

## PART 9.7 MY PREACHING MINISTRY: CONTENT, NATURE AND SHAPE<sup>1</sup>

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Introduction

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Primarily, this section is a description and explanation of the content, nature, shape and significance of my preaching ministry from my perspective. Hopefully it portrays a mode of good praxis which might inform that of others. However this might be, my intention it not to set out a model of good praxis and even less *the* model of good praxis. Preachers find their own idiosyncratic way(s) of going about their preaching ministry. Here, as in the remainder of these notes, I focus on my vocation and how I have practised it in critical reflective mode.

As I worked on this Section I came across an article by The Rev Dr J. Alexandra Findlay published in the *Methodist Recorder* on 19<sup>th</sup> January 1961. I had marked the beginning of this passage.

I too have wondered over the years and as I wrote this long section.

The article appears at the end of the section.

“Many a time I have wondered, since I first began to preach, what business I had to meddle with such a sensitive thing as a human soul, or have people come to me in distress, and often to have nothing to say to them, or worse still, think up something to say which does not sound in reflection convincing even to me.

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1 First draft 24.11.11 revised/ rewritten 28.11.11!

To mean well in a service like this is evidently not enough. I have wondered sometimes if I had not been within measurable distance of invoking upon me the curse upon a man who interferes in matters too great for him, or for any man. And then I come back to my other text. There was a time when some of us were called to the ministry, and let ourselves in for a job too difficult and delicate for any men to undertake. How glib we were in those days when we started out and how kind people were to us.

They lavished words like ‘helpful’ upon us, and it was not long before we began to feel out of our depth, and wonder whether we were really helping or hindering.”

## PART ONE: PREPARATION FOR ANALYSIS AND REFLECTION

### 1. Formulating an approach to a formidable and intimidating undertaking!

#### Beckoning tasks

Task 1, sorting out background material, papers and sermons notes;

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### 2. Sorting, indexing and researching sermons and talks

## 1. Formulating an Approach to a Formidable and Intimidating Task!

Approaching and starting work on this Section is proving to be particularly problematic and daunting for several reasons: I have so much material which I am deeply attached to because it represents an incredible amount of precious memories; almost all of it expresses deeply felt beliefs and conviction and therefore reveals much of my inner spiritual life and character, that which has excited and motivated me; the sheer multiplicity of potentially things that theoretically I could attempt and which I would love to do; I am finding it hard to decide what I should do and the tempting possibilities that I should resist. What I feel is required at this stage is careful thought, hopefully leading to responsible decision making and a cogent manageable working brief, so essential to the constructive use of my time and energy. That is precisely what I am trying to do here through thinking out loud on paper!

## Work Completed

Earlier this year the publication of a book Neil Richardson and I wrote, *Sustaining Preachers and Preaching: A Practical Guide*, described and explored in some considerable detail our separate and joint thinking and experience of the essentials of pursuing creative preaching ministries in the twenty first century. Two parts for which I was particularly responsible grew out of our extended programme of in-service training for preachers in Leeds North East Circuit which started in January 2000 and for which was primarily responsible. One part was about the ‘dynamics and relationships of a preachers working life and the other was about sustaining developmental support cultures, services and networks’, way of an appendix, I illustrated some of what I had written with the notes of a sermon I had preached on the subject matter: Communion Challenge and Faith.

Much of what I believe about preach is in this book (and in the companion website, <http://www.leedsnandemethodist.org.uk/preachers/index.htm> ). This is particularly true of what appears in the Introduction, the sections I have written and the final chapter, ‘The Renewal of Preaching’.

This is work completed – in as much as these things are completed. I am no longer responsible for the local in-service programme for preachers. However, whilst I do not intend to report further on this aspect of my preaching ministry, I may well revisit it and even re-work some of the ideas when I come to write about what I now feel about preaching and its future and my own preaching life in particular.

Engaging in this in-service training programme and writing the book were very important to me and deeply satisfying. Writing to David Gamble about it in December 2009 I expressed some of my thoughts and feelings in the following way.

Sharing in this work has been a most interesting, worthwhile, satisfying and privileged aspect of my recent ministry and my retirement! There is a sense in which it has brought me full circle to my original call to preach, which as always been at the heart of my vocation. Two major aspects of my ministry are being brought together through the application to preachers and preaching of the ways and means of supporting and training workers in church and community development work in their ministry that has occupied so much of my ministry. I thank God for the opportunity to round off my ministry in this way.

## **Beckoning Tasks**

Writing these notes takes me from work I have done with other preachers on their preaching ministries and mine to my own preaching vocation. So far I have identified three groups of beckoning tasks.

- [Sorting out background material, papers and sermon notes.](#)
- [Organizing and possibly updating records and indexes.](#)
- [Writing analytical and reflective pieces on my preaching ministry.](#)
- [Researching what I have written on the subject.](#)

### ***Task 1. Sorting Out Background Material and Papers and Sermon Notes***

This material includes manuscripts from which I have preached sermons (—I have kept all of them since I began to preach!—), background material, notes of lectures and walks on biblical and religious themes. More recently some of this has been typed up on request and is on my computer. This material is in files under subject headings in my filing cabinet. There is a list of them but I am not sure it is up to date. To these files I have added anything that I have come across which could be useful in editing the existing sermons on preparing new ones on the same subjects. This system has worked very well for sixty years and as long as I continue to preach I am loathed to dismantle it. I do not know how long I will go on preaching. In addition some of the sermons have been tape recorded as I preached them, but not many.

It occurs to me that it is expedient to approach this group of tasks in two stages: the first relates to the present and as long as I continue to preach the second relates to the time when I cease to preach. I find this frees me up. The first task involves stripping the files of all redundant material such as articles that no longer speak to me and some of the earlier editions of revised sermons and getting all the records up to date including those of the tape recordings of sermons. In short updating the system and making it better fitted for its purposes to me as a preacher. The second task may involve more pruning and in addition to deciding how to store material no longer in use.

Both groups of tasks raise the fundamental question of how much of this material should be kept for posterity. Catherine's advice based on what professional archivists have recommended is to keep it all. They say that it is extremely important data of which there is a shortage. But am I taking myself too seriously in wanting to keep it and being vain? Possibly. I do

not know. What I do know is that they reveal much about me as I have already indicated and about changing autonomy of my preaching over the years. Something that was said to me in my early days as a local preacher in Grosvenor Road will not leave me. An elderly devout Methodist who used to sit in front of me in that Church said after hearing me preach, “You don’t know him until you have heard him preach”. I know there is much truth in that. Consequently I am inclined to keep rather than destroy the sermons.

### ***Task 2. Organizing and Possibly Updating Records and Indexes***

For the main part this is not too difficult or onerous a task. Each records of preaching engagement are on sheets of paper but from September 1966 onwards this information has been kept in ‘sermon registers’.

Completing the biblical index of texts of sermons which is on the computer would be time consuming. I started this some years ago in order to be able to locate sermons I had preach on particular texts and it has been useful. But I never completed it and I did not update it. Complete it would give an overview of the biblical passage in which I had preached/ not preached. But whether that warrants all the labour it would involve I am unsure.

### ***Task 3. Writing Analytical and Reflective Pieces on my Preaching Ministry***

This is the group of tasks that I really want to do. (In fact I broke off thinking my way through these three groups of tasks to write something on the shift in my approach to preaching resulting from the emphasis upon lectionary preaching because I got caught up in what had occurred to me by thinking about those tasks! There is a clue here about procedure!) As noted I have completed a major phase in reflecting on preaching which culminated in *Sustaining Preachers and Preaching* and the CLPD (Continuing Local Preachers Development) website. At this stage all I have is a miscellaneous collection of ideas about what the analytical or reflective pieces might be about or cover:

- Reflections on my preaching ministry;
- Trace out any significant phases in my preaching ministry and distinctive differences or emphasis related to them say in Wales, Sydenham, Parchmore, P20-25, Avec, Leeds i.e. look at the evolution / development of my ministry;

- Gather and/or list key sermons from my ministry (possibly those which illustrate the phases on emphasis), put them in some order or structure (possibly get some typed up and digitized);
- Gather up sermons and notes on the nature of preaching.

#### ***4. Researching what I have written already on the subject***

I need to do this in relation to both these notes, sermons, notes and publications.

