginal people who are Christians and that they do love the Lord and have the same values as other Christians do in our community…

To break down stereotypes?

Yeah, to break down stereotypes that people have of Aboriginal people. I think there is a wrong perception of Aboriginal Christianity out there in the Western world. At times people somehow find it difficult to understand how an Aboriginal can be a Christian. There are times I have come up against that. The comment is, "Do you mean to say there are Aboriginal Christians and there is an Aboriginal church?" I say, "Why don't you come along and have a look, rather than me try to explain it come see it for yourself." Some people find it hard to believe that Aboriginals could be Christians, Christians who love the Lord and who can preach. They can't believe that Aborigines can get out of their own religion and their own belief systems and mindsets. That thinking has even permeated the church to some degree. "Are there any Aboriginal Christians, what do they believe, how do they worship?" are questions I've heard and they come up quite regularly. It threw me back a fair bit to hear that people could not picture Aboriginal people as being Christians.

Are there any other ways that you think the non-indigenous church can learn from the indigenous church and particularly in the area of preaching and sermons?

I think bringing more stories into the preaching style of today. I think generally speaking in the average church, white or black, there are people there who just want to hear simple truth and I think the simplicity of the Gospel being preached amongst our people has died in Western preaching. It has become more academically minded. That by putting everything together in the proper way the better you look in the eyes of man. But still in the heart of the Gospel, in the heart of preaching from an Aboriginal point of view is a message from the heart linked to our struggles. And I think in the Aboriginal preaching style a lot of yourself comes out, a lot of your own struggles that don't come out in a Western style of preaching that is more informational or educational.

Do you think that there are any particular Gospel themes that the non-Aboriginal church could learn from the Aboriginal church?

The compassion of the Lord, the love of God is a pretty strong theme in Aboriginal circles. We do preach on sin and repentance and judgement but there is a focus on the love of God that comes through quite strongly in Aboriginal preaching.
I think that many of the white churches today neglect the areas of justice and other hard core issues. The Aboriginal preaching style is not afraid to say what they think and feel about issues. They'll talk about the injustices, I sense that is with good balance because we believe that God passionately loves everybody, that he is no respecter of persons and that is the foundation for justice. So I think the Western

world in its preaching shies away from hard core issues where the Aboriginal church would preach and bring those issues to the fore.

You minister in the context of a community which is low income, amongst the poorest in the community. Does that provide any unique perspectives and challenges in terms of what you communicate? Is there something there that the Western church can learn from?

The issue comes up quite often in our preaching. The struggles economically for our people to live are enormous. Generally speaking our people are good givers, that is a cultural thing. If the needs are there, people will share and look after each other. The old people here would provide me with a shopping bag of food all the time because you look after the pastor. I've spoken a lot about poverty, I mean Jesus ministered amongst the down and outs and the outcasts of his society. That element of preaching, linking Jesus into that lower socio-economic community always sits with our people. I think that element is missed out in Western preaching unless you are living in the slums or with a poor community. But generally people can think they have arrived and you might hear of one's responsibility in giving but the sermons will not contain a lot of elements of talking about those issues of poverty and analysing it.

Sometimes I have included in preaching things like budgeting, using our money wisely to help our people move forward. Its one thing to talk about money and say that is what you need to give or do with it but some of the people just can't give because they haven't got the money or they do not know how to handle the money they've got. Ministering in that setting I do not shy away from issues of giving because our people are poor or they do not have the finances that other people have. I believe our people want to do what is right by the Lord and even with the few resources they have. Even when I took on ministry I said that I want you to be able to support your pastor, not because it's what I want but what God wants. And they picked that up marvellously and they have given out of their poverty, like the church of Macedonia, to keep things going the way they are. In some of my preaching I talk about budgeting and it is a little more like work shopping, it's a cross between a workshop and a sermon. That's been helpful to say, "Say let me put up something here on the overhead to show you how I use my money. See I need to be a steward of what God has given us. See I give this much to God, this much to family, this much for all our bills. Now what do you reckon is the best way of going about paying those bills with this much money?" That is also a place where people have a little bit of input into the sermon. Not complicated but simple, down to earth language and people have got the picture through that way. The Western world rarely teaches like this, there is not the need, things are taken for granted. In our context we have to help our people, to help our people be wise in using the resources we have, teaching them in a way that we value some of the resources. We don't have much value for material things. We come from a mindset that material things don't mean anything. Money? Well you spend it while you got it. Financially we are better off but we are still paupers to some degree because we have not learnt how to utilise the resources we have. So some of my preaching helps our people understand we are stewards, that we are looking after what God has given us, that these things are important, that our time is important without taking away from the idea that we just need time with each other. How we balance these things is hard for us, coming from our culture into an urban setting where everything is so fast and

instant. Now our people are here and the church can also demand that we need to get these things done. We are walking a fine line at times.

The above is clear evidence that dialogue with Indigenous Australians would provide rich soil for cultivating a contextualised Christian way of being in Australia. According to Piggin's (1996) analysis, despite some growing social awareness and dialogue, in the latter third of the twentieth century the Word and Spirit emphasis was still predominant with energy being consumed over a fight between a Word emphasis and a Spirit emphasis. Piggin (1996:172-202) argues that Reformed theology has been at the fore of the Word emphasis, while Charismatic and Pentecostal movements have been at the fore of the Spirit movement. While this battle is going on the world is not being engaged with sufficiently, despite renewed efforts in evangelical circles to engage the world in more considered ways. Generally however while the applicational hermeneutic has focused on how the Word and Spirit can be made concrete in everyday life, this hermeneutic has tended to focus on morality and obedience in a pietistic manner at the individual, personal and family level. Even more recent attempts for the evangelical church to be more missional can operate within this narrower hermeneutic.

Commenting on the late 1980's and early 1990's Piggin (1996: 187) observes that within the Word stream, "The instinctive feeling about what makes congruity for the unchurched and utility for them was overborne by a concern for the pure church. The instinctively sociological was swallowed up by the theological." This observation is pertinent in light of the underlying thesis of this research, that Australian evangelical churches preach a decontextualised message, and is also pertinent in light of a

practical theological perspective that highlights the importance of the sociological in its theological model.

In speaking of the church's inability to engage with the world, Piggin (1996: 193) offers the example of Christians in politics where he writes, "Australia continues to be a difficult place for conservative Christians to thrive in politics." He claims that this was not simply due to the powerful and sustained opposition of committed secularists. He writes, "The perfectionist demands of conservative evangelicals *with their keen sense of withdrawal holiness* and their aversion to compromise has also made the role of the evangelical politician thankless. A great problem has been the reluctance of the evangelical pulpit to enunciate principles in other than personal morality and to give pastoral support to members of their churches who are in politics. Their fear is the charge of 'interference'. The reality is that evangelical leaders failed to get together with other Christians to express a common mind in individual items, fearing 'contamination' by non-evangelicals." (italics added) A privatised, individual faith expressed in personal piety, intentionally separate from the Australian culture has been the result. Though there has been a shift in recent years toward greater Christian involvement in politics there is still a cautious response from the Australian public when what are seen as overtly Christian agendas are forwarded.

Piggin's (1996) argument that the church has focused on Word and Spirit is supported by Kaldor (1996). Significantly less than 1% of ministers saw their role as social reform (153) and only 24% of attenders were involved in social care/justice issues within their own congregation. All denominations who would define themselves as evangelical were below this average apart from the Salvation Army. While 27% of

church attenders were involved in wider community groups, all evangelical churches apart from Presbyterian were below this average (Kaldor 1996: 45-47). Evangelistic mission has higher participation, with 56% having a willingness to discuss their faith (Kaldor 1996: 51).

The Word emphasis over a Spirit and mission emphasis has aided the development of a de-contextualised, non-dialogical, applicational hermeneutic. It is not intrinsic to an applicational hermeneutic that it be de-contextualised and non-dialogical, though it is being argued that generally the applicational hermeneutic of the evangelical church in Australia has been of this nature. That a Word focus has led in this direction will be developed further in the next chapter when modernism is discussed. Suffice to say here that a retreatist, separatist church is intrinsically de-contextualised and non-dialogical. This coupled with a Word focus, that includes some of the pre-suppositions of modernism, encourages an inadequate applicational hermeneutic.

To focus solely on the hermeneutical practice of the church however is inadequate for this research. To study church praxis using the framework of contextualization requires not only an understanding of church praxis but also an exploration of how the broader culture understands itself. In studying the broader cultures it is hoped that particular themes and patterns can aid in better understanding and analysing current church praxis and future directions.

3. AUSTRALIAN CULTURAL IDENTITY

A culture understands itself through a variety of means - cultural myths, the social-sciences, religious beliefs and mediums of cultural expression such as the arts,

entertainment and sport. Social myths may or may not be grounded in historical realities, nevertheless they have the capacity to construct social realities which people live by. Empirical research in the social sciences may reveal that the myth has little or no empirical accuracy but myth still has the power to shape a culture.

Heyns and Pieterse (1990: 72) state that the term, "empirical" as used in practical theology, "lies in people's ordinary, day-to-day experience of their environment." How Australians understand themselves in their ordinary, day-to-day experiences is therefore critical to developing a preaching praxis that speaks to the Australian context.

Ward (1966: 1) in the second edition of his classic *The Australian Legend***,** writes that, "National character is not …something inherited, nor…entirely a figment of the imagination. It is a people's idea of itself and this stereotype, though often absurdly romanticized and exaggerated, is always connected with reality in two ways. It springs largely from people's past experiences, and it often modifies current events by colouring men's ideas of how they ought typically behave."

Millikan (1981: 18) writes that the popular Australian vision "is of a society where wealth is evenly distributed, class distinctions will not be tolerated, where democratic institutions have a sturdy and honourable tradition and where a man is judged first as a bloke before his status, job or office is taken into consideration. This vision of Australian society is deeply entrenched." He also points out that these qualities, which Australian culture has developed as its own, are not reflected in the culture of Australian Christianity (Millikan 1981:19). He also highlights Australian's hostility

to authority and the idealisation of male mateship. Eighteen years later elements of this myth still persist in the work of Leaves (1999: 22) who also highlights the anti-authority character of Australia and what is known as "the tall poppy syndrome" - the cutting down of those who think themselves above and better than the 'average' Australian. He also sees Australians as content to have a temporal, pragmatic lifestyle, affirming, "a 'yes' to life in the face of passing away into extinction" (Leaves 1999: 22).

Ward (1966: 1, 2) emphasises Australia's (and again this is thought of as being primarily male) egalitarianism and social democracy, the idea that "Jack is as good as his master", the giving to others of a "fair go", the valuing of earthiness, a lack of pretence, being "knockers" of imminent people apart from sporting heroes and being essentially pragmatic in outlook. Ward also claims that Australians are stoic, emotionally reserved, not talkative and sceptical about the value of religion and of intellectual and cultural pursuits.

Tacy (1995: 50-54) claims that these traits have a low threshold of cultural consciousness that carry a dark side of despair and violence. He also questions how women fit into this myth. Tacy (1995: 50) argues that through a one sided focus on the positive aspects, the "national ego comes to construct itself as strong, tough and stoical. Enormous energy is exerted in the construction and maintenance of resilient barriers against emotion, against feeling, against any kind of inwardness, since what is 'inner' comes to be associated with what is dangerous, what undermines and makes us feel weak. So the classic Australian becomes stoical, resistant to feelings; and laconic, resistant to expression of feelings and emotions in language, behaviour or culture."

Tacy (1995: 51) also sees the Australian identity as being stereo-typically masculine but one that, "is exaggerated and hollow…..Men develop a sort of false, forced, or extreme masculinity, and this serves merely to mask their sense of inner weakness and vulnerability….It is a forced, adolescent style of masculinity, one which desires to prove itself in rituals of combat and battle, both locally in pubs and on sports fields, and overseas in exotic theatres of war."

Tacy (1995: 39) claims that Ward's (1966) view does not have historical and social credence yet Tacy's (1995) own writings could be accused of a similar error; presenting a one dimensional myth as historical and social reality. This myth ignores the multicultural diversity in Australia, minimises the intellectual and artistic heritage, minimises Australia's place as a Western industrialised and colonizing nation, ignores women and ignores the disturbing and unacknowledged history of Indigenous and non-Indigenous interaction. While apparently arguing against Ward (1966), Tacy's (1995) analysis tends to hold a mirror up to the same myth and sees a different reflection, or another dimension to the myth. He does not present a different view of the Australian identity just a more critical one. Both present the myth of a stoic, resilient, pragmatic, laconic, democratic, egalitarian and anti-authoritarian white Australian (male), a myth which has remained the same over many years. Ward (1966) sees something unique and attractive in this basis for national identity, Tacy (1995) something dark and dehumanising.

Tacy's (1995) perspective of a forced masculinity that needs proving, highlights an insecurity that the Australian myth seldom acknowledges. Despite it's affluence and power as an industrialised Western nation, Australia sees itself as an underdog on the

world stage, a nation of battlers, who in it's national insecurity both absorbs and

mocks outside influences and glories in sporting and cultural triumphs on the world

stage against "bigger" opponents. This insecurity and uncertainty may in part explain

adolescent suicide rates that on a per capita basis are amongst the highest in the world.

(Boss et al, 1995: 105, 106). This insecurity and vulnerability is the soft underbelly of

the Australian myth that may be a point of connection and dialogue with the Gospel.

Some elements of the Ward (1966) myth, such as equal distribution of wealth and

scepticism about intellectual and cultural pursuits, may now be dated. There is also a

paradoxical aspect to the myth of the anti-authoritarian Australian. Australian

governments have also generated a complacent and compliant population due to the

extent of the welfare-state (Walmsley & Sorenson 1990: 122-129). This may add to

the laconic, cynical aspect of our character where we are fiercely independent in

private while publicly compliant.

The focus of Australian identity is also shifting from a white Anglo-Saxon male

profile, although the myth still tends to perpetuate this. This can still be reflected in

the church as highlighted in the interview with Minister 'C'.

When a woman preaches for the first time in some ways there's more inspection, and I think it is significant that in most denominations the first women who were priests or ministers were middle aged or older. I think that's partly that to be a priest or minister, is a pretty buffeting sort of process and so you've got to have the support and life experience to help you with that. They will forgive a young guy who is in training more than they'll forgive you when you make mistakes.

So I think for some people it's still difficult to hear "thus says the Lord", words of authority in a female voice. But I think a lot of that's changed in society. I can still remember when the first time that there was a woman newsreader on the ABC and how strange it sounded. But these days you wouldn't think twice about it, most of the reporters are women, they're often young, and you get some very authoritative commentators who are women fronting on TV, it's not an issue. So I think that even that thing about hearing the voice of God through a women is less of a problem and

we have much stronger value about being authentic, being real, transparent, communicating real Aussie. Those things have become more important.

For women who may have felt or have felt disenfranchised in the Christian community, is there a perspective for them that you bring as a woman?

When I was at [suburban church], so we're going back 15 years or so, a woman said to me: "Because you are up there I feel better about myself" and I had to wrestle with that for awhile. It was about the time that a deaf actress received some sort of Academy Award. She said in her acceptance speech, because a deaf person received this award all deaf people feel better about themselves. So I came to accept what I had not wanted to accept, I suppose before, was that there was a symbolic function of being part of that ministry team. And certainly now if I go to a setting like the [Theological] College graduation and has all men up on the platform as its staff, I'm now very sensitive to it and I know that other men are and other women are…… So I accept that where women are part of what people see when they come in to church, which means up front, even though you know that's not the only area where people are ministering, then there is immediately a greater feeling of acceptance for women, or particularly for women who feel hard done by the church or where in extreme cases the abuse has been on the part of the church or where it's been a father figure that's been part of it. So I notice that tone or value and in fact we have people come here to this church because the women were disaffected in previous churches for some of those reasons.

But I'm sure that if it were all males up the front nobody would notice it, but if it were all females up the front they would notice it. To me what you're saying by having men and women participate together is in the cross of Christ there is reconciliation. The early church had to wrestle with reconciliation between Jew and Gentile. Later on we had to wrestle with reconciliation between slave and free but the hardest reconciliation is the gender one. I think we notice first about a person is their gender, and this is what God is working on in our era, reconciliation between men and women. So it's not about promoting women or their rights or it's not about preserving men's rights, it's about being seen together as being reconciled in the cross. And that's my philosophy of what God is doing in the church. So it's important that women be seen as well as men, but not the promotion of one over the other.

That sounds a little more than a symbolic function, that sounds like a real function.

Yes I guess so. Irrespective of what you actually say, the very fact that you're there says something.

The gospel as emancipation, would you see the gospel as emancipation for both male and female in the gender issues?

Yes, I think there are a lot of ways men have not seen the consequences for them of emancipation. In fact as we see some of the consequences now of so much having changed, men haven't been able to catch up, and if we're not careful they will be

marginalised from the more real, emotional side of life because that wasn't part of their upbringing. They may feel like they've been asked to do things they haven't had any preparation for. Some of that will come with change in generations. The way my husband and I relate is quite different from the way our sons and their wives relate because of generational change, and my husband and I have changed over time. I think there is value in having women ministers simply because you're saying that the church isn't the last place in which they're reconciled. It should in fact be the first place. I think it was Leon Morris said in one of his books about women and ministry 20 years ago, that the Corinthian church was bringing dishonour on itself because women were rejoicing in their new freedom but they looked like prostitutes with their hair down and whatever. We need to look at what is the church bringing itself into disrepute over now and that some of it is the treatment of women.

The location of the Australian identity in the white Anglo-Saxon male is also shifting in light of multiculturalism. As Bouma (1996) highlights Australia is a highly multicultural country with a wide range of ethnic representation. Multiculturalism is a government policy. This makes the development of a singular Australian identity impossible and attempts to define a singular Australian identity can be unhelpfully stereotypical. A greater challenge to the country and the church is not how we might define what it means to be Australian but how can we connect and be inclusive of the vast range of differences that is part of being Australian.

Despite these shifts, gaps and paradoxes the myth of the stoic, resilient, anti-authoritarian and loyal Australian is still a critical and significant aspect in how Australians have come to see and define themselves.

Ward (1996) and others, such as Smith (1989: 7-24) argues that this Australian identity is based in the convict origins of Australia. Australians, with their convict heritage are suspicious and untrusting of anyone in positions of privilege and power. This argument is weakened though when it is acknowledged that the majority of Australians do not have convict heritage, that West Australia and South Australia did

not commence as convict colonies and that South Australia's establishment was

markedly shaped by German Lutherans who had migrated to South Australia for

specific religious reasons (Batrouney 1996: 13). While the convict origins of a

number of the Australian colonies may be a contributing factor to Australia's anti-

authority stance, a longer term factor and one that is true for all of the colonies is that

many, if not most, who have come to Australia, both past and present, have come to

get away from the real and perceived strictures of their home country for a sense of

freedom and opportunity, e.g. Jewish and Orthodox settlement in Australia,

(Batrouney 1996: 17, 23). Australians have been reluctant to allow this freedom to be

ordered away. In this regard Australia shares something in common with migratory

based populations like the USA.

It would seem in light of the above that preaching, if it is to encourage connection

with Australian's in their understanding of self, would need to be non-authoritarian,

free of pretence, connected to real life while not offering didactic instruction and pat

answers. Minister 'A' spoke to these concerns in the following way.

At a time where there are a lot of questions about what it means to be the church in Australia do you think there is still a place for the sermon in contemporary life?

Yes I think so. I am fully convinced of that. People might change the structures but we still have to communicate in some way. I think that if we lose the place where God can stand over and against us as the other and speak to us what we don't want to hear or never thought of hearing, so that God cannot disrupt us anymore, then we have just domesticated civility.

How do you hold that in light of the view that Australians are non-authoritarian and don't like being spoken over, we like democratic processes where everybody can have their say and we come to our own decisions?

In the gospel there is just not one pattern. There are places where it invites, where it stimulates but there are also places where it says, "I don't care if you like it or not."

There is still an authority factor as we are speaking about God. We are speaking from the text from which he speaks authoritatively.

Do you think there is a particular way you need to sermonise in an Australian context?

Yes I do think because people are more sceptical you have to allow them escape hatches. People are not just going to follow you on a sermon, or necessarily trust you, so for example when I go to a youth group I will break the ice, tell a joke, break things down, give an escape hatch. If I give them an opportunity to climb out of the boat then they may actually let me take them further.

Minister 'C' also spoke of the need to think carefully about sermonizing in an Australian context.

Is there a particular reason for calling the preaching a message rather than a sermon?

Only because the word sermon in Australian society has the thing about lecturing and rousing on people. I don't know whether you want to talk about the gender issues but I do think one of the problems for women preachers in Australia is what Anne Summers says: that women in Australia are either "Damn whores or God's police" and there has been that theme particularly in previous generations where fathers were not been involved much with their children, particularly with the moral side of the children's life, that they can hear a woman preaching as a nagging mother. I don't think people hear me as the nagging mother but you are conscious of this all the time. And I don't think we have got the right to lecture people about how to live. Well we won't be heard very well. I believe strongly in the power of kerygma *in the proclamation and that there is a power of God at work in that form of communication but it is not the only form of communication and I am very big on small groups and discussion and finding it there. But I also see preaching as having a role. It's just that preaching and sermons have more of those overtones than talking about the message. But I do think that no great movement goes anywhere in the world without it having people who articulate where you're going and how to think about it. It is not that the preachers dream it all up themselves but in a way I think it is the articulation of people's heartfelt need, you've helped them see this is what they have been searching for. So it's not coming in with the truth from above but the role articulating where people are hurting or what they need to hear.*

So in a culture that is said to be anti-authoritarian and in a culture that says there are many stories and many perspectives, you still think there's a place for preaching?

Yes, I think there is a place for preaching. The culture effects your style, you cannot be lecturing or haranguing. And you have to be very careful about what you are going to be dogmatic about and what you are going to allow as essentials. There are basics that you're not going to let go of. And I work hard to help our older generation understand what it is the younger ones find hard difficult and where those things can

be let go. But in the long run we are still going to say there is a meta-narrative. There is a Word of God to us that is revealed and that we can't be Christian unless we understand that. We had some one recently in a small group say that they had a lot of trouble with the concept of hell and heaven. She did not think there was a heaven after this life. A number of people jumped on her after that. But really what she was objecting to was hell I think. I'm using that as an illustration that the group was free enough in this discussion for her to say that and though people wanted to argue with her they were not ostracizing her. So you're wanting to create an atmosphere where people can say, "Well I'm struggling with that issue" or "I'm not happy with that." On the whole this congregation, and all the congregations I have been in have a very high view of Scripture but they are not going to swallow something just because you say a certain verse says it.

It would also seem that Australians' insecurity could be an opening to the Gospel that may not seem apparent in the face of our apparent stoicism. The exploration of how a multicultural and diverse population can live together and the exploration of how as a nation we deal with current, past and future relationships with Indigenous Australians would also seem opportunities for contextualised Christian thought.

In regard to religion and Christianity there has been a persistent myth of antipathy toward religion in general, and Christianity in particular. The National Social Science Survey conducted in 1993 and completed by over 2000 Australians, showed that only 13.2 percent of the population attend a religious service weekly (Bentley and Hughes 1998: 117). In a country which claims a Christian- Judeo heritage this would appear to be a low percentage. Smith (1989: 7-24) again links this antipathy toward the church to the convict era when it is claimed that the clergy were seen to be supporters of the oppressive colonial powers, and that this anti-church view has been ingrained in subsequent generations.

This at first sounds reasonable but again it must be recognised that most Australians are not descended from convicts. It has been argued that the religious persuasions and

affections of the convicts *and settlers* prior to coming to Australia has been just as important a factor in shaping relationships with the church (Batrouney 1996: 12). Amongst the convicts and the warders there were lower levels of religious participation and intensity of belief and this reflected the levels of religiosity in the working class in Britain during the late 18th and early 19th century (Bouma 1996: 101).

In light of these particular themes of Australian self-understanding, how has the Australian Evangelical church interacted with the culture, remembering that the church has been an imported church, historically focusing more on Word than Spirit or mission, though now changing to a greater Spirit focus, while still tending to be retreatist in nature?

4. THE "AUSTRALIAN" CHURCH

Since the 1970's the Australian church has more deliberately explored the question of what is an Australian church, based on some sense of shared "Australian-ness". During this time "gumleaf theology" was born. This shared in common with many Australian's, a superficial, jingoist identification of Australian-ness with icons based on clothes worn – blue singlets, football shorts and thongs; foods eaten – meat pies and Vegemite; liquids drunk – beer; sports followed – Australian Rules Football, and consumer items purchased – Holden cars. It was still a white male version of the world. Attempts to baptise stereotypical and superficial elements of the Australian myth into the Australian church were unsuccessful, embarrassing and quickly dated. Young (1992) in an article that questions the equating of the story of *The Good Samaritan* with the notion of Australian mateship, argues against the superficial

nature of "gumnut theology". Smith (1989: 225) also warned of, "the great danger that we end up attempting to manufacture an Aussie God, or an Aussie Jesus. We have this term "gumleaf theology". …. I don't like the term because I think it cheapens serious investigations into the Australian need for sensitive evangelistic communication. It is not a matter of just trying to create a theology which popularises the Australian image. Rather we should ask, 'what aspects of the historic gospel and the Jesus of the Gospels should we see as obviously appropriate to our national/personal needs?' It's not that we haven't presented an Australian God, but we haven't presented the biblical God – the God of the Bible is relevant to Australia simply because He is God." This theological task is still underdeveloped in the Australian context.

The issue of identity has been explored by other writers as well. Based on the fact that the Australian church has not primarily grown by conversion but through migration patterns, Batourney (1996: 26) states, "The question of the identity of Australia's religious communities is not fully resolved….. For example, although the Anglican Church is a fully autonomous Australian church, to what extent are its culture and values still determined by its history as the church of the English and of the ruling classes in Australia? Similar questions can be asked of the other established religious communities in Australia. Is the diversity of membership of the Catholic Church reflected in its religious traditions and practices, as well as its hierarchy? Is it truly a multicultural church or still essentially an Irish-Australian one? Has the Uniting Church forged an identity from the denominational union of its constituent churches? To what extent is it still largely a collection of its antecedent churches? To what extent has the Lutheran Church, which has suffered in the past from its German

connection, been able to become part of a multicultural Australian religious community? To what extent has it become Australian?"

While the church has been making some attempt to explore what it means to be an Australian church, for the general public having a sense of an Australian identity has not been of overwhelming importance (Bouma 1996: 74). Indeed it is now being recognised that one of the identifying marks of being Australian is that Australians are not that fussed about having a defined identity. MacKay (2000) acknowledges both this unique feature of Australia and the opportunity that this lack of obsession with identity allows in creating an open and inclusive society. He states that, "The most precious resource we are carrying into the new century is the *absence* of a clearly defined sense of national identity" (MacKay 2000: 15). We have our myths and our icons but we hold them lightly, at some level seeing the superficiality of having a "bronzed Aussie lifesaver" as a national figure. It is a self-deprecating reminder not to take ourselves too seriously and perhaps a joke on other countries which hold their myths more deeply.

The danger is that in the absence of a richer and deeper meta-narrative, the nation can start to take the joke seriously and base complex issues of identity and place on superficial categories, particularly in a consumer driven culture that elevates the superficial to the level of a necessary possession. A superficial foundation for identity and hope also deepens insecurity, anxiety and stress which generates personal and social problems.

MacKay's (2000) analysis may be changing however. With the national fever over hosting the Sydney Olympics, followed by the growing experience and fear of terrorism and the desire to keep "illegal refugees" from our shores, there seems a deepening of an "us and them" sentiment in Australia, with our "us-ness" once more based in superficial notions of shared values and romanticised history.

In the eighties and nineties the search for a model of an Australian church seemed to lose momentum and churches began to again uncritically borrow from non-Australian sources. One such source was, and still is, an American cultural model based on middle-class baby-boomer demographics which is seeing a "pan-Western" expression of church consisting of contemporary worship, consisting primarily of enthusiastic singing and a talk. Smith (1989: 214) argues that "the new surge of American methodologies and presentations is not wholly appropriate to Australia…… Australia is receiving increasing evangelistic thrusts from America which show no understanding of our culture or history or the needs of our people."

Batrouney (1996: 22) while highlighting that the church has been primarily shaped by the immigration of people, also recognises that particular evangelical denominations, such as the Baptists, have also been influenced by the immigration of ideas and models of church life, particularly from America.

America has social myths that generate a culture that has greater confidence in the institutional - a people joined by great conquests, wars, speeches and documents, with the institutions of the Presidency, the Judiciary, Congress and the Church, and powerful symbols like the Flag, the Statue of Liberty, the Declaration of

Independence and the Constitution (Smith 1989: 212-215). This is quite different from the Australian myths. Here there were no great conquests – ignoring the conquest of the Aboriginal people, Australia was founded on the fiction of *Terra Nullus*. The great battle Australia remembers, Gallipoli, was a resounding and tragic defeat. There have been no great public speeches or documents – our constitution is basically a power-sharing, trade and defence agreement between the States and the Commonwealth. And our great architectural symbol, the Sydney Opera House, does not point to liberty and justice but to sailing on the weekend (Fiske, Hodge & Turner 1987). Sport and the "Land of the Long Weekend" (Conway 1978) is honoured in our finest building. Australians seem to value the lack of what they see as pretence.

As a church rooted in an historical British conservatism and reservedness, which is also part of a culture that is wary about authority, we still look to the outside world, particularly at this time the USA, for ideas. We consume and put these ideas into practice and perpetuate the creation of a conformist church in a culture that is more sceptical of the institutional. This may be less a reflection of American 'imperialism' and more a reflection of the absence of a solid and rich basis for Australian identity. This suggests that Australia is as much a part of, and shaped by Western materialism and consumerism, as by any other defining influence.

This wariness of authority may also be supported by research regarding communication patterns that suggests that there are cultural distinctives to ways of conversing. Deng (1999) studied patterns of overlap and listener response in Chinese and Australian conversations. He found that Chinese were more likely than Australians to overlap during the course of a conversation whereas Australians were

more likely than Chinese to overlap during transition points in the conversation. In terms of listener response Chinese used fewer than Australians. Deng (1999: 361) also reports studies that show that Japanese use more overlaps than Americans and also more listener responses. Deng (1999: 362 - 366) analyses these differences in terms of communal and individual rights and obligations that operate within these cultures. Deng (1999: 362) argues that in the Australian context, "an individual's rights and obligations in relation to those of others are quite clear cut and explicitly stated. In this culture, both rights and obligations are somewhat equally emphasized." Deng (1999: 362) adds that, "This sense of rights and obligations in Australian culture can be traced back to its Judeo-Christian tradition, which emphasizes egalitarianism between individuals." Deng's (1999: 366) conclusion on this matter in regard to Australians is that their particular way of using overlap and listener response, "may show a balanced and equalized emphasis on and a clear specificity of the rights and obligations for a speaker and listener."

This suggests that for Australians, while communication needs to be clear and direct and we are obliged to listen, we are also equal partners in the conversation and free to respond. We will listen but we will not be passive and we do not like just being told what to do or who to be. This would seem to support the need for dialogical approaches to preaching, a speaking *with* the listeners not just a speaking *to* them.

Another influence on our model of church is an increasingly internationalised youth culture which is largely based on images and values that have their genesis in consumerism and the entertainment culture. In certain attempts at contextualization the church has immersed itself in the consumerism and entertainment focus of this

culture. While claiming relevancy this cultural immersion is not distinctively Australian and sets up a paradoxical value conflict in that the churches which use such immersion will often speak a strong message against worldliness and compromise. Interestingly Reiber (1997) argues that such unconscious value-conflicts creates sociopathy within cultures, a deadening of conscience, which if true must inhibit the gospel within the church itself. At a broader level, Reiber's (1997) research would also suggest that a denial of the wrong and destructive treatment of Indigenous Australians, while glorying in white Australia's triumph over the adversities of the 'frontier', the harsh environment and Gallipoli, would also create a culture marked by a deadening of conscience. This would have critical implications for the life of a nation and for preaching in such a context.

5. AUSTRALIANS AND RELIGION

One particular myth that does not appear to hold up under the weight of empirical research, despite first appearances, is our perceived antipathy toward religion in general and Christianity in particular. Research shows that the reality is a little more complex. While there may be antipathy toward the Christian church, there is a marked openness to issues of faith and meaning.

MacKay (1993) is one who contrary to the myth of the secular, religiously indifferent Australian believes that Australians have a real and unique spirituality. In contrast others like Leaves (1999: 22) argue that Australians are temporal, pragmatic, have a lack of belief in any transcendent divine being and that Australia's "cultural understanding of 'mateship' forges community identity and values without the necessity for religious adherence or belonging."

The research findings reported by Bentley and Hughes (1998) reveals a more complex picture. The World Values Survey 1995 shows that 43.7% of Australians *often* think about the meaning and purpose of life and a further 35.5% *sometimes* think about the meaning and purpose of life (Bentley and Hughes1998: 84). The National Social Science Survey, 1993, reveals that while 65.3% of Australians believe that "life is meaningful if you provide the meaning yourself" and that 53.5% believe "we each make our own fate", 22.3% said that, "life is meaningful only because God exists" and 17.7% believe, "the course of our life is decided by God" (Bentley and Hughes 1998: 85). These findings seem to suggest that while many Australians are pragmatic and self- determining, at least 1 in 5 believe that God has a direct part in shaping our lives, and while this may not be God as revealed in Scripture there are many Australians who are open to thinking about God and the meaning of life.

That two thirds of Australians believe that "life is only meaningful if you provide the meaning yourself" would seem to support the importance of developing dialogical preaching approaches that allow hearers to shape the meaning by being active participants rather than passive listeners.

The National Social Science Survey 1993 (Bentley and Hughes 1998:110, 111) also revealed that 30.3% of Australians "know that God exists" a further 22.8% "believe with doubts", 8.2% "sometimes believe, 17.4% "believe in a higher power", 12.7% say "we can't find out" and only 8.6% "don't believe in God". Even more surprising, considering the myth of the non-religious Australian, is that the same survey revealed that 39% of Australians believe "there is a God who concerns himself personally with every human being," while 25.2% were undecided and 33.4% said no to this belief.

Other findings revealed that 48.1% of Australians felt either "extremely close" to God or "somewhat close" most of the time (111), 20.1% prayed daily, 14.3% prayed weekly and a further 26.8% occasionally (116). The same survey showed that 39.8% of Australians had attended religious services weekly as a child, 37.3% monthly, 17.6% occasionally and only 5.3% never (117). This appears to reveal a population more open to God and the spiritual than the myth perpetuates. Again it may not be the Christian God but there is a greater opportunity for dialogue and engagement suggested by this research than evangelicals often recognise.

In support of this the most recent NCLS (2001: www.ncls.org.au/pages.asp?page=1683) reported that, "More Australians believe in God (74%), the divinity of Jesus (42%), his resurrection (43%), life after death (45%), heaven (53%), hell (32%), and the devil (33%) than attend church monthly or more often (20%)."

The perceived antagonism to the church may also not be a true picture as Bentley and Hughes (1998: 119) analysis revealed that 49.7% said "yes" to the question, "All in all, do you feel positively about the church?" 24.5% were "undecided" and 25.8% said "no". More recent disclosure of systemic sexual and physical abuse in the established churches in Australia may result in a less favourable outlook on the church.

Bentley and Hughes (1998: 117, 118) report that 73.5% of the population attend church less than when a child and only 13.2% attend a religious service weekly (although this is more than the populist figure of 4% that is circulated by word of mouth) while 10.4% attend monthly and a significant 42.5% attend occasionally.

More recent research reveals that some 20% of Australians at church at least once per month (NCLS 2001: www.ncls.org.au/pages.asp?page=275) and for those in the church, "The majority of attenders (85%) have experienced at least some growth in faith over the past year. Some 43% of all attenders have experienced much growth in faith, including 22% attributing their growth to their congregation or parish. The age of attenders makes very little difference to whether attenders feel they are growing in their faith. Dissatisfaction with worship is a major reason why attenders change churches. Yet most current attenders appear to be satisfied with the worship life at their church: 74% always or usually experience a sense of God's presence in worship, 62% experience joy and 54% experience inspiration.

Kaldor et al (1999: 12) analysing data from the Australian census, 1998 Australian Community Survey, 1996 Catholic Life Survey and the 1991 and 1996 National Church Life survey, concluded that, "The church is an important part of Australian society. Few organizations can claim the same level of support from the wider community. It is evident that there is a significant level of latent Christian belief in the wider community. Many who do not regularly go to church or even contemplate going to church retain some basic Christian beliefs. There are certainly some positive starting points for the churches and signs of spiritual interest in the community that they can build on…….Apathy, rather than hostility, keeps many Australians from a closer involvement in the churches." They also conclude that around 71% of Australians have been to a religious service in the last 12 months. "Excluding christenings, weddings, funerals and other special services around 40% of Australians attend church at least once a year….such contact is only bettered by attendance at the cinema (62%) and, marginally, sporting events (44%)" (Kaldor 1999: 19). Apart from

church services, a range of contacts extends beyond regular church attendance e.g., churches are the largest non-government-sector providers of social services, 17% of Australians have been visited by ministers in their own home and 30% of school students attend church-based private schools (Kaldor 1999: 18,19).

At the same time age profiles reveal that all denominations involved in the studies have aging congregations (Kaldor 1999: 32). This pattern is not universal though. The Anglican church in Sydney, characterised by its evangelicalism, has 38% of attendees aged 15 to 39 years of age, compared with 24% for the Anglican church generally (Kaldor 1999: 33). Apart from the Anglican, Uniting and Presbyterian churches, other Protestant churches such as Baptist and Pentecostal have a higher percentage of young adults and adults with young children than any other age group.

While the Australian society is ageing and generally the church with it the NCLS (2001: www.ncls.org.au/pages.asp?page=88) revealed that, "significant differences exist between the age profiles of church attenders and the Australian population. While people of all ages are present in church, younger people continue to be under-represented. Among people aged 15 years or over in the community, nearly half are under the age of 40 years. By comparison, less than a third of church attenders are under 40 years. The age group that is least represented in church life are those in their twenties. While 19% of the Australian population is aged between 20 and 29 years, only 9% of church attenders are in this age grouping……..A comparison of 1991 and 1996 NCLS results shows that even among denominations with younger age profiles there are early signs of 'bracket creep'. That is, there are now smaller proportions of attenders in their twenties and a larger proportion of

attenders in older age groupings than in 1991. This suggests that few denominations are immune to the problems of ageing."

The NCLS (2001: www.ncls.org.au/pages.asp?page=88) in offering some possible explanation for these age discrepancies point out that, "Many observers are quick to point to cultural differences between the pre- and post-World War II generations. These differences can be seen in the adoption of different attitudes and values and the rejection by later generations of traditional religious practices and religious institutions. ……… it is unlikely that the current grouping of young adults will ever exhibit the same high levels of church attendance currently found among older people………. NCLS Research has consistently demonstrated that across a whole range of aspects of church life post-war generations think and act differently from pre-war generations. This poses two challenges. Not only are young people outside of church life quite distant from traditional approaches to church life, but those who are church attenders approach their involvement in quite different ways……… this is reflected in their beliefs, their approaches to worship and mission, and their attitudes to leadership."

Of particular significance to this thesis, the NCLS (2001: www.ncls.org.au/pages.asp?page=88) finds that the, "denominations that have assisted post-war generations to express their faith in ways that are culturally relevant to them have fared better in the retention of attenders in their twenties and thirties than those that haven't."

The NCLS (2001: www.ncls.org.au/pages.asp?page=88) research finds that not only are those under 40 years under-represented in church life but that, "Men are under-represented in the life of the churches. Only 39% of attenders are male. …… In every

denomination, in every age grouping, women outnumber men. The imbalance of

males to females starts at a young age. Among attenders in their twenties, the highest

proportion of men in any denomination is 46%." What this means in light of the male-

dominated myths regarding Australian identity seems a critical question for Australian

churches.

Kaldor's (1999: 41-43) analysis also highlights that many church attenders are

switching churches. Older mainstream denominations – Anglican, Uniting,

Presbyterian and Lutheran, are the biggest losers in this process with 29% of attendees

switching out of these churches and 17% switching in. Till 1991, 24% of all switching

movements were to Pentecostal denominations though this has abated since that time

with higher levels of switching occurring into Baptist and Presbyterian churches.

Since 1991 the Anglican church is attracting more switchers and losing less. The main

reason (42% of respondents) given for moving out of a church is that church services

are boring or unfulfilling (Kaldor 1999: 48). These people are not feeling engaged in

these services.

Kaldor (1999: 33) also argues that the, "research has shown how different generations

express their faith in quite different ways. The culture clash between the generations

in the mainstream churches has left them badly scarred. Many young people have

drifted out of church life or moved to other denominations where their cultures are

reflected and the sounds of their generation are more easily heard."

That the Australian church is missing a large number of the population is a particular

concern of interviewee 'D'.

Contextualisation seems to be a fairly big idea for you, do you think in the Australian culture there are particular issues, or particular aspects of the culture that need to be engaged with and the Christian community or the church is not seeing or connecting with?

Yeh, probably about 80% of the Australian society. I suppose in that way I am post-modern, in the sense that I view modernism as an experiment that didn't really work too well, but I'm not quite sure on what the "post" is. (Mind you I have got some clues.) But the church has, well the evangelical church, that's the one I know best, has been a bit too narrow in its forms, so there's large tracks of the Australian population who don't want to set up a co-dependent relationship with the church, they don't want to sing those types of song, they don't want to become cloistered away from the rest of their community and become a subset who only meet with each other. And I think they're mostly right.

So the church has to find ways of engaging people without isolating, without tearing them away from the fabric of the society they're a part of. That doesn't mean they don't critique that fabric, help them to delineate what's the image of God and what's sin. You don't have to tear, you can transform.

So I reckon that's a large percentage of Australian people, who haven't been meaningfully engaged. The lawnmowers of Australia are a problem: (Walt Disney once said there are three types of people, well poisoners, lawnmowers and life enhancers. Well poisoners, are people for whatever reason, probably pain in their life, damage the community they live in, by vandalism or violence or whatever. The lawnmowers in suburbia that's the biggest group, they just come home, pay their taxes, mow the lawn, keep their head down, go off to work, come home. That's it. Don't really engage helpfully in the community. Then there's life enhancers who do that; reach out beyond themselves and help build relationships.) I think lawnmowers are a pretty big section of the community that the church, if it recalibrated, could help tease out of their little hovels and reintroduce to their community again. We've seen that here - people who describe themselves as self confessed homebodies – "We don't get out much, don't have many friends." Just the other week this guy, tattoos everywhere, mullet, VB, you know the whole picture, and he's saying to me "We're homebodies – we don't get out very much but we've been thinking we should, we want to catch up with you guys more", and then I was talking about [a community group] and taking action to help people who are unable. He said, "Well, if anyone ever needs any sort of general labouring or anything I can do that, let me know." So he's becoming a life enhancer, he's made a shift, a significant shift for that guy and his family.

Are there any other critical aspects of Australian culture or what's happening in Australia that the church misses?

It's kind of an odd question because my brain goes how was I before when I was working within the church cloister, and how am I now. When you ask that question it's almost like every level of society. We should be meaningfully engaging in all of the community conversations. What's going on with movies, what's happening down at the beach, in local government, residence associations, where the teenagers are,

hanging around the bus stop. Wherever there is a group of people who don't have contact with the body of Christ yet, that is through just living, breathing Christians, then that's the group you've got to reach and that's a big percentage. Northbridge, Goths, punks, surfers, skates, schools, wherever. The church by and large misses everybody outside the church.

In New Zealand concern over the exodus of young people and young adults out of the church has seen analysis (Jamieson 1999; Pritchard 1999) conducted in line with Fowler's (1981) stages of faith development. It is argued that many leavers are not leaving faith but moving on from the stage of faith that their churches allow. The argument is that many evangelical churches only allow faith to develop to the "synthetic – conventional" stage. This stage of faith highlights the need for adherence to propositional statements of belief and conduct, value conformity to the norms, beliefs and practices of a church culture, and encourages submission to authority. In this stage there is only partial development of one's own self-identity and worldview as these are primarily borrowed rather than personalised. Hence personal conviction about the beliefs held is not fully developed and the expectations and evaluations of others outweigh autonomous judgement. Those who are seeking a more personalised, incarnational faith are not satisfied in such churches, or seen as a threat, and move on. It is felt that to develop into the "individuative-reflective" stage of faith or even later stages of "conjunctive" faith, one needs to move on from churches which are in the "synthetic-conventional" stage.

While no such analysis has been conducted in Australia I would argue that the situation would be similar with most evangelical churches operating at a synthetic-conventional level. This is fed by an applicational-hermeneutic that tells listeners how to act based on the adherence to propositional truth statements. If this profile is true it

further highlights the need for contextualised, dialogical forms of preaching that allows for the discovering and exploration of an incarnational faith rather than telling passive hearers what to believe and how to act.

That church as it is, is missing Australians is also suggested in the National Social Science Survey, 1994 (Bentley and Hughes 1998: 108) where only 9.2% said the church was a place where they *always* find a sense of peace and well-being, though a further 18.9% said they *often* found such a sense in the church. Leaves (1999: 30) sees this as evidence that most Australians are content to be non-religious. However as highlighted above, other findings reveal that Australians have a marked religious and spiritual aspect to their lives.

It is interesting to note that the same survey (Bentley and Hughes 1998: 108) revealed that only 7.4% *always* find a sense of peace and well-being in "playing or singing", with 22.7% *often* finding a sense of peace and well-being in such activities. This is in some ways a small detail but an important one considering how much worship in Australian evangelical churches has been reduced to singing. It was found that most Australians find a sense of well-being and peace by the sea or in the bush. Leaves (1999: 30) writes that, "the populace at large is extremely happy to remain swimming with their own non-religious friends in the Indian Ocean. Here is reality for the majority of Australians – especially on a Sunday morning."

5.1 Space

This sense of well-being in relation to land and sea appears consistent with Pickard's (1998) argument that unique to the Australian context is living in the "in - between

places." Australians live on an island continent, mainly on the coastal fringe between expanses of desert, sea and sky. Australia's relationship with the expanse of our geography has become part of the Australian myth. Tacey (1995) in the *Edge of the Sacred,* also highlights the theme of space and geography and how Australians while mythologizing the interior space of Australia have been terrified by it. He believes Australians have become closed as a result and need to open themselves to a spiritual dialogue. While this may be more Jungian analysis than sociologically verifiable, it is true to say that the notion of space has been incorporated into the Australian myth, being immortalised in our poetry and literature. Banjo Patterson's classic, *Clancy of the Overflow,* pictures a man bound by the constraints of the city, imagining his friend mustering cattle in the outback.

> *And the bush hath friends to meet him,*
>
> *and their kindly voices greet him*
>
> *In the murmur of the breezes and the river on its bars,*
>
> *And he sees the vision splendid of the sunlit plains extended,*
>
> *And at night the wondrous glory of the everlasting stars.*

These lines have been absorbed into the Australian psyche. Pickard (1998) argues that this desire for space has uniquely shaped the Australian character. His metaphor for a contextualised church in Australia is the 'veranda' - a, "sanctuary offering spaces for social interaction and relative comfort in the Australian climate" (Pickard 1998: 5). He sees the veranda as being a place of dialogue and argues that we need to create a culture of dialogue in the Australian church, believing this metaphor captures something that opens the Australian culture to the gospel. The veranda may not be one attached to a church building as this implies that people need to and will come to

the church. If the church is to be a church in the world then dialogue needs to occur on the verandahs of others.

5.2 The Call to Dialogue

This call to a dialogical approach is also spoken by Smith (1989: 218). To the questioners, doubters, thinkers, atheists and agnostics he says we need to reply, "with an open and honest dialogue, instead of cowering in our pews or flinging out naïve and simplistic comments on the deep questions."

MacKay's (1993) research also suggests that Australians are open to dialogue in response to a shared uncertainty about future direction. Based on evidence from over 60 reports on long term social research, he concluded that Australia has been "plunged into a period of unprecedented social, cultural, political, economic and technological change in which the Australian way of life is being radically redefined" (MacKay 1993: 6). "Since the early 1970s, there is hardly an institution or a convention of Australian life which has not been subject either to serious challenge or radical change. The social, cultural, political, and economic landmarks which we have traditionally used as reference points for defining the Australian way of life have either vanished, been eroded or shifted" (MacKay 1993: 17). He argues that this has seen Australians as a whole, living within a culture of anxiety, "the present era seems fraught with the peculiar stresses created by a confused and diffused sense of identity, the lack of consistent or coherent sense of purpose, and a growing feeling of isolation and even alienation among Australians - especially the young" (MacKay 1993: 19).

Many evangelical churches have responded to this situation pragmatically by developing ministries, services and sermons that respond to felt need. The desire to concretise and live the Gospel is a continuing trait of evangelicalism but the current approach risks reinforcing an individualised applicational hermeneutic in a more contemporary form. Sermons that offer God's remedy to anxiety, the Biblical way to parent, God's plan for marriage or how to improve your relationships, offer a new form of imperative-based sermon that eventually develops a new form of Christian culture but leaves deeper spiritual, existential and social questions untouched. It can develop, not into a Christian community formed by the story of God but into a community that shapes God to fit their own lifestyle needs.

MacKay (1993) claims that Australia has entered an era of redefinition and that as when anyone or any institution redefines itself, it is an anxiety filled process but one that is also full of new opportunities and possibilities. He sees a clear need for a dialogue in this time of redefinition. Amongst a list of how various groups in Australian culture respond to these times he writes that, "theologians smile knowingly" (MacKay 1993: 7). He sees the churches response as too frequently being one of a smug "we told you so" (MacKay 1993: 7). This is consistent with the lack of engagement with the world that Piggin (1996) argues has come to define evangelicalism in the later part of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st.

What is also interesting about MacKay's (1993) research is it's own dialogical methodology. The research is based on extensive conversations with thousands of Australians, either in already existing social groups or with individuals, conducted over a 20 year period, leading to the release of 69 reports. In the group discussions the

researchers simply listened to dialogue the group generated in response to the topic presented. MacKay felt that this dialogue based, qualitative research was the most effective way to gain a sense of what Australians were thinking.

5.3 Relationship with other religions

Another factor that has and will shape the way that church is lived in Australia and hence the practice of preaching, is Christianity's relationship with other religions. Uniquely, "The shape of Australia's religious profile is primarily a function of its migration history and only secondarily a function of conversion or changing religious identification" (Bouma 1996: 1). Since World War II this has seen an increasing religious diversity due to immigration. "Australia is a success story of religious settlement involving highly diverse religious groups. Other nations have been less successful in achieving as peaceable, productive and cooperative a religious environment. This is not because Australia has become increasingly secular, because in many ways religion is more important, more on the agenda now than before. Reasons for this successful transition include the Australian institution of giving others a 'fair go', Australian experiences in the 19th century with religious sectarianism, 20th century ecumenism, the Australian pattern of funding primary and secondary education, and a history of resolving conflict by reference to courts of law. The framework provided by Australia's civic values of tolerance, equality, and freedom of speech and religion together with the structures of constitutional parliamentary democracy and the rule of law have worked together to enable this transition" (Bouma 1996: ix).

This civil tolerance suggests that Australians do not like religion that is imposed or forced upon them. They are not closed to religious influence but closed to religious propaganda.

Baldock (1996) believes that the increasing significance of religious identification creates a unique opportunity for the Christian church. "If religious identity is set to become a more significant factor in Australian society over the next fifty years, this creates the possibility as well that Christian churches too will be able to reassert or reinvent themselves as a more relevant and more potent force in the community…..
Being required to argue and defend your position in a context which does not automatically understand or accept the premises upon which your argument rests, and against many others, requires perhaps a stronger sense of purpose and identity than has been required before of Christians in Australia……The current re-evaluation of public policies in order to accommodate a diversity of religious beliefs and practice provides an opportunity to reconsider the provision of services to religious groups, and for religious groups to learn to play a more active role in our society. In this context the expression of religious concerns and preferences will become much more possible than it has been. In the discussions required to do all this, religious factors are likely to be given more credence in public life and discourse than is now the case. This will both demand and enable greater ability to articulate a faith position and to hear the faith positions of others, including those who claim no faith" (Baldock 1996: 189).

This again suggests that the church needs to move toward and cultivate a dialogical approach rather than be retreatist. Stackhouse (2000) sees in a day of increased globalization and pluralism that the church needs to develop a greater ability to

articulate a faith position. He argues that, "the whole ministry of the church, ordained and lay, is truncated if it cannot offer a compelling account of what is happening to people's lives at the local level because of real forces, which they can understand and respond to, at another, now a global level. The ministry is also truncated if it cannot offer guidance as to how God wants people to live together in both, church, community, society, and the world at large, especially when the happenings of the world at large play out in local church, community and society"(Stackhouse 2000: 30). He argues this articulation requires careful preparation and he asks if the church is preparing such people. Preaching is clearly a place where the need for this dialogue can be communicated, taught and modelled.

Baldock (1996) is concerned that such a dialogue may not occur as, "Already we see in many religious groups a profound reaction against any contact with other religious groups, save for the purpose of evangelism. Building bridges between communities, working together around common concerns, is essentially syncretistic. For some Christians this is seen as a betrayal of Jesus Christ" (Baldock 1996: 190).

6. SUMMARY OF CHAPTER IN TERMS OF PREACHING PRAXIS

Writing nearly twenty years ago, Millikan (1981: 20) wrote, "Christians in Australia will best represent the cause to others by not adopting postures which suggest that they see themselves as superior. When dealing with a society of knockers, skilled and sensitive to the hollowness of pretension, they need first to present themselves as good blokes before there is a hope of being heard. Australians judge the quality of a man's spirit before they think of judging the content of his message. There is genuine affection and respect for Christian personalities which have this common touch about

them. On the other hand, there are many spokesmen for the churches who have an

austere, pedantic or aloof tone. They are treated formally and distantly."

This perspective is echoed by Minister 'E' in the response to the following question.

Do you have any particular assumptions about who your hearers are?

If it is our regular crew I get the sense that people are there because they want to be there on the whole. I'm aware there are a fringe of people who are distracted and distressed. I want people to be there because I have a relationship with them and vis versa. *Now some are closer and I can't get intimate with every single person. The preacher may bring a hard word because the hard word is from the Bible but they are doing that out of care and love. So I think that relationship is very important. I am always amazed by the itinerant preachers as its harder for them to make connections. A regular preacher preaches in relationship and people listen because they think that the preacher is giving this word because you care for us. The other side of it is, perhaps its that Australian authority issue, is that people want to know that you are travelling with them and that I'm not standing on high condemning them but I am standing with them. As a preacher I am travelling with the gang or wanting to stand for them. I think that helps in our culture.*

While the research discussion has not been clearly established that an applicational

hermeneutic is operational, factors that suggest an applicational hermeneutic in

current praxis are

1. Word and Spirit focuses (often in tension with each other) over mission

2. a retreatist mentality

3. a focus on personal morality and obedience

4. attempts at relevancy based on superficial categories

6.1 Suggestions regarding future Praxis.

Themes and research findings presented in this chapter would suggest that preaching

in Australia needs to be,

1. rediscovering the God of the Bible and the story of God, in ways that allow the preacher to speak to Australians rather than attempting to baptise God into an Australian identity

2. equipping listeners to engage with their culture and community, not expecting better preaching to attract people into the church

3. non-authoritarian and non-coercive

4. reality-based

5. genuine and free of pretence

6. clear using non-jargony language

7. dialogical rather than didactic

8. encouraging faith beyond synthetic-conventional levels

9. inclusive and sensitive to the non-religious by not creating artificial distinctions between, "us" and "them"

10. inclusive particularly of woman, Indigenous Australians and new migrants

11. addressing insecurity and anxiety regarding identity and the future

12. aware of multicultural context

13. balanced by a missions (inclusive of social justice) focus

14. reframing the message of reconciliation in broader social and national contexts not simply in individual faith terms

15. directed to the unique culture and diversity of their particular community rather than trying to reach the "typical" Australian who may be more mythic stereotype than reality.

Sadly the need for an engaged dialogue with the culture is still in urgent need of being addressed. Fortunately some evangelical churches are seeing the need to understand the culture and communicate within and to it. The culture is being seen as primarily

post-modern and that for the church to be relevant it needs to communicate in this

post-modern culture. There is both opportunity and danger in this trend, with a certain

lack of clarity about what post-modern means. It is these concerns that the next

chapter addresses.

CHAPTER 3
SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS – MODERNISM AND POSTMODERNISM

This chapter will continue to follow Zerfass's (1974) model in studying situational factors that shape a practical theology of preaching. In the previous chapter historical and cultural factors were considered. This chapter will explore the influence of modernism and postmodernism on preaching. Both the act of preaching and the receiving of preaching are shaped by presuppositional and interpretive frameworks. In the current period the influences of modernism and postmodernism as frameworks are critical. Zerfass's (1974) model delineates between situational and theological factors but as can be seen in the previous chapter the delineation between the two cannot always be sustained as the influence of one on the other is often immediate. This will also be the case here where the implications and interactions of these movements for and with theology cannot at times be separated.

Grenz (1996: 2) writes that, "we are experiencing a cultural shift that rivals the innovations that marked the birth of modernity out of the decay of the Middle Ages," and that these, "transitional periods are exceedingly difficult to describe and assess." Despite these difficulties this chapter will attempt to delineate between postmodernism as a cultural movement and postmodernism as a literary theory as well as how they interact. Postmodernism as both a cultural movement and literary perspective needs to be understood if preaching is to be contextualised and dialogical.

Modernism will first be explored as my argument is that modernist pre-suppositions feed a narrow applicational hermeneutic. While some are aware of this and are increasingly cautious about the impact of modernism on understanding and communicating the Gospel, to simply turn to postmodernism as an alternate literary theory has its own dangers. While the reader-response perspective of postmodernism

has allowed the dialogical nature of Scripture to be emphasised, and while it is critical that pre-suppositional influences be acknowledged in the reading of a text, the perspective taken here is that Scripture's primary interpretive framework is not an external, *apriori* philosophical system that overlays the text, be that modernism or postmodernism. While engaging as a neutral and objective reader or listener is impossible, to allow abstracted philosophical systems to be an external locus of truth by which Scripture is judged, continues the particular dualism of modernism. If this is allowed to govern the interpretive process then the critical exegetical and hermeneutical framework for understanding Scripture that is argued for in, and is also the presupposition of, this research, is discounted. The hermeneutical framework being advocated is that of the self-revealing God himself, who calls a people into a conversation and story with himself. While never being free itself from being an interpretive overlay, I would argue that this hermeneutic is based on the incarnational Word of God where the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. This ongoing tension between the lenses through which Scripture is read or heard, and the correcting reality of the self-revealing God, in itself sets up the reading and hearing of Scripture as a dialogical process.

1. MODERNISM

Littlejohn (1996: 14) points out that elements of modernism have always been a part of culture as humanity has always studied, quantified, labelled and abstracted. Nevertheless the period known as the "Enlightment" set the foundation for modernism. This period was characterised by critical developments in, and commitment to, observational science, which through the works of men such as Bacon and Locke promoted an observational basis for knowing. This was paralleled

by the elevation of the individual, particularly as a rational being, to the centre of the world. Descartes' philosophy laid the foundation for this shift (Grenz 1996: 2, 3).

The notion that reality can be accurately measured and even controlled by use of the scientific method was advanced by the work of Newton. Newtonian physics played a major role in the development of the belief that the laws of the universe were fixed, observable and reducible, and could be explained by cause and effect. Marshall (2000) argues that modernists have used Newtonian physics in ways that Newton never intended, and used his theory to create a mechanistic universe where God is absent. "Descartes demanded to be told what transmitted Newton's gravitational attraction – 'Where's the rope?' Newton replied, *'Hypotheses non fingo'*- I have no use for hypotheses. In other words, I don't know, and I am not going to speculate about it. What I have shown is that if you assume my gravitational force, you can calculate that the planets will move as they are actually seen to move. To infer from this that God cannot act on or influence the physical world is not a process of logic; it is a leap of atheistic (non) faith" (Marshall 2000: 12). Nevertheless Newtonian physics was critical to the development of a modernism which excluded God.

Grenz (1996: 3) states that, "The modern human can be appropriately characterized as Descartes' autonomous, rational substance encountering Newton's mechanistic world." Subsequently in fields outside the natural sciences, such as theology, attempts were made to construct "truth" as laws on the basis of empirical evidence and justification, governed by the power of the rational mind (Grenz & Olson 1992: 15-23).

Originally in this movement "observed reality" determined language and language became increasingly "observationalist". Language was seen to be subject to event, yet adequate to provide a high level of correspondence between the phenomena observed and the symbol used to describe the phenomena (Littlejohn 1996: 15). High level correspondence views on language were linked to a confidence in the rational mind, with knowledge being seen as objective and measurable. In this view truth was simply the mind or language mirroring nature (Grenz 1996: 4 - 6).

However over the course of this period the relation of language to reality developed in a paradoxical fashion in that the truths or laws developed by this approach became the determiners of reality, e.g. apples fall from trees due to the Law of Gravity. The Law of Gravity became the "truth" by which the reality was judged, rather than the Law of Gravity being our best yet conceptual explanation of the phenomena of apples falling from trees. Language became the interpreter of reality and event became *subject* to language. Postmodernism as a literary theory rightly highlighted this shift and further developed the notion that language shapes and even determines reality. (Observational language spoke in a way that conveyed intentionality to reality, e.g. the reason why apples fall from trees is *because* of the Law of Gravity. That humans operate with and assume intentionality is critical to the theories of Searle (1999) which will be discussed in Chapter 7.)

Under modernism, structuralism (e.g. Saussure 1959) as a literary theory developed. "Structuralists argue that language is a social construct and that people develop literary documents – texts – in an attempt to provide structures of meaning that will help them make sense of the meaninglessness of their experience. Structuralists

maintain that literature provides categories that help us to organize and understand our experience of reality. They also contend that all societies and cultures possess a common, invariant structure" (Grenz 1996: 5, 6). Even though structuralists saw language as referring to objective realities, the outworking of this view was that language, category and text became *determiners* and shapers of reality.

Critics of postmodernism have argued that postmodernism abandons modernism. Postmodernists themselves may claim that they have abandoned the basis of modernism, namely foundationalism i.e. the idea of a given axiomatic truth from which all arguments may be validated or invalidated (Van Huyssteen 1997: 2). However, rather than simply abandoning modernism and structuralism, I would suggest postmodernism is based on the supposition of structuralism that language is a social construct and shapes reality. Rejecting the notion that all cultures have common and invariant structures, postmodernism takes structuralism further and argues that meaning is not inherent in the text itself but emerges as the interpreter enters into dialogue with the text (Gadamer 1984: 261), meaning that reality will be read differently by each person. In postmodernism, "there is no one meaning of the world, no transcendent center to reality as a whole" (Grenz 1996: 6). While this may be the postmodern conclusion to this line of reasoning *re* meaning, in important ways it was also its pre-suppositional beginning point with the elevation of Descartes' rational mind to the centre of existence. With presuppositions resting in Descartes and Nietzsche, the arguments of Derrida (1974: 50) for ending both "onto-theology" and the "metaphysics of being" are then seen as reasonable and justifiable.

Both modernism and postmodernism acknowledge the dualism between language and event or reality, and attempt to resolve the dualistic tension. Modernism attempts to

resolve this tension by claiming that it can discover "the truth" that superintends or over rides the split between language and reality. In this "truth" the tension is unified by a higher order of reasoning or explanation. Postmodernism alleviates the tension by arguing for the inter-subjectivity of perspectives. In this approach the tension is not between truth claims that can be alleviated by an appeal to a higher 'truth' that can then determines the right way to think and act. Rather if there are tensions it is between interpretations and as each has validity the process of thinking and acting occurs through dialogue between these perspectives.

Modernism and structuralism also strengthened a particular dualism (Littlejohn 1996: 14, 15) that presented truth as existing outside of the phenomena itself. "Truth" was divorced from reality and became an abstraction. Abstracted truth resolved the tension between reality and language. In modernism a body of truth existed outside of reality itself, which reality was subject to and by which reality was to be measured (Torrance 1999: 21 –51).

It is important to note that the dualism inherent in the language-reality dimension is an issue not simply resolved despite the efforts of modernism and postmodernism and of theologians such as Barth and Torrance (McGrath 1999:192-194). Dualism in the language-reality dimension, while problematic in that it can present truth as an abstraction or construct that is separate from reality, would also seem intrinsically part of the process of naming and labelling, a practice that according to the Genesis account is not only intrinsically human but commissioned by God. Conceptual distinction from the reality described is inherent in the nature of language as language is both representational and symbolic. Language also operates within and is part of the

same reality structure as the phenomena itself and as such has the capacity to shape the nature of that reality, i.e. language is not simply representational but also has agency or communicative force (Vanhoozer 1998b). This dualistic tension is present in Scripture – human language is used to speak the unspeakable, and rather than being a problem that must be resolved by scientific method as in modernism, or by reducing language to purely interpretation as in postmodernism, this tension sets up Scripture's dialogical nature. At the same time I would argue that Scripture is not inherently and primarily dialogical due to the nature of language but is primarily dialogical due to the nature and purposes of God in his communicative relationship with humanity.

A dualism that splits truth from reality, with its attendant epistemological confusion, occurs when it is assumed that language, or the language of "truth", exists in a sphere separate from and superintending on reality, or that the language domain is simply a pool from which purely symbolic conveniences can be arbitrarily attached to phenomena as though language has no spatial-temporal relationship with that phenomena. Both perspectives are present in modernism and postmodernism, creating an epistemology where language defines, determines or creates reality, thus negating the self-revealing God of Scripture.

Within evangelicalism a crisis developed when the same stringent observational methodology used in the natural sciences was applied to theological thought. This led to the modernist - fundamentalist standoff in the early years of the 20th century (Grenz & Olson 1992: 286, 287). Even though it was essentially an argument over authority and epistemology the debate was generally conducted on modernist pre-suppositions regarding the nature of truth. Marsden (1984: 98) argues that

evangelicalism generally is a child of modernism with its critical, rational thinking and empirical scientific approach. The modernists argued that God and the witness of Scripture did not fit the realities that had been observed using scientific and critical methods. The evangelicals responded by saying that the truth of God and Scripture is defendable according to the theological truth systems that they had developed (Grenz 1996: 161). Abstracted truth was used by both sides to defend the Bible and to oppose it.

God and Scripture were defended by a rational apologetic based on dualistic, modernist notions of truth and belief in a Newtonian universe with its fixed principles of cause and effect (Ramm 1959: 107-125). This led in certain circles to an evangelicalism which, while seldom stated, in practice conducted itself with a propositional authority that was at least equivalent to and at times superior to the subject that it was describing, i.e. God in Christ. Kung (1988: 193) described this as the elevation of the Bible to a position of a "paper pope".

Torrance (1999) argues that the wing of evangelicalism that may be known as fundamentalism is grounded in the dualism of modernism. "At this point the epistemological dualism underlying fundamentalism cuts off the revelation of God in the Bible from God himself and his continuous self-giving through Christ and in the Spirit, so that the Bible is treated as a self-contained corpus of divine truths in propositional form endowed with an infallibility of statement which provides the justification felt to be needed for the rigid framework of belief within which fundamentalism barricades itself. The practical and the epistemological effect of a fundamentalism of this kind is to give an infallible Bible, and a set of rigid

evangelical beliefs primacy over God's self-revelation which is mediated to us through the Bible. This effect is only reinforced by the regular fundamentalist identification of biblical statements about the truth with the truth itself to which they refer...[W]hat must be particularly distressing for a genuinely evangelical approach is that the living reality of God's self-revelation through Jesus Christ and in the Spirit is in point of fact made secondary to the Scriptures" (Torrance 1999:17).

My own position, which will be further highlighted in the next chapter, is that the Bible not only *mediates* the truth of God in Christ and in the Spirit but it also *is* God's word in human speech. Scripture is not simply a conduit for truth, nor simply the human voice recording revelational experiences. Rather a word is spoken in Scripture from outside of our humanness, through our humanness. However this word from God i.e. Scripture, is not God and Torrance's (1999) concern for the fundamentalist elevation of Scripture is valid. The danger of modernism is that it has tried to justify Christian faith on narrowly defined, empirical notions of rationality, which has proved impossible. A narrowly defined rationality has then seen an equating of exegesis and hermeneutics with the Word it exegetes and hermeneuts, creating a closed system that distrusts any sort of rationality outside of its own system in understanding Christian faith. This has led in some circles to fideistic positions, where truth is seen to be self-evident and beyond rationality, existing in its own abstract sphere outside of reality, which then puts it beyond study, evaluation and dialogue.

In light of this perspective I would argue that many churches in Perth that claim to be evangelical are in practice more fundamentalist. Determining and then adhering to right truth in a modernistic manner becomes the hermeneutical principle of the church

and its preaching. This fideistic truth then becomes the standard by which people are to live life and defend the faith, if not the God of the faith. A narrow applicational hermeneutic is the consequence, applicational in both a doctrinal and behavioural sense. A doctrinal applicational hermeneutic is expressed as "Here is the body of truth that you are to believe," with the practice of the Christian life becoming the believing and mastery of those truths. A behavioural applicational hermeneutic is expressed as "Here is the lifestyle that you are to live," based on the extent and mastery of doctrinal and ethical imperatives. This misses the grand narrative of God's saving incarnational acts in which he invites us to participate.

In such an approach sermons also develop a functional dualism. First the sermon text is exegeted to discover its pure propositional meaning and truth statements. Its truth is deconstructed in a manner that either ignores its cultural context or attempts to distil the text of its cultural context, so the underlying truth can be seen. This may be done either naively with a preacher having little awareness of cultural and historical context, yet determining the truth through these layers, or it might be done using the most current critical scholarship. Even in the use of critical tools the intent is to understand the cultural and historical influences so that the eternal truth of the passage can be cleansed from these cultural and historical influences (Okure 2000: 445). This also means that liberal churches whose preaching follows the same process also operate out of an applicational hermeneutic.

This methodology is flawed due to its epistemological dualism (truth is separate from reality) as meaning can neither be separated from nor determined by culture. This approach also creates at least two problems within its own hermeneutical system.

Firstly many passages do not yield such evident propositional claims that clear application can be developed. Preachers 'exegete' the passage then tag on points of application at the end that can be forced and spuriously linked to the text. This forces the Bible to be theoretical, applicational and behavioural, rather than thematically narrative, incarnational and dialogical. The second problem is that once the meaning of a passage is decontextualised historically then the preacher has to recontextualise it by making points of application within the present culture. Again questionable applications can be made and the process again forces Scripture to be primarily applicational rather than historical, revelatory and incarnational. The applicational hermeneutic approach discounts the very revelation that such forms of fundamentalist evangelicalism claims it is the true defender of. Liberals who follow the same methodology also force the Scripture in a theoretical, applicational, behavioural direction but would be less concerned about the discounting of revelation as understood from an evangelical perspective.

This argument is not suggesting that Scripture is not applicational. Scripture as revelatory and incarnational has profound implicational and applicational effect, often beyond the levels of manageable obedience that evangelicals can glean from the text.

In light of the previous chapter's discussion on Australian identity and culture this applicational hermeneutic would seem culturally inappropriate. Australians appear wary of theoretical abstraction and institutional authority that dictates behaviour. Therefore an applicational hermeneutic with fundamentalist overtones sets itself up for rejection. On the other hand Australian's paradoxical compliance with authority

and non-critical consumerism can make us more susceptible to such fundamentalism then we may be aware of.

In the evangelical church this approach to the text and to preaching has generated a theoretical and mechanical Christianity that lacks the dynamic of the Spirit and the Living Word. To counter this many churches have moved to a more experientially based, contemporary, Spirit-led approach. This however often generates a new applicational and behavioural approach that is more concerned with the present work of the Spirit than imbedded in the greater narrative of God's redemptive action through history and eschatologically in His kingdom.

Willimon (1990: 23, 24) in criticizing modernism's effect on the hermeneutical process believes, "The Bible's purpose has been misrepresented through certain modern methods of reading scripture. As we said, scripture is a story which has a 'political' function, namely, to form and to critique a new community, a peculiar people, the church. Modernity asks not, 'How is the Bible shaping a new reality among us?' but rather it asks, 'Does the Bible report accurately the events it is describing?' Narrative meaning, story, is lost in debates over facticity." He continues by saying that, "In the hands of both fundamentalists and historical critics, the Bible becomes fragmented, uninteresting. The story and its political claim upon us is lost in debates over 'what really happened'" (Willimon 1990: 25, 26).

Torrance (1999: 71-77) sees the prevalence of modernist presuppositions in three areas,

1. Scholastically in the domination of a syntactical reading of Scripture over a semantic reading,

2. The triumph of the written word over the heard or spoken word in preaching (this is consistent with Lawton's (1988) observations regarding the need for high literacy levels in the Australian church).

3. The triumph of the visual over the spoken. Torrance argues that words and language can take us beyond the surface of the observed and allows us to understand realities, relationships and dynamics that are unseen. While this is true it should also be noted that the visual can at times highlight the inadequacy of words and language.

The tension between the adequacy and inadequacy of language to describe and shape the reality it is referent to is inherently dialogical. The spoken or written word invites us into a dialogue due to its adequacy and inadequacy. God in revealing himself in Scripture establishes such a dialogue as Scripture is adequate to reveal God and fulfil his purposes yet is inadequate to fully describe the character and purposes of the God revealed. Bartow (1997: ix) in quoting H.H. Farmer's dictum *Deus cognitus, Deus nullus* writes that, "A God comprehended is no God, and the theology that pretends to know everything is a sham. Yet theology must know something or it cannot recognize the aptness of what Farmer said." This invites us to the dialogue of faith.

2. POSTMODERNISM

2.1 Postmodernism as cultural movement

As a broader cultural movement postmodernism has its roots in art, science, philosophy and literature before postmodernism as a more specific literary,

communication theory was clearly established. Like modernism, elements of postmodernism have always been present in culture as people have questioned meaning and the relationship of meaning to observed reality and in the process deconstructed previous understandings of self, culture and the world. Humans have always hermeneuted their world. Okure (2000) argues that we are hermeneutical by nature. "One may describe it as the natural process by which a human being interprets, understands and relates meaningfully to self and the world outside self on a daily basis. To be human is to be hermeneut" (Okure 2000: 447). This is consistent with Gadamer's (1975) view that humans interpret naturally as part of existing and that we cannot be human without interpreting (Littlejohn 1996: 209). Okure (2000: 447) points out that, "Not only are the readings of the 'happenings' within an event made from a 'perspective', the interpretation of life on a daily basis is also made from a standpoint. Our daily readings of reality are influenced by our culture and hermeneutical presuppositions". This again is central to Gadamer's (1975) theory – that experience is always understood from the perspective of presuppositions or assumptions (Littlejohn 1996: 209). This is also a critical perspective of postmodernism.

Grenz (1996: 5) sees postmodernism as a rejection of the "Enlightenment project" and the assumptions on which it was built. Rather than simply a rejection I would argue that postmodernism is the outworking of modernism's ideals of freedom and the autonomous, interpreting individual. The belief in the autonomy of the individual and the individual's power to reason are Enlightenment principles that are critical to postmodernism. Groothuis (2000: 40) sees postmodernism as modernism's natural conclusion.

During the modernist period itself there was significant critique of the observational, empirical foundation of modernism. Schleiermacher opposed empiricism by arguing that, "God is the object of 'feeling' and faith rather than knowledge," with religion, "grounded on the immediate intuitive feeling of dependence" (Copleston 1994, vol. VII: 158). Hegel argued that truth is a teleological process, an unfolding dynamic of self-development, presenting a phenomenological perspective of the human consciousness (Copleston 1994, vol. VII: 170-188). Kierkegaard argued from a distinct phenomenological perspective concerning the experience of faith (Pattison 1999) and Nietzsche directly rejected the Enlightment concept of truth (Grenz 1996: 88-98). In science Darwin's evolutionary theory and Einstein's theory of relativity (Torrance 1999: 31 - 35), aided by the philosophy of Kant (Copleston 1994, vol. VI: 180-307) and Hume (Grenz 1996: 74-76), "ended" a Newtonian view of the world. It was argued that reality could not be reduced to cause and effect, reality could not be contained by language and that there were critical elements beyond observation. Mystery was allowed to re-enter science, although as Marshall (2000: 12) highlights, Newtonian physics, "still works as well as ever where it is applicable".

At the turn of the century in art, Picasso, despite concerted effort, decided that universal meaning could not be determined by mathematical and geometric processes and along with other artists such as Matteuse and Dali, began to do art that highlighted meaninglessness (Rookmaaker 1994:117-120). In philosophy, Bertrand Russell also saw the futility of discovering meaning through the logics of mathematics. He argued against empiricism and argued that language was a means to construct the world (Copleston 1994, vol. VIII: 425 – 470). In literature, Joyce's

Ulysses (1934) created a storm by its apparent lack of recognizable literary structure. The writings of D.H. Lawrence and the "New Morality" of Russell (Copleston Vol. VIII: 471-494) fractured the Western world's existing order of relationships and marriage. Freud (1996) was also critical in reinventing the internal, unseen human world and the existential writings of Camus (Copleston 1994, vol. IX: 390-397) and Sartre (Copleston 1994, vol. IX: 340-389) further eroded a modernist worldview. The confidence that science and technological advance would lead to a better world were also shattered by World War I where the nation states of Europe that had grown powerful on the back of Enlightenment thinking, used the machinery of their scientific and technological sophistication, to try and destroy each other with sobering effect.

Modernism's "failure" encouraged a phenomenological approach to knowledge that developed on a number of fronts at the same time. Phenomenological in this sense is meant to denote the perspective that what is felt, experienced or sensed to be true, is a central and sufficient basis for knowing. The pursuit of knowledge becomes the validation of these apriori realities (Littlejohn 1996: 203-208). Self becomes the interpreter of reality and self discovers what it believes to be the truth. While phenomenologists like Husserl (1962) were clear that there was reality (a true essence) outside of the self and the self's own consciousness that the self could not subsume, and which was the proper direction of study, the phenomenological perspective shaped a subjectivism that placed self at the centre of knowing and knowledge.