### **Procedure**

The most appropriate approach or procedure emerges naturally from these notes. The first two groups of tasks are procedurally first. Tackling those will identify topics for the analytical and reflective pieces and the subject matter. In turn that will enable me to produce a working outline for this Section of the Notes. More likely than not I will break off, as I already have done, to write pieces en-route!

### **Purposes**

- To consummate my preaching ministry by drawing out significant features of it through analyzing and reflecting upon it as deeply as possible and evaluating it.
- To help me to withdraw from it.
- To decide what written material should be kept for posterity and making it as accessible as possible.

## **2. Sorting, Indexing and Researching Sermons and Talks**

<sup>2</sup>At the end of November 2011 I set myself the four tasks above. Since then I have been working steadily and systematically as I was able on Tasks 1, 2 & 4 concurrently. Now I think that I have made sufficient progress to start on Task 2 and feel that I must do so. So to Part Two of this Section.

As anticipated, Task One was an enormous undertaking<sup>3</sup> but it has been

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<sup>2</sup> 20.2.12

<sup>3</sup> To give some idea of the time taken, I have worked at it assiduously at the

incredibly rewarding as will become apparent. Pruning redundant material and reorganizing the remainder (background papers and notes mainly) reduced the volume of hard copy from three crammed filing cabinet drawers and a large box file (comparables) to less than two easily accessible filing drawers. That was deeply satisfying to Molly and to me. As I sorted through the material I became increasingly clear that the files remain working files as I am continuing to preach. A considerable amount of articles which I had once thought might be useful was removed and scrapped. I cannot bring myself to scrap my sermon notes – except, that is for a very small number of very old ones. I have kept early ones to show changes and developments (I hope!) in my thought, beliefs, convictions and style. A major job related to Task Two was the updating and restructuring of the list of sermons, devotional talks and Bible studies. This was done piecemeal with Task One. Joyce White, and to a lesser extent Anne Millett, helped me enormously by doing an incredible amount of typing of sub-lists. The first edition of a succession of these lists was compiled by Dorothy Household of blessed memory in the 1960's. Whilst it is now out of use, I have kept it out of sentimental reasons and appended it to this section. Copies of the final revised list along with the one from which it was compiled are also appended. Comparing them reveals the nature and extent of the editing and the reorganization of the files. Gathering more of the sermons under generic heads rather than under their original titles, reveals the pattern of my preaching better than the earlier lists did and the relative density of it on particular subjects, topics and themes. But more on that later. Also, to my relief and joy, as I worked on this list, it dawned on me that it would not be necessary to go back to the sermon notes in order to gather the information required to update the textual index of my sermons: the information was now on that list so the revision and updating of the textual index could be done by transposing it. This work remains to be done. Furthermore, going through the sermon files and papers enabled me to make inroads into Task Four. Notes and sermons on preaching and on my approach to Biblical criticism and exegesis, for instance, were unearthed.

Working on Tasks 1, 2 & 4 has been demanding and at times tedious but it was moving and, as I have already said, it was rewarding. Apart

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core job for two/three months but I broke off to write pieces on lectionary and inspirational preaching and family and community worship and parade services. Then there was Christmas, Molly unwell, two or three sermons to write, preparing a submission on 'Fruitful Field', organizing the luncheon to celebrate our Diamond wedding anniversary and some demanding correspondence! And at one stage I lost a sense of direction and had to give time to reviewing the work on preaching and prepare a working outline for Section 9:7.

from the earlier period of my preaching life, the notes came alive and in my cases the occasions when I preached from them. Gradually, a unique perspective of my preaching ministry unfolded in my mind and a wide range of emotions were stirred through actually handling considering and reflecting upon, over a comparatively short period of time of three months, notes of all the sermons I have preached over a period of sixty two years! The experience is reminiscent of those I have had when I have got on top of a wide range of subject matter which I have been studying for a year or more, in preparation for examinations. They engender those unique perspectives which are gained by being on top of a whole range of interconnected things: they are variously intellectual, emotional and spiritual mountain top experiences, privileged and invaluable. Possibly, I exaggerate and will discover that I am only part way up the mountain in relation to my preaching ministry, but I do not think I can climb up much higher. However this may be the view is impressive.

As I pursued these tasks many thoughts and insights occurred to me, which I noted for further reflection. I aim to work on them over and above all this, many thoughts and ideas are tumbling around in my head and heart, which I am bursting to get down and work through on paper.

Consequently, whilst there is work still to be done on Tasks 2 and 4 this is the time to get on with Task 3, writing analytical and reflectional pieces: I simply must get some of my thoughts on paper before the overview fades as it inevitably will, just as it did after examinations (and sometimes before and during them!) To use a different metaphor, hopefully, applying myself to analysis and reflection may take me deeper into the things I have glimpsed through pursuing Tasks 1, 2 and 4.

## **Note on the Sermon Notes etc List**

This is not ruthlessly logical! Many of the sermons I have reallocated and closed the files. So, for interest, I have gathered sermons on Jesus and Christ on one file. Similarly with those on God. In some cases I have cross referenced them so that I would be able to find them. Others I have left in the place they have occupied for up to fifty years for ease of accessing them. However I have done sufficient to reveal the nature and pattern of my preaching subject matter as will become clearer in the analysis.

## **Preaching Engagements**

Engagements are noted in my diaries. Also there are three small cross referenced sermon register books dated from 1966 on my shelves. Prior engagements are noted in sheets in the background notes preaching file.

## PART TWO: ANALYTICAL REFLECTIONS ON MY PREACHING MINISTRY

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#### II Reflecting on the substance of my preaching:

1. The notes
2. The list of sermons and talks, March 2012
3. Generic subject matter
4. The status and potential value of the linear classification system
5. Gleanings from the lists
6. Breakthrough of a systemic perspective
7. Reflections on the system perspective on my ministry  
[Rehabilitation to my core vocational work; July 2012: a connecting note]
8. Family and community worship and parade services
9. My approach to and use of the Bible
  - a) My current approach to hermeneutics and the Bible: A reflective note on my approach to hermeneutics and the Bible
  - b) Experience and the Christian year
  - c) Inspirational and lectionary preaching
  - d) Residual guilt and regret about not keeping up my Biblical scholarship
10. Phases, patterns, emphases and preoccupations
  - a) A local preacher and a candidate for the ministry
  - b) A theological student and minister in training
  - c) Circuit ministry
  - d) Sector ministry: Project 70-75 and Avec
  - e) Retirement
11. Sermons I failed to preach

<sup>4</sup>As described above, I am writing these paragraphs after a prolonged exposure to the whole of my preaching life through handling and sorting texts which were instruments critical to its conduct. Doing this was powerfully evocative. Reflecting on the thoughts and ideas that had emerged I felt I could best write about them under the following headings:

- I. Reflections on the notes and scripts of sermons and talks;
- II Reflections on the substance of my preaching;
- III Reflections on the praxis of my preaching

Preaching is a discipline in its own right. The preaching in which I have been engaged has been an integral part of acts of Christian Worship with which it has an important symbiotic relationship. A relationship I have always fostered. Here I concentrate on preaching as Neil Richardson and I did in *Supporting Preachers and Preaching* which is possible because it is a discipline in its own right. (See SPP p. ix)

## **I Reflections on the Notes and Scripts of Sermons and Talks**

My reflections are best expressed under several titles, each section gives a different but complementary perspective on the notes and scripts.

### ***1. The Notes, Their Function and Uses***

As they were initially prepared and used, sermon notes and scripts were handwritten. More recently to meet requests from people who had heard the sermons for them to be made available in print, some, a relatively small number of those preached, were typed up and edited. Rarely, however do I preach or speak from a typescript; I find it difficult. Handwritten notes speak to me more evocatively than typewritten ones; spontaneously they put me in touch with the concepts, thoughts, ideas and emotions and convictions that gave them birth. Typed pages seem to lose so much of this.

For twenty or thirty years or so, I wrote them in ink, first blue and then black. Now I write them in pencil more often than not (easier to amend and edit!). Initially they were on lined quarter or foolscap pages so they were in portrait format. Later I began to write them on plain paper using it in a landscape format, writing in two or three vertical columns first on foolscap and then on A4 paper. This practice grew out of working with small groups of people I found that using a clipboard on my knee was more useful when it was in the landscape position across my knee. I found it easier to write across the page rather than down it as it were and it was less intrusive because it did not point at members of the group when using it to hold my notes. Also I found that writing in two or three vertical columns gave a flow of ideas and thinking as I moved horizontally from column to column. It gave a picture of the material.

Finding a single word or phrase which communicates the nature of the function and uses of the notes from which I preach sermons is difficult. 'Note' has many meanings and uses:

- a brief record of facts, topics, thoughts etc as an aid to memory in writing, public speaking etc (often in plural....)
- a formal diplomatic or parliamentary communication.

These are two of many definitions from *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* (1996 edition). The first gives the impression of brief headings: the second describes short manuscripts summarizing complicated material and arguments in precisely crafted sentences to help busy ministers master their brief. (John Pater, the Treasurer to Avec who had been an under secretary was a master at writing them. He wrote many for me on complex matters related to Avec). Neither of these definitions represents my sermon notes. Generally speaking they are carefully and painfully written and structured: I labour over key sentences and titles, headings and sub-headings which are properly representative of sermons and sub-sections. So the notes are not paraphrases. They are possibly better described as scripts: written texts of sermons. (Following one of the definitions as script in the C.O.D, 'the text of a play, film, or broadcast').

Amongst preachers they are referred to as 'full manuscripts'. Their genre is quite distinctive. They differ from any other form of writing in which I engage. They are not lecture notes just as sermons are not lectures; they are similar to some of the personal and pastoral letters I write. They are written to speak, to preach as I write them I hear and, possibly more importantly, feel myself speaking and preaching them. Paradoxically, however, they are not meant to be read but to be preached to a congregation.

Neither are they scripts which like those of plays provide lines for actors, preachers are not actors or performers, they are preachers so my notes/scripts are texts for me as a preacher. Before I turn to how I use them, a little more about writing them.

Writing these notes/scripts is essentially an exercise in discovery. An exploration of the material and subject matter that has excited my imagination and the insights that I have glimpsed: testing out its veracity; critically examining its application and relevance, studying texts and Christian thinking associated with it; rigorously considering how I personally relate to which/is emerging, intellectually, experientially and spiritually; searching my conscience about my motives and aspirations over the preaching engagement; searching for ways of expressing and illustrating what I feel under God I must attempt to preach. Oh, and so much more. However, this is sufficient to indicate the writing notes/scripts from which to preach sermons is an absorbing, demanding and exciting business. It demands and activates my whole being deeply; it calls upon my mental, physical and spiritual energies to the utmost and can be as draining as it is exhilarating and fulfilling: it is full of emotion and can be devastating and lonely. (*Cf Sustaining Preachers and Preaching* pp 54 ff et al and below).

One of the basic reasons I have writing these notes is to test out whether or not thoughts and ideas and promptings of a spiritual nature which are seriously inchoate can be formed into a sermon. So, in that sense, writing sermon notes for me is a dummy run on paper of preaching it: an extremely important dummy run! Notes/scripts are not the sermons but they are an important prelude to them. The acid test is in preaching them. Maldwyn Edwards famously said, ‘How can you write them, until you have preached them?’<sup>5</sup> Presumably he either had the ability to prepare or construct them in this head/heart beforehand or his preaching was extempore as are most of my public prayers. However this might be, writing notes or a script or an account of a preached sermon is quite a different exercise. (I will pursue this further below). But few can do to good effect what Dr E did magnificently.

## ***2. Modes of Preparation and Their Psycho-Spirituality***

Observations about the modes of my preparation follow naturally. They have varied considerably. During the time that I was working at the RAE my preparation had to be in my leisure time. To the best of my memory I started in good time, possibly a week or two before. But there are frequent references in my diaries to being stuck on the Saturday prior to an appointment on the following day and to everything suddenly coming together on the Saturday evening! Whilst in College Circuit, I dedicated myself to the preparation during the day and, particularly in Circuit saw it to be a major part of my working week. Especial appointments I would work on well in advance – but I still got stuck. That has been part of my experience throughout my preaching ministry (see *Sustaining Preachers and Preaching*<sup>6</sup> pp 55-57 now re-cast on the following pages). During my

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5 It was at one of our meetings with him. He was my first chairman. During my probation we had regular meetings with him. On one occasion we were discussing when we prepared our sermons. Some say well in advance, others started on Monday and yet others wrote them on Saturday evenings – they needed the pressure of the event. (Leslie Griffiths used to write them before breakfast on Sundays. Over breakfast, if he had not appeared, his children would speculate about whether he was on his second or third point!) Eventually someone said, ‘Dr Edwards when do you write yours?’ ‘Oh, I dictate one before coffee on Monday morning and one after’. Members of the group then said, ‘How wonderful. You then have the rest of the week quite free for other things. They don’t hang over you’. Dr E replied, ‘I think you misunderstand me, how can you write them until you have preached them?’

6 Referred to as *SPP*

time in Avec the general pattern was for me to read the lectionary readings at the beginning of the week or on the Sunday or orientate myself to the subject or theme. For the remainder of the week I allowed/encouraged my unconscious to work on it and browsed when I was able making notes of anything that occurred to me. On Saturday morning and possibly evening I would write my notes and prepare the service in whatever time was available.

During my time in Leeds I have given much more time to sermon and service preparation even when I was responsible for the post graduate training courses.

Preparing sermons, like preaching, is an existential event. It is not in any way—or more precisely it has not been for me in any way—routine, mechanical, standardized, automatic or a predictable sequence of tasks, steps on stages. It is messy! However sequences and recurring types/forms/modes of experience can be discerned. Drawing deeply upon my own experience I have written about these in *SSP* and particularly in Chapter 4, ‘The Preaching Circle’, pp 53-70. Here, I can do no better than refer to this and to highlight particular sections/passages and especially those in the ‘preparation sequence’ of the preaching circle, pp 54-58.

When I came to look again at these pages I felt I ought to personalize them more thoroughly: I was at pains to depersonalize them as far as I could when I wrote them not least because Neil Richardson felt I ought! Here they are in the first person singular!

I find that the affective aspects of my preparation vary a great deal. Helpful and unhelpful feelings arise spontaneously at the most unlikely moments. At one end of the spectrum of these emotional ups and downs there are spiritually electric moments. These occur, for instance, when I experience new, exciting insights coming in a flash, seemingly from nowhere, along with the inner conviction to preach on them and the opportunity to do so. Such events induce a range of feelings in me: awe, euphoria, intellectual and spiritual animation. In such circumstances I draft sermons comparatively quickly in a flow of inspiration, with a sense of being used by God. Anticipating preaching is exciting. Such humbling and fulfilling experiences confirm my vocation and re-energize me.

At the other end of the spectrum are the occasions when I simply do not know what to preach about, even though I have lots of sermons in my filing cabinet and commentaries on my shelves. Preparation is laborious, mechanical, uninspired and I can be blighted by sermon writer’s block.

Feelings engendered in me by these experiences are the antithesis of those associated with the first kind. Then I experience a variety of experiences and feelings that fall between these extremes: when, for instance, one or other of the components - insight, inner prompting, and preaching opportunity - is disconcertingly absent. There is also the added complication of the time factor: I find, for instance working against the clock can focus my mind or induce panic; on the other hand, preparation can take all the time available to me and more, expanding into time that should be given to other things and creating guilt feelings.

The emergence of these different scenarios is unpredictable: I cannot of my own volition engineer or create the good ones, nor avoid or prevent the bad ones; they just happen unexpectedly. Whilst I cannot foresee, engineer or prevent them, I try to expect them in their unexpectedness, accept them as part and parcel of the way things actually work out in my unfolding ministry, be patient with myself when they occur and discover ways of coping with the different emotional conditions and effects they engender in me. Quite simply, I struggle to learn how to live with them in mature and contained ways. Through prayer and reflection, I try to cultivate and nurture inner poise and a philosophical approach to the fluctuating emotional states. I find this very difficult; I also find living with the lows painful and very trying. Three things I have learned from experience help me to gain intellectual if not emotional and spiritual poise and to be realistic about the highs and lows of preparation and sermon writer's block. They are:

*Emotional highs and lows do not necessarily indicate that I am either good or bad preacher.* My personality make me prone to various emotions and affect their degree and intensity, but highs and lows do not unfailingly represent the quality of my preparation or performance with any accuracy *nor* do they indicate or determine my true worth as a preacher *nor* the effectiveness of the outcome: sermons which have a difficult birth can have a powerful life. Many of the sermons that I have struggled with and agonized over are amongst the most rewarding that I have ever preached, but some of them are the worst! Unpredictably, what I consider to be a 'good' sermon can go badly wrong when I preach it in one church and extremely well in another.