While the 20th century Western world was moving in this phenomenological direction, within evangelical scholarship there was an increasing confidence in the critical methods of modernism. Yet modernism in Christian scholarship was matched with phenomenalism in non-academic Christian reading and preaching (Okure 2000: 445, 446). This has been seen as a spiritual reading of the biblical text, or a Spirit-led reading, as opposed to a scholastic reading and led to the artificial splitting of spiritual and scholastic approaches to Scripture (Allen 1997: 19). More recently this has seen the application of Biblical texts in a self-help fashion to what have been deemed psychological or lifestyle problems. While this may be reflective of Rorty's (1979) pragmatic postmodernism, this self-help approach has added new impetus to an applicational hermeneutic. Sermons have become pragmatic, problem solving or behaviour modifying responses to lifestyle or personal problems, using the Biblical text in support. Existential realities have been linked to "biblical" imperatives divorced from the indicatives of Scripture.

A pragmatic preaching approach would seem to fit the pragmatic tendencies of Australians and so it is an appealing direction to take. Scripture however does not offer a simple pragmatic approach to life. In its self-revelation of God the imperative call often leads away from the pragmatic to a lifestyle of faith and obedience that seldom "works" according to cultural norms. Incarnational kingdom living is not always pragmatic.

This phenomenological/pragmatic approach meant that many Christians were reading Scripture postmodernly before postmodernism was fashionable, while at the same time defending a modernist view of God and the Universe.

At the same time evangelical scholarship under modernism was also deconstructionist. The syntactical and critical approaches aided this deconstructionist tendency. The same critical methods the liberals used to support their presuppositional base were now being used by the evangelicals to support theirs. Using these approaches God was deconstructed to fit already existing doctrinal and ethical systems. This can paradoxically be a phenomenological approach when these methods are used to support truths that are already held as truth based on assumed subjective or intuitive beliefs. Scripture is used to support *apriori* positions. Fideistic systems are the consequence.

Globalization is also a critical factor in understanding postmodern culture. Lyon (2000:12) states that, "Globalization refers most commonly to an economic process in which the global system has become the reference point for transactions." In this global economic system, "categories such as nation, state, and region have become less significant by comparison." Apart from economic and trading relationship Lyon (2000: 12) argues that it brings about other kinds of relationships, "within transnational political and cultural arrangements". "Indeed the culture of globalization is very much a consumer culture, fostered by mass media advertising and transnational electronic commerce." The consequence of this globalization is that, "people once separate and isolated from each other are drawn together into frequent and almost necessary contact." While some see in globalization a new enemy, Lyon (2000: 12) argues that it also, "provides new opportunities for mutual understanding and cooperation, a common transnational context for activity. It may mean, for instance, that peoples across the world may be more united against a common foe, such as industrial pollution and environmental degradation." At the same time Lyon

(2000: 13) believes that religious identity is, "potentially relativised by globalization," and consequently, "Religious language is itself marginalized; it becomes harder to communicate using religious terms. To try to appeal to arguments deriving from a specific religious position is difficult in a world where tolerance is increasingly translated into a presumption of worth of any and all views different from one's own." Lyon (2000: 13) argues that for those on the receiving end of globalization, "Relativism and uncertainty is counteracted with absolutism and certitude." In the context of globalization, Lyon (2000: 15) believes that, "As consumer cultures become more entrenched and universal so they increasingly compete with explicitly religious orientations to life."

Anderson (1990) sees that postmodernism and globalization are indelibly intertwined. He argues that postmodernism cannot be seen as primarily an artistic, cultural or intellectual movement. "The postmodern condition is not an artistic movement or a cultural fad or an intellectual theory – although it produces all of those and is some ways defined by them. It is what inevitably happens as people everywhere begin to see that there are many beliefs, many kinds of belief, many ways of believing. Postmodernism *is* globalism; it is the half-discovered shape of the one unity that transcends all our differences" (Anderson 1990: 231).

There are significant implications for the church and preaching in Lyon's (2000) and Anderson's (1990) perspectives. In response to the relativising and "many ways of believing" that are commensurate with globalization and postmodernism, there is the temptation for the church and preaching to retreat to absolutism and certainty. On the other hand, if religious language no longer communicates in this new context then

there is a new opportunity to rediscover how to speak the Gospel in the language of the public square rather than the religious cloister. Similarly if the church, in the face of this new context, has lost the ability to appeal to a religious orientation to life, then rather than abandoning true religion by mimicking current consumerism there is a new opportunity for the church to speak of a personal and relational God, incarnate in Christ. Rather than simply following religious traditions that may not speak the Gospel in this day and age, this new context allows fresh exploration of what it means for God's people to incarnate the life of Christ and his kingdom. This can challenge empty religion and consumerism while inviting people to consider the reality of Christ.

2.2 Postmodernism as literary theory

Postmodernism as a literary, language & communication theory developed in the cultural and global context outlined in the previous pages. Four of the most influential thinkers in this field have been Derrida, Lacan, Rorty and Foucoult.

Derrida (1976) rejected the idea that language "has a fixed meaning connected to a fixed reality or that it unveils definitive truth" (Grenz 1996:141). He denied the meta-physical perspective of truth or presence. This is the idea that behind and at the foundation of language there is a truth, reality, or essence that the reader or hearer can come to know (Derrida 1976: 11-12). Vanhoozer (1998a: 21, 22) claims that, "The motive behind Derrida's strategy of undoing stems from his alarm over illegitimate appeals to authority and exercises of power. The belief that one has reached the single correct Meaning (or God, or 'Truth') provides a wonderful excuse for damning those with whom one disagrees as either 'fools' or 'heretics'. Derrida challenges the

pretension of the philosopher and the exegete to have arrived at a fixed or correct view of things. This holds true whether the thing in question is a text, an event, or the world as a whole." Interestingly Derrida argued that if the transcendent did exist it would have to be beyond and apart from language, so as not to be tainted and entangled by language (Grenz 1996: 142).

While this would not be Derrida's intent, his notion that the transcendent is beyond language would highlight the radicalness of the incarnational word that Christianity is based on. The God beyond language became a living Word to be read by humanity! In Derrida's (1976) view meaning is never fixed and static. He, "denies that meaning precedes interpretive activity; the truth of an interpretation depends on the response of the reader" (Vanhoozer 1998a: 26). A text always has alternative and changing meanings, depending on the passage of time and context (Grenz 1996: 144). Deconstruction is Derrida's means of taking apart the notion that something else lies behind language as there is no extra linguistic referent (Grenz 1996: 148). That texts can be understood as expressions of various meanings means that there is no ontological ground for certain knowledge (Grenz 1996: 150).

Lacan (1981), a psychoanalyst trained by Freud, took the ideas of Sausurre and Levi Strauss and applied them to the self. Saussure argued that language and social institutions were social and cultural constructions, while Levi Straus argued that self is so thoroughly embedded in a social context that it cannot be studied by delving into conscience but only by exploring cultural expression (Grenz 1996: 119). Lacan argued that the self is nothing in itself but is the product of language and discourse (Littlejohn 1996: 99). In summarizing Lacan's thinking, Vanhoozer (1998a: 67)

writes that, "The self does not stand behind language but in the thick of it, caught in a swirling crosscurrent of competing discourses and vocabularies that determine the way one thinks and speaks. Now, if language is an arbitrary structure, and if *logos* is shaped by language, then *logos* itself is only an arbitrary way of apprehending the world."

Foucault (1979) like Derrida did not believe there was a transcendent, metaphysical reality behind language and like Lacan believed that language and social discourse created the self. He is identified as a post-structuralist, in that he agreed with the structuralist's view that there were underlying structures or myths that constructed reality while rejecting the idea that these were universal or certain. He believed that worldviews, cultural rules and meta-narratives are so imbedded in language and discourse that these meta-narratives control and shape people and reality rather than language itself or particular communicators. He argued that there are competing and complex meta-narratives and like Derrida argued that reason and knowledge are linked to power. Those myths that are dominant are due to the exercise of coercive power. These dominant narratives need to be countered by offering other narratives and myth that counter the dominant myths of culture that give the appearance of meaning in history (Grenz 1996: 124 – 138; Vanhoozer 1998a: 70, 71). Deconstruction, therefore, offers liberty and freedom from oppression, and creates an openness that resists the closure that the "correct" interpretation imposes on freedom (Vanhoozer 1998a: 40).

Foucoult (1979) argued against the notion that meaning was determined by the author's intent. When this is done a special place is given to the author of the text

which is a way of limiting the possibility of meaning for fear of the proliferation of meaning. He argued that the idea of authorial intent was therefore a means of social control.

Foucoult (1979) also argued that due to the nature of these meta-narratives it is impossible for one period to think like another period and so to try and understand a text by reconstructing its cultural context and authorial intent has little value. He believed that interpreting the text does not reveal the underlying discursive structure and so should be minimised. The outworking of this is that the text is interpreted by the reader in the current context.

Vanhoozer (1998a: 38) separates two kinds of postmodern thinkers. There are the undoers or deconstructors of a text and there are the pragmatists or users of a text. While Derrida and Foucault would fit into the former category, Rorty (1991) fits within the pragmatist's category. Rorty argued that the search for truth should be abandoned and that we should be content with interpretation and the use of such interpretations. His perspective is one, "which does not view knowledge as a matter of getting reality right, but rather as a matter of acquiring habits of action for coping with reality" (Rorty 1991: 1). He argued this on the basis that correspondence between an assertion or concept, with objective reality does not establish truth. Nor is truth established by logical coherence between assertions. He proposed a philosophy that seeks to continue a conversation rather than discover truth. (Grenz 1996: 6; Rorty 1979: 393). Fish (1966) who presents a reader-response perspective, supports Rorty's pragmatism by arguing that texts should be used for their possibilities not studied to find the correct interpretation. Vanhoozer (1998a: 50) writes that, "For Rorty,

Western philosophy is only one story among others that people tell to help them cope; epistemology is a way of getting through the night." "Concepts do not mirror nature or represent how the world really is; they are simply tools humans use for certain purposes" (Vanhoozer 1998a: 55).

To try and summarise postmodern literary theory is difficult. Generally postmodernism as a literary perspective has a non-correspondence view of language with there being no inherent meaning in event or language. This is because language, the means of interpreting event, operates in a pre-suppositional playing field shaped by meta-narratives that are the primary determiners of meaning not language itself. These meta-narratives however have no inherent authority as they are also constructed by language that has no inherent referent. This circularity destroys equivalency and correspondence in language.

Postmodernism can also have a deconstructionist perspective. As there is no inherent meaning and structure in language that must be yielded to, there is a need to deconstruct meaning and the meta-narratives that are the basis for them, as they restrict individual freedom and freedom of expression.

The outcome is that language and event has no intrinsic objectivity that can be captured. Postmodernists are not absurdist in the sense of believing that reality exists only in the mind. They acknowledge there is reality out there but that there is not one correct interpretation and meaning for it. Language can be used, based on human freedom, to shape and describe event. The hearer or the reader is the interpreter and shaper of reality and this freedom cannot be imposed upon. Vanhoozer (1998a: 16)

argues that in a postmodern context, "The purpose of interpretation is no longer to recover and relate to a message from one who is other than ourselves, but precisely to evade such a confrontation."

Some may argue that postmodern literary theory is nonsensical word play but as Vanhoozer (1998a) highlights, it is a logical consequence once belief in God is ended, and it is based on serious scholastic endeavour. Derrida, "correctly perceives, as a philosopher, the implications for knowledge and interpretation of the death of God; henceforth, we have "only human" (e.g., fallible) knowledge, "only human" (e.g., relative) truth. Yet he sees further than Kant in perceiving that the loss of God leads to the loss of the knowing subject (the hero of modernity) as well. Derrida has correctly analysed the modern situation, or at least an aspect of it, *but he has done so by bracketing out orthodox Christian beliefs*" (Vanhoozer 1998a: 52). Vanhoozer (1998a) also adds that the death of God that deconstruction brings is the death of the God of the philosophers not necessarily the God revealed in Jesus Christ.

2.3 Evangelical Responses to Postmodern Literary Theory

Postmodernism highlights the influence of presupposition, context and social influence in how we read, hear or understand an event or text. The raising of this awareness has been critical in both understanding and communicating the Gospel.

Longman (1998: 23) urges the church not to be naïve about its presuppositions and idolatries. He encourages Christians to be rigorous in their reflection on the forces that shape their minds and hearts. He writes that the "Agenda of postmodernism is to

rescue the world from false stabilities of any sort" (Longman 1998: 25). This is true to the iconoclastic nature of the gospel.

Vanhoozer (1998a: 39) describes Derrida as iconoclastic in that he seeks to undo, "the idols of the sign: the idol of reliability (the sign corresponds to reality), the idol of determinacy (the sign has a single, fixed sense), and the idol of neutrality (the sign is a descriptive, not prescriptive or political instrument)." The postmodern call to deconstruction and iconoclasm is consistent with the Biblical idea that humans have a proclivity to craft their own wisdom regarding life and God and that these idolatries need to be brought down.

Pascal (1989: 231) writing over 300 years ago said, "We make an idol of truth itself, for truth apart from charity is not God but his image. It is an idol we must not love or worship for its own sake." Even sincere attempts at understanding and theologizing God will fall short and need to be de- and re- constructed on an ongoing basis. As hearers, due in part to our presuppositions and meta-narratives, we will also construct God in our own image. Hence the objectifying capacities of the exegetical sciences are also critical in deconstructing our own interpretations.

While the Bible, "speaks clearly and adequately according to God's purpose of salvation"(Longman 1998: 29) postmodernism's awareness of the presuppositions with which we come to the text needs to be acknowledged. "We all wear 'lenses' through which we read, influencing what we find or what we expect to find in the text. A modernist-scientific viewpoint denies this and asserts neutrality or objectivity. But this is the worst sort of blindness producing interpretations that do violence to the

text and assert a will to power"(Longman 1998: 30). We need to, "become as aware as we can of our subjectivity" and "read with openness to seeing new things and openness to correction"(Longman 1998: 30).

Postmodernism's call to be aware of presuppositions, subjectivity and social context are critical for evangelicals. Contrary though to postmodernism's scepticism about being able to encounter the transcendent behind or in the text, evangelicals hold to the belief that, "at the center of a Christian reading of the Bible is the belief that we encounter God in its pages. Differences abound among Christians as to how that encounter takes place, but virtually all who call themselves Christian hold that the Bible is a place where God meets men and women and appeals to their hearts and minds"(Longman 1998: 24).

Postmodernism's critique of meta-narrative, while valuing narrative myth has, paradoxically, been helpful in rediscovering the narrative flow of Scripture and in seeing the underlying meta-narrative of God's self revelation. Postmodern readings have also allowed mystery, anomaly and paradox to be seen in Scripture.

The reader-response perspective has allowed us to see that Scripture immediately invites the reader to engage with and respond to it due to its dialogical nature (Okure 2000: 457-460). We do not have to *master* the text in its objectivity before we can engage with it in our own humanness. One does not need to understand *all* the cultural and historical background, or master the exegetical sciences, or read through the lens of doctrinal formulations to engage with the text. As a living Word it is God who speaks.

Barth's concern for the living Word is explored by Ward (1995) in relation to postmodernism. In comparing Barth and postmodernism Ward (1995) argues that the postmodernist question of how to get beyond language to represent reality and postmodernism's acknowledgement that our words are limited by "otherness", are parallel to Barth's concerns of how words reveal the Word and are limited by "the Other". Vanhoozer (1998a: 51) argues that Ward's perspective then allows postmodernism to be seen as a strategy for theological thinking. That the Living Word is revealed through the written word highlights the dialogical nature of Scripture - there is both an objective and subjective tension in this reality that necessitates a dialogical engagement. Modernism and postmodernism both describe aspects of reality that need to be held in tension and dialogue but which ultimately without the meta-narrative of God, nullify faith.

Both modernism and postmodernism despite their differences, end up with the same epistemological foundation - language and senses determines and define reality, event and meaning, with the human perspective being central to the scientific and hermeneutical process. As Morrison (1999: 182) states, "Semantics and linguistic analysis, long under the dualistic sway of defunct logical positivism, have arbitrarily concluded that language cannot connote, denote, inform, or point legitimately beyond the world of the senses."

At the same time both modernism and postmodernism are grounded in reason. "Derrida is continuing the philosophical tradition of Kant, seeking out the conditions and the limitations of reason" (Vanhoozer 1998a: 51). In this exploration modernism

and postmodernism use reason differently and to different ends. Modernism explores and uses reason from an observational perspective, postmodernism from a phenomenological perspective. However the exploration of the conditions and the limitations of reason would seem to be an important endeavour within a Christian perspective that acknowledges the limits of reason and the necessity of faith.

Modernism asks us to yield to what is seen and cognated as there is an order that can be discovered and that must be submitted to, there is "a power to will". Foucault (1980: 133) in questioning this power to will, was aware of the use of language and meta-narratives to create oppression and this is why such meta-narratives need to be countered with alternative narratives. He believed that naming and interpreting reality is an exercising of power that does violence to the reality named and that social institutions are agents of such violence.

On the other hand, as there is no objective truth, just one perception verses another, postmodernism asks us to, on the basis of sensory data, yield to what is experienced and felt. (Even though terms like "sensory data" and "perception" imply an interpretive process that has a rationality inherent in it.) Without God modernism becomes objectivism and Law while postmodernism becomes subjectivism and the New Law of personal freedom. To use either as a primary exegetical or hermeneutical approach will not communicate the Gospel.

2.4 Present Postmodern culture

The current cultural expression of this movement is a mix of lost faith in modernism's certainties and truth systems but a continuing confidence in the invention, materialism, pragmatism and consumerism that is modernism's offspring.

In a pessimistic perspective Grenz (1996: 7) claims that, "Postmodernism replaces the optimism of the last century with a gnawing pessimism. Gone is the belief that every day, in every way, we are getting better and better. Members of the emerging generation are no longer confident that humanity will be able to solve the world's great problems or even that their economic situation will surpass that of their parents. They view life on earth as fragile and believe that the existence of human kind is dependent on a new attitude of cooperation rather than conquest". This is consistent with MacKay's (1993) analysis of the Australian public presented in the last chapter, but it may be also reflective of an evangelical perspective regarding the world that is read into Western Culture.

This gloomy outlook is countered by the West's continuing confidence in new technologies and science to bring about substantial solutions to significant human problems and thus create the good life. Knowledge as a means of salvation is still valued, though in postmodern culture there is the belief that there are many paths to knowledge apart from reason. This includes feelings and intuition as "the universe is not mechanistic and dualistic but rather historical, relational, and personal" with reality being, "relative, indeterminate, and participatory" (Grenz 1996: 7).

Evangelicals can also characterise postmoderns as self-centred and amoral. Instead, I would argue that in postmodern cultures there has been a shift to an ethic based on human rights and freedoms, resting in a community-based understanding of truth, often based on pragmatic means to a shared purpose. "Truth consists in the ground rules that facilitate the well-being of the community in which one participates," (Grenz 1996: 8). Culturally, postmodernism appears to move ethics and morality to Kohlberg's (1981) post-conventional stage of moral development. In this stage morality is not primarily based on law-codes and legal conventions but on principles of justice, rights and community well being. This has parallels with Fowler's (1981) reflective-individuative and subsequent stages of faith development as discussed in the previous chapter. As culture and individuals are increasingly dissatisfied with a law-bound morality and spirituality, preaching that is based on a narrow applicational hermeneutic will miss not only the heart of the Gospel but also the heart of its hearers. The postmodern theme of ethical imperatives coming out of personal freedom and not imposed law, has critical parallels with Paul's argument in Romans that freedom from the law through liberation by Christ (chapters 1- 11) is the basis for ethical living (chapters 12-16).

Postmodernism as a literary theory or view of language as distinct from a cultural movement, has influenced individuals to the degree that they may be more cynical about taking promises and propositional statements at face-value. Grenz (1996: 162) states that, "In this new context, Foucault's suspicion of every "present order," Derrida's questioning of reason by reason, and Rorty's thoroughgoing pragmatism are common parlance, even for those who have never heard the names of these philosophical gurus of postmodern culture." In this sense Australians may have been postmodern for much of their history as these qualities are present in at least the myth

of the Australian identity. However it could be argued that this suspicion about truth claims and promises is based not on postmodern philosophy but on an inherent, populist belief that words should mean something and have value, and that relational transactions do have some form and structure that should be valued.

2.5 Postmodernism and Christianity

Coldwell (1997) argues that in Australia like the rest of the world, the paradigm of Christianity as "Christendom" is collapsing. He argues that following the apostolic paradigm of the early centuries A.D. there has been a longer period of the Christendom paradigm where, "the church and the world were made one, the civic and social life of the Empire was baptized, Christian civilization was born, and the good Christian became the good citizen. There by and large the Church has remained, from the fourth century when Christianity became 'official' until well into the twentieth century"(Coldwell 1997: 15). He believes Christendom's influence is waning but still remains in the mainstream churches. "The Christendom paradigm bred the sort of Christians still well represented in our congregations in their old age…Faith for such Christians is diffused through their general sensibilities. It is an unreflective, morality-centred ambience rather than a belief *vis a vis* other beliefs. Its essence is more likely to be the ten commandments than the creed. Its almost invariable concomitant is good citizenship and a sense of civic duty. It is politically, socially and liturgically conservative"(Coldwell 1997: 15). Bolstered by modernism but challenged by postmodernism, the church which, "once was synonymous with meaning in the West"(Coldwell 1997: 16), is now treated as one more voice among a myriad of options.

Coldwell (1997) sees the Australian church responding in one of two ways. "With the aim of keeping Christendom alive, of maintaining the link between Christ and culture, the Church reduces its vision to morality, to psychotherapy, or to the championing of whatever current politically correct obsession of the left – what was often right wing conservatism in Christendom's heyday very often gives way to declining Christendom's mildly left-wing Christian activism in an attempt to preserve a social role for the church. But in all these cases Christianity is essentially little more than software for personal or social transformation, and like all software it is readily discarded when a better package comes along. On the other hand we see flawed attempts to revive the apostolic paradigm in the resurgence of various so-called 'conservative' Christianities. These have the sectarian-style elements of the apostolic paradigm, and a cognitive distance from the mindset of the prevailing culture up to a point. But they are really about self-preservation, and they are ultimately fearful. Where do we see in them the genuine fearlessness and zeal of the apostles to win the world to Jesus Christ, to engage and adapt, to converse and confute with the world, and to invest the talent that God has given? On the contrary, too much conservative Christianity is like the third servant in that shocking Gospel parable, whose careful self preservation in burying the talent given him by his master earned him a definitive rebuke – his proved to be the one strategy most inimical to the cause of the Gospel"(Coldwell 1997: 16). Coldwell (1997) argues the church either gives up its distinctive claims or retreats into a fundamentalist sectarianism. He sees the current situation as an opportunity for the Christian, "tradition to be unpacked to lay bare its core experiences, whereupon a new expression can be found more faithful to the original vision" (Coldwell 1997: 17).

The evangelical church in thinking that it is being relevant and a more informed reader of trends and culture than the church of previous generations, seems to have mistaken popular culture's disillusionment with modernism as an abandoning of modernism, while at the same time using the pragmatic, consumer mentality of postmodernist culture to create new means of gospelising. Willimon (1990) is critical of the churches response to cultural postmodernism, not due to outdated methodology but due to accommodation. In the postmodern world Willimon (1990: 11) argues that the church is no longer a threat to our culture as, "we have been so willing to accommodate the message of the Bible to the limitations of contemporary culture". In Australia this could become the new millennium's version of "Gumnut Theology". The church then mimics the culture - mistaking fashion for substance, becoming more consumer-orientated, minimizing the spoken as it becomes more visual and image based, and using these methodologies to say it has a better truth to live by. Though there are flavours of Rorty's pragmatism in this, and some churches validate such an approach on the basis of the cultural postmodern desire for the pragmatic, this is the modernist message in new guise, with the danger that populist, consumer driven means becomes the message. In this process, of which pragmatic, lifestyle related, applicational preaching is critical, the church then loses the power of the gospel, which is both a spoken (dialogical) and incarnate (seen and historical) Word. The existential – imperative link may be strengthened but again at the expense of the indicatively grounded story of God. The concerns of Minister 'E' for the loss of the indicative Word is expressed in his response to the following question.

Many contemporary churches in an attempt to be contemporary are going to topical approaches. Do you have any particular thoughts about this?

I think it is only a risk if you avoid the hard passages. You can fall into having your own hobby horses if you are only asking, "What does the world want us to speak

about?" You can miss out on some of the hard yards of thinking and grabbling with passages which I might never use in a topical sermon. I think here we address contemporary issues more by thinking here are the contemporary issues, what book speaks to that.

In determining to be seen as contemporary and relevant the church chases fashion and "what works", yet in its tardiness runs the risk of becoming outdated, unfashionable and ineffective. This is evidenced by the fact that both art and architecture have gone through postmodernist phases and have moved on to neo-modernist schools, while philosophy and theology is also moving beyond postmodernism with the post-foundationalism of thinkers such as Van Huyssteen (1997).

3. GOD'S SELF REVELATION

This theme will be further developed in the next chapter. At this point it will be simply stated that God's revelation in Scripture does not put as much faith *in* language as either modernists or postmodernists do. The importance of language and word is not underestimated, but not primarily in terms of a late 20th century debate about the nature and structure of language and meaning. Language and word is important in its relational dimension - in terms of how it allows or bars relationship with God and others.

 In keeping with its own phenomenological language, there is an assumed "is-ness" in Scripture regarding language - language "is". Language is both an adequate means to point to a reality bigger than itself and an inadequate means to capture God (Okure 2000: 459). Language gives substantial and sufficient means for the intent of Scripture to be realised but Scripture is not God. Modernist approaches to Scripture can claim to capture God in language while postmodern perspectives can claim that

language cannot reveal any God, and so the God of Scripture is ultimately a mystery. An even more critical postmodern perspective argues that God is simply a construct of language, which paradoxically is the error that modernism ultimately falls into in its attempt to master God through the text.

God's revelation is neither modernist nor postmodernist - it subsumes both observational and phenomenological realities in its theme of God's historical self-disclosure in Christ. Pascal (1989: 157) wrote the "The corrupting influence of reason can be seen in diverse and exaggerated customs. Truth had to appear so that man would stop living within himself". Scripture reveals that Truth is not an abstraction but a person and that this person is not the self-referent centre of the Universe for the God of Scripture is Trinitarian. The Trinitarian God reveals himself as holy and other-centred rather than subjectively focused. This is revealed in ethical imperatives that are not based on subjective whim and fancy but are relationally orientated, rational and ordered. At the same time God is truth and therefore he is not judged by an external code of ethics and truth. This is revealed in those instances where God methods and means appear irrational to our systems.

4. POSTMODERNISM AND PREACHING

Consistent with a postmodern emphasis on community, Longman (1998) argues that the reading of Scripture needs to be done in the context of community - it is a spoken, heard and dialogued word. This is consistent with Derrida (1976) who argued the primary nature of speech over writing. Derrida (1976) sees that speech entails the possibility of direct contact with the truth whereas writing is an implicit acknowledgement that such immediate contact is not possible. He sees that speaking

was closer to the source than writing and it has an immediacy that is connected to the speaker. Writing disconnects from the writer and loses the immediacy of its source (Derrida 1976:37).

Sermons in opening us up to God and each other, also opens us up to our subjectivity and idolatries while introducing us to what is new. This can only occur in sermons that have a dialogical base. Traditionally sermons have tended to reflect the belief that right doctrine communicated well will lead to salvation and lead us in our salvation (Hudson 1998: 19). Sermons that insist on our rightness in interpreting the truth of God would seem to close the door on new encounter with the living God. In the context of sermon and congregation Willimon (1990: 11) argues that, "A congregation is Christian to the degree that it is confronted by and attempts to form its life in response to the Word of God." Preaching is interactive. "It means in our life with the Bible, we claim to have been confronted by the living Lord." This is grounded in the fact that, "divine-human dialogue is the originating event of the church"(Willimon 1990: 12).

In addressing the postmodern shift at a cultural level, Webb (1998: 44) states, "Gone are the days when we can convince others to believe in the gospel based on logical, persuasive argument. Now, people need someone to describe why their faith is real, not as objective truth or dogma, but as subjective encounter." This does not mean we speak only of an imminent God, neglecting transcendence or truth, but Webb (1998) accurately describes the current existential context into which sermons are spoken and this must be acknowledged. Webb (1998: 45) rightly asserts, "who I am, my cultural

context, my immediate life struggles play a part in how I read, see and enter scripture." Interviewee 'D' reflects this shift in the following response.

Are there any particular changes in how you've understood learning in the context of Christian community over the years? Is there kind of a before and where you are now story to that?

Yeh, definitely. I guess I came from a framework that was about if you could just teach people and put it clearly enough in so many words and they grasp what you were saying, well then they've learnt it and then they could just go away and put it into practise in their life. What I've discovered is, even if you managed that, they need a whole lot of coaching, whole lot of trial and error, a whole lot of processing, they've got previous ways of thinking about it that they need to undo; all that's going on. People learn in lots of different ways; reason, authority, experience and revelation, so Reason was the paradigm I was coming from in the beginning, make it clear and they should get it – that's the end of the story.

But there's experience too, they need to try it before they believe it and sometimes they need to try and fail, try and fail before they succeed – it's just like windsurfing. The authority method, I never was really too strong on; I believe in the authority of the Bible but I don't expect people are just going to nod their heads just because it says. I think people will go and look for "how does that make sense?", before they are going to take it on board. Revelation of course is the inspiration part, God inserts it, and you get a sense "ah, that came from God," so away they go.

Smith (1998: 81) advocates that closer attention be paid to who our audience is. He writes, "Most evangelistic models assume a unified subject - a person who thinks consistently, logically, and in linear fashion - as the audience. When asked a question this person can be assumed to give a predictably reliable response nine times out of ten. This may have enjoyed acceptance in the modern era, but not so in postmodernity. That is, today, each one of us lives as Legion: many varied languages and dialects that we use and take in, many culturally varied network groups which we interact. Why does that matter? Because our schismatic selves require more than a simple hit-and-run with the gospel. Logical thought clearly expressed and understood no longer suffices, for each form of logic competes now with many logics and apathy; truth lived and experienced firsthand is now the key."

At the same time I think that we can misread what people are asking. Without a unifying, coherent meta-narrative that also operates at the community and personal level, people will tend to define needs in personal and experiential terms and seek need fulfilment in such terms. The church can then attempt to respond to the myriad voices of felt need. I believe what people most deeply need is a unifying story that engages and dialogues with existential realities and this is what preaching can uniquely offer.

5. SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS AND THE RESEARCH QUESTION

5.1 Analysis in terms of current praxis

The arguments forwarded in this chapter do not establish empirically that an applicational hermeneutic, based on epistemological or functional dualism (i.e. that truth exists outside of reality and a Christian's reality should increasingly approximate this truth) is operational in evangelical churches in Perth. There is evidence though that evangelicalism generally has been influenced by modernist pre-suppositions which feed an applicational hermeneutic. This hermeneutic has generated communicative praxis which in the light of postmodern culture risks becoming irrelevant. Postmodern culture is being responded to by simply developing new applicational sermons under the guise of being contemporary, pragmatic and relevant. The transformational authority of the historical and living Gospel is diminished. Minister 'A' speaks of this concern in the following manner.

You believe in connecting with the life situation of people, is that the same thing for you as relevance or is relevance something else?

Relevance is something else. Relevance means something on top, so to have relevant sermons is to speak about contemporary events, what the newspapers are saying. You must do this from time to time. Connecting with reality is about the undertones of the real world where people live, that's something deeper.

So how do you see 'relevance' and how do you see the 'deeper'?

Relevance is often froth and bubble, for example stuff you might hear when people preach with young people. They have all this sensational stuff about how bad the world is but it's all spectacular with nothing of substance underneath. It's seemingly relevant but it is froth and bubble.

Minister 'C' also expressed concerns about superficial understanding of the notion of

relevance. In response to a discussion about bringing the Scriptural text to the life of

the listeners I asked the following question.

Is that the same thing for you as relevance, or being relevant?

I see it as more comprehensive than relevance. Relevance is you tell the story first then you have the application at the end. Contextualization is much deeper. It isn't just this is the story of Jesus, or the story of the Good Samaritan and this is how you apply it today. It goes deeper than that to things like the principles behind what God gave the Israelites on how they are to treat their land. So you go back down to the principles and ask how do those principles work out in everyday life.

So it is more than exemplary preaching?

Yes. Let me give you an example. When I was at [the name of a particular church], before I went into ministry, I used to participate in writing a column for the local newspaper every week on an issue and thinking Christianly about it. We would take it in turns and some people would write a story and then add the Christian application at the end but I felt it was more important to look at the things that concern ordinary Australians and think Christianly about those. So Jon Sanders came home from his round the world circumnavigation and a whole lot of us went down and welcomed him through the moles at Fremantle. So I talked about the concept of coming home and that coming home is a very valuable way of thinking about coming back into relationship with the Creator, the Father. Or another time, I remember seeing my obstetrician in the days of having children and seeing all the gifts on his back wall and bookcase that he had been given and thinking about how fundamental it is for us to want to give thanks. You see these birth notices that give thanks to the doctor and the nurse and everybody else as if they were not just doing their job. And so think about that human instinct to want to give thanks, gratitude. And I remember Phillip Adams, who I enjoy listening to, saying that one of the problems of being an atheist as he is, is that you have no-one to thank for the good things in the world. So it is that deeper level of understanding what it means to be human and not just applying stories superficially.

Interviewee 'D' also expressed concerns about superficial contextualization.

So there is something about that kind of contextualisation that you wouldn't be an advocate of?

Yeh that's right, because there are many features of that kind of lifestyle that I think Jesus wants to undo. So the role of contextualization isn't the same as syncretism, just buy into it all. You learn the language that's going to best connect so that they can start to see what Jesus was on about and therefore what he wasn't on about. So that some self-reflection can go on and people can start making changes where that's needed. By crossing the street or saying hello (not gate-crashing their lives, but respectfully), we're actually critiquing that isolationist part of lawn-mower culture. But we also tap into their dreams for a loving community. And we affirm the good that is there, so we can have permission to show the better Way of Jesus.

5.2 Suggestions regarding future praxis

Postmodernism's rejection of correspondence between propositions and the world

Saviour. Consequently in preaching there may need to be better correspondence made

so that what is preached speaks more meaningfully about God in the reality of the

hearer's world.

Postmodernism would highlight the need to link truth to how life is experienced, that

preaching be more grounded in the existential. The imperative call of the applicational

hermeneutic is in itself a critical aspect of the claims of the Gospel. But when this is

not grounded richly in the indicative, and joined with the existential, then it simply

cultivates a behavioural system. While most Christians would acknowledge the

indicative, it is often assumed in sermons or presented as a collection of ideas not as a

thematic and coherent narrative. Evangelicals may also struggle to allow the

existential to be a more critical aspect of their exegetical and hermeneutical process.

This linking of the indicative, existential and imperative will be further developed as a

hermeneutical and praxis model in chapter 7.

Postmodernism would also highlight the importance, power and the immediacy of the spoken word in communication. Preaching has an immediate ability to connect that is distinct from the written word and this should be treasured and crafted.

Postmodernism's belief that there is no unified whole that can be called reality (Grenz 1996: 163) sets up a new dualism where reality and language are split, and paradoxically runs counter to a postmodern cultural concern for holism and unity. This coupled with a rejection of meta-narrative provides rich opportunity for preaching that offers a realist perspective, e.g. Torrance (1999). Such preaching can speak the rich meta-narrative of God as the centre of reality and of a God who speaks holistically. This would seem consistent with Rorty's (1991: 106) argument for a new type of coherence theory of truth where, "'truth' lies within an entire system of belief that is coherent. If it is coherent then it has truth", though as an evangelical, truth would not ultimately be grounded in the notion of coherence. The truth of the Gospel is not established by or grounded in its coherence but the coherence of the Gospel may be meaningful to a postmodern audience. In the absence of a culturally held view of meaning and unified existence, the message of the Gospel offers a unique voice. Evangelicals believe it is the true voice, those who hear a preacher may think that it is simply one among many. While not abandoning the historicity of Jesus (and in many ways valuing it more than some evangelicals do) and reasoned apologetics that support this, the culture of postmodernism may free the preacher to appeal to faith in the incarnate Christ rather than belief in a Gospel based on the propositional rationalism of modernism that can reduce Jesus to a series of ideas or life-principles. Preaching can echo postmodernism's scepticism about modernism and speak even more strongly against putting one's faith in a certain, rational, ordered and measurable

world. This though will sound empty when the hearer sees the church still putting its confidence in modernism's and consumerism's means, methodologies and ends.

Preaching can also reflect the postmodern concern regarding oppressive meta-narratives and for the sake of the Gospel wisely deconstruct them. In fact we might even go as far to say that all meta-narratives apart from the reality of God have a false-ness about them. This may encourage a bolder engagement with the world's meta-narratives yet greater humility in preaching as the church is honest about its own. Nor do we simply want to state that all meta-narratives are completely false because we believe that smaller narratives can be understood and even be part of God's greater narrative. This may mean that evangelical preaching is not as separatist but invites the world to consider their stories in the light of God's, even affirming those aspects of culture that may bear the witness of God (Okure 2000: 448; Romans 2:12-16).

The postmodern view that the text is meaningful only as an interpreter dialogues with the text could be restated to say that a text is only meaningful for an interpreter as they dialogue with the text. This is consistent with the nature of Scripture as argued in the next chapter. This approach then calls on preaching to engage listeners in a dialogue with the text. Rather than chasing some of the more superficial fashions of postmodern culture, which in certain contexts may be an appropriate pragmatic though temporal means, preaching needs to be elevated to its full potential as a communicative event that invites people into significant and rich dialogue with the Living Word and the story of God. The pursuit of relevancy based on fashionable means, rather than relevancy based on the belief that the Word is sufficient, powerful

and relevant to the human condition, tends to "dumb down" both the text and the interpretive capacities of the hearers. The audience may be postmodern but this does not mean it is stupid. In many ways the postmodern audience is more attuned to the falsities of formulaic answers for the task of living, is wanting dialogue regarding life and spiritual issues and is aware that their options in pursuing meaning are greater than ever before.

Coldwell (1997: 18) believes that the Australian church needs to "rediscover itself as a story-formed community" where features of the apostolic tradition would re-emerge". He sees in this a revival of biblical theology, a rediscovery of powerful liturgy and living distinctively in the world. "This would be manifest in Christianity recovering a characteristic vocation within secular culture, rather than continuing as merely an optional perspective on how to live a civic-minded moral life within that culture" (Coldwell 1997: 18). He argues that apart from the apostolic vision there is little to draw young people to the church. "While the charismatic Churches can offer young people an intense though often brief experience, in keeping with the romantic consumerism of today, it is only a great adventure that will decisively lure the young away from the dubious priorities and impoverished ways of being that the late capitalist society allows them"(Coldwell 1997: 18). He encourages Christians to see their faith as "the adventure of a lifetime"(Coldwell 1997: 18), with a renewed commitment to worship, education, evangelization, and lay ministry.

Coldwell (1997) though has some difficulty with those he calls post-liberals such as Willimon. The sole emphasis on story, critical to postmodern culture, can sideline the question of truth. "I want to know whether the story of Jesus Christ is true, or whether

it is just a personal favourite at best, a piece of unrealistic wish-fulfilment at worst. To be sure, the Christian story cannot be proven, if proof means establishing a direct correspondence with reality, using a correspondence theory of truth. But it can be believed on the basis of its coherence, both internally and with the experience of life and the world, using a coherence model of truth. I am most sympathetic to theologies today acknowledging that the proof and objective certainty is over, that religious conviction will only take hold once we open ourselves to the story of Christ and put it to work in our lives. But at the same time these are theologies not content to retreat into a cognitive vacuum, into a narrative enclave of meaning"(Coldwell 1997:19).

Coldwell (1997) cannot have an historical, true Jesus if there is not a correspondence perspective on truth. To set coherence and correspondence as oppositional views in regard to truth is unfortunate and wrongheaded. Both are intertwined aspects of truth that support each other. What is clear though is that neither correspondence nor coherence can serve an absolute function. Nevertheless Coldwell's (1997) argument would appear to be an opportunity to explore preaching that presents a coherent message of the Gospel that links life and the Word in meaningful ways.

In the Anglican tradition Coldwell (1997: 19) sees this as maintaining a conversation between the world and the story based on Richard Hooker's belief that God is in the story but he is also present "in the world into which that story erupts." He believes that this is the "abiding tone of the Christian story properly understood. It is not a story that condemns or fears the world. Rather, it tells of a God whose persevering covenant of love continually creates and redeems the world"(Coldwell 1997: 19). He sees that such a church will engage the world, open to God's truth in the world,

seeking healing and betterment of that world, though aware that the story will not be finished by human effort within the limits of world history and that the church will be political and at times even partisan. He envisions this stance as being consistent with Niebuhr's (1951) *Christ the Transformer of Culture*, "emphasizing ongoing creative engagement with the culture of which the Church is a part, as a story-formed community that stands at some distance from that prevailing culture"(Coldwell 1997: 20).

Grenz (1996: 167-174) believes that in a postmodern context the Gospel needs to embraced and communicated in a way that is "post-individualistic, post-rationalistic, post-dualistic and post-noeticentric."

Post-individualistic affirms the community as being essential to the process of knowing and is consistent with Willimon's (1990) theme of a communal hermeneutic in *Shaped by the Bible.* "The community mediates to its members a transcendent story that includes traditions of virtue, common good, and ultimate meaning"(Grenz 1996: 168). The community of the Gospel, "will seek to draw others to Christ by embodying the gospel in the fellowship they share"(Grenz 1996: 169).

Post-rationalistic is not an abandoning of the intellectual gains of the Enlightment but a recognition that we are more than rational beings (Crabb, 1987: 99) and that truth cannot be reduced to rational certainties. "We must continue to acknowledge the fundamental importance of rational discourse, but our understanding of the faith must not remain fixated on the propositional approach that views Christian truth as nothing

more than correct doctrine"(Grenz 1996: 170). Post-rationalism takes seriously the dynamic, relational reality of relationship with Christ.

Post-dualism highlights the issue raised previously of a holistic Gospel that sees the human being as a unified whole and is consistent with Piggin's (1996) evangelical emphasis of Word, Spirit and mission. "It involves integrating the emotional-affective, as well as the bodily-sensual, with the intellectual-rational within the one human person" (Grenz 1996: 172). It also puts the individual back into their social and environmental context and relationships.

Post-noeticism means that communicating the Gospel will be for the gaining of wisdom not simply the gaining of knowledge for its own sake. Wisdom emphasises the "relevance of faith for every dimension of life" (Grenz 1996: 173). Again his is consistent with Piggin's (1996: vii) view of evangelicalism in that, "It aims to produce right-heartedness (orthokardia), right thinking (orthodoxy), and right action (orthopraxis). It calls for the consecration of heart, head and hand."

The perspective offered is still predominantly a Western European worldview and so there is a clear need for a preacher to understand the culture of their particular church community and wider community. They may be neither modernists nor postmodernists. In Australia this is particularly true for indigenous Aboriginal communities and certain ethnic communities e.g. Asian, where Confucius, Hindu or Buddhist worldviews and epistemologies are operational. Mixed communities or multi-generational ethnic communities present unique challenges in presenting a contextualised message. What does seem true for many of these cultures is that aspects of Grenz's (1996) post-individualistic, post-rationalistic, post-dualistic and

post-noeticentric perspectives are already intrinsic to their worldviews. What is critical to many of these cultures is the telling of story and the possession of a grand-narrative. And so in this sense the community aspect of the post-individualistic gospel may be particularly important. Holistic perspectives of body and soul, physical and spiritual are present and post-rationalist and wisdom orientations are also valued in these communities.

Zerfass's (1974) model acknowledges a critical role for situational analysis in moving from praxis to praxis. This aspect may be somewhat unfamiliar to the evangelical church. Evangelicals would be more familiar with the need for theological analysis to shape praxis and it is to the consideration of theology and theological traditions that the research now turns.

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CHAPTER 4
THEOLOGICAL TRADITION

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1. ZERFASS'S MODEL AND THEOLOGICAL TRADITION

As mentioned previously in Chapter 1, Zerfass's (1974) category of theological tradition is problematic for two reasons. The concern that "tradition" can be suggestive of the past and overlook new thinking in the theological disciplines is not a major concern. The other concern is that of delineating between all other theological disciplines and practical theology, suggesting a distinction between "academic" fields of theological study and theology that has practice as its focus. This delineation is

necessary to identify fields of study but can suggest that some fields of theology need not be concerned with praxis issues. Grenz and Franke (2001: 12-13) are fearful that such indifference to theologies relationship to the life of faith and the academic inward focus on theological methodology has sidelined theological interest and impact in the church.

In this delineation Zerfass's (1974) model utilises current perceptions of practical theology *vis-à-vis* other theologies. I would argue this is a flawed perception that allows a false dichotomy to exist between theologies rather than asking "academic" theologies to do their theologies in the light of praxis, even if this be minimally in terms of the communication of their own theologies in interdisciplinary dialogue.

A basic presupposition of this paper is that God's revelation of himself in Christ is incarnational. While I am concerned about a narrow applicational hermeneutic, God's incarnational activity has an imperative, applicational intent. As Pieterse (1999: 417) states, "Every act of understanding involves interpretation, and all interpretation involves application - application is an essential moment of the hermeneutical experience. Theological knowledge is practical knowledge and is gained through practical reason." Theologies that do not recognise the applicational intent of their own theological communication, even though it may not be the primary goal for that particular field of theology, are naïve to the nature of communication. In regard to the particular theological focus taken in this paper, theology that is not concerned with its applicational intent would be inconsistent with the ontological and economical basis of an incarnational theology. This may be a state that such theologians are content with but if all theologies are communicative acts then all theologies need critical

interaction with practical theology. As Pieterse (1999: 416) states, "We must base practical theology in the wider context of the unity of theology."

I would also argue that Zerfass's (1974) model has a further weakness. The notion that theological tradition can be split from situational analysis was shown in chapters 2 and 3 to be difficult, if not at times impossible to maintain. Chapter 3 contained significant theological interaction with the situational analysis. Theological positions and tradition do not arise and exist in a situational vacuum and conversely theology is an important criteria by which to analyse the situational. While practical theology may sit in the tension between theory and praxis (Pieterse 1999: 415), stating this as a bipolar tension suggests a dichotomy between truth and experience that is difficult to sustain. Truth may not be simply the reflection of our experience but at the same time truth is not known outside of our experience.

This dichotomist point of tension between truth/theology and reality/situation is a particularly dualistic Western way of thinking and arguing (Pieterse 1995: 137). The split between the situational and the theological suggests a modernistic understanding of truth in relation to experience that certain hermeneutic theorists critical to practical theological thinking would not support. Habermas (1982) argues for a dialectical synthesis between empirical science, hermeneutics and practice. Gadamer (1975) argues that understanding comes through dialogical engagement with tradition and experience and Ricoeur (1991) argues that human action and experience can be interpreted hermeneutically as can a text. These theorists are critical in Pieterse's (1999: 417) development of a 'correlational hermeneutic - communicative praxis' that is foundational to practical theology. This would suggest dynamic interaction and

continuity is as critical a perspective in regard to theory and praxis as is bipolar dichotomy.

The post-foundationalism of Huyssteen (2000: 11-39) also emphasises the continuity between the theoretical and the situational by arguing that all experience is an interpreted event which is hermeneuted through a rational matrix that is shaped by theory, tradition and experience. Theory, tradition and experience as elements of this rational construct, interact with each other in a fluid manner each influencing the other in an ongoing circularity. The construct through which experience is interpreted is therefore never a "pure" theory that exists outside of experience and the construct itself interacts with new experiences in a dynamic, interactive manner. While evangelicals believe that reality and truth can exist outside of ourselves (we are not the summation and reservoir of truth), how we describe that truth and reality is constructed by human language (Grenz & Franke 2001: 23) which then also effects how we experience reality.

Unique to the Christian paradigm that shapes how experience is understood is revelation - the notion that God has spoken to humanity through Scripture, Christ and the Church. Coupled with this is the belief that this revelation speaks truly. It speaks truly as God is truth and the truth it speaks is the truth that corresponds to what really is, even if unseen and unheard. This cannot be confused with theology or literalism. Theology, as the servant rather than the master (Grenz & Franke 2001: 17) of the truth of God, and while it uses the inspired Word under the guidance of the Spirit, is nevertheless a human construction that may or may not correspond, correlate and cohere with the truth. That God allows us to theologise him and his truth again reveals

his dialogical engagement.

At the risk of repeating themes from the last chapter this revelation of truth is distinct from a purely modernist idea of truth, which evangelicals have slipped into. This view presents truth in Platonic terms as an abstraction that can be mastered. My concern is not primarily with the notion of abstraction which seems an unavoidable aspect of describing reality. My concern is with mastery – the human tendency that seems to permeate all our attempts at theorizing. For example "God is love" is a language construction and an abstracted truth claim that corresponds to the reality of the love of God, a truth that is not the construct of humans but revealed by the self-revealing God. Our understanding, or construction, or abstraction, of either God, love or the connection between the two may be in error or incomplete (it is truer to assume that it always will at least be incomplete) but this does not alter the objective truth of God as love. Existentially and subjectively this objective truth may not be experienced as reality. Some may not believe that such a reality is grounded in God but purely in our construction of love, God or both. But that it is an objective truth that stands outside of our own subjectivity means that it makes a demand on us existentially and relationally. The objective qualities of something that is real makes a claim on people even if the language used to describe or name what is real or the qualities it possesses is inadequate. It could be claimed that this property is what distinguishes an objective reality from that which is theoretical or abstract. A rock could be called a "$%&*#@". If this is a shared symbolic form this may be adequate for the task of naming and referring to a rock. Certainly as a name it will not reveal all that pertains to a rock but the truth concerning a rock does not lie in its name, it lies in the objective reality of a rock. That a rock has a certain qualities such as hardness is an

objective reality that makes a demand on me in terms of how I existentially engage and relate to that rock. I can ignore this claim if I decide to relate to the rock by kicking it but I will suffer the consequence of my action. Not all rocks have this claim on me as I will not encounter all rocks. But due to empirical scientific studies the quality of hardness is one that rock's possess, otherwise it would not be a rock. I can therefore take this paradigm or classification with me in my journeys so that my engagements with rocks are not always profound new moments of existential encounter. (This capacity to study and classify is indeed part of the modernist endeavour that has clear importance and value.)

This may be easier to argue when discussing a rock but may be harder to uphold when discussing "love" or "God". Is love objectively real? I would argue that it is and that it realness is evidenced by qualities (e.g. 1 Corinthians 13 – though not an exhaustive list) that make a claim on a person in the presence of those qualities. If those qualities are not present then it is not love. At this point both context and language can shape what qualities of love may be present in any given interaction. In the context of Corinthians the qualities listed as loving are critical to the issue of spiritual gifts (Van Oudsthoorn: 2000) while in another (e.g. Hebrews 12) discipline is a quality of love. This does not mean that the qualities of love are situationally determined and arbitrary. All qualities that express love are at all times the qualities of love though what qualities are expressed at any one point may be situationally shaped. Ultimately the qualities of love are revealed in the one who is love, God, revealed to us in his written and incarnate Word.

Evangelicals do not help the notion of truth by claiming a level of objectivity for its

own beliefs and knowledge that go beyond the reality revealed in the Word. Nor does the church help by claiming as objective truth, dogma which it has abstracted and divorced from reality and narrative in a modernistic fashion. In a paradoxical fashion the church does not help an understanding of truth by its tendency to live in a world-denying and reality-denying manner that is more akin to Gnosticism. At times the evangelical church in its defence of biblical revelation takes an anti-scientific stance that seems to deny any objective reality apart from that which is spiritual. Spiritual "truths" divorced from reality actually denies the objectivity claimed for them and opens the Gospel for dismissal. If the church minimises the objectivity and historical basis of the Gospel meta-narrative, turning Jesus into an idea, principle or power for living, then it can hardly be surprised when others dismiss Christianity.

The claim of evangelical Christianity is that God is objectively real. This is evidenced in his incarnation. His objective realness in Christ makes a claim on humanity in terms of relationship with him and how we then relate to the world. The objective realness of Christ makes a claim on us to consider the life and words of Jesus and who he and his followers claim him to be, and to live life in accordance with our conclusions. While as evangelicals we do not believe that language creates the reality of God, (God is the one who uniquely creates by speaking, though as his 'sub-creators' he allows us to construct from what exists) who people declare Christ to be and how we theologise him, can uniquely shape the nature of our relationship with him. Jesus in asking Peter, "Who do you say I am?" (Mark 8:27-30, NIV) is asking Peter to recognise and name the reality of who Jesus is and his claim on Peter's life. Apart from human acknowledgment (even if Spirit inspired and which may be as much a process as an event) God does not impose a relationship on us. This is an

inherently dialogical process. In terms of authority it may not be dialogical equality as God authors, inspires and inSpirits the dialogue but that he allows us to consider who he is, name him and theologise him reveals both the humility of God and relational heart of God. Whether or not I declare to a rock, "You are a rock", it will impose its objectivity on me if I trip over it. It is not a dialogical engagement. But God does not impose and dictate, he reveals and invites acknowledgment. It is not quite as open-ended as this. While God may give the freedom to live as though his objective reality has no claim on us, our freedom is in a sense no freedom for apart from God it leads not to life but death. Humanity living this way will continually come up against the consequences of violating the objective reality of God and his design (including moral design) for his creation. But this in itself is an act of non-imposition that reveals that God is patiently waiting for opportunity to reveal himself.

God's objectivity has never come to us outside of relationship (creation itself is a relational act and sets up a relationship between Creator and creation). It has not come to us in purely abstracted propositional form. God's revelation is experienced through our own humanness and so it too is an interpreted event. In Scripture the event or content that is being interpreted may be from beyond our humanness and so is a place where God can be encountered. But as evangelicals we claim more than the idea that God can be *encountered* in the Scriptures or that God speaks *through* the Scriptures. The idea that God can be encountered in or through the text seems to be an attempt to once more meet God in a text that has become dead through propositional abstraction. The notion that God can be encountered in or through the text reinforces the idea that the text is indeed a dead document with God lurking in the background somewhere, who we hope may come out and surprise us. Evangelicals claim that God has spoken

in Scripture whether or not an individual encounters God in their reading or hearing of

the text. We believe the word is an "inSpirited" word (Grenz & Franke 2001: 64-83).

We may have deadened it by propositional abstraction but the response to this

problem is not to find if there is another way that God may speak from the dead text

but to reclaim the truth of the Spirit's activity in the Word (Pieterse 1995: 15).

Minister 'A' captures something of this "inSpiritedness" in response to the following

questions.

When you give a sermon do you have any particular sense of how you would like people to respond to your sermon?

Yes I would like them all to be wildly excited about it. I want them to be moved. I think that a sermon is a way to make people see rather than just giving them information.

Moved by, and seeing what?

The vision of the text opens them up to God, to see God and the world and each other, to see all of reality differently. So it is really to create a new paradigm.

In response to Huyssteen's (2000) theory, I would argue that there are at least three

places, apart from Scriptural revelation, where something outside our personal

humanness can "intrude" and create an opportunity for revelation. Firstly when

experience does not match the conceptual paradigm, there is an opportunity for

transcendence or what Huyssteen (2000: 29) calls the quality of mystery. Secondly,

community is a place where that which is outside of us can meet us. In community

"this interpreted experience will now often be religious experience, where the

experiences of genuine love, faith, or permanent commitment may be deeply

revelatory of what is believed to be beyond these experiences" (Huyssteen 2000: 18).

Thirdly, I would add that ignorance - that which we do not know, either consciously

or unconsciously, is part of the conceptual and experiential matrix that we bring to an

event. Ignorance is a point where that which is outside of ourselves can also become known.

If Zerfass's (1974) theological tradition is understood to be the theoretical arm of the bipolar tension, while situational analysis is the experiential, then it perpetuates an inadequate understanding of the dynamic continuity of the two. This dichotomy perpetuates the false notion that academic theology can be outside the experiential and that the situational can be separate from the theoretical or the theological. Chapter 7 will attempt to develop a model that more accurately represents this continuity while at the same time does not make theory equal experience and experience equal theory.

A possible starting point in the development of a model is the acknowledgment in practical theology that its focus is on the praxis of faith and its communicative acts. Practical theology is -

1) experiential - "Theology studies the faith of people in God, and their religious experience and religious praxis" (Pieterse 1999: 416).

2) hermeneutical - "Theology works with a hermeneutical approach, and practical theology also" (Pieterse 1999: 416).

3) situational - this combines the experiential, contextual, and meta-theoretical

4) indicatively grounded in the revelation of God,

5) imperatively focused in terms of past and current praxis (tradition) and future praxis, and

6) interactive - it engages with other theologies and disciplines.

Points 3 - 6 are summarised by Pieterse (1999: 416), when he states that, "Modern theology works with a critical correlation between contemporary, contextual religious

experience and the Christian tradition. The hermeneutical approach in theology

functions as a bond that brings unity in the different disciplines of theology."

While this is a definition that Pieterse (1999) uses for practical theology it has

important similarities with Grenz & Franke's (2001: 16) definition for all of theology.

They state that, "Christian theology is an ongoing, second order, contextual discipline

that engages in critical and constructive reflection on the faith, life and practices of

the Christian community. Its task is the articulation of biblically normed, historically

informed, and culturally relevant models of the Christian belief-mosaic for the

purpose of assisting the community of Christ's followers in their vocation to live as

the people of God in the particular socio-historical context in which they are situated."

In this definition the classic disciplines such as Systematic Theology serves the intent

of God in shaping the life and community of faith in their service to God. Classical

foci such as the study of God (Theology Proper) or Christology do not claim authority

over the church or the Scriptures (in either an evangelical or liberal manner) by the

"accuracy" of their propositional formulation. Rather the propositional formulations

serve the life of the church and the life of faith, in service to God. Indeed this focus

shapes the content of the propositional formulations.

These very definitions then set up a dialogical process. The academy serves the life of

faith and the church rather than act as its master and protector (often ignored by the

church anyway). The life of the church then becomes a critical factor in the

development of theology which requires dialogical engagement between the

theologian and the church in a spirit of mutual submission and intercourse.

A weakness of this approach can be that the life of faith and the church becomes more important that the object of theology and faith, i.e. God. That these definitions of theology apply to practical theology is sound in that its focus is the life of faith. That Grenz & Franke (2001) apply their definition to all of theology is more problematic in that their definition is primarily economic and functional rather than ontological. This can then set up a new version of a pragmatic, applicational hermeneutic. Whenever propositions or praxis takes precedence over the source and author of faith then there is ultimately a deadening of faith. This concern is countered by the notion that God does not set himself up as simply an object to be studied and admired but calls us into the dialogue of faith. Nevertheless theology is first of all a servant of God rather than the church. Certain emphases in the dialogical approach can denote a sense of mutual cooperation between God and humanity and deny that as God is ontologically distinct from humanity he also at times stands against humanity. A dialogical approach must remain alert to the errors of human propositions and praxis in regard to God, recognizing that it is a dialogue in submission to God.

Despite the weaknesses in Zerfass's (1974) model and taking into account the experiential dynamic of theological tradition, Zerfass's (1974) model will remain the procedural basis for this analysis, which at the point of theological tradition in regard to preaching runs into a problem in the Australian context. There is a significant lack of theological studies on preaching in Australia. Therefore the research will have to consider broader theological categories with the danger again being that in going broader, support can be found for one's own argument while other categories may be overlooked.

2. THEOLOGICAL TRADITION

2.1 Incarnation, Trinity and Covenant

The evangelical tradition claims that its theology and praxis is ultimately grounded in the person and works of Jesus Christ. "Christian preaching has its origin in the base and content of faith, Jesus Christ. God revealed himself in word and deed in the history of Israel, a revelation culminating in the complete and final revelation in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus not only brought the Word of God, he *is* the Word of God (Jn 1:1-18), he not only proclaimed the truth, he *is* the Truth (Jn 14:6). The entire history of Jesus Christ not only manifests the truth, it also realises the truth. The truth of the Word is Jesus Christ, the crucified but resurrected and therefore living Lord. Jesus Christ is himself the original figure of the canonical truth of salvation - not as a metaphysical principle, but as the living Lord who meets humankind in the present in his living Word "(Pieterse 1995: 5). Pieterse (1995) in reference to 1 John 1:1-3 highlights that preaching is concerned with the testimony of the apostles regarding what actually happened in the life of Christ. "This testimony is the basis of the apostles preaching and indeed all preaching. Their testimony came to be owned by the church and the church has kept and preached this testimony through the ages to the present day. Christian communicative actions are sustained by this testimony and determined by it. He or she who has the word in preaching, cannot simply air his or her own opinion, but interprets this specific testimony passed on to us concerning Jesus Christ to the congregation. That is why the action of preaching is acting in faith" (Pieterse 1995: 6). Pieterse is also aware that while the Word of God can be heard in preaching, preaching is not *the* Word of God but an act of interpretation based on a belief that the Holy Spirit is at work (Pieterse 1995: 9).

It is this very centrality of the Living Word and the written Word in evangelical tradition that can set up the error of biblicism, or perhaps more often the error of the church and minister acting as master of the Word rather than its servant, with its consequent behavioural, applicational hermeneutic. Piggin's (1996) view of evangelicalism as more a movement than a theology or an ideology can help counter this biblicism, as the elements of Spirit, Word and world are recognised as key emphases in this movement that need to be understood in their inter-relatedness.

Morrison (1999: 166) states the evangelical position as follows. "By thus identifying Scripture as the written Word of God, the claim is then that God has revealed himself historically in acts, centrally and supremely in Jesus Christ. It also means that God has revealed himself personally to persons to redeem them; that God has revealed himself 'content-fully,' i.e. that God's self disclosure is not fully given in a bare act of power (e.g. Exodus) nor in dramatic, but conceptually empty, 'will-o'-the wisp' personal encounters, but 'content-fully' in ways effectually expressible in and as human speech, even written language." This allows humanity to enter into dialogue with the living God as objective reality.

Evangelicals claim that we can have confidence in the written Word. Baudrillard (1995: 80-81) argues that we can have sufficient confidence in language and communication as that confidence is guaranteed by God. He argued that a sign (language) could exchange meaning as God is the guarantee of the exchange. Groothuis (2000: 66) states that this guarantee is grounded in the Trinity where, "Communication has eternally existed between all the members of the Trinity and continues as God speaks to us."

Morrison (1999: 170) also adds that evangelicals recognise "Scripture's unitary connectedness to, in, and under Christ the Word," with an acknowledgment of the Scriptures as part of, "God's gracious, condescending self-giving, to be known objectively and redemptively as he is himself in the world." But Morrison is careful to acknowledge, "that the phrase 'Word of God' is used with contextual variety in Scripture. Scripture is *not* 'Word of God' in the same sense, or better, as I will argue, at the same 'level' as Christ the Word, for he is by nature the eternal, self-disclosure of God (John 1). And yes, Scripture is the God-given witness to Christ (John 5:39). Scripture, by the process of *theopneutos*, in, of, from, and under Christ, is *derivatively* Word of God. But by God's grace, it *is* Word of God, a conclusion affirmed by scriptural usage of the concept 'Word of God' ".

As praxis cannot be divorced from interpretative activity so too the, "acts of God are vacuous without verbal interpretation" (Morrison 1999: 173), i.e. the meaning of the acts of God cannot not be known apart from his interpretation to us of his acts. Evangelicals believe that God has spoken in Scripture the content and purposes of his acts but "the nature of 'inspiration' ...of the historical text of Scripture is not intended to displace the centrality of Jesus Christ, the ontological Word made flesh, in the whole of God's redemptive self-disclosure. Scripture is the inspired witness to Christ; it is such by the Spirit under Christ the Word. But this subordinate servant's role is clear in Scripture itself and is affirmed historically by the church" (Morrison 1999: 175).

While questioning Fackre's (1997) position, Morrison (1999) agrees with Fackre's (1997: 175) statement that, "Inspiration, while *part* of the revelation story, is neither

the whole or the heart of it, and must find its *derivative* place under the Word *enfleshed* and its *relative* place before the Word *eschatological.*" Morrison (1999: 175) argues that, "Christ the higher "level" of divine disclosure is the interactively related basis of the lower, historical, written 'level' of revelation by the Spirit of God. This is the position taken in Scripture when Scripture itself is referred to." Morrison's (1999) perspective supports the notion that preaching uses the Word as its authoritative source but is clear that this Word is referent to Christ and relationship with Christ.

In discussing the work of Wolterstoff (1995) in relation to his view of language, Morrison (1999: 186) states that, "The outcome of his multi-leveled analysis of language theory is that God need not remain incommunicative beyond bare act or meeting ('manifestational revelation') but that God can and has made historical 'assertions,' 'propositions' ('non-manifestational revelation') and that this speaking can and has resulted '*in a text* which, when properly interpreted, transmits knowledge from God to us.'"

In the evangelical tradition it is this written Word as witness to the Living Word that is preached. Pieterse (1995: 9) argues that, "the sermon should let Scripture speak in such a way that the Word of God can be heard, that the sermon will be bound to a text. Preaching in a congregation….presupposes a congruency between preachers and their listeners, that they share in the fellowship of faith. In this fellowship, the Bible serves as the highest authority in the reformed tradition. The fact that the sermon is bound to a text facilitates the faithfulness of preaching with the origin of the Christian faith." In referring to the commission of Jesus in Matthew 28:18-20, Pieterse (1995:

11) writes, "With the commission to preach, the content of preaching is given: the contents of the Bible."

While Morrison's (1999) view of the Word is Christ and Spirit dependent, there is a danger with Morrison's (1999) perspective that evangelicalism readily falls into. Too easily with the Gospel grounded in the Word it becomes a description of what God *has* done for us. The acts of God can be communicated in the past-tense. This makes the text a dead text that must be brought to life by *application* in the present and in the evangelical tradition this aids an applicational hermeneutic. Piggin's (1996) emphasis on mission calls us to think of what the Gospel means in the present-tense, while his emphasis on Spirit means that this present-tenseness does not come about by reviving the text but because it is alive in the present-tense due to the activity of the Spirit.

Garrett (1997: 8) speaking from an Australian context says, "The word God speaks runs as deep as God's own being. God is not God apart form the outpouring of word toward the world. And the presence of that word, its shape and meaning, is given….in the concrete figure of Christ…This word is flesh of our flesh alive and active, before our eyes and in our hearing. And more. For preaching to make sense this Word made flesh, to which scripture bears testimony, must in turn be able to take up habitation in human speech and action. Christ must be in the word proclaimed by us. A real presence. Otherwise preaching is mere reportage of information, the recollection of a life once lived long ago and far away, not the God-filled word upon which faith and hope and love depend. And to cap it off, if preaching is to involve this living encounter it means that God, God the Spirit, must be active in our speaking. Preaching takes place at the pleasure and in the power of the Spirit. To preach at all

this minimum of Trinitarian theology is needed: That God is. That the God who is speaks. That the speech of God is trustworthy. That it has specific and understandable shape in Christ. That it can be reiterated in human words. That in the power of the Spirit such words become the living presence of grace. Such is the metaphysics of preaching. 'I will make my covenant between me and you…' Without a God-initiated covenant there can be no *possibility* [of] preaching. Without trust in that covenant there can be no *practice* of preaching."

Covenant is intrinsically dialogical. An agreement between two parties with mutual promise and obligation that binds the two parties together. The very nature of Scripture is dialogical in its covenantal base that assumes speech between God and humanity. Torrance (1999: 86) argued that "In order to be heard and understood, and to be communicable as Word, divine revelation penetrates into the speaker-hearer relationship within the interpersonal structure of humanity and becomes speech to man by becoming speech of man to man, spoken and heard through the intelligible medium of a people's language. Thus the reciprocity created by the movement of divine revelation takes the form of a community of reciprocity between God and man established in human society, which then under the continuing impact of divine revelation becomes the appropriate medium of its continuing communication to man."

2.2 Scripture as public text

C.S. Lewis argued that even before Scriptures Trinitarian, incarnational and covenantal content and purpose is understood, the Bible is dialogical in that by its very nature it is a public text. In this sense it has no unique claim in being dialogical. Lewis argued that texts developed from alphabets which evolved so that public communication beyond the verbal could occur. Alphabets gave the ability to write

texts that allowed the communication and interchange of ideas. Alphabets were

generally common codes developed to allow the communication and dissemination of

ideas between people, i.e. they serve a public purpose. Texts in Lewis's views are

primarily public items that allow the public flow and discussion of ideas. Texts are

not primarily private documents subject to individual and subjective interpretation.

Edwards (1998: 34) argues that for Lewis the, "most helpful critic is one who

promotes such a "public text" - who examines "the poem the author really wrote"

instead of one he effectively made up himself. To do otherwise is the obverse of true

reading, which for Lewis always lifts up the reader "out of his provincialism by

making him 'the spectator' if not of all, yet of much, 'time and existence'" and brings

him "into a more public world" ". Lewis believes that written language is a sufficient

means to communicate ideas that people can understand, question, explore and

respond to and that good literature serves the public domain and keeps its public

audience in mind.

The Bible therefore as a public text is not a mystery document that only experts hold

the key to interpreting, or whose meaning is primarily determined by the private

interpretation of the reader. It is a public text that is to be explored publicly. While

authorial intent is important to Lewis, that texts are public documents makes the

determination of meaning a public, hermeneutical and dialogical affair. This also

means for Lewis that scholarship is not an end in itself. Scholarship is to be brought

out into the public domain, not cloistered in Christian or theological enclaves.

Lewis was not a fan of modernist literary methods that tended to think that

imagination and creativity on the one hand and historicity on the other were mutually

exclusive. He argued that the two are compatible in that Scripture as literature needs to be understood as literature is understood. The elements that make up literature are the elements that make up the Bible. Lewis believed that Christian literature's success depended on "the same qualities of structure, suspense, variety, diction, and the like which secure success in secular literature" (Lewis 1939, Public Address, published in Hooper 1967: 1-11). He believed that while Scripture told an earthly yet unearthly story, needing vision and imagination to grasp (exemplified so vividly in his own writing) that it is grounded in the historical event of the Cross and therefore as a public, historical event is subject to public, rational study, inquiry, debate, dialogue and defence. This is by no means Enlightenment modernism as Lewis was well aware of the limitations of rationalism in trying to capture the mystery of God, arguing that reason and language could never adequately express Transcendence and that rational discourse and philosophy can only "hint at the unsayable" (Ware 1998: 56). He was clear that the truth of the Gospel is too vast to simply be described and defined. "The "doctrines" we get out of the true myth [the Gospel] are of course less than true; they are translations into our concepts and ideas of that which God has already expressed in a language more adequate, namely the actual incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection" (Lewis quote in Hooper 1986: 165-166). Ware (1998) also argues that this was partly why Lewis expressed some of his deepest theological thoughts through poetry, myth, and symbol and was then iconoclastic in regard to the images he and others made of God. Nevertheless Lewis firmly based his beliefs on the reality of God's saving acts in Christ.

While a champion of imaginative invention, Lewis as a vivid creator saw himself clearly as a sub-creator, believing the highest form of literature and art is that of

imitation. The Postmodernist's urge for the new and innovative, is countered by Lewis's insistence that the "basis of all critical theory [is] the maxim that an author should never conceive of himself as bringing into existence beauty or wisdom which did not exist before, but simply and solely as trying to embody in terms of his own art some reflection of eternal Beauty and Wisdom" (Edwards 1998: 37).

Dialogue and discourse did not minimise Lewis's concern for form and structure. Being dialogical is not an excuse for lack of preparation and a cavalier approach to preaching. Lewis countered any contempt for form and structure by arguing that it is the writer who submits to the conventions of form and structure who is often the most creative and original. He wrote that the greatest error is to assume that the imposition of a form like a sonnet, fantasy or epic on the writer's thoughts, feelings and experiences keeps them from being original. "The attempt to be oneself often brings out only the more conscious and superficial parts of a man's mind; working to produce a given kind of poem which will present a given theme as justly, delightfully, and lucidly as possible, he is more likely to bring out all that was truly in him, and much of what he himself had no suspicion" (Lewis 1961: 3).

Lewis argued for a reasoned, creative dialogical discourse based on sound methodology and hard work. Haphazard attempts at dialogical and contextualised approaches are inadequate.

2.3 Dialogue as Scriptural Pattern

Apart from theological grounds and the nature of Scripture as a public text there are still other reasons for arguing that preaching be dialogical. While scholars

acknowledge that there are several types of literary genre in the Scripture, dialogue is seldom acknowledged as a genre in itself. Dialogue is usually seen as a literary device within a narrative genre. Scripture is replete with dialogue of many types e.g. narrative, poetic, prophetic, written correspondence. It is clear that Scripture is dialogical. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament contain dialogue, God with humanity and humanity with each other. God converses with Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses and many others, and it is not one-way conversation. He allows enquiry, doubt, complaint, grief and negotiation as well as praise, worship, obedience and submission. This is clearly exemplified in the Old Testament in the Psalms. The hymn book of the people of Israel is intrinsically dialogical - written, heard and sung in the context of their lives as the people of God, in response to the acts of God.

Jesus in his own ministry is continually amongst the people dialoguing with them. In stories and parables he invites points of identification and parallel so as to invite people into the message (Okure 2000). The stories and parables often present a twist on people's expectations but unless the people were in the story, travelling along with it, the twist in the tale would not have had impact (Crossan 1988). Christ often spoke in a directly invitational, inclusive manner. "Let us….." (John 11:15; 14:31, NIV), "When you……" (Matt. 6:2, 3, 5: Mark 11:25; Luke 14:12, 13, NIV), "Consider……." (Mark 4; 24: Luke 8:18; 12:24, 27, NIV). At least this is how it is recorded for the hearer or reader so that as they hear and read they are immediately invited into the text. They become part of the story and the dialogue, not only as a reader and observer of the story but a subject and interpreter of the story.

Even the Epistles, which evangelicals can tend to think of as the most systematic and

propositional of the biblical texts are highly contextual both in setting and content. They are written in light of specific situations and so in their content are truths for a situation. It is this contextualization that at times makes Scripture difficult to interpret. Is this truth specific only to a particular time and place or is it general, cross-cultural, 'timeless' truth speaking implicationally to a specific context?

Scripture makes it clear that it was to be dialogued, read publicly, preached and passed on (e.g. Deut. 6: 4-9, 20-25; Psalm 119:9-16, 46; Matthew 28: 18-20; Acts 2: 43-47; 4: 32-35; 1 Corinth. 14: 26-33; Col. 3: 16,17; 1 Tim. 4: 11-13). It is a privilege that we can read the Bible in a private, individual context due to high levels of literacy. But the stories, laws, prophecy, oracles, songs, speeches, proverbs, gospels and letters that make up the canon were initially spoken and heard in a public context. For centuries even the canon in its final form was primarily read to hearers who then engaged with each other and the world in light of what they heard.

It seems clear from these broader considerations that preaching is based on a thoroughly dialogical faith. But the focus of this thesis is the Australian context and to this context we will turn. There are few Australian theological voices that consider the place of dialogue and contextualization in preaching. Those studies that will be considered here highlight the value of both creative and methodical thinking.

2.4 Australian Theological Voices

There are very few theological considerations of preaching with a specifically Australian voice or context in mind. There are writings that explore issues of postmodernity (e.g. Conrad 1991, Franzmann 1991, Johnson 1998, McCredden 1999-2000, Spearritt 1992), contextualization and theology in terms of the life of faith (e.g.

Bayer 1997, Butler 1997, Chapman 1998, Edwards 1996, Sansome 2000, Trainer 1998) and dialogical approaches (e.g. Mascord 1995). But these tend to speak at a broader level of theological principles rather than focus on preaching.

Graham Johnston (2001) is a Perth pastor who has published a book based on his doctoral studies, entitled *Preaching to a Postmodern World.* Its focus does combine the sociological with preaching, while assuming an evangelical theology. As an American with extensive contacts in the USA, and as a book published in the States, it does not have a specific Australian focus. While using a mix of Australian and USA examples it speaks more from a pan-Western perspective. Johnston's (2001: 12) purpose is, "to examine both sermon development and delivery in light of our postmodern generation." He is clear in stating that his writing "is not a theological treatise on postmodernity, nor an attempt to address exegetical procedures of sermon preparation" (Johnston 2001:12). He works from the assumption that, "biblical teaching would demonstrate a proper exegesis while maintaining attention the changing culture" (Johnston 2001: 12). Johnston's (2001) focus is more sociological and practical though he is concerned not to promote pragmatism as a governing philosophy (61-63). His analysis of modernism and postmodernism is thorough and accurate and its implications for preaching well though out and insightful.

Johnston (2001) does not overtly write from a practical theology meta-theory as this is not his intent. But in his writing meta-theory is evident. Implicit meta-theory includes,

- the concept of 'biblical'

- the notion of truth and love

- a narrative, dialogical basis for preaching,

- the notion that preaching uncovers the message of God and reveals the heart of God
- the belief that preaching allows transformation (Johnston 2001: 21).

There is both an incarnational Christological (Johnston 2001: 68) and Pneumotological (Johnston 2001: 12) meta-theory that is expressed in his writing.

While not using Zerfass's (1974) model, Johnston (2001) analyses old praxis in the light of both theological tradition and situational analysis so as to recommend new praxis. (Although it could be argued that he analyses old and new practice more than praxis.) His presentation of theological tradition may be more implicit then explicitly formulated but it is clearly within an evangelical perspective. His situational analysis is more explicit and the stated focus of his work, as are his recommendations for new praxis. He does not develop a particular practical theological model or theory to shape new praxis. Rather than offering a new theology he offers new and helpful patterns of communication in light of the situational analysis. His concern is effectiveness in the light of current cultural influences. Effectiveness does not mean what works but rather "bringing the listener to a clear appreciation of the biblical message."(Johnston 2001: 62).

Johnston (2001:74) does argue that application is critical to a postmodern audience. "A fallout of living in the information age is that people need to be shown that what they are about to hear will directly effect their lives, or they'll tune out." This is because, "People only process information that they can apply immediately…… "Preachers in the past may have imparted the meaning, or what is said, and left the listener to establish relevance, or what difference the information makes. This formula doesn't wash anymore." How this does not drift toward pragmatism and a narrow

applicational hermeneutic is a critical question.