*Feelings about preaching ministry are the effects of some things and also the cause of others.* My feelings are facts of life to be taken seriously. They can be reactions to disappointment over a preaching performance or to criticism of a sermon. But they may be displaced from unrelated occurrences such as a family argument. Whatever their source, once stirred, they can have a life of their own and become causal agents. They can and do distort my self-

image and lead me to underestimate or over estimate myself and to become depressed or conceited.

*Respecting and trusting my personal and idiosyncratic human and spiritual creative systems helps them to perform their functions better.* At times when I am preparing and drafting sermons I find that a lot of thoughts and ideas are buzzing around in my head, but no matter how hard I work at them, I simply cannot get them into a pattern or find a structure that holds them together thematically. Attempts to commit them to paper end in a collage of disparate thoughts. From experience, I know that left to its own devices my unconscious mind will, in its own time, bring them into some semblance of order - frequently in the middle of the night, 3am is the time that it normally occurs! But I have often persisted in working at them doggedly long after I should, because I want to complete the sermon notes and get on with something else. The result is an impasse: I tire myself out and deepen my despondency. Sermon notes of quality cannot be produced mechanically to order; they are conceived within me and, after their proper period of gestation, I- or the Holy Spirit- give birth to them. For most of the time, however, I do work more sensibly to the rhythms of my creative processes and then I find the Holy Spirit is better able to work *with* and *through* me at different levels of my consciousness. That I find to be a wonderful and humbling experience of prevenient grace. A basic general principle of sermon construction and preparation by which I try to live, therefore, is that I need to understand *my own* creative processes, to trust, respect and nurture them and to work *with* and *through* their moods, rhythms and time cycles; I must try not to envy or mimic those of others. When I collaborate with myself in these ways, God and I seem to be able to collaborate with each other more naturally and effectively; the Holy Spirit appears to enter the processes as a cooperative partner and to infuse them with divine inspiration. Such holy/human partnerships are those to which I aspire but frequently fail to achieve.

Another important aspect of writing notes and scripts is that they help me to prepare psychologically and spiritually for preaching appointments. Getting into a good frame of mind and heart is clearly desirable but it can be quite difficult. Various things inhibit me from doing so, such as feelings of unworthiness and inadequacy even when I recall that these are healthy and proper response to the awesome responsibility of preaching the word of God, that they induce within me creative tension and humility, that they generate emotional and spiritual energy in me that I need and lead me to reach out to the Holy Spirit for help and inspiration. All these are conditions necessary both for effective preaching and for my spiritual well being. I

have had the privilege and thrill of creative moments again and again. My unhealthy feelings can, however, become confused with these healthy ones and undermine them. This can unnerve and disable me. Having worked endlessly over my material, for instance, can mislead me into feeling and believing that my sermon ideas are elementary or mundane or lacklustre when they are not. My confidence ebbs away, despair and even panic can set in. Even when I understand and expect the emotional ups and downs of these processes and the patterns they take, I struggle in the emotional flux to find a quiet confidence and assurance. When I succeed, it brings a measure of equanimity.

So, for me, preaching means living with all kinds of emotional ups and downs, which at best result in the build up of tension and its creative release.

### ***3. Their Nature***

<sup>7</sup>Sermon notes and scripts are not sermons just as writing them is not preaching them and preaching them is not writing them. Whilst this is obvious, establishing and defining their natures and the relationship between them is, I find far from easy. Both activities are existential events in their own right. Writing notes and scripts is, in many ways, I find, preaching the sermon on paper within myself, in my heart and mind and to myself. And, at the same time imaging myself preaching it to the congregation for which I am preparing it. (I cannot remember preparing a sermon without a specific congregation and preaching event in mind). Already, I have reflected above about the messy psycho-spirituality of doing this as I did in *SPP*.

Amongst other things, it involves working contextually at a vast array of material and subject matter to create something that is a coherent sermon with its own integrity. (Clive Thexton, after listening to and reflecting upon my college sermon at Richmond, said that he conceived what I was doing in terms of building up a picture in words and ideas. At the time I felt this was most perceptive and still do. It immediately rang true is and informed my experience even though I had not thought of any preaching in terms of this analogy. When writing sermons and especially when preaching them, I know instinctively when I have built up completed the word picture of my sermon, of my message. Doing so is a deeply satisfying experience and feeling<sup>8</sup>). So the composition of sermon notes/scripts and the preaching

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<sup>7</sup> 29.2.12

<sup>8</sup> As I wrote this I was reminded of a monk speaking at Moor Park College, Farnham in the early 1950's about God's act of creation. He likened it to an opera singer in a large auditorium packed with people and silent in excited

of the sermon are interdependent creative activities. Notes and scripts are tangible records and reminders of intensive personal activities which create something within me, writes something in me, in my mind and soul. Preaching the sermon creates an event, an experience which can be measurable. It is recorded in the minds, hearts, memories of those who participated in the service. (Almost all of my preaching is done in the context of acts of Christian worship). Feelings about sermons long outlive accurate recall of the content: the emotional and spiritual impact of preaching – and of preparing for it – is very powerful, I find.

The creative relationship between preparation, sermon notes (scripts etc) is quite difficult to trace out and generalize about because it is so complex and diverse and almost mystical. Reflecting on this I found myself for the first time thinking of the notes as the bread and wine of the sacrament of preaching. When both preparation and preaching are truly inspired, the Holy Spirit transforms the written to that the spoken (preached) word becomes the word of God, the word made flesh which, in turn, reveals the ‘real presence of Christ’. That is true preaching to which I aspire but only achieve on special occasions. Then, we, preacher and congregation, experience the ministry of word and sacrament. (Whilst this has been deeply moving for me and is like writing a sermon. I have completed the picture at this part, or so I feel!)

#### ***4. Structuring Notes and Scripts***

Structuring and notes with headings and sub-headings is an important part of my present practice along with finding opposite titles. I give much attention to their wording. They shape sermons, define and outline the contours of the content, I embolden them by underlining them; they highlight significant stages in the argument or thesis of the sermon, they are the punctuation of the notes. I rely heavily upon them when preaching. It is important that they clearly state the progression of thought, how one section of the notes builds on or follows logically from the previous one.

Properly articulated and sequentially organized they facilitate creative flow of the notes and sermons: one thing follows another naturally. My earliest and early sermons were without such overt structuring; the argument was implicit.<sup>9</sup> It would be possible to locate the change in practice.

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anticipation when the singer was about to sing. Whilst singing he filled the place with his singing. God spoke and the world was created, he said, and as long as he keeps speaking the act of creating and recreating continues.

9 About four years ago in some in-service training of preachers, I got two or

The affective structuring is equally important but not as apparent in the notes. Emotion and excitement that I experienced in writing the notes expresses itself sometimes in my handwriting; for instance it becomes racy through written in the haste and heat of feelings in a desperate / intense attempt to get the thoughts and inspiration down on paper before I lose the fullness of and excitement about what I am experiencing. Possibly this is why I prefer to use my written notes in the pulpit rather than a typed version which standardizes the text distinctively between the carefully, neatly written paragraphs in which the words have been considered carefully and ponderously to those which I write in excitement without much thought to grammar or syntax.

However, I do not annotate the notes to indicate the emotions and excitement (or the reverse!) experienced in composing them. Nor do I indicate the timings that I need to emphasize. That could be done. In fact I have done it in in-service training sessions. But it would be entirely wrong to try to reproduce the emotions experienced in writing the notes in preaching the sermon. (Although I have told congregations at times that I have struggled with preparing a sermon but not with the intention or a desire to struggle in the same way in the pulpit! That would be impossible). Each has its own emotional patterns, rhythms and music generated in quite different but interrelated contexts and settings. One is private and personal. In that setting I grapple with the material inwardly and on paper in the presence of God and with the imagination and conjectures about the congregation and the event for which I am preparing. The affective content is entirely my own. The other is public and interpersonal. It has its own atmosphere, mood and expectations generated by the interactions between people gathered worship and the place in which they assemble. My affective engagement and involvement is self and other <sup>\*10</sup> generated. It is the synthesis of my feelings in preparation and those of being in the

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three of them to submit manuscripts of their sermons so that we could discuss their composition. To my amazement two of them were without sub-headings. One was a presbyter who had been a tutor, the other by a local preacher who had taught history. A small group of us worked on the latter. Initially the preacher was defensive and felt the exercise was unnecessary. However after we had teased out the structure and struggled to find sub-titles he saw how the sermon could have been structured better and said, as did the others, that the exercise was invaluable to good presentation. This underlined and confirmed a conviction I had come to from listening to hundreds of sermons that most of them lacked good structure and would have been improved enormously in each case by careful structuring.