Johnston (2001) offers a dialogical approach based on the example of Jesus who communicated with an awareness of his listeners in mind. Johnston (2001: 149, 150) encourages preachers to not think of themselves as preachers as traditionally understood (a focus on the accuracy of dealing with the text) but as communicators who, "are about a process of imparting information that involves both message and listener." He advocates the Socratic method, inductive preaching, the use of narrative, the creation of suspense and the use of the visual to facilitate this dialogical approach (Johnston 2001: 151-166).

Johnston (2001: 153) also advocates an intuitive approach that presents God as being consistent with people's intuitive sense of how things are or could be. Less clear is the place of the voice of God who also speaks from outside us and even at times against us. The question of how dialogical preaching, which I am an advocate of, does not become anthropocentric and create a god more digestible to the sensitivities of the current generation is a critical one.

Another critical issue in regard to cultural contextualization is raised by Oz Guinness in an interview with *Christianity Today* (2003). With the Western obsession with time and the belief that current and newest is best and most advanced, there could be a rush to accommodating a cultural movement whose life is short-lived. Contextualization needs to occur at a richer level than just that of social movements and pop phenomena. Contextualization ultimately needs to connect with deeper, more universal, existential realities of human existence such as questions of meaning, what it means to belong to each other, how we can make a difference in our worlds, what do we hope in, what is our source of wellbeing? As Guinness (2003) states,

"Evangelicalism has never chased relevance more determinedly than it does now. And yet, we've never been more irrelevant. That could be purely accidental, and other factors are behind it, but I would argue that we've pursued the wrong type of relevance. We've fallen captive to modern views of time, progress, timeliness, and relevance. They're leading us down a garden path."

In the Australian context a valuable analysis of preaching has been offered from a Catholic perspective by Gleeson (1989). As a Catholic he raises similar issues to those I have raised from an evangelical perspective. Lilburne (1996: 19) argues that Catholics have led the way over Protestants in contextualizing theology in the Australian setting and that, "Protestants have been somewhat reluctant to take up this task, perhaps out of fear of being faddish and a desire to preserve academic rigour and respectability." Due to the rarity of considered theological analysis of preaching within an Australian context, Gleeson's (1989) work will be considered at length.

Gleeson (1989: 87) argues that, "A good preacher tries to find fresh words for the traditional, though never dated, message of salvation in Christ, and strives to live with integrity the discipleship of the gospel, lest his or her words fail to ring true." His primary concern is with the possibility of revealed truth and understands the divine-human tension when it comes to the issue of authority. "Clearly, the question whether a religion involves some definite positive truth is allied to that of *authority* – a revealed truth is a truth that humans beings have not just worked out for themselves, it is potentially surprising, challenging and disruptive, to be received 'in faith' – that is, with the conviction that this truth and the demands it makes on one's life are sustained by a power beyond human beings. Revealed truth is founded in the authority of the God who freely chooses to reveal himself. However, the very possibility of a revealed

truth in this sense is called into question by the realization that ultimately it is we human beings who must recognise and accept a revelation for what it is. In some way, *we* judge the gospel as indeed 'truth for salvation', as a message that resonates with the deepest desires of our hearts, that announces salvation *for us*"(Gleeson 1989: 87).

This again opens up an intrinsically dialogical perspective. Gleeson (1989: 88) argues that, "revelation implies that the human search for the transcendent has met a divine *answer,* with a definite content and shape which is normative for the human religious quest". At the same time that revelation is judged to be so by human beings is a conceptual problem, "which can be shown to be incapable of theoretical resolution in terms of some further explanation, and so is a theological 'mystery' in the formal sense"(Gleeson 1989: 88).

Gleeson (1989) argues that much of Catholic theology has been an attempt to resolve this fundamental conceptual difficulty. These "truths were expounded in the dogmatic formulations of Councils and Popes, and the continuing tradition, and were expressed in the technical language of philosophy and theology, by contrast to the more picturesque and metaphorical language of the scriptures, and so safeguarded the truths in a way the biblical language could not quite do so"(Gleeson 1989: 89). Re-emphasizing this point he argues that, "it has been assumed that dogmatic formulations in these terms captured the truth of the gospel more literally and precisely than the metaphors of scripture"(Gleeson 1989: 90).

Hence the Catholic church did similar things with 'truth' as the evangelical church did – formulations outside of the text of Scripture became the master of Scripture. The parallels between Gleeson's (1989) arguments and the concerns I have raised are

clear. Gleeson (1989: 89) also acknowledges that this understanding of truth is breaking down in the Catholic church and there must be a new way forward. "The contemporary preacher is faced with a clash of cultures – between the relativising culture in which his congregation live and the absolutizing culture in which the truths of faith were articulated"(Gleeson 1989: 90).

Gleeson (1989: 94) argues that the way forward is not be grounded in some reworking of Kantian and Newtonian thinking regarding understanding and being. He explores three possible directions. Firstly he looks at the transcendent subjectivism of Karl Rahner (1975), secondly he looks at the newer hermeneutical approaches and lastly he explores newer formulations regarding the objectivity of revelation.

Karl Rahner (1975) believes a dialectic approach to revelation and authority is possible because God has created humans with 'transcendental openness'. "It is this transcendental openness which makes the human being both the possibility and, in Jesus, the event of God's self revelation. The human being alone in creation, is this openness to God simply because God has freely and *graciously* made him as such; every man and woman, as a result of God's gracious offer, lives with a 'natural' desire to see God face to face" (Gleeson 1989: 95).

There are several places where evangelicals would question Rahner (1975) e.g. his theory on 'anonymous Christians' and his belief that God is already present in the grace deeply present in human communities. But primarily it his anthropological understanding that may concern some evangelicals who argue the closedness of sinful humanity toward God and argue against any natural human desire for God as he really is. Rahner's(1975) claims about the unlimited horizon of the human spirit would be

countered by Scriptural themes of slavery to sin and our lack of human freedom. But human openness toward God is intrinsic in the story of Eden. Those who insist on the subsequent closedness of humanity toward God due to human sinfulness would agree that this openness has been restored by the salvific activity of God in the perfect divinity and humanity of Christ. For Rahner(1975) God has not revealed himself as an object or idea within the human horizon but has revealed himself as a subject only known within the rational and experiential horizon of humanity, ultimately in Christ but not solely. Kantian and Newtonian thinking bases understanding on human rationality and experiences. In Rahner's (1975) thinking humans are as subject, central to the process of understanding and knowing but this is intrinsically based in the initiating and gifting activity of God. This is seen as a co-operative engagement resting in human consciousness whereas evangelicals, in the acknowledgement of restored openness between God and humanity, would argue that God in his ontological distinctiveness would also stand against humanity where ever humanity lived in its sinfulness.

Gleeson (1989) in his consideration of Rahner's (1975) thinking wonders whether such an anthropological focus also limits the freedom of God's self-disclosure. Gleeson (1989: 97) briefly refers to the crucifixion as being beyond human expectations and implies that an anthropological understanding may diminish the radicalness of the Cross. Nevertheless he argues that this theology, "suggest an obvious strategy for preaching – to awaken and stimulate the transcendental desire for God; to enable men and women to identify those experiences in their lives which possess this implicit orientation to mystery; and finally to help them to understand these experiences in terms of the christian gospel and the dogmatic expressions of the

Catholic tradition….In every case, the preacher will attempt to relate to his congregation at a level deeper than that of the verbal, and dogmatic formulation" (Gleeson 1989: 97). He further advocates a preaching approach where, "In seeking to articulate the desire for God and the presence of saving grace, a preacher will concentrate on those positive and negative 'limit' experiences (or the 'limit' dimensions of ordinary experience) which highlight our orientation to mystery; the wonder of human knowledge and love, the witness of unconditional obedience to conscience, the possibilities of indescribable joy, and also of breakdown, in human relationships, the pain of grief and suffering, times of dislocation and disorientation" (Gleeson 1989: 98).

Again while there may be points here that some would question theologically, it is important to acknowledge Gleeson's (1989) advocacy of existential starting points in preaching, sermons utilizing and exploring the human desire for mystery (even if that not be the mystery of God as revealed in Christ) and preaching that in the face of our human limitations queries the possibility of there being something beyond our limitation (even if our sinfulness does not orientate humanity toward the God revealed in Christ). Gleeson's (1989) existential starting point takes the sermon beyond the pragmatic situationalism of some contemporary evangelicalism, to consider more core existential matters of life and death. The existential context of preaching is highlighted by the response of Minister 'A' to the following questions.

And you also talked about the "So what?" question. What do you mean by that particular question?

I think the sermon has to have some relevance, have meaning within the lives of people so they can say it somehow fits into where my life is today. I can't just take them back to the time of writing, it must be brought to here and now, there is a process where it must be God's living word to them now.

In talking of Biblical Theology, do you also think that a sermon should speak to the situation in which people live?

Yes it needs to impact their world. But I wouldn't want to limit myself to something just because it is in the news. The sermon is to engage with their circumstances but not to be swamped by their circumstances.

Do you incorporate contemporary events into your sermons?

Sometimes. So something like September 11. I had to answer to that. Sometimes circumstances impinge. But at other times the sermon should create reality, so we are not just reacting to reality, we are also getting a framework by which we can handle different things in reality.

How does that fit with your idea of a change of paradigm in regard to the world? I imagine that it could be relatively easy to get Christians to say "Hallelujah" but it is different to create a paradigm shift in relation to the reality and the world they enter into. So how do you marry those two ideas?

Continually bouncing off the text and bouncing off reality and the real world in which people live needs to be in the forefront, not contemporary events but the real world. So as I'm building my sermon up I am aware that I am talking with people who have suffered heartbreak, are not wanting to say "Hallelujah", are suffering brokenness. Unless I engage with that then I am being false and it becomes emotionalism. So a logical structure that is embedded in the real world and in the text, with emotion, are all components of a sermon.

Minister 'C' highlighted the existential context of preaching in the following way.

You use the phrase 'applied exegeses. What do you mean by that?
Occasionally you will do topical sermons but on the whole I think it is better to be based on systematic looking at what Scripture says looking at a passage and I think the same thing about small group material. You need to vary it but its better to have a systematic study of Scripture. Then you are not just bringing your own thoughts or hobby horses, you are actually having to wrestle with what the text says. My passion theologically is what we called in 'Zadok' the "theology of everyday life" and for 15 years I wrote a quarterly column for 'Zadok' <u>Perspectives</u> in which I started from something in everyday life and thought about it theologically. In a number of places where I am now asked to speak outside of the church it is thinking Christianly about what has happened to people in everyday life that is my passion. And so for me at the end of a sermon it is not enough that people have understood the passage - they need to see how that connects for what they are going to do Monday. Another phrase we use is "Connecting Sunday to Monday." I was leading a group at an Evangelical Alliance conference in Melbourne in May and it was about how do we contextualise Scripture to everyday life. I just talked a little bit about some of the things we do here and they were like revelations to people while to me they're just straight forward things. For example once a month we have someone talk about what they do in their job, we call it "Frontline". It has the function of people in the congregation getting to

know each other but we ask them what are they like in their work, what are their passions, what are the gifts that God's given them in their everyday life. We are getting at how they are a Christian in that without it just being, "Don't steal the rubbers and the boss's time." And then we ask them what the challenges are and we pray for that person and the categories they represent. Quite deliberately we started with engineers. Actually, we started with my husband as he understands the concept. He's an agricultural scientist. What is it that God has called you to in everyday life? So that's the connecting of everyday life with the Sunday and with the Scriptures. So that's a passion there.

Gleeson (1989: 98) also acknowledges that in the newer hermeneutical approach there are those who see in transcendent subjectivism a new type of metaphysical absolutism restructured in terms of human subjectivity that again attempts to master reality. In considering these hermeneutical approaches he argues that, "Once theology becomes hermeneutic rather than dogmatic, the transcendence of God is no longer a matter of his cosmological separation as absolute Being (as was paramount) in classical metaphysics; it is the transcendence of love, of the absolute inner Trinitarian love which is the 'foundation' of all hermeneutic dialogue"(Gleeson 1989: 100). In this thinking, "there is no longer a metaphysical system which might truly, however inadequately, *describe* God; there are only names that may *invoke* him"(Gleeson 1989: 99). The new hermeneutic opens up a more dialogical approach in the sense that the process of coming to understanding and invoking is seen as more important than description of the content of understanding. Gleeson (1989: 100,101) raises a cautionary note by referring to the work of Geffre (1987), himself of the newer hermeneutic school, who, "notes that the prevailing tendency to refuse to call God anything other than the inexpressible 'Thou' may itself 'be the expression of a certain triumph of man's subjectivity and therefore a certain humanization of God'…. Geffre's warning is timely – the refusal to countenance the possibility of naming God (albeit a God we cannot define) may simply reflect the human subject who does not wish to acknowledge the supreme Other who sustains, but may also challenge, him."

It is interesting to note that many of Geffre's (1987) names for God actually *describe* both his character and his work. God's names are not mere abstractions, they are intrinsically linked to his saving and liberating acts. It would seem impossible to invoke without at least implicitly describing. In fact it may be this aspect of the hermeneutical approach that is its most helpful – it has reminded us of and focused us on, the God who acts incarnationally. As Gleeson (1989: 102) says the, "hermeneutic dimension of theology has important consequences for both the method and content of preaching – for method in that it highlights the hermeneutic dialogues between the text and the preacher called to wrestle with it, between preacher and congregation, between past and present christian experience; for content in that the open, liberating, character of these dialogues reflects, and shares in, the liberating power of God at work in our history, as he was in Jesus, embracing and overcoming evil with the 'force' of love."

Nevertheless Gleeson (1989) is still concerned by the ontological otherness of God which would make objective revelation possible. The original question still stands, how does the objectivity of God's transcendence and self-revelation in Christ relate to human's subjective appropriation. Gleeson (1989: 103) argues that there are ways of, "safeguarding the objectivity of the gospel revelation, without resorting to doctrinal fundamentalism."

While an apologia for revelational objectivity is appropriate, the belief that *humans* can *guarantee* its objectivity is the first step toward Christian fundamentalism. Gleeson (1989: 104) does not offer such a guarantee but appeals to the notion that created reality maintains its sacramental nature. "A *sacramental* approach attempts to avoid the dilemma that finite realities (including concepts and formulations) either

become meaningless in themselves (because wholly subordinate to the transcendental and infinite), or are absolutised as the objects of faith in themselves (as in the fundamentalism of propositional theories of revelation)."

Gleeson (1989: 106) also appeals to the work of Friedrich von Hugel. "For von Hugel, religion is ontological or it is nothing, and just as the foundation of religious experience is an awareness of God's presence, so the central act of religion is *adoration*." Von Hugel (2001) believed that the knowing of God was mediated by the traditions and beliefs of the church and that experience must be held in balance by the institutional and the critical life of the church. But von Hugel (1999) firmly believed that the ontological reality of God could be experienced. While calling such experience mystical he believed that, "there was no distinct 'mystical' kind of knowing; rather, the Infinite is to be met as the polar dimension of all experience; though ontologically the Infinite is immediately present to us, psychologically and logically, we only become aware of it through our experience of finitude, revealed especially through action and involvement in the world; the Infinite is not *inferred* from the finite, but co-known or co-intuited with it. Furthermore, our awareness of the infinite grows through that conversion which 'breaks up the soul's habits and standards' "(Gleeson 1989: 105). While resting in tradition and belief, "God is known as we come to see the depth and explore the full implications of ordinary experience"(Gleeson 1989: 105).

Gleeson (1989: 105, 106) argues that the, "great challenge facing theology today is to integrate its hermeneutic character with the traditional ontological claims of Christianity." The hermeneutical approach that explains God's transcendence in love, "needs to be complemented by an ontology of God's transcendence and immanence *in*

being, since he is also the *creator* and *sustainer* of the universe he loves. While contemporary philosophy is recognizing the hermeneutic and metaphorical dimension of science, and hence that it does not provide an absolute, one-to-one, map of reality, our scientific models do 'give us a positive (even though limited) insight into the structure of the real'. Philosophical 'naturalism' flourishes especially in Australia, and fosters that robust sense or reality that von Hugel endorsed"(Gleeson 1989: 107).

Gleeson (1989: 107) sees that in the Australian context, contemporary philosophy, particularly 'Australian naturalism' attempts to place human existence in the natural order of the universe rather than in consciousness, which is the tendency of transcendent and hermeneutical approaches. In Australia there is an emphasis on the physically embodied character of human existence, and "the primacy of *action* or praxis through which we transform the world"(Gleeson 1989: 107). This orientation is consistent with the analysis of Chapter 2 that highlighted the pragmatism characteristic of Australians and their sense of identity in relation to geographic space and the natural elements.

Gleeson (1989: 108) argues that this perspective can effect preaching in an Australian context in the following way. "A robust, naturalized metaphysics which also preserves human dignity and our orientation to God, will help underpin a christian response to the many aspects of human existence which cannot be 'redeemed' from the point of view of consciousness – for example, the sufferings of the handicapped, the oppressed, and the starving." While evangelicals would again question humanities 'natural' orientation toward God, they would agree with Gleeson's (1989) acknowledgment that existence grounded in consciousness cannot deal with the issue of suffering and evil. Something that is outside of consciousness but is real is needed

for redemption. "It is not clear that transcendental and hermeneutic theologies do full justice to the ontological reality of the universe of which humans are a part, or to the objectivity of the grace of redemption announced by the gospel, which (fortunately) transcends the *a priori* abilities and expectations of human consciousness"(Gleeson 1989: 108).

Gleeson (1989: 108) finally turns to Hans Urs von Balthasar (1968), "whose starting point is not *a priori* human expectations, but the overwhelming *form (Gestalt)* of God's love revealed in Christ." The encounter with absolute love, glory, beauty is the, "mystery of christian revelation in which the 'eyes of faith'…encounter the absolute majesty of God's love (in the crucified Christ), which is overwhelming and self-authenticating, utterly beyond the expectations of human beings, yet a fulfilment beyond their desires." The glorious, "expressions of God's self-revelation are not illuminated simply by the subjective dynamism of the human subject; rather, a light 'breaks forth from the form's interior'"(Gleeson 1989: 108). Again while many evangelicals would baulk at some of von Balthasar's views on salvific possibilities for other religions, and his focus on Christ as human fulfilment rather than atoning sacrifice, Gleeson (1989: 111,112) draws two implications from his work for preaching. The first is that preaching should not equate religious experience with aesthetic experience but rather, "preaching draws no attention to itself, or to the preacher, but 'loses' itself in the process of displaying the glory of God's love, as it is manifested in the entire history of salvation, and above all in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus." Secondly to describe the glory and majesty of God and his salvific acts, "a theological aesthetic emphasises the role of imagination, symbol, image and ritual in the proclamation of the Gospel."

Apart from Gleeson (1989) there are a few other examples of contextualizing theology in the Australian situation that have gone beyond general principles. Strom (2000) who does explore contextualization more thoroughly will be explored in chapter 6. Other examples have focused on developing theology in Aboriginal and multicultural contexts (e.g. Carrington: 1988a, 1988b, Gondarra:1988, Hume:1993, Warne: 1997). While these studies do not focus on preaching *per se* they are worthwhile considering.

Carrington (1988a: 12) argues that, "One of the characteristics of colonial empires is that all subjects and colonies are expected to exist with one epistemology which governs all things. The Empire becomes a way of life and religion becomes the monolithic determination of successful thinking, indeed the only successful epistemology possible." Carrington (1988a: 13) believes that Christianity has been co-opted by Empire and aids in the imposition of this singular epistemology with an attempt to produce a world of, "one language, one history and one culture." Counter to this monolithic history is the reality that, "God has created many histories and we are called to live in a world of pluralism and diversity"(Carrington 1988a: 13). "Australian Christianity, being derivative from a dominant British Colonial heritage, is particularly prone to accept uncritically theology which has monolithic and monocultural assumptions about creation and about the human creation of world history. Our people assume that One English-speaking Culture is the ideal towards which God intends that we should move, and any diversion from that is a temporary slip into imperfection and paganism"(Carrington 1988a: 14). Carrington (1988a: 15) argues that colonialism and Empire creates sub-cultures of the poor and exiled within their own countries and that, "It was evident that when these people became Christian their theologies were not at all the same as those of the powerful elite."

Carrington (1988a) argues that there needs to be a thorough reconsideration of the assumed theology of the West. "It is not the case that the poor may simply become affluent within the same structures as operate at present, thus preserving a well advertised illusion that affluence is attainable uniformly for all. Rather there appears to be a need to develop the genuine plurality of the Gospel in the context of the plurality of today's rich and poor, which would break the nexus of exploitation and see the victims begin to develop their own God given resources, thus challenging the dependent rich also to become more self reliant. This suggests that theology must enter all contexts with a message responsively appropriate to each context. In Biblical imagery God's response to historical pluralism is the Incarnation. Yahweh is one who responds to the cries of the people, becoming contemporaneously available through Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Jesus comes, but he does not 'rubbish' culture nor poor people but rather in compassion he heals, transforms and fulfils. Jesus invites his followers into creative effort centred first around their own culture and history in its integrity"(Carrington 1988a: 15).

Evangelicals may be concerned that Carrington (1988a) is too 'culturo-centric'. It would appear from the ministry of Jesus that he did not simply transform from within his own Jewish culture but also critiqued and disrupted it. The Gospel also calls us to critique culture and indeed Carrington (1988a) uses the Gospel to critique Western culture. The Gospel would also suggest that identity is not ultimately found in culture (though it cannot be separate from it) but in our relationship (individual and communal) with God in Christ. This is so because the whole world and all cultures are guilty of independence from God and so have lost their true identity. Nevertheless Western Christian perspectives that have either intentionally or unthinkingly been

harmful to non-Western cultures need to be acknowledged. There is a need for contextualization that allows those within their own cultures to evaluate and critique how their culture lives the Gospel, rather than assuming that the West knows best what to critique and how to contextualise.

In Carrington's (1988a: 18) view hermeneutics is critical for the contextualization of theology. "It is the Bible the local theologians must interpret and not the writings of erudite, definitive, dogmatic theology from far away places." The importance of this is emphasised by the evidence that, "In local contexts all over the Third World there is a widespread listening to the Word taking place in the basic Christian communities of the common people. This is a grassroots hermeneutic which is directly related to the 'praxis' of these Christian groups"(Carrington 1988a: 19). He also believes that an authentic hermeneutic is always intercultural and that the field of cross-cultural hermeneutics has helped to rediscover a corporate dialogical 'dialectic'. "In the people's reflection upon scripture this is part of their 'praxis'….In the Third World, dialectic is a corporate endeavour better described as an authentic people's reflection which is checked and cross-checked in the basic Christian communities. In short, praxis and dialectic are inseparably inter-related"(Carrington 1988a: 19).

Carrington (1988a) believes that contextualization is a primary process of theology and is not simply repackaging Western theological concepts in cultural clothing, which he believes that too many cross-cultural workers from the West do. De-contextualizing the Christian message to its purest form is to turn it into religious abstraction. To then repackage it in new cultural garb actually alienates the cross-cultural worker, "from participation in the authentic hermeneutics of the people at the

grassroots, the very people they ostensibly came to serve"(Carrington 1988a: 23).

Carrington (1988a) argues that local people should be equipped in grassroots Christian communities to be theologians with real decision-making authority, with genuine two way sharing and dialogue in theological education. This requires the dominant class or culture, "to learn to trust the potential creativity of student/members of other Christian cultural groups who have experienced the Incarnation of Jesus and who are seeking to articulate this good news in their own cultural categories" (Carrington 1988a: 25).

Examples of Carrington's contextualization methodology (1988b) focus on narrative. Lilburne (1996: 23) states that, "In study books for Aboriginal Christian leaders Carrington uses the modes of narrative theology to move into biblical stories. By setting these narratives in relation to Aboriginal stories, using techniques of juxtaposition, comparison, and mutual interpolation, he opens up these stories for Aboriginal and European understanding."

Carrington's (1988b) hermeneutical principles would also appear to be relevant to non-indigenous communities in Australia. Communities of 'lay' theologians in dialogical engagement and reflection, exploring the Gospel story in light of the stories, vocations and praxis of that particular community and those they are connected to, would seem appropriate for the broader Australian culture. Kaye (1996) speaking in a non-indigenous context also urges this approach. By linking this hermeneutical approach to a philosophical naturalism (which as previously stated attempts to place human existence in the natural order of the universe with an emphasis on the physically embodied character of human existence and the action or

praxis through which we transform the world) we are then beginning to open up possibilities for contextualised preaching in Australia. This focus on an embodied, naturalistic, storied faith, contextualised for the Australian situation, is evidenced in a number of our theological journals, e.g. *St Marks Review, Colloquium, Reo,* and in Christian Magazines, e.g. *On Being Alive*, which are predominantly concerned with issues of contextualization, though seldom with preaching itself as a focus. Minister 'C' also spoke of this naturalistic, storied faith.

I use a lot of personal, everyday life for illustration. I started doing that when I was writing at 'Zadok'. Robert Banks started it and I took it over from him when he went to America. I remember the first time I went off to the post office and sent off the column. I was talking about something personal and feeling very vulnerable because Robert was good about talking about everyday life but up until that point you did not reveal personal, family life things in respectable academic journals. In particular I had a couple of knock-backs when I used to write for On Being. I wrote them an article once that had references to breastfeeding and they replied they did not have a women's page and so they couldn't publish it. That same month there was a whole article about dangers of men being on the road and the sexual attractions of being away from home. So that idea was that men's experiences are normative and a woman's experience was for a woman's page. Admittedly in those days the Australian newspaper still put all its social analysis type articles on a women's page. So for me the passion was for these things that were really important for me. What does it say, thinking about personhood, how you treat your body? Or where do your ideas about retirement come from? Or attitudes to work or how do you make decisions about how you spend your money? They all have a theological underpinning. So for me what is important is that connection to everyday life.

Carrington's (1988a, 1988b) particular concern for Indigenous Australians is reflected in Garrett's (1997) article that focuses specifically on contextualised preaching in Australia. He argues for the idea that we should preach with the Saturday between the death and horror of Good Friday and the resurrection and new life of Easter Sunday in mind, as this is where most people live there lives. This is similar to Gleeson's (1989) awareness that preaching should speak to suffering and evil. As Christians it is easy with our 'grasp' of Good Friday and Easter Sunday to speak a message that does not

deal with the reality of Saturday. But Garrett (1997) points out that the life of the in-between places is a clear Biblical theme – the life of Abraham and Sarah awaiting the promise of God, Israel in Egypt, in the wilderness and in Babylon, the disciples on the road to Emmaus. This is similar to Pickard's (1998) notion of the in-between places in Australian existence. The theme of exile for an Australian context is also picked up by Stewart and Wilson (1999) who see its implications in how we relate to the land, to those 'outside' the church and to mission. In their thinking, the person of Christ as the fulfilment of promise supplants the land as the fulfilment of promise. "Christendom, it may be argued, involved an illegitimate return to reliance on land in a territorial sense and a position of social privilege. It was not only a regression in the history of the people of God, but a regression that led to exile, a reliance upon territory rather than covenant"(Stewart and Wilson 1999: 14).

As one example in the Australian context Garrett (1997: 7) sees that, "we seem to be stuck fast in Saturday on the most important moral issue that faces our nation, that of our relationship with the indigenous people of this land." In light of this and many other 'Saturdays' that Australians face at a corporate and personal level he turns to the laughter of Abraham and Sarah as a hermeneutical guide for preaching. The possibility of new life and resurrection seems laughable, implausible in the light of paralysis, tragedy, suffering and death. Humour in the face of impossible odds and cynicism about cheap promises are two Australian 'traits' that are contexts for preaching that evangelicals easily overlook in their familiarity with the judicial work of the Cross and their quick resolution of the horror and ambiguity of Good Friday and Easter Saturday. In these texts Garrett (1997: 9) says that, "the model of faith in God, presents itself in a context of laughing doubt of God." And God is patient with their doubt and accepts their laughter. "To live and preach on Saturday is to know the

pain and the destruction of Good Friday and yet to live in the light and hope of Easter

Sunday. For us the trustworthiness of the theological chain of preaching depends on

the promise that the word became flesh. It depends on the truth that God is really with

us, that God loves the world that God has created, and that this love looks and acts in

the world the way Christ looked and acted"(Garrett 1997: 9,10).

While concrete and realistic, these themes of Easter Saturday, exile and in-

betweenness also allows an eschatological framework that is critical to preaching

based in the Kingdom of God and critical to preaching that communicates God's reign

and Kingdom principles for living between the times. The focus on the concrete and

realism also connects with Habel's (1996) theology of Australian human relatedness

to the land which also parallels Pickard's (1998) notion of our connection to certain

kinds of physical space, particularly the in-between spaces. Pickard (1998) uses this

connection to the real rather than the abstract, and our connection with space and

being in-between, to develop the metaphor of 'veranda' as a place where Australians

can live and dialogue the Gospel. The notion of veranda resonates with Carrington's

(1988a) call to true dialogue and reflection, with true sharing of power and decision-

making. Preaching that calls people to this way of faith (dialogical, conversational,

reflective, relational, reciprocal, shared, concrete, earthy, non-esoteric, non-abstract,

transformational, relaxed, connected to story and community praxis) and that also

reflects this way of faith in its own preaching style and content, may be preaching that

speaks more powerfully and deeply in the Australian context.

If this opens up possibilities for preaching in Australia in the future, how does this

relate to preaching as it has been conducted traditionally. It would appear that in

Australia there has not been a preaching style or content (apart from the Aboriginal

church) that has been markedly distinct from that of the English-speaking West.

2.5 Traditional Preaching Praxis

Traditionally preaching has consisted of a monologue involving exposition and application. Pieterse (1995: 136) shows that 99% of sermons in the Western context of his research, were text-thematic in form and based on the rhetorical model that have its origin in the Greco- Roman period. "The text-thematic sermon form is designed mainly to convince the hearer. By means of argument and evidence he is persuaded to accept the viewpoint expounded in the preacher's message. It addresses the mind, the will and the emotions, to which end various rhetorical devices are used – illustrations, similes, metaphors, rhetorical questions and the like. The aim is to address an appeal to the hearer, thereby persuading or moving him" (Pieterse 1995: 139). The rhetorical method is essentially argumentative as it is based on a proposition or statement that is forwarded which is then proven or disproved by rational discourse and logic. It is not primarily a dialogical engagement. Until the 4th century the church had resisted the rhetorical form, instead using simple homilies. From the 4th century on, as preachers were trained in the schools of rhetoric, this approach was adopted by the church and has continued to the present (Pieterse 1995: 137).

In discussing homilies Pieterse (1995: 158) states that, "The homily owes its *origin* to the synagogal sermon which, in its simplest form, was a verse by verse and sentence by sentence exposition of a pericope. The New Testament indicates that early Christian preaching was mainly dialogical. Paul's preaching is mostly designated by the verb *dialegesthai,* indicating a two-way conversation with questions from the hearers, discussion and even argument. In the New Testament the term "homily" was

not yet applied to this form of sermon, although it displays all the attributes later indicated by this term." Pieterse (1995: 158) writes that, "In the early church…it was a simple address, expounding Scripture in a sort of paraphrase with a view to propagating the faith and summoning the congregation to a higher plane of Christian living. From the fourth century onwards the influence of rhetoric became more pronounced and sermons increasingly turned into formal discourse. But the homily never disappeared entirely and during the Reformation many preachers reverted to this early sermon form." In evangelical circles the homily is still a primary approach to preaching. As Pieterse (1995: 159) states, "Whenever the Word was focal, the homily as a sermon form was revived." Pieterse (1995: 159) reports Muller's (1984) research which revealed that 56% of those surveyed preferred the informal presentation of the homily while only 19% preferred a more formal sermon style.

Pieterse (1995: 160) argues that, "The homily does not resort to the extremes of the analytic…method. It does not demand slavish literalism and analysis of every word. Exegesis in the proper sense should be applied to the entire pericope or "long text". Exposition is not fragmented but situationally oriented, kerygmatic and dialogic…The homily is pre-eminently the sermon form designed to stimulate *discussion* after the sermon…It is associated with spontaneous, conversational delivery. Since earliest times this sermon form involved the congregation dialogically and sought to create involvement. It provides an atmosphere for dialogue."

While it would appear that this is a sermon style that would be suitable for an Australian context and one that is used in evangelical churches, its dialogical potential has been tempered by preaching that focuses on proving the truth of indicative propositions in the rhetorical style, or focuses on the imperative and applicational in a

narrow and coercive style.

It would appear that narrative forms of preaching would also be suited to an Australian context. Narrative forms more directly reflect the narrative/story base of Scripture, as argued by Jungel (1983), and fits with the place of story in Australian history, culture and relationships. Pieterse (1995: 163) argues that, "Fundamentally to preach the gospel is to proclaim Jesus Christ by narrating the events of salvation. Hence narration is essential to the nature of preaching. That is why the sermons throughout the church's calendar repeat the birth, passion, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit."

Pieterse (1995: 137) highlights a narrative strand in English-speaking churches since the Reformation, particularly in the American church. In the Puritan tradition, experience was subordinate to argument but when there were periods of religious experience, such as the Great Awakening, narrative was the form in which religious experience was communicated. Pieterse (1995: 137) argues that, "Whenever experience is neglected, there is an outbreak of narrative sermons to satisfy this need." If Australian churches are neglecting the experience of those inside and outside of the church in regard to living their lives on the Saturday between Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday (Garrett 1997) then it would seem there is a need for more narrative linked to this reality in our preaching. This is consistent with Buechner's (1977: 39-44) view that most parishioners experience the absence of God during the week as much as the presence of God and that unless the preacher preaches in a manner that recognises, acknowledges and addresses this experience of absence then preaching will be ineffective.

"Because it conveys human experience, a narrative is engrossing and eminently suited to driving home a truth with great impact…This sermon form moreover communicates through the identification with a particular character. It leaves the hearer free to decide for himself whether he will accept the truth, experience, appeal or decision communicated by the story" (Pieterse 1995: 139). Pieterse (1995: 139) also believes that narratives are a form of communication appropriate for societies that no longer accept authoritarian claims. Again this would seem to make it eminently suitable for an Australian context.

As the narrative form invites the hearer into identification with the story it allows both distance and involvement. While, "No demands are made on him, …the narrative intrigues and involves him in such a way that he is presented with a choice, and the tension is not defused until he has chosen. The story does not let go of the listener but continues to haunt him for a long time" (Pieterse1995: 169). Pieterse (1995: 170) believes that at one level all sermons are narrative in that, "Fundamentally a sermon is the preacher's testimony to his own experience with a text."

This would suggest that all sermons need to come out of the authentic experience of the preacher and be linked to the story of the congregation. It suggests that in the Australian context, sermons of a homiletic nature that draws out the story element of the text linked to the existential experience of the preacher and the hearer, would be more effective than argumentative rhetorical styles that require either right belief or right action as the outcome.

In all of the interviews I conducted I asked about the place of sermons in the
contemporary Australian church and culture. Here is each response.

Minister 'A'

Why a sermon rather than some other way of communicating?

*I think it is all about communication but a sermon is a unique opportunity to capture
the moment, it's a very existential moment where we all become participants,
believing that something is happening, that its not just information, that its not just
emotion. It's actually an event where God himself is again speaking. It has this real
existential moment to it that I think makes it unique.*

Why do you think that may not come through another means of communication?

*A sermon can use different forms of communication but it is unique in the immediacy
of the Word, the very contemporaneousness of the situation is unique.*

**So what makes a sermon a sermon rather than a devotional, or a multimedia
presentation or a lecture?**

*The element of authority. In a sermon a preacher has got to believe that God is
actually speaking. They are speaking with authority. The teaching element supports
that authority but the urgency and the power is much bigger than just teaching
information. In a sense a sermon is never true as it takes one particular aspect and
says it in such a strong way. There is a demand, an urgency and authority that
disrupts all that they have had before.*

Minister 'B'

**Do you still think that the sermon has a place in an Australian context and in an
Aboriginal context?**

*Oh yeah for sure. I don't think it ever should lose it place but there has to be better
ways though that we can communicate the gospel in our preaching styles that better
helps our people understand the Scriptures and God. I think that we are still changing
over from an era where the sermon was spoken by one man, the work has been done
by one man, everything has revolved around one man or one woman. We are still in a
transient situation coming out of that style. I'm trying to be mindful of including
people into the ministry through my connections with them and through my preaching
style.*

Minister 'C'

So preaching, whatever words are given to it, is still important to you?

Yes for me it is and in places where I have to defend that. In fact I had a discussion here last week with someone about it. Churches of Christ have a very strong doctrine of the Communion Service. And if you ask them what their definition of the church is it is the people of God gathered around the Table. Baptists probably say it is the people of God gathered. And they think that if you have the people of God gathered you have to have preaching. So that in some Church of Christ circles Communion is much more important than the preaching and when I came here I had to adjust a little bit. This congregation are very appreciative of my preaching so they don't want to diminish it and occasionally I sometimes get comments that I'm getting squeezed out as I've had to cut down because time has run away. But many Church of Christ people, especially people here would say that when you meet around the Communion Table God is present in a special way, the same way when a person is baptised. So it is almost a sacramental view. And there were people here last week who were having these discussions about the role of the sermon, who were espousing what I would say is a sacramental view of preaching - that is when the Word of God is opened it is powerful beyond human expectation. Now I've never gone as far as saying that but actually I suppose that I believe that. The responsibility of opening God's word to people is an incredible responsibility so that has consequences for my own prayer life and purity of life. It has an element of when I have done all of my preparations, I still feel that what God does with that on a Sunday is an act of the Spirit. So I do believe that, I just have never gone as far as to say it is has a sacramental nature to it.

Interviewee 'D'

Has there been any kind of developments or shifts in your understanding of preaching or the place of preaching?

It has a small role – where you get permission to speak, you do need that platform, where the unspoken contract is, "you talk for awhile, we'll shut up and listen and you give us a chunk of info for us to chew over." But for me now very much, it is "for us to chew over." There's a big difference between (on one hand) audiences where that's happening, where I say I'm going to do this but then after it's question time, or even during if I've said something that's not clear; if people are actively engaged in the learning process in preaching, which is quite fine. But (on the other hand) there is another group that you go to and they're just used to passively letting it wash over them, and its just like talking to thin air. Not exactly, because you can see them ticking theological boxes and saying yeh, I agree with that, ah yeh that's good. But that's it, and you know that by lunchtime they would have forgotten everything you've said for all intents and purposes, and it's probably not going to make much difference in their life. That's largely because preaching for them is the be all and end all of learning – and it's just not sufficient. Whereas when it's seen as part of an active process, where here is a chunk of info but now you have to do some work with it, not just in the conversation and dialogue afterwards, but then that dialogue has to relate to your experience, so then you're going to try it out in your experience or whatever

the themes are you're going to look for it in your experience or whatever. Then that's okay, there's a place for it.

Minister 'E'

Do you think there is something that makes a sermon a sermon rather than a devotional or a lecture?

I think they are on a continuum. The sermon and devotional are closer on the continuum, a lecture further away but even at a theological college that can blur. But certainly a sermon, and in my mind a devotional, allows the text to speak in a present and living way. It might be a time factor that makes a devotional a devotional. In the end I want God's word to stir me up to love and good deeds. A 30 minute sermon, depending on the people hearing, can allow me more freedom in how I do that than a devotional.

Anything else that you see as unique to a sermon?

I think the sermon allows a person who is trained and wise and thoughtful and equipped in the Scriptures to teach and help those who do not have the time or the experience or the training to see some of the connections. You can fast track someone into a passage. The sermon gives the trained person opportunity to share things that are there in the text for the hearers. That can also happen in other forms of communication.

At a time where there are a lot of questions about what it means to be church in Australia do you still think there is still a place for the sermon in contemporary life?

Yeah for sure. I think there is a place for the Word of God and the sermon is one way in which that can happen and I think there needs to be some quality control to help that. Paul says to Timothy to train up reliable people to handle the word of truth. There is a leadership issue in the preacher. Being the preacher is organic, it means having relationship with the local gathering of God's people and helping them grow and mature. As I offer the word I am under it as well. And so there is a place for bringing God's word to bear in a present culture and I think that some of the problems of our churches is because that is being neglected or ignored. To neglect God's Word marginalises God and gags God. I'm not convinced the sermon is the only place that happens but it is a helpful place. It is one way we can speak to 350 people spread across four congregations.

At least the myth is that Australians are non-authoritarian and don't like being spoken over, we want freedom of choice, we're individualistic, everybody can have their own say and we can come to our own decisions? In light of that do you think there is a particular way to sermonise in an Australian context?

Yeah I think there is. I'm anti-establishment myself. Australians love story and have always loved stories and will travel with you in a story. So I think a humble preacher does not water down the message but people are happy to listen, at least those who

come to our church, those outside our culture may want to throw rocks, but those who come are willing to listen if they know the preacher cares for them and I hope they get that sense from me. And I think that people like hearing stories and tales and so Australians and Australian culture have never walked away from tale-telling. And I think that Jesus has some of the best stories to tell. I like narrative parts of the Scripture because they give me more freedom to tell stories. Paul's letters are a bit more of a challenge to use a story style. But I think that as the preacher people respect that you take them seriously and you care for them and they will listen to stories.

3. SUMMARY OF THESIS

So far we have been travelling two parallel paths. The thesis has both been following Zerfass's (1974) model while also evaluating it. In terms of this evaluation two issues have been raised. One is to caution between splitting practical theology from academic theology and to advocate that all theology serve praxis and the life of faith. The second issue is to acknowledge the continuity and inter-relationship between theory and praxis and not just see them as binary opposites in dialectic tension.

In terms of following the model a situational analysis of Australian culture as well as broader issues of modernism, postmodernism and globalisation have been explored. This chapter has looked at the theological tradition in regard to preaching in Australia. It is still my contention that current preaching praxis in Australian evangelical churches, while it may be primarily homiletic in style with narrative elements, is governed by a rhetorical argumentative style that in an authoritarian manner requires either right belief and/or right behaviour in both a narrow indicative and imperative sense. Preaching content and style that more effectively connects with and speaks to both the broader postmodern culture of the West and the naturalism, realism and physicality of Australian culture, is needed. It would appear that such preaching in both content and style would be need to be dialogical, conversational, reflective, relational, reciprocal, shared, concrete, earthy, non-esoteric, non-abstract,

transformational, relaxed and deeply connected to story (both the Gospels and the

hearers) and to community praxis and action.

In the next chapter further theological and theoretical considerations will be discussed

that provides further suggestions for dialogical, contextualised preaching. In chapter 7

there will be an attempt to bring the two paths together as a model for practical

theology will be presented that will also provide a model for contextualised preaching

in Australia.

CHAPTER 5
THEORIES OF COMMUNICATION

Zerfass's (1974) model presents a bi-polar tension between theology and the situational out of which a practical theological perspective can arise. Practical theology as exemplified by Zerfass's model, seeks to develop a theology that has praxis as its focus, identifying the problem of disconnecting theory from praxis. While in full concurrence with this concern I am also concerned that if practical theology is seen as just one more theology alongside others than it continues the modernist proclivity to systematise, explain and dissect rather than unify theology and praxis as a correlational movement and process. That a theology has to be labelled "practical theology" suggests that theology may have become subject to the modernist agenda and lost its purpose for existing, that being of communicating the Gospel in all its multifarious and dynamic ways.

The notion of binary tension by itself can communicate the idea that there is a pool of abstract truth, principles or theory that exists outside of the situational context that can be drawn upon to inform and shape the situational. While this may be true in the sense that particular truths may not be brought to bear on specific and particular situations, the truths that may subsequently be brought to bear on the situation will have an historical and epistemological continuity with the immediate situation. While one cannot escape binary tensions, having tension on the one hand or continuity on the other as a primary epistemological presupposition, will significantly shape how one understands theology and praxis.

This chapter will present theorists who not only think in terms of binary tension, but also offer dynamic, process orientated thinking in regard to "truth" and the communication of that truth. In discussing each of the theorists further implications

for preaching will also be expanded on.

1. THEORY AND THEORISTS

1.1 Gadamer

Gadamer's (1975) critical contribution to the theory of communication is the idea that one cannot divorce understanding from the experiential. The phenomenological and the hermeneutical are joined in both the meaning given to experience and the experience of seeking meaning. Because of this he argued that we are natural interpreters as participants in life not simply objective observers. The meaning readers get from a text is a result of a dialogue between tradition, meaning imbedded in the text and current meanings and understandings. The meaning that is gained from a text comes not by being an objective observer but by the reader involving themself in a dialogue between the present context and understandings and those meanings embedded in the language of the text. We do not read a text objectively in the sense that we only read it in terms of the language of the text. We do not read in such a manner because it is impossible to do so. We read in light of our own tradition, context and experience. We bring ourselves to the text, interpreting it through our grid. This does not mean that meaning is the same as experience. Meaning is the current culmination of a whole series of different types of actions, historical, present and anticipated (what we may call knowledge) that places experience in an interpretive context. This allows meaning to be greater than merely the sum of the actions in the current experience but also means that the current experience can shape meaning. That we read in light of our own tradition, context and experience does not mean that the historical distance and separateness of the text is unrecognised. Because

of our 'presentness', historical distance is recognised and the recognition of historical distance aids in the process of hermeneutics. But within this process there is the aim of making the meaning present in our time and space. This is the call of the preacher in regard to the Gospel – to allow the Gospel to be present and communicate in the present tense.

1.1.1 The Gospel in the Present-tense

Forde (1990) argues that in a modernist context theology became explanation rather than serve the purpose of proclamation. He argues that proclamation is the present and future tense of the Gospel. "The 'mighty acts of God in history' have not ceased. The proclamation is the present form and outcome of those acts" (Forde 1990: 168). Proclamation is present-tense, first-to-second-person communication. "It is not explanation *about* God and things, it is announcing the Word *of* God, or even better, the Word *from* God, in the living present" (Forde 1990: 168). Forde (1990) argues that this proclamation is the primary discourse of the church which teaching, as secondary discourse, is to serve. Preaching is a form of proclamation that he believes has been reduced to teaching rather than proclamation.

This shift has come about as the theological enterprise has been influenced by modernist assumptions. The understanding that objective truth was determined by evidence saw the Biblical text become subject to an analysis shaped by this understanding of truth. Reid (1994/95: 447) argues that in the West, "The proponents of the Enlightenment sought to treat the Bible as a book of reason….And the Bible, previously chained to the church pulpit, became firmly chained to the professor's lectern." He laments that, "This style of reading produces an unfortunate byproduct,

an interpretation that does not excite the public imagination" (Reid 1994/95: 477) but does feed individualism in replacing the corporate, ecclesiastical guide to interpretation with the expertism of the scholar.

Miller (1983) also argues for the present-tense, revelatory nature of preaching which he sees in its sacramental character. One does not reason or argue with a sacrament, which would be possible if preaching was simply teaching or explanation. "One responds to it as to a revelation and in whatever way is appropriate to it" (Miller 1983: 232). The present-tenseness of preaching is critical to his definition of preaching. Preaching, "is simply to unfold and apply the Gospel to the human condition. The preacher has to do with a revelation, an impingement of God on human existence and reflection, an impingement of God with cosmic implications" (Miller 1983: 235). He writes further that Christianity is not simply mindful of what God has done, "but also of things God can do in the here and now. He is acting and 'actable' in the present. His action in Christ has dynamism for today…Our proclamation should never give the impression that the living God may be seen only at work in the past. It must testify to the fact that his acting may be discerned and known in the present and may be expected in the future" (Miller 1983: 236). For Miller this present–tense aspect to the Gospel does not just feed the individual but God's Word as it impinges on individuals, through his preachers, "should by them and through them have regenerative repercussions throughout the whole of organised society" (Miller 1983: 236). Minister 'E' speaks of the present-tenseness of the Gospel in the following manner.

What do you understand by the notion of relevance in a sermon?

I believe that God's Word is a living word. So the word that it speaks it speaks to us in the present. So whatever it says it is a relevant word. The preacher does not always

give that clearly so that it sounds relevant. For the hearers the soil is not always watered to be relevant to them at that point. But I work with the conviction that God's Word is a living word and God speaks and so my default is that every time I get up there is something relevant here for me and for us as a congregation. I put myself in as a listener of the Word as I hear a passage and the Word has got something to say to us. There may be reasons why there may not be successful connection. Either the preacher is underdone or the hearers are distracted.

Miller (1983: 232) also believes that the preacher themself is sacramental. While using gender specific language, he argues that the preacher is a sacramental figure who, "breaks the Bread of God's Word through his own word and person. Preaching…is not the art of making a sermon and delivering it, but of making a preacher and delivering that." He states further that, "The preacher's effectiveness lies ultimately… in the depths of his own being. He himself must be captive to the Gospel"(Miller 1983: 233). "The truth and grace of Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit have to be for him existential realities, dimensions of his own spiritual experience"(Miller 1983: 234). "Preaching is not an essay being read to a congregation; it is a man transmitting a message to a congregation. The preacher's manuscript is an aid to him, a prop to him in his task, but it is *he* who preaches"(Miller 1983: 239). "What we are to bring a congregation is not a sermon but a man with a sermon, a sermon which is deeply and livingly a part of him"(Miller 1983: 241). Minister 'A' also spoke of this personal embodiment of the message.

This suggests to me that there is also a sense that the preacher is something of an actor?

I think so. Yes, because all reality becomes part of the script. Acting yes but not acting something false but acting that is becoming part of a different script and believing that this script is actually reality.

In a sense you are acting or living the new paradigm before the people as you preach?

Yes you become a participant in this.

Similarly, Pieterse (1999: 419) states that the "Existential communication of the gospel implies…that when we convey it (our interpretation of the gospel for today in our context) to others, we offer our whole existence as a guarantee. Finally it implies that we live by this message – that we cannot and do not want to live otherwise."

Minister 'E' says,

My bread and butter is that I rely on my relationship with the congregation and I think that preaching is personal at that level they do get my perspective on life or my perspective on life out of a passage. I think that personal nature helps people to listen. I think I get stronger as a preacher as a congregation gets to know me and I get to know them. Preaching is an organic, relational thing. If I tell them a story about my kids after being with a church 18 months then people are with me. I think though that I am more intuitive about most of those connecting and engaging kind of things that allow people to travel with me as we hear what God is saying. I think it helps people when they hear how this text speaks to me and challenges me. If I have been walking well I can encourage people with that or if I have been struggling, or if something in a passage has hit me I can offer that.

Brown (1989: 53) argues in an Australian context that, "A communicator's disposition will have significant effect on the responsiveness of their hearers, and requires careful consideration. This is important among a people influenced by a social myth, which hates officiousness, affectation, and moralism, is wary of preachers and religion generally and is bent on egalitarianism."

Schmidt (1981) uses Walker Percy's (1979) description of message as being either *science* or *news* to highlight the modernist tendency to turn theology into science at the expense of news, a lead that preaching has subsequently followed. Percy (1979: 125) argues that *science* is "knowledge which can be arrived at anywhere by anyone and at any time," while news communicates a present, "event or state of affairs which is…peculiarly relevant to the concrete predicament of the hearer of news." Schmidt (1981: 428, 429) argues that the learning that comes through science, "might require

laboratory research, historical research, or artistic insight; it would include scientific principles, logical propositions, and poetry", while with *news,* "No experimentation or insight, study or reflection will lead one to this information: it is a single event whose importance is now." Like Forde (1990), Schmidt (1981) believes that preaching is primarily news not science, and science should serve the purpose of news.

Schmidt (1981) also argues that science and news are responded to differently. Scientific knowledge is accepted, "by verifying it, experimentally in a laboratory or experientially by reflection"(Schmidt 1981: 429), whereas news is accepted in its relevance to one's own situation. "The basic and proper response to knowledge is confirmation (or rejection if it is false). This can lead to further experimentation and discovery, to happiness at knowing something significant, or contentment at insight; but these follow the basic first response, confirmation. The basic response to a piece of news is to move, to act on it, to respond immediately"(Schmidt 1981: 430).

Schmidt (1981) in his analysis of preaching as news rather than science, sees that the credibility of the messenger is critical for the acceptance of news. He does not see this as being such a critical factor when it comes to the communication of science. "If one knows the newsbearer as a sober person of good faith, one can accept the news; if one knows the newsbearer 'as a knave or a fool, [one has] reason to ignore the news'. A newsbearer who is a stranger must at least project sobriety and good faith. This criteria are not important for knowledge *sub specie aeternitatis:* one who discovers chemical principles need not be a sober person or one of good will, but only able to perform reliable experiments or to have significant insights. But the person of the newsbearer is highly important to the acceptance of news"(Schmidt 1981: 230).

Schmidt (1981: 432) argues that when preaching becomes science rather than news it disallows, "the real power of God's word to enliven and empower the Church to act, to change, to move outward and beyond itself and to proclaim the Good News to others and to baptise them, to feed and to clothe and to free them. The difference is between talking about the Good News and proclaiming it, between talking about Jesus and proclaiming him. It is saying, 'It is a truth that God loves every human being,' rather than saying, 'Listen: God loves you!'"

Schmidt (1981: 433) continues by saying, "It is possible of course, that Christians prefer to keep God's word in the safe category [of science], with its cold security of logic and reason rather than the warm folly of faith in Jesus, his cross and resurrection. It may be that the Western tradition of the Church means that it is fascinated with science and logic and disquieted by the knowledge that is faith, which demands at some point a leap into the partially unknown. Or perhaps Christians prefer to simply to keep God safely in the head rather than roaming loose in the heart. The Good News unchained speaks of love without caution, of life without term; and this news has always had the power to lead men and women to values and lifestyles that defy sober systems and cold calculations. Words given free rein are dangerous, and the word of God is the most dangerous of all! Whatever the motivation or underlying reasons, Christians seem to proclaim God's word more often as a sourcebook for inspiration or as a textbook for conduct than as news that speaks to needy men and women here and now as part of God's ongoing revelation to his people."

Minister 'A' spoke of his concerns of a tamed proclamation of God word which I believe speaks of the risk of an applicational hermeneutic

What are the essential things you would want to communicate in a sermon?

I think ultimately, and it is the most difficult thing, is that a sermon should create the opportunity for people to love God more. And out of that you view reality in a different way, you see others in a new way, in light of the Kingdom of God. I think you can persuade people to do certain things but it may not come from hearts that love. But as soon as I say that communicating the love of God is what the sermon is about then it is virtually impossible, I'm on a losing streak.

Why do you say you are on a losing streak?
Yes I want people to love God and to love other people but it is easier to get people to do things, easier to create obedience. But to create love is impossible. I am so much aware in my sermon and in my church that there is not just a recipe that can make it happen.

Apart from a recipe do you have any sense of how it does happen in a sermon?

I do think that it is very important that you yourself are touched by the sermon, while thinking about it, preparing it and giving it. I think often I get more spoken to while I preach than even when I am preparing it. I know what I am going to say but as I say it it becomes fresher to me and actually touches my life and makes me stand in awe of God. We must be engaged in the process.

Do you see the love of God as a critical element in every sermon?

Every sermon should be part of the structure of a new understanding of reality in light of who God is. So it is all part of the process of seeing differently and therefore being different.

This perspective *re* science and news is critical to keep in mind when developing a practical theology of preaching. Practical theology is a critical science used in the service of dynamic communicative events. Perhaps particularly in the area of preaching the *science* of practical theology must not dominate the preaching content and act of preaching. While it is critical that news be based on good science, content and form that primarily serves scientific formula risks losing the dynamic, present – tenseness of the Gospel.

Woodfin (1970: 409) also emphasises the present-tenseness of preaching which he says, "expectantly anticipates the existential and eschatological benefits which are presently available under God's grace to the hearer who responds in faith… preaching is essentially the *announcement* of the event of God's Good News in Christ" adding that humanity is not, "basically redeemed …by concepts or instruction."

Woodfin (1970) attempts to reconcile the "theological teaching – proclamation preaching" divide by appealing to Ritschl (1960), who like Forde (1990) argues that while teaching and preaching are interwoven, "there is a definite primacy of preaching over teaching, which corresponds to the priority of God's calling over man's understanding"(Ritschl 1960: 97).

For the Gospel to be spoken in the present tense it needs to be contextual and situational. It needs to be a word for the particular group of people who are hearing it. It needs to be more than a truth that is *imposed* from a system outside of the hearers even if it be clothed in the language and culture of the hearers. For it to be a word that is true for this people they need to be active participants in the hearing of the word and the meaning that is given to the word. This is profoundly existential communication. Pieterse and Wester (2001: 57) write that, "Existential communication implies that through interpretation and acceptance of the gospel we find salvation, meaning and our human destiny. It also implies that when we convey it to others, we offer our whole existence as a guarantee. Finally it implies that we live by this message – that we cannot and do not want to live otherwise." This word as the living word of God may speak for or against the hearer's situation but this word, for

or against, is heard through the active hermeneutical engagement of the hearers, it is not a word imposed from a superior theological system or Christian culture from the outside.

Schmidt (1981: 445) believes that a, "faithful Christian community can never forget or obscure this dynamic of God's word. If a community should ever simply proclaim its truths without professing the immediate relevance of those truths to the life of those who hear them, it would run the risk of identifying those truths with the general fund of human knowledge, which contains a great store of knowledge stated as truths, but which leaves the hearer free to verify it and to find the value for oneself." Preaching under modernist paradigms then feeds the relativism and individualism of its postmodern offspring.

Rather than a bipolar tension between theology and the situational present, Forde (1990: 171) calls for the correlation of theology and the situational in preaching. Woodfin (1970: 409) argues that, "Christian theology is related to proclamation in that it critically and reflectively examines preaching to test its correspondence to the primary witness of Scripture, both at the point of historical and linguistic faithfulness to the Word, and at the level of existential relevance and adequacy in addressing human need." "The sermon, therefore, to be biblically and theologically valid, must reflect the cohesiveness and unity of the one God who is revealed in rich tonal depths in Scripture through the varied and sensitive responses of men in their immediate life situations"(Woodfin 1970: 410).

In similar vein Bartow (1997: 128, 129) states that, "Preaching has a *present-tense tone*, emphasizes *divine initiative*, offers *a Christian interpretation of life*, is in the *indicative mood*, and features *a dexterous use of variety.*" I am concerned that preaching in the Evangelical church in Australia, in contrast to Bartow's perspective, is imperatively focused in a narrow individualistic manner, authoritarian (based on the imperative 'should' rather than the indicatively based possibilities of the Gospel) and instrumental, acting mechanistically on its audience. In this approach language is treated instrumentally and mechanistically with coercive intent. This is distinct from the language of God which from our first hearing of it in Genesis 1 is speech which initiates and sustains relationship between the Creator and the creation. It is powerful and authoritative language but it is covenantal and the language of promise rather than the language of coercion (Brueggemann 1982: 22-32). This view of language is more akin to that which Searle (1969) describes in his Speech Act Theory.

1.2 Speech Act Theory

Ritschl's (1960) view that God's calling takes precedence over human understanding is a theme taken up by Vanhooser (1998b). Like Gleeson (1989) in the previous chapter, he questions the relationship of God's initiating actions and human response. Vanhoozer (1998b) explores the nature of the God/world relationship, using the example of 'saving grace'. He contrasts two traditional understandings of how God interacts with the world and then argues for a perspective of how God interacts with the world based on Searle's (1969) theory of 'speech acts'.

In the Reformed tradition there is the doctrine of 'effectual call'. In this view God is supremely sovereign, immutably omnipotent and also estranged from his creation. It

is God's sovereign purposes and decrees which determine all that happens and will happen in the world. This has tended to construct an impersonal God and a deterministic causality that both science and theology are now questioning (Vanhoozer 1998b: 214, 215).

In the Reformed tradition 'effectual call' is construed in a causal sense. There is an outward call through the preaching of the Word and an inward call which is a work of the Spirit. Quoting Heppe (1978), Vanhoozer (1998b: 217, 218) states, "*Vocatio* 'is the act of God by which through the preaching of the Word and the power of the H. Spirit He brings man from the state of sin to the state of grace'. The effectual call takes place 'over and above' the outward call by the inward power of the almighty Spirit. At the same time, the word by which the Spirit effects calling 'is the same word by which God's call to grace is outwardly proclaimed'. The internal call is virtually indistinguishable from regeneration: 'Calling is therefore the act of the H. Spirit, by which…He creates a new man… The direct effect of such a calling is thus the regeneration of human nature.' "

Vanhoozer (1998b) claims that this is still the current Reformed perspective on the effectual call. As a divine act, "it is something that enters into human history" (Vanhoozer 1998b: 218) and is an act of divine power that is causative and effectual. Grace is irresistible and "God's will is both a necessary and sufficient cause for moving the human will" (Vanhoozer 1998b: 220). "If the human response were what made the call effectual, then the call would be no more than an invitation that lacked inherent efficacy"(Vanhoozer 1998b: 221).

This perspective, and the language used to describe it, suggests to Vanhoozer (1998b: 221), "a certain coercion, even violence – a *contravening* of human freedom." For many, "a God who effectually calls cannot really love the world, for love is a matter…of mutual, reciprocal and non-coercive relations. Theism's root metaphor of God as Prime Mover of the world and the will is ultimately incompatible with the biblical picture of a God who covenants with humanity" (Vanhoozer 1998b: 222).

Vanhoozer (1998b: 219) questions this position by asking, "If the human response is an effect of the call, does it not follow that God relates to human persons in an impersonal way? If the human being is both creature and person, dependent on God for his being yet able to make responsible decisions, why attribute the effectual call to God alone?"

The 'contrary' view is that of 'free-will' theists who argue that, "God reacts and interacts with human beings in a way that respects creaturely autonomy…God exerts a constant attractive force on the soul – a kind of divine gravity… God's call offers the possibility of salvation to every human being. Sufficient grace becomes efficient…only when the sinner cooperates with it and improves it…it is the human response – an exercise of free will – that makes the sufficient grace of God common to all efficient in the case of the individual" (Vanhoozer: 1998b: 223). "Grace cooperates with human freedom and God elects those who respond to the evangelical call" (Vanhoozer 1998b: 224). In newer developments of this theology, God is not the ruler of the universe but its wooer, working not with causal power but with the power of love and persuasion. The course of history thus takes the shape of a dialogue between God and the world. God and the world come together to converse, to 'enjoy'

one another. The way that God works with the world…is by *convening* a cosmic conversation. Grace, we may say, is therefore *convenient*, achieving its effects not causally, but as it were conversationally" (Vanhoozer 1998b: 225).

Vanhoozer (1998b) is also concerned by this approach. "Of course, to say that God's call is conditionally effectual is tantamount to say that it is intrinsically *ineffectual"* (Vanhoozer 1998b: 223). Vanhoozer (1998b: 227) neither sees God as a physical cause or an ineffectual influence. Perspectives that argue for prevenient grace (free-will theists) see the Spirit as, "the one who imparts grace to believers. The infusion of grace resembles a transfer of energy. The Spirit, then, is indeed like a physical force. Better, God, as love, acts on individuals like a force field, empowering humans freely to respond" (Vanhoozer 1998b: 240). Those who argue for supervenient grace (panentheists – God is in the world as a whole, acting on/in it as a whole) see the Spirit as, "more like the operating system or software, of creation. In sum, God communicates to humanity through the fabric of the natural world" (Vanhoozer 1998b: 240-41). Vanhoozer (1998b: 242) asks, "Is it possible to have a personal relation with one whose presence and activity is always only prevenient or supervenient?"

His response is to these understandings is to argue that the effectual call is a *speech act* with a unique communicative force (Vanhoozer 1998b: 226). He thinks of, "the God/world relation in terms of communicative rather than causal agency. The call exerts not brute but communicative force" (Vanhoozer 1998b: 242).
Speech Act Theory (Searle 1969) presents the basic notion that speech does not simply label and state, it is an action that has an effect, it *does* something, e.g.

summons, invites, warns, directs, questions, etc. Apart from content (the propositional matter), speech has illocutionary force, which is the 'energy' of the communication action. Illocution is the idea of "what we do *in* uttering words"(Vanhoozer 1998b: 243). Vanhoozer, using Habermas, distinguishes speech acts from strategic acts. Speech acts seek to communicate, strategic acts in this view attempt to manipulate. God's speech and call is communicative, not manipulative.

The power of God's communicative act does not rest in the causality of the message, there is no intrinsic power in the sign, but its power rests in the authority and character of the speaker. The message nevertheless is the medium of God, never divorced from his authority and character as it emanates from him. Speech Act Theory allows one to see that communication is both matter and energy and rather than a causal joint between God's speech and human response, there is a communicative joint. God's word is deeply linked to God's grace but not in a deterministic fashion (Vanhoozer 1998b: 244, 245).

God's authority or agency expressed in speech initiates change. When God speaks things do not remain the same. This is what happens in a word event. It enters into a context and by its entry (by both its illocution and content) changes the context. "New human possibilities do emerge…but not out of purely natural processes. Many emerge out of…communicative action… The world then is not a closed system but one that is hermeneutically open. And the way this system is put into motion is through God's communicative, and self-communicative, action… Divine communicative action is thus of a wholly different sort than instrumental action… God's work of grace is congruous with human nature"(Vanhoozer: 1998b: 245, 246).

This is consistent with Habermas's (1975) notion of Ideal Speech Acts. Preaching can act as if it was an instrumental action, or at least communicate the Word as if it was instrumental. Instrumental power is too easily coercive power and negates the Word of grace.

However the notion of non-coercion critical to Habermas, Pieterse and my own persuasion, needs to be thought through more carefully. God in initiating salvation by his actions has acted against the will of humanity (unless one holds that humanity intrinsically desires to be saved by God and in this desire indirectly invites his action). He has moved in an uninvited manner. At some level this is coercive. There is no one angrier in Scripture than God himself, who not only in his love but also in his anger sent his son to die to save the world, enacting his wrath against Christ. In a real sense, even though Christ voluntarily gave his life, God acted coercively in his punishment against his Son so that his anger could be turned away from the world. This is not to be seen as God possessing a *need* for vengeance, or an appetite for anger that must be satisfied. God's hatred of evil and injustice is deeply embedded in his love of all that is good, right, holy, just and beautiful. God could not be zealous in his love without an anger at that which impedes love. God now acts against our will, without hostility, but with loving, *redemptive* initiative and 'force'. One could possibly call it non-aggressive force or even non-aggressive coercive intent that brings people to a non-manipulative choice. Speech Act Theory acknowledges that illocution has a quality of force, that also bears with it the authority (or lack of authority) of the speaker. If it is an action then it is also intrinsically strategic. It is designed to have an effect that changes the nature of things. The human freedom to say yes to God (according to

Speech Act Theory – the perlocutionary effect) is due to the activity of the Spirit that liberates humanity to say yes. By non-coercive preaching it would be naïve to believe that a preacher is not acting with strategic intent to change the nature of things. Preaching will create a certain disequilibrium. This is because 'news' enters and shifts established patterns and paradigms. Often this effect will be against the will of the hearer who both desires a word from God but wishes to maintain equilibrium. Non-coercive preaching recognises the humanity of the hearer, treating them as people not as targets, numbers or a project, and it is ethical in allowing the Gospel to communicate without using manipulative words and manner to persuade. It is not hostile and aggressive, recognizing that God's justice has been fulfilled in Christ and the preacher does not have to revisit the punishment of God on their hearers. It identifies with the hearer in their standing before God and in Christ, so it does not treat them as the hostile enemy that needs to be overwhelmed by aggressive force. Disruptive illocutionary force may be present but it is offered in the Spirit of grace and the love of God.

For example, if I as a friend speak a word of hope to a 35 year old man who sees himself as hopeless as a consequence of repeatedly being called so as a 10 year old by his father, then I have posited a new possibility into his experienced reality. His context has changed. If he only hears that word as a word from a friend who in his estimation does not bear as much weight and significance as his father, he may choose to minimise the transformational opportunity inherent in that word of hope entering into his reality. There is no magic or intrinsic power in the word but it opens up a new perspective and opportunity that he can make choices in regard to. He may consider my words but if the word of hope does not correspond or cohere with the reality that

he is engaged with it will not have efficacy. *Biblical truth statements that do not correspond to the reality people are experiencing do not connect and do not have power to change people.* If he picks up a hint that I am speaking with a different kind of voice, message and relationship than that of his father then there may be greater chance that the word event has transformative potential. If he senses the voice of God being spoken in human speech then the potential for change is even greater, again not because the Word of God is magical but because it is God who is speaking. It is the character, message and authority of the voice heard not any inherent power in the words that creates an opportunity to choose life. A living, dynamic, relational word needs to be heard. This is how critical it is that as Christian communicators we are dependent on the Spirit of God, not as magic power but as dynamic, personal voice of God.

More than this is needed however. The word offered not only needs to connect to the person's reality but it needs to create dissonance. Christ used coherent stories that corresponded to the hearers' reality but added a dimension for those who could hear, so they might see that their lives did not correspond with the new reality of the life of the Gospel. Likewise preaching provides points of connection so a new word can enter and encourage a person to question the coherence of their own life and how it corresponds to the reality of God's design and purposes. For the Christian there is a new ability to hear and obey that word as the life of Christ is now their life. For the non-Christian the new word may initiate the desire for God in a way they have never considered before. In this sense turning to God (repentance) is a gift initiated and given by God in a speech act.

This is the very essence of Christ as the Final Word. He became flesh and thus connected with us so that a new reality could enter the existing context that could disrupt us. Nothing is the same once he entered the situation.

Vanhoozer (1998b) draws implications from his argument for preaching. "What we have in gospel preaching is a *narrative* illocution. What does one do in narrating? One displays a world and commends a way of viewing and evaluating it"(Vanhoozer 1998b: 246). Christian preaching does not primarily present a collection of ideas or correct truth statements. Nor does it primarily imperatively commend or command a set of right actions or feelings. Primarily, preaching tells and explores the grand narrative of God in the midst of our reality in the context of worship that lives, tells and explores the same story.

Vanhoozer(1998b) refers to the writing of Jungel (1983) to amplify this point. He writes that Jungel, "observes that the event of addressing results in a concrete relation between the discourse, the subject of the discourse, and the one being addressed. Something happens in and through talk about God in Christ. What happens is that God comes to speech: 'God's humanity introduces itself into the world as a story to be told.' Only through narrative, says Jungel, can we articulate, and then actualise, certain 'emergent possibilities' for human being. Jungel construes the God/world relation, in other words, as a *story* that alters the cause of history. 'The hearer must be drawn existentially into this story, and this story through the word, precisely because it is also his story, and this must happen before he can *do* what corresponds to this story.' For Jungel, it is the Gospel narrative that effectually calls people to union with Christ by drawing them into the story of Jesus"(Vanhoozer 1998b: 246, 247).

Vanhoozer (1998b) then wonders what renders certain communicative acts as efficacious and wonders if it be the *truth* of the message in both its content and person i.e. the Holy Spirit. At this point Vanhoozer turns to the notion of *perlocution.* This is the effect on the hearer of a speech act. He sees the perlocutionary effects of the Gospel as including regeneration, understanding and union with Christ. "It is not simply the impartation of information, nor the transfer of mechanical energy, but the impact of a total speech act…that is required for a summons to be effective… The effectual call is best understood in terms of a conjunction of Word and Spirit, illocution and perlocution. Does the Spirit, then supervene on the Word? I can give no more than a qualified 'Yes' to this query, for while the Spirit's call depends on the external call and is irreducible to it, it is nevertheless possible to have Gospel preaching without regeneration. 'Advene' would therefore be a more accurate term. For the Spirit *comes to* the Word when and where God wills. The Spirit 'advenes' on the truth to make it efficacious"(Vanhoozer 1998b: 248, 249).

In Vanhoozer's (1998b) view God is a sovereign speaker, the locutor in terms of both illocution and perlocution. As all of God's actions come from the freedom of his love, to believe that preaching is causally effective negates the freedom of God and hence his sovereignty. "Nothing in the world… can constrain God's Word or force God to speak"(Vanhoozer 1998b: 250).

Preaching is therefore a speech act that communicates the speech act of God. God's speech act is the preacher's model and content for their own speech act. The preacher cannot preach as if their speech act was the actual speech act of God but he or she can

speak believing that in their speech act the speech act of God can be heard. They cannot assume deterministic, instrumental causality in their own speech act nor in the speech act of God. Therefore in this sense it is not coercive though it is strategic and may be disruptive. While this suggests a dialogical engagement it is not a dialogue of equals as both the preacher and hearers dialogue in submission to the speech act of God. Speech Act Theory reinforces the perspective that we only know God in the context of situational reality. God is not a theoretical abstraction that we correlate to our praxis *through* dialectic tension. It is our *theology* about God and life that we compare with our experience of God and life and that *is* part of a dialectic tension. Torrance (1999: 70, 71) argues that language is a sufficient means to point to the reality of God, but that when it comes to the use of conceptual language to describe God it, "must be constantly submitted to critical clarification and revision in the light of the realities that become disclosed to us through the Scriptures, so that they may retain their semantic function as conceptual signs and not become theological objects which terminate our understanding on themselves. That is to say, instead of being objectifications of the truth, our concepts are to be transparent, open structures of thought, forged under the impact of divine revelation in the Scriptures, structures through which the Truth of God is allowed to disclose itself to us in ways appropriate to it and through, which, therefore, our deepening understanding of him terminates on God himself and not upon conceptual significants or propositional ideas."

God is over and above us not as theory but in his reality. Our praxis is based on God being with us historically and presently in Christ, which allows us to relate to the otherness of God in our own reality. Theology (theory), which is an attempt to answer two questions – How does God relate to the world and how do humans relate to their

world (inclusive of God) – is intrinsically linked and continuous with our experience of the world and the saving acts of God. This is consistent with the ideas of Gadamer (1975) who argues that understanding is intrinsically linked and continuous with our experience. This dynamic process in the hermeneutical process is also critical to the theories of Ricoeur.

1.3 Ricoeur's theory of Distanciation and Appropriation

Ricoeur (1976) also based his theory on speech acts. He saw a speech act as occurring in the present and being linked to and referring to the reality in which the speech act occurs and to which it is connected. Ricoeur argues that this reality is made up of, "past experience, tradition, faith, culture, worldview, social, political and economic circumstances, and so on. Reality influences the content and type of speech act, which also refers to extra-linguistic reality. A speaker, moreover, implies a dialogue partner. When a speaker speaks, he or she gives verbal expression to an intention… Hence language utterances are subject to change"(Pieterse 2001: 77).

Ricoeur (1976) highlights in the speech act the transition from the speaker's original intent due to the *interlocutionary* aspect of the speech act. The speaker speaks from their experiential, pre-suppositional and linguistic reality. In the intersubjective communication (the interlocution) the hearer decodes the speech through their experiential, pre-suppositional and linguistic reality. Meaning does not occur through reconstructing the speaker's intention but hearing the message in a dialogical context where there is shared interaction in regard to syntax, content, illocution and perlocution.

Ricoeur (1976) argued that there was a further shift when spoken words were written as text. The text is now distanced or separated from the original speech act. Ricoeur called this distanciation. "In other words, you could read the message and get meaning from it despite the fact that you were not part of the original speech event" (Littlejohn 1996: 212), i.e. you do not have to know the author's intent to get meaning from a text. Despite this process of distanciation humans are able to connect with a text due to its narrative nature. Every text is connected to human reality and as all human reality is intrinsically active and has a sense of movement, then all reality has a clear narrative character. Speech acts and texts recount and enact this movement and action (narrative). The world in which this action occurs is what Ricoeur (1976) calls the prefiguration of the text. The creation of the text by an author is configuration. When the text is read refiguration occurs. "They perform a reading act and shape their own story through their reading of the text. The story that derives from a world of action in the past returns to the world of action – the world of the reader. The reader may experience the story of the text as an appeal, may be renewed by it, inspired to act and create a new story from the original one" (Pieterse 2001: 78).

While Ricoeur (1976) applies this theory to text as distinct from a speech act, I would argue that the same process occurs in preaching. To delineate preaching as a speech act distinct from textual language is difficult as preaching is based on the Scriptural text and is often written and even read as text to the hearer. Every sermon is prepared in a world of action and heard in a world of action – there is prefiguration. A sermon is created by an author in the privacy of their study and a sermon is also created in the process of delivering it – there is configuration. There is also refiguration as hearers hermeneut the sermon in the present. Hearers do not primarily work to determine

what was going through the author's mind in their study but hear it in their present context. There is also a certain distanciation as the hearer is neither the God who speaks in the Scriptural text, the human author of the Scriptural text, nor the preacher of the sermonic text. The hearers' distance from the sermon (text) is part of what allows it to have meaning in the present. Their hearing (reading) is for the purpose of appropriation – applying it to their own context. This message from outside themselves needs appropriation for it to have meaning. Ricoeur (1976) argued that it is in appropriation that meaning is discovered. Apart from appropriation there is no meaning for particular hearers (readers). "Thus, interpretation begins with distanciation but ends with appropriation"(Littlejohn 1996: 213).

Ricoeur (1981) is not saying that the reader (hearer) simply shapes and adapts the text (sermon) to their context. "On the contrary, application means letting go, as readers (hearer) open themselves to the world presented by the text (sermon). When this happens, two worlds confront each other: the world of the text (sermon) and that of the reader (hearer)… Understanding happens when readers (hearers) receive the other, foreign 'self' of the text (sermon) from its world which is presented to them. Application entails receiving and appropriating this new 'self' or property of the text (sermon), which makes you perceive your situation afresh, moves you to action, or makes you construct a new story in your own context from the story presented in the context of the text (sermon). This application of the text's (sermon's) presentation to your own life does not happen because your spirit and that of the text (sermon) are on the same wavelength. Rather it is the result of a confrontational dialogue. Appropriating the message of the text (sermon) is an existential act. It is the actualisation, via confrontation with the text (sermon), of the meaning of the text

(sermon) in your own situation and context" (Pieterse 2001: 79. Text in brackets added).

Evangelicals argue that the capacity to receive the confronting word of God is because of the Spirit of God acting in the believer. It is the perlocutionary action of the Spirit of God that allows the human spirit to bear witness to the truth ministered by God's Spirit. Torrance (1999: 85) argues that the "self-revelation of God … posits and sustains man as the partner of its full movement from God to man and from man toward God. There is created such profound reciprocity between God and man that in assuming human form, divine revelation summons an answering movement from man toward God." Because of this God-initiated partnership, confronting truth may not always be *experienced* as confronting or coercive but thrilling and challenging and may be met with a 'yes' and 'amen' in the hearer. But this is not the smug 'amen' that assumes it has already mastered the meaning nor an 'amen' that maintains the status quo. It is a 'yes' to something new that resonates a 'deep truth' in the heart and will of the hearer leading to transformational action.

Consistent with the theme that has been developed in this and the previous chapter, preaching is a word event, breaking into a personal and communal context from outside the self. It is in the present tense, with the impact of news, challenging existing perceptions of God, self and the world, leading to transformational action and mission. Pieterse (1987: 2) states that, "Practical theology is concerned with the actions of people, who, in their pastoral conduct, are intermediaries to the coming of God in His Word, and who in so doing, communicate faith to the people." Critical in this definition is the idea that preachers are intermediaries to the coming of God in

His Word. There is an authority and hence influence in preaching that comes from outside of the preacher. In speaking of revelation, Torrance (1999: 85) argues that it, "is not some vague, inarticulate awareness of God projected out of the human consciousness, but an intelligible, articulate revealing of God by God which is actualized within the conditions of our creaturely existence and therefore within the medium of our human thought and speech." The preacher by human means reveals God who communicates through the preacher. This is theology seeking praxis due to its connection with the reality of God and the reality of life.

Ricoeur's own theory can have an instrumental flavour to it, suggesting that language, speech and text works because of the mechanics involved in a communication act, i.e. communication works because of its communicative elements. Christians would argue that there is a qualitative element to a communication act based on the character of God and of the kingdom and that these qualitative elements make speech and text powerful and effective. The truth a preacher speaks points to a Truth beyond the theological or communicative mechanisms and constructs used and presented in preaching. Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, argues that the power of his message is not based on the skill, mechanics and the sophistication of the trained rhetoricists of the day but that his presentation of the Gospel message had authority due to the Spirit of God. The qualitative aspect of the communication act is taken up by Habermas (1975) in his notion of the Ideal Speech Act.

1.4 Habermas's Ideal Speech Act

Habermas (1975) posited that society consisted of three interests – work, interaction and power. In Habermas's (1975) view work is technical by nature and based on an

instrumental rationality. By contrast Scripture would suggest that work is an act of worship. That Habermas (1975) saw it only in instrumental terms may suggest how far we have moved from work's intent. In the Christian context worship tells and explores the story of God and shapes the formation of a community and all the actions that lie within it. This is the power of preaching – to transform the instrumental into the works of God. In Habermas (1975), work outcomes serve technological ends and are practical and pragmatic. Critical and evaluative thinking is minimised.

An example of Habermas's (1975) category of instrumental rationality can be seen in the effect on tertiary education of those aspects of free-market capitalism based on principles of economic rationalism and corporatization. While universities struggle for funding for the arts and humanities, courses in information technology, economics and business grow and generate income for universities, often on a commercial basis. In Australia the present government has issued the following statements regarding higher education. "Universities are looking increasingly for every marketing opportunity in the tertiary sector to boost their positional value in the market place… The higher education sector should be concerned with the commercialisation of good ideas, the creation of new market opportunities and proper response to the needs of the economy" (Horne: 2001, 26). One of Australia's leading academics, Donald Horne (2001: 26) writes that this kind of instrumental language, "comes directly from an attempt to economate Australian's imaginations by pushing the voguish terminology of markets, globalism, salesmanship, the bottom line and so forth into places where it has no place…Marketing opportunity in the tertiary sector…boost positional value…commercialisation of good ideas…communication of information to stakeholders - by using terms such as these, university spokespeople don't try to

explain lucidly and eloquently what is special about teaching and inquiry: they simply make universities sound just like everything else."

Critical thinking which is essential for transformative opportunity is minimised in such rationality (Faraclas 2001). Economic rationalism of a global scale can be seen to be fideistic, a closed system that is difficult to question. While globalization may be inevitable and has benefits, e.g. it is difficult for open markets (as distinct from free markets) to operate without democratic systems of government, a globalization based purely on unrestrained free market economics could potentially set up a new colonialism as profit maximization is gained by labour cost minimization. In terms of Speech Act Theory, it is difficult for a word act to penetrate the fideistic context of such a closed system and hence provide transformational opportunity. In a culture where technology is a critical catalyst for globalization, corporatization and economic rationalism, there is the very real threat that the rationality that characterises particular cultures will be encouraged in an instrumental direction. Those whose work serves the purposes of free-market globalization will be taught how to think and act in ways that serve the function of the powers that be. Faraclas (2001) is concerned that this will develop a new form of economic slavery.

Like Faraclas (2001), Habermas (1975) was concerned about the domination of instrumental thinking in capitalist systems. He believed that power has the potential to enslave or to emancipate. Emancipation is possible if people can be self-reflective and think critically. This allows people to analyse where power lies and to act so that power is not held by dominating forces. This is similar to the concern of Foucoult (1980). Habermas (1975) believed that power led to the abuse of communication for

the purposes of domination and believed that a strong public domain was necessary to keep the interests of the individual and private ownership in check.

It can be seen then that preaching in both form and content, has a crucial role in communicating non-instrumentally. The emancipatory potential of preaching (Pieterse 2001a: 111-118) is critical in light of the enslaving capacity of unchecked power, of which globalised capitalism and consumerism is perhaps the most pervasive world-wide force at present. Though economic in force it shapes the nature of whole cultures. In this regard then it is important that preachers sees themselves as offering a public service with a public text rather than serving the interests of a particular religious institution or elite, for the purposes of maintaining positions of dominating influence and power. Theiss (1991) argues that preaching must serve the purposes of public life and public service if it is not simply to serve the unhealthy aspects of individualism. As an example Pieterse (2001b: 28) argues that in the South African context theology, "had inherited the Western, liberal hermeneutical approach to the Bible, which has a vantage point from the freed, middle class society. In South Africa this hermeneutic made it possible for the bible to become the instrument of social control." I would argue that this danger is not unique to South Africa and that in the Australian context preaching based on an uncritical use of such a hermeneutic maintains the status quo of a middle class, conservative, materialistic ideal and hence social control.

Brueggemann (1998a) argues that preaching should be subversive, presenting an alternate reality to the dominant themes of our culture. He claims that, "Preachers have on their hands a Subject who is not obvious and a mode of speech that is endlessly open and demanding …. in a congregation schooled in one-dimensional,

technological certitude. The offer of such certitude, however, not only misreads the text and the God of the text; it seriously distorts and misrepresents the true human scene, as every pastor knows, for the human scene is one of endless zones of contradiction and endless layers of interpretation….for that reason…faithful speech about God is sure to be faithful speech about the complexity of being human, and this in a society determined to over-simplify"(Brueggemann 1998a: 198). He argues that, "Such utterance is unsettling, open, freeing, demanding. Such utterance in our time, as in all the times of our mothers and fathers, generates possibilities – public and personal – that are not otherwise possible, not otherwise doable or thinkable" (Brueggemann 1998a: 199).

Brueggemann (1998a) sees the dominant version of reality that marks our world as being one of violence. This violence has three dimensions which he counters with three 'subversions'. Firstly, "The taproot of violence is *material deprivation,* fostered by a myth of scarcity, the driving power of market ideology. The counter to material deprivation is a practice of sharing that is rooted in and appeals to *an affirmation of abundance*. That affirmation of abundance, rooted in the generosity of God, is deeply subversive to the deep social myth of scarcity"(Brueggemann 1998a: 200-201).

Secondly the, "taproot of violence is a *break-down of connections,* the severing of elemental social relationships so that folk are driven into isolation and then made desperate and frantic"(Brueggemann 1998a: 201). Brueggemann (1998a: 210) sees the antidote to this as being the, "offer of covenant, a vision, a structure, and a practice that binds the "haves" and the "have-nots" into one shared community, so that we are indeed members of each other. We live in a world of kinship, where when

one suffers all suffer and when one rejoices all rejoice together. It is indeed covenantal community that is the only available alternative to the dissociation that fosters and legitimates and thrives on violence from below and violence from above."

Thirdly, Brueggemann (1998a: 202) argues that, "the taproot of violence is surely *silence,* of being vetoed and nullified and cancelled so that we have no say in the future of the community of our own lives." In response, "We of all people have the textual resources authorizing and modelling *speech that breaks the silence* of violence and the violence of silence"(Brueggemann 1998a: 202). These antidotal themes mark the preacher as odd and, "The maintenance of oddity – that creates freedom for life, energy for caring, and joy through the day – is the first task of the preacher. It spins off into public policy and proposes reordered public life"(Brueggemann 1998a: 204). This oddity is modelled on Jesus. "As the story goes, Jesus came among those frozen in narratives of anxiety and alienation, of slavery and fear; he authorized a departure into the new world of God's governance"(Brueggemann 1998a: 209). Jesus, "subversioned by his emancipatory teaching that was not quite clear (parabolic) but …was marked by quixotic irony, as though mocking the way that it has been for a long time"(Brueggemann 1998a: 210).

Reid (1994/95) offers an example in the African-American church that reflects the ideal presented by Brueggemann (1998a). "The black neighbourhood and church have traditionally formed the interpretive context, and preaching has been the crucible of African-American biblical interpretation; preaching and worship constitute the implementation of interpretation. The neighbourhood kept the preacher/scholar focused on the needs and the language and life world of the community. The African-

American community pioneers a populist hermeneutic, a guide of interpretation that moves contrary to the assumptions of the secular university. This populist hermeneutic finds a rudder in the vision of the Reign of God and the just world"(Reid 1994/95: 482, 483). This vision of the reign of God and a just world, "puts the lie to conventional readings of Scripture"(Reid 1994/95: 479). In the context of preaching, "The traditional African-American liturgy has an antiphonal nature. If the preacher/scholar gets off track, there is no 'amen' to bring him/her 'home'. The congregation corroborated and validated his interpretation. For the organic scholar/preacher Bible study and preaching lead naturally and inexorably to a life of activism; but the activism is never solitary; the antiphonal response validates the interpretation but also promises community activism"(Reid 1994/95: 483).

It can be seen from Brueggemann (1998a) that contextualised preaching is not simply mimicking the culture. In fact this is a trend that I am concerned about in many churches that attempt to be contemporary in order to reach the culture. These churches simply mimic the culture and are no longer an alternate community of faith. Contextualised preaching knows and engages with the stories, meta-narratives, myths, speech acts and communication events that shape the norms, values and culture of a people. This brings the gospel to present reality, providing points of connection and critique.

Bosch (1991: 452) in the context of mission, uses the word 'inculturation' in a similar way to which I use the word contextualization. Distinct from other missional approaches that can impose a system from outside, "In inculturation, the two primary agents are the Holy Spirit and the local community, particularly the laity. Neither the

missionary, nor the hierarchy, nor the magisterium controls the process"(Bosch 1991: 453). Bosch's (1991: 453) idea of inculturation, "comprises much more than culture in the traditional or anthropological sense of the term. It involves the entire context; social, economic, political, religious, educational, etc."

Bosch (1991: 454) also sees that inculturation, "consciously follows the model of the *incarnation…*of the gospel being "en-fleshed", "em-bodied" in a people and its culture" where, "it is not so much a case of the church being *expanded*, but of the church being *born anew* in each new context and culture." Bosch (1991: 455) argues that inculturation should be, "structured *christologically"* where the, "missionaries do not just set out to "take Christ" to other people and cultures, but also to allow the faith to start a history of its own in each people and its experience of Christ." Critical for our study is Bosch's cautions in regard to inculturation. Inculturation does not mean, "that a particular culture is merely to be endorsed in its present form…..Often in the West the inculturation process has been so 'successful' that Christianity has become nothing but the religious dimension of the culture – listening to church, society hears only the sounds of its own music. The West has often domesticated the gospel in its own culture while making it unnecessarily foreign to other cultures. In a very real sense, however, the gospel is foreign to every culture. It will always be a sign of contradiction…Authentic inculturation may indeed view the gospel as the liberator of culture; the gospel can, however, also become culture's prisoner"(Bosch 1991: 455).

Concerned about churches that simply mimic the language and experiences of the culture, Marva Dawn (1999: 336, 337) points out that faith is neither a cognitive exercise where intellectual assent is given to a set of propositions nor simply

experiential in terms of either action or emotions. Based on the work of Lindbeck (1984), Dawn argues that Christianity is also a cultural-linguistic system. While neither dismissing the intellect or experience Lindbeck (1984: 39) argues that, "logically, even if not causally, a religious experience and its expression are secondary and tertiary, in a linguistic-cultural mode. First come the objectivities of the religion, its language, doctrines, liturgies, and modes of action, and it is through these passions are shaped into various kinds of what is called religious experience." This does not break the hermeneutical dynamic of Ricoeur, Habermas, Gadamer or Searle. Dawn is not particularly supportive of modernist hermeneutics. It is saying, as previously stated, that meaning, which is the current culmination of a vast series of different types of actions, (situational and academic, historical, present and anticipated), places experience in an interpretive context. This allows meaning to be greater than merely the sum of the actions in the current experience while acknowledging that current experience also shapes meaning.

Christianity that emphasises cognitive and intellectual assent to a system can create language systems that are exclusive, archaic and disconnected from the language systems of the wider culture and are hence non-transformational. Conversely Christianity that is based on emotion and feeling excludes those who do not share similar experiences and emotions. While seemingly offering more points of intimacy and connection than mere intellect and systems of truth, feelings too are an exclusive language system that in many ways is even more elusive to connect with. Consistent with Proverbs 14:10, that says that personal emotions cannot be communicated in their fullness, Dawn (1999: 338) writes that, "objectivities can be passed on, shared with another, whereas subjectivities cannot be transmitted". She continues by stating

that, "if you tell me that I should get excited about Jesus when I am battling with anger at God because of a new physical malady, your invitation will only make me more depressed. If, on the other hand, you show me some objective truth about God that can produce in me hope for his presence in the midst of new tribulation, then I might be able to move away from anger and into a more positive response" (Dawn 1999: 338). Such a speech act has transformational power. While we bring our realities to dialogue with God and the Word, and I would encourage that this be done more intentionally than occurs in some sermons, I agree with Lindbeck's (1984: 125) emphasis that the gospel is distorted when we begin with a simple hermeneutic of feelings and experience. The kingdom of God is then shaped primarily according to experience rather than our experience and emotions being shaped by the grand narrative of God and his kingdom.

Lindbeck (1984: 126) laments that churches have become purveyors of the personal quest for the transcendent experience, "rather than communities that socialize their members into coherent and comprehensive religious outlooks and forms of life." In reference to worship, in which she sees preaching as a critical part, Dawn (1999: 338) states that, "The goal of our worship must be instead to give a clear vision of the reign of God so that the participants are formed with the communal, coherent, comprehensive way of life that enables is to deal constructively with the perils of modernity and postmodernity." Only by doing so, in subjection to the kingdom of God, does Dawn (1999) see the gospel as being transformational and subversive, rather than giving way to the materialism, consumerism and instrumentality of the West. (Here is another clear example of the great difficulty is separating the situational and the theological in one's analysis).

Habermas (1975) believed that free speech and emancipatory communication is necessary for transformation and to keep the powers of colonization at bay, of which globalization could be a continuing form. In colonization, language does not serve emancipatory purposes but serves the interest of the system. Ideal speech situations are characterised by freedom of speech, equal access of all parties to communication with equal distribution of power. Pieterse (1999) like Dawn (1999) sees these ideals of transformation and emancipation as consistent with the values of God kingdom. He states that, "From the perspective of Jesus' communicative actions, religious communication in all its facets ought to be domination free. It should be conducted on an equal footing with the freedom of every participant to bring her/his own perspectives, interpretations, and ideas to the communication on, and of, our faith. They are also free to engage and disengage in the communication. Through dialogue we need to move to mutual understanding"(Pieterse 1999: 419).

I have previously stated my concern that too often preaching in Evangelical churches is instrumental and authoritarian. Pieterse (1999: 420) highlights the difference between dialogical and authoritarian communicative acts in the following way.

Figure 5.1 Dialogical – Authoritarian Communicative Acts (Pieterse 1999: 420)

DIALOGICAL	**AUTHORITARIAN**
a. conception of the other/partner in communication	
Partner gives meaning to message and acts thereon	Partner's behaviour a product of factors playing on its organization, i.e. it is inst rumental
Defends the other against humiliation and destruction	Sees the other as potential convert to own ideas
Active participant	Receiver
Co-believer	Not sharing the correct views
b. Communication situation	

Domination free	Speaker dominant
Pastoral	Non-pastoral
Gospel orientated communication	Manipulative communication
Involved in religious gathering	Outsider

c. Goal of communication

Building relationship with God/people	No relationship building
Allowing own convictions	Dominating persuasion
Striving for mutual understanding	Communicating own understanding only
Liberating	Non-liberating

d. Form of communication

Dialogical approach	Monological approach
Interchange of roles	Seeing only own position
Open-ended	Prescriptive
Communication a step in the process	Communication of only truth to be accepted now

e. Contents of communication

Centrality of love/compassion	Judgemental toward partner/s
Good news from God	Moralism
Biblical message open to communal Interpretation	Biblical message rigidly defined according to communicator's interpretation
Message of liberation from God	Putting new burdens on communication partner

While these may be extremes of a continuum and no communication neatly falls into one or the other, the stark contrast highlights how much communication in the church may tend toward the authoritarian. I would suggest that unless the church is intentionally dialogical as an institution it will naturally incline to the authoritarian. Interviewee 'D' spoke of the tension between a dialogical approach and a more directional approach.

Have you ever found it as a point of tension, that on the one hand you say you've got no end game, but on the other hand we do have an end game, we do have a kind of a meta-narrative?

Absolutely. It is a tension. I suppose being aware of the tension is the only way I can live with it, because I don't want to taint the relationship by saying, "I'm only your friend so that you'll get to that". And that's not true, I've come to love these guys already and that's a separate issue almost. I just love these guys full stop. But on the other hand, because I love these guys I desire them to grow and develop and have that spiritual awakening that I know. And everybody, if they want the best for somebody will have some desire for them and that happens to be how our minds are framed. So, as relativistic as people say they are – they're not. Everybody has a dream for

people.

Minister 'C' spoke of a similar tension.

You said not wanting to impose, do you have a tension between what people might want to hear and what you feel that they need to hear?

Yes. People may just want to be comforted and you want to put a bomb under them. That's the fundamental thing. Comfort those who are hurting and you want to stir those who are too comfortable. Yes, I'm always wanting to call people up, out to the next level of commitment and involvement and wanting to see God working in their life because they're really going out on a limb.

Do you have any particular ways of addressing that tension between what people might want to hear and what you think they might need to hear?

Well I would normally start from where they are and bend over backwards to acknowledge where something's difficult for people, whether they're hurting or struggling…. Yesterday for instance, talking about Christmas, I acknowledged that a lot of people find Christmas very difficult, because somebody is missing from around the table who died in the past year, or there's somebody alienated from the family., So I will always work very hard at acknowledging the pain of people in situations, but then I want to go on to say that Jesus promised to help you in this. Or this is an example, Abraham left all his family and went out… So I think it's very important to acknowledge where people are at but not leave them there. One of the things I wrestle with in this congregation is what does retirement mean, does retirement mean you've opting out of life, or does retirement mean redeployment. I'm not satisfied to say at retirement that your life is your own. You're still disciples, still Jesus' followers.

While Ricoeur's perlocutionary perspective states that speech has an effect and often has an intended effect, Habermas's Ideal Speech Act argues that speech in its effect is not to be coercive. This is a path strewn with tension as reflected in the following response of Minister 'A'

Do you use any particular communication models in preparing and delivering your sermons?

I have shifted. Underneath my communication model there is not a sender-receiver model but more a putting of something in the middle that they buy into or don't buy into. So I have to persuade them to enter into this, so it is like shopping, self-service. Are they going to take this? I can't take for granted what they want to hear or what I think they need to hear, so I have to package it in such a way that they actually might buy it.

And how is that different from a sender-receiver model?

I don't take for granted that they are receiving. I start off with the assumption that they are window shopping, they are not buying. So there is a lot more of, "How can I present it so that they actually want to enter into it?"

So you are wanting to persuade them?

Yes there is a persuasive element. I want to persuade and I want them to make a rational decision as well, so there is an interaction. I want to invite them to the text and say look this is what the text says and let that persuade them, so there are certain elements for them to think about rather than just be emotionally persuaded by.

Is that how you would keep it from being propaganda?

Yes I hope so, I think that propaganda at heart always has the agenda of getting people not to think, not to consider, not to evaluate. I communicate to the church that while I am totally convinced they must listen as if they are not.

Is that something you actually communicate to the church as an aid?

Yes as an aid. They must be sceptical. I ask them to open up their Bibles to check up on what I am saying. That is why I think the Bible is critical to all preaching. "Is this sermon really God's voice?"

How is that different from emotionalism?

Emotionalism is where you build people up but you do not have a logical substance underneath. So I want to build people emotionally but I also want to have a logical structure underpinning the emotion that is based on the text. So I want them to get excited, I want to move them but I want to constantly bounce them off the text so that when they go back at another time to the text something of that same emotion, something of that same understanding can be there again.

In an Australian context Carr (1988: 199, 200) argues that Christian education and teaching needs to offer empowerment for transformation. He believes that such teaching consists of 5 basic characteristics, which can also be applied to preaching.

"1. It must help believers interpret and respond christianly to the focuses that shape

(or dehumanise) them, by reference to the Word of God;

2. It must take cognizance of the learner's own world (cognitive, affective, existential

and practical) and of the developmental stages in a person's understanding,

morality, faith and spirituality;

3. It must equip believers for the prophetic and critical task of transforming

      themselves, society and culture into the image and likeness of Christ;

4. It must combine action and reflection (knowing and doing/ being and becoming) in

      a way that promotes justice, peace and love in the world;

5. It must empower believers of all ages, both individually and collectively, to deepen

      their knowledge of God and fulfil their lives as his covenant people

      responding to the demands of the Kingdom."

Carr (1988: 200) believes this need is critical in the Australian church as, "The old formula of training 'sermonisers' has failed to equip Christians for effective ministry and mission. The trend is still accepted in middle class churches because the information mode of communication, characteristic of sermons and lectures, is admirably suited to a hierarchical view of reality and to an acceptance of things as they are. Sadly, however, such a pedagogical mode – as opposed to that of dialogue or problem-solving – numbs the brain and thwarts any possibility of critical inquiry or prophetic engagement with evil in the world."

A subtle means by which preaching can be non-transformational and instead dominating, is highlighted by Skinner (1990: 194-201). In his thesis he points out how preachers can make unsubstantiated truth claims which people respond to by making either a decision of assent or dissent. From this, behavioural imperatives are developed that listeners are again required to make decisions of assent or dissent to. For example it is asserted as an unsubstantiated premise that God is love. This is offered at the beginning of a sermon. It is then asserted that because God is love the listeners should live according to the examples provided. The listener is asked only to

be obedient. The truth claims are seen to be self-evident and any non-obedience is then deemed to be acts of disobedience and unfaithfulness on the part of the listener. There is no dialogical engagement and the opportunity for dominance and coercion though it may be subtle is nevertheless present. Conformity and compliance rather than transformational living are the consequence of such preaching and non-compliance is seen as rebellion.

A dialogical approach might (there is not one dialogical approach) posit the notion of 'God is love' as an unsubstantiated premise that needs to be presented as a thesis with investigative questions leading to imperative possibilities. The preacher gathers and presents the evidence in relation to the love of God from textual, incarnational and existential sources. The preacher is also honest about the questions that listeners have because many have the felt the absence of God's love in their lives or have had experiences in life that appear bereft of the love of God. That the preacher engages in these questions sets up a dialogical process that not only helps people come to their own conclusions about the original premise and the imperative implications, but also helps them to think critically, reflectively, hermeneutically, and transformationally; a capacity that they can then take with them into the other contexts of their lives. They became active participants in the Gospel, not simply compliant followers of another person's truth.

While agreeing with Skinner's (1990) position, I believe that there is also a place for a proclaimed word that in giving its evidence declares with passion and conviction the character and purposes of God. At times such a declared word does not have to provide all the evidence for the claim. This is more akin to a prophetic style (Pieterse 2001: 88-90) where there is a "Thus saith the Lord" followed by rich and often

disturbing imperative implications. I would argue that a narrow applicational

hermeneutic offers imperatives that are often manageable and individualistic, calling

the listener to a personal pietistic obedience that they can actually enact without too

much disturbance to their lives (Mulholland 1993: 146-149). The word of God is then

trivialised and is not a living word of the Spirit but managed and dead words which

have no transformational capacity (2 Corinth. 3:6). Assertions such as "God is love"

become weak and anaemic when they are coupled with easily managed imperatives.

Such insipidness can then lead to cosy and inconclusive discussions and dialogue

rather than committed action based on purposeful dialogue. The premise that "God is

love" linked to a radical call to transformation and justice in our personal lives and in

the culture, will immediately invite a dialogical response as we grapple with this

stunning word event that calls us out of our comfortableness. The thinking of Minister

'A' reflects this perspective.

Are there places where you would want to make things very clear in a sermon such as, "This is the application" or "This is the call"?

Yes there are times when it is an imperative text or when it is a prophetic text where that becomes very specific, very definite and confrontational. I think there are times we can become so wishy-washy that we do not say things that will disrupt. I think the sermon should disrupt the existing paradigms in order to create new paradigms.

Interviewee 'D' offered this perspective on the prophetic word.

You mentioned before the question of authority, the authority of the Word. There are those who speak of the need for an authoritative proclamation or a prophetic witness, those places where there is a "Thus saith the Lord" kind of message. How do you understand this perspective?

For me, when it comes to prophecy how I think about it is that you hold the nail but the Holy Spirit hammers it home. So the good prophetic people I know are the ones who will say "You know, I get a hunch that God might be saying this to you", and they'll float it, and if they're right and if they're truly moving in the prophetic, it hits home. You know, people go "Yeh, your right, exactly" and it's a revelation for them, bingo it's all happened. But it's the Spirit who's nailed it home.

What about the prophetic as cultural witness, a prophetic voice like a John Smith?

Yeh, I think there is a place to stand up and say "Woo, this is bad". And we've done that here, the Government wanted to shut down the local school; that would have been diabolical here, so we started saying "Well how would Jesus approach this?" There were lots of things about forming working relationships "with the enemy" (the Government) to see how far we could go that way, rather than demonising people, or polarising them, and it ended up that it worked. So we won and retained the school, so good news.

Obviously not everything in the world is good and you do have to say "Woo" at some time or another. If you have the platform to speak strongly about that, then speak strongly about that. If you don't have the platform to speak strongly about that, you might be doing more harm than good, so think carefully about how you're going to approach it.

In the context of prophetic theology, Pieterse (2001b: 29) argues there is always a call to action. "The prophets do not have a purely theoretical or academic interest in God and the signs of the times. They call for repentance, conversion and change…The prophetic approach prompts the church to get involved in society for the sake of fellow humans." As will be further outlined in the next chapter, I believe that much of what Pieterse (2001b) says in relation to prophetic theology and preaching is true for all theology and preaching. There is a rich and disturbing imperative in the gospel that is impossible to remove from contextualised preaching no matter its type. "The truth of the gospel must be 'done'" (Pieterse: 2001b: 31). This is not the same as moralism. "Moralism in preaching asks of the listeners to do the right things in a specific situation first and then God will liberate them"(Pieterse and Wester 2001: 69). Such moralism begins with the imperative as a precondition for the action of God (the indicative). This is part of the applicational hermeneutic that I am concerned about. Transformational preaching is first and foremost based on the liberating activity of God in Christ.

Habermas (1975) acknowledges this element of assertion. He characterises three types of speech acts – assertions (speech acts attempting to assert that certain propositions are true), regulatives (used to influence the behaviour and relationship with the other persons or groups) and avowals (which reveal the speaker's inner feelings, intent and motivation). Habermas (1975) saw it as critical that avowals be truthful and sincere for communication to approximate an ideal speech situation. This is consistent with Schmidt's (1981), Miller's (1983) and Pieterse's (1999) concern with the character of the preacher.

2. SUMMARY

This chapter argues that a practical theological model that emphases the continuity between the theological and the situational is supported by a number of critical theorists. These theorist's own work also supports the premise that preaching needs to be transformational, contextualised, dialogical, in the present tense, having the impact of news and grounded in the story of God in Christ. This story forms the community of faith in their worship and service of God and his kingdom, leading to further transformational action.

The research is continuing to move toward the development of a practical theological model that focuses on continuity between the theological and the situational. This model, as well as the development of an ideal preaching praxis, will also allow the confluence of the indicatively grounded story of God, the existential contextual situation and the transformational imperative. However before presenting this model and the ideal praxis, the next chapter will attempt to reassess some of the material that has been covered thus far in light of two authors who might appear critical of what

has been posited as possibilities for preaching.

CHAPTER 6
PREACHING, AUTHORITY AND THE CHURCH

The research is gradually moving toward the development of a preaching model and

an ideal preaching praxis. However, before presenting these there is still a need for

some reshaping and refocusing of the material that has been covered thus far. This

reshaping will occur by exploring new material but before doing so it would be

helpful to summarise the conclusions that can be drawn from the discussion so far.

The thesis of this paper is that,

> Evangelical churches in Perth, Western Australia, operate predominantly with an
>
> applicational hermeneutical model in regard to preaching and hence communicate
>
> the gospel ineffectually to ordinary Australians.

Thus far it has not been empirically established that an applicational hermeneutic is operational. This hermeneutic however has been observed by the author and the examination of current analysis and research concerning preaching, using Zerfass's (1974) model, also suggests the presence of this hermeneutic. Observed factors from the research that suggests an applicational hermeneutic in current praxis are

1. the prevalence of Word and Spirit focuses (often in tension with each other) over mission

2. a separatist and retreatist mentality in evangelical churches

3. a focus on personal morality and obedience

4. attempts at relevancy based on superficial categories

Themes and research findings presented in the chapters so far would suggest that preaching in Australia needs to be

1. rediscovering the God of the Bible and the story of God, in ways that allow the preacher to speak to Australians rather than attempting to baptise God into an Australian identity

2. equipping "listeners" to engage with their culture and community, not expecting better preaching to attract people into the church

3. homily in style

4. non-authoritarian and non-coercive

5. reality-based

6. genuine, free of pretence

7. clear, non-jargony language

8. dialogical rather than didactic

9. It would appear that narrative forms of preaching would also be suited to an Australian context. Narrative forms more directly reflect the narrative/story base of Scripture and fits with the place of story in Australian history, culture and relationships.

10. encouraging faith beyond synthetic-conventional levels

11. inclusive – sensitive to the non-religious by not creating artificial distinctions between, "us" and "them"

12. inclusive - particularly of woman, Aboriginal Australians and new immigrants

13. addressing insecurity and anxiety regarding identity and the future

14. aware of multicultural context

15. balanced by a missions (inclusive of social justice) focus

16. reframing the message of reconciliation in broader communal, social and national contexts not simply in individual faith terms

17. directed to the unique culture and diversity of their particular community rather than trying to reach the "typical" Australian who may be more mythic stereotype than reality.

As can be seen these recommendations are primarily pragmatic and structural and can sound quite wooden presented in point form. Another way of expressing the recommendations is to say that preaching needs to promote faith that is dialogical, conversational, reflective, relational, reciprocal, shared, concrete, earthy, non-esoteric, non-abstract, transformational, relaxed, connected to story and to community praxis. Or it can be stated that preaching needs to be transformational, contextualised, dialogical, in the present tense, having the impact of news and grounded in the story of God in Christ. This story forms the community of faith in their worship and service

of God and his kingdom, leading to further transformational action. These ways of describing preaching seem less instrumental but still miss critical issues of the nature of the church in which preaching occurs and the substance of the message which is communicated. Both these issues will be explored in this chapter.

A practical theological approach such as Zerfass's (1974), allows for new grounds for theological praxis to arise through the process of considering situational elements in dialectic tension with theological tradition. This is an evolving process that may lead to quite different praxis from the initial praxis under consideration and to different findings than what may have been anticipated. I have been arguing that preaching needs to be considered as a dialogical, contextualised communicative action. Yet in the main I have considered the act of preaching within the context of a fairly traditional understanding of preaching and the services of the church. In this chapter we will further explore these presuppositions and consider two authors who might question my orientation.

The first author discussed will be Barth who would seem more cautious, even opposed, to the contextualization that I advocate. The second is Australian author Mark Strom who might argue that I haven't thought radically enough about the context in which preaching occurs, i.e. the church. In light of the conclusions drawn from this exploration I could revisit prior chapters and incorporate a more critical thread through the already existing material. But this would actually mask the process by which practical theology operates. Consequently there may be a shift that evolves in this chapter that is consistent with a practical theological process but may seem less consistent with the view of church and preaching presented thus far. This then is the

dynamic process of practical theology at work. Rather than presenting this more critical edge as a dogmatic position that I have held from the beginning of this research, this critical edge is presented as part of the unfolding dialogical action. This is part of the frustration of dialogue. It is harder to pin down a position that is fixed and upon which we can make precise judgements. Perhaps this is why dogmatics is preferred over dialogue in preaching.

This process is also consistent with the work of Kegan (1994) who, rather than proposing an anti-modernist, deconstructionist postmodernism, encourages the development of a reconstructive postmodernism. He writes that, "the reconstructive approach would have an equal interest in bringing the limits of the disciplines and its theories to center stage in our learning, but for the purpose of nourishing the very process of reconstructing the disciplines and their theories. We could argue that the purpose of reconstructing – this creating of better and better theory – is to arrive eventually at the Complete Theory, but a truly reconstructive view would actually be more likely to associate such a "victory" with death. As long as life goes on, the process will need to go on……The disciplines become generative. They become truer to life"(Kegan (1994: 330). So rather than present an evolving perspective as an already existing one and hence perpetuate the absolutism of modernism, the evolving perspective will be presented as it has evolved.

1. BARTH'S PERSEPCTIVE

Barth appears to have argued strongly against contextualised preaching. David Buttrick in his introduction to Barth's *Homiletics* (1991: 9) writes that, "Perhaps the most disturbing of Barth's polemics is his attack on 'relevance'. For example he

regrets ever having mentioned World War I in his own sermons….Barth has been criticised most for his strong, uncompromising biblicism; so strong that he is willing to suggest that preachers risk no more than a 'reiteration' of the text lest, in interpreting, they admix the scripture's message with their own cultural thoughts….Those who preach the scriptures will not be pontificating clerics or detached visionaries or merely dull. For again and again, the scriptures will speak God's *new* word."

Barth unswervingly held to the importance and centrality of preaching to the theological endeavour. *Homiletics* (1991) is the published version of a Barth seminar on preaching. In describing this seminar Barth (1991: 17) wrote, "The generally theological character of the seminar title, 'Exercises in Sermon Preparation,' results from the fact that theology as a church discipline ought in all its branches to be nothing other than sermon preparation in the broadest sense. The title is not meant in any true sense to denote a separate theological discipline. The vital connections between the three main branches of theology – dogmatics, biblical exegesis, and practical theology make this plain… we cannot think of any one of these disciplines without the other two, nor can we speak of any of them in isolation without speaking of the others as well."

Barth (1991: 24) had a concern for the "authoritative position vis-à-vis scripture" that preachers are given in relation to the Word and the congregation. But he saw this authority clearly in submission to the Word. He was concerned that the attempt to make the text relevant can see the preacher standing above the Word as the interpreter of the Word. This concern is clear in what Barth (1991) sees as the priorities of

preaching. "Two things call for emphasis. First, God is the one who works, and second, we humans must try to point to what is said in scripture. There is no third thing"(Barth 1991: 45). He sees preaching primarily as announcement, "that in it God is the one who makes himself heard, who speaks, and not we, who simply have the role of announcing what God himself wants to say" (Barth 1991: 46).

Barth's (1991: 47) concern that preachers are not to become masters of the text is clear in his argument that, "Revelation is a closed circuit in which God is both Subject and Object and the link between the two." "If God himself wills to speak his truth, preachers are forbidden to interfere with any science or art of their own…. Again, preaching may not try to create the reality of God….so that the congregation is not left with the impression that the preacher has a corner on Christ and the Spirit"(Barth 1991: 48). Barth (1991: 79) also states, "Preachers must not be 'clerics' who, puffed up with the sense of their mission, office, and theology, and perhaps 'full of the Holy Ghost,' attempt to represent the interests of the good Lord to the world… Where holy scripture reigns, no clericalism can develop."

Statements such as these suggest Barth (1991) advocated an absolute minimalist role for the preacher. Similarly he argues that if preachers, "offer their congregation a clever conceptual picture, even though it be arrived at by serious and intensive exegesis, it will not be scripture itself that speaks, but something will merely be said *about* scripture" (Barth 1991: 49). The use of concept and metaphor is deemed by Barth (1991: 58) to be legitimate "only when it does not seek to be anything other than a commentary, an interpretation of the sacraments, a reference to the same thing, but now in words." Preaching, "has simply to repeat the testimony by which the

church is constituted. It has to be a witness to that witness, to the revelation attested by holy scripture"(Barth 1991: 62).

It seems Barth (1991) is advocating that preachers be little more than a conduit for the Word of God. Theorists who have been considered in the previous chapter make it clear that such a communicative process, where the human speaker is simply a passive channel, is simply not possible. At the same time Barth's (1991) concern that the preacher be subject to the Word cannot be dismissed. His concern is one shared by other critical thinkers.

Willimon (1998a: 111, 112) is concerned that the preacher be submissive to the text. "The interpretive skills that many of us learned in seminary invariably took a superior stance toward the text; modernity is inherently arrogant. We have been conditioned to feel that we moderns are privileged to stand at the summit of human development, uniquely equipped to stand in judgment upon any idea or anyone who preceded us. All knowing is tied to some scheme of power, and in a capitalistic, democratic culture, all knowing begins and ends with the sovereign consumer. So we ask, 'What does this text mean to me?' or, more precisely, 'What can I *do* with this text?' before simply sitting quietly and letting the text have its way with us."

This modern pre-occupation with the question of relevancy distorts the message of the text. Willimon (1998a) argues that rather than a focus on how we can make sense of the text, the first position is to allow the text to make sense of us. We must be, "willing to let the text stand in a superior interpretive position to us, not the other way around"(Willimon 1998a: 113).

This is important to understand in regard to dialogical preaching. Dialogical preaching is not primarily a dialogue between the preacher and the congregation, but the preacher in submission to the text draws the congregation into an engaged dialogue with the text. The preacher does not primarily serve the congregation but serves the text (Willimon 1998b: 122).

In a further article, Willimon (1998c: 128) argues that the determination for relevancy actually limits the text. The 'so what?" question limits the text to our own field of observation and experience, our own conventions, rather than allowing the text to open us up to something new. Willimon (1998c) argues that if preaching is to be transformational and true to the nature of the gospel then it requires a miracle. Likewise Barth (1991: 70) states that "Right hearing of God's Word is the only valid effect of a sermon, but where and when this happens we cannot know, for what we have here is the working of the word of God that we can only believe." We need a miracle of transformation. Rather than getting the text to fit our human experiences we must allow the text to shape our human experience as it speaks to our human situation. "Preaching is not a means to evoke certain 'common human experiences' through the artful use of metaphor and simile. Preaching means to engender experience we would never have had without the gospel"(Willimon 1998c: 133).

Just as the congregation can become deaf to the gospel due to our enculturation to oft repeated Christian metaphors, so too the language of relevance can dull the voice of the gospel with the language of the broader culture. "People bring many things with them in their listening to a sermon. Having been preconditioned, their ears are not in

tune with the message; their understanding is blocked by metaphors that enable them to participate in the culture but make it difficult for them to hear the gospel…Desiring too desperately to communicate, at any cost, can lead us into apostasy. The odd way in which God has saved us presents a never-ending challenge to those who are called to talk about it" (Willimon 1989c: 129).

Willimon (1989c: 134), like Barth(1991), wants to make it clear that in the end (if not from the beginning) it is our message not our technique that communicates the gospel. If preaching lacks authority the first thing to examine is not technique, style or relevancy but the nature of the message being communicated.

Willimon's concern, like Barth's, adds a cautionary note to the notion of dialogical preaching. If, 'The gospel is an intrusion among us, not something arising out of us"(Willimon 1989c: 135), we must be careful that dialogical preaching is not simply the elevation of the human interaction to the centre of authority.

At the same time Barth (1991) may not be as abstractionist as his biblicism may suggest. His concern and connectedness with reality is evident when he states that, "Preachers must not be visionaries, well meaning idealists, who push big ideas around in their heads but have no grasp of reality. Preaching that is biblical is never visionary, for holy scripture speaks to reality"(Barth 1991: 79). And despite how it may seem, his view on preaching does not advocate a naive, minimalist role for the preachers, or a narrowly constrained paraphrasing of the biblical text. "In proper sermon preparation the word of scripture has spoken to preachers in such a way that they primarily come before their congregations as hearers….Then there must be the courage to say to others what is now there for *me*…. I myself am now called upon to

be a witness who will remain biblical but will not be stuck fast in exegesis"(Barth 1991: 82).

In Barth's (1991: 83) view the preacher must be fully present as themselves, "they must put *themselves* in the pulpit, for *they* are the ones who are called…We are to preach as the people we are: in a history, on the way that the Bible takes with us. For this reason we should give honest information and reports about our own situation. This will stop us from unpacking items in a system, or tossing out chunks of Christian thought sequences, or travelling in old ruts. Christian truth is constantly won afresh in history. You must preach as the one you now are today."

This would suggest that Barth's (1991) concerns about relevancy are not a denial of the historicity or contextuality of the preaching event and content. It is also important to note that Barth's (1991) own perspective on preaching arose in a particular context itself. His view on preaching reflects his concern about the neglect of preaching and biblical authority in his own day. This concern with the historicity and contextuality of the preaching event is further highlighted in his view of the preacher's relationship with the congregation. "If preaching is to be congregational, there must also be openness to the real situation of the congregation and reflection upon it so as to be able to take it up into the sermon. Living with their congregations, preachers live out a history with them, and they are constantly agitated by the question: 'How is it with us now?' This does not mean that they are to let themselves be carried along by the stream of life and merely be the mouthpiece of the *congregation*. They are not to be popular village sages who know life, who dramatise it, who tell people what is on their hearts. The sermon is not just a transfigured continuation of life, its leading theme. The congregation is waiting for the light of God to shine upon its troubled life,

not for the preacher to blow horns that are being blown already….What does the situation demand in which we are now together? I live out a history with the congregation. The congregation tells me what is on its heart. My sermon should be a response. This feeling ought to protect us against speaking about things that are no longer important. From all that has been said it is clear that to be congregational is not to be an information service"(Barth 1991: 84,85).

This is a view echoed by Dawn (1999: 138) who believes that, "most important for sermons is our partnership with the congregation, which is integrally related to their intimacy with God." Hauerwas (1998) also argues that preaching is not something that the preacher does but that it is an activity of the whole community. That preaching becomes monologue may not simply be the fault of the preacher but that of a community that has lost its capacity for dialogical engagement and hearing. "As a result, preaching is not the practice of the community but rather, as it so often is, an exercise in sentimentality"(Hauerwas (1998: 64).

Barth (1991) certainly was troubled by the issue of relevancy. His caution about relevancy arose after he had so often preached about World War I that a woman in his congregation asked for a break (Barth 1991: 118). But Barth's perspective on relevancy needs to be carefully understood. He also wrote, "woe to preachers who do not see first how relevant the Word of the Bible is to the people of today! Woe even more to preachers who do see the contingency and relevance of the biblical Word to the people of today but who are then fearful or unwilling to give offence and thus become deserters of the Word – the Word which seeks to seize and disturb and confront the people of today, and in this way truly lead them truly to the rest of God,

but which is buried by the cowardice and disobedience of the preachers, and thus prevented from doing its proper work" (Barth 1991: 114).

It would seem that Barth's (1991) concern is for a type of relevancy whereby the transforming and living Word of the text is highjacked by contemporary themes and issues, and the pet themes of preachers. This concern for "hobby horses" was expressed independently by all those interviewed as part of this research. Minister 'A' said,

I want to use the text to limit my own ability to have my own hobby horses foisted on the congregation, to have the text make me preach about what I would not of necessity have wanted to preach about. That means finding out what the text says, what it wants to say and how it says it, so I don't end up with one standard form of sermon. So the sermon changes in light of what text I am dealing with.

The text stands as "the other". I think the sermon is the voice from the outside. If I just read the text I can warp it to fit in with my world. Preaching gives me a different slant on it. Preaching should be based on the text so that the text actually comes to the people.

Minister 'B" in speaking of his exegetical approach said,

But if you are teaching consistently verse by verse I feel that is the best way for our church to grab a hold of truth and forces me to stay within the framework of what the passage is and it also stops me from jumping on a hobby horse here and there.

In response to the following question Minister 'E' replied,

Many contemporary churches in an attempt to be contemporary are going to topical approaches. Do you have any particular thoughts about that?

I think it is only a risk if you avoid the hard passages. You can fall into having your own hobby horses if you are only asking, "What does the world want us to speak about?" You can miss out on some of the hard yards of thinking and grabbling with passages which I might never use in a topical sermon. I think here we address contemporary issues more by thinking here are the contemporary issues what book speaks to that.

This concern is also shared by Hauerwas (1998: 65) who believes that middle-class religiosity is reinforced when preaching is, "some arbitrary decision by the minister to find a text to fit a peculiar theme that currently fits the preacher's subjectivity." Hauerwas, like Barth and Willimon, is also concerned with the issue of authority. He argues that, "preaching as a practice is prophetic when it is done with authority. Where else in our culture do you find a people gathered in obedience to a Word they know they will not easily hear? Such an exercise of authority is anomalous in liberal cultures, which assume that all forms of authority cannot help but be authoritarian"(Hauerwas 1998: 65).

This seems particularly critical to the Australian context. As has been noted previously Australia prides itself as an anti-authoritarian culture. In the Australian context, certain kinds of dialogical preaching could easily become a validated means by which Australians come out from under the authority of the Word and the community. Instead, the Australian church needs to submit to becoming faithful hearers of the Word, training and educating ourselves to be dialogical engagers and active listeners to the Word, *particularly* when it is a message we do not want to hear and submit to. Submission to the Word is a, "constant reminder that the church is constituted by people who have learned that they have not chosen God"(Hauerwas 1998: 65). We are constituted by, "a story that we have not chosen. This is not a story we could have 'made up'"(Hauerwas 1998: 66).

While Australian's love their autonomy, to practice preaching as a community we need to "be schooled to be creatures" so that preaching becomes a, "prophetic reminder to a culture bent on denying our status as creature"(Hauerwas 1998: 66).

Dialogical preaching, particularly of the more conversational nature that Strom (2000) advocates, could easily become a sharing of personal recipes with little transformational authority. Dialogical preaching has to be subject to the Word, to God's story. Preaching requires that the community be, "confronted by a Word that does not illuminate what they already know but rather tells us what we do not know – and, indeed, could not know on our own" (Hauerwas 1998: 67). Minister 'A' is clear about the transformational opportunity that is present in preaching.

The vision of the text opens them up to God, to see God and the world and each other, to see all of reality differently. So it is really to create a new paradigm.

I think the sermon should disrupt the existing paradigms in order to create new paradigms.
Every sermon should be part of the structure of a new understanding of reality in light of who God is. So it is all part of the process of seeing differently and therefore being different.

While (as previously touched on and to be expanded in the next chapter) the Word is only understood in the interaction of the indicative, imperative and existential, there is a sense in which the Word serves as the indicative in the context of the church community. Dialogical and conversational approaches can easily serve immediate existential purposes and the felt needs of the community if it is not subject to the indicative.

2. STROM'S PERSPECTIVE

There are others who have a more radical questioning of the whole notion of preaching as it is conducted in the evangelical church. Australian theologian Mark Strom (2000: 206) argues from his analysis of the New Testament, "that there is absolutely no evidence for anything like our conventions of preaching in the New

Testament – no expository task, no pulpits, no ordination, no teaching of eloquence. The evidence does not point to the centrality of a monologue in the early gatherings, let alone the conventions of preaching as we have known them for two millennia." This is certainly a bold and daring statement but it is not simply a reactionary waving of opinion. Strom grounds his conclusion in solid research. Like Barth (1991) he is deeply concerned about the dangers of "clericalism" and is concerned about the centrality of Christ as the message of the Gospel. Because of the centrality of this message he is also understanding of the historic role of the sermon. "At the heart of the evangelical faith stands the person of Christ and his death and resurrection for sinners. Thus we stand or fall by the trustworthiness of the Bible and by the integrity of our proclamation of its message. The strength of these beliefs has made the sermon the central event of the evangelical life and faith, and the preacher/pastor its central figure" (Strom 2000: 203).

He is also not naïve about the threat that his perspective may hold for many. "Many scholars and preachers speak of the evangelical faith as a beacon shining absolute truth on a world lost in relativistic ignorance and idolatry. For them the sermon is a *saving* event. Any challenge to the centrality of preaching or any diminution of its authority will supposedly condemn the preacher and his congregation to a malaise of relativity and doubt" (Strom 2000, 207).

Strom (2000: 210) rightly and succinctly places preaching in a larger context that can be easily overlooked by too narrow a focus on the communicative action of preaching itself. "Every sermon and service proclaims not only beliefs but an entire culture. To accept the sermon is to accept the culture, and vice versa….Every sermon conveys

ideals. Every service reinforces control, rectitude and the boundaries of acceptable

meaning and behaviour."

Strom (2000: 208) argues that in this preaching-centred system it is believed that,

"every malady of faith derives ultimately from a failure to grasp and apply the word

of the preacher. This reinforces the need for rhetorical power to move an audience."

While there may be a certain hyperbole in such statements, Strom is right in his

concern that too often preaching and church systems miss the mark. "What they do

not admit is that the system no longer works for many people. What they can not

admit is that their own principles and system are often a parody of their rhetoric of

grace. The link between evangelicalism and the ideals and conventions of the classical

and Graeco-Roman eras are all too obvious. The emphasis on ideals, universal

principles, abstract systems, intellectual capacity, eloquence, preaching as therapy,

elegance as a mark of leadership, professionalism – Paul fought against them all. The

great irony is that evangelicals appeal to Paul as they enshrine the ideals and system

of the Graeco–Roman sophists"(Strom: 208).

To exemplify what he means by therapeutic preaching, Strom (2000: 113,114) uses

Paul's writing to the Corinthians. "There are uncomfortable links between the

Corinthians and much that passes as sound theology and ministry in evangelical

circles. Paul confronted the arrogant disposition that accompanied the intellectualism

of the strong. They had adopted a common therapeutic model of reason to improve

the weak by correcting each faulty belief. The cure came through sermons to drive out

false beliefs. Paul had no such agenda. He promoted love rather than precision and

conformity. He urged the strong to be sensitive to the pain of the weak rather than to

correct every inadequate belief. Much evangelical theology and preaching sides with the Corinthians over against Paul. In some circles a simplistic logic links preaching with objectivity and with the authority of the Bible, portraying the preacher as the last line of defence against the evils of relativism. The outcome is an obsession among some clergy and congregations with driving out every vestige of thought deemed less than truly evangelical. This mindset has spawned generations of zealous preachers who have harassed their captive audiences into needless guilt and dubious 'work for the Lord'."

Clarke (1998: 3) is also concerned with therapeutic preaching. "A comfortably domesticated church has abandoned theological language, and the way of understanding the world that the language represents, for the language of therapy." In the contemporary scene preaching too often is a means to correct faulty patterns of living, thinking and relating. Therapeutic preaching therefore has a long history but is a critical element of an applicational hermeneutic. Clarke (1998), while sharing Strom's (2000) concern for the therapeutic, along with Barth (1991) is cautious about abandoning theological language for the language of relevancy. Similarly Brueggemann (1998b: 41) argues that, "speech other than our own gradually results in the muteness of the church, for we have nothing left to say when we have no way left to say it." The move toward relevancy and the language of relevancy, "epistemologically erodes the language and meaning of the biblical traditions and text. Relevancy too often feeds the status quo and ignores the biblical tradition of "liberated, defiant, anticipatory speech"(Brueggemann 1998b: 41).

Brueggemann (1998c) is also troubled by the influence of the therapeutic. He sees this in preaching that avoids anything demanding but surrenders to the demand for what works and is manageable. Manageable obedience is permissible and encouraged in an applicational hermeneutic but a more troubling obedience is avoided. At the same time Brueggemann (1998c: 48) does not advocate an imposed moralism. When it comes to the commands inherent in a covenantal relationship, "the most crucial issue for reflection and preaching is to frame the commands so that they are not alien impositions, extrinsic to our life, but belong to and are embraced as definitional for the very fabric of our existence."

He sees that, "duty converges completely with the desire and delight of communion…It is not that obedience is instrumental and makes communion possible, but obedience itself is a mode of 'being with' the desired in joy, delight and well-being"(Brueggemann 1998c: 51).

A non-reflective move toward contemporary relevance, often expressed in the therapeutic, sees us too readily speaking the language of our consumer culture and commodifying the Gospel. In the American context, Brueggemann (1998d: 10, 11) claims that, "serious, reflective Christians find themselves increasingly at odds with the dominant values of consumer capitalism and its supportive military patriotism; there is no easy or obvious way to hold together core faith claims and the social realities around us." This distinctiveness is highlighted by Hauerwas and Willimon (1989: 46) who write that, "The church offers an, "alternative *polis,* a countercultural social structure called the church. It seeks to influence the world by being the church, that is, by being something the world is not and can never be, lacking the gift of faith

and vision, which is ours in Christ." Dawn (1999: 334) also emphasises this distinctive identity. "In the midst of our post-Christian culture, the true church must be a similar sort of parallel society….In our worship, we are formed by biblical narratives that tell a different story from that of the surrounding culture."

Strom (2000) believes that to go forward in exploring our understanding of church we need to go back to a basic question. We need to ask, "Why *did* the *ekklesia* gather? Most evangelicals, and indeed Christians of nearly all persuasions, traditionally answer that churches meet for worship. Paul's consistent answer was "to build each other up." The members met to use their personal endowments from the Spirit for the common good. They prayed, read Scripture, encouraged, sang, taught, and prophesied to one another as the Spirit enabled them. Paul *never* defined *ekklesia* in terms of a vertical relationship of worship. The meeting was for *one another.* The gathering was a *conversation* - a rich, diverse, extended conversation" (Strom 2000: 174).

"Participants in each *ekklesia* had to grapple with ongoing challenges of making sense of their lives in the light of the story of Jesus Christ. Each community was an informal learning network. Their well-being required them to remain open to the learning that the Spirit would bring to bear through their conversations and care for one another and their interactions within the wider society" (Strom 2000: 175).

In the learning process that interviewee 'D' advocates he says that,

It's trying to help people discover that for themselves, rather than me deciding what it is and by sophic questioning making them come to the conclusion I'd already pre-decided. It's really helping them assess where their life's at, what they want to change, why they want to change, what they feel is right and good, why is that. Just constantly helping them find it; and often the conversation will go in a different direction you thought it would and ends up still a satisfying image of God answer.

Strom's (2000: 175,176) "description of Paul's communities bears little resemblance to what most of us have known as church. The conventions of preaching and church services effectively gag our conversations. There is no meal. Spontaneity is avoided, absent or slotted into five - or ten-minute "greeting" or "sharing" segments, small conversational digressions from the main performance led from the front. We endorse the need for 'sharing' but locate it away from 'real church.' In a sad irony of Paul's meals, we speak of coming to church to be 'fed.' In our case the 'meal' is usually a course of words prepared by one chef rather than the smorgasbord of rich conversations."

While Barth (1991) sees theology as serving preaching, Strom (2000) sees that the dialogue of the church serves the purpose of theologizing, though in a grounded existential manner. This is a theology for living not theological abstraction. Theology is not the possession of the minister which he or she dispenses to the congregation, theology is the task of the church.

Strom (2000) believes that Paul's writings were not primarily concerned with developing a comprehensive doctrinal, theological or institutional system. Rather they were pastoral responses to particular situations where the implications for living the dying and risen life of Christ were developed. For Strom (2000: 15, 16) the dying and rising Christ is the centre of the Gospel and he is convinced Paul, "would not allow any human system or convention to hedge the communities against the risks of working out what it meant to live by the dying and rising of Christ….The openness of Paul's life and thought to the world around him contrasts with the insularity of parts of evangelicalism. Paul urged believers to remain in the world for the sake of both the

gospel and the world; we have frequently retreated into institutional and privatised ghettos. There is a certain irony in this. While evangelicals generally do not warm to the concept of a state church, we have erected what is in effect a Christendom – complete with large organisational structures vying for public influence, educational institutions spanning kindergarten to university, and a vast network of bureaucrats, business, tradespeople and professionals. In a further irony, this imitation of "secular" structures has not brought the everyday world within the scope of theology and the gathering. Indeed, it may have deepened the ways we split life into the sacred and the secular."

Paul sought to encourage a Christian community, "focused on integrating allegiance to Jesus Christ with everyday concerns. The people met to equip one another for the decisions and options they would face outside the gathering. The gathering did not convene for religious worship, they did not gather for a rite. Nor do the sources suggest a meeting structured around the reading and exposition of Scripture following the model of the synagogue. They met to fellowship around their common relationship to one another on account of Christ. Most evangelicals agree that a rite is not central to church; most argue that preaching is central. But rite and preaching share common ground. Both are clergy-centered. Perhaps the reason so many theologians and clergy resist any shift away from the centrality of the sermon lies not only in the fear of subjectivism or heresy, but also in the fear of losing control and prestige" (Strom 2000: 16).

Strom (2000) argues that the early *ekklesia* were informal associations of people, with informal, even minimalist leadership, gathered around the dying and risen Christ. In the context of meals and conversations these gatherings discussed the meaning and

implications of such a reality. These conversations though did not depend on Graeco-Roman systems of abstraction or idealism. Paul, "did not arbitrate for his *ekklesiai* according to some rule of rationality or bend his own thoughts toward any criteria of absolute, timeless truths. Every shred of Paul's conversation remained anchored in his wonder at Christ and in the changing circumstances of everyday life"(Strom 2000: 18). Strom (2000) is deeply concerned that too often the evangelical church in Australia bases its form and message on contemporary forms of abstractionism and idealism that rob the church of living and conversing the reality of Christ.

This living reality is known through a living story. Strom (2000) sees that New Testament church was steeped in the story of the Gospel. While Paul wrote letters, they are grounded in the narrative of the Gospel and the particular story of the churches he wrote to. There is the danger in this perspective of trying to read the text behind the text as the primary source. Nevertheless, "Paul's conversations were rich in stories. These stories characterized the gathering. The believers came together around Christ and his story. They also came with their own stories. They came to (re)connect their stories to his and to each others' stories. That was the gathering. They taught, prophesied, shared, ate, sang and prayed their stories – their lives – together around Christ. The Spirit made the conversation possible. All the people shared the Spirit through whom they met God and one another face to face. They urged one another in conversation to grow into the full measure of their freedom and dignity"(Strom 2000: 18).

Strom (2000) also focuses specifically on the practice of preaching which he argues is tainted by assumptions and presuppositions that are not grounded in scripture. "We who are evangelicals like to think our beliefs and practice derive from Paul without a

trace of the worldviews he rejected. But our heritage is not so clean. We are the children of both parents… Our preaching owes more to the oratory of sophists and super- apostles, and to the tradition of reason as therapy for the soul, than to Paul's disavowal of eloquence or to his preference for love over precision. The same confused heritage lives on in our ideals of supremacy, serenity and self-sufficiency for leaders. Once again, Paul largely lost the battle. In the generations following Paul, his radical teachings were largely neutralized by the prevailing paradigms of Graeco-Roman moral leadership to produce the basic shape of what we know as *clergy.* A millennium and a half later, the Reformers recovered a great deal about grace for the unconverted, but expected them to live by law in the church. We still do" (Strom 2000: 155).

Strom (2000: 125) links his concerns with the nature of preaching to the way theology is done by the church. "Evangelicals have benefited enormously from the faithful and creative labors of many theologians. I certainly acknowledge that for myself. But there are other less acknowledged sides to the story of theology: its inability to connect with everyday concerns; its use to patronize and disdain others; its role in propping up an elitist system of leadership; its deadening effects on young theological students; its promotion of pedantry and destructive debate; its second-hand character that minimizes genuine creativity and new perspective; the ways it imposes law in the name of protecting grace; the ways it pre-empts and gags conversations that might other- wise break new ground in integrating faith and life. There is great value in laying a foundation of beliefs. But the methods and disposition of theology have failed to deliver its promise of a richer personal knowledge of God. Theology and

church have by and large abducted the conversations that rightfully stand at the heart of the gathering."

This culture creates an "us" and "them", the "faithful" and the "unfaithful", the "insiders" and the "outsiders". "To the faithful, the system reinforces the mystique of evangelicalism as self-evidently right. To the disaffected, the system looms as closed, fearful and irrelevant. To both, the system is only as viable as its ongoing ability to demarcate the acceptable from the unacceptable"(Strom 2000: 213).

Indigenous Minister 'B' has clear views about the "us" and "them" mentality that can effect churches.

Do you think that because of your connectedness with the community you are part of that there is a unique sense in which you live your sermons?

In our context if you don't live 'em you don't get heard Sunday, that's how it is. I think that in the years gone by, in the mission era, and in other places you could preach something and go home. The missionary went to his house, closed the door and could lock himself away. Even my wife's experience of the missionaries, I'm not a product of the missions, indirectly yes but not directly, but my wife always tells me about it, and I learn a lot from her because she grew up in a really strong mission era, and how the missionaries lived behind closed doors and you had to go down and knock on the door to get access to them and then you would see them on Sunday. But that can't happen in my context. The values of trust and integrity and being with the people and belonging to the community and being a part of them can never be separated from the message. I know that when I get out of here I am living that message all the time with the people. I may be hunting with the guys and the message may come out again in that way. If you don't live it you are guaranteed not to be heard. You won't be listened to.

Strom (2000) argues that Paul had an engaged and fluid relationship with the culture of his day, as represented in the following diagram. The contemporary church also needs this type of engagement if it is not to be either unhealthily sectarian or accommodationist.
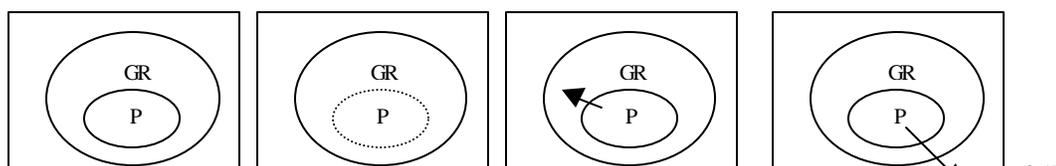
Figure 6.1 The dynamics of Paul's thought in relation to Graeco-Roman popular intellectualism (Strom 2000:104)

Strom (2000) stresses that Paul is insistent on not imposing a particular form on the *ekklesiai*. This would seem to be a true reading of Paul and why I do not share Stadelman's (1998) confidence that the New Testament reveals a clear ecclesiological structure. In Strom's (2000) writing though there appears to be the implicit suggestion that this "non-model" of Paul is the model that we should follow. If he is saying that there is not one form that being church is to take then I would support this view. To be church in Australia may need a far greater diversity of form than has been present historically. If Strom (2000) is saying that his particular view of the 'informal, conversational, *ekklesiai*' is the model to follow then this is hermeneutically inconsistent with his view that the New Testament provides no model of church that compels a particular form of church.

Strom (2000: 141) also advocates a 'non-religious' view of Christianity and church. "Evangelicals like to distance themselves from the ritual traditions of Catholicism and Orthodoxy. To be sure, we are a long way from the more overt religiosity of the Graeco-Roman cults and clubs. Yet when we consider the entirely nonreligious character of Paul's *ekklesiai* and his struggle to keep them free from the religious mindset, we may well ask how much of that same mindset *we* have perpetuated.

Church services are religious occasions structured around formal proceedings conducted by authorized leaders - a far cry from the spontaneity of the *ekklesiai* and the central place it gave to conversation between all participants. Even more informal and relaxed modes of meeting, such as seeker services and "sharing times," remain more in the domain of entertainment or of a token nod in the direction of egalitarianism. Rarely do they accord the dignity and freedom that Paul attributed to the conversations within his *ekklesiai*. How far have we drifted from the spirit of Paul? We need only consider our loss of the capacity for sustained conversation about Christ and the affairs of our every- day lives. It is no wonder so many struggle to imagine a world of rich conversation integrating faith and everyday life, a world of sustained conversation unfettered by irrelevant sermons and theological disputes, a world of sustained conversation freed from the confining agendas of the professional elites of clergy and theologians."

While having not read Strom(2000) at the time of his interview, interviewee 'D' expressed views that reflect many of Strom's perspective as evidenced in the following exchange.

Not everybody is going to become part of new church paradigms or perspectives, there a lot of people are going to stay in a kind of conservative, suburban church context. Are there particular things that you would want them to either learn from yourselves or get a hold of?

Yeh, definitely. I'd want them to learn some relationship skills, some community development skills. They could still be a part of your normal suburban church, but taper down the amount of involvement with just church people, and increase your involvement with the community.

Nothing has to change in the church structure, but maybe the degree to which church people are swallowed up by it has to change. So you can still go to church on Sunday morning, still have your home group, but learn how to meet your neighbours, go to your residence association and learn how to take those conversations one step further

or two steps further, learn how to actively love and engage and become those "called out ones who develop the community at large" towards the Kingdom of God (ekklesia). Learn those sorts of skills, and I'm not trying to dismantle your church, I'm trying to get you out of it to become yeast in the dough for God.

You're asking them to be the church?

I'm asking them to be Christ's "ekklesia". Look up ekklesia in the Greek Lexicon. Then compare to church in the English dictionary. You'll wonder how they ever chose to use the word church to translate ekklesia. Try doing a word search for church. Then substitute "community development movement" (= ekklesia), and re-read those passages. It's wonderfully different.

Any other things you might want the churches as they are to learn?

There are going to be some difficult calls made about the nature of some of the things they do probably. Like, churches need to start to become ekklesias in their areas again. Consumerist mentality will be one, so again you don't have to change your practise, but do have to change the way you engage with that. You might really love the songs, that moment where you're singing a song and you just feel swept up by it. Call that worship, maybe you need to become aware that could be just consumerism of someone else doing it for you, and it could be quite a narrow definition of worship, learn that God is at work in all the world around you and not just a Sunday at that psycho-spiritual moment. And learn to see where God is at work in other people and where God's at work in nature, where God's at work in cultural expression, where God's at work in those odd moments in life that you wouldn't have taken notice of otherwise, see the miraculous under your nose. Yeh, I'd like people to recognise those things.

I've seen a lot of people who have been in the church and have now moved away, who have grown up with a propositional truth gospel, and have assumed that that is *the* truth and in a culture where there are a lot more stories and a lot more other narratives and questionings of pre-existing narratives they've come to a position that is not even about, "Oh, we don't like this particular way of church, or this form church." Their questions are actually more significantly existential and more about the core of the faith. Rather than, "I want to be church in a different way," it's actually, "Do I want to be a part of this at all?" Do you have any sense of connecting with those people in what you are about, or what you want to do with that, I think, significant group of people?

Again, that heart, mind, soul, strength paradigm. One of the post-modern things in its negative frame, has been to toss out the whole educational sort of intellectual side of it and go with the more relativistic experiential stuff and I think the flaw in modernism was that it was reductionist, not that it was entirely wrong but it was a reduction and it all comes down to the mind. So to throw out the mind in favour of other things is an equal mistake.

There is a place for sitting down and having a good hard think and bringing a meaningful connection between your world view, the way you think about this and the

*way you interpret it and your experience, your spiritual life, the heart. Get the heart,
mind, soul, strength together, integrated. In fact Paul H Ray has done a massive body
of research, 100,000 Americans, the American Life Survey. And the significant group
that he's uncovered, 24% of the American adult population, is what he calls the
integral group. And they're people who've started doing that. They're trying to
integrate their various ways of being. That's where we'll try to take people, whatever
their background.*

While greatly challenged and drawn to Strom's (2000) picture of the "conversational
church" and sharing many of his views regarding how sermonizing is done in our
churches as well as sharing his concerns about unhealthy ways of being church, I also
believe that his view can be naïve to the nature of human institutions and authority.
There is a populist view that one can choose between institutional ways of being and
non-institutional. With this view there is the implicit assumption that institutional is
intrinsically bad and that non-institutional ways of being and individual freedom are
intrinsically good. This in itself is a particular Western perspective that minimises the
place of tradition and the communal, and minimises how that which is historically
communal and collective is an intrinsic and continuing part of the present (Aluli
Meyer 2001: 124 – 148).

Searle (1999: 111-135) argues that we cannot construct ourselves socially apart from
institutional forms. How we form ourselves socially and communally is institutional
no matter how formal or informal the social form appears. Searle argues that these
social realities are objectively real on the basis of

1. Shared/collective intentionality

2. Function

3. Conventions

A social reality can be measured on the basis of if and how it carries out its intentions, if and how it functions in light of its intentionality and if the conventions allow the shared intentionality to be expressed in its functions. This is a critical assumption of practical theology, i.e. the intentionality, function and conventions of the social institution of the church and its praxis can be measured. Searle (1999) argues that the objectivity (the reality) of a social institution is not measured by absolute, abstract standards of truth but can be measured if the social institution's intention, functions and conventions meet conditions of satisfaction that are consistent with the nature of their intent.

This means that humans as communal and social beings cannot do otherwise than form themselves into social forms and institutions bound by shared intentionality and values, shared function and shared conventions or rules. These conventions and rules allow the expression of shared intentionality and fulfilment of shared functions. People will move toward and need form and structure to function humanly and communally. Whenever a group of people have shared intentionality expressed in shared functions, with conventions to allow this to happen, then they *are* an institution. Whatever form a Christian community takes it is an institution. Likewise the practice of a Christian community's shared intentionality, functions and conventions is the practice of religion. All Christian communities are religious institutions. To claim that Christianity is not a religion but simply and only a relationship with the living Christ, is creating a false distinction so as to distance ourselves from what we believe to be the worst excesses of religion. We cannot so easily divorce ourselves from the history of the church as the people of God, even if that history is frequently marked by the worst of human nature. To claim that there is

the institutional church which is "bad" and that in response we can form non-institutional churches is nonsensical. It is simply not how we construct ourselves communally and socially.

All human institutions are a product of human endeavour and thus will tend toward self-serving and self-preserving ends. No institution (formal or informal, old or contemporary) escapes this tendency. Strom's (2000) new version of church is as open to these tendencies as any other institution. Granted some institutions clearly have an agenda of evil intentionality and function as such, e.g. Nazism. But assuming that historically the majority of churches have formed with good intent, then the potential for the home-church to be as glorious or as ruined as a more structured, liturgical, sacramental church are similar. (Though the nature of the glory or ruin may differ.) The critical issue is whether the form of any particular community/church is consistent with the character, purpose and mission of the Gospel and Kingdom of God, and is appropriately contextualised to cultural and situational factors so that the Gospel is neither impeded or compromised. This perspective informed the following question I asked of interviewee 'D'.

Before I started my research I would have said that the problem with the church is that it is an institution but now I have come to the place of saying that humans can't help but form themselves as institutions, any time that humans generate some kind of form they are an institution. The question is whether they are a healthy or an unhealthy institution. Any sense of how as a movement, that's how you describe yourself and I think that anything that is new or fresh in the church begins as a movement, any sense how a movement keeps from becoming an unhealthy institution, or does a movement just have a life span and the next one comes along?

Obviously I'm not at the other end to be able to say definitively, but we have thought about it and we do have some strategy in place if you like.

One is that we have resolved not to become incorporated, because as soon as you do

that you have to have membership and therefore screening of who's in and who's out and we don't want to do that to people. We want to keep the edges open, and anyone who in some way feels they're a part of it, we talk about participants. (There are a few who I haven't even met who are a friend of someone who's part of this group, but the person who's part of this group has said to them, "Can you keep an eye out for street for any needs that are going on there and let us know and we'll see if we can help out in that area." And that person is going, "Oh, that would be fantastic," so they kind of feel like a part of it, even though they indirectly are and that's the kind of open edge that we like the sound of.)

The other thing is, that we've written in to our dreaming paper, once we've learnt enough and we've canvassed the sort of things that we really need to know to be equipped to do this, we make a commitment to try and replicate this at least twice in our lifetime. So we're looking for the kind of people who can start again, either in [another part of this suburb] or in another suburb or however it pans out. So we want to equip people to multiply, that way hopefully, this body won't get too big and will keep staying small.

So keep it diffused, keep it focused on the community rather than an alternative community within it, because [this suburb] is our church. Jesus is in our church to develop [this suburb]. [This suburb] is our community. We try and keep the focus on the broader community life, multiply it out to diffusing it and hopefully then we won't have too many people to organise.

Mind you, sometimes we need an auspice, because we have a bank account, so we have got Scripture Union to auspice us. So we very carefully worked out the nature of that agreement of that association and so we don't have to incorporate and yet we have the benefit of the bank account and public liability if we need it for a certain event. I want to get the best of both worlds. So we keep an association there so that if something does require it we've got it.

By and large the rest of the movement is just by relationships. If somebody's being a problem in the community, certain kind of behaviour or whatever that's destructive then it's a problem for everyone in [this suburb] not just [particular community group]. So we can't just sort of say, "You're out" because there is no in or out, it's at the edge.

The primary question then is how well and richly does the church in whatever form and tradition tell, live and engage with the story of Jesus in a way that engages with the stories of our cultures and our own personal lives. In this sense the beauty and sacramental riches of a cathedral church may be as powerful in communicating the gospel as a house church living the gospel in its neighbourhood, and sadly both can also be stuck in traditional or contemporary conventions that deaden the living reality

of the Gospel. The centrality of the message and how it relates to form is explored in the following questions.

Interviewee 'D'

What do you see as the relationship between message and methodology? So it seems to me very clear that your message is about Jesus but your methodology is somehow very intrinsically related to that. So could you put some words to that?

Well, if when you are studying Jesus you start to get a sense of what he's on about and you just use a method that doesn't display what he's on about, in other words if you use an over arching method that says I'm the one with the knowledge, power and authority, and I'll tell you what you need to do and that's the way it works here, you don't question me. Well, then that's a method that totally undermines what Jesus was constantly saying about serving each other and building one another up so they can be the best they can be, and we can work together and build a relationship network that is enriching. And so if I'm going to teach about that stuff I need to demonstrate that. I need to teach by showing as much as telling. Tell the stories of how it's happening, and let people see it if they want to come and see it, and then explain it and they can say, "Oh yeh, I can see that, or feel that, or I engage with that," it's a much more holistic way. So if the method contradicts the message we're in trouble. If the method lines up with the message its going to be a lot more effective. The method is the message.

What do you mean by the method is the message?

The method is so integral to the learning of the recipient that it almost doesn't matter what you say. The message is carried more fundamentally by what you do and how you carry that message. If it doesn't match, then you create a dichotomy, and your hearers have to choose – which one is the real you? Which do you think they'll choose?

Would you have a summary of your message?

Jesus' way of living and relating to people and the world is holistic and one worth our learning. The best way to learn it, is to engage with the living Jesus. I guess that's a summary.

Strom (2000) may also be naïve to the nature of authority. Any person, lay or ordained, who bears a responsibility in a community must also have the authority to carry that responsibility out. Responsibility and praxis cannot occur without authority. For the one whose responsibility is the analysis and communication of the Word,

there is a particular authority. Paul in writing to Timothy (1 Timothy 5:17) asks that those elders in the community who have the responsibility of preaching and teaching the Word be recognised as such by receiving double honour or payment. Their authority and responsibility is recognised in monetary terms. The analysis of Scripture sets up some degree of difference between those who have studied (teacher) and those who learn (student). Minister 'A' sees authority as a unique element of preaching.

So what makes a sermon a sermon rather than a devotional, or a multimedia presentation or a lecture?

The element of authority. In a sermon a preacher has got to believe that God is actually speaking. They are speaking with authority. The teaching element supports that authority but the urgency and the power is much bigger than just teaching information. In a sense a sermon is never true as it takes one particular aspect and says it in such a strong way. There is a demand, an urgency and authority that disrupts all that they have had before.

Minister 'E' also suggests an element of distinction in the following response.

Do you think there is anything unique about the preacher compared to a Bible study leader or a lecturer?

I think it is a question of degree of wisdom and training and insight. A particular sermon is unique because the preacher is unique. You don't need a piece of paper to be a wise, Godly preacher but training can help you get there. Wisdom and life experience and insight into the word is more a maturity question. I guess I see leadership as better in the hands of mature people.

Learning may best come about by conversational means but there is always some form of authority involved in this dialogical transaction. Paul clearly states his credentials as an apostle and speaks with a certain authority as such. In Galatians he claims his place as an apostle with the Jerusalem church. In Philemon he uses social and verbal persuasion to encourage egalitarianism within the church. In this particular situational moment, he bases his imperative appeal on the indicative of the gospel. But his propositions have illocutionary and perlocutionary force based in part on his

authority as an apostle. Paul's writings retained an authoritative status in the church and did not disappear as part of a non-authoritative grace-filled conversation. Communities that fail to recognise the authority of those with responsibilities will either run by de facto leadership or will fail. In some instances de facto leadership may be effective but de facto leadership can also be exploitative if not shaped and constrained by articulated communal conventions.

There is another potential problem with the Strom's (2000) view in that it does not adequately consider a developmental perspective in regard to faith. While the faith of a child is still faith, Scripture urges us to mature, not for the sake of hubris and pride, but for the sake of living and trusting the life of Christ in the midst of life's complexity.

In terms of developmental perspectives, Kegan (1994: 314, 315) argues that postmodernism is not only or even primarily a social movement but a development of cognitive capacities and processes needed for living in the dynamics of the present world. He argues that thinking processes in humans move from childhood developmental stages to stages of traditionalism, modernism and currently postmodernism. Traditionalism is aware of the separateness and inter-relatedness of the person but believes that there is *one* system for understanding the world, ourselves and our inter-relatedness. Modernism recognises that there is more than one system. In fact it recognises there are many systems we are inter-related with and which we need to understand so that we can inter-relate. Modernism though assumes that our own systems have an integral wholeness, completeness and integrity that we bring to the interactions. These interactions can actually serve to validate the essential completeness of our systems as we at least tolerate, if not value differences between

systems. As one recognises the validity and integrity of other systems this validates the integrity of one's own system. Modernism assumes that we bring already existing systems to relationships. Personal completeness is then seen as a pre-condition for a capacity to relate. This perspective can be clearly seen in the orientation of many therapeutic models and in many current Christian theologies and praxis that suggest that personal completeness is central to the message of the Gospel. We have to have wholeness and completeness to live the Christian life and the Christian life is based on God making us whole and complete.