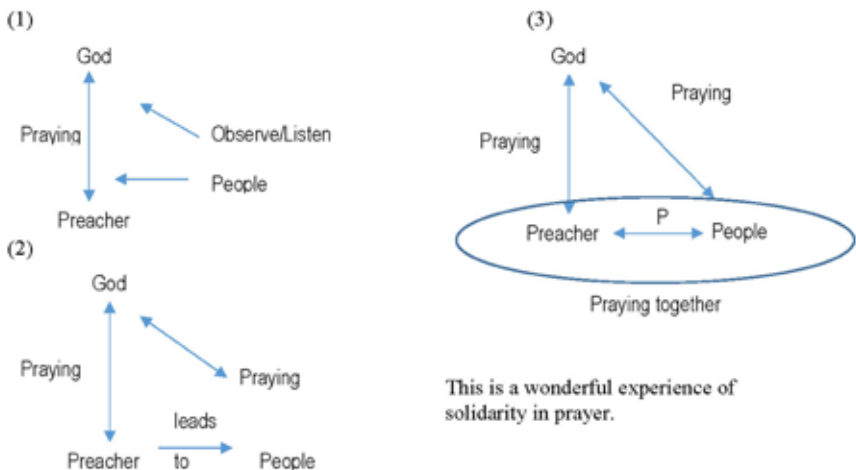
10 Cf David Riesmon et al *The Lonely Crowd*: tradition-, inner- and other-directed cultural types.

preachers role in a living congregation sensitive of each other and the presence of God and the feelings of everyone else involved. Both are existential events in their own right but deeply interconnected in my case. I must give myself to the public one allowing it to sub come and draw upon and express all that is now relevant if I am to preach contextually and to enter into the collective affectivity of this new existential event. Then it will be for me and for members of the congregation a genuine emotional experience in which I express myself with authentic affective conviction. One of the things people have said they appreciate about my preaching is that it is with thought and feelings. I think it draws heavily upon my emotional intelligence.

## ***5. Preparing in the Private Domain and Preaching in the Public Domain***

The diagram below shows how in preparation – or is intended to – the congregation is in mind as is the event. Preparation involves, inter alia, finding, shaping and honing material which I feel is important enough to preach about in ways which it speaks to, becomes the word of God to members of the congregation and fits the vent. So the arrow lines are dotted to show this mental link whereas in the public domain they are firm lines to indicate physical presence and psycho-spiritual interaction.

A limitation of this diagram is that it is somewhat static and the movement between the two domains is oscillatory. In reality the two systems

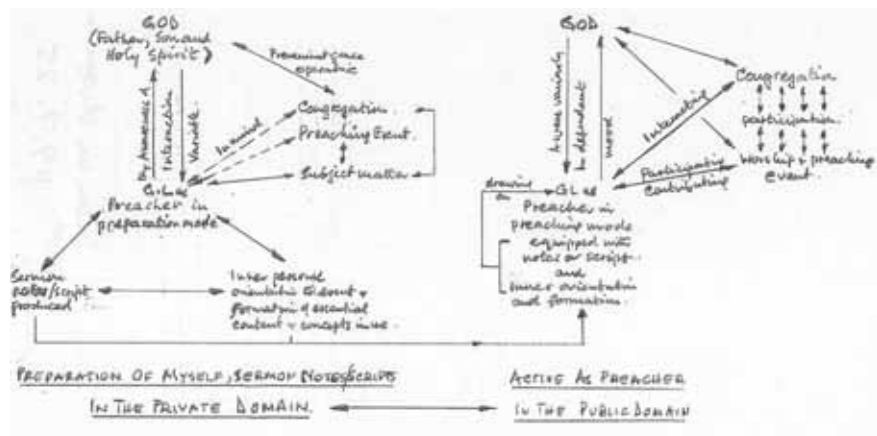


are dynamic and dynamically interrelated. They interact and intersect continuously, not least through prayer which has not featured in what I have written here but which features large in my life – in both domains – especially when I am anxious, unsure of myself or fearful and the events are demanding.

### A reflective note

The interpersonal dynamics of preaching are similar to those of conducting public prayer in some ways. I have identified three possible patterns of interaction.

#### *Private and Public Domains of my Preaching Working Life*



In *SPP* I wrote in some detail about the public and private domains of a preacher's life, again out of my own experience (see pp 47-52). I am not going to rehearse that material here. Without any semblance of complacency or conceit I think have acquired sufficient of the attributes and abilities required to prepare for and practice my preaching ministry at a standard generally acceptable to both myself and the congregations to which I have preached over the years (cf p50). By and large, the things I have learnt serve me reasonably well in both domains of work and the movement between them. One of the things that has helped me in the past few years is a suggestion from Rita, my daughter in law. She happened to be staying with us when I had an appointment to take the morning service at Lidgett Park Methodist Church which is the one we attend regularly. I was quite anxious about it. Rita suggested that I imagine myself preaching in a manner I would like to do. I took her advice and found myself thinking of

myself standing erect in the pulpit looking at the congregation confidently and proudly (not arrogantly so) galvanised by the occasion and animated by what I wanted to share. I was, in fact, ‘connecting myself positively’. It worked quite remarkably. I had a great time. Frequently since I have used this same device to prepare myself mentally, psychologically and spiritually. Always with the same good outcome. Picturing myself in situ in the mood and mode in which I want and intend to preach is a way of projecting myself contributes significantly to overcoming anxieties, displacing fears of failure and realizing my hopes.

## ***6. Using Notes in the Public Domain***

For the first part of my preaching ministry I did not refer to my notes at all either when preaching and speaking. I always took them with me to give me confidence and as a safeguard against my ‘drying up’. But I spoke entirely from memory. This continued throughout my ministry in Carmarthen and South Wales. This was so with the thirty-fourty minute talks that I gave in Carmarthen and my other churches on subjects like the parables and world religions. I might have had the briefest of outlines or a note of words or names but no more. Before all services or talks I pored over my notes, reading them through two or three times – a practice which has continued throughout my ministry. As far as I recall, this practice changed incrementally from early in my ministry in London, i.e. from 1962 onwards. First, I used headings and then headings and notes. There is no way in which I can now trace the changes in any detail. My practice has it has evolved so far is: to write out in full the notes or scripts and then to do a concise summary ideally on one page. Normally I do the summary some days after writing the notes and on the day or evening before I preach. Frequently preparing a summary refines the structure and sharpens the presentation of material and it brings back to mind and memory the content of the notes. The notes can take a week or two to write. (That is not always the case. I wrote the notes for a sermon yesterday morning! But I had been thinking about it for a week). Whereas writing a summary rarely takes more than an hour or so. Consequently it is gathering material together in summary from which has been written piecemeal. This I find to be creative. I take both in the pulpit with me whenever possible placing one above the other.

Describing how I preach for them is not easy. I do not read them through word for word. I cannot recall ever doing that. More often than not I will read the text and quotations. But as far as possible I address the congregation directly, looking at the people but not generally making

eye contact except in small groups. I tend to glance periodically at the script focusing more on the sub-headings than the detail of the notes. Very occasionally, when I am not sure of the next point or cannot recall it sufficiently quickly, I will read a sentence from the script. In flow, I speak without reference to the notes. Possibly this is for most of the time. This explanation is somewhat inadequate, but it is honest. My relationship with my notes is messy. They give me the assurance and confidence I require to aim to be as free from them as possible, orientated to what I am preaching about and to the people – in short to give myself to the act of preaching freely. (A favourite word in my diaries, ‘I preached freely’!).

## 7. *Their Quality*

As I worked through the sermon files I was aware of the enormous amount of energy that I have invested over the years in sermon preparation. I regret none of it and have been greatly rewarded by it. The discipline of doing it has constrained me to think through many aspects of my faith, critical contemporary religious and secular issues and problems in living the Christian life and to come to conclusions.

Consequently the sermons record: my beliefs at different periods of my ministry and the ways in which they have evolved; the issues I have sought to address because of their importance; my concerns and convictions. The list of sermons and talks which is appended to this section indicates the range of subjects I have tackled. Also, preaching enabled to speak out about things on my mind. That was a great privilege. Much release of feelings and thoughts about things of vital importance to me was facilitated through having a pulpit from which to preach.