Kegan (1994) argues that postmodernism begins with the assumption that systems are incomplete entities that change and develop in the process of relating. Rather than confidence in the integrity of the self or the system that the self is a part of, postmodernism highlights incompleteness. We do not bring a complete self to the interaction. We interact to create and recreate the self. Postmodernism argues that those who believe in the completeness of the self and their own systems will in fact be agents of oppressive power. Institutions that are naïve or unaware that they are incomplete will drift to self-interest and self-preservation. Such institutions, if they assume or aim toward completeness, will be unhealthy, destructive forces. An institution that has an assumption of incompleteness and an assumption of a tendency toward control, is potentially healthy. This perspective seems particularly pertinent to the church which claims that human incompleteness and human attempts to control are central themes of the gospel.

Kegan (1994) also argues that more complex levels of consciousness can understand and incorporate less complex levels but less complex levels find it far more difficult

to understand and interact with more complex systems of thought. This implies the need for patience and dialogue.

Stage models of development can convey the implication of a hierarchy of superiority. Often those who see themselves as better thinkers, or postmodern or stage 4'ers in Fowler's (1981) model, are impatient and even intolerant of those they perceive as not having developed as far. I would argue that the Gospel incorporates elements of traditionalism, modernism and postmodernism. Christians believe that ultimately life is centred and understood in God (traditionalism), that we are made complete in Christ as individuals and communally (modernism) yet we are also in the process of becoming whole (postmodernism) and no one individual, church, community, institution, culture or society can claim wholeness and completeness in themselves (postmodernism). One is not 'superior' to the other, each has its place depending on a number of contextual factors.

Kegan's (1994) perspective parallels Fowler's (1981) stages of faith development. Fowler's stage 3 (synthetic-conventional) has similarities to Kegan's traditionalism. There is basically one way of seeing things and one way of being Christian. Modernism parallels Fowler's (1981) 4th stage of reflective-individuative faith that recognises life is more complex than a single system but in integrating faith into one's own worldview there is the pursuit and belief in the self as a complete and whole system. Stage 4'ers can be quite intolerant and impatient with stage 3'ers, critical of the perceived incompleteness of synthetic-conventional thinking as compared to the perceived completeness of their own more 'mature' view. Postmodernism has parallels with Fowler's (1981) conjunctive and universal stages that see greater

understanding of complexity, more openness to complexity and a greater willingness to see the incompleteness of one's own understanding and development, while accepting of others incompleteness.

The implication of this is that people are developmentally at different places within any particular church, while certain churches, even denominations could also be characterised as being in different stages. Strom's (2000) views have a clear postmodern influence which traditionalists, even modernists, could find difficult to accept. It could be argued that conversation would be the ideal means by which to bridge these differences (and in certain communities this could be the case). But it could also be argued that intentional preaching and intentional leadership, even from within more hierarchical church structures, could as readily facilitate the developmental process. Informally recognised leadership in idealistic, conversationally formed gatherings could maintain and perpetuate oppressive control as much as an ordained priest, aware of the dangers of institutional power and office could facilitate genuine empowerment and emancipation of their congregation through dialogical communication.

The developmental perspective discussed above was explored in the interview with Minister 'C'.

Do you see preaching in terms of faith development?

One of my strong things is challenging people to trust God, that when you're in your comfort zone you think you can do it on your own, but God is always calling you out of your comfort zone into beyond, stretching you that little bit more, so I'm a challenger in that sense.

Fowler's models of faith development, Kegan and those who say there are people who are in different places along ….

It is an interesting analysis and I actually introduced Fowler to our Elders this year, and it helped them understand why they were frustrated with some people. I find it a mixed tool. It helps you to understand a person at stage 3, why they can't be more open and flexible, but because we're at stage 4 we understand them, you know. So it's useful. But I'm not sure I agree about the final stages. As an evangelical I'm not quite satisfied that you can be quite as undogmatic about the essentials of your faith as suggested in Fowler's stages 5 and 6.

How do you find their general ideas when preaching to people who are at different places? If you are wanting to connect and meet people where they are at and people are at different places………

Yes, the dilemma is you always have a very mixed congregation. I suppose the specifics of it, of understanding faith stages comes out more in conversations with people, or if somebody wants to come and talk about a particular issue they're wrestling with. I wrote an essay once on how would you preach about sin to stage 3 people and stage 4 people. At the time I was at [particular] church where we had a big argument between the people who were into the peace movement and the people who weren't and it was very helpful to understand why the people in the peace movement (often stage 4) were a threat to the stage 3 people in the church. So in that sense it was a useful interpretive tool, but I'm not sure it tells you where to go with preaching.

In preaching to you have any particular ways of engaging with a mixed congregation who may be in different places in their journey?

Well although I said to you I like the sermons to have a structure, and I'm wanting people to see the whole thing, I know that most people go away from the message with one thing they've latched onto and so I actually work hard that they can have a lot of things they can latch onto. It maybe an illustration, it maybe one turn of phrase; like I was using definitions once of humility and I've had people repeat that back to me. All they heard really was an understanding of humility that helped them. So I suppose what I'm really trying to do is offer a range of things for those who want to think about big structure, those who want to think about a particular Scripture verse, those who find an illustration helpful. If at the bottom (of the message notes) I put questions to ponder that might be for somebody else or if I put a poem in. I also write an editorial at the front of our weekly paper which is often a tangent to something in the message so that it's actually reinforcing without necessarily people seeing that. So I suppose you are trying to use multiple things all the time, even though I said I have one aim that's sort of an encompassing thing.

So you don't aim for an "average"?

No, some people say you preach to a literate 12 year old. I suppose because I see one of my specialties is making complex things understandable and applicable, I like to think that anybody can grasp what I'm saying. So I don't think of it as you're dumbing down. I see what I do as interpreting, communicating, being what a good teacher does. Starting from where a person's at. That's really most important. One of interesting things that has happened is that the majority of people who have joined this church since I came here have been in their 50's with long church experience.

We've actually got a good core of people who've come in here, some because they're associated with [ministry of church], but they come here because the preaching is not demeaning to them, either because of their academic background or long history in Christian things, but other people in the congregation will say it's understandable, they understand more of the sermon here than they ever have. So I suppose it's those multiple things that people take away but making it understandable.

Regardless of form, dialogical communication seems necessary for developmental processes, and the church needs to attend to this seriously. The particular form of the dialogue may be linked to the developmental stage (both in terms of faith and cognition) of particular denominations, churches and individuals. This would seem to open up a whole new dimension for practical theology to explore, i.e. the relationships between developmental processes, dialogical communicative acts and the church and its communicative forms. It also raises a question for practical theology in terms of praxis in relation to the person and story of Christ. Are there aspects of Christ's character, actions and purposes that are appropriate or inappropriate to communicate dependent on a person's, or communities stage of faith development?

It would seem that in any one church that there would be people who are developmentally at different stages and therefore have different learning styles. Those with a traditional worldview and means of processing may tend to learn by being told and instructed. Those with a more postmodern worldview and processing style would be more suited to conversational approaches. Those with a more modernist approach would be more suited to instructional and discussion processes that attempt to cohere more complex levels of data and then make applicational conclusions. While different people and groups may have different styles of learning it is also true that all people are living in a more complex world and that preaching and teaching styles need to encourage people to faith for their times and contexts. The Gospel calls people to

maturity and so there needs to be dialogical approaches that create dissonance in people's understanding so there is opportunity for growth. Dialogical approaches are not always based on overt verbal structures of dialogue but do involve communication that creates dissonance and mental interactions and processes that engage with this dissonance. Dissonance may be created by a number of means. In relation to speech acts this may include engagement that encourages intrigue, curiosity, imagination, disruption, identification, conviction, puzzlement and even confusion. It is critical that preaching uses all these means, not to simply bring people back to deeper commitment to a closed worldview but to encourage people to greater openness to the possibilities of the Gospel, a gospel richly connected to life as it is.

Ideally good preaching generates dialogue. This may mean that good preaching also teaches and guides people into how to have these dialogues. It cannot be assumed that people know how to converse and dialogue with each other let alone dialogue over complex theological and existential issues. The preacher may need to teach a language and process for dialogue. When people are then freer to discuss what was said they will tend do it in a way that is natural to them and their culture.

Strom (2000) may be profoundly accurate in envisioning a form of church that may be more 'natural' for many in the Australian context. Natural though cannot be confused with what is vital. Strom's (2000) perspective is vital because it is grounded in the essence of the Gospel, the dying and rising of Christ. This message is one that many Australian evangelicals seem to have lost touch with either through mindless adherence to tradition or a mad rush to relevancy. If the gospel is losing its power it is critical to consider the message before the form. Willimon (1998c: 127) argues that

the gap in preaching is not between the time of Jesus and our time nor is the gap between the preacher and congregation but rather the gap is between us and the Gospel.

I suspect that both Barth (1991) and Strom (2000) would agree with this and concur that the central concern of the Christian is exploring and living the life of the crucified and risen Christ. Church, preaching, dialogue, contextualization are subservient to the risen Christ. Barth (1991) is correct in his concern that contextualisation could lose a focus on the centrality of Christ. Conversely while Strom (2000) is no fan of trendy enculturation he is correct in understanding that without contextualization Christ cannot be enfleshed.

Strom (2000: 19) is clear about what he is envisioning in the conversational church. "What kinds of new conversation do I envisage? First of all, I visualize not the neutral posturing of traditional exegesis and theology, nor the pseudo-interaction of preaching and church service, but people engaging with one another around concern and desire grounded in their everyday experiences. At heart is a rhythm between ancient narrative and modern story, between insight and healing. The agenda is as broad as life. The mood may be analytical and incisive, light and irreverent, deep and therapeutic. Maybe all, some or none of the above. At its heart are people wrestling with the Spirit and with one another to know the truth, grace and freedom of Christ in all the particulars of who they are and what fills their lives. I think of them as 'grace-full' conversations. Conversations marked by grace. Conversations full of grace. Conversations that bring grace."

In many ways I think that Barth (1991) would say "amen" but with a cautionary note. If Strom's (2000) conversations are primarily between the participants about their life experience, and not finally informed and subject to the Word, then it will be conversation that is not subversive enough. Conversational democracy can absorb the Word into communal cultural norms that are more concerned with creating and preserving a particular kind of community and community experience. This domesticates the Word that is not only immanent but also extrinsic to our culture and community. The governing motif of the dying and risen Christ needs to be as intriguing, puzzling and disruptive to the church now as it was at the time of Christ's death and resurrection. This brings us back to the question, "If preaching is to be dialogical/conversational, what kind of conversation/dialogue will this be?"

3. METAPHORS FOR DIALOGUE

Preaching and dialogue are thematic and these themes are often communicated in metaphor. Metaphors can shape how the congregation listens and dialogues, either intra- or inter- personally. Are there particular themes and metaphors that may be helpful in communicating the Gospel in the Australian context?

Brueggemann (1998d: 12) writing in the American context, suggests the metaphor of exile as a guiding theme for the church. "I propose that in our preaching and more general practice of ministry, we ponder the interface of our *circumstances of exile* (to the extent that is an appropriate metaphor) and *scriptural resources* that grew from and address the faith crisis of exile."

Brueggemann (1998b) bases his thinking on the work of Ricoeur (1975), using his notion of 'limit experiences' which need and require 'limit expressions'. "'Limit experiences' are those in which all conventional descriptions and explanations are inadequate. When one is pushed experientially to such extremity, one cannot continue to mouth commonplaces but is required to utter something 'odd'. The 'odd' limit expression is in language that effectively 'redescribes' reality, Thus such speech invites the speaker and the listener into a world that neither had known before this utterance"(Brueggemann 1998b: 29,30). Not only is new language used but such communicative action also "employs in fresh ways speech which is already known and trusted… however, the already trusted speech must be uttered in daring, venturesome ways that intensify, subvert, and amaze"(Brueggemann 1998b:30). Preaching looks for the hunches, hints and promises of newness, based not in what is seen and already but in the character and action of God (Brueggemann 1998b: 40).

Brueggeman (1998b: 30) suggests that, "our loss of the white, male, Western, colonial hegemony, which is deeply displacing for us, is indeed a limit experience... Such experience requires limit expression." He sees that there is a particular responsibility of preachers to "reconstruct, replace, or redraw" reality as, "The end of our privilege is the possibility of God's newness for all"(Brueggemann 1998b: 40).

Brueggemann (1998d) sees exile as a relatively recent experience in the USA, as the central and privileged place that the church has held in American society has been diminished. This use of the metaphor fits the American context due to the place of the church in its history and the connection between the Christian culture and the popular and establishment culture. I am not so sure that this sidelining of the church has been

such a deeply displacing experience for Australians as for the USA. The church has never held such a central and valued role. Rather, it could be argued that the church has voluntarily chosen exile and retreat.

Rather than recent exile I would argue that there has been a longer term, pervasive sense of displacement that is part of our identity. Words for this displacement need to be offered and limit expressions need to be spoken to the church which has disengaged from themes of displacement by making a comfortable home within its own institutions.

Brueggemann (1998d: 25) believes the engagement with the metaphor of exile, "may deliver pastors and people from magisterial notions of being (or needing to be) chaplains for the establishment and guardians of stable forms of life." He bases this hope on his concern that Christians too often want to reduce life to moral idealism and symmetry. We are invited to a larger domain of mystery that contains the wild call to faith and trust. Moral explanation is too often barren – trust is wilder. This is trust in a God bigger than all our moral programmes. Brueggemann (1998d: 26) warns, "we are always about to be domesticated and…we have these *narrative models of resistance, defiance and negotiation,* which remind us that there is more to life than conformist obedience or shameful accommodation."

Similarly, Taylor (1998: 99) says, "Tune into many of our churches on Sunday mornings, and you will hear preachers speaking of God as they would speak of a pet lion – oh, he was fierce once, but there is nothing to be afraid of now. You can climb on his back if you want to. We've had all his teeth and claws pulled, so he can't hurt

you anymore." At the same time Taylor (1998) sees in our present culture the opportunity for movement from over-familiarity with God to deeper reverence as we learn more of what we do not know.

This domesticity is a charge that evangelical churches in Australia need to answer but in a manner that has some distinct elements from the American church. Brueggemann (1998d: 26) believes that, "As the preacher stands up to preach among exiles, the primal task (given this metaphor) concerns the narration and nurture of a counteridentity, the enactment of the power of hope in a season of despair, and the assertion of a deep definitional freedom from the pathologies, coercions, and seductions that govern our society."

While the Australian church needs to offer a counter-identity, it is one that needs to be inclusive and non-sectarian. Helpful for developing this idea is Brueggemann's (1998d: 15) extension of the metaphor of exile to, "the theme of *rootlessness,* as though we do not belong anywhere." The banished, the displaced, the refugee, the exile, the homeless, the dispossessed have come to our shores and in coming displaced and dispossessed the indigenous population of this country. This theme of 'rootlessness' and displacement opens up the possibility of a conversation with all of Australia's displaced. I am not suggesting that preaching will bring more people into the church, though this may be an outcome, rather that preaching models and equips those in the church for the kind of dialogue and conversation these metaphors suggest.

In the context of a displaced people in a country that historically has struggled to form a sense of identity, the church may be part of a conversation that offers an alternate

identity for Australians but one more inclusive than the exclusive Christianity of the past. This would suggest in the Australian context that the metaphor of the veranda (Pickard: 1998) may be particularly pertinent to the theme of displacement. The veranda being a place where the displaced can gather and converse.

While appealing to a certain familiarity Australians have with the veranda, the metaphor suggests a settled life in which the house has been built and the country broken-in. It has a countrified and idealistic sense to it, which is a far cry from multi-cultural suburbia where most Australians live. It can smack of colonial settlement more than a process of becoming. It once again excludes Indigenous Australians to the outside of the house. Sadly as a people they are too familiar with the veranda.

As Brueggemann (1998d: 26) cautions in his use of the exile metaphor, "there is nothing in this faith model of 'sectarian withdrawal'… It is rather intended for full participation in the life of the dominant culture, albeit with a sense of subversiveness that gives unnerving freedom."

What is needed then is a metaphor that sees the church stepping out from domesticity to new territory. But territory that is home or a potential home for those we have historically avoided. I am going to suggest a construction metaphor once more and one that evangelicals may struggle with. Many Australians have as a critical part of their communal life either the hotel (the pub) or the club. Many Australians are part of social or sporting clubs or associations. Historically the evangelical church has avoided these forms of community as the pub is a place where alcohol is served, and clubs were a threat to the priority of church membership and attendance. The

metaphor of the pub (or club) calls the church out of its exile to live where Australians live. Historically pubs and clubs have also been places off limits to women, Indigenous Australians and certain migrant groups or at least there were separate bars for men, women and Indigenous Australians. The metaphor of the pub/club opens the doors to those previously excluded. The pub/club though is not a place where we welcome in the less fortunate by incorporating them into an essentially white worldview, this is displacement by charity. The Jesus who was a friend of publicans and sinners was not a man of superficial charity.

Similarly the theme of displacement and dispossession is not to encourage an identity based on victimhood. The metaphors allow us to explore how the displaced form a new identity shaped by the Gospel. Taylor (1998: 96) sees that within postmodern culture there are critical movements from individual to community and within these movements preaching is about forming us as a people. This forming does not assume that the 'white' church's identity is the default position. While not seeking an identity based on victimhood, the metaphors provide opportunity for those who have been victims of displacement to be acknowledged, heard and accepted. This particularly opens up the possibility for conversations with Indigenous Australians, new migrants and refugees, groups who not only need to be heard but are critical in shaping our identity.

The pub/club provides a place for exploring the gospel in the light of the everyday. Taylor (1998: 97, 98) advocates a preaching that fits the metaphor of the pub/club. The preacher is someone who speaks with a, "real voice, not a phoney one. This is not someone doing an imitation of a preacher. This is someone speaking to you from the

heart, in the same voice he would use to wish you happy birthday or say a prayer by your bed. No high drama, no polished gestures, but gravity, yes – the unmistakable sense that what he is about to say matters, to him and to you. You may even get the sense that it has cost him something – some sleep, some peace of mind – that putting this sermon together has required more of him than working a crossword puzzle or washing the car."

This is rich not superficial conversation. As Dawn (1999: 137) highlights, "In our postmodern world, people are desperate for a place where the inscrutable can be queried and quarried. In the assurance that God is the absolute Truth even if we can't know it absolutely; what is confusing can be sorted out and what is baffling can be made less threatening." And this is not only rich dialogue, it is real. "I believe that the best thing we can do for our preaching is to surrender ourselves to God and our neighbors and then to tell the truth about what that is like. It is so important not to lie. We do so much damage when we tell people things are easier than they are or that if they just do this, then that will happen or God will make everything all right. They want to believe us, but they know better, and the net effect is that they learn to keep us separate from the rest of their lives. They nod at our sweet lies on Sunday, and on Monday they go back to surviving anyway they can. The more we ground our sermons in everyday life, the better. The more we tell the truth about human experience, the better. And the more we avoid religious cliché, the better"(Taylor 1998: 98).

To extend the metaphor, at the risk of it becoming clumsy, the pub/club is not only a place for the exchange of words but pubs and clubs are full of icons and sacraments that tell the story of their community. They are also a place of celebration,

remembrance and the occasional singing. As Brueggemann (1998d: 20) reminds us, "It is thoroughly biblical to attend to modes of presence that are visible (material, physical) so that the whole of presence is not verbal (or sermonic)." Not only is there a need for the physical in the Australian church due to its strong verbal base but Brueggemann (1998d: 20) argues there is a need for visible sacrament due to the threat of, "technological emptiness that is filled by the liturgies of consumerism and commoditization."

Often displaced and exiled people cannot take their sacramental traditions (physical and symbolic elements) with them and are left with the "ministry of language" (Brueggemann 1998b:40). As a country with a history of displacement this may explain why there is not a strong sacramental evangelical tradition and such a reliance on speech acts (sermons) in the Australian church. Even in this we do not often use and see the transformative power of language. Rather we use speech to normalise our displacement. At the same time the indigenous cultures, while displaced, do have a continuing experience of sacrament and sign that is often ignored by the evangelical church in exploring and expressing the Gospel.

The place of traditional sign in the life of the Indigenous evangelical church, a community who have known profound displacement, is a critical issue for Minister 'B'.

A younger generation of urban aboriginal people are in some sense reconnecting with traditional ways of expressing their being. Do you think that is important in communicating the Gospel to a younger generation?

Yeah, although the younger generation now know very little of those things so you see in the urban context more are becoming more educated and at the same time relearning their history and so it is appropriate in that sense to use the means of our culture to share the Gospel in other ways.

So it's a sort of catch-22 situation. Our younger generation know very little of their traditions. The Stolen Generation and my generation have been separated from our history. So we have a large group of our people who have been separated from that in their childhood and can't pass it on to their children. So to a lot of our next generation those things are foreign to them. But as they start to relearn that they say, "Oh hang on that's a part of our culture" and they start to appreciate it. So there are two things going on. For some they are becoming enlightened to it as they are getting older and some are still wary. Traditional things are obviously more relevant in rural areas or more traditional areas where people are used to it. I think that in the years to come there will be a move to look at some of these areas of being able to communicate the Gospel a lot better. I think we do it in an appropriate fashion already, not just preaching but sharing the gospel we unconsciously do it our way. So when Nyoongar blokes are all together hunting we are talking about the Lord. There are always ways that the people have for sharing the Gospel that are culturally sensitive because you've grown up with it. Some of my family moved out of the State and lived in a white world for a long time and they came back at 20 years of age and they did not know how to react in a death situation. So if you haven't grown up with that then it's hard to connect even though you might see it as important.

Some go to the other extreme and say, "Well I lost it all so I'm gonna try and get it all back and synchronise it all back into Christianity." There has been some stuff that has been pushed out by some of the denominations that have turned some of the churches to the opposite extreme. There was an attempt at one stage in AEF, at the AEF convention there was a big traditional painting telling the Gospel story and that was good but then there were some denominations that were trying to get an Aboriginal theology out of everything in the culture even into the spiritual world and there have been books written in that fashion without understanding and getting a proper balance. They just went to the other extreme and just enmeshed things like the Rainbow Serpent into Christianity and so it has pushed people back in another direction saying no that's not it and shied people right away from a good balance. But it's finding a balance. From my point of view some people try and make Christ fit into the culture rather than the culture fitting into Christ. And that can depend on where you are. Speaking the Gospel out in the desert communities is very different from preaching it here.

Poetry and singing can also occur in the pub/club and this too can have liberational and transformative power. "In our own situation, the hymnic act of praise has become largely innocuous. It happens often among us that praise is either escapist fantasy, or it's a bland affirmation of the status quo. In fact doxology is a daring political, polemical act that serves to dismiss certain loyalties and to embrace and legitimate other loyalties and other shapes of reality"(Brueggemann 1998b: 37). Again in the

Australian context the songs that we sing may not be as overtly counter-identity but it does seem that the metaphor of the pub/club allows for new songs to be sung and perhaps fresh meanings given for old songs now sung in a new land.

This metaphor though may not be appropriate for two groups. The first is the evangelical Indigenous church where alcohol and going to the pub are deeply frowned upon due to the damage that alcohol abuse has brought to Indigenous communities and the strict, conservative missionary foundation of the Indigenous church. At the same time the Indigenous Christian community is not disconnected from the broader Indigenous community. Church association is not at the exclusion of family and community association. While the metaphor is not literal, and there may also be a need for 'limit expressions' in Indigenous communities the metaphor of the pub may not be appropriate. At the same time clubs and associations have been important for maintaining Indigenous communities in cities and country towns. It may be more respectful and important that the Indigenous church shape their own metaphors for what being church in Australia may mean; metaphors that may be critical for the predominantly white church to hear and allow to shape our understanding of what being the community of God means for the Australian context. Minister 'B' encourages this approach by saying,

The preaching of those kind of issues would carry a biblical foundation but also a cultural perspective as well. From our cultural point of view not just a Western one.

When Minister 'B''s Indigenous church began to attract more non-Indigenous Australians he had to choose which paradigm he was going to operate out of when it came to preaching– a Western paradigm of church or an Indigenous paradigm.

… now 20% of our church are non-Aboriginal. It threw me out a little bit in preaching because I've been ministering 100% to Aboriginal people. Even those non-Aboriginal people who have married Aboriginal people are locked into an Aboriginal system and then during the '90's other people started coming into our church, the Lord led them our way and they are part of our church now. It really threw me out because I was using a lot of Nyoongar words and I knew that the people would know what I was saying and that makes the message a lot more acceptable particularly with some of the people who may find it hard to understand a lot of things, using a lot of the Nyoongar words makes it easier for the people to connect with the message. Also some of the unsaved coming along identify with those things and it also helps them to stay alert. I've felt that I have had to not so much restrict my use of Nyoongar but I have had to clarify a lot of the language that I am using. I would use the Nyoongar and I use an English word to say the same thing in a different way. I have had to adapt in a round-a-bout way but I still use a lot of the Nyoongar language.

The other group where the metaphor of pub/club may not connect is younger Australians. While they are part of sporting clubs, the nightclub is a metaphor that they could more readily identify with than the pub. At the same time it would seem that the nightclub provides more a sense of shared experience than shared dialogue and conversation. To take the metaphor more literally, some churches are attempting youth services that reflect the character of nightclub. How this facilitates communities of dialogue and conversation around the dying and risen Christ is harder to see. My fear is that unless grounded and supported by communities of greater substance, these services could be more an example of relevancy based on superficial categories of a consumer culture, than communities based on a commitment to build each other up in the life of Christ. Rather than wanting to pour coldwater on the vision and passion of a younger generation, I would hope that my caution would open up exploration for the development of this metaphor and the development of others that may connect with younger people. Again it may be critical that younger people in the context of the heritage and communal nature of the church be allowed to form their own metaphors that allow dialogue and connection with their generation.

Whether the metaphor be pub, club, nightclub, veranda or others, these metaphors suggest that the Australian church needs to be willing to consider significant shifts in the attitudes it holds in regards to how it be church, both in relationships within the church and in the church's relationship with the broader community. Preaching will play a critical role in encouraging these shifts and expressing these shifts. Likewise the church will need to consider significant shifts in the form that being church may take. Again preaching will play a critical role in exploring and reflecting these possible changes.

It also needs to be made clear that these metaphors are not to replace rich Scriptural metaphors for the church. The metaphors of the Bride, the Body and the living Temple are unique pictures of what it means to be the church that are foundational and primary. More specifically contextualised metaphors need to serve this scriptural witness. Trendy, overly literal application of the pub/club metaphor robs the metaphor of implicational possibilities. If the Australian church strives to be like the pub/club and simply replicate these institutions we are at risk of losing what it means to be the Body of Christ.

Willimon (1990) rightly warns that in the rush to relevancy we must not forget that the church is its own unique reality and that it is in its uniqueness of both message and form that the church is authoritative and influential. By form I mean that it is a people gathered around the risen Christ, not that there is any one particular right way of constructing that gathering. The New Testament witness is of a church gathered in open public spaces, temple courts, homes, hired halls and riverbanks. There is a level of flexibility in the New Testament church that we may need to rediscover.

My concern in the Australian context is that we too easily discuss metaphors such as the Body within the confines of a particular way of meeting – typically on a Sunday for an hour and a half in a church building. This restricts the scriptural metaphors. There needs to be contextualised metaphors to open up fresh and potentially new ways of being the Body in Australia.

With fresh and new ways of being the Body in mind we are now at a place in the research where we can consider a new model for praxis. An analysis has been done of current praxis in evangelical churches in the light of theological tradition and situational factors. We are now ready to develop a new model in the light of these considerations.

CHAPTER 7
### AN EVANGELICAL PRACTICAL THEOLOGY/ PREACHING MODEL

It is now time to consider a practical theological model suitable for praxis including

preaching. In doing so we must recall a number of concerns raised previously. A

critical concern when considering the discipline of practical theology is to ensure

practical theology is not disconnected from other theologies and disciplines of

inquiry. Conversely, the emphasis of practical theology in relating theology to

practice must also be maintained, in this instance the practice of preaching. As Strom

(2000: 182) points out, using the example of the Apostle Paul, too often, "Theology

and sermons are built on the distinction between theory and practice, interpretation

and application. One interprets first, and then applies. But simplistic formulas like

these do not do justice to the ways people live and think. Paul is no exception. We

must not reduce what he is doing to 'applying' the gospel. *Paul was generating new*

meaning. The richness of Paul's, message – the coherence he found in the dying and

rising of Christ – only emerged as Paul was open to the possibilities of changing

circumstances." A model needs to be developed that allows the interaction of other

theologies and disciplines and maintains the focus on theologically formed praxis.

There are further concerns specifically in relation to Zerfass's (1974) model.

Analytical models can create analytical praxis. While at one level all models are

analytical some can be more complex and mechanistic than others. As can be seen by

the diagram below, Zerfass (1974) model is quite complex in the number of its

analytical interactions, with each number representing an analytical process. My

concern is that such complex analysis could produce new praxis that is weighty and

flat rather than fluid and dynamic.

Figure 7.1 Practical Theology Model (Zerfass 1974: 166)
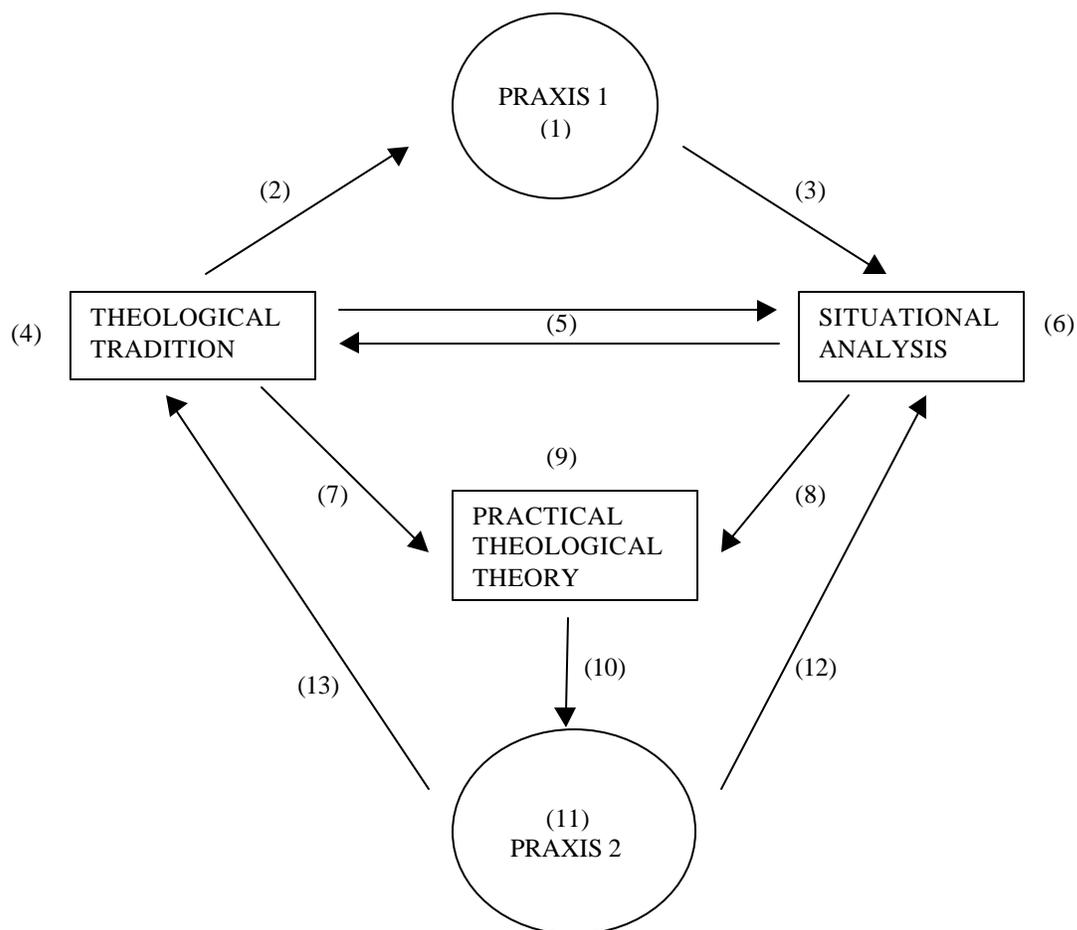
A further concern is that Zerfass's (1974) model highlights dialectic tension between

the theological and the situational, over continuity between them. As has been pointed

out in earlier analysis and discussion it is often difficult to distinguish the theological

from the situational. This is particularly evident in the previous chapter's discussion

of Barth (1991) and Strom (2000) where it was virtually impossible to separate their

theological argument from their situational analysis and context. In fact no attempt

was made to do so as this would diminish their perspectives and create a dualistic

distinction I believe they would be cautious about. As Van Huyssteen (1997: 21) highlights, our knowing occurs in the context of related elements and experiences. "All our knowledge therefore takes place in, and is constituted by, a relationship: every knower, from the theoretic scientist interacting with abstract symbols to the skilful athlete judging the angle and speed of a ball, acquires and employs his or her knowledge in relational participation with that which is known." Theological understandings and traditions are so inter-related with the situational that it could be argued that theological paradigms are part of the situational. This perspective will be further developed in this chapter.

It would seem there is a need for a model of practical theology that both reflects the dynamic interaction of the situational and theological, and reflects the dynamic process of moving from praxis to praxis; a model that reflects the sense of movement and action that is part of a dialogical, narrative perspective. This model is not offered as a replacement for Zerfass's (1974) model, as there are times when dialectic tension is critical to recognise and utilise in the process of moving from praxis to praxis. Rather this model is presented as another potential tool in the practical theology repertoire.

I would also argue that this new model is not only a helpful meta-model for the discipline of practical theology as a whole but can be used as a model for the praxis of preaching itself.

1. BASIS FOR THE MODEL

As mentioned in chapter 1, Ridderbos (1975) presented a simple principle for

understanding the epistles of the New Testament. He highlights indicative text as text

describing how God has acted on our behalf and imperative text calling us to respond

to God's actions. This is consistent with Speech Act Theory that argues that speech is

an action that has an effect in an existential context. To Ridderbos's (1975) model, I

would make it more explicit that the text or Speech Act is presented in an historical

existential context and read, heard, explored and understood in a current existential

context. A simple hermeneutical model could be presented as follows.

Figure 7.2 Existential, indicative, imperative model
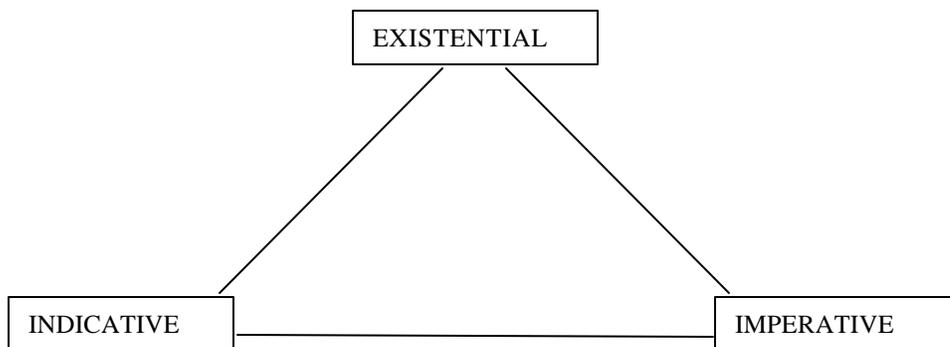
Within this hermeneutical dynamic, evangelicals claim to have a focus on the

indicative – the acts of God, particularly all that God is for us in Christ. But this

indicative would have no 'realness' if God did not act in existential time and place, nor

carry any authority or 'realness' if it did not lead to action (the imperative) in the

existential context. Additionally, we could not connect with the text if we did not

understand it in our existential context. All three elements are interconnected and

joined. Remove any one dimension from the dynamic and the gospel is distorted.

This disconnection does seem to occur in the church. For example the indicative and

imperative without the existential (diagram below) leads to abstraction. Truth

disconnected from the situational is abstraction, which at best serves as principles for

particular kinds of behaviour. The church misses the profoundness of God incarnate

when Christianity is presented as a set of truths *about* Christ that then become

principles for how we live, with Christ reduced to being the standard by which to

measure the imperative behaviour. When this occurs the imperative simply maintains

the culture of the indicative. Christian obedience simply serves the maintenance of the

culture and system of doctrine that exists to demand obedience to that system.

Figure 7.3 Existential, indicative, imperative model
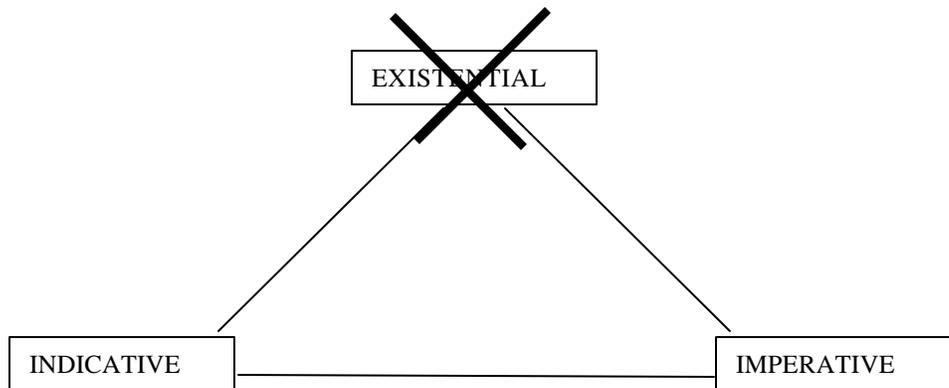
When the indicative is neglected, as in the diagram below, then Christian imperatives

simply becoming a way to gain and maintain completeness and wholeness in the

midst of existential reality. The "Christian way of life" is presented as the way to the

best kind of marriage, family, community. This approach seems to be more evident in

churches that aim at being contemporary and relevant. Unfortunately, Christianity

then becomes one more utilitarian, pragmatic lifestyle philosophy competing with a

myriad of others. The plethora of books and seminars on how to live the Christian

lifestyle are testimony to this trend.

Figure 7.4 Existential, indicative, imperative model
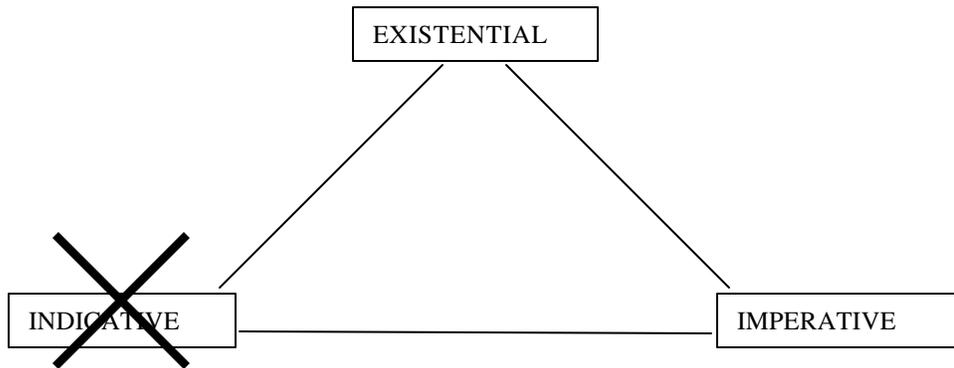
In discussing the implicational or applicational aspects of a sermon in the interview

conducted with Minister 'A', he provided this insight as to why the indicative may be

left aside.

Do you have any sense when you might be more implicational or when you might be more direct and applicational?

I sometimes find, I did the other day, when I give a sermon, this one was about the new heaven and the new earth, that I am not that convinced by the power of the indicative. I was not captured by it myself and I went to an imperative application of the text, a "Therefore you must", which worked really well with the congregation but I walked away from there and felt I had been dishonest with the text. I haven't given them what they should have heard. It worked, but I didn't, it still failed in what I actually wanted to bring across. I find that going to the imperative easy, an easier way.

So you are saying that there was something in your own grasp of the text that led you to deal with it imperatively.

I think the big thing is that I did not communicate the indicative.

**So something about the indicative did not grab you?**

Yes, as I was developing the sermon I thought it would grab me but I did not feel it strong enough. So I did not engage enough, there was not enough "Wow" factor on my part, something bigger that is a trigger.

So what do you do when as the sermon preparer, the preacher there is not the "Wow" factor?

I think I need to move to another text or I have just got to keep on sticking at it, trusting God that it will be there.

Not only can the indicative be neglected but also the imperative. The neglect of the imperative sees another form of abstraction where the relationship of Christian belief to existential realities becomes an endless theological and sociological discussion, often around the theme of crisis, e.g. the crisis of faith or the crisis of the church. Seldom does this endless discussion and dialogue translate into the life of the Gospel.

Figure 7.5 Existential, indicative, imperative model
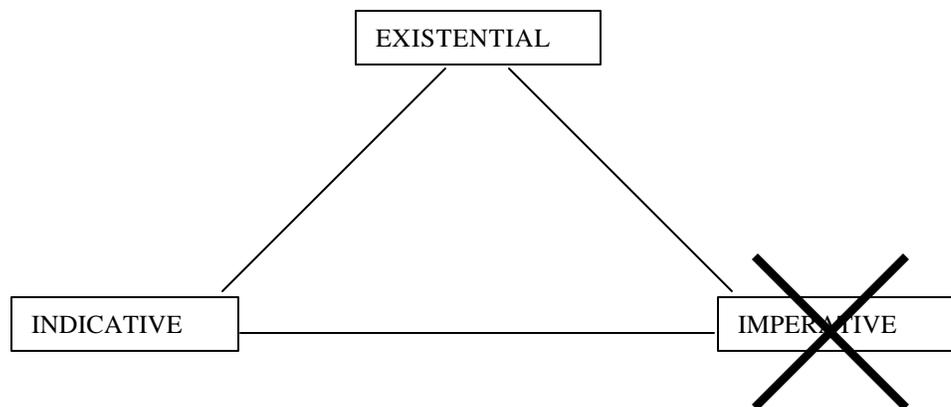
When it came to understanding the place of the imperative in the sermon there appeared some differences between the interviewees in the language of their response, though closer examination also reveals they may be saying something quite similar to each other.

Minister 'A'

Do you think that a sermon always needs to have an application at the end of it?

No I don't think so. I certainly do think there are times when to say anything applicational breaks down the sermon.

….. the way I see it is that a sermon opens a door to get people to think for themselves. So a lot of the applications are things that they need to work out for themselves rather than be just spelt out from the pulpit. There are times the pulpit should just leave them dangling. The actual work of the sermon continues after the sermon.

Are there places where you would want to make things very clear in a sermon such as, "This is the application" or "This is the call"?

Yes there are times when it is an imperative text or when it is a prophetic text where that becomes very specific, very definite and confrontational. I think there are times we can become so wishy-washy that we do not say things that will disrupt.

Minister 'C'

You say that in preaching there is an exhortation or an application or a call. Would you always see that in preaching, would you always have an application or exhortation?

I would always have an aim, what am I trying to do in this message. I wouldn't necessarily write the aim first, but when I'm reading the passage, doing the background work, I'm looking all the time for what that passage is actually saying. But you're looking for what that passage is saying to us here in this particular situation today so it comes out of where you're at and your interpretation of what's happening in the congregation and what people are saying and feeling. Nowadays I wouldn't actually write the aim down in words but that's my practice, and at the end of my preparation on a Sunday morning before I come here, I now have a habit of kneeling in prayer with the Scriptures and my notes and committing that aim to God – it is very focused. On the other hand you're aware that you're preaching to a very mixed bunch of people, so the tension is between being specific enough so people can go out and say, yes, I can see that that was what Jesus was saying, or I can see why that story was there in Genesis or whatever, and I have to do that or it should affect my thinking in some way. The challenge is to be specific enough without missing a whole lot of people because you've been too specific.

I remember my father saying towards the end of his life, "If I had my time over again I would preach more on the "how to's" and less on "just this is what it means to be a Christian or whatever", that is actually how to do it." So I think my inclinations are along that line to say well, how are you going to do this? Yesterday we were talking about Christmas, are you going to set aside some time before Christmas to let God's peace come into your life and give you something new to show you about the Christ child? Something quite concrete like that which a lot of people can try.

If there were texts that appeared to be more implicational in what they are saying rather than directly applicational, would you be content to leave people with more of the implications of the text?

To use some that had more implications than others?

I think at times there can be a style of preaching that squeezes applications out of texts.

That's true, but all Scripture is for our edification. There is one Church of Christ theory that says because we want to get back to New Testament times, the New Testament is more significant than the Old. Somebody said that to me the other day. When I raised it with the elders that said it wasn't a generally held view. I'm a product of the Baptist College and John Olley is always wanting us to see implications of the Old Testament. Also, because of my interest in the underlying principles, some of Christopher Wright's writings for instance on living as people today has helped me., What was God telling them when he got them to not pulling right to the corners of field? Or what was the principal underlying the jubilee and all that sort of thing. I think those things are really important.

So it sounds like your application goes beyond just being pragmatic?

Yeh, yeh I guess that's true. For instance we had a September 11th commemoration service here which we did combined with other churches. I spoke at it, and I think those are really important. I was in China at the time of September 11th. I came back and found people quite shattered. Our Youth Minister had preached the Sunday after that had happened and he didn't make any reference to it. I thought that was his inexperience that he didn't change what he was doing for what was happening. But to me those things which are part of what's impacting people in the community are really significant to our being real people before God. Not superficially. I think a lot of the implications of September 11th for instance has taken us a couple of years to really think that through.

Minister 'E'

Would you always be looking for an application in a sermon?

Yes I am, for sure. It might be, "Isn't God good," lets just soak that up, lets just enjoy God at that point. I see that as application. I am, and the text is, moving the person to rejoice in God again. That might be different to, "Confess your sins" or "Care for your family" but I guess I'm saying that I want every sermon to challenge a person to do something and that something might be praise of God based on passages that talk about his majesty and character that invite us to go "wow!"

You are saying that people have different learning styles. Some are saying they need that next step, others are saying they've got what you are saying. Would you be happy to leave people at times with the implications of the text?

I'm not deliberate about that. I think it would depend on the text. I think it can also depend on how much time you have given to preparation. For application I think that you have to give yourself space and time to work out how you are going to apply a passage. In the style of preaching that I have been raised up in the temptation can be to say we've worked through the passage, here ends the lesson so lets sit down. Whereas I am aware that I need to give myself space to chew through what some of the implications for different sorts of people are. Because the nature of a congregation is diverse I think you have to help people see how they can put it into action but in one sense there is also a certain ownership of the person in the pew to take it further.

So you see implication and application as being something very similar?

I think I do. An implication is saying, "So what does this mean for us?" An application is taking that principle into a particular situation. In my mind I see application is taking a specific step. If its, "flee immorality" the implication is that I want to work out in my life how I do that. Taking it the next step I might be saying to you, "Well don't look at those emails". That's getting a bit more particular. Because there are people who I am preaching to who are in all sorts of places in life, application can only be a guide for helping people to think about matters and help bring the word to bear in their own lives.

You see risks in being non-applicational, do you think there could be any risks in being applicational?

You want to find a balance. The risk of being only applicational is the voice of the text is lost. The point of the passage can be lost in being applicational. For example it can be a series of life lessons disconnected from the text. I want the text to set the agenda. There is a risk that in the end the talk can be so "life-focused" that it can move away from the principle of the passage. Good preachers don't do that but there is a risk that without balance the text can be lost in a focus on changing our lives. Both those things make a strong sermon.

It appears that in evangelicalism all three errors, either ignoring the indicative, or the imperative or the existential are evident. It may be that the error of ignoring the existential is more evident in churches marked by traditionalism, the error of ignoring the indicative more evident in churches marked by modernism and the error of ignoring the imperative more evident in churches open to the influence of postmodernism.

These distortions have parallels with Hiebert's (1994) historical developmental perspective on evangelicalism. Hiebert (1994) sees that in response to the naïve realism of historical fundamentalism in the evangelical tradition, there was a move toward the critical realism of neo-evangelicalism. Those who saw this as a shift toward liberalism then moved to the idealism of neo-fundamentalism.

My own conjecture is that the majority of evangelical churches in Perth have as their epistemological foundation the idealism of neo-fundamentalism. This feeds an applicational hermeneutic that focuses on what the Christian life should look like. Traditional churches within this idealism ignore the existential, i.e. the truth about Christ simply translates into how one obeys those truths. More contemporary churches within this idealism, minimise or assume the indicative. The Christian life is presented as the way to have better marriages, family and life in general. In this perspective Christ 'saves' us to free us to live this better life. Richer, more troubling and more complex understandings of the life and death of Christ are minimised. In this view quite contemporary churches while thinking that are moving away from traditional fundamentalism are actually generating new forms of idealism. Idealism heightens exclusivity by creating two groups of people. There are those who comply with the idealism and those who do not. Therefore idealism actually inhibits dialogue and communication.

Figure 7.6 Types of Conflict on the Evangelical Scene (Hiebert 1994: 32)
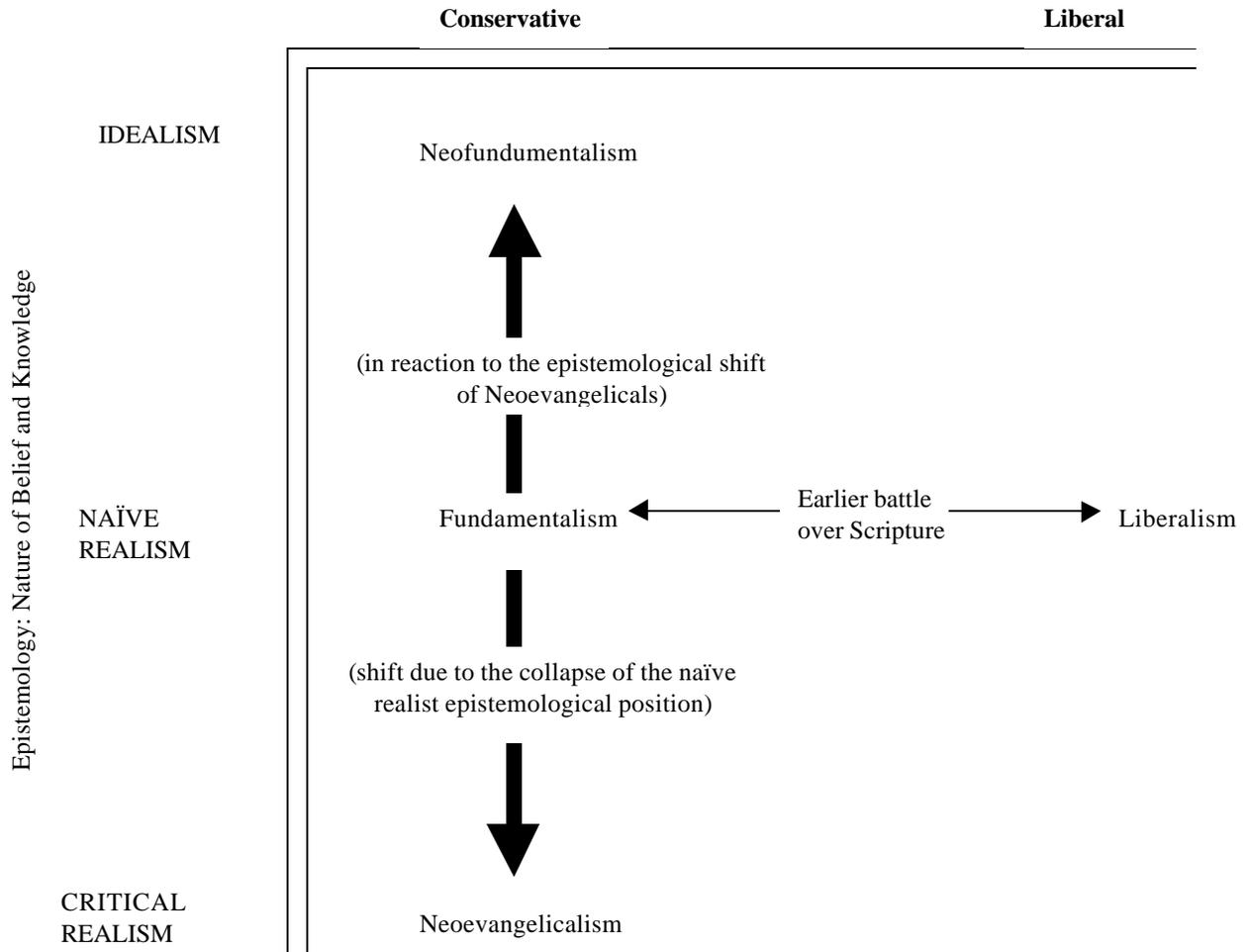
Hiebert (1994: 31) summarises his argument as follows. "As I see it, many young

evangelicals aware of the shifts now taking place in Western epistemology have

moved from the old position of naïve realism to that of critical realism, while

remaining evangelical in *theological content*. Seeing this move as a shift towards

liberalism, other theologians have reacted by asserting the certainty of theology as a

comprehensive, complete system of thought (not to be confused with the

trustworthiness of Scripture as historical revelation). But in doing so they have been forced into an idealist epistemology that absolutizes ideas over historical reality." Hiebert (1994: 27) argues that in naïve realism, evangelicals, "assume that their theology bears a one-to-one correspondence to the Bible", claiming, "a one-to-one correspondence between knowledge and reality." Naïve realists, "hold an exact correspondence between their theology and Scripture, they claim equal and absolute certainty for both"(Hiebert 1994: 27). For Hiebert (1994: 27) this kind of naïve realism is very similar to idealism in which, "human thought is seen as foundational and empirical realities as contingent." Idealists have a certainty that, "rests on biblical revelation and reason"(Hiebert 1994: 27).

There are a number of problems with idealism. Firstly like traditionalism, it assumes there is one system of reason and behaviour for all humans. But when evangelical idealism equates its theological authority with that of Scripture then, "idealists must appeal to human reason as the arbiter of truth"(Hiebert 1994: 28). In evangelical idealism the work of the Spirit is then allowed to become purely subjective, "for each person can claim to have had a divine revelation regarding its interpretation"(Hiebert 1994: 29). While some evangelical idealists who emphasise the Scriptural authority of their theology are cautious about those who claim subjective experience of the Spirit, both come out of the same confidence in human experience and the human capacity to interpret. (This is similar to Piggin's (1996) Spirit/Word analysis presented in chapter 2.) Because of this confidence in *individual* reasoning and experience, idealism has difficulty in accounting for communication.

Hiebert (1994: 28) argues that, "We cannot know another person's mind directly. All

communication is mediated through external events. But if the meaning of these events is what we make them to be, communication breaks down." Disagreements cannot be arbitrated as the appeal is to the internal without an external reference point. "The only real resolution lies in the conversion of one side to the position of the other"(Hiebert 1994: 29). This invariably leads to some kind of coercion.

Idealism also undervalues the importance of history as the framework in which divine revelation takes place. Idealism, "tends to be ahistorical and acultural… This disconnection from reality makes it virtually, impossible to integrate an idealist theology and a realist science" forcing us to "choose between one or the other as our ultimate frame of reference"(Hiebert 1994: 29).

"Idealists require agreement as the basis for harmony. Consequently, they tend to be conversionist and polemical in their approach to those holding other theological positions"(Hiebert 1994: 33). On the other hand Hiebert (1994: 33) argues that Realists, "tend to be confessional and irenic in their approach to those who disagree. Moreover, they are committed by their epistemological stance to continue discussion with other points of view."

As an advocate of critical realism, Hiebert (1994: 25) argues that "critical realism makes a distinction between reality and our knowledge of it…Theories are not regarded as photographs of reality, but as maps or blueprints. Just as it takes many blueprints to understand a building, so it takes many theories to comprehend reality." In evangelical circles, "it would differentiate between theology and biblical revelation, ascribing full and final authority to the Bible as the inspired record of God

in human history"(Hiebert 1994: 29). "Theology in a critical realist mode is our human understanding and interpretation of the Scriptures…This assumes that all theologies are partial and culturally biased, so that truth in the Scriptures is greater than our understanding of it"(Hiebert 1994: 30).

Hiebert (1994: 33) argues that, "Realism looks at events in the real historical world within which we live and focuses on the nature of truth in specific situations. Realist theologians, therefore, emphasize biblical theologies that look at God's acts and self-revelation in specific historical and cultural situations (theologies of the road)."

One needs to be careful about being naively uncritical of critical realism. An insistence on critical realism can in fact create a different type of idealism. An important question for realists to consider is how the study of "events in the real historical world within which we live" (Hiebert 1994: 33) does not reduce all reality to empiricism or at least require that all reality be judged by empiricism? The Gospel needs to be grounded in reality but a realism that ignores mystery and the incomprehensible becomes another version of the modernist endeavour.

Focusing the idealism/realist discussion on the particular area of preaching, Strom (2000) is concerned that the disparity between ideals and reality can lead the preacher in an unhealthy direction. The preacher may be aware of the disparity between ideals and reality and feels compelled to more often preach, "those principles that he believes apply *universally* to any congregation. Community increasingly comes to mean *conformity*"(Strom 2000: 219). Strom (2000: 219, 220) believes this is what happens in many evangelical churches in Australia. As a result, "A circular dynamic sustains the system: Conformity requires ideals, ideals require persuasive oratory, the

orator needs to feel he knows the truth, persuading others of the truth becomes the basis of conformity. The conventions of preaching establish boundaries for the congregation's thoughts, feelings and behavior. The effect is to make the whole system seem self-evidently true."

Hiebert's (1994) distinction between idealism and critical realism is reflected in Strom's (2000: 219) questions in regard to preaching. "The sermon is a *social* event in which its form is as much the message as the words. The sermon is a cultural experience. This leads us to ask new questions: What is the sermon to a congregation? What images, expectations and ideals does it convey? What parity or disparity lies between the timeless principles and ideals of the pulpit and the realities of experience?"

If the evangelical church in Australia is either stuck in traditional idealism or is heading in the direction of contemporary idealism, what model of practical theology could help in encouraging a direction that as stated previously, reflects the dynamic interaction of the situational and theological and reflects the dynamic process of moving from praxis to praxis, a model that reflects the sense of movement and action that is part of a dialogical, contextualised, narrative perspective.

2. A NEW MODEL
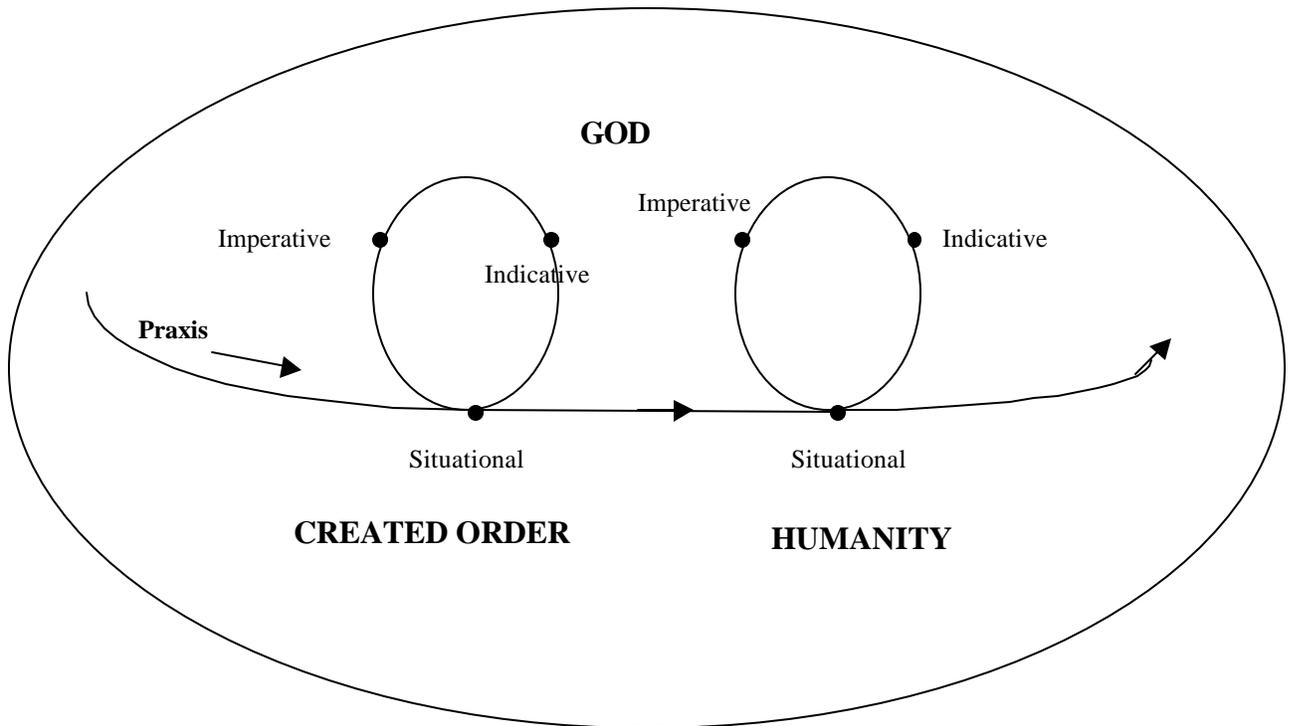
Figure 7.7 New Practical Theology Model

The triangulated variation of Ridderbos's (1975) model has been further modified as a continuous loop of developing praxis, remembering that praxis is not simply the instrumental practice of communication but is also the theological and dynamic elements that constitute that communicative action. Praxis in itself is a unified three cord strand of the indicative (what the praxis is in its practical, sociological, and theological makeup), the imperative (the effect of the praxis) and the existential (the dynamic context in which the praxis occurs).

In this model the term existential has been replaced by the term situational to reflect something of Van Huyssteen's (1997) perspective that the theoretical arises in and is part of the situational. This has been evidenced in our discussion so far where at certain points it has been virtually impossible to separate theoretical elements from their situational context. Therefore the situational in this model includes not only the subjectively experienced reality of a situation, as is often understood by the term existential, but also the theoretical and theological paradigms developed to understand and describe reality. Our theology is not God or his activity but our attempt, as humans in a contextualised reality, to describe God and his activity. In this model the indicative denotes the witness of God in Scripture, centred in the revelation of Christ. The God who is outside of us is real to us in his actions in time and history as written in Scripture and witnessed in Christ. The imperative is the effect in human actions that the situationally grounded indicative has or intends. God's speech acts and actions have a perlocutionary effect in an imperative call. This imperative is then enacted in the situational as praxis, and theorised in the situational as theology for praxis. This movement of praxis is then evaluated and refined as it moves through continuing loops of situational, indicative and imperative analysis and practice.

From the outset it needs to be acknowledged that there is a tendency for the situational to sustain itself and not to develop new praxis or renewed praxis. This is the strength of Zerfass's (1974) model in that it is often dialectic tension that is a catalyst for change. Cultural change outside of the system can be a catalyst for change, as well as cultural change within the system, often through younger generations who have a new ethos and values. The guiding and convicting activity of the Spirit of God is also acknowledged by evangelicals as a catalyst for change and

intentional openness to the Spirit of God would seem critical in preventing dynamic continuity not becoming a continuation of the status quo.

2.1 Background

This model also holds that the process of new and renewed praxis itself occurs in a context. As the model suggests reality in the form of God, the created order and humanity are the background for this model. *Background* is the phrase that Searle (1999: 10) uses to describe the external reality that is not a linguistic or philosophical construct but is 'there'. He argues that external realism is not a position or a theory it is the background that makes all theorising possible.

Searle (1999: 11) simply says that there is reality. There are things that objectively are and exist. There is a real world that exists independent of us. Background reality is not language or consciousness dependent. The world existed before any particular human being's existence and will continue after it (Searle 1999: 13, 14).

Searle (1999: 10) argues his point on the basis of 5 default positions.

1. There is a real world that exists independently of us, independently of our experiences, our thoughts, and our language.

2. We have direct perceptual access to that world through our senses, especially touch and vision.

3. Words in our language, words like rabbit or tree, typically have reasonably clear meanings. Because of their meanings, they can be used to refer to and talk about real objects in the world.

4. Our statements are typically true or false depending on whether they correspond to how things are, that is, to the facts of the world.

5. Causation is a real relation among objects and events in the world, a relation whereby one phenomena, the cause, causes another, the effect.

He argues that if we do not understand or see the relationship between cause and effect we should not conclude that causation is a false concept. We must say we do not understand and see everything. Critically though Searle (1999) does not believe in deterministic causation but intentional causation. This notion has implications for a theology of God, creation and redemption as has been seen in Vanhoozer's (1998b) thinking on God's call and which we will discuss again shortly.

Searle (1999: 11) also argues that not all assumed default positions are true. Searle (1999) states that the above five are. One default position that he rejects is dualism.

Truth in Searle's (1999: 5) thinking does not exist in abstract isolation. Rather truth is an attempt to describe realities and the relationship between these realities. "Truth is a matter of correspondence to the facts. If a statement is true there must be some fact in virtue of which it is true. The facts are a matter of what exists, of ontology. Provability and verification are matters of finding out about truth and thus are epistemic notions, but they are not to be confused with the facts we find out about."

It is important to note Searle's (1999) distinction between attempts to describe reality (truth) and reality itself. His view of correspondence does not equate truth and reality as being the same thing. Objectivity of statement or proposition is not intrinsic to itself; rather objectivity of statement is in relation to its correspondence to reality.

This is similar to Kant (1781) who argued against a naïve realism that equated description with intrinsic reality. Vanhoozer (1998a: 49) presents Kant as, "demonstrating that the 'world' is the product of human experience *as processed by conceptual categories.* The categories with which we think do not mirror the world but *mould* it; that is, *they impose distinctions on experience that may or may not be intrinsic to reality itself.*" Searle is clear though that there is intrinsic reality and is opposed to the dualism of abstracted truth. Abstraction, e.g. doctrine, can suggest that the 'truth' is objectively true in itself, not in its relationship to reality. Descriptors are not the same as the reality they describe but neither are they part of a separate reality from reality. Perspectivism – that things are seen from a point of view, does not negate the reality of what is seen. It is the nature of reality that we cannot see things without it being seen from a point of view.

Searle (1999) argued that even something as contentious in philosophical circles as consciousness is real because it has intentionality which leads to real action that has a real effect in the world. Consciousness expressed in speech is an action that has intentionality to produce an effect. He developed this idea further in Speech Act Theory. As presented in the previous chapter he also argued that social institutions are real because of shared intentionality which has real effect in the world. This is critical to Searle's (1999) notion that causation is intentional not deterministic, which is also critical to Vanhoozer's (1998b) argument in regard to the call of God.

The weakness in Searle's (1999) argument is his dependence on human rationality to be able to understand and articulate reality – even if it is an unfolding developmental process. This dependence which can lead to an over-confidence in the rational is

critical to deconstructionist perspectives. One might argue though that human rationality is all that we have to understand and articulate reality. Even if as evangelicals we claim that inspiration and revelation from God allows us to grasp certain realities, human rationality is still required to understand and articulate the revelation or inspiration.

At the same time evangelicals claim there is a primacy of order in the process of comprehending. Revelation precedes human rationality as the basis for confidence in the *background,* and reality is intrinsically bound in God. Yet we know this revelation as revelation precisely because it is the action of God in reality – God reveals himself to us in reality.

Consistent with the thinking of Torrance (1999) and Hiebert (1994) it can be said that God is the existential reality 'behind' reality and through whom reality exists. He is the eternally existent indicative, who provides reality with its imperative and eschatological intent. Thus all reality is 'moving' in a direction toward God's intent. Yet within this God gives freedom to his creation to move in accordance with his intent or against his intent, albeit with their commensurate consequences. In this sense the reality which is the background to all theologizing and praxis is not neutral. Reality either corresponds and coheres with the character and purposes of God or it does not. The character and purposes of God is therefore the objectivity by which we measure human actions and intent, including theologizing and praxis. Causation is not deterministic but relationally intentional. God creates and acts to bring about his intention of a people to share his glory. It is a Trinitarian, communal, shared intentionality that God enacts through his people. God as Trinitarian background

allows the praxis development to be an inspirited process. God created a real world

and a people to steward that world (and even construct and deconstruct it in their

naming) in ways that correspond and cohere with his intent. Thus even the created

order is in 'movement' conforming to the purposes of God or not conforming. This is

not because the objective world has any innate moral intent, force or code. Though

subject to the Fall, creation is part of the redemptive intent of God with creation's

redemption effected, at least in part, by how it is stewarded by humanity.

God, his created order and humanity is the background reality to the practical

theological process. Theological rationality does not make God but attempts to

describe God, his purposes and actions, and attempts this process in accord with the

character and purposes of God. The theological endeavour and praxis is more likely to

go astray if it is not intrinsically bound to God, the reality of his creation and the

context of human community.

As stated previously God's own speech act is the practical theologian's and preacher's

model and content for their own speech act. But part of background reality is also the

human/communal context. Van Huyssteen (1997: 16) highlights this by stating, "I

have argued before that all religious (and certainly all theological) language always

reflects the structure of interpreted experience. …The personal dimension of this

relational knowledge does not at all take away from its validity and objectivity, which

is warranted by a communally shared expertise. Our search for legitimate knowledge

always takes place within the social context of a community, and individuals who

share a certain expertise make up this community and help, challenge, critique, and

confirm one another. If we relate to our world epistemologically through the

mediation of interpreted experience, our attempts to locate theology in the ongoing and evolving interdisciplinary discussion acquire new depth and meaning."

This view is supported by Hiebert (1994) who argues that the hermeneutical process is not primarily the task of individuals or leaders but of the Christian community as a whole. He refers to Kraus (1979) who writes, "Thus the Scripture can find its proper meaning as witness only within a *community of interpretation.* Principles of interpretation are important, but secondary. There needs to be authentic correspondence between gospel announced and a 'new order' embodied in community for Scripture to lay its proper role as a part of the original witness. The authentic community is the hermeneutical community. It determines the actual enculturated meaning of Scripture" (Hiebert 1994: 30). Hiebert (1994: 31) continues by stating that, "The interpretation of Scripture within a hermeneutical community must, therefore, be carried out in a spirit of humility when speaking and with a willingness to learn"(31).

At the same time it must be made clear that the notion of dialogical that is being advocated here, based on the theories of communication discussed in chapter 5, goes beyond naïve understandings of interpretive communities. This can encourage naïve realism and idealism where every person in the community becomes their own subjective judge and authority. And the notion of dialogical goes beyond naive ideas of conversational which can become a mish-mash of shared opinion that lacks a grounding in sound communication theory. Communication theory allows a community to hermeneut the dialogical intent of the text as an ideal speech act with illocutionary and perlocutionary authority. This very process occurs in the context of

a community attempting to communicate in ideal speech acts with illocutionary and perlocutionary effect. Conversational approaches can be too easily based on democratic ideals and an understanding of the principle of contextualization than any particular communication theory.

If God is background reality and God as a being is intentional then it can be argued that God's intent is captured in the concept of Kingdom. God as background reality is postulated by faith, so there is a quality of conjecture about this claim. At the same time it is faith located in history in the acts of God, which make such claims open to a degree of empirical investigation.

God's intentionality is intrinsic to his narrative movement throughout Scripture. For example God's intentionality is implicit in the creation account (Gen.1, 2), his grief over the creation of humanity (Gen.6:1-7), his covenant with Noah (Gen.9), his choosing and blessing of Abraham (Gen.12), his deliverance of Israel from slavery (Exodus). God's intentionality is made explicit in a number of Scriptures, e.g. Gen.12:2, 3; Josh. 1:1-9; Rom.8:28-30; Eph.1:11; Col.1:25-27; Heb.11:40. God's intent is to establish his kingdom in accord with kingdom values, e.g. Matt.6:10, 23. Habermas's (1975) notion of Ideal Speech Acts as being transformational, emancipatory, empowering and non-coercive appears consistent with God's kingdom purposes. However as suggested in Chapter 5, illocution and perlocution carry a type of force that has an effect on the hearer. Habermas (1975) does acknowledge the assertive aspect of communication but this is not to violate free speech and freedom of response. How the idea of non-coercion is understood in light of Kingdom values such as peacemaking, as opposed to peacekeeping, or hatred of evil and injustice, and in terms of the God's actions in the eschatological future, seem difficult to reduce to

simple notions of pacifism and voluntarism (or free choice). Whatever form these actions may take they are to be consistent with the grace, love and justice of God, whose hatred of evil is bound intrinsically to his love. Regardless of these difficulties it seems evident that if praxis is to serve the Kingdom intent of God, then consistent with Habermas's (1975) notion of Ideal Speech Acts, praxis needs to transform the instrumental into the works of God for the purpose of emancipation. Kingdom values though, claim that such emancipation is freedom not to serve self but to serve the purposes of the Kingdom and it is in this we realise out true humanity.

This then is the background context of our model. Though already briefly outlined, more detail will be provided for the actual process of moving from praxis to praxis.

2.2 The situational, indicative and imperative

2.2.1 Situational

Theological understandings and traditions are so inter-related with the situational that it could be argued that theological paradigms are part of the situational. Therefore in this model the theological is seen to be an aspect of the situational. This includes practical theological theory. This is a potential weakness of the model as diagrammed. Zerfass's (1974) model explicitly diagrams the place of practical theological theory in the process whereas this is not the case in the new model.

In this new model the praxis is first analysed in light of the situational. This has in fact been the process in this study so far. Situational analysis in regard to preaching preceded the analysis of theological tradition. In moving from praxis to praxis, the praxis needs to be analysed for what it is before it can be filtered through and shaped

313

by the indicative of the Word.

The praxis is analysed in terms of a variety of situational elements – theology, practical theology, history, current and past practice, anthropology, sociology, communication theory, psychology, demographics, group dynamics, vision, and intent. The picture building process may seem to have endless possibilities and so selectivity and weighting needs to be exercised depending on factors critical to the evaluation being undertaken. Minister 'A' describes something of this evaluative process when he says,

Continually bouncing off the text and bouncing off reality and the real world in which people live needs to be in the forefront, not contemporary events but the real world. So as I'm building my sermon up I am aware that I am talking with people who have suffered heartbreak, are not wanting to say "Hallelujah", are suffering brokenness. Unless I engage with that then I am being false and it becomes emotionalism. So a logical structure that is embedded in the real world and in the text, with emotion, are all components of a sermon.

2.2.2 Indicative

The praxis is then analysed in terms of the indicative of Scripture. Praxis may be analysed using broader indicative themes such as the character and purposes of God, Kingdom values, the character and purposes of Christ, grace, redemption, reconciliation. The praxis may be also be analysed in more specific ways if there is specific Scriptural witness regarding the praxis under consideration. Importantly the situational may also open up more indicative possibilities then have been discovered thus far.

I am not returning to a naïve realism in 'isolating' the indicative from the situational. The movement from the situational to the indicative is a dynamic movement. It is

acknowledged that an understanding of the indicative is a theological process occurring in the situational. Nevertheless, I would argue that the praxis in its situational context needs to operate in submission to the indicative, even in acknowledging its theological context. This is not only because of the presupposition of the authority of Scripture as held in evangelical circles but also because of the issue of distanciation as highlighted by Ricoeur (1981). Submission is needed due to the nature of the hermeneutical process involving texts written in a particular historical context. There is a distance or gap between the present and the past that needs to be acknowledged. The analyst involves themselves in a dialogical process between their current context and understanding and the world and meanings of the text. Zerfass's (1974) model is correct in highlighting that this may be a point of dialectic tension, and I believe this model allows for that. This acknowledgement of distanciation and the indicative nature of the text means that the model's notion of submission to the indicative could be acceptable to theologians who do not hold evangelical presuppositions.

Evangelicals can tend to argue that praxis needs to submit to the indicative as though all that the indicative reveals has been revealed and is now fixed and clear. But in highlighting the notion of dynamic and dialogical continuity the situational analysis allows us to bring new questions to the text that may have not been previously considered. This can lead to a further revelation of the intent and action of God with its consequent implications for praxis. This is also consistent with Ricoeur's (1976) notion of dialogical engagement with a text because of its connection to human reality and its narrative movement in an existential context. Likewise this is consistent with Gadamer's (1975) notion that interpretation of what is (the indicative) cannot be

divorced from the experiential. Once more the analyser of the current praxis is in a dialogical process between their current context and understanding, and the world and meanings of the textual indicative. Again this may be a point of dialectic tension or a place of dynamic, dialogical continuity. I am not arguing for an either/or position, and I believe this model allows for either possibility. While at times learning happens by a process of association and resonance there are may occasions when learning progresses via means of points of tension, dissonance and not knowing. This model does not wish to deny this but simply to emphasis the possibility of and allow for the dynamic, evolutionary movement of this process over dialectical confrontation and tension.

Strom (2000: 236) illustrates the dialogical movement of praxis between the situational and the indicative in describing the praxis of storytelling in Christian community. "Whatever the focusing question, storytelling pervades grace-full conversation. We tell and retell the story of Jesus… From Genesis to revelation we string the story together around the grand themes like creation, wisdom and redemption. Time and again we yell what we know of the stories of Jesus and Paul and their friends. We raid the primary sources of everyday life in their times. We ask about what the early believers faced, how they conversed and what they chose."

Strom (2000: 182) argues that this movement (which he calls improvising) between the situational and the indicative is central to Paul's praxis. "There were two aspects to his improvising. First, Paul creatively adapted his message and methods to match new challenges raised by new circumstances. His thinking and practice was *conceptual* – shaped by and for each new context. Second his improvisations were

coherent – strong patterns and defining experiences linked all that he said and did. This coherence lay in his personal admiration and allegiance to Jesus Christ and his preoccupation with Christ's dying and rising……Every contingency offered him new opportunity to articulate the coherence he saw in the dying and rising of Christ."

Paul's message was fluid but centered	Each circumstance brought opportunity	He improvised to match the message to the context	His understanding grew with each experience

Paul's dynamic knowledge of Christ	An event, issue or context	Point of new learning	New understanding emerged
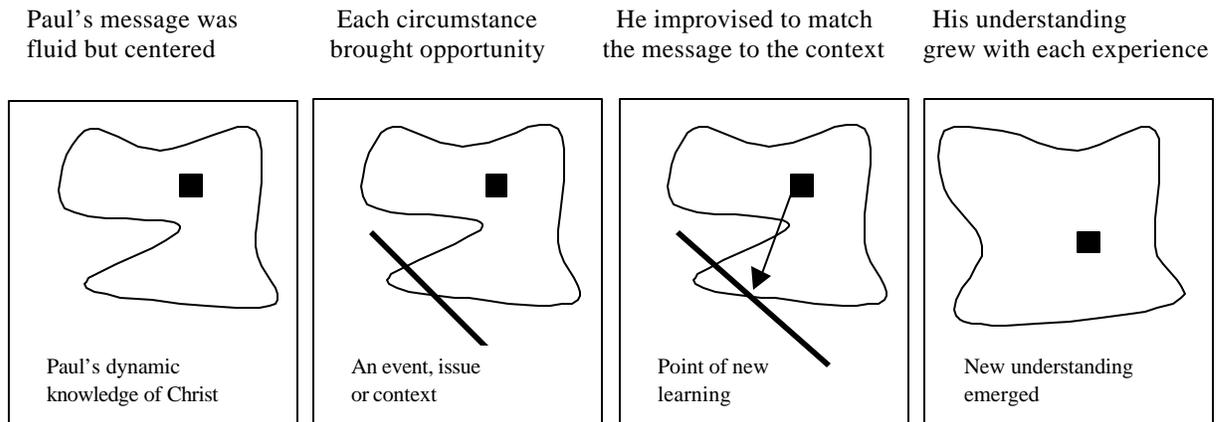
Figure 7.8 Paul recreated the coherence of the message for himself and his *ekklesiai* in each new contingency (Strom 2000: 183)

Implicit in the above diagram is that the event, issue or context creates a new point of opportunity out of which new understanding evolves. This may be a point of tension or dynamic continuity. Again it is the aspect of continuity and evolution that I hope the new model highlights.

2.2.3 Imperative

The praxis is then analysed in terms of the imperative. The dynamic process may already be forming possibilities in regard to new, renewed or re-shaped praxis but there is still a need for analysis in terms of indicatively shaped and revealed imperatives. In this regard the imperative can be analysed in two ways. The praxis being studied may have a specific imperative call in Scripture that is to shape its action. For example Scripture (Prov.10:11, 19-21, 31, 32; James 3:1-12) calls us to watch and be careful with the words we use in communicating with others. This

imperative call, resting in the gracious speech of God (the indicative) has direct bearing on how Christian's might engage with their neighbours.

On the other hand the imperative may need to be shaped in accord with more implied aspects of broader indicative themes. For example questions may be asked as to how the indicative act of God in redemption with its imperative call for humanity to act redemptively, shapes the style, tone and content of Christian involvement in communities of disadvantage.

The indicative and imperative analysis is then brought back to the situational as it is in the situational that the praxis is enacted. This bringing back to the situational once more allows further exploration of how the praxis needs to be reshaped, reformed or even discarded in light of the situational, indicative and imperative analysis that has been undertaken. In ongoing dialogical movement new praxis is then enacted which in time is analysed and reshaped through the same evaluative process in light of the given background.

Within this movement there may be an awareness in some instances of dialectic tension, in other instances more of a sense of dynamic continuity but the model allows for both in an ongoing dialogical movement.

2.3 Support for the new model

In the use of Zerfass's (1974) practical theology model for this research there has been the development of a new model that highlights continuity and evolutionary processes over dialectic tension in moving from praxis to praxis.

Further research or theoretical support for this model enhances its chances of being accepted by the academic and practice community. Support for this model can be found in the work of Poulter (2003). Writing in an Australian context, Poulter (2003) has developed a model for understanding the practice of social work and counselling as a research process. He argues that the elements that constitute a research process are present in the process of case practice. Poulter (2003) argues that these research elements may be assumed and unarticulated but nevertheless are present. He presents a meta-model for this communicative act in a way similar to the process and aim of practical theology. Interestingly his model also allows for both continuity and dissonance as the basis of praxis development. His model allows for both the dialectic tension approach of Zerfass (1974) and the continuity approach of the new model. Poulter's (2003) model is diagrammed below.

Figure 7.9 Poulter's model (2003)

REFLECTIVE CYCLE

Contextualizing

Ordering   Modelling

Categorizing   Accommodating

REFLEXIVE CYCLE

Assimilating

Generalizing   Acting

Abstracting   Observing

                              Describing
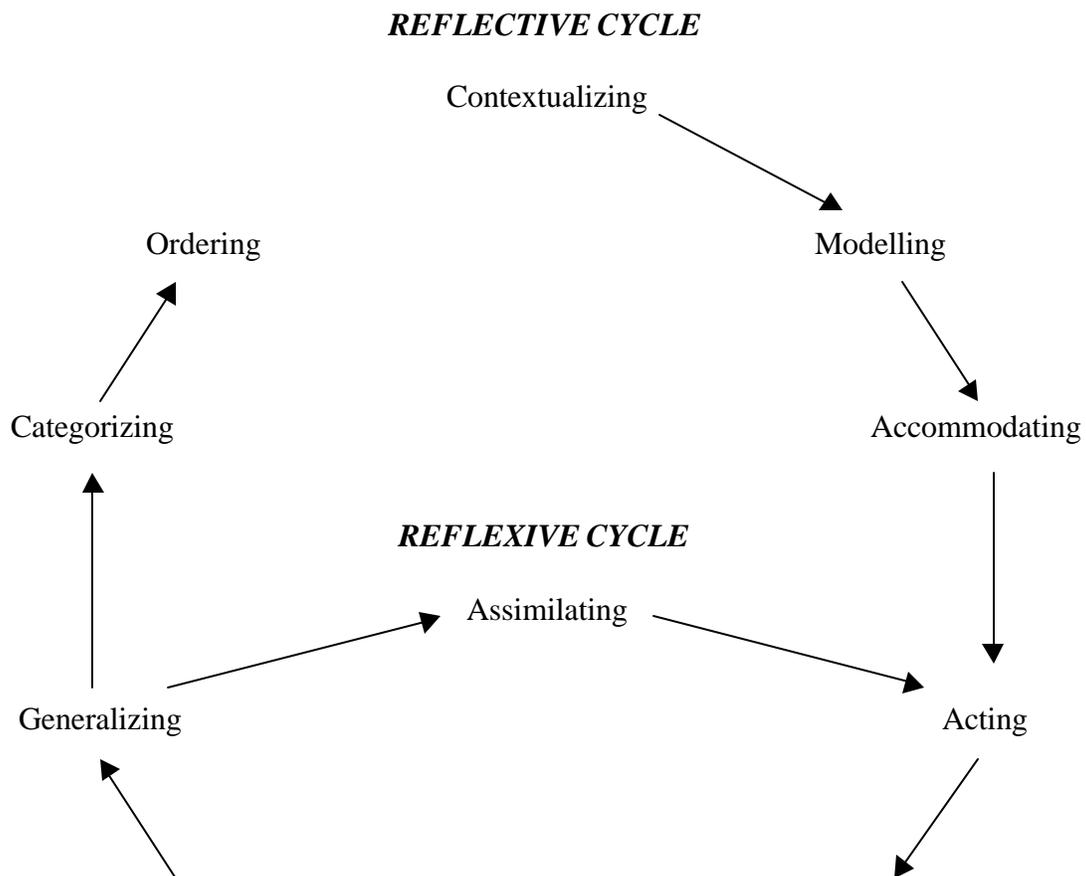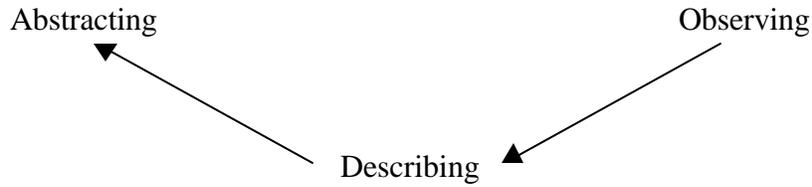
The reflective cycle models those occasions where a more focused knowledge

development occurs or is required because there are practice anomalies that do not

allow easy assimilation of existing data into existing practice. In the continuous cycle

of reflective analysis (similar to the new practical theology model) there are points of

dialectic tension (anomalies), as per Zerfass's (1974) model, that allow further praxis

development. In Poulter's (2003) model, reflective movement occurs at the point

when attempts to generalise the observed data requires new categories as the action

that has been observed does not fit existing generalizations.

In Poulter's (2003) model the reflexive cycle reflects the action imperative of

everyday practice which, "demands that the practitioner immediately match the data

of existing theory and generate an immediate interventive response from the

practitioner's skill repertoire"(322).

The practical theologian would practice the elements of the reflective cycle more

intentionally than the practising minister. While it could be argues that a minister may

more often operate out of the reflexive cycle, the minister who in their preaching and

pastoral work seeks to practice and be informed by a practical theology approach

would need to use both cycles of Poulter's (2003) model.

Poulter's (2003) model consists of the following elements.

Observing – the data gathering process

Describing – describing the data in a manner that allows the "data the best chance of speaking for itself" (Poulter 2003: 322).

Abstracting – "Reduces and transforms the data gathered, in ways that makes conceptualization possible"(Poulter 2003: 322). Poulter (2003) argues that abstraction allows the data to be freed from the concrete details of time and place. The argument of this research suggests that it is not possible to free data to this degree and so I would prefer to use the word 'conceptualization' to describe this phase of the model. This also avoids the semantic minefield attached to the word "abstraction". The use of the word conceptualization rather than abstracting reinforces that what is being dealt with is real. The researcher or practitioner is making conceptual generalizations based on reality.

Generalizing – In generalizing, "both the researcher and the practitioner alike, further condense the concepts abstracted. Again, the heuristic approach is important for seeing what clusters of abstractions or innate patterns present themselves as vehicles for new insight" (Poulter 2003: 322). In the reflexive cycle this generalization may be sufficient as a basis for understanding what is needed for new action.

Critical to a dialogical approach is that the researcher or the practitioner is not the only player making conceptualizations or generalizations. The client, counsellee or congregation are part of the conceptualizing and generalizing. This is the basis of narrative forms of therapy (White 2000) and as the church is a story formed and forming community, the participation of all for the creation of meanings is vital. In

this the meaning and story of the individual is not lost in the voice of the powerful or the academic or the minister. In the new model that I have presented it is of utmost importance in a dialogical approach that the analysis of the situational, indicative and imperative is not only based on academic perspectives and research. The voice of the people is critical and there are important places for the idiosyncratic voice. If the majority of people in a Christian community love the preaching as it is being currently practised but there are those who have a different experience, those voices need to be engaged with and brought to the analysis.

Abstraction and praxis removed from the real life of people is the consequent risk if the voice and meanings of the people or the individual are ignored. Such voices may be one of the places where it is heard that current conceptualizations and generalizations are inadequate for new action or praxis. It can become clearer that new categories are needed for new action or praxis.

Assimilation – in the reflexive cycle the generalised conceptualization of the data can be readily assimilated into an immediate action response.

At this point Poulter (2003: 323) recognises that a practitioner may intuitively generate a response, based on the data, that is different from previous practice. But for this response to be properly considered and its potential for further practice considered, "it needs to be channelled through the full reflective loop."

Categorising – When it is recognised that existing generalizations do not provide a sufficient basis for new action there is a need for the process of categorization. Poulter

(2003: 323) advocates that the researcher deliberately avoids the influence of existing theories so as to generate new theory from the data so that the new categories, "derive from the properties of the data itself." This also allows a dialogical approach if the data includes and honours the voices and meanings of the people who are part of the study.

Ordering – These categories are then ordered in a manner that both allows the data to speak for itself but also brings what was disparate data back into a whole based on relationship/s between the data. Initially this ordering may be "exploratory or provisional" while new concepts and categories develop "and the best ordering evolves" (Poulter 2003: 324).

Contextualizing – In Poulter's (2003) view contextualization is in terms of pre-existing theory. Where possible the data is considered, conceptualised and ordered in its own terms. It is then compared to existing theory (contextualised) to see points of difference and similarity. This process may not always be possible as the ordering being considered is so problematic that existing insight may need to be sought to aid the process.

Modelling – New knowledge is generated or synthesised. For the practical theologian and practitioner these would be praxis models, new working models for both the theological process and communicative action process.

Accommodating – the alteration of existing cognitive structures at either the personal conceptual level of the theologian/practitioner or the shared conceptual level of the community/institution to accommodate the new knowledge.

Acting - the operationalising of knowledge, either existing (the reflexive cycle) or new (the reflective cycle) which Poulter (2003: 325) sees as more the imperative of the practitioner. The daily imperative of effective practice means that there is a need for ongoing consideration of current praxis which then sets up the research cycles. Consistent with both the rationale behind and process suggested for the new practical theological model, Poulter (2003: 327) concludes that, "Each of these steps in the reflexive and reflective practice has been shown in practice to occur in a fluid matrix relationship, rather than a rigid sequential process, with much practice knowledge being generated by a continuous process of critical incident and critical mass learning experiences."

Poulter's (2003) model appears to support the new practical theological model developed in this research. Poulter's (2003) model supports the new model in that his model, based on continuity, allows for both continuity and dichotomy to inform praxis development. It would seem though that Poulter's (2003) model would be worthy of further consideration in itself as a model for practical theology. There are a number of others possibilities for further study that comes out of this research.

3. NEW PRACTICAL THEOLOGY MODEL AS PREACHING PRAXIS

The new model can be utilised for the construction and delivery of a sermon (I am not assuming a 25 minute lecture format is the only way to sermonise). It may be easier to

see how a situational entry point, which is then subject to an indicative analysis with an imperative call, is suited to a topical sermon. The preacher analyses a current existential issue or context, explores richly (and I would argue Christologically) what Scripture speaks in light of this matter, drawing out imperative implications that are lived in the situational. This can be done poorly where texts are forced to speak directly to situations that they simply do not address. Or the indicative is simply used to issue behavioural principles for life in the existential. Rather than offering a fresh revelation of the living Word with implications for living the living Word, Scripture is simply used to uphold behavioural or ideological idealism.

While perhaps not as easy to see, but perhaps truer to the dialogical, dynamic process being advocated, exegetical sermons can also follow this model, even if derived from a format as traditional as a preaching lectionary where the text to be preached is known in advance. Minister 'C' spoke of her churches use of a lectionary.

Is there any particular reason why your church uses a lectionary?

Church of Christ, and this church would be on the left wing of the Church of Christ, have been very strong and committed from the beginning to doing things in unity with other churches and in particular the theory was if we all went back to the New Testament way of doing things we would all be one and the divisions between the churches would break down. So they call their history Restoration history. And so there is quite a strong emphasis on doing it in common with other churches. People here take pride in the fact that we celebrate the seasons of the church year. It is also important that you are not just riding your hobby horses because you are actually looking at all of Scripture.

This is the first church I have been in where we use the lectionary because I haven't been in the Churches of Christ before but because of my background in Scripture Union I am very concerned that people read the whole of Scripture and they read it systematically... And so to me it gives a framework but I have in mind that that in February, March every year we do things about the church, we have a commitment Sunday that's about the New Year starting, that's about church life. In the middle of winter when everybody is getting down you want something that is about encouragement. We celebrate Advent so we are doing the four Sundays of Advent now. In January we usually do a series attractive for people who are coming around

looking at churches and we don't want to be just marking time. So one year we did a series on spirituality in January. This January we are having a series called "Summer in Australia," so we are using summer themes that are around but it is kind of a counteraction to the Rick Warren material "Forty Days of Purpose" that we are doing at the moment. The lectionary provides a base rock and we can always go back to that. I feel free not to use a lectionary. I think I was the first minister here to feel quite that free not to use the lectionary. You use tools; you are not mastered by them.

It could be argued, particularly if the preacher intentionally attempts to approach the

text in a fresh manner, that the exegetical sermon has an indicative rather than

situational starting point. But the analysis to date has shown that we cannot approach

the text divorced from our own contextuality, there is never a 'pure' reading of the

text. At another level the very nature of the model is not to force delineation between

the indicative, imperative and situational where these are not sustainable, nor to

demand a fixed order of analysis that cannot be deviated from. Dynamic continuity

and a dialogical approach are stressed over mechanistic, instrumental preciseness.

So the preacher studies the text in its own right, acknowledging distanciation, but also

does a reckoning of the situational context. The recognition of both distanciation and

current situation is highlighted in the response of Minister 'A'.

I want to use the text to limit my own ability to have my own hobby horses foisted on the congregation, to have the text make me preach about what I would not of necessity have wanted to preach about. That means finding out what the text says, what it wants to say and how it says it, so I don't end up with one standard form of sermon. So the sermon changes in light of what text I am dealing with.

I think the sermon has to have some relevance, have meaning within the lives of people so they can say it somehow fits into where my life is today. I can't just take them back to the time of writing, it must be brought to here and now, there is a process where it must be God's living word to them now.

This hermeneutical process includes existing theological interpretations of the text,

the content and manner in which the text has been previously preached and current

situational factors affecting the dialogical participants who hear and engage with the

sermon. The indicative and situational are analysed to discover what the text has to speak in the present situational context, or whether the situational context brings new questions to the text that open up new revelational possibilities. As well the current situational context can provide guidance as to how the text is to be 'preached', what structure, what tone, what dialogical aids and processes are appropriate. How the text engages with the situational is not to be seen primarily in simple behavioural applicational terms but first and foremost in terms of the character of God and his intent, most 'clearly' revealed in Christ. The imperatives that arise out of this approach may often be more implicational than directly applicational. If there is direct textual imperative they are usually of such imperative weight (even in their simplicity, e.g. Philippians 4:5) that they will not yield to simple, manageable obedience. Nor is the imperative call preached in a manner that violates human freedom. The movement to the imperative is given room to be dialogically explored in light of the situational, keeping the heart of the indicative in mind so that the living God and his Kingdom call is not at the last moment turned into a set of manageable principles for living.

3.1 Ideal praxis

How might preaching praxis reflect the process outlined in the model developed? Based on the practical theology model developed, an ideal praxis would mean that

1. Preaching is intentionally dialogical as God and humanity is background. This relational context implies dialogue.

2. Preaching is indicatively Trinitarian as God is background. The sermon is grounded in the Trinitarian character and activity of God.

3. Preaching is contextualised as humanity and the created order is background. The givenness of humanity and background reality means that you cannot

have a decontextualised sermon. Intentional contextualization is therefore held
as part of an ideal praxis.

3.1.1 Ideal Praxis for Topical Preaching

1. The preparation

a. Broad analysis of topic

Situational analysis

- situational factors

- theological interpretations

- church practice

Indicative analysis

Analyses Scriptural witness in light of background
presuppositions - humanity, God and reality, and situational
analysis

Imperative analysis

Analyses imperative implications in light of background
presuppositions, indicative and situational analysis

b. More specific analysis of topic in light of congregation/ community

Analyses congregational/ community context

Analyses Scripture in light of congregational/ community context

Analyses imperative implications in light of congregational/
community context

2. Delivery

Plans delivery in dialogical manner consistent with

  Background presuppositions

  Community & congregational context

  Scriptural witness

  Imperative implications

  Learning theory

Delivers in dialogical manner consistent with

  Background presuppositions

  Community & congregational context

  Scriptural witness

  Imperative implications

  Learning theory

3. Evaluation

  Situationally – in light of community and church response

  Indicatively - in light of background presuppositions and Scriptural witness

  Imperatively – in light of attitudinal, behavioural and situational changes

3.1.2 Ideal Praxis for Exegetical Preaching

1. The preparation

  a. Analyse text – Analyses Scriptural witness in light of community,

  Trinitarian God & reality

b. Broad analysis of text

<u>Situational analysis</u>

- situational factors

- theological interpretations

- church practice

<u>Indicative analysis</u>

Analyses Scriptural witness in light of background

presuppositions – humanity, God & reality and situational

analysis

<u>Imperative analysis</u>

Analyses imperative implications in light of background

presuppositions, Indicative and Situational analysis

c. More specific analysis of text in light of congregation/ community

Analyses congregational/ community context

Analyses scripture in light of congregational/ community context

Analyses imperative implications in light of congregational/

community context

2. Delivery

Plans delivery in dialogical manner consistent with

Background presuppositions

Community & congregational context

Scriptural witness

Imperative implications

Learning Theory

Delivers in dialogical manner consistent with

Background presuppositions

Community & congregational context

Scriptural witness

Imperative implications

Learning Theory

4. **Evaluation**

Situationally – in light of community and congregation response

Indicatively - in light of Background presuppositions and Scriptural witness

Imperatively – in light of attitudinal, behavioural and situational changes

Below is an example of sermonizing that approximates elements of this ideal praxis in terms of the indicative and situational analysis.

Minister 'A'

So the text ultimately is your criteria of judgement?

Yes I think so. The text stands as "the other". I think the sermon is the voice from the outside. If I just read the text I can warp it to fit in with my world. Preaching gives me a different slant on it. Preaching should be based on the text so that the text actually comes to the people.

And you would say the same when it comes to topical sermons?

I hope so but I think that topical sermons are much more difficult, for in topical sermons I think the preacher should be informed by the big structures of the Bible.

More of a Biblical Theology?

Yes. I think sermons and biblical theology go hand in hand. If I was to preach just from Jonah without a bigger meta-narrative in mind the sermon falls apart. So yes I

think it is important that it is not so much individual, little texts but it is in the context of big themes of the Bible such as covenant, kingdom.

In talking of Biblical Theology, do you also think that a sermon should speak to the situation in which people live?

Yes it needs to impact their world. But I wouldn't want to limit myself to something just because it is in the news. The sermon is to engage with their circumstances but not to be swamped by their circumstances.

Do you incorporate contemporary events into your sermons?

Sometimes. So something like September 11. I had to answer to that. Sometimes circumstances impinge. But at other times the sermon should create reality, so we are not just reacting to reality, we are also getting a framework by which we can handle different things in reality.

Below are some examples of sermonizing that is experimenting with elements of this

ideal praxis in terms of dialogical approaches.

Minister 'A'

Do you intentionally include in your sermon elements that allow people to interact with it during the sermon?

Yes I am doing that a little bit more nowadays. I actually do stop and ask questions so that people can respond during the course of the sermon. "What do you think about this….What do you think about that?" And at the moment I have expanded that. As I have given my series I have encouraged people to keep a sort of spiritual diary, with thoughts and questions during the week, reflections on the sermon and the passage they can look back on. That's a new thing I am moving into.

I have seen at the end of sermon notes, points of application people are encouraged to make and follow. A spiritual diary sounds a little different from that.
Yes the way I see it is that a sermon opens a door to get people to think for themselves. So a lot of the applications are things that they need to work out for themselves rather than be just spelt out from the pulpit. There are times the pulpit should just leave them dangling. The actual work of the sermon continues after the sermon.

And at the particular time of hearing a sermon how would you want the listeners to be interacting?

I would love them to actually talk about it and generate discussions and I am really disappointed when people come from the church and start talking about the rugby and whatever and nothing significant has effected them. Then I have failed.

Do you provide any leads for those discussions?

Not enough. I do think that the sermon should always end up on a high point. It should end up before it's finished. It shouldn't have a nice come down. There's also an emotional upbuilding so I don't want to just add a little "think about this" at the end as that can be a little clue for people to begin to switch off. You want to take them somewhere, lead them somewhere and so there may need to be other ways to facilitate their thinking.

You believe in connecting with the life situation of people, is that the same thing for you as relevance or is relevance something else?

Relevance is something else. Relevance means something on top, so to have relevant sermons is to speak about contemporary events, what the newspapers are saying. You must do this from time to time. Connecting with reality is about the undertones of the real world where people live, that's something deeper.

Minister 'B'

The old style has a connection but it really needs a reshaping. It needs to change over the next 5 to 10 years. I think the structure and the way that we gather together in the churches adds to the preaching and the connection with the message. So I'm saying to a few of our guys, "Lets change the way we sit on a Sunday night. Let's get the people in a circle get 'em away from the stage up top get 'em down the bottom and just have some time together." We enjoy the sharing and that but lets get something more conducive to sharing and a little bit more interaction.

We have some interaction going on a Sunday morning and even on a Sunday night we have a little more interaction during the preaching. For me personally I use a lot of interaction in the morning and get a lot of people to not so much just respond to me because if you just leave it open you never say much and all kinds of things can come up that you may not want, like gripes and things like that. But one of the things that I have been mulling over and looking at is how to include people more rather than just one man delivering information. Even if its getting people involved in a verse, "Okay could someone finish this verse for us" or there were a couple of times when we were speaking about an issue and I said to someone in the congregation, "I'm talking about this on Sunday, could you say something about this right in the middle of the sermon". So I ask them to say something. They are reluctant a lot of the time but there were a couple of times where people said yes. So I use that person to enlarge on what I am saying in a personal testimony. I could say the same thing about that person but I think that person says it better and it is better received by the people and it adds to the preaching. That is what we have started to do and I think it could be used a lot more, including people in the message through lived experiences. We do a lot at night time where people get up and share and they are free to do that but that is a sharing time. But I think that sharing can also take place in the preaching.

Minister 'C'

Do you use intentional elements in the preaching itself to have interaction or draw responses?

I am trying to vary a lot more, sometimes using someone to come up and tell their own story. This last Sunday I read a paraphrased of a story of John the Baptist which I put into West Australian terminology, "It was the ninth year of John Howard as Prime Minister, the week after Latham had been elected leader." This is the sort of thing the congregation laughs at; they saw the joke in that. Occasionally we have used drama in the message. So I am actually varying it a lot more than I used to. That's partly wanting to help younger generations to respond. We have a couple of people in this church who are very good at drama but I need to get it organised well ahead of time and sometimes I am doing my sermon preparation on the whole the week before and sometimes I have not left enough lead time for that and you can also lose control. I had someone share in the message recently and they went on for twenty minutes. You can lose control of the process as well. Yes, so for me it would be primarily I start out with how I would normally do it, as you do get into patterns and find things that work and I'm just trying to vary that from time to time.

Interviewee 'D'

Do you have ways of being intentionally dialogical in what you do, and how do you go about being dialogical in content?

In Second Sunday Session we'd get our heads around the topic and come up with what are the thorniest issues in this topic. Then pose questions around those, have a few ideas and answers up our sleeve, but really make them struggle and sweat on the idea, and that was the input. Then of course there were the "Godspace" times, in which people reflected on the topic more deeply, through different types of intelligences (art, contemplative, words/reading, nature, body) etc.

Whereas if its more of a typical church context or a lecture type context I'll say up front "I want you to stop me and ask as I go along", or I'll stop during the talk if I know that here's a point that I have just made that really needs some processing now rather than later because they would've forgotten by then. I'll stop and say, "Alright in little groups of 3 come up with" – and I'll ask them a direct question. Sometimes I will have done a presentation and say, "Right now before I ask you some questions, are there points for clarification?" If there aren't then I ask open questions. I have 6 up my sleeve that I can always ask, you know, "What did you like best about what you heard today? What did you like least about it?, What did you not understand", and already those 2nd & 3rd questions make people have to apply it. "I didn't like this because …I don't find it works, or …" They're already into that nitty gritty of learning. "What did you learn about God", "What do you have to do about it?" "What's the main thing you take home today?" So those 6 questions are always in the back of my brain in case the group isn't very responsive.

Is there any particular way that you frame the content or speak the content that's dialogical? I could imagine that you could speak information and then ask those questions. Is there a way to present the actual content of it that has a dialogical nature to it?

Yeh, there's a few. One as I say is the Second Sunday Session approach where we begin by floating the questions and just to-ing and fro-ing around the group constantly redirecting rather than us answering it, banging it around, giving them a few hints as the conversation goes on. But that's mainly word based. Mind you the topic was also floated with pictures and music on 'PowerPoint'. Or a labyrinth was also a well-received method of a more contemplative nature.

There are some other presentations that I'll do where I get them engaged in an activity and then debrief the activity, then another part of the activity, debrief that and just do that to-ing and fro-ing. A church asked me to speak on servanthood so got the group and brought about 10 buckets and things and we looked at Jesus washing feet. So there was a group that were the washees, and a group that were the washers, and a third group that were the creative servants, and so then we were processing how the washees felt without being served, how the servants felt, the topsy turvy values of Jesus started coming out. It actually felt good because various learnings like that were coming up from the activity and experience itself.

That's one way in the more typical preaching context, but there's other ways of learning outside of that which are more to do with coaching, like our peer group stuff where there's not any preaching at all. It's more about trying to find, in theological terms, trying to find Jesus' next step for you. Because when Jesus said "go" in the New Testament, he put a rider on it and it was different for every person - go home, leave home, give all you have, half is fine. Different for each person, so trying to find out what Jesus' "go" means for each different person is coaching, helping them to find that.

Minister 'E'

Do you think there are any ways that you think that congregations can actually respond to a sermon in the sermon?

I think we can be more creative in this. I think that question and answer can be helpful. I think that there are a few ways of doing this. I think in our university congregation we feel less locked in than our other congregations.

What kind of things do you use there?

Question and answer, breaking up into small groups. Small groups can go a number of ways, "What do you find stimulating, what do you want to pray for, what questions does that raise for you?"

Does that allow something different in terms of the effect on a congregation if you have that interactive process compared to if you speak for 25, 30 minutes and then sit down?

It adds life to your sermon at the level of giving to people rather than telling people. The monologue is a clever as you are as a communicator. It is that interactive process that allows people to apply the message. Sometimes we have linked up small groups to what is being preached. Churches find that hard to do because of the nature of small groups but at times it has been helpful in extending the life of a sermon. In a church meeting you are constrained, at least in our situation, by time and so there needs to be encouragement to keep talking about the material. I think people are helped if they are given the opportunity to do that. You've got to be deliberate about being interactional and it can be easy to slip back into a more passive mode. I think to be interactional you have to plan to be like that.

4. CONCLUSION

In concluding this chapter I wish to return to an earlier concern regarding the

relationship between the form of the church and the nature of the message. While they

are intertwined and the form certainly communicates a message and reflects a

message, I believe that the message is primary and central. While it is true that form

can communicate what is really believed in spite of the what the content of the

message may suggest, in ideal praxis the message would be grounded in the living,

incarnate Word of God as revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Christ and the

form would also reflect and communicate this message. Otherwise the Gospel is lost.

Minister 'C' communicates the importance of the relationship between the two but

grounds the relationship in the centrality of the message.

Finally, if you were to express a hope for the Australian church, any sense of what you'd hope it would be?

Its about being relevant to Australian society. When I go to national conferences and things, I end up having arguments with people like Michael Frost and others who want to abandon the established churches because nothing creative is happening there. And I keep saying it's true that exciting things happen at the margins and the creative people are at the margins. But you don't want to lose all the loyalty, the hard work of the traditional church. So my passion at the moment is, how to bring

together the innovation, the passion of the people at the margins into established churches. People like Geoff Westlake and myself often argue about this. Geoff does some very innovative stuff, but he said to me one day, "I can't even disciple all the people I've brought to Christ". And I said, "No you need a church to do all that." But they have to get off their butts and see that they have to give their lives to looking after hurting people. The people who are going to come in from the Australian society on the whole are going to be hurting. They'll be from dysfunctional families, they may have grown up not knowing what a father or stable steady family is about. They're going to come with a whole lot more baggage than they may have in the past, so the churches that receive them have to be a lot more flexible and patient. As I mentioned, I've got a son who has moved to a country town and is church planting with another couple. I'm on the executive of Churches of Christ, and we are trying to work out some relationship with Forge, a number of whom, like Andrew Hamilton are doing some innovative church planting. But at the moment they're seeing that it will all happen by being involved in the community and sharing their faith one to one and I think that's just still only part of the community. They may think we are too far towards one end of the communication spectrum, but they're at the other end and only one part of it. We all need to be doing it. My hope is that the innovative people on the margins; the article I wrote on this after an Evangelical Alliance consultation was called Postcards from the Edge.(I thought I made up that title, but I've seen it elsewhere since so I may not have made it up. Well, it's now used for a conference that Forge runs as well.) But we need to become much more innovative and what I am excited about here is that this was a traditional inner suburban church that's turned around(some of the turning around happened before I came here) because it's found its particular niche ministry. But on the whole it is still a fairly traditional congregation, so the challenge is how do we own this peculiar spirituality ministry and are ourselves changed by it and also learn how to talk to our neighbours and to reach out in ways we haven't before and not just settle in and find it's a nice comfortable church, we all like it here, we're friendly etc.

So for the Australian churches I want see people find innovative ways to do things. That's not going to be me, my skills are in making things work in a structure, but I want to be part of those things coming in to other churches and turning other churches upside down.

Are you saying then that you have some concerns about the idea of relevancy or contextualisation?

Yes, about relevancy.

Do you see any dangers in those ideas?

Relevancy is a much bigger question than methodology and some of the critique of traditional churches is simply about methodology. Relevance is a much bigger issue than that. The relevance of your faith is about how ordinary people live their lives on their street, it's about how much they're affected by kingdom values as against society values. And you can keep working away at those in your church. But what I see in some of the people working at the fringes is adopting a different methodology but that they haven't got any more answers about relevance than we have. So my passion is that wherever people are experimenting about relating the gospel to Australian

society, that it will effect all of us and we need it as much. But I see the ones out at the margins needing it just as much.

In the long run the Good News still has to be communicated and in the long run you've still got to create community, in the long run you've still got to show people that following Jesus is discipleship to the end of their life and those things apply whether you're at the margins or at the centre, and in the long run to be relevant to the Australian society people have to be called to commitment to Jesus and that's not an easy ask. I think there is probably less difference between what's being done at the margins and at the centre than people see because it's about methodology and style, but the core issues are still there.

The core issue is still the message?

Yes and it's going to be a smell of death to some and fragrance of Christ to others. And the issue of that is how does that impact Australian society. Before I became a minister I was very involved in that and I'm still very concerned about how we are involved in the political process and all of that, but that's taken a back seat in my thinking now I'm in a church setting. My brother is an evangelist and so we used to have long arguments and because he liked an argument he could provoke me. He'd say the church is for the purpose of evangelism and I'd say the church is for the purpose of nurturing the people of God to go out and be God's people in the world. We both knew it was both of those things, but within Churches of Christ circles now there is a lot of discussion about being missional church, and it is about looking at everything we do in terms of mission. We need that corrective but you could be just as unbalanced in that direction and forget the nurturing, the caring, the supporting of people. I see those things from here now, the implications of that is more about the other things we do in the church rather than about preaching because I've always been missional in my preaching without being an evangelist and always wanting to provoke people to do more. But this coming year what we're going to do is look at all the activities of the church and say how are you structuring it, is it open to outsiders, do people feel confident to bring their friends. And in terms of worship services, are people comfortable bringing their workmates to them or are people feeling the gap between what they do in church and what the people they work with is so big, they feel like they can't bring them in.

1. SUMMARY OF RESEARCH

The research undertaken has been based on concerns about the practice of a narrow applicational hermeneutic in preaching in the Australian context. The research has been based on the thesis that,

> Evangelical churches in Perth, Western Australia, operate predominantly with an applicational hermeneutical model in regard to preaching and hence communicate the gospel ineffectually to ordinary Australians.

The concern is that this approaches misses the richness of the gospel based in the incarnation of God in Christ, reduces the imperative aspect of the Gospel to manageable, usually personal pietistic categories and misses the existential complexity in which people understand and live the Gospel.

This concern was studied using Zerfass's (1974) model as a methodological process. Zerfass's (1974) model moves from praxis to praxis on the basis of dialectic tension between the situational and the theological tradition. In the course of this research it has been posited that while at times praxis does develop based on dialectic tension

there are places where praxis has more of a continuous evolutionary development. It has also been posited that at times theological tradition and the situational cannot be so easily separated as the distinct elements of a dialectic tension.

Consequently a new model of practical theology was also developed that allowed the development of praxis that reflected this developmental continuity and the joining of the theological and the situational.

The concerns about a narrow applicational hermeneutic have been explored in the context of research and analysis that have already been forwarded by a number of authors regarding the nature of the church in Australia as well as the nature and preaching. In addition lengthy interviews were conducted with five ministers in the Perth area.

1.1 Preaching

Factors observed through the research that suggest an applicational hermeneutic in current praxis are

1. the prevalence of Word and Spirit focuses (often in tension with each other) over mission

2. a separatist and retreatist mentality in evangelical churches

3. a focus on personal morality and obedience

4. attempts at relevancy based on superficial categories

On the basis of the themes and research findings presented it is suggested that preaching in Australia needs to be

1. rediscovering the God of the Bible and the story of God, in ways that allow the preacher to speak to Australians rather than attempting to baptise God into an Australian identity

2. equipping "listeners" to engage with their culture and community, not expecting better preaching to attract people into the church

3. homily/pastoral in style

4. non-authoritarian and non-coercive

5. reality-based

6. genuine, free of pretence

7. clear, non-jargony language

8. dialogical rather than didactic

9. It would appear that narrative forms of preaching would also be suited to an Australian context. Narrative forms more directly reflect the narrative/story base of Scripture and fits with the place of story in Australian history, culture and relationships.

10. aware of developmental issues regarding faith, encouraging faith beyond synthetic-conventional levels

11. inclusive – sensitive to the non-religious by not creating artificial distinctions between, "us" and "them"

12. speaks to the reality of living the Saturday between Good Friday and Easter Sunday with hope and humour

13. inclusive - particularly of woman, Indigenous Australians and new immigrants

14. addressing insecurity and anxiety regarding identity and the future

15. aware of multicultural context

16. balanced by a missions (inclusive of social justice) focus

17. reframing the message of reconciliation in broader communal, social and national contexts not simply in individual faith terms

18. directed to the unique culture and diversity of their particular community rather than trying to reach the "typical" Australian who may be more mythic stereotype than reality

19. offered in the context of renewing ways of being church and exploring new ways of being church.

There is a need for the church and it message to be an embodied, naturalistic, storied faith, contextualised for the Australian situation. This encourages all sermons to come out of the authentic experience of the preacher and be linked to the story of the congregation. It suggests that in the Australian context, sermons of a homiletic nature that draws out the story element of the text linked to the existential experience of the preacher and the hearer, would be more effective than argumentative rhetorical styles that require either right belief or right action as the outcome.

Even though these recommendations may suggest a "culture friendly only" approach to preaching it is clear that there is also a need and a place for preaching that is more prophetic in terms of what it calls the church to be in the Australian context. There is a need for a challenging applicational approach though I believe that if this is the predominate tone of the Australian church it will be dismissed as a "clanging gong".

As has been stated before preaching needs to promote faith that is dialogical, conversational, reflective, relational, reciprocal, shared, concrete, earthy, non-esoteric, non-abstract, transformational, relaxed, connected to story and to community praxis.

Or it can be stated that preaching needs to be transformational, contextualised, dialogical, in the present tense, having the impact of news and grounded in the story of God in Christ. This story forms the community of faith in their worship and service of God and his kingdom, leading to further transformational action.

There has also been an exploration of possible metaphors that might be helpful in being church in an Australian context. Metaphors such as veranda, pub and club were considered though all have their limitations. Perhaps the biblical metaphor of body is more powerful than current reinventions and is cross-culturally transferable. I would still argue that the authority and power of the church is in its message of the living Christ, incarnate in the world in his body, the church. New metaphors and forms are potentially important but secondary to the message of the church lived in word and deed.

1.2 Practical Theology Model

As well as researching preaching in an Australian context, a new practical theology model has been forwarded. An ideal praxis for preaching based on this model has also been offered. Based on the practical theology model developed it is suggested that an ideal praxis would mean that

1. Preaching is intentionally dialogical.

2. Preaching is indicatively Trinitarian.

3. Preaching is contextualised.

Further to this an ideal praxis for topical preaching and for exegetical preaching were offered.

2. FURTHER RESEARCH POSSIBILITIES

The exploration of preaching in a practical theological framework raises an awareness of further areas for research in regard to both preaching and practical theology.

2.1 Testing of Original Thesis

While the research provides evidence that a narrow applicational hermeneutic is operational, the *extent* of such practice in light of the original thesis of the research is not clearly established. For this to occur a more extensive and thorough survey of preaching is needed to explore –

    a) the relationship between the intent, content and delivery of preaching

    b) the relationship between the preaching and the congregation/Christian community in terms of their participation in and reception of the preaching

    c) the effect of the preaching beyond the preaching event.

The 'ideal' meta-theory developed by this research could be used as a scientific research structure by which to evaluate existing praxis.

The interviews conducted in this research were primarily used for illustrative purposes and were often suggestive of ideas presented in the ideal praxis. The interviewees basically presented their own theoretical understanding of their own preaching and an understanding of their own intent in preaching. This was not critically tested against actual practice or against the ideal praxis. More extensive research would allow a more critical analysis of preaching as it is actually practiced.

2.2 Praxis in terms of hermeneutical approach

The existing research does not clearly indicate, though it may be suggestive of, which hermeneutical approach/es are taken by ministers and preachers and so research is still needed to test which hermeneutical paradigms are operational.

2.3 The communication acts of Jesus

Of particular interest to myself is the different means and content of Jesus' communications in the context of different audiences. Further analysis of the content of these communication actions for preaching generally would be valuable in itself. But apart from the specific content of Jesus' communication, what might be the implications for preaching in Australia be in Jesus' use of different means and content for different audiences Are there aspects of Christ's character, actions and purposes that are appropriate or inappropriate to communicate dependent on a person's, or communities demographic profile and/or stage of faith development?

2.4 Preaching and developmental stages

In light of Fowler's (1981) and Kegan's (1994) models, further research as to the nature and content of communication actions generally, and preaching specifically, in relational to developmental theories and perspective would be of value. If there is a need for different means and content based on developmental stages what does this mean in a Christian community where people are in different phases of the journey of faith as well as having different learning styles and educational experiences. If tests such as the Myers Briggs Personality Test (Briggs-Myers & McCaulley: 1985)

suggest that people have different ways of processing and relating to the world what might the implications of this be for preaching? Mulholland (1993) has explored the relationship between learning styles that are part of a structure of personality and spiritual formation. The exploration of the relationship between learning styles and preaching would be of value?

2.5 Dialogical learning processes and methodology

The research addressed the need for dialogical and contextualised approaches to preaching. The relationship between learning theory and dialogical and contextualised praxis would be valuable to research. Further study regarding the nature of dialogical learning processes and the development of actual dialogical and contextualizing methodology is needed. The use of electronic aids such as *PowerPoint* which allows dialogical aids such as questions to be visually presented could be explored and researched.

2.6 Research on new model

The applicability and usefulness of the new practical theology model in regard to preaching and other communicative actions of the church needs to be further researched and tested.

2.7 The nature of being church in Australia

The research has personally raised further questions about what it mean to be church in Australia. Research regarding the nature of preaching and other communication actions in regard to various demographics in Australia would be of interest. Is there a need for different means and content when preaching to men, women, indigenous

groups, ethnic groups or different age groups? What does new praxis mean in light of the male-dominated myths regarding Australian identity is a critical question for Australian churches.

I have a particular concern for those Christians who for a variety of reasons are disaffected with church. I call the disaffected "church refugees." They may no longer be part of a church community, or they may continue to be a part of a church but are silent in their questions and doubts for fear of being seen or heard as "not one of us", an outsider.

They may be stage 4er's in Fowler's (1981) framework, or have more of a sense of Christianity as pilgrimage than those set on arrival, or they may be burnt-out with life or church, or struggling with life issues they feel they have to keep under wraps. How will the Australian church deal with its refugees?

Within the evangelical church we too often believe that to convince people the gospel is true we have to,
- persuade people of the truths they have to acknowledge and adhere to and/or,
- persuade people that the gospel works better than other religions, philosophies or
        lifestyles in terms of marriage, family, vocation, wealth and/or health,

The "true-ness" of the Gospel is then further confirmed if people,
- live these truths and/or
- have better marriages, family, vocations, health or more wealth and/or
- evangelise, serve or act according to a prescribed set of parameters.

Apart from the tendency of this approach to reduce the living reality of Christ to a propositional or cultural construct, what happens in this approach for those who are not so readily convinced, or all the truths do not fit so easily in their lives or are not readily mastered, or their marriages and families are still difficult or they feel pressured to the point of weariness? How do these people experience church and how does church engage and relate to these people?

I specifically asked those interviewed how they think about and engage with those who might be in this category. Below are some of their responses.

Minister 'A'

You have said that you invite people to be cynical, what if there are people listening who are doubting, questioning or struggling, what if they don't come with you to the emotional highpoint, or come to the call?

You work on the assumption that not everyone will come.

Is there a place for these people in the sermon?

Hopefully in the fact that you are saying new things, not just repeating old stuff, you are stimulating curiosity, you are inviting them to think on their own about what you said, allowing them to be cynical or argue. Even in their cynicism they are interacting with the sermon in a specific way. Just because they are not following you does not mean they are not interacting.

Minister 'E'

At times an applicational approach can leave people with either a yes or a no response. There are people who may be questioning or doubting, or have particular struggles. Do you have any thoughts as to preaching with people who have questions and doubts?

I see the sermon as one part of the process. My ideal is, and I am not sure we are there, is that someone would be comfortable to say, "Hang on a minute what did you say that for?" or "I find that hard." In our evangelistic service we give people a card

which is their opportunity to say, "I would like to know a little bit more," but I don't think we give opportunity for or are not deliberate in that in other sermons. We need to be deliberate in giving people an open forum to come and speak with the preacher. I am more than happy if someone came up to me and said, "That was a joke, where did you get that from?"

How do you think you can cultivate that openness in a church?

Inviting it. I recognise that it is not an easy thing for someone to express doubt. There might be a real perception, or a wrong perception, that, "I had better not show that I am a dissenter." Or it's difficult to say, "That sermon challenged an inappropriate behaviour in me and I need to talk to someone about it." We can put these hurdles in the way of people and the preacher is not always the first person to approach if you doubt what they are saying or are you are challenged by them. We need to develop cultures of being real in our conversations. To do that over morning tea is not easy in church culture. If I'm grappling with a doubt or an inappropriate behaviour I'm not likely to share that over the noise of morning tea. I want to invite people to talk with me after a sermon. I'm not sure I say that regularly. Or the leader of a service might finish a service by offering that invite. We had a series on relationship at the University congregation and we encouraged that more there. One thing that we did which was really useful was on the second last week of the series we asked people to write down all the questions they had or anything they wanted to talk about. We had a list of about 20 questions that people had which we then distributed. We did not answer everything from the front that night but small groups were given the list and said, "Here are some of the things that people in our congregation are asking, how would you answer them?"

As an indigenous pastor, minister 'B' lived through a period where the real struggles of Indigenous Australians as a dispossessed people were not often recognised and engaged with in churches. These churches often developed out of mission cultures that were at times part of that dispossession. The government report on Indigenous children removed from families, named "Bringing them Home", opened a door for Indigenous people to speak their own story in a more public manner. In my concern for 'church refugees' I asked Minister B if there was a place within his church for speaking of the experience of being refugees in their own country and how this has effected his church. There also appears lessons for the non-Indigenous church to learn in regard to caring for the refugees and dispossessed among us.

Has the 'Bringing them Home' report and awareness of the "Stolen Generation" and experiences of dispossession changed your preaching? An older style of preaching may have emphasised that we leave the past behind and press on to what is ahead. Do speak more in terms of some of these historical experiences and elements that people have been through?

Yes very much so, those elements are always brought in. I am sensitive that a number of our people are a part of that history and we talk about it a lot. That's why we might only do a verse of Scripture. We might start on something but if I feel that I need to pick up on one theme or something else, we will go with that. I don't feel I have to get through my notes and finish this stuff. Preaching from an Aboriginal perspective there is a lot of Spirit led stuff. Myself and other Aboriginal pastors as well are more sensitive in regards to the contemporary issues we face in light of historical events. People are open to us there. Our younger people are open to it.

Does it feel like you can talk about your own history for the first time*?*

Oh yes.

And what's that been like?

It's been invigorating for a lot of people to be able to talk about the past. Much of Paul's writing talks about his past. Before King Agrippa and others they were challenged by the story of his past. He shared his testimony with them. So there is another form of preaching that I have been working out based on the Paul testifying before people. Even as Aboriginal people we are used to giving testimonies but the opportunity to preach in a testimonial way seems a new thing. Most times when I go to preach somewhere else now I tell my story, my testimony with Scripture added in. And I've taken that from Paul's model. He brought up his past to confirm what Jesus had done in his life.

You were saying that 20% of your congregation is now non-Aboriginal. Why do you think those people are coming here?

I think two reasons. One is they feel accepted. More than hearing the message they feel accepted, they feel they are part of a family.

Is that because outside of here they don't feel accepted?

Yes. I think in some places and churches there are people who just don't feel accepted for who they are, with their weaknesses, with the struggles that they've got. Some of them may have family problems that people don't understand and when they come here they find that they are amongst a group of people who have the same problems and struggles and heartaches and live in the real world. And they just feel as they talk to people that they are in the same boat together and they feel a sense of belonging…… they found a sense of belonging and understanding and acceptance.

Interviewee 'D'

What about those people who may be refugees from church, who want to come to a place and just be fed and offered new water?

We haven't offered to carry them, we haven't spoken in a language that's said, "If you keep coming here you will get what you need to survive," we haven't said that. We've said, "that Jesus is the one, that relationship with Jesus is what grows you and develops you, how are you going to foster that? If you get fed at other places as well, whatever, then great. But you need to find those things. We might help you engage holistically, but you have to do it yourself.

People have asked us, coming out here to [suburb], "You're doing great work, but who nurtures you?" For us it's like this [suburb] nurtures us, Jesus is at work in this suburb and when you see Him at work it's a thrill. That's where our nurture comes from, right under our nose; through those so called pagans out there. So it's great! So we try to expand people's way of looking.

When I first came back from the States there were peers, people my own age who had left the church and what I've discovered since is that a lot of older people have as well. They were saying two things I think, one is that somehow the form of church cuts us off from community and requires an enclave and puts pressure on us. But there's something about the message as well, we've either lost it or we're not so convinced about it any more. So I've seen people who are still pretty committed to Christianity but want to be in a different way of being church. But there's a group of people saying, "Look, we actually have doubts about the meta-narrative of the gospel, we haven't walked away from faith but we have doubts at that particular point." That's a group that somewhere doesn't get touched. Now on the one hand it's interesting because they're saying "We don't want to be touched but nobody's touching us. Leave us alone, we're sick of church and we're sick of how we're not convinced about a message but who's telling us another message or what to believe." So there's this kind of leave us alone, rescue us, leave us alone, rescue us, leave us alone, rescue us kind of thing. That's seems to be a group which are not being connected with but also difficult to connect with because they're saying on the one hand "leave us alone" but then they go, "nobody's touching us."

I've got a mate who is very much in that vein and when we catch up he invariably brings it up and at the end of it he always says, "Thanks so much for listening." I feel like I've made some progress and that's all I've done is not told him he's wrong, not jumped on what he's saying, offered some other perspectives but understood what he was saying, understood the validity in much of what he was saying. Also, just pressed sometimes on what he was saying too. I get the right to press because he knows I've understood what he's actually saying, not caricatured him into something that's easy to combat. So it is difficult and it's a long journey, there's no doubt its going to be a long journey.

I almost feel like there needs to be kind of a church or a non-church for agnostics. They're almost so wary of any kind of Christian overtones or church symbolism, but they haven't jumped ship either.

Kind of like I've got these grave questions but nowhere to turn them over.

Yes, so there seems to be a significant number of people out there who are looking for a place even though they seem they're not wanting a place.

They might want a place like that, they might want a place to do that because these questions as soon as they start thinking about them, these questions loom and, "This is what I need to work through this and I don't know how, and nobody out there seems to know how either, so I'm just left." We started [particular ministry] for that reason. To provide a safe place for doing that thinking.

3. CONCLUSION

In practical theology, with its focus on moving from praxis to praxis, there is an awareness that there is no actual end point to our theologizing and praxis development. We may develop ideal praxis but it is in itself imperfect and at its best it is still ideal praxis for this moment in time. There may be an eschatological end in God but in this age we live with incompleteness. Ongoing disappointment with current praxis in the church may in part reflect our difficulty in accepting disappointment and imperfection. But it also can reflect our desire for the fullness of resurrection life. Currently we live in the tension of waiting for the glorification of God's church and living the resurrection life of Christ now.

In the midst of this tension the Word of God is still being preached. This research would suggest that we need to preach in a manner that is richly indicative and deeply existential while invitingly and powerfully imperative. In Australia at this particular time we need to preach in a manner where we are participants in a dialogue and journey with God and others that is inviting, intriguing, provocative and challenging. And we need to remember that while the message continues to be that of the risen Christ, what it means to live the life of Christ for this day and age, and how we communicate the message of Christ and his kingdom in this day and age, is an ever

developing process done in submission to God and for his glory. May we in the myriad forms that church and preaching may need to be in an Australian context, continue to speak, explore, enact and cooperate with the saving activity of God, past, present and continuing.

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APPENDIX A

AN ILLUSTRATIVE STUDY

AN ILLUSTRATIVE STUDY

I am arguing that preaching in evangelical churches in Australia tends to operate out of an applicational hermeneutic that focuses on imperative requirements. This approach can then perpetuate the culture of the church rather than allow dialogue and engagement with the broader community. I am also offering a new model for informing the process of doing practical theology and developing church praxis including the area of preaching.

As stated in chapter 1 this thesis has attempted to discuss and measure the praxis of preaching against epistemological and operational norms. The epistemological norm is based on the message of the Scriptures according to an evangelical tradition which is also open to theory and research. Operational norms have included a number of communication theories that outline both what the elements of communicative processes are and what makes communication effective. A number of these theories, e.g. Ideal Speech Acts also have an epistemological element.

The analysis of preaching praxis, as well as the formulation of a new model has primarily been drawn from literature based research as well as analysis of research already conducted in relation to the church in Australia. To illustrate the research interviews were undertaken with 5 ministers/preachers who self-identified as being evangelical.

In light of the research focus there seems to be a number of areas that could have been the explored in an interview.

1. The process by which ministers prepare their sermons including the intent of their sermon.

2. The manner by which ministers 'deliver' their sermons.

3. Whether or not the delivery of the sermon is consistent with the process and intent of the sermon development.

4. What dialogical intent and devices are used in the sermon?

5. The impact of the sermon on the congregation and whether the intent of the preacher is matched by effect on the congregation.

6. The impact of dialogical structures and content on the congregation.

7. Whether the sermon allows dialogue and connection with the broader community.

To cover all these areas in detail, and others that I may not have included, would have been too exhaustive in light of the analysis and theory development also undertaken. It would seem particularly valuable to gain some measure, not only of each of the elements listed above but also of the relationship between the preparation and intent of the preacher, the actual delivery and content of the preaching and the effect on the congregation. But again in light of the analysis already undertaken, this would have made the research project too large.

There is also the question of sample size. If the study was 'simply' to gain a measure of the process and intent of the minister/preacher in preparing and communicating a sermon, it would seem that a larger sample could have been used based on a formal

questionnaire basis. This would require that the questions are quite refined. Due to the innate bias that Attribution Theory (Forgas 1981: 33-42) postulates regarding human understanding of their own behaviour, imprecise questions could encourage preachers to attribute nobler intent to their preaching and a more developed theory of praxis than they actually might be practising out of.

A smaller sample field would allow a more informal interview method that could allow more thorough exploration of process and intent. The difficulty here is that Attribution Theory dynamics still operate in any self-reporting methodology and there is the question of how representative the results would be due to the smaller sample size.

In view of the ideal praxis developed I wanted to get some examples of -

1. How ministers/preachers view the nature and place of the sermon in the life of the congregation/community?

2. Ministers/preachers awareness of presuppositions governing the use of sermons.

3. The process by which ministers/preachers develop their sermon.

   a. whether or not it is intentionally dialogical?

   b. how it is dialogical?

   c. whether or not it is intentionally contextualised?

   d. how it is contextualised?

   e. what of the situational, indicative and imperative are included?

4. The rationale and intent of the sermon development.

   a. what is the stated intent or rationale of the sermon?

   b. what is the rationale for whether or not the above elements of 3a. to 3e.

are used, and the rationale for how they are used?

The incarnational and narrative view of being evangelical that is presented in this research is not typical of how Australian evangelicals understand themselves. Many evangelicals define themselves on the basis of their perceived correct and distinct understanding and handling of the Bible. Identifying preachers and churches who participate in the interviews as evangelical based on these categories may be difficult. The ministers own self-identification with evangelicalism was accepted. This can allow discussion of how their self-understanding can be measured against an incarnational and narrative understanding of being evangelical as well as discussion of how a preacher's understanding of themself as being evangelical effects the nature of their preaching.

1. INTERVIEWEES

I intentionally identified 5 interviewees who I believed could provide helpful and challenging illustrative content to the research. They are –

A – a minister and theology lecturer of a Reformed church background who I knew was thinking dialogically about preaching and could provide examples of thinking and practice that supported my research thesis and recommendations.

B – an Indigenous pastor in the Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship (AEF) who was chosen to reflect my concern that voices outside the of the predominantly non-Indigenous church need to be heard and engaged with. At the time of interview I had no idea of B's views on preaching or his ideas on contextualization. What was

revealed in the interview was a thoroughly contextualised approach that did not come about due to some theoretical persuasion but out of the necessity of the context in which he is a minister.

C – a minister who was chosen for two reasons. One was because of the uniqueness of her position as a woman in a denomination that has historically been male dominated in Western Australia. The denomination has historically tended to have two wings – a more conservative, fundamentalist branch and one considered more 'liberal' and concerned about social issues. C's church has been one that has been seen to encompass both elements and so C was also selected to be interviewed in light of Piggin's (1996) concern for Word, Spirit and Mission. Again C's specific views on preaching and contextualization were not known by me prior to the interview.

D – not currently a minister in the traditional sense and chosen for this reason. The 'leader' of a group who is thinking about and creating new ways of being church in the community. Without knowing D's views on preaching and contextualization I thought that his perspective would challenge the more conservative church context in which much of the analysis of church and preaching in Australia is conducted. I thought that D's perspectives would also be valuable in light of the analysis of church in Australia that is presented by Strom (2000).

E – an evangelical Anglican minister who was chosen because he may be considered a more typical of an evangelical in a traditional liturgical based denomination. As well judging his theological training using Piggin's (1996) analysis,

one might assume 'E' was more in the 'Word' camp and consider that issues of contextualization not to be as critical to his thinking.

2. GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEW

Even though the interview process was to be informal and could follow lines of questioning and discussion that may be situationally determined as the interview unfolded, there was the development of a number of questions that could provide a foundational structure for the interviews. The particular areas that I wanted to discuss were identified as being

- general presuppositions

- sermon preparation

- dialogical dimension

- situational/contextualised dimension

- indicative dimension

- imperative dimension

The questions were developed by the identifying the theoretical underpinning of each area of concern and then developing questions that would address these.

All the questions were then collated in the order developed and then randomly ordered. This was done with the thought that if the questions were simply asked in sequential order than it increases the likelihood that the interviewee's response can be shaped by the direction of the questions and the interviewee's anticipation of the intent of the interviewer. Randomly ordering the questions can makes the intent of the interviewer less obvious.

2.1 Question development

General presuppositions

<u>Theoretical underpinning</u>

Wanting to gain a picture of presuppositions *re* use and nature of sermon and whether these presuppositions are assumed or considered.

<u>Questions</u>

Why do you use a sermon to communicate the message of the gospel?

Do you believe that a sermon is the best method to communicate the message of the gospel to an Australian audience? Why?

Sermon preparation

<u>Theoretical underpinning</u>

Wanting to see if there is some understanding, or use of the situational, indicative and imperative either implicitly or explicitly. Wanting to get some picture of background presuppositions that are worked out of either with or without awareness

<u>Questions</u>

What is the process by which you develop a sermon?

What do you believe are the key elements you need to consider in developing a

    sermon?

What is your intent in giving a sermon?

What is the effect that you would want a sermon to have on your hearers?

Dialogical dimension

<u>Theoretical underpinning</u>

Wanting to see whether or not there is a conscious or unconscious dialogical intent.

<u>Questions</u>

How do you hope that people will respond to the sermon?

How do you hope that people interact with the sermon?

How do you hope people interact with the sermon while it is given?

How do you hope that people interact with the sermon once it is completed?

Do you intentionally include any elements in the sermon that allows people to interact

with it during the sermon and/or after the sermon?

Do you seek to speak or offer the sermon in a way that allows people to interact with

it's content during or after the sermon?

How does the sermon fit with the rest of the service?

What communication models do you use to construct a sermon?

What communication models do you use to construct a service?

Situational/contextualised dimension

<u>Theoretical underpinning</u>

Wanting to see if and how situational analysis and contextualization is used in a

sermon and what is understand as contextualization.

<u>Questions</u>

What do you understand by relevance?

What is the part that relevance plays in a sermon?

Do you seek to incorporate contemporary events into your sermon?

What is your reason for this?

How often do you start to develop your sermon in response to problems you have

picked

      up from other people, the media, etc.?

Do you think that a sermon should

    -   speak to the situation in which the hearers live,

    -   arise out of the context in which the hearers live,

    -   allow the context in which the hearers live shape the meaning of the text?

Indicative dimension

<u>Theoretical underpinning</u>

Wanting to see what indicative elements are present in a sermon either intentionally

or assumed.

<u>Questions</u>

What are the essential things you want to communicate in a sermon? Why?

Do you see these to be critical in every sermon? Why?

What are important, though not essential, things you want to communicate in a

sermon?

Imperative dimension

<u>Theoretical underpinning</u>

Wanting to see what imperative elements are present in a sermon either intentionally or assumed. Wanting to get a picture of what importance is placed on the imperative and what is understood by the imperative.

<u>Questions</u>

What do you believe the point of a sermon is?

What do you understand by application?

Do you think that sermons need to have an application?

Do you think that sermons always need to have an application? Why?

Do you think that there may be any dangers in offering an application? Why?

Do you think that all texts have an application? Why?

Do you think that sermons need to be applicational or implicational? Why?

Would you be content to leave the implications of a text open for the congregation to decide and to act on themselves? Why?

Would you prefer to spell out the implications of a text or leave the implications more vague for the listener to work through themselves? Why?

2.2 Collated Questions

Why do you use a sermon to communicate the message of the gospel?

Do you believe that a sermon is the best method to communicate the message of the gospel to an Australian audience? Why?

What is the process by which you develop a sermon?

What do you believe are the key elements you need to consider in developing a sermon?

What is your intent in giving a sermon?

What is the effect that you would want a sermon to have on your hearers?

How do you hope that people will respond to the sermon?

How do you plan for people to interact with the sermon?

How do you hope people will interact with the sermon while it is given?

How do you hope people will interact with the sermon once it is completed?

Do you intentionally plan for and include any elements in the sermon that allows

       people to interact with it during the sermon and/or after the sermon?

Do you seek to speak or offer the sermon in a way that allows people to interact with

       its content during or after the sermon?

How does the sermon fit with the rest of the service?

What communication models do you use to construct a sermon?

What communication models do you use to construct a service?

What do you understand by relevance?

What is the part that relevance plays in a sermon?

Do you seek to incorporate contemporary events into your sermon? Why?

How often do you develop your sermon in response to problems you have picked up

       from other people, the media, etc.?

Do you think that a sermon should

     -   speak to the situation in which the hearers live,

     -   arise out of the context in which the hearers live,

     -   allow the context in which the hearers live shape the meaning of the text?

What are the essential things you want to communicate in a sermon? Why?

Do you see these to be critical in every sermon? Why?

What are important, though not essential, things you want to communicate in a

       sermon?

What do you believe the point of a sermon is?

What do you understand by application?

Do you think that sermons need to have an application?

Do you think that sermons always need to have an application? Why?

Do you think that there may be any dangers in offering an application? Why?

Do you think that all texts have an application? Why?

Do you think that sermons need to be applicational or implicational? Why?

Would you be content to leave the implications of a text open for the congregation to
decide and to act on themselves? Why?

Would you prefer to spell out the implications of a text or leave the implications more
vague for the listener to work through themselves? Why?

2.3 Questions randomly arranged

How do you go about preparing a sermon?

How do you hope that people will respond to the sermon?

Do you intentionally include any elements in the sermon that allows people to interact
with it during the sermon and/or after the sermon?

What communication models do you use to construct a sermon?

Why do you use a sermon to communicate the message of the gospel?

Do you seek to incorporate contemporary events into your sermon? Why?

Do you think that a sermon should speak to the situation in which the hearers live,

What are the essential things you want to communicate in a sermon? Why?

Do you see these to be critical in every sermon? Why?

Do you think that sermons always need to have an application? Why?

Would you prefer to spell out the implications of a text or leave the implications more

vague for the listener to work through themselves? Why?

What do you believe are the key elements you need to consider in developing a

sermon?

How do you hope that people interact with the sermon?

Do you seek to speak or offer the sermon in a way that allows people to interact with

its content during or after the sermon?

What communication models do you use to construct a service?

What do you understand by relevance?

What are important, though not essential, things you want to communicate in a

sermon?

What do you believe the point of a sermon is?

Do you think that there may be any dangers in offering an application? Why?

What is your intent in giving a sermon?

How do you hope people interact with the sermon while it is given?

How often do you start to develop your sermon in response to problems you have

picked up from other people, the media, etc.?

Do you think that a sermon should arise out of the context in which the hearers live,

What do you understand by application?

Do you think that there may be any dangers in offering an application? Why?

Do you think that sermons need to be applicational or implicational? Why?

What is the effect that you would want a sermon to have on your hearers?

How do you hope that people interact with the sermon once it is completed?

How does the sermon fit with the rest of the service?

What is the part that relevance plays in a sermon?

Do you think that a sermon should allow the context in which the hearers live shape

the meaning of the text?

Do you believe that a sermon is the best method to communicate the message of the

gospel to an Australian audience? Why?

Do you think that sermons need to have an application?

Do you think that all texts have an application? Why?

Would you be content to leave the implications of a text open for the congregation to

decide and to act on themselves? Why?

In randomly ordering the questions it was also seen that a number of the questions were simply being re-asked in a different way. This can be helpful for measuring consistency of thinking but can also make the interviews longer than necessary. So while these 'repetitive' questions remained in the interview guide sheet they were not used unless there was clarification needed or ambiguity in the interviewee's response.

2.4 Additional questions

In reviewing the questions in light of the research conducted and in response to a trial interview process it was decided that some areas of interest to the research were not adequately covered by the questions developed. The following questions were also added to the interview schedule as possible questions to ask in the interviews.

What do you think hearers want to hear in a sermon?

What are your reasons for thinking this?

What do you think that hearers need to hear in a sermon?

What are your reasons for thinking this?

How does being evangelical influence your sermon preparation?

How does being evangelical influence your sermon intent?

How does being evangelical influence your sermon delivery?

How is Jesus and the message of the good news in Jesus linked to your sermon?

Is this the case in every sermon?

Is this clear in every sermon?

Is this an intentional aspect of every sermon?

What shapes the use of Jesus in your sermons?

3. INTERVIEW PROCESS

Each interview was approximately 2 hours in duration and tape-recorded. They were
then transcribed and sent back to the interviewees. They could then modify their
responses if they did not think that in the immediacy of an interview their responses
did not accurately reflect their thinking or if they wished to expand on any of the
points. The returned edited interviews were then used for illustrative purposes in the
preceding chapters. Again some minor semantic and grammatical editing was
undertaken to aid understanding and clarity.

As can be seen by the full transcripts of the interviews in Appendix 1 the interviews
with 'A', 'C' and 'E' s followed the question guide more closely while the interviews
with 'B' and 'D' varied to a greater degree though thematically all the interviews
were consistent with the concerns of this research.

APPENDIX B

LETTER TO INTERVIEWEES

Dear

I am writing to you to request your assistance in current studies I am involved in. I am in a doctoral programme in Practical Theology at the University of South Africa. My studies are focusing on preaching and I am wondering if I may be able to interview you for an informal research component to my dissertation.

While it may bias your responses if you were aware of my precise research thesis it is important to understand that your responses are not part of a formal research project, nor will your responses be foundational to my research findings and argument. It is intended that your responses will be more illustrative of the practice of preaching as it occurs in evangelical churches in Perth. While your church/denominational affiliation will be used in the dissertation, any personal identifying information will be excluded. I am writing to you because in my understanding your church falls within the evangelical tradition. If you do not identify as such then I would not use you in my research.

I would estimate that the interview would take between 1 and 2 hours. I know that a minister's time is valuable and so I would very much appreciate your participation in my studies. I will phone you in person to follow up this letter or if you wish to contact me feel free to do so either as 9266 0292(wk) or 9246 3946(hm).

Attached are personal details in regard to myself so that you have some picture of who I am. Thankyou for your time and consideration in this matter.

Yours Sincerely

David Michie

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEWS

MINISTER 'A'. Conducted 6.8.03

How do you go about developing a sermon?

I try to put the sermon into a broader framework, thinking over a year or two year timeframe so that I have a balance of Old Testament, New Testament, topical, so there is a mix over time, and then I work on a series and the particular sermon fits in with a series.

When it comes to the sermon itself, is there a particular way that you develop a sermon?

It usually would start off with a general reading of the text and some commentaries on the text. Before I actually get to the sermon preparation I let that fizzle around in my brain and then I try and think of the intention of text, what the text says and then think of the congregation and once I have got that information I ask the "So what?" question my wife always asks me.

When you say the intention of the text what do you mean by that and how do you develop a sermon in regard to the intention of the text?

I want to use the text to limit my own ability to have my own hobby horses foisted on the congregation, to have the text make me preach about what I would not of necessity have wanted to preach about. That means finding out what the text says, what it wants to say and how it says it, so I don't end up with one standard form of sermon. So the sermon changes in light of what text I am dealing with.

You also mentioned keeping in mind the congregation, what do you mean by that?

That is really important. I've got to think how the audience will react, how interested they are in the information that I am going to give, how I'm going to give it so they will be interested. So it means getting to know the people you are talking to better in order to try and engage them, make them excited about what is offered. So I think house visitation, meeting with people, talking with people is incredibly important in developing a sermon.

And you also talked about the "So what?" question. What do you mean by that particular question?

I think the sermon has to have some relevance, have meaning within the lives of people so they can say it somehow fits into where my life is today. I can't just take them back to the time of writing, it must be brought to here and now, there is a process where it must be God's living word to them now.

Do you have any means by which you try to develop the "So what?" question, to bring that question to their life situation?

I don't have any formal ways, I think it is more a way of thinking, a process of knowing the people, bouncing between thinking about the people and thinking about the message.

When you give a sermon do you have any particular sense of how you would like people to respond to your sermon?

Yes I would like them all to be wildly excited about it. I want them to be moved. I think that a sermon is a way to make people see rather than just giving them information.

Moved by, and seeing what?

The vision of the text opens them up to God, to see God and the world and each other, to see all of reality differently. So it is really to create a new paradigm.

Do you intentionally include in your sermon elements that allow people to interact with it during the sermon?

Yes I am doing that a little bit more nowadays. I actually do stop and ask questions so that people can respond during the course of the sermon. "What do you think about this….What do you think about that?" And at the moment I have expanded that. As I have given my series I have encouraged people to keep a sort of spiritual diary, with thoughts and questions during the week, reflections on the sermon and the passage they can look back on. That's a new thing I am moving into.

I have seen at the end of sermon notes, points of application people are encouraged to make and follow. A spiritual diary sounds a little different from that.

Yes the way I see it is that a sermon opens a door to get people to think for themselves. So a lot of the applications are things that they need to work out for themselves rather than be just spelt out from the pulpit. There are times the pulpit should just leave them dangling. The actual work of the sermon continues after the sermon.

Are there places where you would want to make things very clear in a sermon such as, "This is the application" or "This is the call"?

Yes there are times when it is an imperative text or when it is a prophetic text where that becomes very specific, very definite and confrontational. I think there are times we can become so wishy-washy that we do not say things that will disrupt. I think the sermon should disrupt the existing paradigms in order to create new paradigms.

Do you have any sense when you might be more implicational or when you might be more direct and applicational?

I sometimes find, I did the other day, when I give a sermon, this one was about the new heaven and the new earth, that I am not that convinced by the power of the indicative. I was not captured by it myself and I went to an imperative application of the text, a "Therefore you must", which worked really well with the congregation but I walked away from there and felt I had been dishonest with the text. I haven't given them what they should have heard. It worked, but I didn't, it still failed in what I actually wanted to bring across. I find that going to the imperative easy, an easier way.

So you are saying that there was something in your own grasp of the text that led you to deal with it imperatively.

I think the big thing is that I did not communicate the indicative.

So something about the indicative did not grab you?

Yes, as I was developing the sermon I thought it would grab me but I did not feel it strong enough. So I did not engage enough, there was not enough "Wow" factor on my part, something bigger that is a trigger.

So what do you do when as the sermon preparer, the preacher there is not the "Wow" factor?

I think I need to move to another text or I have just got to keep on sticking at it, trusting God that it will be there.

Do you use any particular communication models in preparing and delivering your sermons?

I have shifted. Underneath my communication model there is not a sender-receiver model but more a putting of something in the middle that they buy into or don't buy into. So I have to persuade them to enter into this, so it is like shopping, self- service. Are they going to take this? I can't take for granted what they want to hear or what I think they need to hear, so I have to package it in such a way that they actually might buy it.

And how is that different from a sender-receiver model?

I don't take for granted that they are receiving. I start off with the assumption that they are window shopping, they are not buying. So there is a lot more of, "How can I present it so that they actually want to enter into it?"

So you are wanting to persuade them?

Yes there is a persuasive element. I want to persuade and I want them to make a rational decision as well, so there is an interaction. I want to invite them to the text and say look this is what the text says and let that persuade them, so there are certain elements for them to think about rather than just be emotionally persuaded by.

Is that how you would keep it from being propaganda?

Yes I hope so, I think that propaganda at heart always has the agenda of getting people not to think, not to consider, not to evaluate. I communicate to the church that while I am totally convinced they must listen as if they are not.

Is that something you actually communicate to the church as an aid?

Yes as an aid. They must be sceptical. I ask them to open up their Bibles to check up on what I am saying. That is why I think the Bible is critical to all preaching. "Is this sermon really God's voice?"

So the text ultimately is your criteria of judgement?

Yes I think so. The text stands as "the other". I think the sermon is the voice from the outside. If I just read the text I can warp it to fit in with my world. Preaching gives me a different slant on it. Preaching should be based on the text so that the text actually comes to the people.

And you would say the same when it comes to topical sermons?

I hope so but I think that topical sermons are much more difficult, for in topical sermons I think the preacher should be informed by the big structures of the Bible.

More of a Biblical Theology?

Yes. I think sermons and biblical theology go hand in hand. If I was to preach just from Jonah without a bigger meta-narrative in mind the sermon falls apart. So yes I think it is important that it is not so much individual, little texts but it is in the context of big themes of the Bible such as covenant, kingdom.

In talking of Biblical Theology, do you also think that a sermon should speak to the situation in which people live?

Yes it needs to impact their world. But I wouldn't want to limit myself to something just because it is in the news. The sermon is to engage with their circumstances but not to be swamped by their circumstances.

Do you incorporate contemporary events into your sermons?

Sometimes. So something like September 11. I had to answer to that. Sometimes circumstances impinge. But at other times the sermon should create reality, so we are not just reacting to reality, we are also getting a framework by which we can handle different things in reality.

Do you have any criteria as to your use of contemporary events?

Not anything specific. I think it is quite vague.

What are the essential things you would want to communicate in a sermon?

I think ultimately, and it is the most difficult thing, is that a sermon should create the opportunity for people to love God more. And out of that you view reality in a different way, you see others in a new way, in light of the Kingdom of God. I think you can persuade people to do certain things but it may not come from hearts that love. But as soon as I say that communicating the love of God is what the sermon is about then it is virtually impossible, I'm on a losing streak.

Why do you say you are on a losing streak?
Yes I want people to love God and to love other people but it is easier to get people to do things, easier to create obedience. But to create love is impossible. I am so much aware in my sermon and in my church that there is not just a recipe that can make it happen.

Apart from a recipe do you have any sense of how it does happen in a sermon?

I do think that it is very important that you yourself are touched by the sermon, while thinking about it, preparing it and giving it. I think often I get more spoken to while I preach than even when I am preparing it. I know what I am going to say but as I say it it becomes fresher to me and actually touches my life and makes me stand in awe of God. We must be engaged in the process.

Do you see the love of God as a critical element in every sermon?

Every sermon should be part of the structure of a new understanding of reality in light of who God is. So it is all part of the process of seeing differently and therefore being different.

Do you think that a sermon always needs to have an application at the end of it?

No I don't think so. I certainly do think there are times when to say anything applicational breaks down the sermon.

You would be okay at times to leave the congregation with the implications of the text. What is your thinking behind that?

I think I need to develop that more in terms of the diary idea so people can reflect and think through the implications. I think you can leave it there but unless you have a community who can spontaneously speak about God it can easily just fizzle out. So I need to find ways to help people think about it.

Over the course of a one or two year plan how do you hope your listeners will interact with what has been preached?

I hope they would be aware of different nuances, that they would actually grow in their knowledge so they can become more evaluative so they can see the sermons as a dialogue not just one off things but see the sermon as part of a bigger process where God is recreating a new understanding of everything.

And at the particular time of hearing a sermon how would you want the listeners to be interacting?

I would love them to actually talk about it and generate discussions and I am really disappointed when people come from the church and start talking about the rugby and whatever and nothing significant has effected them. Then I have failed.

Do you provide any leads for those discussions?

Not enough. I do think that the sermon should always end up on a high point. It should end up before it's finished. It shouldn't have a nice come down. There's also an emotional upbuilding so I don't want to just add a little "think about this" at the end as that can be a little clue for people to begin to switch off. You want to take them somewhere, lead them somewhere and so there may need to be other ways to facilitate their thinking.

What are you describing in your idea of an emotional highpoint?

I think a sermon is built up, a sermon should preach from its ending, it goes somewhere and it is worked back from its end and it moves toward that end. Unless I am really gripped by where I want to end I don't have pace, I don't have energy, I don't have flow and I lose them. That is why I do not have three points but rather one point that I develop to the end.

How is that different from emotionalism?