Notwithstanding all of this, during the first few weeks that I worked on the notes of sermons and talks I was somewhat overwhelmed by feelings of disappointment at the quality of them. I know that I worked as hard as I could on them for most of the time under considerable pressure from the other demands of my ministry and life. Often I took, stole, time for other things. Nonetheless I was disappointed by the quality. Some of the points could have been worked out more fully; material would have benefitted from re-writing and editing. Several sermons went through several editions and adaptations without producing a synthesized version. Typed polished versions would have given me the choice of considering publishing some of them.

(Jed Davies said to me a couple of years ago that he regretted not publishing the sermons I preached at Chelsea at two or three special

events). Occasionally people asked to see my notes, mostly I said that was not possible, but two or three times I did get out a typed summary.

Gradually the sense of disappointment lessened. I realized that I had done the best I could at considerable cost and whatever the quality of the notes, the preaching seems to have been acceptable. (But that raises an issue I need to consider further – should I have given more time to my preaching ministry? That would have prevented me from doing all I did in p70-75, Avec and afterwards, I must turn to this later). Also I realized that over the past ten or twelve years I have given much more time to sermon preparation. Lidgett Park Methodist Church has drawn the best preaching out of me and requests for the text of my sermons to be made available has involved editing the notes. Further there have been requests to give talks on some of them.

Incidentally, experts in the field would have a field day examining the changes that have occurred in my handwriting over the years!

## ***8. Their Content***

Overall, whilst the quality of the presentation of the material left much to be desired at times and disappointed me, part of the content did not. Consistently it is animated; charged with energy and passion; energetic and excited. Invariably it is about some issue or concern that has galvanised me. Whether others will see all this from reading the notes or not, I do not know. They evoke in me memories of writing them and preaching the sermons. If anything the quality of the content improves and continues to do so. (I am struggling to express what I feel about them. I am using these notes to think through partly formed ideas).

An overview of the context and subject matter of the sermons and talks is to be found in lists of them which are presented and discussed in the next section, i.e. II.

## ***9. Content: Its Identification and Formation***

<sup>11</sup>Tackling the task of reflecting on how I identify the content or subject matter of sermons is difficult not least because it is diverse, complex and mysterious. At times it seems as though I do not find or discover or work out the subject matter but that it finds me; it comes to me, strikes me, is borne in upon me. In other words, it comes from beyond me and appears mysteriously and awesomely within me. Does it come from God? I like

to think so and am most confident when I believe that it does. It could of course come from God through the inner depths of my psyche. It feels like this when a verse or scripture, what someone says, an idea/concept in a book, an incident, a TV programme..... the list is endless..... strikes me, possesses me, takes hold of me, excites me, grabs me. Other occasions are quite different, I find myself in some instances discerning, deducing, working out that a situation requires I preach about this or that. It may be debate in the church or the media or the world generally about a social, moral, spiritual, political and theological or religious issue. Then there are those awful times when I do not know what to preach about!

This is one aspect, the identification of fastening on to and being gripped by a topic or theme which points to the content of the sermon talk. The other aspect is the development of the theme, the research, thinking, praying that goes into the determining, shaping and structuring of the content into a preachable form. Earlier, I wrote about some aspects of this. There I reflected on some of the difficult periods in preparation when the subject matter simply will not take shape in my conscious minds no matter how I try and the need to trust the creativity in my whole being and particularly in my unconscious. Here I want to try to tease out some of the interactive processes which, again are complex!

Shaping the content of sermons draws deeply and heavily upon all my faculties and involves my whole being: it is an intellectual and spiritual exercise, requiring much emotional and physical energy and biblical and theological study and emotional intelligence.

The gravity and awesome responsibility of preaching about things of such enormous significance sharpens all my faculties. Consequently, shaping subject matter is for me an intense and all-absorbing internal activity – as is searching for and exploring it is, which I find to be variously animating, depressing, frightening and intimidating. Whilst doing it I have experienced some of my most wonderful and stressful spiritual and intellectual experiences: at best supremely rewarding, at worst distressing and painful. In one sense this intensive internal activity I find to be a highly personal engagement with myself, at times accompanied by feeling profoundly alone. But in another sense I feel the interior personal space is heavily populated. God is there and the people for whom I am preparing and to whom I will preach. Sometimes I feel like wrestling Jacob – I am wrestling with myself, God, congregations as well as with the subject matter! So, spiritually and personally it is highly interactive, imaginatively, empathetically and spiritually.

This interactive process goes on internally throughout the preparation – all the time, any time, working or sleeping – between and with myself, the material, God, others as I imagine and empathize with them. Amongst other things it involves finding form of words, concepts, illustrations which can communicate through the spoken/preached word the message that is forming within me. The intensity of these internal interactive processes and their complexity is enhanced by an intermediate stage between thinking, exploring and feeling them and preaching on them – writing notes or scripts. Getting things down on paper – on trying to do so – I find to be an acid test of their veracity. Flaws in my arguments which seem so clear in my mind are revealed as I try to express them. Lack of flow in my reasoning and in the sequence of my points and so much else is quickly exposed. Working at all times on paper is always highly profitable even if it is quite demanding. Feeling I have expressed things as well as I can is satisfying and builds up my confidence in my material as well as providing a working script. And when it all pours on to the paper – as it sometimes does after a period of painful gestation – I find myself excited, humbly thankful and fulfilled.

(Earlier I noted another important aspect of writing notes and scripts, namely that they help me to prepare psychologically and spiritually for preaching appointments.

Whilst I am writing notes I focus purposefully on producing a script the substance of which can be preached in 15-20 minutes. (Twenty minutes is the time it normally takes one to preach a sermon or slightly longer). Generally this involves me selecting from more material than I can cover and summarizing what I have chosen so that the points I wish to make are clear when heard in contradistinction to being read. So I am writing down material to be spoken and heard. Moreover the sermon must be self contained whilst making readily understood and accessible connections with the relevant stuff of faith, life and experience. I find this challenging but exhilarating: it involves me in creating something which is in turn creative through being preached. It arises out of my thought and, if it is to do its job, it must promote thought – from my inner dialogue to that of the members of the congregation, but more of that later.

This process is of particular importance when I am exploring ideas or concepts critically important to my faith and spiritual wellbeing and/or to the members of the congregation to which I am to preach.

Composing such sermons I take very seriously and with great care and caution attempting to be as sensitive and caring as possible. For over forty years I have been helped to work through religious and spiritual confusion,

## Aspects of the Christian life 38 [total 110]

- Abiding in Christ 1
  - Acceptance 4
  - Bartering the soul 1
  - Being and belonging 8
  - Confusion 1
  - Conversion 7
  - Death 1
  - Discipleship 3
  - Dividends 1
  - Escapism 2
  - Experience 5
  - Failure 1
  - Fear 2
  - Fellowship 1
  - Friendship 4
  - Guidance 1
  - Harmony 3
  - Happenings 1
  - Identity 11
  - Leisure 1
  - My faith: by this I live 4
  - Satisfaction 1
  - Temptation 4
  - Time, timing and timed 2
  - Way
  - What are you worth? 3
- ible [89]
- Beatitudes 5
  - Bible 12
  - Bible studies 2
  - Bible talks and lectures 30
  - Miracles 2
  - Parables 36
  - Psalms 2
  - Transfiguration
- Christian citizenship and social reform 11 [24]
- Caring 5
  - Christian aid 2
  - Racial justice 3
  - Rich and poor 1
  - Temperance 2
- Christian education [2]
- Christianity as a creative force [2]
- Church [25]
- Church and community [19]
- Church unity [11]
- Family and community worship [c60]
- Festivals [44]
- Harvest 13
  - New year 16
  - Remembrance Sunday 15
- Inner life and history 7 [19]
- Intimacy 1
  - Loneliness 4
  - Love 8
- Humanity, the environment and God 11 [32]
- Change 7
  - Development 1
  - Suffering and disaster 13
- Jesus Christ 48 [49]
- What Jesus means to me 1
- The liturgical year [169]
- Advent and incarnation 49
  - Ascension 8
  - Covenant 15
  - Crucifixion 20
  - Lent 18
  - Palm Sunday 11

## THEMES

- Easter Sunday, resurrection 26
  - Sunday 2
  - Pentecost (Whit Sunday) 15
  - Transfiguration 5
- Mission [13]
- Mission 12
  - Message and messenger 1
- Morality and religion 21 [47]
- Competition, co-operation and conflict 3
  - Demonstrations 1
  - Good news, not good advice 1
  - Human rights 7
  - Kindness 1
  - Moral rearmament 1
  - Non-violence 1
  - Sexuality 1
  - Sin 1
  - Sympathy and pity 1
  - Temperance 2
  - Ten Commandments 6
- Other faiths [8]
- Living religions of the world 7
  - Scientology 1
- Peace and war [9]
- Preaching [4]
- Reflective Christian processors [2]
- Sacraments and occasional offices [14]
- Baptism 2
  - Communion addresses 12
- Spirituality [9]
- Prayer 6
  - Quietness 1
  - Saints 2
- Theology [113]
- Assurance 1
  - Authority 3
  - Doctrine of 'man' 3
  - Faith and reason 16
  - Family of God 13
  - Forgiveness and reconciliation 2
  - Freedom 1
  - God 17
  - Guidance 1
  - Healing 2
  - Honest to God 3
  - Hope 3
  - Idealism 1
  - Justification by faith and of works 3
  - Kingdom of God 10
  - Power 12
  - Purpose 1
  - Providence 3
  - Reconciliation, and forgiveness 2
  - Revelation of the unknown 1
  - Sin 1
  - Superstition 2
  - Time 2
  - Trinity 6
  - What and why of my belief
  - Will of God 1
  - Work 4
  - (See also The liturgical year)
- Topical [9]
- Apollo 10 1
  - Blindness 4
  - Don't adjust your set 1
  - Holidays 2
  - Walls 1
- Vocation [7]

## GENERIC THEMES

Aspects of the Christian life [110]	Christianity as a creative force [2]
Bible [89]	Christian education [2]
Christian citizenship and social reform [24]	Reflective Christian processors [2]
Christian education [2]	Preaching [4]
Christianity as a creative force [2]	Vocation [7]
Church [25]	Church unity [11]
Church and community [19]	Mission [13]
Church unity [11]	Other faiths [8]
Family and community worship [c60]	Peace and war [9]
Festivals [44]	Spirituality [9]
Inner life and history [19]	Topical [9]
Humanity, the environment and God [32]	Sacraments and occasional offices [14]
Jesus Christ [49]	Church and community [19]
The liturgical year [169]	Inner life and history [19]
Mission [13]	Christian citizenship and social reform [24]
Morality and religion [47]	Church [25]
Other faiths [8]	Humanity, the environment and God [32]
Peace and war [9]	Festivals [44]
Preaching [4]	Morality and religion [47]
Reflective Christian processors [2]	Jesus Christ [49]
Sacraments and occasional offices [14]	Family and community worship [c60]
Spirituality [9]	Bible [89]
Theology [113]	Aspects of the Christian life [110]
Topical [9]	Theology [113]
Vocation [7]	The liturgical year [169]

face up to issues related to faith and doubt and to work through theological dissonance by an interpretation and understanding of such experience described by Professor Russell Hindmarch. In a lecture in London which I heard him give he described how in his work and religious life he experienced conceptual cycles.

‘Simplicities’ he said helped him to work on complexities he could not otherwise get his mind around. In order to help people to handle their confusions I preached a sermon on this same seven years ago and published a version of it by request in the Lidgett Park Methodist Church *Link* and an abbreviated one in *SPP* as an example of what I called ‘process preaching’.

(See *SPP* pp 28-9 and Appendix I). A copy of the *Link* version is appended). I will return to this in Section III, 'Underlying Principles and their Genesis'.

P.S. As I worked on this section I turned to diagrams to help me think through the material but they were not very helpful. They oversimplified the patterns and processes of interaction, I felt. Describing them I concluded was a better way of trying to communicate them which is unusual for me!

## *Epilogue*

<sup>12</sup>Writing this section has been quite demanding but very rewarding. It was written after completing the enormous task of sorting, pruning, reorganizing and listing my sermon notes and scripts. As I did that work I experienced all kinds of emotions: nostalgia; gratitude for all the preaching I had been able to do; a sense of achievement and pride in some of the sermons I had produced; hypercritical of some of my efforts; disappointed, defensive, self-denigrating about my failure to edit and polish some of the sermons; wondering whether I should have dedicated myself more thoroughly post Parchmore (1972) to preaching and what kind of a ministry I would have had had I done so. Some of these feelings remain but they are now limited. Reflecting and writing has helped me to be more constructive about my preaching ministry. At all stages I put my heart and soul into it and gave myself to it unconditionally. My sermons were the best I could produce and preach in the circumstances in which I could myself and the constraints I was experiencing in circuit ministry, family life and the work I did in Project 70-75, Avec and afterwards.

Throughout my preaching was enormously influenced and inspired by the work I did and the studies and research to which I gave myself in order to do that work. My preaching would have been much different, and I think much poorer, without experience which played an important part in my intellectual, theological and spiritual formation. Preaching was an integral part of my whole ministry, it was informed by my whole experience *and* it contributed creatively to every aspect of my being and ministry. It was/it not a bolted on addition. It was/is a vital organ of the body of my being and my ministry. I am a preacher, an ordained minister whose ministry has been variously exercised as a pastor, researcher, tutor, trainer, author, consultant, lecturer..... All of which has been about Christian ministry.

So I think I have a more balanced view and find myself thankfully accepting my ministry in general and my preaching ministry in particular – as they say nowadays, 'It is what it is'. Thanks to be God!

## **II. Reflecting on the Substance of My Preaching**

As already noted, I have gained a more profound overview of my preaching ministry by sorting through all my files and reorganizing them and listing essential details of the notes of each sermon over a period of two or three months: my memory has been refreshed, corrected and sharpened; impressions, some long held, have been revised. Consequently, I write this section from a better informed and less impressionistic perspective than I would have done without all that sorting and listing.

### **1. The Notes**

At this stage, I have only one observation to add to the points made in Part I. For the main part the notes are carefully structured written versions of what I planned to say when I preached the sermon: as I wrote them I heard and felt myself preaching them. However, there was a period, roughly coincident with my Parchmore ministry and my time working on Project 70-75 and Avec when notes of many of my sermons and addresses consisted of precisely worded headings of the main points carefully structured supplemented by brief notes. During this part of my ministry my energy for creative thinking and writing was used on my work in developing and applying the non-directive approach to church and community development and studying, researching and writing it up.

### **2. The List of Sermons and Talks, March 2012**

By way of getting into commenting and reflecting on the list of sermons and talks I need to recap on its formulation and status.

Dorothy Household produced the first list of my sermons and lecture files in the mid 1960's as part of an enormous amount of work that she did on cataloguing my books and papers. (She was a librarian). Her original list is appended, partly to illustrate the process and partly from nostalgia.<sup>13</sup> (Dorothy was an enormous help and support and would have thrown herself unreservedly into this present exercise with great enthusiasm and excitement. It is a tragedy she is not here. I would love her to be working with me on these notes. She said in the 60's that she would one day write my biography but sadly that was not to be. I still miss her). The list proved

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13 Sermons and Lectures: compiled in the 1960's by Dorothy Household

to be extremely useful and for some time I kept it up to date. It gave the titles of the files but not the details of their content. The version with which I started when I began this exercise is also appended.<sup>14</sup> Working from the latest version of Dorothy's list<sup>15</sup> and with the files and their contents, I:

- pruned the files of redundant material and mainly cuttings and articles and draft notes which reduced the volume by a third;
- listed the title, text, date and reference number or as number of this information as was available; (Sermons without titles, mainly early ones, I titled. I did not start numbering my sermons until September 1966);
- collated sermons and talks originally filed separately under their titles under generic headings. (Inter alia this made the material more accessible and revealed patterns.)

Exactly what emerged from this process can be seen by comparing the Lists of Sermons and Talks 2011 and 2012. Sufficient to say here that the complicated process resulted in a considerable reduction in the number of files!

Whilst the March 2012 comprehensive list is proving to be useful for general use in my preaching ministry and my purpose in writing these notes, the following points indicate their limitations:

- Generally but not invariably, the dates indicate when the notes were written and, when this is not available when they were preached for the first time;
- The lists do not indicate how many times the sermons or variants of them have been preached, that information can be gained from my sermon registers; (some sermons have been preached in revised forms. Up to 1972 it was common to 'take sermons round the circuit' (\*<sup>16</sup>))
- Generally but again not invariably, the information relates to the original rather than revised sermon notes.
- See also the note on the sermon notes..... 9.7.10.