Emotionalism is where you build people up but you do not have a logical substance underneath. So I want to build people emotionally but I also want to have a logical structure underpinning the emotion that is based on the text. So I want them to get excited, I want to move them but I want to constantly bounce them off the text so that when they go back at another time to the text something of that same emotion, something of that same understanding can be there again.

Do you have an example of an emotional highpoint from a recent sermon?

Just the other day I ended my sermon with "Hallelujah" as it was all about the glory of God, all about the angels stopping to sing. I was using a text in 'Revelation' where you see something of that magnificence. Your voice goes up, your tempo goes up, your whole energy goes up, everything is moving you, painting a picture with dramatic effect. That's definitely an emotional highpoint. So I think each sermon should have an emotional climb otherwise its just rational, disinterested speech.

How does that fit with your idea of a change of paradigm in regard to the world? I imagine that it could be relatively easy to get Christians to say "Hallelujah" but it is different to create a paradigm shift in relation to the reality and the world they enter into. So how do you marry those two ideas?

Continually bouncing off the text and bouncing off reality and the real world in which people live needs to be in the forefront, not contemporary events but the real world. So as I'm building my sermon up I am aware that I am talking with people who have

suffered heartbreak, are not wanting to say "Hallelujah", are suffering brokenness. Unless I engage with that then I am being false and it becomes emotionalism. So a logical structure that is embedded in the real world and in the text, with emotion, are all components of a sermon.

Are there any other key elements that you want to develop in a sermon?

The visual element, it's a matter of seeing not just hearing.

How might you construct that in a sermon and when you say "seeing" are you saying actual visual images or what the mind's eye sees?

More in terms of using physical descriptions and a visual way of communicating your facts. We live in a world where people perceive and see reality. I want them to see the world, I want them to see the text, I want them to see something of God.

So you use the visual as you see that is part of how people……

Live.

How might you actually do this in a sermon?

Often I do too little as that is the hard work. To get the text and the movement of the text and then develop how I am going to get them to see it is hard work.

This suggests to me that there is also a sense that the preacher is something of an actor?

I think so. Yes, because all reality becomes part of the script. Acting yes but not acting something false but acting that is becoming part of a different script and believing that this script is actually reality.

In a sense you are acting or living the new paradigm before the people as you preach?

Yes you become a participant in this.

You believe in connecting with the life situation of people, is that the same thing for you as relevance or is relevance something else?

Relevance is something else. Relevance means something on top, so to have relevant sermons is to speak about contemporary events, what the newspapers are saying. You must do this from time to time. Connecting with reality is about the undertones of the real world where people live, that's something deeper.

So how do you see 'relevance' and how do you see the 'deeper'?

Relevance is often froth and bubble, for example stuff you might hear when people preach with young people. They have all this sensational stuff about how bad the

world is but it's all spectacular with nothing of substance underneath. It's seemingly relevant but it is froth and bubble.

So the news may change but people remain the same?

Yes that's a good way to put it.
Why a sermon rather than some other way of communicating?

I think it is all about communication but a sermon is a unique opportunity to capture the moment, it's a very existential moment where we all become participants, believing that something is happening, that its not just information, that its not just emotion. Its actually an event where God himself is again speaking. It has this real existential moment to it that I think makes it unique.

Why do you think that may not come through another means of communication?

A sermon can use different forms of communication but it is unique in the immediacy of the Word, the very contemporaneousness of the situation is unique.

So what makes a sermon a sermon rather than a devotional, or a multimedia presentation or a lecture?

The element of authority. In a sermon a preacher has got to believe that God is actually speaking. They are speaking with authority. The teaching element supports that authority but the urgency and the power is much bigger than just teaching information. In a sense a sermon is never true as it takes one particular aspect and says it in such a strong way. There is a demand, an urgency and authority that disrupts all that they have had before.

When you say that a sermon is strong are you saying it is aggressive?

It can be but it can also call, it can be a strong call, it can also invite but invite with strength. So it is one thing to talk about God but in a sermon there is a belief that God is involved directly.

You have said that you invite people to be cynical, what if there are people listening who are doubting, questioning or struggling, what if they don't come with you to the emotional highpoint, or come to the call?

You work on the assumption that not everyone will come.

Is there a place for these people in the sermon?

Hopefully in the fact that you are saying new things, not just repeating old stuff, you are stimulating curiosity, you are inviting them to think on their own about what you said, allowing them to be cynical or argue. Even in their cynicism they are interacting with the sermon in a specific way. Just because they are not following you does not mean they are not interacting.

At a time where there is a lot of questions about what it means to be the church in Australia do you think there is still a place for the sermon in contemporary life?

Yes I think so, I am fully convinced of that. People might change the structures but we still have to communicate in some way. I think that if we lose the place where God can stand over and against us as the other and speak to us what we don't want to hear or never thought of hearing, so that God cannot disrupt us anymore, then we have just domesticated civility.

How do you hold that in light of the view that Australians are non-authoritarian and don't like being spoken over, we like democratic processes where everybody can have their say and we come to our own decisions?

In the gospel there is just not one pattern. There are places where it invites, where it stimulates but there are also places where it says, "I don't care if you like it or not." There is still an authority factor as we are speaking about God. We are speaking from the text from which he speaks authoritatively.

Do you think there is a particular way you need to sermonise in an Australian context?

Yes I do think because people are more sceptical you have to allow them escape hatches. People are not just going to follow you on a sermon, or necessarily trust you, so for example when I go to a youth group I will break the ice, tell a joke, break things down, give an escape hatch. If I give them an opportunity to climb out of the boat then they may actually let me take them further.

From what I have heard you saying you are not convinced that you need the sermon to arise out of relevant news but you are saying there is something about the context in which people live that the sermon needs to arise out of. Would you tend to use what is happening in the life of your particular community as a beginning place for a sermon.

No. I am taking myself down to the text too strongly for that but it does have an influence on my reading and understanding of the text if I really know what is going on but otherwise I will end up with just a few hobby horses.

Do you think there is any way in which the hearers shape the sermon?

Yes. They always filter and cut out and are selective. So my idea is that they are buying certain things. That is why I try to put something in there that disrupts but to put it in a slot that disturbs them the least and try to catch them by surprise by the text so that it creates curiosity because once they are curious they are more inclined to follow along and create the new opportunities for the text to work.

Do you think there is ever a place where what is happening in the life of the congregation, or in an even bigger context, shapes the meaning of the text in new ways?

Yes. Because the sermon is the living voice of God, if it wasn't we would just read the text. The text opens a door for us to say in light of our contemporary society what God is saying for us now, which is not just a repetition of the text but a recreation of the text. But it is a recreation that is embedded in the text that wants to be true to the text in the different circumstances. So it just not the same as the text, it is just not a repetition, it is a new voice, a new word.

How do you see the sermon fitting with the rest of the gathering of the church or the community, or with the service?

I am becoming more and more integrated. My wife said that I was always waiting for everything else to end so that I could get to the sermon, as that was all I was concerned about. But theologically I always knew it to be part of something bigger but I struggled with really taking that into account and seeing it as a smaller part of a whole. But it is a significant and pivotal part.

How do you see the sermon connecting with other parts of what is happening?

I think it should be the source out of which everything else flows, the wellspring which feeds everything else that is happening. It is the direction, it is the vision, the thing that opens everything up and allows people to become excited about the Gospel and want to evangelise and want to worship.

MINISTER 'B'. Conducted 24.9.03

How do you go about preparing a sermon?

The first issue for me is getting a consistent time. I am preaching every Sunday, at least every Sunday morning, going through different books of the Scriptures so it means I have to set aside a time regularly each week. Wednesday is the day that I set aside totally for messages. I usually start on a Monday by just doing some preliminaries in reading and thinking it through. Even though Wednesday is put aside you are never free from having it on your mind right from when Sunday finishes. Sunday night I have a break from it. Monday morning is picking up, thinking, reading over the text, looking at it, meditating on it, maybe read some material on that passage of Scripture prior to Wednesday so I don't have to do a lot of reading on Wednesday when I'm trying to put it together. I have to do it in a day basically, so the reading and other things have taken place on a Monday night or a Tuesday night which I have a bit of freedom in. Then when I start I write out a set of notes first, scribble notes, putting some stuff down, picking some stuff out from other material from other books. I'm not that flash on the computer at the moment but I'll probably look at some programmes there that I have been accessing and using.

Is there a particular structure or way that you approach the text.

Yes, probably in ten years, no we've been pasturing since 1990, so 12, 13 years in the ministry here, I felt that our church was lacking in a good understanding of exegetical stuff and looking at and going through book by book the Scriptures. Since the beginning we have most probably looked through most of the New Testament books and in some of our Bible Studies we have done the Old Testament to match it up. So it is not necessarily topical stuff, though some of our topical stuff comes in the evening which is a little bit more geared toward evangelism. But I am usually going through verse by verse. That is a lot harder to do in an Aboriginal context because it is easier to talk about issues and to speak of topical stuff. But if you are teaching consistently verse by verse I feel that is the best way for our church to grab a hold of truth and forces me to stay within the framework of what the passage is and it also stops me from jumping on a hobby horse here and there. So that is the structure that I think is good for me but also important for the church and after 10 years of preaching in that style I find that the church has benefited from it far more than the topical preaching I used to do before I changed. The topical preaching can still be incorporated into the church through the passage and Bible Studies but I think that people need a good handle on the Scriptures and what the Bible says. Generally speaking that's what Aboriginal people want to know, "What does the Word say, what does the Bible say, what do I need to do, how do I need to change." So as far as Sunday morning goes it is verse by verse. Sometimes I may just do 2 verses, might be one verse depending on the depth that is there, depending on whether that passage is relevant for the people. So sometimes I might do 10 verses depending on the passage of Scripture.

When you say, "relevant for the people" what do you understand by "being relevant"?

I think that there are many trends and changes in Aboriginal society and I think the Word must also apply to those changing trends that are taking place. Also if I sense if there is a passage of Scripture, or one or two verses that are important because of a weakness in our church because of their growth as Christians then I would spend a fair bit of time on that. I tend to avoid using the Bible to deal with an individual's life. I have seen that in the past and I have seen it too often where the Word of God is used to bash somebody because the preacher of pastor can't deal with it in a constructive fashion. So I never have a single person in mind when I am preaching the message. I try to avoid that as much as possible. I'm aware of the single issues that are there and need to be dealt with but I would rather avoid them in a message and allow the Lord to work through any kind of preaching to bring conviction upon people's lives. But if there are issues that need to be dealt with we will deal with them outside of the context of preaching.

What about broader issues that are affecting your community?

They are incorporated into my preaching quite regularly and I speak a lot about Aboriginal issues. I speak a lot about justice, I speak a lot about reconciliation, even to the degree that there are issues in our own heart that we have to deal with in regard to non-Aboriginal people that we sometimes hold and feel we have a right to hold on to because we have been treated unfairly. There are a lot of issues, if there is a death and the things that come up in that, it will come out in preaching if it fits but it must also fit the passage of Scripture, it must be relevant and tied in there, it is not something that I have mentioned just loosely. But if I sense that it is a big issue in the community I will make mention of it somewhere along in the message. I think if you really want to you can follow an avenue in a lot of the Scriptures to bring out issues that our people are facing in our contemporary culture.

Do you think there are particular issues for your community that you would want to address in preaching?

Yeah, we have touched a lot on racism and reconciliation and those kinds of themes to mainly help our people come to terms with the love of God for people regardless of who they are. That's worked, that's come through quite strongly. We want to see people as people. Generally speaking Aboriginal people do anyways so it is not a hard principle, biblically, to apply to their lives. Other things like homosexuality I have spoken on just recently because it has been an issue in certain denominations and people are asking questions and wanting to know more about it. So we will pick up those themes in a Sunday evening and talk about them Biblically but also culturally. The preaching of those kind of issues would carry a biblical foundation but also a cultural perspective as well. From our cultural point of view not just a Western one.

My understanding is that in a lot of the preaching that the Aboriginal church has been brought up on in the missions or when there were white pastors, would not have focused on issues like justice, racism or reconciliation. They would have

been more an individual message about salvation and how to then live the Christian life. Is that a fair understanding?

I think so. Many of our people have been evangelised, I think that there has been a lot of doctrinal truth taught to our people but not the opportunity to apply a lot of those truths that they learn given the responsibilities and the gifts God has given to them. For instance, I think the teaching of gifts just hasn't been taught in the history of our people. There are a lot of things in the years that have passed, in the mission circles, that just have not been touched on and that is disempowering. Allowing people to use their gifts, teaching them to fulfil God's will in their lives, using gifts in the church and in the community are only just new things that we are teaching our people. It has been said that Aborigines are the most evangelised people on earth. We know a lot about the Gospel, we know a lot about Jesus, the compassion of God, salvation but the issues that our people face each day of their lives in the community have very rarely been touched on in the past.

So as you have begun to do that, and you have been doing it for a number of years, how has that been heard and received by your congregation, particularly by those people who are used to an older, more 'mission' style of preaching?

We have not got many older people left in our church. In the last 5 or 6 years a number of our older folk have passed on. Of our men the oldest bloke is not quite 50. We have a couple of older ladies but they are more open to change and they are used to the 10 years I have been pastoring and my preaching style now. Over that time I have changed some of those things as you talk about issues and raise issues. Obviously the issue of sex is still a taboo issue with Aboriginal people so I have to be careful where I go with that and raising the term sex and sexual relationships and intimacy is acceptable but when you start to talk about the details of sex and incorporate it in your preaching you can sometimes turn people away as it is still an area our people are not used to being up front with. A lot of the issues like justice and reconciliation and some of the other contemporary issues, our people now are pretty well open to that because I've struggled with some of that in the early stages. I guess learning in college and other places that there is more than just what our people have been taught in the past, "Its important to know God and a few doctrinal things and that's all you need to know." In the back of my mind, always in my preaching is, "How do I move our people forward whether its preaching the Scriptures or preaching contemporary issues, how do I help them to deal with that issue or that Scripture to move them forward in their relationship with God and particularly in the world in which they live, the environment in which they live. So if the Scriptures or our preaching can't help them in their context and it only just relates to the church then its just a bit of information and we are no different from a university or any other place that is giving out information for knowledge's sake.

Has the 'Bringing them Home' report and awareness of the "Stolen Generation" and experiences of dispossession changed your preaching? An older style of preaching may have emphasised that we leave the past behind and press on to what is ahead. Do speak more in terms of some of these historical experiences and elements that people have been through?

Yes very much so, those elements are always brought in. I am sensitive that a number of our people are a part of that history and we talk about it a lot. That's why we might only do a verse of Scripture. We might start on something but if I feel that I need to pick up on one theme or something else, we will go with that. I don't feel I have to get through my notes and finish this stuff. Preaching from an Aboriginal perspective there is a lot of Spirit led stuff. Myself and other Aboriginal pastors as well are more sensitive in regards to the contemporary issues we face in light of historical events. People are open to us there. Our younger people are open to it.

Does it feel like you can talk about your own history for the first time?

Oh yes.

And what's that been like?

Its been invigorating for a lot of people to be able to talk about the past. Much of Paul's writing talks about his past. Before King Agrippa and others they were challenged by the story of his past. He shared his testimony with them. So there is another form of preaching that I have been working out based on the Paul testifying before people. Even as Aboriginal people we are used to giving testimonies but the opportunity to preach in a testimonial way seems a new thing. Most times when I go to preach somewhere else now I tell my story, my testimony with Scripture added in. And I've taken that from Paul's model. He brought up his past to confirm what Jesus had done in his life.

Do you think there is a unique way of preaching because you are part of the Indigenous community?

That's a good question because now 20% of our church are non-Aboriginal. It threw me out a little bit in preaching because I've been ministering 100% to Aboriginal people. Even those non-Aboriginal people who have married Aboriginal people are locked into an Aboriginal system and then during the 90's other people started coming into our church, the Lord led them our way and they are part of our church now. It really threw me out because I was using a lot of Nyoongar words and I knew that the people would know what I was saying and that makes the message a lot more acceptable particularly with some of the people who may find it hard to understand a lot of things, using a lot of the Nyoongar words makes it easier for the people to connect with the message. Also some of the unsaved coming along identify with those things and it also helps them to stay alert. I've felt that I have had to not so much restrict my use of Nyoongar but I have had to clarify a lot of the language that I am using. I would use the Nyoongar and I use an English word to say the same thing in a different way. I have had to adapt in a round-a-bout way but I still use a lot of the Nyoongar language. The old ladies who know it well and speak it a lot, they smile and they know you are on track with them as well. That's one of the ways that the old people we still have click in with us.

I have endeavoured as much as I can to change the way of communicating to include story so its not just preaching doctrinal truth. Previously that was the way it was done in Aboriginal circles, you are seen as the teacher and the hearers had to get this truth. And most of our people have missed out on some of the fundamental truths of the

Scriptures because it has just been coming from a doctrinal point of view without any relevance. So I try to tell a story and I think much of the Scriptures that come to us you can find some way of using a story form. So if I talk about Philippians I talk about Paul coming to Philippi. We know that he had no church to go to so he sat on the riverbank. I would open it up in a way that people can relate to, "You know this fella sat on the riverbank with 'em, under a tree most probably, somewhere around there, maybe they had a fire going and cooked up a feed with Lydia. Lydia knew a little bit about God like a lot of our people do………" So its in that kind of form so that they can see Paul. "Oh he sat on the riverbank he did not go into the synagogue." In that then Lydia came to know God and I relate that to how many of our people have come to know the Lord under a gumtree somewhere, sitting down with people. We don't have to come to church to find God. He can be found anywhere. Lydia knew about God but she didn't know Jesus. She believed in God but she needed the personal touch by the Lord.

Trying to find things in the Epistles is hard. It is easier in the book of Acts you can tell one big story. But I always try to communicate the Gospel in my preaching. I'm trying always to look at ways in a passage of Scripture that's going to make it easier for the one who is coming as a Christian and who understands very little. That is my aim. You may have heard it, "If you aim at the giraffes that's all you get. If you aim at the sheep you get the sheep and the giraffes." So that's where I try to aim. At the new Christian so they can get something but also in the same way help some of our people who have been 20 years in the faith and are a little more mature. That's hard at times as in our context there is a huge range on level of understanding from people who are well educated to school dropouts who have been converted and have a passion for God but find it hard to understand the Scriptures and to understand the English language. So the range of the educational level of our people makes it difficult. 70% are higher but there would be 30% lower and I try to consider them as much as possible. My level is most probably considering very strongly the lower group and including some kind of story, always looking for something that's going to help people connect into this situation.

Paul's imprisonment is another example that connects with the issues like deaths in custody. All of our older folk have spent time in goal for being on the streets after 6 o'clock. Most of us have spent some stint in gaol. You can connect into that particularly with books where Paul is in prison and his companions like Apophroditus, come in to comfort him and he cries with them and wept with them. Our people really feel that. They may not talk to me about the message but they will talk with others and others will come up and say, "That message really spoke to me, it connected here or encouraged me there or I gotta change that or that was really good because I just needed to hear that as I'm going through this struggle." And there are struggles our people are going through in our church that I will pick up on like marriage break-ups and the problems that they have and you may spend time with them but they may just need to hear something from a sermon because our people have a sense that this is coming from God. There are some of our families that are struggling with kids who are on drugs. Some of them are Christians and really battling in that area so whenever there is something in the Scriptures that you can enlarge on I don't mind even going outside of the passage to enlarge on that theme if it is going to help the church and the people to speak about that issue they are struggling with. There was a time last year and even this time where there have been

a number of marriage difficulties, some partners have left and some are just hanging in there. So we spoke about faith and I had that in the back of my mind, just talking about holding on to God when we have nothing else to hold on to, when everyone else has deserted us. I guess it is just communicating in a way where you are in tune with the people.

When you give a sermon is there any particular way that you want people to respond?

I would want to see people not only just grow in the Lord, I guess that's a pretty general thing we want, but endeavouring to help people to be what God wants them to be out there in the community, outside of the church. It is an aspect of our history that we think the church is where it all happens. You got your teaching and then you went home, back to your camp and sit down and fill your time away with nothing. Now we get caught up in business but we still have a mindset that it all happens in church and out there in the community that's your own world where you do your own thing. I endeavour to push that what we learn here we got to take out there into the world where we are living. That's been one of my gaols to help them move forward in their relationship with God beyond just the borders of the Christian environment and circles. Its unfortunate that our conventions are patterned on the same mindset. People see all these people singing up the front, full of the joy of the Lord and then people go home to relationships and situations that are hard and they leave it all behind. "Oh that was convention time, or I'll wait till the next one, or we'll wait till Sunday." That is an aspect of our history that we are still dealing with, battling through, trying to change. So I have been focusing in my preaching to help people live in the community and in their families and be what God wants them to be there.

Are there particular ways, or aids you use, to help people translate what they hear in a sermon to their life situation?

Yeah, I talk about family a lot. The family is just one issue among many but it can be an enormous struggle. "How do I live out there? It is easy to come to church and be with Christian family but to go back to an unsaved husband, kids who are on drugs and the family is dysfunctional." It's a hard task.

How you spend time with people apart from preaching is central. Preaching is just one way, one avenue to get people to see that there is always a light at the end of the tunnel, there is always hope, getting people to hold on to God. There are families coming in now, you know the boy who was in the papers who died and all the things said about that, his family is coming to church now. The father who I have been just talking to slowly over the weeks is coming to church for the first time. But how do you share the gospel, how do you preach the gospel in a way that is going to help that man and the dysfunctional state the family is in, so they can connect with what you're saying? I've had to break it down sometimes and even point to people and say, "Brother, I understand your struggle and its good to see you here this morning." And that interaction is sometimes part of my preaching. Its not a lot and sometimes I think I need to do it a lot more. You have to be careful but you do know that there are people who would be encouraged and warmed by that. "I know what you have been going through and I am with you in it and there is hope and God has changed our

people and continues to change us." So to interact with people in a way that helps them and they don't feel threatened.

Do you think that because of your connectedness with the community you are part of that there is a unique sense in which you live your sermons?

In our context if you don't live 'em you don't get heard Sunday, that's how it is. I think that in the years gone by, in the mission era, and in other places you could preach something and go home. The missionary went to his house, closed the door and could lock himself away. Even my wife's experience of the missionaries, I'm not a product of the missions, indirectly yes but not directly, but my wife always tells me about it, and I learn a lot from her because she grew up in a really strong mission era, and how the missionaries lived behind closed doors and you had to go down and knock on the door to get access to them and then you would see them on Sunday. But that can't happen in my context. The values of trust and integrity and being with the people and belonging to the community and being a part of them can never be separated from the message. I know that when I get out of here I am living that message all the time with the people. I may be hunting with the guys and the message may come out again in that way. If you don't live it you are guaranteed not to be heard. You won't be listened to.

Apart from the content do you think there are any uniquely Aboriginal ways you give a sermon?

Other than the issue of including stories as much as possible, I think using the language, the way in which you speak, the words you use. But you don't want to simplify things too much and just feed people milk. That has happened too much in the past. You want to take people somewhere and move them forward. But matching the language you use to the educational level of our people is important. Your non-verbal communication is important. In our context Aboriginal people read the way something is said more than anything.

What do you mean by that?

The tone of voice, the way it is said, the intensity of it, the seriousness of it, the body language?

Are there particular tones and body language you are thinking of that are acceptable and people will respond to?

Oh yeah. There are tones which are offensive. Our people also are responding more to a sense of whether you believe what you are preaching. I always identify with the people that I'm a part of this struggle too. If I'm struggling with an issue and I'm going to preach it then I will say it. I'll say, "Look we are in the same boat together here," and I keep reminding our people that we are not perfect. That does not give us a license to do what we want but we are all struggling. In the role God has given me as a pastor and preacher of the gospel I am never separated on a pedestal where I don't struggle with things. People have said that, "Oh it just doesn't seem like you blokes struggle." And I say, "Oh I do." We have marital problems, we have conflicts, we have family struggles. I bring up those things all the time, we are in the same boat.

Identifying with our struggles is important because people warm to that kind of communicating. People can see that, sense that in the body language, in the tone of voice, in what you say. People will listen, they will say, "Yeah we know that." And they know our family and the extended family, the grapevine stuff and the connections outside of the church. They know the struggles in the family. But you won't be heard if you are getting up and preaching in a fashion that is forever condemning or slamming people with the Gospel, and that has happened in the past not only in mission circles but with our older Aboriginal folk there's been this style of preaching. We want to move our people in a strong way into truth but also so they can sense it in us in the way in which we speak. So we can use a tone of language where people know that we are angry with them and usually there is a finger pointing, and people can be used to that but you become like it says in Corinthians, a clanging bell. Just imagine if I spoke like that all the time, if that's all they heard.

What about use of indigenous art and symbols? For a while there you had the Gospel story in indigenous art around the walls.

We still haven't used a lot of that and it is still an area we need to work through. Some of our people are a lot more sensitive to it so it is an area that is going to take the next 5 to 10 years to work through a lot of that stuff – the expression of the Gospel in other ways and by other methods.

A younger generation of urban aboriginal people are in some sense reconnecting with traditional ways of expressing their being. Do you think that is important in communicating the Gospel to a younger generation?

Yeah, although the younger generation now know very little of those things so you see in the urban context more are becoming more educated and at the same time relearning their history and so it is appropriate in that sense to use the means of our culture to share the Gospel in other ways.

So it's a sort of catch-22 situation. Our younger generation know very little of their traditions. The stolen generation and my generation have been separated from our history. So we have a large group of our people who have been separated from that in their childhood and can't pass it on to their children. So to a lot of our next generation those things are foreign to them. But as they start to relearn that they say, "Oh hang on that's a part of our culture" and they start to appreciate it. So there are two things going on. For some they are becoming enlightened to it as they are getting older and some are still wary. Traditional things are obviously more relevant in rural areas or more traditional areas where people are used to it. I think that in the years to come there will be a move to look at some of these areas of being able to communicate the Gospel a lot better. I think we do it in an appropriate fashion already, not just preaching but sharing the gospel we unconsciously do it our way. So when Nyoongar blokes are all together hunting we are talking about the Lord. There are always ways that the people have for sharing the Gospel that are culturally sensitive because you've grown up with it. Some of my family moved out the State and lived in a white world for a long time and they came back at 20 years of age and they did not know how to react in a death situation. So if you haven't grown up with that then its hard to connect even though you might see it as important.

Some go to the other extreme and say, "Well I lost it all so I'm gonna try and get it all back and synchronise it all back into Christianity." There has been some stuff that has been pushed out by some of the denominations that have turned some of the churches to the opposite extreme. There was an attempt at one stage in AEF, at the AEF convention there was a big traditional painting telling the Gospel story and that was good but then there were some denominations that were trying to get an Aboriginal theology out of everything in the culture even into the spiritual world and there have been books written in that fashion without understanding and getting a proper balance. They just went to the other extreme and just enmeshed things like the Rainbow Serpent into Christianity and so it has pushed people back in another direction saying no that's not it and shied people right away from a good balance. But its finding a balance. From my point of view some people try and make Christ fit into the culture rather than the culture fitting into Christ. And that can depend on where you are. Speaking the Gospel out in the desert communities is very different from preaching it here.

Do you still think that the sermon has a place in an Australian context and in an Aboriginal context?

Oh yeah for sure. I don't think it ever should lose it place but there has to be better ways though that we can communicate the gospel in our preaching styles that better helps our people understand the Scriptures and God. I think that we are still changing over from an era where the sermon was spoken by one man, the work has been done by one man, everything has revolved around one man or one woman. We are still in a transient situation coming out of that style. I'm trying to be mindful of including people into the ministry through my connections with them and through my preaching style.

Do you have any sense of how those things could be better in terms of preaching?

Not a lot at this stage because I am still struggling with a lot of it myself and thinking through other ways and methods of being able to do it. The old style has a connection but it really needs a reshaping. It needs to change over the next 5 to 10 years. I think the structure and the way that we gather together in the churches adds to the preaching and the connection with the message. So I'm saying to a few of our guys, "Lets change the way we sit on a Sunday night. Let's get the people in a circle get 'em away from the stage up top get 'em down the bottom and just have some time together." We enjoy the sharing and that but lets get something more conducive to sharing and a little bit more interaction.

We have some interaction going on a Sunday morning and even on a Sunday night we have a little more interaction during the preaching. For me personally I use a lot of interaction in the morning and get a lot of people to not so much just respond to me because if you just leave it open you never say much and all kinds of things can come up that you may not want, like gripes and things like that. But one of the things that I have been mulling over and looking at is how to include people more rather than just one man delivering information. Even if it getting people involved in a verse, "Okay could someone finish this verse for us" or there were a couple of times when we were speaking about an issue and I said to someone in the congregation, "I'm talking about this on Sunday, could you say something about this right in the middle of the

sermon". So I ask them to say something. They are reluctant a lot of the time but there were a couple of times where people said yes. So I use that person to enlarge on what I am saying in a personal testimony. I could say the same thing about that person but I think that person says it better and it is better received by the people and it adds to the preaching. That is what we have started to do and I think it could be used a lot more, including people in the message through lived experiences. We do a lot at night time where people get up and share and they are free to do that but that is a sharing time. But I think that sharing can also take place in the preaching.

That sharing time on a Sunday evening seems a part of Aboriginal churches right across the continent and is something that does not happen so much in non-Aboriginal churches. Do you know what is the history of that sharing, testimony time?

Its only been there since Aboriginal people have really taken leadership of the church. It originated and came from the sing-a-longs. In those sing-a-longs you would have around the camp-fire in the old days people would be asked if they would like to share something and somebody would share something. They might not have even been a Christian but they would share their struggle.

Further to that it came out of the cultural practice of sharing together, where if there is a death everybody is there, everybody's got a little bit to say, to encourage. Or if somebody has a problem with a kid then uncles and aunties are having their say and sharing together. So that's a strong part of our lifestyle, sharing one with another. Its therapeutic in that sense. You don't have to do a lot of counselling to some degree. A lot of it is done on Sunday night where people are able to express. From our history our people have always been honest and open about their struggles. If there is a break-up there's a break-up, if there's a fight there's a fight. Some people get up and I think, "Oh boy don't say it, we don't need that kind of detail." But the detail is good at times because it helps them to say, "Well people know my situation and they are praying for me and I've been able to share." Probably about 60% of my counselling, or the counselling that I haven't done, has been done on Sunday night during our sharing time.

Not only there but on Sunday morning where people sit around and yarn and talk and share in that way. One of the other things that I am thinking about also is having a cup of tea on a Sunday morning with a group who want to talk and share a bit more about the word we've just heard about so that the preachings not just to the people but it is another time where we can sit down, and I don't think it will happen during the week, with the people so they can share that message together and what they don't understand and how they were encouraged or how they were helped.

There's the thought of even on Sunday night of having a time where we get in a group together and ask, "What did we think about Sunday morning and what was said. Do you want to say anything or add anything?" A lot of our people are still reserved too though they are pretty good at sharing and getting up there and sharing. They are accustomed to that but its strange cause some of the other ways of trying to encourage them into things they pull back a bit. Mind you even in the sharing time you get 3,4,5 of the same people usually go up there regularly so we have tried to change our structure for those leading to create other ways to involve other people.

To have youth testimony night, an old people's testimony night, ladies testimony night just to develop people's involvement. So there are other methods where the value of preaching can be added to rather than just a one off delivery from up the front, where it can be examined over a cup of tea and talked about and explored and that's where you can pick up on what it means to live it out there in the community.

So at this stage I'm looking at how do I get my people involved a bit more in the message. And it's not an easy one either because I know I've got the freedom to do it but I know I can shy people away as well by just asking the wrong questions. So I really need to do the work first and ask people beforehand to say something in the sermon.

That you have been developing your thinking in this way is that because of any particular model or communication theories or things you have been reading, or has this come out of your own experiences?

Just from my own experience. Just from the my own times where I sit down with the guys in the car going hunting and everybody's got involved in an issue. Maybe a brother who has raised an issue, "Hey Harley what do you think about this? I'm struggling with this temptation or desire. I want to be honest with you about this, I want to serve the Lord but I battle with this. What do you reckon?" Before I can say something someone else jumps in. That's an environment where they have freedom to do that, to share that and I may not even say anything it may be the other guys and then at the end of the day they may say, "Well what do you think Harley?" So being a part of those experiences is where you are helping and counselling in depth, where a lot of people are involved, although the pastor still has a lot of respect in the Aboriginal community, but there is a lot of people involved in that problem or in that death or in that issue.

So I think that in the teaching there is some way I'm sure from our own context where we can help our people be a little bit more involved in what they are going to learn. I think our younger generation warm to it, our older folk may be a still a little uneasy with it. But I got one of the old ladies to get up and share and she enjoyed it. Right in the middle of the message she spoke of the heartache she had. So that's what I have started in just a different approach. If I'm teaching or preaching on something to try and connect it with somebody who is going through that and ask them to speak.

So its mainly coming from my own experience of seeing the value of teaching in a group setting where people are involved sitting around having a cup of tea, having a yarn. And a lot of that takes place out there. We still to a large degree have this one model that comes from our history and that's working all right because we've done a fair bit of work on trying to change it a little bit, adding a story, teaching in a way that people can go away at the end of the day and say, "Yes, I heard that, I learnt that, I know what I need to do for the Lord." But I don't think we have fully explored a lot of the ways that culturally we learn. Getting other people involved because culturally everybody was involved. Obviously there were the leaders there, culturally that was the way. A lot of our people click into a leader, one or two leaders they respect enormously because that's our culture. But then everybody had an involvement in the learning process. Our Bible Studies are structured that way. We get a lot of people involved.

Probably in the years to come there may be different approaches. I don't think we will ever get away from preaching and teaching but we need to develop some ways that are more culturally appropriate.

You were saying that 20% of your congregation is now non-Aboriginal. Why do you think those people are coming here?

I think two reasons. One is they feel accepted. More than hearing the message they feel accepted, they feel they are part of a family.

Is that because outside of here they don't feel accepted?

Yes. I think in some places and churches there are people who just don't feel accepted for who they are, with their weaknesses, with the struggles that they've got. Some of them may have family problems that people don't understand and when they come here they find that they are amongst a group of people who have the same problems and struggles and heartaches and live in the real world. And they just feel as they talk to people that they are in the same boat together and they feel a sense of belonging. That's what they have when they come here. But also they have enjoyed the church, the preaching. We had a surge of people coming in from different churches at one stage and I didn't know what was going on and they were saying they just liked the preaching, that they wanted to stay true to the Scriptures. But they didn't last too long because that is all they came for. They came for a little while and then moved on. But there are the 20% who came for different reasons. Some of them feel that God has called them here to work amongst Aboriginal people and just a few have stayed true to that, most have moved on. Others have come because they found a sense of belonging and understanding and acceptance.

As an Aboriginal man how to do you feel when you hear somebody say that they feel that God has called them to work amongst Aboriginal people?

Well when I heard that of one fellow from Korea my response was, "Well I really feel sorry for you because you can't even speak English let alone understand Aboriginal people." To be honest with you I didn't think he would last because we have had people come in with this great thing of, "Well God has asked me to work amongst Aboriginal people and I'm here to find out if this is the place." And I don't get that excited anymore.

Do you tend to think that it is a call of God?

80% have a bit of a desire for Aboriginal people but I do not think it is a call. It's a desire or a bit of a passion because maybe they have read things or learnt things so they come along and say, "I believe God's calling me." But I don't believe it is that. They may have a bit of a heart toward Aboriginal people but they do not know us too well. So the fellow from Korea came here with no mission background or connection, no money, no nothing and said, "This is where God wants me to be and God will supply and provide." Now the churches in Korea want to tag him as their missionary. He is the exception he has lasted. We do get a lot of non-Aboriginal people who come

here and have these aspirations about what they believe God is wanting for them but to be honest, now I don't take too much notice of it initially.

I think at the end of the day my calling is amongst our Aboriginal people and that's my focus and endeavouring to do what is necessary to reach our people in a way that is culturally appropriate and non-Aboriginal people need to be willing to fit into that. And if they can't fit into that then it is probably better that they find a place where they can fit. I also want to be sensitive that if God brings non-Aboriginal people into our lives and this is the place for them then I've got to adapt to that and to help them utilise their gifts in this church.

And that's not easy because the focus must be on leadership by Aboriginal people. So we have a few times where its been hard. One non-Aboriginal guy was nominated as an elder, a lovely brother who had been with us for five years, became a member and then he was nominated. I say to non-Aboriginal people, "Look if this is the church that God wants you to be at and you believe that in your heart and we perceive that" then they become members and they need to utilise their gifts otherwise our church suffers. I said to the same guy, "I want you to preach" because he is a good preacher. He said, "I don't want to do that if it takes anything away from Aboriginal leadership." I said, "If you don't preach and God has gifted you in that area then the church is going to suffer. We want you to be involved." But when it came to leadership he was nominated by our Aboriginal people to be an elder. I had to say, "What happens when he goes to the door or house of an Aboriginal family and he says that he is the elder from the Aboriginal church and that he is there on behalf of the Aboriginal Church?" Their response will be, "Where's the Aboriginal pastor, where are the Aboriginal guys?"

I enjoy non-Aboriginal people coming here. It is a good thing. They learn and they see. But as far as being involved that does not happen straight away, it needs time to sort that out. Sometimes you realise that a non-Aboriginal person has not been here for a while because our focus is more directed toward Aboriginal people. We don't want that to be exclusive either but I've seen it happen where a church has changed from an Aboriginal focus that was ministering to Aboriginal people and now it is just a white church with no Aboriginal people in it. I guess that is in the back of my mind. I want to incorporate people in but not to lose our focus.

Do you think the non-Indigenous church can learn things from the Indigenous church about being church and about preaching?

Yes definitely.

I guess the question really is what things can the non-Indigenous church learn from the Indigenous church about being church and about preaching?

Yeah. I think some of the qualities of fellowship are things to be learnt. I think the biggest thing has been non-Aboriginal people coming Sunday night and seeing people pour their heart out. That blows away non-Aboriginal people more than anything. And that's been a real encouragement for a lot of non-Aboriginal folk who have come here. Most non-Aboriginal folk I invite to church I will invite on a Sunday night for that reason. I think they have a lot more to learn from Sunday night.

The issues of time and seeing a way of worshipping God that does not have all this heavy structure to it and time framing of 25 minutes sermons. The evening has more of a timeless element to it. We pretty much start on time but we finish when we finish and I think the non-Aboriginal church can learn what it means to worship God without time restrictions. I think to see the Aboriginal way of worshipping God and sharing from their heart is an important thing for non-Aboriginal churches. I think just to come and to meet Aboriginal people and see that there are a lot of Aboriginal people who are Christians and that they do love the Lord and have the same values as other Christians do in our community...

To break down stereotypes?

Yeah, to break down stereotypes that people have of Aboriginal people. I think there is a wrong perception of Aboriginal Christianity out there in the Western world. At times people somehow find it difficult to understand how an Aboriginal can be a Christian. There are times I have come up against that. The comment is, "Do you mean to say there are Aboriginal Christians and there is an Aboriginal church?" I say, "Why don't you come along and have a look, rather than me try to explain it come see it for yourself." Some people find it hard to believe that Aboriginals could be Christians, Christians who love the Lord and who can preach. They can't believe that Aborigines can get out of their own religion and their own belief systems and mindsets. That thinking has even permeated the church to some degree. "Are there any Aboriginal Christians, what do they believe, how do they worship?" are questions I've heard and they come up quite regularly. It threw me back a fair bit to hear that people could not picture Aboriginal people as being Christians.

Are there any other ways that you think the non-indigenous church can learn from the indigenous church and particularly in the area of preaching and sermons?

I think bringing more stories into the preaching style of today. I think generally speaking in the average church, white or black , there are people there who just want to hear simple truth and I think the simplicity of the Gospel being preached amongst our people has died in Western preaching. It has become more academically minded. That by putting everything together in the proper way the better you look in the eyes of man. But still in the heart of the Gospel, in the heart of preaching from an Aboriginal point of view is a message from the heart linked to our struggles. And I think in the Aboriginal preaching style a lot of yourself comes out, a lot of your own struggles that don't come out in a Western style of preaching that is more informational or educational.

Do you think that there are any particular Gospel themes that the non-Aboriginal church could learn from the Aboriginal church?

The compassion of the Lord, the love of God is a pretty strong theme in Aboriginal circles. We do preach on sin and repentance and judgement but there is a focus on the love of God that comes through quite strongly in Aboriginal preaching.

I think that many of the white churches today neglect the areas of justice and other hard core issues. The Aboriginal preaching style is not afraid to say what they think and feel about issues. They'll talk about the injustices, I sense that is with good balance because we believe that God passionately loves everybody, that he is no respecter of persons and that is the foundation for justice. So I think the Western world in its preaching shies away from hard core issues where the Aboriginal church would preach and bring those issues to the fore.

You minister in the context of a community which is low income, amongst the poorest in the community. Does that provide any unique perspectives and challenges in terms of what you communicate? Is there something there that the Western church can learn from?

The issues comes up quite often in our preaching. The struggles economically for our people to live are enormous. Generally speaking our people are good givers, that is a cultural thing. If the needs are there, people will share and look after each other. The old people here would provide me with a shopping bag of food all the time because you look after the pastor. I've spoken a lot about poverty, I mean Jesus ministered amongst the down and outs and the outcasts of his society. That element of preaching, linking Jesus into that lower socio-economic community always sits with our people. I think that element is missed out in Western preaching unless you are living in the slums or with a poor community. But generally people can think they have arrived and you might hear of one's responsibility in giving but the sermons will not contain a lot of elements of talking about those issues of poverty and analysing it.

Sometimes I have included in preaching things like budgeting, using our money wisely to help our people move forward. Its one thing to talk about money and say that is what you need to give or do with it but some of the people just can't give because they haven't got the money or they do not know how to handle the money they've got. Ministering in that setting I do not shy away from issues of giving because our people are poor or they do not have the finances that other people have. I believe our people want to do what is right by the Lord and even with the few resources they have. Even when I took on ministry I said that I want you to be able to support your pastor, not because it's what I want but what God wants. And they picked that up marvellously and they have given out of their poverty, like the church of Macedonia, to keep things going the way they are. In some of my preaching I talk about budgeting and it is a little more like workshopping, it's a cross between a workshop and a sermon. That's been helpful to say, "Say let me put up something here on the overhead to show you how I use my money. See I need to be a steward of what God has given us. See I give this much to God, this much to family, this much for all our bills. Now what do you reckon is the best way of going about paying those bills with this much money?" That is also a place where people have a little bit of input into the sermon. Not complicated but simple, down to earth language and people have got the picture through that way. The Western world rarely teaches like this, there is not the need, things are taken for granted. In our context we have to help our people, to help our people be wise in using the resources we have, teaching them in a way that we value some of the resources. We don't have much value for material things. We come from a mindset that material things don't mean anything. Money? Well you spend it while you got it. Financially we are better off but we are still paupers to some degree because we have not learnt how to utilise the resources we have. So some of my preaching helps our

people understand we are stewards, that we are looking after what God has given us, that these things are important, that our time is important without taking away from the idea that we just need time with each other. How we balance these things is hard for us, coming from our culture into an urban setting where everything is so fast and instant. Now our people are here and the church can also demand that we need to get these things done. We are walking a fine line at times.

MINISTER 'C'. Conducted 8.12.03

How do you go about preparing a sermon?

In this church we have the basic assumption that we use the common lectionary but over the top of that we do other series and it's my responsibility, I talk to the elders about it, but it is my responsibility really about the shape of the year and what series we do. And we have a lot of people here who would like to preach and we have a smaller group who also preach but I certainly oversee the process and I probably preach three out of four.

In my own personal preparation I am very strongly committed to applied exegesis, I suppose that is the best way to put it. So I would normally start from having a good look at the text. And by text I don't mean the American one verse approach but the whole passage, and spend quite a bit of time just looking at that and looking at the themes that come out of it. So I would normally after that consult a couple of commentaries. I sometimes use some online resources. And I develop maybe 2 or 3 pages of ideas. Then I look at that and say, "How are we going to structure this," because I preach from a sermon outline. Generally I have an A5 sheet which everybody in the congregation gets and everybody gets the Bible passage on the back of that. That's what I finally preach from. But I'm looking for the structure because I remember where I want to go from the structure. So it's not a three point sermon, it is whatever structure comes out from that passage or what the emphasis is for the series.

So you allow the structure of the passage to shape the structure of the sermon?

The structure comes out of the passage. And if that's one big point and a whole lot of development of it or three points that's less important to me. So my passion is - what the scripture meant <u>then</u> and what does it mean <u>now</u>? So that's my basic approach. My experience is that when you are preparing to do something God brings all sorts of illustrations, personal and others, to mind so that they then go into it. After I develop that framework (which I hand out on the A5 sheet) that will largely be an understanding of what the Bible passage is about and the application of it, whether the application is going through it or at the end. But for different series I will do different things, so sometimes I'll end with a thought for people to go away with to ponder. On occasions our small groups will use the message (we call it a message rather than a sermon, we try to get away from that word sermon). Sometimes some groups use those for discussion, sometimes we do a coordinated series using small group material that fits in with the message.

So for me I am looking all the time for, "What is the one thing, what is the aim of this message, what is that God's wanting to get across?" and in particular I am very aware of, "Has God been teaching me that somehow in my life?" because I think that if you're bringing a message that you have not wrestled with yourself it has less authenticity.

Is there any particular reason why your churches uses a lectionary?

Church of Christ, and this church would be on the left wing of the Church of Christ, have been very strong and committed from the beginning to doing things in unity with other churches and in particular the theory was if we all went back to the New Testament way of doing things we would all be one and the divisions between the churches would break down. So they call their history Restoration history. And so there is quite a strong emphasis on doing it in common with other churches. People here take pride in the fact that we celebrate the seasons of the church year. It is also important that you are not just riding your hobby horses because you are actually looking at all of Scripture.

This is the first church I have been in where we use the lectionary because I haven't been in the Churches of Christ before but because of my background in Scripture Union I am very concerned that people read the whole of Scripture and they read it systematically.. And so to me it gives a framework but I have in mind that that in February, March every year we do things about the church, we have a commitment Sunday that's about the New Year starting, that's about church life. In the middle of winter when everybody is getting down you want something that is about encouragement. We celebrate Advent so we are doing the four Sundays of Advent now. In January we usually do a series attractive for people who are coming around looking at churches and we don't want to be just marking time. So one year we did a series on spirituality in January. This January we are having a series called "Summer in Australia," so we are using summer themes that are around but it is kind of a counteraction to the Rick Warren material "Forty Days of Purpose" that we are doing at the moment. The lectionary provides a base rock and we can always go back to that. I feel free not to use a lectionary. I think I was the first minister here to feel quite that free not to use the lectionary. You use tools, you are not mastered by them.

You use the phrase applied exegesis. What do you mean by that?

Occasionally you will do topical sermons but on the whole I think it is better to be based on systematic looking at what Scripture says looking at a passage and I think the same thing about small group material. You need to vary it but its better to have a systematic study of Scripture. Then you are not just bringing your own thoughts or hobby horses, you are actually having to wrestle with what the text says. My passion theologically is what we called in 'Zadok' the "theology of everyday life" and for 15 years I wrote a quarterly column for 'Zadok' Perspectives in which I started from something in everyday life and thought about it theologically. In a number of places where I am now asked to speak outside of the church it is thinking Christianly about what has happened to people in everyday life that is my passion. And so for me at the end of a sermon it is not enough that people have understood the passage - they need to see how that connects for what they are going to do Monday. Another phrase we use is "Connecting Sunday to Monday." I was leading a group at an Evangelical Alliance conference in Melbourne in May and it was about how do we contextualise Scripture to everyday life. I just talked a little bit about some of the things we do here

and they were like revelations to people while to me they're just straight forward things. For example once a month we have someone talk about what they do in their job, we call it "Frontline". It has the function of people in the congregation getting to know each other but we ask them what are they like in their work, what are their passions, what are the gifts that God's given them in their everyday life. We are getting at how they are a Christian in that without it just being, "Don't steal the rubbers and the boss's time." And then we ask them what the challenges are and we pray for that person and the categories they represent. Quite deliberately we started with engineers. Actually, we started with my husband as he understands the concept. He's an [occupation]. What is it that God has called you to in everyday life? So that's the connecting of everyday life with the Sunday and with the Scriptures. So that's a passion there. When I was doing my doctoral studies at [seminary] I did a unit with Richard Pearce called 'Exegeting the Culture, Applying the Text', and we had to do a whole lot of analysis of TV programmes and movies and things like that, plus to use the same kind of tools on Scripture and to bring them together, that was his thesis.

So contextualization is an important idea for you?

Yes, yes.

Are there any other ways you do that?

I use a lot of personal, everyday life for illustration. I started doing that when I was writing at Zadok. Robert Banks started it and I took it over from him when he went to America. I remember the first time I went off to the post office and sent off the column. I was talking about something personal and feeling very vulnerable because Robert was good about talking about everyday life but up until that point you did not reveal personal, family life things in respectable academic journals. In particular I had a couple of knock-backs when I used to write for On Being. I wrote them an article once that had references to breastfeeding and they replied they did not have a women's page and so they couldn't publish it. That same month there was a whole article about dangers of men being on the road and the sexual attractions of being away from home. So that idea was that men's experiences are normative and a woman's experience was for a woman's page. Admittedly in those days the Australian newspaper still put all its social analysis type articles on a women's page. So for me the passion was for these things that were really important for me. What does it say, thinking about personhood, how you treat your body? Or where do your ideas about retirement come from? Or attitudes to work or how do you make decisions about how you spend your money? They all have a theological underpinning. So for me what is important is that connection to everyday life.

Is that the same thing for you as relevance, or being relevant?

I see it as more comprehensive than relevance. Relevance is you tell the story first then you have the application at the end. Contextualization is much deeper. It isn't just this is the story of Jesus, or the story of the Good Samaritan and this is how you apply it today. It goes deeper than that to things like the principles behind what God gave the Israelites on how they are to treat their land. So you go back down to the principles and ask how do those principles work out in everyday life.

So it is more than exemplary preaching?

Yes. Let me give you an example. When I was at [suburban church], before I went into ministry, I used to participate in writing a column for the local newspaper every week on an issue and thinking Christianly about it. We would take it in turns and some people would write a story and then add the Christian application at the end but I felt it was more important to look at the things that concern ordinary Australians and think Christianly about those. So Jon Sanders came home from his round the world circumnavigation and a whole lot of us went down and welcomed him through the moles at Fremantle. So I talked about the concept of coming home and that coming home is a very valuable way of thinking about coming back into relationship with the Creator, the Father. Or another time, I remember seeing my obstetrician in the days of having children and seeing all the gifts on his back wall and bookcase that he had been given and thinking about how fundamental it is for us to want to give thanks. You see these birth notices that give thanks to the doctor and the nurse and everybody else as if they were not just doing their job. And so think about that human instinct to want to give thanks, gratitude. And I remember Phillip Adams, who I enjoy listening to, saying that one of the problems of being an atheist as he is, is that you have no-one to thank for the good things in the world. So it is that deeper level of understanding what it means to be human and not just applying stories superficially.

So you are content to have more of an existential starting point?

No I find it much harder to speak if I do not start with a passage of Scripture. I am more comfortable starting with a passage of Scripture and then saying now what is that saying, how does that talk to us today? Recently I had to address a conference of office professionals. They told me there would be people there who were not Christian though I think that it turned out that they mostly were but I found that much harder to get my head around as I've got into the habit of starting with a passage of Scripture or if we've got a sermon series starting with that topic. Now that may just be laziness or just habit. I don't see myself as being particularly good in apologetics or of wrestling with philosophical ideas with non-Christians. Again that may just be lack of experience. My passion is more working with Christians or those disaffected with the church or particularly those at a point where they're suddenly entering into a deeper understanding of how their faith applies to everyday life. So particularly people in midlife or people in say twenties or thirties at the stage of having children when you look at some of those big issues of life.

I want to at some stage ask you about those disaffected by church but I do not want to lose this question along the way even though perhaps it is a small one. Is there a particular reason for calling the preaching a message rather than a sermon?

Only because the word sermon in Australian society has the thing about lecturing and rousing on people. I don't know whether you want to talk about the gender issues but I do think one of the problems for women preachers in Australia is what Anne Summers says: that women in Australia are either "Damn whores or God's police" and there has been that theme particularly in previous generations where fathers were not been involved much with their children, particularly with the moral side of the children's life, that they can hear a woman preaching as a nagging mother. I

don't think people hear me as the nagging mother but you are conscious of this all the time. And I don't think we have got the right to lecture people about how to live. Well we won't be heard very well. I believe strongly in the power of kerygma in the proclamation and that there is a power of God at work in that form of communication but it is not the only form of communication and I am very big on small groups and discussion and finding it there. But I also see preaching as having a role. Its just that preaching and sermons have more of those overtones than talking about the message. But I do think that no great movement goes anywhere in the world without it having people who articulate where you're going and how to think about it. It is not that the preachers dream it all up themselves but in a way I think it is the articulation of people's heartfelt need, you've helped them see this is what they have been searching for. So its not coming in with the truth from above but the role articulating where people are hurting or what they need to hear.

What is your concern with those disaffected by the church? What is your sense of this?

Here at [suburban church] we have the [ministry centre]. This is a ministry to the wider church. The board is made up of people made up outside of our church and other denominations. There is also a sprinkling of people who come who have dropped out of church life, who say they are continuing their relationship with God, who have a hunger for spirituality. They may say that it is church as institution they are disaffected by and also find here in [ministry centre] different aspects of community. So partly that's the purpose of [ministry centre].

I've also had contact with a number of women over the years where the tone of church life has been, if not paternalistic at least hierarchical which has disaffected them so I also have a strong concern for those, and we have people who come here now, who have been alienated from church society and other places because of that. But also because we attract people like that we have a number who are not happy with the sermon as a communication medium. When I was a Baptist I was involved in a group called Baptists Today which met once a year in Canberra. It was the radical edge of Baptists and I was there because I was a woman minister. (That makes you radical obviously!) There were those who were there for ecumenical unity which is not widely accepted in Baptist circles. There were the Aboriginal people and there were those people who were against church in the way that we do it. I would then end up being the defender of preaching in that setting because I do believe strongly in it. But there is also a movement now of doing church differently with a younger generation that's represented by Forge. I have son who is involved in that church planting sort of situation. They want to do it in a very different way. It is going to be exciting to see what comes out of that but I don't see how you can get away from the teaching, exhorting, encouraging, articulating function of preaching.

So preaching, whatever words are given to it, is still important to you?

Yes for me it is and in places where I have to defend that. In fact I had a discussion here last week with someone about it. Churches of Christ have a very strong doctrine of the Communion Service. And if you ask them what their definition of the church is it is the people of God gathered around the Table. Baptists probably say it is the people of God gathered. And they think that if you have the people of God gathered

you have to have preaching. So that in some Church of Christ circles Communion is much more important than the preaching and when I came here I had to adjust a little bit. This congregation are very appreciative of my preaching so they don't want to diminish it and occasionally I sometimes get comments that I'm getting squeezed out as I've had to cut down because time has run away. But many Church of Christ people, especially people here would say that when you meet around the Communion Table God is present in a special way, the same way when a person is baptised. So it is almost a sacramental view. And there were people here last week who were having these discussions about the role of the sermon, who were espousing what I would say is a sacramental view of preaching - that is when the Word of God is opened it is powerful beyond human expectation. Now I've never gone as far as saying that but actually I suppose that I believe that. The responsibility of opening God's word to people is an incredible responsibility so that has consequences for my own prayer life and purity of life. It has an element of when I have done all of my preparations, I still feel that what God does with that on a Sunday is an act of the Spirit. So I do believe that, I just have never gone as far as to say it is has a sacramental nature to it.

Recently I was talking to one of the older women's groups in our church and they asked what they could do to support me. I said, "When you come into church on a Sunday morning start praying, even before you come pray for the service, pray for the leader and when I am preaching pray for me." And most of them had never thought of that before. I said, "I can preach in some places and you know there's people sitting there praying that God's Spirit will be free to speak." And you go to other places and you can't feel that at all. There is a tangible perception of God at work through that.

So in a culture that is said to be anti-authoritarian and in a culture that says there are many stories and many perspectives, you still think there's a place for preaching?

Yes, I think there is a place for preaching. The culture effects your style, you cannot be lecturing or haranguing. And you have to be very careful about what you are going to be dogmatic about and what you are going to allow as essentials. There are basics that you're not going to let go of. And I work hard to help our older generation understand what it is the younger ones find hard difficult and where those things can be let go. But in the long run we are still going to say there is a meta-narrative. There is a Word of God to us that is revealed and that we can't be Christian unless we understand that. We had some one recently in a small group say that they had a lot of trouble with the concept of hell and heaven. She did not think there was a heaven after this life. A number of people jumped on her after that. But really what she was objecting to was hell I think. I'm using that as an illustration that the group was free enough in this discussion for her to say that and though people wanted to argue with her they were not ostracizing her. So you're wanting to create an atmosphere where people can say, "Well I'm struggling with that issue" or "I'm not happy with that." On the whole this congregation, and all the congregations I have been in have a very high view of Scripture but they are not going to swallow something just because you say a certain verse says it.

And for those people you have a concern for who are disaffected by the church is there any particular way you shape your message or your preaching in response to those people?

I think being real, that's showing you're wrestling with issues. The one that came up in the Forty Days of Purpose is the final purpose that Rick Warren is propounding, that of evangelism. He acknowledges and I acknowledge that people don't like the word 'evangelism' now and so we talked about mission. But I did talk about why people find it difficult to talk with another person about Christ. And we had one or two people say, "I'm interested in inter-faith dialogue so I even have difficulty in saying that Jesus is the only way to God." (I've summarised what they were saying.) Anyway, in terms of those conversations with people who are most disaffected or are on the fringe or on the outskirts of [ministry centre] that's not primarily my role and I would be seen as more dogmatic than some of the other people would be and I would see my role as primarily preaching to the people who are here. And I have a very strong role in leadership and the growth of the church but there are other people around who are better at that apologetic or those long lengthy discussions with people about where they've come from and helping them see that they are still on the track, that God is calling them, that God's active in their life.

What would be your intent in giving a message?

That God has insights for us in how to live; he has specific advice sometimes about particular situations; that he is the Creator and he knows how we function best. So the message is part of the total package on a Sunday morning. The total package includes worshipping God which is about giving pleasure to God not just giving us a high. Sunday morning is also about community, it is about moving forward as a group and I am very strong on those things being important and people feeling part of community. If we have to go on a big building programme or have some form of outreach or ministry in the community, then my job in preaching is also to lead people in that. So there is a leading function in it. But my own thing is that I learn how to live my life by listening to God's wisdom through the scriptures primarily but through other people and that's what I want. So the passion in me is hearing God speak and wanting to communicate it. There is a communication passion there. So if I found that this is a good way to live then I want other people to know about it. Every Sunday I want to say, it does not always happen, that this is an understanding of God that I've never seen before or this is our situation now and let's see what God's word is for it or have you ever noticed when it says about forgiveness that if you understand forgiveness and start working on that in your life it let God lead you in it then you are going to be a freer person. I see preaching as counselling writ large. I'm not a counsellor specifically but I see a whole lot of the themes that underlie counselling, for instance, coming out in preaching. And I see it as a way of acknowledging issues that a person may think they are struggling with on their own but when you address them as issues that you are struggling with or you know that other people have been then that is also encouragement as well assistance for people to put those things into words to get help or to share them in small groups.

How do you want people to respond to your message?

There are some formal ways to respond. We have some Care Cards which are collected after the message in which people can ask for prayer or make comments on. For some reason people in this church don't make many comments on the message on the cards but they will ask for prayer. More recently we brought in what I would call

prayer counselling. We have two people available after the service and now we have got some more rooms that when people come to the front they can go to. So we are looking all the time for people who may want to ask for prayer for something that may be triggered by the message. On the whole those things are not directly coming out of the message thought they may be encouraged by it. I suppose I see the primary response as people go home and work on it with God and that will primarily be at the personal level. But sometimes there are things to do with the life of the church and so I would hope that would stimulate conversations or would flow over into our small groups. I don't like using a lot of the sermon time to talk about internal church issues as I always want to be aware that there are visitors here every Sunday and there may be people coming looking for a need that has not got to do with the church polity. My elders on the whole would like me talk a little more about what is happening internally than I do. For instance the Constitution at the church says that I am to preach about the role of the elders three Sundays, or its maybe two, every year before the election and that to me is out of proportion to other things so I don't do that. And I wouldn't stand up and talk about the role of the elders as a sermon topic but we might choose a series around that time that would bring that out.

How do you gain some sense that your hearers actually are engaging, interacting with the message as you would hope they be?

This congregation, I can read congregational response pretty well, and this congregation in particular is very ready to laugh and sometimes you can tell they are with you because I use not formal jokes but almost asides or personal illustrations or something about my sons or my husband or whatever. We had a fellow minister start here in July and the first couple of times he preached he did not get the same sort of laughter and I told him they were a very responsive sort of congregation. But they were still trying to suss him out. They were trying to work out where he was coming from. So it isn't an automatic turn on. And I said that people don't write things down but they do give a lot of comments. Not so much on going out the door because now we've got the foyer you don't stand at the door and talk to people. But people will come up and talk. I said I don't have specific counselling ministry but people will come and ask to talk about things or they will talk to me in the course of other activities. My preaching doesn't produce a long stream of appointments on Monday of people wanting to come and work things through. It's a more general response.

Do you use intentional elements in the preaching itself to have interaction or draw responses?

I am trying to vary a lot more, sometimes using someone to come up and tell their own story. This last Sunday I read a paraphrased of a story of John the Baptist which I put into West Australian terminology, "It was the ninth year of John Howard as Prime Minister, the week after Latham had been elected leader." This is the sort of thing the congregation laughs at, they saw the joke in that. Occasionally we have used drama in the message. So I am actually varying it a lot more than I used to. That's partly wanting to help younger generations to respond. We have a couple of people in this church who are very good at drama but I need to get it organised well ahead of time and sometimes I am doing my sermon preparation on the whole the week before and sometimes I have not left enough lead time for that and you can also lose control.

I had someone share in the message recently and they went on for twenty minutes. You can lose control of the process as well. Yes, so for me it would be primarily I start out with how I would normally do it, as you do get into patterns and find things that work and I'm just trying to vary that from time to time.

Any sense of what you would hope that the church would be doing with you during the sermon?

We give people the message notes and so we are wanting them to follow the outline. That's because I think if people see the structure of where you are going they remember it better. Not everybody thinks that way but I do. We've decided to put the Bible passage on the back of the message notes. The net effect of that is people don't bring their Bibles quite as much but on the other hand you are all using the same translation so that helps. And I will often make a reference and you hear people turning their sheets over so they are doing that. You know that some of them are off thinking about something else and so you work hard to change the tone and things you do and the pace in the message. I normally speak about twenty to twenty five minutes. The service goes for about an hour and a half. If it goes past 11 o'clock its too long and so occasionally I will have to cut short. I'm not an incredibly creative person in terms of alternative styles and things like that. I am still primarily using, not a teaching style, though some people would say that my style leans toward the teaching side but I'm not just teaching, I'm preaching.

And what do you see as the difference there?

I see preaching more as moving toward a decision to change something in your life and/or exhortations, teaching as more understanding where this passage comes from, giving some background and saying why that this wasn't the same Herod in the John the Baptist story as when Jesus was born that sort of thing. I think those things are important and it is important for people to understand the Biblical setting. So I work hard to help them understand what the jars were at the wedding at Canna and all that sort of thing. Yes so I'm somewhere in between in that and I don't like using a pulpit. We used to be down on the floor here and we put in a platform when we did the renovations and I found that for the first few weeks difficult but I don't like being behind a pulpit and I just use my notes and my Bible. So I'm symbolically holding the Bible even if I am not actually looking to references and I use a lapel mike so I am free to move around and occasionally I will go down into the congregation to make a point or turn around and look at the Communion Table or something like that. I look free in what I am doing but I am not as creative as some people might be.

You mentioned before that you do not do a lot of in-house things in the message. Do you ever use what is happening in the life of the community?

Yes, either as illustrations or as the introduction to say why this is an important issue.

Any examples that come to mind?

Well, when we were doing the 'Forty Days of Purpose', everybody was reading the 'Purpose Driven Life' which is 40 days of readings written by Rick Warren, and he has a habit of copying Jesus' hyperbole, but he overstates some things. People were talking about them so I would refer to those discussions and say I know you're

wrestling with the issue, he sounds like he's into predestation at one point, I know you're wrestling with that and this is the discussion we had at our home group about that and so I'll make references like that.

The things I don't like spending a lot of time is issues that maybe the Board's wrestling with that are not part of that larger community group. To give two sermons on what elders are, when recognizing the gift of elders is very important, but recognizing everybody's gifts is important too. So we might talk about recognizing one another's gifts or everybody understanding how God wants to use them and then mention what elders do as a subset of that.

Oh yes, another illustration is when I go away to a conference I can come back with ideas and things and I'll talk to the elders about it, and they'll say to me, but you didn't tell the congregation about that on Sunday. But I'm not going to stand up there and give a report of a conference I went, which is what they want me to say. But I might say I was energised this week by a conversation I had at a conference, it is not that it is hidden, but I don't think a sermon is a place for making a report or those sorts of things.

But on the other hand when I was up at [previous church] we ran into a lot of opposition when we were trying to get a site for a church, and in particular, there was a whole campaign in the local newspaper of cartoons making fun of our church. My colleague, I was in a co-pastoral situation there, saw the sermon as such a high value, handling the Word of God that he would make no reference at all to those things, but to me what happens on Sunday morning is the community coming together and so you have a role in leading that community. So one Sunday I just said I know you're all really hurting from these cartoons and so I want to read you some verses and I read them from John 15, about Jesus saying, "If I've been persecuted you're going to be persecuted." I suppose I remembered doing that because I did it against my colleague's viewpoint because he was of another generation. But for me preaching is about leading the people and it's an incredible responsibility, but incredible opportunity for you to be known and heard. You have to be up front to lead and I see the minister as needing to be the leader in the church without being an autocrat. So I work very hard with the elders, with our Board, our carers, our home group leaders and those sort of activities, but there is an element that you are still the leader and that's relatively new thinking for some Church of Christ people. In the past the person who was employed was often called the evangelist going back a generation or so, and they were always short term appointments. Churches grow because they have a vision, and while I don't think the leader brings the vision, the leader articulates what God is bringing to the church. A very strong concept of leadership is what most of the churches are needing now and you do that as a good listener and as a good interpreter of what's going on but not necessarily imposing your own agenda.

You say that in preaching there is an exhortation or an application or a call. Would you always see that in preaching, would you always have an application or exhortation?

I would always have an aim, what am I trying to do in this message. I wouldn't necessarily write the aim first, but when I'm reading the passage, doing the background work, I'm looking all the time for what that passage is actually saying.

But you're looking for what that passage is saying to us here in this particular situation today so it comes out of where you're at and your interpretation of what's happening in the congregation and what people are saying and feeling. Nowadays I wouldn't actually write the aim down in words but that's my practise, and at the end of my preparation on a Sunday morning before I come here, I now have a habit of kneeling in prayer with the Scriptures and my notes and committing that aim to God – it is very focused. On the other hand you're aware that you're preaching to a very mixed bunch of people, so the tension is between being specific enough so people can go out and say, yes, I can see that that was what Jesus was saying, or I can see why that story was there in Genesis or whatever, and I have to do that or it should affect my thinking in some way. The challenge is to be specific enough without missing a whole lot of people because you've been too specific.

I remember my father saying towards the end of his life, "If I had my time over again I would preach more on the "how to's" and less on "just this is what it means to be a Christian or whatever", that is actually how to do it." So I think my inclinations are along that line to say well, how are you going to do this? Yesterday we were talking about Christmas, are you going to set aside some time before Christmas to let God's peace come into your life and give you something new to show you about the Christ child? Something quite concrete like that which a lot of people can try.

If there were texts that appeared to be more implicational in what they are saying rather than directly applicational, would you be content to leave people with more of the implications of the text?

To use some that had more implications than others?

I think at times there can be a style of preaching that squeezes applications out of texts.

That's true, but all Scripture is for our edification. There is one Church of Christ theory that says because we want to get back to New Testament times, the New Testament is more significant than the Old. Somebody said that to me the other day. When I raised it with the elders that said it wasn't a generally held view. I'm a product of the [Bible] College and John Olley is always wanting us to see implications of the Old Testament. Also, because of my interest in the underlying principles, some of Christopher Wright's writings for instance on living as people today has helped me., What was God telling them when he got them to not pulling right to the corners of field? Or what was the principal underlying the jubilee and all that sort of thing. I think those things are really important.

I write Scripture Union notes once a year for the 'Encounter With God' series., They're upper level readings and worldwide readership, and that's always quite a challenge. For some reason recently they've been giving me Old Testament ones to do, so on Friday night at midnight, I finished the ones I've just been doing on Jeremiah. And I remember once saying I hope I never have to write notes on Jeremiah. Fancy being called to preach to people when you're told at the beginning they're not going to take any notice of you. I don't want to be Jeremiah, but I understand the fire in the bones. But these were the last chapters about the oracles against the nations. I believe that God has preserved those Scriptures for us to

understand, so there I am with these chapters of Jeremiah. In 330 words I have to write so that people can get enough out of the background that you're not distorting it, but enough to go away from having read those chapters of Jeremiah today with the help of the notes with something to apply. I am committed to that as a process but it's hard yakka at the time.

Last year it was Amos, and the year before it was Isaiah, I don't know why I got the Old Testament. I told them never to give me the passages where Saul is called to kill everyone, or when they go into the land killing all the occupants of it. I really wrestle with that. So I'm committed to the fact that those Scriptures are there for us, it's the Bible Jesus read. For example there's the reference about all Scripture's inspired. It's a reference to the Old Testament, but you have to wrestle hard. But I do believe that God gives us insight. This time (on the last chapters of Jeremiah) those notes had a reference to some reading I had been doing about clashes of civilisations, September 11th, a Palestinian family in our congregation who wants to know why God favours the Jews and why the land is just for the Jews and not for them. Occasionally Scripture Union in England will take out my more topical references from those notes because they are published a year later. I remember writing something about Princess Dianna's death and that got taken out, and I think it was wise in the long run but I was a bit annoyed at the time.   But I really do want people to look at those big issues, why do people respond that way in grief to a symbolic death? And the big issue is about wrestling with the world we live in now, we are no longer an island paradise, we are actually invited to be part of the big world of terror now.

So it sounds like your application goes beyond just being pragmatic?

Yeh, yeh I guess that's true. For instance we had a September 11th commemoration service here which we did combined with other churches. I spoke at it, and I think those are really important. I was in China at the time of September 11th. I came back and found people quite shattered. Our Youth Minister had preached the Sunday after that had happened and he didn't make any reference to it. I thought that was his inexperience that he didn't change what he was doing for what was happening. But to me those things which are part of what's impacting people in the community are really significant to our being real people before God. Not superficially. I think a lot of the implications of September 11th for instance has taken us a couple of years to really think that through.

Every person I have interviewed has mentioned September 11th, it's quite amazing.

Yeh. It didn't have quite the same impact on me personally because I've lived in a number of overseas countries. We lived in Germany when there was The Wall, and the Philippines. A lot of Australians have lived in a paradise and have been very protected.

You speak of the importance of reading the culture and engaging culture, are there any particular themes or issues in the culture at the moment that you think are particularly important to read and to understand and to speak to?

There's the ongoing question about what we now call border security. We've been wrestling with it as a church regarding refugees, and we've had people come and speak about how do you help the refugees. The Government's given some of them visas but dumps them on the street, money for a backpacker's hotel that's all.
So the issues of what I've put under the heading of border security because I don't think we can also say you've just open the gates so I think that's a big issue for Australia and whether we are less moral in our national choices than we used to be. More recently I think an ongoing issue is going to be that the teachers in our congregation are absolutely overwhelmed by the behaviour and lack of respect of the kids in the schools that they have to teach. Our grandparents worry about that for their grandchildren and so the idea of whether a society can be turned around when it no longer has Christian values at schools, that to me is one of the big issues. Do we continue to think of ourselves just as a remnant rather than as main stream?

What do you use to read the culture?

I find it very difficult to use movies to communicate in messages because there's very little overlapping in what people have seen. So if I make a reference to the Matrix, you see the young ones eyes light up, but the older ones don't know what you're talking about. The one I got the widest response from was 'Bruce Almighty' because a wider group in the congregation had seen that and that was easy to make applications of. But I use them more to think through issues. I read magazines, 'Time', and listen to the radio news but I'm still listening to the elite end. I'm conscious that I'm not part of main stream Australia in terms of what I listen to or read and I suppose I've given up thinking I can be anything other than that. My husband doesn't even like TV being on so when he's away I watch a whole lot of TV to get a feel for it, but I'm not addicted. So I watched 'Australian Idol' because I was interested in what's going on there and the phenomenon and that sort of thing. I make references to that. I joined one of the playgroups here at one stage with my granddaughter and they got talking about 'Big Brother', so I decided I had better watch 'Big Brother'. As it turned out, I watched 'Big Brother Uncut' and I knew that I'd watched the extreme end and I turned it off of course, but I made that as a joke. But the young members of our congregation still tease me about the fact that if you're going to look at 'Big Brother' you don't watch 'Big Brother Uncut'. We can't imagine you sitting there watching that, they say. So those sorts of connections with popular culture in one sense are contrived, because I don't sit in that culture. I'm at the more elite end, but none of these things are emphasised. We don't use titles of people here and I've discovered that sometimes I don't even tell people what I've been writing or where I've been speaking or whatever and my Elders tell me that's naughty, that I at least should tell them what I'm doing. So when I received the 'Zadok' prize this year we actually decided to have the presentation in the church but then we had to explain and tell people what 'Zadok' was all about and we had the Director (from Melbourne) here. What I've learned is that they take pride in being associated with someone like this so that's community building.

But all the time if you're at the more thinking end of the spectrum, you're wanting to relate to every day life and I used to pick up my grandchildren on a Friday. On Fridays we have a friendship club so once a month I go along and do the "Thought for the day" and I would bring my grandchildren. It interfered with my going around talking to people but the leader of the Friendship Club is chairman of the Elders and

he said to me, that makes you seem more like us and more human. So I think I'm learning some things like that, I'm still not going to sit and watch the amount of TV that most of our congregation do. However, my family is sports mad so I can make lots of references to football, soccer and cricket in particular. I think those things are really important but those I would put more as illustrations and showing your connectedness in bringing up issues.

So what would you see as the essential elements, would you have a sense that these things are what's essential to the message?

You've got to connect, you've got to know where you're going, you have to be faithful to Scripture and you have to sit under Scripture in the sense that you're coming from that. But as part of connecting you're using illustrations from your own life; I use illustrations from people in the church where I've asked their permission but I often disguise a lot of other things. I work really hard to illustrate that a lot of people are wrestling with this but without betraying confidences and I don't think I've had any problems that. My husband is very tolerant so I can make jokes at my expense or his expense. So that's all part of connecting. People say about my preaching they understand it better than most preachers because I think they're just not meaning diction, though my diction is clear, but that I'm talking about significant theological things in every day terms, so that's affirmed, and they like seeing me as one of them. That's important. I'm not the younger generation, and I know that I have a particular slot in the culture and I try not to be too confined to that, but it would silly trying to do what a 20 year could get away with and so I encourage the two young fellows we have here on staff to do whatever outrageous things they want to do because I can't do it.

Any essentials in terms of content that are important?

At any one time? Well you're wanting people to go away with a better understanding of what the Bible passage you used or if you're teaching topically of where you've derived your authority from. So it's about authority and the use of Scripture is about authority. Why in all of the ideas around is this one important? You are wanting them to go away with something to think about or be challenged about. Yeh, I suppose that's how I'd describe content.

Now there aren't many women ministers in evangelical circles in Perth, so that in itself is a fairly big area, what's your experience of that been in terms of being a woman preacher?

In the long run I don't think it has many consequences. I get invitations to places because somebody wants to have a woman preacher. There are other places I don't get invitations to because they wouldn't have a woman. Because it is about authority that comes through gifting as well as the Scriptures, the position matters less today I think, and in some ways that's an advantage. One of the difficulties is where do you learn the skills? When a woman preaches for the first time in some ways there's more inspection, and I think it is significant that in most denominations the first women who were priests or ministers were middle aged or older. I think that's partly that to be a priest or minister, is a pretty buffeting sort of process and so you've got to have the support and life experience to help you with that. They will forgive a young guy who

is in training more than they'll forgive you and you make mistakes. I do a lot of supervising of ministers and I'm in charge of Supervised Field Education for the Churches of Christ so I oversee all the supervising of the ministers in training. And I remember that with one woman that I was supervising I made a mistake. I said to her that I'd just added up that day that I'd preached about 600 times in my years of preaching. I looked at her and thought, I should never have said that because she's just starting out. What was worse, it was a conversation about how you learn from experience. It was too big a gap between her beginning and where I was at now.

When I was a town planner I was a consultant and in the different stages of my work, one of the jobs I had in America, when we lived in Connecticut, was to go round the State for a year explaining some new wetlands legislation that had come in and the implications on the local community. And I got some incredible experience in public speaking and in making concrete and understandable some difficult legislation. In the wisdom of God I see that I had a lot of preparation in doing that. I came into preaching with the experience without having had to have that learning in the church setting. So I think the main pressures are for the younger women, and particularly those who are still in the child bearing age, that's difficult. But in terms of your authority to preach where that's theologically possible in that denomination or that church, it matters less.

When I was at theological college we used to have preaching class, and one of the students, as part of his preaching, had a number of us to read the Scriptures. He asked me to read the voice of God in that particular Scripture. In those preaching classes, students can be very rough on each other with the "green sheets" (assessment forms) we used to have. One of the guys criticised this preacher because he had a woman read the words of God. We had an interesting discussion and we ended up saying, "Do you really think that God is male?" And they had never made a distinction between the Father and the words we use for God and they really did have an understanding that God was male. So I think for some people it's still difficult to hear "thus says the Lord", words of authority in a female voice. But I think a lot of that's changed in society. I can still remember when the first time that there was a woman newsreader on the ABC and how strange it sounded. But these days you wouldn't think twice about it, most of the reporters are women, they're often young, and you get some very authoritative commentators who are women fronting on TV, it's not an issue. So I think that even that thing about hearing the voice of God through a women is less of a problem and we have much stronger value about being authentic, being real, transparent, communicating real Aussie. Those things have become more important.

Preaching has been predominately in the male voice so what does preaching in the female voice bring?

Well I have difficulty with that question, because I don't think of what I do as being more female than male, partly because of my gift mix is down the spectrum more in the end that's normally thought of as male. I have an exercise I do when I teach Pastoral Theology. I have a whole list of characteristics and I ask them to mark which ones they think are masculine and which ones are feminine. Then I ask them to mark down which ones a pastor should have and then I ask them to mark which ones Jesus had. Now that exercise hardly works at all. Originally when I first did it, maybe six

or seven years ago they would have definite masculine and feminine characteristics, you know, sensitive ones were feminine, nurturing were feminine, masculine ones were the leading ones. And then they would wrestle a little bit with what they should put for pastors. People have done some research in the past showing one the problems in Australia is the characteristics pastors are supposed to have were seen as feminine characteristics - listening, nurturing that sort of thing. So they would wrestle a little bit more with that, then of course when you asked them which one of these did Jesus have, they would tick nearly every one. Then the students would see the point of the exercise. The last time I did that, maybe in first semester last year, the students know where I'm heading and they don't put as many characteristics as either masculine and feminine, the dichotomy as they used to.

I don't even know that I'm more inclined to use personal stories or family stories than a male would now. I have some interesting dilemmas about dress, and I had an illustration recently to do with my mother, that I made some reference to her legs and mine and I decided afterwards that I went too far. I know some women pastors say to me they have difficulty relating to the men in their congregation as equals or for them being taken seriously, but I don't have that problem on the whole. If anything people take me too seriously, and also because of my particular gift mix I'm the one who leads up the building programmes with my town planning background, or I'm the one who knows most about the financial things and when we have working bees normally I'm outside working with the men, so I use all the opportunities I can to relate to the men in the congregation in normal situations. In the early days if I went to visit a couple they would occasionally assume that I'd be there to talk to the wife and leave the man out, but that doesn't happen here at all.

For women who may have felt or have felt disenfranchised in the Christian community, is there a perspective for them that you bring as a woman?

When I was at [suburban church], so we're going back 15 years or so, a woman said to me: "Because you are up there I feel better about myself" and I had to wrestle with that for awhile. It was about the time that a deaf actress received some sort of Academy Award. She said in her acceptance speech, because a deaf person received this award all deaf people feel better about themselves. So I came to accept what I had not wanted to accept, I suppose before, was that there was a symbolic function of being part of that ministry team. And certainly now if I go to a setting like the [Bible] College graduation and has all men up on the platform as its staff, I'm now very sensitive to it and I know that other men are and other women are. In Canberra I have some friends who run an annual service for people who are adult survivors of child sexual abuse and they say that there are some churches they could never do this and other churches they could because of the tone of what happens up front. It's largely to do with whether it's all male but also the tone of how things are done. So I accept that where women are part of what people see when they come in to church, which means up front, even though you know that's not the only area where people are ministering, then there is immediately a greater feeling of acceptance for women, or particularly for women who feel hard done by the church or where in extreme cases the abuse has been on the part of the church or where it's been a father figure that's been part of it. So I notice that tone or value and in fact we have people come here to this church because the women were disaffected in previous churches for some of those reasons.

I suppose I don't want to make a big thing about it, I suppose that's why I don't want to say you have to have women in ministry so that women are not left out because some churches have a problem that there are more women there than men. So for me it's an issue we wrestle with For example, if we happen to have on a Sunday, because we have a roster with a lot of people taking part, if we happen to have a lot of women up front I will remind the person who does the roster that we need a mix although it always happens that way because somebody has swapped with somebody else. But I'm sure that if it were all males up the front nobody would notice it, but if it were all females up the front they would notice it. To me what you're saying by having men and women participate together is in the cross of Christ there is reconciliation. The early church had to wrestle with reconciliation between Jew and Gentile. Later on we had to wrestle with reconciliation between slave and free but the hardest reconciliation is the gender one. I think we notice first about a person is their gender, and this is what God is working on in our era, reconciliation between men and women. So it's not about promoting women or their rights or it's not about preserving men's rights, it's about being seen together as being reconciled in the cross. And that's my philosophy of what God is doing in the church. So it's important that women be seen as well as men, but not the promotion of one over the other.

That sounds a little more than a symbolic function, that sounds like a real function.

Yes I guess so. Irrespective of what you actually say, the very fact that you're there says something.

The gospel as emancipation, would you see the gospel as emancipation for both male and female in the gender issues?

Yes, I think there are a lot of ways men have not seen the consequences for them of emancipation. In fact as we see some of the consequences now of so much having changed, men haven't been able to catch up, and if we're not careful they will be marginalised from the more real, emotional side of life because that wasn't part of their upbringing. They may feel like they've been asked to do things they haven't had any preparation for. Some of that will come with change in generations. The way my husband and I relate is quite different from the way our sons and their wives relate because of generational change, and [husband] and I have changed over time. I think there is value in having women ministers simply because you're saying that the church isn't the last place in which they're reconciled. It should in fact be the first place. I think it was Leon Morris said in one of his books about women and ministry 20 years ago, that the Corinthian church was bringing dishonour on itself because women were rejoicing in their new freedom but they looked like prostitutes with their hair down and whatever. We need to look at what is the church bringing itself into disrepute over now and that some of it is the treatment of women. I remember at the time the Anglicans were particularly wrestling with the issue of women in ministry, and my husband is a scientist and we'd often have dinner parties when scientists were in town visiting. If they asked me what I did, the first thing they would mention after I said I was a minister of a church, was the Anglican treatment of women. It was a criticism of church that the church had brought on itself unnecessarily. I think that's

what Leon Morris's concern was. How does this look in the community and is it a cultural way in which you're bringing disrepute on the church?

But for me the whole context is about everybody being gifted and everybody finding their own ministry. You have to keep coming back to that as the concept. We need each other and what we are demonstrating is in some ways like a picture of the communication in the social Trinity. A man and a woman look the most different of all the combinations. For example, you can have 5 people up on the platform. You know they're all different so if you're talking about the community of the different gifts working together, then it's just more obvious when you've got at least one woman there.

I have a few more questions. One of those is do you see preaching in terms of faith development?

One of my strong things is challenging people to trust God, that when you're in your comfort zone you think you can do it on your own, but God is always calling you out of your comfort zone into beyond, stretching you that little bit more, so I'm a challenger in that sense.

Fowler's models of faith development, Kegan and those who say there are people who are in different places along ….

It is an interesting analysis and I actually introduced Fowler to our Elders this year, and it helped them understand why they were frustrated with some people. I find it a mixed tool. It helps you to understand a person at stage 3, why they can't be more open and flexible, but because we're at stage 4 we understand them, you know. So it's useful. But I'm not sure I agree about the final stages. As an evangelical I'm not quite satisfied that you can be quite as undogmatic about the essentials of your faith as suggested in Fowler's stages 5 and 6.

How do you find their general ideas when preaching to people who are at different places? If you are wanting to connect and meet people where they are at and people are at different places………

Yes, the dilemma is you always have a very mixed congregation. I suppose the specifics of it, of understanding faith stages comes out more in conversations with people, or if somebody wants to come and talk about a particular issue they're wrestling with. I wrote an essay once on how would you preach about sin to stage 3 people and stage 4 people. At the time I was at [suburban] church where we had a big argument between the people who were into the peace movement and the people who weren't and it was very helpful to understand why the people in the peace movement (often stage 4) were a threat to the stage 3 people in the church. So in that sense it was a useful interpretive tool, but I'm not sure it tells you where to go with preaching.

In preaching to you have any particular ways of engaging with a mixed congregation who may be in different places in their journey?

Well although I said to you I like to think of the sermons to have a structure, and I'm wanting people to see the whole thing, I know that most people go away from the

message with one thing they've latched onto and so I actually work hard that they can have a lot of things they can latch onto. It maybe an illustration, it maybe one turn of phrase; like I was using definitions once of humility and I've had people repeat that back to me. All they heard really was an understanding of humility that helped them. So I suppose what I'm really trying to do is offer a range of things for those who want to think about big structure, those who want to think about a particular Scripture verse, those who find an illustration helpful. If at the bottom (of the message notes) I put questions to ponder that might be for somebody else or if I put a poem in. I also write an editorial at the front of our weekly paper which is often a tangent to something in the message so that it's actually reinforcing without necessarily people seeing that. So I suppose you are trying to use multiple things all the time, even though I said I have one aim that's sort of an encompassing thing.

So you don't aim for an "average"?

No, some people say you preach to a literate 12 year old. I suppose because I see one of my specialties is making complex things understandable and applicable, I like to think that anybody can grasp what I'm saying. So I don't think of it as you're dumbing down. I see what I do as interpreting, communicating, being what a good teacher does. Starting from where a person's at. That's really most important. One of interesting things that has happened is that the majority of people who have joined this church since I came here have been in their 50's with long church experience. We've actually got a good core of people who've come in here, some because they're associated with [ministry centre], but they come here because the preaching is not demeaning to them, either because of their academic background or long history in Christian things, but other people in the congregation will say it's understandable, they understand more of the sermon here than they ever have. So I suppose it's those multiple things that people take away but making it understandable.

Somebody said one time, I don't know what I preached on, Anna or Zechariah or something like that, and they wondered how many times in their life they'd had a sermon on that but that I always brought them something more to think about. So I do work hard at new insights, but I'm looking for new insights because I'm not satisfied to repeat things. When I was working at Scripture Union in the CVS programme (I did that for 3 years) some people would come along and give the same lecture every year and that was fine, because it was a new bunch of students. But I can't do that. I've always got to be speaking at the edge of where I'm learning. The person who taught us Homiletics at the [Bible] College used to say don't speak on anything that's too recent because you haven't thought it all the way through, but I think I'd rather have it fresh and bumble a bit, and so often if I go back to a sermon that I've preached before I have to rework it because I can't even remember what the illustrations were about because it was something very immediate at the time and unless I've written it out in full I don't remember what it was.

So you don't necessarily preach on something that you have a handle on?

I don't think you have to have it all sorted out before venturing to speak about a topic or a passage. Humility before the Scriptures is a virtue.

You said not wanting to impose, do you have a tension between what the people might want to hear and what you feel that they need to hear?

Yes. People may just want to be comforted and you want to put a bomb under them. That's the fundamental thing. Comfort those who are hurting and you want to stir those who are too comfortable. My husband thinks that I expect too much of people in that he says, you expect everyone to live the kind of life you live, which is workaholic, disciplined, focused. He is the same. I end up telling him that's the pot calling the kettle black! Yes, I'm always wanting to call people up, out to the next level of commitment and involvement and wanting to see God working in their life because they're really going out on a limb.

Any particular ways of addressing that tension between what people might want to hear and what you think they might need to hear?

Well I would normally start from where they are and bend over backwards to acknowledge where something's difficult for people, whether they're hurting or struggling.... Yesterday for instance, talking about Christmas, I acknowledged that a lot of people find Christmas very difficult, because somebody is missing from around the table who died in the past year, or there's somebody alienated from the family., So I will always work very hard at acknowledging the pain of people in situations, but then I want to go on to say that Jesus promised to help you in this. Or this is an example, Abraham left all his family and went out... So I think it's very important to acknowledge where people are at but not leave them there. One of the things I wrestle with in this congregation is what does retirement mean, does retirement mean you've opting out of life, or does retirement mean redeployment. I'm not satisfied to say at retirement that your life is your own. You're still disciples, still Jesus' followers.

Finally, if you were to express a hope for the Australian church, any sense of what you'd hope it would be?

Its about being relevant to Australian society. When I go to national conferences and things, I end up having arguments with people like Michael Frost and others who want to abandon the established churches because nothing creative is happening there. And I keep saying it's true that exciting things happen at the margins and the creative people are at the margins. But you don't want to lose all the loyalty, the hard work of the traditional church. So my passion at the moment is, how to bring together the innovation, the passion of the people at the margins into established churches. People like Geoff Westlake and myself often argue about this. Geoff does some very innovative stuff, but he said to me one day, "I can't even disciple all the people I've brought to Christ". And I said, "No you need a church to do all that." But they have to get off their butts and see that they have to give their lives to looking after hurting people. The people who are going to come in from the Australian society on the whole are going to be hurting. They'll be from dysfunctional families, they may have grown up not knowing what a father or stable steady family is about. They're going to come with a whole lot more baggage than they may have in the past, so the churches that receive have to be a lot more flexible and patient. As I

mentioned, I've got a son who has moved to a country town and is church planting with another couple. I'm on the executive of Churches of Christ, and we are trying to work out some relationship with 'Forge', a number of whom, like Andrew Hamilton are doing some innovative church planting. But at the moment they're seeing that it will all happen by being involved in the community and sharing their faith one to one and I think that's just still only part of the community. They may think we are too far towards one end of the communication spectrum, but they're at the other end and only one part of it. We all need to be doing it. My hope is that the innovative people on the margins; the article I wrote on this after an Evangelical Alliance consultation was called 'Postcards from the Edge'.(I thought I made up that title, but I've seen it elsewhere since so I may not have made it up. Well, it's now used for a conference that 'Forge' runs as well.) But we need to become much more innovative and what I am excited about here is that this was a traditional inner suburban church that's turned around(some of the turning around happened before I came here) because it's found its particular niche ministry which is [ministry centre]. But on the whole it is still a fairly traditional congregation, so the challenge is how do we own this peculiar spirituality ministry and are ourselves changed by it and also learn how to talk to our neighbours and to reach out in ways we haven't before and not just settle in and find it's a nice comfortable church, we all like it here, we're friendly etc.

So for the Australian churches I want see people find innovative ways to do things. That's not going to be me, my skills are in making things work in a structure, but I want to be part of those things coming in to other churches and turning other churches upside down.

Are you saying then that you have some concerns about the idea of relevancy or contextualisation?

Yes, about relevancy.

Do you see any dangers in those ideas?

Well I can see that relevancy is what your topic is about. Relevancy is a much bigger question than methodology and some of the critique of traditional churches is simply about methodology. Relevance is a much bigger issue than that. The relevance of your faith is about how ordinary people live their lives on their street, it's about how much they're affected by kingdom values as against society values. And you can keep working away at those in your church. But what I see in some of the people working at the fringes is adopting a different methodology but that they haven't got any more answers about relevance than we have. So my passion is that wherever people are experimenting about relating the gospel to Australian society, that it will effect all of us and we need it as much. But I see the ones out at the margins needing it just as much. I've been having a chuckle at some of the things that Michael Frost is doing recently, because he's doing some of the things in the Manly church plant that we do here with the labyrinth and things like that, as written in an article in 'On Being'. In the long run the Good News still has to be communicated and in the long run you've still got to create community, in the long run you've still got to show people that following Jesus is discipleship to the end of their life and those things apply whether you're at the margins or at the centre, and in the long run to be relevant to the Australian society people have to be called to commitment to Jesus and that's not an

easy ask. I think there is probably less difference between what's being done at the margins and at the centre than people see because it's about methodology and style, but the core issues are still there.

The core issue is still the message?

Yes and it's going to be a smell of death to some and fragrance of Christ to others. And the issue of that is how does that impact Australian society. Before I became a minister I was very involved in that and I'm still very concerned about how we are involved in the political process and all of that, but that's taken a back seat in my thinking now I'm in a church setting. My brother is an evangelist and so we used to have long arguments and because he liked an argument he could provoke me. He'd say the church is for the purpose of evangelism and I'd say the church is for the purpose of nurturing the people of God to go out and be God's people in the world. We both knew it was both of those things, but within Churches of Christ circles now there is a lot of discussion about being missional church, and it is about looking at everything we do in terms of mission. We need that corrective but you could be just as unbalanced in that direction and forget the nurturing, the caring, the supporting of people. I see those things from here now, the implications of that is more about the other things we do in the church rather than about preaching because I've always been missional in my preaching without being an evangelist and always wanting to provoke people to do more. But this coming year what we're going to do is look at all the activities of the church and say how are you structuring it, is it open to outsiders, do people feel confident to bring their friends. And in terms of worship services, are people comfortable bringing their workmates to them or are people feeling the gap between what they do in church and what the people they work with is so big, they feel like they can't bring them in. I guess that's an illustration of what I was saying before, the big gap.

INTERVIEWEE 'D'. Conducted 15.12.03

The interview began as we were talking over a cup of coffee. 'D' was giving a bit of background on himself and what lead him to be involved in thinking about church in fresh ways.

My dad was a minister. But he also was a missionary as well. He always tried to plant a church as well as doing church. I moved to [country town] when I left home. I really loved [town], but I noticed that there were a lot of people there who would just drink themselves into unconsciousness every Thursday night and I thought how can I communicate hope to people who don't have it. One of the things was just to keep an eye out for them but also to get to know their kids. So we did a youth drop in centre up there out of this old $400 transportable we brought from a mining company. I suppose I fell into youth leadership.

Then I ended up coming to Theol. College, although not knowing what I was going to end up as. Didn't really want to be a Pastor, not in the commonly understood sense of the word, not like my Dad had done it, because it looked too much like hard work. I knew I was called to something, but God was very coy about letting me know what it would be. Going through the Theol. College I learnt, I think I learnt a pretty good theological radar there.

What do you mean by theological radar?

So that I could tell if I'm getting off track here, or that sort of thing, what's kosher and what's not. Noel Vose, who was the Principal at that time, I remember him on orientation day, he was telling a story about, 'cause he was President of the Baptist World Alliance then, and he was talking about when he was in Italy and sitting down to a meal, and the MC said "the water and wine is free, but if you want that poison Coca Cola you have to pay for it yourself." So from then on I began to think about what was just cultural and what was really biblical. Really that began a process of pealing lots of things away. So even though I was being trained in the traditional system, and ended up a Baptist Pastor for 8 years, I was constantly doing that processing of what's core and what's not.

I remember towards the end of my time as a pastor, standing up in front of this group of people, that I knew were good-hearted people, but I also knew their growth had just hit a plateau, that people felt like we're starting to just go through the motions and I didn't know what else to do with them. I was thinking we're singing these songs, I'm doing this preaching or whatever it is, but its not really developing any of us any further than we already are. So that was one large motivation, (there were other performance-acceptance issues as well), but I stepped out of church ministry and went back truck driving which is what I'd done before I joined the ministry. I started looking for how can I communicate hope to the people who don't have any? I don't want to be in the church cloister, taking people up to a glass ceiling and then just hitting that and leaving it there, what else can we do?

I had no concept of what else we could do, so in '98 I went looking to the US and UK, looking at churches that don't look like church. I had these mates at the footy club

who I knew were interested in God or interested in their spiritual life and were even interested in Jesus, but had no desire whatsoever, an anti stance towards church. But I also knew that Jesus said that church was a good thing, so I was trying to figure out, well how can we be faithful to what Jesus meant by church, but avoid the baggage that put my friends off. I was okay that if there was a genuine conflict that they had to work through that but I had a sense that there was a lot of the stuff that they rejected about church was fair enough and wasn't core.

So I went looking for ways of doing church that really didn't look like what I knew and I started out travelling to look at two. One was a mate of mine, Andrew Jones who was doing something in San Francisco at the time, and the other was the Late Late Service in Glasgow and that was all I knew. But when I got to Andrew Jones he said, "Oh, you must talk to so and so". So I got on a bus and travelled there and travelled here and travelled there, and ended up by the end of three months I'd seen about 30 different groups and interviewed the founders at length, what drove them and so on.

So I got back and I'd really paired down in my mind what is church, what does church do, what's the function and then how can you flesh it out. From my own critique of the different groups that I had met, I had to work out well how am I going to assess whether this is a church or not. I ended up with 6 bones from the book of Acts that make up the church skeleton.

Two with respect to God, and that's basically us communicating to God, and then God manifesting, communicating to us in some way. And then the next two were with respect to within the group, and that was learning and friendship. And the next two broadly speaking, were with respect to beyond the group which were serving and explaining. I thought if a group does those 6 things then I can probably tick it off and say it's a church, no matter how it's fleshed out. So I saw a lot of groups that had those qualities and fleshed them out in quite different ways. So when I came home we were starting to think, all right how can we do something like that? What's good missionary practice here?

I started working for [para-church ministry] by then, so that was my day job and my gut feeling was that if the church was ever going to become a movement again, it has to stop relying on big salaries, big budgets and buildings, and has to become a movement of people and God relationships again.

So I had a day job and then had this voluntary level outreach. And from Luke Chapter 10, where Jesus sends out the 72 and tells them to go and look for a person of peace, we found a person of peace, found a lady that my wife worked with and she was interested in knowing more. And my wife said "My hubby knows a bit about this sort of thing." Well after a few months of chats, we offered, "if you want we can do a thing in your home, 6 sessions, bring your friends around, whatever, learn about it", she said, "Ah, that'd be fantastic!" Which blew us away, we thought she'd probably say, "No don't need that religious sort of thing," but she was really keen.

So we went over there and we did the core tenants of the faith and we used a simple method: There was a lot of relationship building stuff around food, we did a little bit of input and a lot of dialogue about the input, and maybe a spiritual exercise, like a

contemplative prayer exercise or something like that. We engaged them actively in the learning process and then she became a Christian, a couple of friends did too and couple of other people came and joined in. That was 'Tuesday church', we called it 'Tuesday church' because we met on a Tuesday night.

I monitored how the group was going from heart, mind, soul & strength perspectives. So as the weeks rolled on I'd just sort of say, "Ah, it's getting a bit intellectual, heavy on the mind part, so let's loosen up , maybe the hearts the weakest one so let's do an activity where we really get a bit of a hearty conversation going. We'll do an activity that gets people closer together." Or maybe it was a bit spiritually stark and sterile, we hadn't prayed much lately, so we'd make a night of doing something like that or if it had become a bit insular we get people involved in some active body process of serving somebody else or whatever. So just kept a monitor of those sorts of things over time. It was a great little healthy group, but not very big, only about 10 and 20 people at different stages and then all of a sudden a lot of people moved interstate and so on.

During that time we had a homosexual guy there, and he was saying that he really wanted to do something that wasn't too intimate, small groups are a bit intimate, you actually have to talk to people. He said it'd be better for some of his friends if there was some way in, where they could be a fly on the wall but access what Jesus was about. So we got talking with him about what would be the right kind of vibe, what do you see in your mind's eye, and he was talking about ambience, giving people space and so on. We started a thing called [Christian community] and had it on the second Sunday of the month. We'd start with a blank sheet of paper, depending on the topic would determine what we would use or activities we were going to do. We sort of found our way into an outline, or a pattern from month to month. But roughly speaking people would come in, get a cuppa, it's darkened, a bit of music going on, music from the radio, just depending on the topic. But then we'd kick it off with maybe a 'PowerPoint' put to music about the theme, then raise some thorny questions about that topic, read a Bible passage about it or show a video of the Bible passage about that topic and then ask some questions again and get people discussing and if you didn't want to discuss you just sit and watch the discussion which would get your thoughts going. Then we'd say, "God's space is on next", and that was at least 20 minutes of silence where you could interact with that topic between you and God. There were always a variety of options there, people could either just go and meditate on a piece of carpet; or there was a reading corner where there were selective passages or books up there on the topic; there were pictures around the place that would stimulate thought; we had an arts table where people could interact with the creative process between them and God. There was a prayer room off to the side with candles and the Cross and things like that. People would do that and then we'd give them a warning and call them back together and just report back maybe what they had discovered in that time about the theme. Then we would normally finish with something symbolic on the theme, then go back to coffee and discussion again. People would just linger for an hour after that. It made it kind of a late night but it was really satisfying to a lot of people for a long time.

But it failed in reaching the gay sub-culture because I think mainly because a lot of people with deep seated issues like that struggle to stay around, because of co-dependency and if they don't feel as if it's working then there out and then they're

back, so we found some of that going on, but there was another set of people that really gravitated towards it because they found it a deeply satisfying way to process their own journey, so some would hang out for a month at a time for the [Christian community].

But only recently we wound that down, mainly because we needed to put our focus on [suburb] increasingly. But also on reflection maybe because there were kind of two groups around [Christian community]. One was the group that would just come, the other was the group that would meet on the fortnight in between to discuss how we were going to do the following one; and that group really flourished in their own spiritual development because they were more actively involved in the whole thing, not just consuming the production of the night but thinking through the issues and what are we going to present and how are we going to present it and how does that resonate with my life; is it bullshit, or is it real what we're trying to say here. That kind of honesty always happened around the lunchtime table and the Bibles were out, stories being told and they were growing the fastest.

So thinking back, the difference between those two groups is, one were like consumers and others were producers if you like. So for the consumers it was like, instead of doing church like mainstream church and that particular brand of consumerism, we'd added pepper and garlic to it but it was another sort of consumerism. And now they couldn't go back to consuming non-garlic & pepper. But for the group that were actively engaged it was something else, so we now thinking about [suburb], how do we make sure everyone's engaged at that kind of level, in taking responsibility for those 6 bones of church life. Not wanting somebody to produce an environment where they can talk to God but they produce the environment where they can talk to God, they produce the environment where they're looking for what God is doing, they produce the learning for themselves, they produce the friendships they know how to work on their faith, choose who to serve and how to serve and they learn how to explain. That's what we want to try and generate here. So we've kind of gone through another evolution again, a journey there. I think [Christian community] was a grand experiment in fleshing things out in ways that we really liked, that rang our bell. With all that experience behind us now, we know a lot of different ways that we can flesh out church life, but here now in [suburb] we are starting to say again, now in this particular environment, these particular people, how can we start them on the journey in the first place, so they flesh out those 6 bones and help them to flesh it out in ways that are meaningful for them. So that's the point where we're at.

So we are going on an action, reflection and celebration cycle, we want to have those three types of meetings.

What are you meaning by that?

David Andrews from the Waiter's Union in Brisbane, he has given us a lot of heads up on how to develop community and so from day one when we moved in here some of those principles applied and we immediately began to meet people. Wasn't long before we were having parties. From some of those early parties we have started to talk about their dreams for the community and for many people floating the idea that may be that was very similar to the Jesus concept of the Kingdom of God and how can we bring that about. So we were already having empowering conversations with them

at that point, and we are also looking for people who would be comrades and can share our heart with them.

We found a few and we started meeting fortnightly in the beginning and that meeting has become known as "[community group]", partly because of the drinks, but partly also because there's two main aims. One is to cheer on whatever is good in the community, whether it's the image of God, or whether it's the mission of God in the area, (so we send cards, and letters and phone calls and emails just to say good on you, keep going to foster that stuff). But the other agenda is to pray for whatever is bad in the neighbourhood and sometimes in that process a no-brainer comes up of how we can act to help in that particular need, or how we can help to empower someone in that area. So we work on that too. So that's the kind of action group that has sprung up.

And then the reflection groups are just starting to appear now and they are peer groups, smaller, there's two being developed at the moment. One's a bunch of non-Christian guys over there; And there's [name] who just lives down the road with a bunch of non-Christian ladies down there, (and so I'm kind of coaching her a little bit how to do it, finding out as I go along with the men how to do it.) We've had conversations, the fellows and I, about how men can so easily get isolated with the surface level conversation and maybe we need some mates who know each other better than that who we can turn to in a pinch - and they've all really resonated with that. So that's about reflecting on how we are going in our life, and it's a mutual thing, but when they hear me reflect, obviously I'm coming from a framework that is quite Jesus centred so they can pick up on some of that and so hear how I think. So it's peer coaching that I'll teach them to do, for my own sake as well, but it's also evangelism as well. Anyway, so that's the reflection part.

Then the celebration one is a big all-in community meeting where anyone's invited and we just celebrate what's good or commiserate with what's bad, we hear the stories of the community, bang that up against the stories of faith that give hope and faith in people, (so that's the Bible stories), celebrate those and have a meal. How we present those Bible stories has to be interactive. We're thinking how do we do it with kids in it and how do we do it engaging those people in the peer groups. We're getting that learning process going on that was part of the in-group in Second Sunday Session. So that's all open for us at the moment, we haven't cracked it yet. We've run a few pilots but we are still sorting it out.

People ask us who's [community group], what's [community group], is it a church? We say no it's a community movement coming from a Christian base: that's how the Government sees us, the local Government knows that we're here. We don't advertise but seems like everyone in the suburb is dying to know who [community group] is. We defy some of the categories people expect. Although we would say it is a legitimate substitute for church, as an ecclesia would be.

Any particular changes in how you've understood learning in the context of Christian community over the years? Is there kind of a before and where are now story to that?

Yeh, definitely. I guess I came from a framework that was about if you could just

teach people and put it clearly enough in so many words and they grasp what you were saying, well then they've learnt it and then they could just go away and put it into practise in their life. What I've discovered is, even if you managed that, they need a whole lot of coaching, whole lot of trial and error, a whole lot of processing, they've got previous ways of thinking about it that they need to undo; all that's going on. People learn in lots of different ways; reason, authority, experience and revelation, so Reason was the paradigm I was coming from in the beginning, make it clear and they should get it – that's the end of the story.

But there's experience too, they need to try it before they believe it and sometimes they need to try and fail, try and fail before they succeed – it's just like windsurfing. The authority method, I never was really too strong on; I believe in the authority of the Bible but I don't expect people are just going to nod their heads just because it says. I think people will go and look for "how does that make sense?", before they are going to take it on board.

Revelation of course is the inspiration part, God inserts it, and you get a sense "ah, that came from God," so away they go.

Another paradigm is the heart, mind, soul strength thing again. People learn in all those different of ways – kind of holistic I guess.

What's the strength element in the heart, mind, soul, strength idea?

Include your body, do something about it.

So the physical, sensual element?

Yes. And also action. My journey really reflects a lot of experiments in those different types of learning, for myself as much as for other people, as a communicator of truth. But I know I'm a walking paradox, because I work for [para-church ministry], their main feature is group gospel presentations. But even with [para-church ministry], they do use a wide range of media in their presentations so that's good. They've also been quite happy for me to take 20% of my time and work on 'Re-frame' and bring 'Forge' to WA, helping people to do evangelism through their relationships, because relationships use all those four different types of learning.

So you still work for [para-church ministry]?

Yeh

And is that still based in [church]?

Yeh.

So you trek?

Once a week. I have an office here.

So how do you deal with that paradox in your own work, or do you see it as a

variety of mediums?

Yeh, my work with [para-church ministry] provides one method for one moment for people at different times. But I really strongly encourage them that this isn't going to do it. This one presentation needs to be part of a bigger picture and most people readily get that. It's not that many now, that say "Come do evangelism – make more Christians for me". (I did get that the other week; this lady came up and said, "Hi, it was really great what you said this morning. This is my son's friend David or whatever. He's not a Christian." And she stood there just waiting for me to do it to him, you know. And I said, "Where do you come from?" and started to get to know him and just left it at that. I was embarrassed for him.)

In all of that has there been any kind of developments or shifts in your understanding of preaching or the place of preaching?

It has a small role – where you get permission to speak, you do need that platform, where the unspoken contract is, "you talk for awhile, we'll shut up and listen and you give us a chunk of info for us to chew over." But for me now very much, it is "for us to chew over."

There's a big difference between (on one hand) audiences where that's happening, where I say I'm going to do this but then after it's question time, or even during if I've said something that's not clear; if people are actively engaged in the learning process in preaching, which is quite fine. But (on the other hand) there is another group that you go to and they're just used to passively letting it wash over them, and its just like talking to thin air. Not exactly, because you can see them ticking theological boxes and saying yeh, I agree with that, are yeh that's good. But that's it, and you know that by lunchtime they would have forgotten everything you've said for all intents and purposes, and it's probably not going to make much difference in their life. That's largely because preaching for them is the be all and end all of learning – and it's just not sufficient. Whereas when it's seen as part of an active process, where here is a chunk of info but now you have to do some work with it, not just in the conversation and dialogue afterwards, but then that dialogue has to relate to your experience, so then you're going to try it out in your experience or whatever the themes are you're going to look for it in your experience or whatever. Then that's okay, there's a place for it.

Do you have ways of being intentionally dialogical in what you do, and how do you go about being dialogical in content?

In [Christian community] we'd get our heads around the topic and come up with what are the thorniest issues in this topic. Then pose questions around those, have a few ideas and answers up our sleeve, but really make them struggle and sweat on the idea, and that was the input. Then of course there were the "Godspace" times, in which people reflected on the topic more deeply, through different types of intelligences (art, contemplative, words/reading, nature, body) etc.

Whereas if its more of a typical church context or a lecture type context I'll say up front "I want you to stop me and ask as I go along", or I'll stop during the talk if I know that here's a point that I have just made that really needs some processing now rather than later because they would've forgotten by then. I'll stop and say, "Alright

in little groups of 3 come up with" – and I'll ask them a direct question. Sometimes I will have done a presentation and say, "Right now before I ask you some questions, are there points for clarification?" If there aren't then I ask open questions. I have 6 up my sleeve that I can always ask, you know, "What did you like best about what you heard today?, What did you like least about it?, What did you not understand", and already those 2nd & 3rd questions make people have to apply it. "I didn't like this because ...I don't find it works, or ..." They're already into that nitty gritty of learning. "What did you learn about God", "What do you have to do about it?" "What's the main thing you take home today?" So those 6 questions are always in the back of my brain in case the group isn't very responsive.

Is there any particular way that you frame the content or speak the content that's dialogical? I could imagine that you could speak information and then ask those questions. Is there a way to present the actual content of it that has a dialogical nature to it?

Yeh, there's a few. One as I say is the [Christian community] approach where we begin by floating the questions and just to-ing and fro-ing around the group constantly redirecting rather than us answering it, banging it around, giving them a few hints as the conversation goes on. But that's mainly word based. Mind you the topic was also floated with pictures and music on PowerPoint. Or a labyrinth was also a well-received method of a more contemplative nature.

There are some other presentations that I'll do where I get them engaged in an activity and then debrief the activity, then another part of the activity, debrief that and just do that to-ing and fro-ing. A church asked me to speak on servanthood so got the group and brought about 10 buckets and things and we looked at Jesus washing feet. So there was a group that were the washees, and a group that were the washers, and a third group that were the creative servants, and so then we were processing how the washees felt without being served, how the servants felt, the topsy turvy values of Jesus started coming out. It actually felt good because various learnings like that were coming up from the activity & experience itself.

That's one way in the more typical preaching context, but there's other ways of learning outside of that which are more to do with coaching, like our peer group stuff where there's not any preaching at all. It's more about trying to find, in theological terms, trying to find Jesus' next step for you. Because when Jesus said "go" in the New Testament, he put a rider on it and it was different for every person - go home, leave home, give all you have, half is fine. Different for each person, so trying to find out what Jesus' "go" means for each different person is coaching, helping them to find that.

There's a few ideas in what coaching is, what's your understanding?

It's trying to help people discover that for themselves, rather than me deciding what it is and by sophic questioning making them come to the conclusion I'd already pre-decided. It's really helping them assess where their life's at, what they want to change, why they want to change, what they feel is right and good, why is that. Just constantly helping them find it; and often the conversation will go in a different direction you thought it would and ends up still a satisfying image of God answer.

Is there a place that you are wanting people to come to that you do have in your mind?

Ultimately, ultimately I want them to have an allegiance to Jesus and have them discover that not only his way is best but that the relationship with him is best, because you get a more holistic encounter with the living God that way.

Have you ever found it as a point of tension, that on the one hand you say you have no end game, but on the other hand we do have an end game, we do have a kind of a meta-narrative?

Absolutely. It is a tension. I suppose being aware of the tension is the only way I can live with it, because I don't want to taint the relationship by saying, "I'm only your friend so that you'll get to that". And that's not true, I've come to love these guys already and that's a separate issue almost. I just love these guys full stop. But on the other hand, because I love these guys I desire them to grow and develop and have that spiritual awakening that I know. And everybody, if they want the best for somebody will have some desire for them and that happens to be how our minds are framed. So, as relativistic as people say they are – they're not. Everybody has a dream for people.

You mentioned before the question of authority, the authority of the Word. There are those who speak of the need for an authoritative proclamation or a prophetic witness, those places where there is a "Thus saith the Lord" kind of message. How do you understand this?

For me, when it comes to prophecy how I think about it is, that you hold the nail but the Holy Spirit hammers it home. So the good prophetic people I know are the ones who will say "You know, I get a hunch that God might be saying this to you", and they'll float it, and if they're right and if they're truly moving in the prophetic, it hits home. You know, people go "Yeh, your right, exactly" and it's a revelation for them, bingo it's all happened. But it's the Spirit who's nailed it home.

What about the prophetic as cultural witness, a prophetic voice like a John Smith?

Yeh, I think there is a place to stand up and say "Woo, this is bad". And we've done that here in [suburb], the Government wanted to shut down the local school; that would have been diabolical here, so we started saying "Well how would Jesus approach this?" There were lots of things about forming working relationships "with the enemy" (the Govt.) to see how far we could go that way, rather than demonising people, or polarising them, and it ended up that it worked. So we won and retained the school, so good news.

Obviously not everything in the world is good and you do have to say "Woo" at some time or another. If you have the platform to speak strongly about that, then speak strongly about that. If you don't have the platform to speak strongly about that, you might be doing more harm than good, so think carefully about how you're going to approach it.

Contextualisation seems to be a fairly big idea for you, do you think in the Australian culture there are particular issues, or particular aspects of the culture that need to be engaged with and the Christian community or the church is not seeing or connecting with?

Yeh, probably about 80% of the Australian society. I suppose in that way I am post-modern, in the sense that I view modernism as an experiment that didn't really work too well, but I'm not quite sure on what the "post" is. (Mind you I have got some clues.) But the church has, well the evangelical church, that's the one I know best, has been a bit too narrow in its forms, so there's large tracks of the Australian population who don't want to set up a co-dependent relationship with the church, they don't want to sing those types of song, they don't want to become cloistered away from the rest of their community and become a subset who only meet with each other. And I think they're mostly right.

So the church has to find ways of engaging people without isolating, without tearing them away from the fabric of the society they're a part of. That doesn't mean they don't critique that fabric, help them to delineate what's the image of God and what's sin. You don't have to tear, you can transform.

So I reckon that's a large percentage of Australian people, who haven't been meaningfully engaged. The lawnmowers of Australia are a problem: (Walt Disney once said there are three types of people, well poisoners, lawnmowers and life enhancers. Well poisoners, are people for whatever reason probably pain in their life, damage the community they live in, by vandalism or violence or whatever. The lawnmowers in suburbia that's the biggest group, they just come home, pay their taxes, mow the lawn, keep their head down, go off to work, come home. That's it. Don't really engage helpfully in the community. Then there's life enhancers who do that; reach out beyond themselves and help build relationships.) I think lawnmowers is a pretty big section of the community that the church, if it recalibrated, could help tease out of their little hovels and reintroduce to their community again. We've seen that here in [suburb] people who describe themselves as self confessed homebodies – "We don't get out much, don't have many friends." Just the other week this guy , tattoos everywhere, mullet, VB, you know the whole picture, and he's saying to me "We're homebodies – we don't get out very much but we've been thinking we should, we want to catch up with you guys more", and then I was talking about [community group] and taking action to help people who are unable. He said, "Well, if anyone ever needs any sort of general labouring or anything I can do that, let me know." So he's becoming a life enhancer, he's made a shift, a significant shift for that guy and his family.

So how do you seek out the lawnmowers?

You just got to reach out to them, respectfully persist, cheer the image of God you see in them, build a relationship.

You've got to initiate the connection?

Yeh, you've got to cross the street. You've got to find legitimate ways to meet them that don't smell of manipulation. If you happen to live next door wave when you see

them, it's a coincidence that there out there so wave and ask "how are you going" and start where you can. When you bump into them down the shops don't just go by, say "Hey, I saw you the other day", get it going, learn how to do that. I reckon what we've found, a lot of people are more open to the Kingdom of God than we thought. Then talk about their dreams...

Any other critical aspects of Australian culture or what's happening in Australia that the church misses?

It's kind of an odd question because my brain goes how was I before when I was working within the church cloister, and how am I now. When you ask that question it's almost like every level of society. We should be meaningfully engaging in all of the community conversations. What's going on with movies, what's happening down at the beach, in local government, residence associations, where the teenagers are, hanging around the bus stop. Wherever there is a group of people who don't have contact with the body of Christ yet, that is through just living, breathing Christians, then that's the group you've got to reach and that's a big percentage. Northbridge, Goths, punks, surfers, skates, schools, wherever. The church by and large misses everybody outside the church.

Do you think that there is an argument to say that the Church quite accurately reflects a lawnmower mentality?

Yeh.

We are primarily a conservative suburban people and our churches reflect a kind of conservative suburbanness?

Yep.

So there is something about that kind of contextualisation that you wouldn't be an advocate of?

Yeh that's right, because there are many features of that kind of lifestyle that I think Jesus wants to undo. So the role of contextualization isn't the same as syncretism, just buy into it all. You learn the language that's going to best connect so that they can start to see what Jesus was on about and therefore what he wasn't on about. So that some self-reflection can go on and people can start making changes where that's needed.

By crossing the street or saying hello (not gate-crashing their lives, but respectfully), we're actually critiquing that isolationist part of lawn-mower culture. But we also tap into their dreams for a loving community. And we affirm the good that is there, so we can have permission to show the better Way of Jesus.

Not everybody is going to become part of a Forge or a Reframe kind of paradigm or perspective, there a lot of people are going to stay in a kind of conservative, suburban church context. Are there particular things that you would want them to either learn from yourselves or get a hold of?

Yeh, definitely. I'd want them to learn some relationship skills, some community development skills. They could still be a part of your normal suburban church, but taper down the amount of involvement with just church people, and increase your involvement with the community.

Nothing has to change in the church structure, but maybe the degree to which church people are swallowed up by it has to change. So you can still go to church on Sunday morning, still have your home group, but learn how to meet your neighbours, go to your residence association and learn how to take those conversations one step further or two steps further, learn how to actively love and engage and become those "called out ones who develop the community at large" towards the Kingdom of God (ecclesia). Learn those sorts of skills, and I'm not trying to dismantle your church, I'm trying to get you out of it to become yeast in the dough for God.

You're asking them to be the church?

I'm asking them to be Christ's "ekklesia". Look up 'ekklesia' in the Greek Lexicon. Then compare to church in the English dictionary. You'll wonder how they ever chose to use the word church to translate ekklesia. Try doing a word search for church. Then substitute "community development movement" (= ekklesia), and re-read those passages. It's wonderfully different.

Any other things you might want the churches as they are to learn?

There are going to be some difficult calls made about the nature of some of the things they do probably. Like, churches need to start to become ekklesias in their areas again.

Consumerist mentality will be one, so again you don't have to change your practise, but do have to change the way you engage with that. You might really love the songs, that moment where you're singing a song and you just feel swept up by it. Call that worship, maybe you need to become aware that could be just consumerism of someone else doing it for you, and it could be quite a narrow definition of worship, learn that God is at work in all the world around you and not just a Sunday at that psycho-spiritual moment. And learn to see where God is at work in other people and where God's at work in nature, where God's at work in cultural expression, where God's at work in those odd moments in life that you wouldn't have taken notice of otherwise, see the miraculous under your nose. Yeh, I'd like people to recognise those things.

I've seen a lot of people who have been in the church and have now moved away, who have grown up with a propositional truth gospel, and have assumed that that is *the* truth, and in a culture where there are a lot more stories and a lot more other narratives and questionings of pre-existing narratives they've come to a position that is not even about, "Oh, we don't like this particular way of church, or this form church." Their questions are actually more significantly existential and more about the core of the faith. Rather than, "I want to be church in a different way," it's actually, "Do I want to be a part of this at all?" Do you have any sense of connecting with those people in what you are about, or what you want to do with that significant group of people?

Again, that heart, mind, soul, strength paradigm. One of the post-modern things has been in its negative frame, has been to toss out the whole educational sort of intellectual side of it and go with the more relativistic experiential stuff and I think the flaw in modernism was that it was reductionist, not that it was entirely wrong but it was a reduction and it all comes down to the mind. So to throw out the mind in favour of other things is an equal mistake.

There is a place for sitting down and having a good hard think and bringing a meaningful connection between your world view, the way you think about this and the way you interpret it and your experience, your spiritual life, the heart. Get the heart, mind, soul, strength together, integrated. In fact Paul H Ray has done a massive body of research, 100,000 Americans, the American Life Survey. And the significant group that he's uncovered, 24% of the American adult population, is what he calls the integral group. And they're people who've started doing that. They're trying to integrate their various ways of being. That's where we'll try to take people, whatever their background.

What about those people who may be refugees from church, who want to come to a place and just be fed and offered new water?

We haven't offered to carry them, we haven't spoken in a language that's said, "If you keep coming here you will get what you need to survive," we haven't said that. We've said, "that Jesus is the one, that relationship with Jesus is what grows you and develops you, how are you going to foster that? If you get fed at other places as well, whatever, then great. But you need to find those things. We might help you engage holistically, but you have to do it yourself.

People have asked us, coming out here to [suburb], "You're doing great work, but who nurtures you?" For us it's like [suburb] nurtures us, Jesus is at work in this suburb and when you see Him at work it's a thrill. That's where our nurture comes from, right under our nose; through those so called pagans out there. So it's great! So we try to expand people's way of looking.

What do you see as the relationship between message and methodology? It seems to me very clear that your message is about Jesus but your methodology is somehow very intrinsically related to that. So could you put some words to that?

Well, if when you are studying Jesus you start to get a sense of what he's on about and you just use a method that doesn't display what he's on about, in other words if you use an over arching method that says I'm the one with the knowledge, power and authority, and I'll tell you what you need to do and that's the way it works here, you don't question me. Well, then that's a method that totally undermines what Jesus was constantly saying about serving each other and building one another up so they can be the best they can be, and we can work together and build a relationship network that is enriching. And so if I'm going to teach about that stuff I need to demonstrate that. I need to teach by showing as much as telling. Tell the stories of how it's happening, and let people see it if they want to come and see it, and then explain it and they can say, "Oh yeh, I can see that, or feel that, or I engage with that," it's a much more holistic way. So if the method contradicts the message we're in trouble. If the method lines up with the message its going to be a lot more effective. The

method is the message.

What do you mean by the method is the message?

The method is so integral to the learning of the recipient that it almost doesn't matter what you say. The message is carried more fundamentally by what you do and how you carry that message. If it doesn't match, then you create a dichotomy, and your hearers have to choose – which one is the real you? Which do you think they'll choose?

Would you have a summary of your message?

Jesus' way of living and relating to people and the world is holistic and one worth our learning. The best way to learn it, is to engage with the living Jesus. I guess that's a summary.

The place where the gospel is an offence, how do you express that or move with that in the context of a community like here? There would be some place where Jesus, the Cross, sin, our need of Jesus as Saviour is still a place of offence, where people baulk. How do deal with that and engage with that is a community like this?

It's a bit of a gross simplification to say if you don't have these theological dot points you're going to hell. But, on the other hand, some folk will go to hell, so at some point we have to talk about that, and it's more complex than it seems.
There will be some who don't have the theological dot points in place who go to heaven, I'm satisfied about that. So it's a conversation to sensitively work through with somebody when that issue comes up. They want to really know what's said about . . . , so I'm okay with having to have that conversation because I've had it various times in the past and we can negotiate our way through that. So that they know that the way to be sure where they're going, is to follow Jesus and put your trust in Him. The way to be up in the air and unsure, is not to – you can carry on how you are and "punt" but really how do you know? So the offensive subjects don't have to be so offensive. I think the offence often is, "How can you just cut us off like that?" That needs to be addressed. The questions answered. And the message-method is in context of a relationship.

But I think another offence of the gospel is the thing that Jesus encountered with power brokers that he was undermining. The common people heard him gladly. He was well accepted at heaps of parties, the things he had to say were good news, mostly, to them. But then he'd have to draw a line in the sand and say, "But you guys who have the keys to the Kingdom but don't enter in and prevent other people from entering in, you're a problem." He got to the point of having to say that because they were too slow to understand him any other way.

We haven't hit that kind of resistance here yet, I hope we don't have to. There are times where the Residence Association and others have said, "Come and join this committee," and I've said," "I actually think there are better ways of building community than through programmes and legal procedures." They're like, "Oh, okay…" There's guys involved in that Association who are Councillors and so on,

*and you can see them trying to get all this kudos and be re-elected and all that stuff.
People don't like that, I don't like it. It's not Jesus' way of doing things, so I've had
to gently contradict that. Because I have questioned their method, they're a little bit
put out. But, because they don't understand what I'm saying, they're finding it a bit
hard to gain community support at the moment. Seems power-broking is offensive.*

**Before I started my research I would have said that the problem with the church
is that it is an institution but now I have come to the place of saying that humans
can't help but form themselves as institutions, any time that humans generate
some kind of form they are an institution. The question is whether they are a
healthy or an unhealthy institution. Any sense of how as a movement, that's how
you describe yourself and I think that anything that is new or fresh in the church
begins as a movement, any sense how a movement keeps from becoming an
unhealthy institution, or does a movement just have a life span and the next one
comes along?**

*Obviously I'm not at the other end to be able to say definitively, but we have thought
about it and we do have some strategy in place if you like.*

*One is that we have resolved not to become incorporated, because as soon as you do
that you have to have membership and therefore screening of who's in and who's out
and we don't want to do that to people. We want to keep the edges open, and anyone
who in some way feels they're a part of it, we talk about participants. (There are a
few who I haven't even met who are a friend of someone who's part of this group, but
the person who's part of this group has said to them, "Can you keep an eye out for
street for any needs that are going on there and let us know and we'll see if we can
help out in that area." And that person is going, "Oh, that would be fantastic," so
they kind of feel like a part of it, even though they indirectly are and that's the kind of
open edge that we like the sound of.)*

*The other thing is, that we've written in to our dreaming paper, once we've learnt
enough and we've canvassed the sort of things that we really need to know to be
equipped to do this, we make a commitment to try and replicate this at least twice in
our lifetime. So we're looking for the kind of people who can start again, either in
another part of [suburb] or in another suburb or however it pans out. So we want to
equip people to multiply, that way hopefully, this body won't get too big and will keep
staying small.*

*So keep it diffused, keep it focused on the community rather than an alternative
community within it, because [suburb] is our church. Jesus is in our church to
develop [suburb]. [suburb] is our community. We try and keep the focus on the
broader community life, multiply it out to diffusing it and hopefully then we won't
have too many people to organise.*

*Mind you, sometimes we need an auspice, because we have a bank account, so we
have got Scripture Union to auspice us. So we very carefully worked out the nature of
that agreement of that association and so we don't have to incorporate and yet we
have the benefit of the bank account and public liability if we need it for a certain
event. I want to get the best of both worlds. So we keep an association there so that if
something does require it we've got it.*

By and large the rest of the movement is just by relationships. If somebody's being a problem in the community, certain kind of behaviour or whatever that's destructive then it's a problem for everyone in [suburb] not just [community group]. So we can't just sort of say, "You're out" because there is no in or out, it's at the edge.

Okay, that's great! Appreciate that. I'll just give you a little bit more about where I'm coming from.

I was in the States for a couple of years and came back and discovered quite a number of friends were no longer in church, some still expressed faith and quite a number also were questioning faith. Over the years I've been concerned by what I call a narrow applicational hermeneutic - we discover the propositional truth of Scripture followed by this is what you should do. That's kind of both the content of preaching and almost the content of the church. I've been quite disturbed by that. So that was the kind of motivation for beginning my studies.

When I first came back from the States there were peers, people my own age who had left the church and what I've discovered since is that a lot of older people have as well. They were saying two things I think, one is that somehow the form of church cuts us off from community and requires an enclave and puts pressure on us. But there's something about the message as well, we've either lost it or we're not so convinced about it any more. So I've seen people who are still pretty committed to Christianity but want to be in a different way of being church. But there's a group of people saying, "Look, we actually have doubts about the meta-narrative of the gospel, we haven't walked away from faith but we have doubts." That's a group that somehow doesn't get touched. Now on the one hand it's interesting because they're saying "We don't want to be touched but nobody's touching us. Leave us alone, we're sick of church and we're sick of how we're not convinced about a message but who's telling us another message or what to believe." So there's this kind of leave us alone, rescue us, leave us alone, rescue us, leave us alone, rescue us kind of thing. That's seems to be a group which are not being connected with but also difficult to connect with because they're saying on the one hand "leave us alone" but then they go, "nobody's touching us."

I've got a mate who is very much in that vein and when we catch up he invariably brings it up and at the end of it he always says, "Thanks so much for listening." I feel like I've made some progress and that's all I've done is not told him he's wrong, not jumped on what he's saying, offered some other perspectives but understood what he was saying, understood the validity in much of what he was saying. Also, just pressed sometimes on what he was saying too. I get the right to press because he knows I've understood what he's actually saying, not caricatured him into something that's easy to combat. So it is difficult and it's a long journey, there's no doubt its going to be a long journey.

I almost feel like there needs to be kind of a church or a non-church for agnostics. They're almost so wary of any kind of Christian overtones or church symbolism, but they haven't jumped ship either.

Kind of like I've got these grave questions but nowhere to turn them over.

Yes, So there seems to be a significant number of people out there who are looking for a place even though they seem they're not wanting a place.

They might want a place like that, they might want a place to do that because these questions as soon as they start thinking about them, these questions loom and, "This is what I need to work through this and I don't know how, and nobody out there seems to know how either, so I'm just left." We started [particular ministry] for that reason. To provide a safe place for doing that thinking.

MINISTER 'E'. Conducted 22.9.03

How do you go about developing a sermon?

It begins with the passage. Our bread and butter at church is expository preaching. We work through a book or a text. So we have a chunk of Matthew that we separate up into eight bits. When it comes to particular sermon I have this slab I am down to preach. So for me the beginning of developing a talk is to look at a passage and see what the passage throws up for me. Hopefully we have broken up passages in units that have one point or a main idea so I want to look at a passage and ask, "What is the main idea that comes out of that passage?" Then I would break up the passage into sensible units so I begin by allowing the passage to tell me what is happening. So in the first part if I've got time and I'm brave I translate from the Greek if I'm in the New Testament. Translating from Greek slows you down which is the benefit of it for me and it throws up details. It helps me to slow down and think about the passage and see what the passage is throwing up. The first thing is that sentence, structural work. Then from there I want to find one angle that the passage feeds into that becomes the angle I apply and then I step back from that. If I've done the work on the passage and think here is what I think it is saying then my mind leaps into how I can help people who I am speaking to connect with it. Packaging questions are part of that. So if the main idea or angle is atonement then I look round for stories, illustrations that will help raise people's curiosity as an introduction into the topic of the passage and then illustrations that might be helpful to illustrate the point or help people apply the point. In my mind I have a few different structures I use that depend on what seems sensible at the time. I'm a big picture person, so if I can first of all see the big picture of the text and also the big picture of the sermon then I would come up with a structure and then fill out the meat and allow the text to inform the shape of the sermon and then sit back and say if that's what its saying to me what is the challenge in the passage. That's the "So what?" question in moving from the text of God's word to this word as a living word speaking to us today. What's the text saying and then thinking about how I want to encourage people to be challenged in the present to what this word tells us now.

What do you understand a sermon to be?

A sermon is a communication of God's Word. A good sermon is one that opens up God's Word to help people understand it. As a preacher I want to allow the Word to tell me what to say.

Are you saying that the sermon is simply the communication of a text?

No. If I understand that it is God's word to me then there is a communication from God to his people in the way that the text is handled, in a humbling kind of way. I want to be as a true as I am able to be to what God is saying from this passage to us today. It is bigger, it is not just a lecture.

When you give a sermon do you have any particular way you would like people to respond to your sermon?

That would depend on the passage but I want people to be cut to the heart with this word, not because of me but because of the material that we are working with. If I'm allowing the text to shape me then it has something to say. It is the authority of Scripture that convinces me that this is why I preach from the Bible. So I want people to be cut to the heart whatever the word is. The particular details of a particular passage may challenge people to respond. So if I have something in a Pauline passage that says flee immorality then I want people to feel the weight of the challenge. I want people to be encouraged to put that into action in their lives.

When you say cut to the heart what do you mean by that?

I guess it is the nature of opening up the Bible as God's word, the sword of the Spirit, that I am expecting it to have an effect on me. So its that spiritual edge, that sword of the Spirit, God's breath that convicts me either by way of encouraging me to keep going as a faithful servant or challenge me in a part of my life that is not in line with God's way or passages that are talking about the character of God or Jesus where I want people to be stirred up that here is a word that is encouraging me to keep my eye on the big picture.

You've spoken the idea of application a few times. What do you understand by application?

By application I understand that a particular passage is going to make a challenge to our life. Depending on who you are and what stage of life you are at, the application might take you in different directions. If you are a housewife at home with kids it might be different than if you are a guy struggling with workaholism. I think that I am still learning how to do this and I don't always do it well. I want to help people hear the principle of the passage, whatever that might be, and bring it into their own context. And I think at that point different kinds of people either need help or don't need help in taking the next step.

What do you mean by the idea of "need help, don't need help"?

I think it's personality types. So some people are helped by application through story, to hear how this principle worked out in a person's life is, "O so that's what you mean by flee immorality." Other people can say, "I know what you mean for me in my life" without the next step being spelt out. I think it is personality types or whatever.....

Different learning styles?

Yeah, different learning styles. So a sermon monologue is weighted towards people who think logically through these things whereas some people feel things more. So that is where different illustrations can help different people who think different ways to apply the principle of the text.

Would you always be looking for an application in a sermon?

Yes I am, for sure. It might be, "Isn't God good," lets just soak that up, lets just enjoy God at that point. I see that as application. I am, and the text is, moving the person to rejoice in God again. That might be different to, "Confess your sins" or "Care for your family" but I guess I'm saying that I want every sermon to challenge a person to do something and that something might be praise of God based on passages that talk about his majesty and character that invite us to go "wow!"

You are saying that people have different learning styles. Some are saying they need that next step, others are saying they've got what you are saying. Would you be happy to leave people at times with the implications of the text?

I'm not deliberate about that. I think it would depend on the text. I think it can also depend on how much time you have given to preparation. For application I think that you have to give yourself space and time to work out how you are going to apply a passage. In the style of preaching that I have been raised up in the temptation can be to say we've worked through the passage, here ends the lesson so lets sit down. Whereas I am aware that I need to give myself space to chew through what some of the implications for different sorts of people are. Because the nature of a congregation is diverse I think you have to help people see how they can put it into action but in one sense there is also a certain ownership of the person in the pew to take it further.

So you see implication and application as being something very similar?

I think I do. An implication is saying, "So what does this mean for us?" An application is taking that principle into a particular situation. In my mind I see application is taking a specific step. If its, "flee immorality" the implication is that I want to work out in my life how I do that. Taking it the next step I might be saying to you, "Well don't look at those emails". That's getting a bit more particular. Because there are people who I am preaching to who are in all sorts of places in life, application can only be a guide for helping people to think about matters and help bring the word to bear in their own lives.

I'm interested when you say, "in the style of preaching" that you have been brought up on. What do you mean by that?

It's the risk that you spend all the time on the text. We were always taught that the nature of God's Word is that it will have an effect on people who are hearers. It is more the risk of the young preacher that I can spend all my time on a text and not give myself enough time to develop applications from the point of the passage.

You see risks in being non-applicational, do you think there could be any risks in being applicational?

You want to find a balance. The risk of being only applicational is the voice of the text is lost. The point of the passage can be lost in being applicational. For example it can be a series of life lessons disconnected from the text. I want the text to set the agenda. There is a risk that in the end the talk can be so "life-focused" that it can

move away from the principle of the passage. Good preachers don't do that but there is a risk that without balance the text can be lost in a focus on changing our lives. Both those things make a strong sermon.

You have mentioned incidentally some things that you use to make connection with your hearers. Are there things that you intentionally do in a sermon to make connection, so the hearers are with you?

I'm sure I do. This is where I think I get a bit intuitive and a victim of pop culture. If I read something in a newspaper, know a story, saw a movie, read a book – I'll plunder anything, I'm shameless at that level. I use humour, I'm not a joke teller, but I like picking up quirky true things to draw people's interest and hopefully the quirky story or the family incident or church history, I try to cycle through different things so I am not locked into one thing like "Gavin the Sports Guy." In my introduction I want to have something that is interesting to draw people in to the point that we are going to explore in the passage. So introduction is one thing that I want to use as a hook and I guess that pop culture is helpful in this. Its often a matter of what's on the radar at the time.

On the way through I am a reasonably structured sort of preacher but I want to inject a story, or an application or something personal to help people flesh out what a particular point might be.

Do you have a sense of how you want people to be interacting with the sermon as you deliver it?

My hope would be that people are stirred and inspired by the passage we are working with and if I can bring an angle on the passage that can stimulate people to think. So I think that I am looking as a packaging question to throw people off balance, to think, "Oh I haven't thought about that." And that stimulates people rather than saying, "Yeah, I've heard all that before". I try, whether by illustration or whatever, to help people think, "Oh yeah I've heard this passage before but that's an angle I have not seen." Not creating something new out of the passage but to stir people to think and come back and say, "I haven't thought about that."

Do you use any other means to have the congregation interacting?

My bread and butter is that I rely on my relationship with the congregation and I think that preaching is personal at that level they do get my perspective on life or my perspective on life out of a passage. I think that personal nature helps people to listen. I think I get stronger as a preacher as a congregation gets to know me and I get to know them. Preaching is an organic, relational thing. If I tell them a story about my kids after being with a church 18 months then people are with me. I think though that I am more intuitive about most of those connecting and engaging kind of things that allow people to travel with me as we hear what God is saying. I think it helps people when they hear how this text speaks to me and challenges me. If I have been walking well I can encourage people with that or if I have been struggling, or if something in a passage has hit me I can offer that.

What do you understand by the notion of relevance in a sermon?

I believe that God's Word is a living word. So the word that it speaks it speaks to us in the present. So whatever it says it is a relevant word. The preacher does not always give that clearly so that it sounds relevant. For the hearers the soil is not always watered to be relevant to them at that point. But I work with the conviction that God's Word is a living word and God speaks and so my default is that every time I get up there is something relevant here for me and for us as a congregation. I put myself in as a listener of the Word as I hear a passage and the Word has got something to say to us. There may be reasons why there may not be successful connection. Either the preacher is underdone or the hearers are distracted.

Do you see the contemporary and the situational as part of what relevance is?

Do you mean that the passage has something to say to the present situation?

More the question of bringing the contemporary and the situational into what you are preaching.

Yes, if there is a world event or a social issue that fits the principle of the passage. We have a generally literate, overworking, wealthy, middle class, upper middle class congregation so I am aware of that profile as I am preaching. I am aware of issues where we need to take a stand on, or make a response to, that may be part of a direction that a passage allows us to take.

Do you have any criteria for deciding on your use of the contemporary and situational in a sermon?

No, I am pretty '*ad hoc'* at that point, driven by the moment. September 11, we were in the middle of a series on Judges and suddenly an event that could not be ignored. I allowed that to shape the sermon. That is an extreme example. Usually I am more '*ad hoc'* in the use of particular issues and situations. It occurs in the process of putting a sermon together. Part of application is thinking what is happening in our scene where this passage might be a helpful word in moving forward in how we act in that situation.

Do you use contemporary events to shape your sermon or does your sermon shape how you see contemporary events?

I would more let the sermon shape contemporary events. So when I say 'ad hoc' I tend to let contemporary events come into how we apply this word we have to our circumstances. I have 2 parts to the sermon. Working the text and seeing what is its point and applying the principles in light of particular contemporary circumstances. Those two things go hand in hand. I'm probably not as deliberate as I could be in scanning our city and our country and thinking what would be helpful. I am more driven by what is happening in the news, diocesan issues, world crises, war.

Do you have any essential elements you want to bring out in a sermon?

Yes, a text will throw up a particular challenge that I would want to bring to bear. A key thing is allowing the text to speak and I help it on its way with a few illustrations or pointers, or theological points that might help our understanding and then bringing that to application. Working the text is essential, helping people engage with the text is part of the packaging of that and at the end of all that helping people apply that. I have different structures to do all that. I might work the passage and apply it all at the end. I might work part of the passage and have application, then work another part of the passage and bring application and so forth.

Do you use any particular communication models or theories of communication in your sermon preparation and delivery?

No. I've probably imbibed one but I am not deliberate about it apart from I am aware of my conviction that the passage is part of the living word of God and I want to allow it to speak. So I work with that conviction. I'm aware I want to work an introduction that draws people in and helps them to hear. Humour and interesting stories is my sort of style. So I think I am deliberate in what I do but I don't think, "Here's my model lets go for it" and put it through that grid.

We've discussed people's response to particular sermons, over the course of a period of time how would you want people to respond to and interact with the sermons you offer?

I'm not quite sure I have thought about it in those terms. I see that as a pastor in a church that the end goal for all of us would be maturity in Christ, standing firm in Him. So as people are travelling with me I would want them to see that the sermon is part of the process of growing in our knowledge of God and as we relate we are helping each other to stand firm and to pick each other up in faith, keep each other moving forward toward the ultimate goal that there will be a day where together we meet our Saviour face to face. For me the sermon is part of that process but not the only thing that happens in the organic life of the church family.

How do you see the sermon fitting with the whole of a service of the church?

There are all sorts of elements in a service. I would want the whole service to be aimed at helping people to stand firm and moving people forward in their knowledge of Christ. Opening up the Bible is a critical part of all that process that allows God to speak into the meeting. Other things, such as prayer, is our response. So I see that the sermon allows God to speak to us and the other parts feed into us being able to respond and interact with those words.

Do you think there are any ways that you think that congregations can actually respond to a sermon *in* the sermon?

I think we can be more creative in this. I think that question and answer can be helpful. I think that there are a few ways of doing this. I think in our university congregation we feel less locked in than our other congregations.

What kind of things do you use there?

Question and answer, breaking up into small groups. Small groups can go a number of ways, "What do you find stimulating, what do you want to pray for, what questions does that raise for you?"

Does that allow something different in terms of the effect on a congregation if you have that interactive process compared to if you speak for 25, 30 minutes and then sit down?

It adds life to your sermon at the level of giving to people rather than telling people. The monologue is a clever as you are as a communicator. It is that interactive process that allows people to apply the message. Sometimes we have linked up small groups to what is being preached. Churches find that hard to do because of the nature of small groups but at times it has been helpful in extending the life of a sermon. In a church meeting you are constrained, at least in our situation, by time and so there needs to be encouragement to keep talking about the material. I think people are helped if they are given the opportunity to do that. You've got to be deliberate about being interactional and it can be easy to slip back into a more passive mode. I think to be interactional you have to plan to be like that.

At times an applicational approach can leave people with either a yes or a no response. There are people who may be questioning or doubting, or have particular struggles. Do you have any thoughts as to preaching with people who have questions and doubts?

I see the sermon as one part of the process. My ideal is, and I am not sure we are there, is that someone would be comfortable to say, "Hang on a minute what did you say that for?" or "I find that hard." In our evangelistic service we give people a card which is their opportunity to say, "I would like to know a little bit more," but I don't think we give opportunity for or are not deliberate in that in other sermons. We need to be deliberate in giving people an open forum to come and speak with the preacher. I am more than happy if someone came up to me and said, "That was a joke, where did you get that from?"

How do you think you can cultivate that openness in a church?

Inviting it. I recognise that it is not an easy thing for someone to express doubt. There might be a real perception, or a wrong perception, that, "I had better not show that I am a dissenter." Or its difficult to say, "That sermon challenged an inappropriate behaviour in me and I need to talk to someone about it." We can put these hurdles in the way of people and the preacher is not always the first person to approach if you doubt what they are saying or are you are challenged by them. We need to develop cultures of being real in our conversations. To do that over morning tea is not easy in church culture. If I'm grappling with a doubt or an inappropriate behaviour I'm not likely to share that over the noise of morning tea. I want to invite people to talk with me after a sermon. I'm not sure I say that regularly. Or the leader of a service might finish a service by offering that invite. We had a series on relationship at the University congregation and we encouraged that more there. One thing that we did which was really useful was on the second last week of the series we asked people to

write down all the questions they had or anything they wanted to talk about. We had a list of about 20 questions that people had which we then distributed. We did not answer everything from the front that night but small groups were given the list and said, "Here are some of the things that people in our congregation are asking, how would you answer them?"

Do you think there are other ways that the hearers can shape a sermon?

I could pause and just ask people what they are thinking but I feel constrained by the time limits on a service. I want to keep encouraging the hearers to take this word through the week and small groups are good for this and for leaders to have feedback to the preacher saying, "You're speaking too long" or "We don't understand what you are saying." I'm not sure I've thought more deliberately about that.

Would you think of starting a sermon based on what is happening in the life of that particular congregation?

I think I would depending on what the issue was. I'm sensitive that depending on what the issue or angle was, that I protect people's privacy and confidentiality. But yes if there are issues that could be helpful for people to talk about and the public forum can cope with that kind of discussion. And as I say that I also realise that I haven't done that much here. In one sense that is starting with the application, the inductive approach, allowing the question and then coming latter on to the passage.

You tend to have more a deductive approach?

Yeah. Though even within a sermon you can go both ways. My default would tend to be set up the problem as a real, relevant challenge and then see how the passage speaks to me in that.

So a broader sense of what may be happening in a congregation, would you bring that to a sermon?

Yes I think I would try to. In the relationship series that we had I knew that there were people in inappropriate relationships but to bring a word to that, a Scriptural challenge to those things is more implicit than explicit rather than saying, "Look we know there are people here indulging in sexual immorality" You challenge me to think about it just as you ask the question. I think I need to be more creative in how I do that sort of thing.

Do you think there are times in terms of what is happening in the lives of the hearers, or even in broader issues, that can bring new meaning to the text?

Yeah for sure. I probably would not call it new meaning, I would call it new application. For a year 12 student struggling with exams and for a husband and wife feeling a bit stale 10 years into a marriage, no sleep because of young kids, there are two very different stories. They are hearing the same word but there will be a fresh application for each. The principles will be the same but the application works differently. The same passage at a different time can have a fresh impact.

In thinking about issues in a congregation and allowing those to shape some of the discussion, one of the difficulties is the diversity within a congregation. So our 5 o'clock congregation is a good example. The single people and the married with kids have quite different issues and tensions. But it also helpful to hear that while it may not be my struggle it helps a person think outside their life square at that point.

In bringing those situations and issues to a text has there ever been the time when you have seen meaning in the text that you have not seen before?

Again I think I want to say not a new meaning but a fresh application, a fresh word. I would have to think about the idea of new meaning. I guess I want to protect the text so in principle it is the same word but I'm not sure that I would want to call that a new meaning.

What about an awareness of a meaning in the text that you had not seen before?

I'm sure that is true as a preacher. You can say, "Now I'm fifteen years married with four kids this passage helps me in a way that was different to me then when I was a young preacher without kids."

You had not seen that in the text before or you had not read that in the text before?

Yeah I am sure that happens – a new angle or a new thought. At any moment as a preacher coming to the text your time is limited and so each new time you come to a text there is room for insight to grow and new connections to make. There are even times when I think, "That was a dodgy sermon last time."

And dodgy because?

Applying a point that may not have been in the text if I had really thought about it. I am a critiquer of myself at that point.

Why a sermon rather than some other form of communication?

That's a good question and I think that part of the answer is being captive to our culture in that the half an hour talk is what we have been raised on and inherited for better or for worse. I'm convinced that opening up the meat of God's word ought to be bread and butter for our diet but I think that it is either business or lack of preparation that hinders creativity of thinking.

Do you think there is something that makes a sermon a sermon rather than a devotional or a lecture?

I think they are on a continuum. The sermon and devotional are closer on the continuum, a lecture further away but even at a theological college that can blur. But certainly a sermon, and in my mind a devotional, allows the text to speak in a present and living way. It might be a time factor that makes a devotional a devotional. In the end I want God's word to stir me up to love and good deeds. A 30 minute sermon,

depending on the people hearing, can allow me more freedom in how I do that than a devotional.

Anything else that you see as unique to a sermon?

I think the sermon allows a person who is trained and wise and thoughtful and equipped in the Scriptures to teach and help those who do not have the time or the experience or the training to see some of the connections. You can fast track someone into a passage. The sermon gives the trained person opportunity to share things that are there in the text for the hearers. That can also happen in other forms of communication.

Do you think there is anything unique about the preacher compared to a Bible study leader or a lecturer?

I think it is a question of degree of wisdom and training and insight. A particular sermon is unique because the preacher is unique. You don't need a piece of paper to be a wise, Godly preacher but training can help you get there. Wisdom and life experience and insight into the word is more a maturity question. I guess I see leadership as better in the hands of mature people.

The uniqueness of the preacher is a personality thing. In our circles we value someone who has been trained who helps me see connections in a particular passage and helps me in their wisdom to apply it.

At a time where there are a lot of questions about what it means to be church in Australia do you still think there is still a place for the sermon in contemporary life?

Yeah for sure. I think there is a place for the Word of God and the sermon is one way in which that can happen and I think there needs to be some quality control to help that. Paul says to Timothy to train up reliable people to handle the word of truth. There is a leadership issue in the preacher. Being the preacher is organic, it means having relationship with the local gathering of God's people and helping them grow and mature. As I offer the word I am under it as well. And so there is a place for bringing God's word to bear in a present culture and I think that some of the problems of our churches is because that is being neglected or ignored. To neglect God's word marginalises God and gags God. I'm not convinced the sermon is the only place that happens but it is a helpful place. It is one way we can speak to 350 people spread across four congregations.

At least the myth is that Australians are non-authoritarian and don't like being spoken over, we want freedom of choice, we're individualistic, everybody can have their own say and we can come to our own decisions? In light of that do you think there is a particular way to sermonise in an Australian context?

Yeah I think there is. I'm anti-establishment myself. Australians love story and have always loved stories and will travel with you in a story. So I think a humble preacher does not water down the message but people are happy to listen, at least those who come to our church, those outside our culture may want to throw rocks, but those who

come are willing to listen if they know the preacher cares for them and I hope they get that sense from me. And I think that people like hearing stories and tales and so Australians and Australian culture have never walked away from tale-telling. And I think that Jesus has some of the best stories to tell. I like narrative parts of the Scripture because they give me more freedom to tell stories. Paul's letters are a bit more of a challenge to use a story style. But I think that as the preacher people respect that you take them seriously and you care for them and they will listen to stories.

Do you have any particular assumptions about who your hearers are?

If it is our regular crew I get the sense that people are there because they want to be there on the whole. I'm aware there are a fringe of people who are distracted and distressed. I want people to be there because I have a relationship with them and vis a versa. Now some are closer and I can't get intimate with every single person. The preacher may bring a hard word because the hard word is from the Bible but they are doing that out of care and love. So I think that relationship is very important. I am always amazed by the itinerant preachers as its harder for them to make connections. A regular preacher preaches in relationship and people listen because they think that the preacher is giving this word because you care for us. The other side of it is, perhaps its that Australian authority issue, is that people want to know that you are travelling with them and that I'm not standing on high condemning them but I am standing with them. As a preacher I am travelling with the gang or wanting to stand for them. I think that helps in our culture.

Do you have any sense of what the hearers want to hear?

One of my hopes is that people who come to our church want to hear God's word explained. I am aware that not everyone is at that place. People don't mind hearing a hard word if they know that it is done carefully and sensitively and with love and so I'm thinking that while people want to hear God speak they don't always want to hear God speak.

Do you ever experience a conflict between what you think people need to hear and what they might want to hear?

Being in a church that has a particular, strong evangelical style I am aware that people may come in and say, "I wish you had spoken about this or drawn this out of the passage" and in my mind I say, "I wish that was in the passage to speak about." I allow myself to be constrained by the passage. I think its not what they hear in a particular sermon but what they hear over a period of time as the whole package where they might say, "I wish you address other things as well."

How does being evangelical shape how you preach?

For me it's a label which says, "We are a group of people who take seriously the God who created the world and he communicates to us primarily through the Scriptures." So it is taking a high view of Scripture and saying, "Here's how God speaks to us." The sermon is just one way of opening up the Word of God and allowing that word to shape us in matters of faith and life. An evangelical sermon is one that opens up the

Bible and is taking it seriously. It does not matter which part of the Bible. If I have a confidence in the unity of Scripture then they all have something helpful to say and they are all part of God's infolding plan of stepping into the world to rescue me and to equip me to stand firm in this present age.

How I handle the Bible might be different to someone who does not recognise the authoritative nature of Scripture, who might see it as merely a record of human consciousness, that its not God's objective word to us. That is what marks me as an Evangelical and I am happy with that label if it says I'm someone who takes the Bible seriously as the living Word of God recognizing all the complexities of it as a compiled document.

You mentioned people saying, "You have not spoken about this or addressed this matter." Do you have any particular thoughts about topical sermons in terms of your approach or preparation?

I think that topical sermons are really helpful. There is good reason to pick a topic. Topical sermons are much harder work. With a passage you can focus on the passage even if you are drawing on other places but in a topical sermon it is a lot harder work, sweeping through all of Scriptures, drawing together the threads about what God is saying. That can also be a rich exercise so I think that its hard work but very helpful from time to time.

If that was your only diet the risk is that you set the agenda rather than the passage. Even in a topical sermon I want to allow the Bible to inform me anyway. As a speaker in a topical sermon you have more control over the content.

Many contemporary churches in an attempt to be contemporary are going to topical approaches. Do you have any particular thoughts about that?

I think it is only a risk if you avoid the hard passages. You can fall into having your own hobby horses if you are only asking, "What does the world want us to speak about?" You can miss out on some of the hard yards of thinking and grabbling with passages which I might never use in a topical sermon. I think here we address contemporary issues more by thinking here are the contemporary issues what book speaks to that.

Do you see preaching as being more for the community of faith or is it also for those not part of the community of faith?

I think it is both. It is more for the regulars. But I guess I see it like Jesus speaking the parables there was something for everyone but for those on the inside there were deeper riches. Some passages are easier for outsiders to come and be a part of then the regular ones who have been with you in a series through the book of Hosea. It is my conviction that the Word of God cuts both ways. The question for the outsider is the preacher has to make choices about how much information to include or not include or whether a mature gang you can assume stuff and say , "Remember Moses" and they go with you and an outsider comes in and you say, "Remember Moses" and they say, "Who's that." So in my mind it is a matter of being sensitive to the people you are preaching to. There is something for everyone but I think we aim for the gang.