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<sup>14</sup> Sermons and Talks, March 2012

<sup>15</sup> Sermons and Talks, December 2011. (All in Appendix II)

<sup>16</sup> But I was struck by the considerable number of services that I preached only once. It would be interesting to quantify this. For one reason or another I was not moved to preach them again – opportunity? standard? I don't know and possible cannot recall much of the detail.

The texts from which I have preached are noted in the March 2012 List of Sermons and Talks. However, it is not easy to discern the Biblical cover of these texts. A better picture of my Biblical textual coverage from the 'Index of GL's Sermons With and Without Texts' +<sup>17</sup>

Unfortunately this is still incomplete but it could be completed from the list of Sermons and Talks, March 2012. However, texts alone do not give a good picture of my use of scripture in preaching.

[25.3.12 At this stage I was feeling quite disheartened, I felt I was losing the plot: I couldn't remember with any certainty what I had written about some things: I felt I was repeating myself over and again and/or moving back to spiral forward; also, I felt here was too much scaffolding i.e. writing about things in order to write, say what I wanted to say. I felt I wanted/needed to do a re-write, seriously editing the material. Eventually, however, I recalled that I was writing notes not a piece for publication and that I should simply continue. And that I am doing.

26.3.12 Further thoughts: One thing that has/is troubling me is the fear that the overview of my preaching ministry gained by sorting and listing is then slipping from me because the process is so protracted. Also, I am feeling that the reflections and analysis will be less profound than I desire and consequently be disappointing. So, possibly I am holding back from the analysis and possible disappointment. Or is it simply that I am unable to get my mind around it all, there is so much material and so many variables? Reminiscent of the RAE when they requisitioned (stole?) from the Germans after the War large rooms full of experimental data which they were unable to analyze and process because of its sheer quantity and complexity. They couldn't find 'simplicities'. Possible that is where I am. We will see.]

### **3. Generic Subject Matter**

During the time that I was reorganizing the files and listing the sermons, it occurred to me that if I could find a way of differentiating and presenting the subject matter to which I had given attention the outcome might be quite revealing especially if it enabled me to tease out emphases or preoccupations throughout my ministry and at particular stages of it. This still seemed to be a potentially fruitful thing to do when I had completed the list of Sermon and Talks, March 2012. It could possibly help me to codify my preaching material and even discern an underlying structure.

So, equipped with the March 2012 list, I started to think about how I might get at the emphases, patterns and preoccupations in my preaching. When I compiled this list I gathered most of the sermons originally listed under their titles under generic heads some of which already existed, for instance files such as Advent and Incarnation, Crucifixion etc. Some, however, I left under the sermon/titles either because they did fit comfortably under generic heads or, as that is how I remembered them, for ease of retrieving them. As a result, the substance and range of my thinking and preaching became much clearer and stimulated further analysis and reflection. How I conceptualized the shape of my ministry is written into this list cum index cum catalogue. Reflecting on this list with a view to getting at emphases etc, I felt that what I needed to stimulate and facilitate analysis was a breakdown of the subject matter which would act as a reflexive foil to the March 2012 list which is essentially an index to aid access and a catalogue of my preaching ministry. So I teased out of the March 2012 List of Sermons and Talks the following twenty five generic themes.

Aspects of the Christian life	The liturgical year
Bible	Mission
Christian citizenship and social reform	Morality and religion
Christian education	Other faiths
Christianity as a creative force	Peace and war
Church	Preaching
Church and community	Reflective Christian processors
Church unity	Sacraments and occasional offices
Family and community worship	Spirituality
Festivals	Theology
Inner life and history	Topical
Humanity, the environment and God	Vocation
Jesus Christ	

These covered all the subject matter of my preaching ministry. Some were headings in the March 2012 List, those that were not become sub-headings of the generic themes. The result is presented on the next page. Numbers are those of the number of sermons I wrote on these themes and sub-themes with the totals in [ ] brackets. Note, this is the number I wrote, not preached: some were preached several times; but I was stuck by the number I preached once only, it would be interesting to quantify this for my registers!

The picture was further clarified by producing two more lists of the generic on principal themes giving the total number of sermons written (not preached), the first in alphabetical order, the second in ascending numerical order.

#### **4. The Status and Potential Value of the Linear Classification System**

Subject matter headings in these lists variously represent or indicate the principle themes, preoccupations, presenting subject matter of Sermons but not their scope or content. All the Sermons, for instance, invariably have biblical, moral and spiritual content and spelt out the implications for personal Christian life and living and the overall implications for church and society. Consequently Sermons contain material that falls under more than one heading and could be variably classified and cross-referenced. However, the lists are useful for what they do show providing account is taken of what they do not show and their ensuing limitations.

Essentially what the list of headings on the previous pages does show, depict, is the basic lineaments of my current mental map of the subject matter of my preaching ministry. This map shows that I conceptualise and categorise my preaching under twenty-five discrete interrelated heads. (Twenty-four if you discount ‘topical’ – I didn’t know could classify these!). Over the years this map has evolved fund and shape to another as I considered how to file each Sermon in thou. Some generic groupings emerged but most Sermons were originally filed under their titles. This process has been accelerated and refined through the sorting, re-classifying and listing described in this section of my Notes. Importantly, the map has not been constructed to conform to a predetermined profile; it is an emergent product of producing a way of organising my Sermon notes to meet my particular and peculiar needs; it emerged, therefore, from responding existentially to preaching needs and opportunities as they occurred over a period of sixty years.

Seeing as producing such a list is a way of reviewing and shaping my preaching ministry holistically as well as a way of filing Sermon notes in a retrievable manner, I realise with hindsight that, had I been able to find the time and energy, to do even an abbreviated form of this sorting and editing periodically, it would have had highly desirable positive effects upon my understanding and conduct of my preaching ministry and its praxis.

## 5. Gleanings from the Lists

Reflecting on and browsing through the lists, I glean that I have given prolonged and serious attention to:

- Biblical exposition (89)
- The person, ministry, mission and salvific work of Jesus Christ; Jesus Christianity, the liturgical year (218)
- Christian education (2)
- The nature of Christianity (Christianity as a creative force, theology (115)
- Christianity and other faiths (8)
- Personal and collective Christian, vocational life (aspect of Christian life, inner life and history, reflective Christianity processes, spirituality, vocation (147)
- The nature of the church and its worship, unity and ministry and mission (church, family and community worship, festivals, church unity, mission and sacraments and occasional offices (167)
- Church, humanity, environment and community (Christian citizenship and social reform, church and community humanity, the environment and God (75)
- Morality and religion (47)
- Peace and war (9)
- Preaching (4)
- Topical concerns (9)

### *Notes about this list*

Those headings without any sub-headings are direct quotes from the lists.

Those headings which combine several of the headings in the original lists show the headings included.

The numbers represent the total number of sermons written and catalogued under the generic head. But note what is said above about the status of these numbers and their relationship to the headings.

## *Observations in the numerically-weighted lists*

In producing these generic subject matter lists and weighting them numerically, I was working on the hunch that it was a way of quantifying the attention I have given to the various subjects. At this point, I started to have doubts about this and to lose confidence in what I was doing and the momentum to continue. I realised that the number of sermons I have preached on each subject would be a more accurate indicator but this would involve going through my preaching registers – a total work. Undoubtedly it would refine this rather crude method but I do not feel I can or want to undertake it when I am beginning to have doubts about the value of what I am doing. Assuming that the number of Sermons sermons written reliably indicates the attention given to various subjects over the sixty-year period, what do they show or possibly more accurately suggest? – or is it imply?

They imply that attention was given to the following subjects:

- Jesus Christ (218)
- The church (167)
- Christian life (147)
- Christianity (115)
- Biblical exposition (89)
- Church, humanity and community & environment (75)
- Morality and religion (47)
- Peace and war (9)
- Church and other faiths (8)
- Topical concerns (9)
- Preaching (4)
- Christian education (2)

Total 890

890 sermons seems a comparatively small number. Had I stayed in Circuit work, it would have been much more, possibly 2,000 dependent upon the kind of appointments. Taking into account the number of re-writes, it could be that over this period I have written some 1,000 sermons. That averages at 17 sermons a year (written, not the number of preaching appointments which is much more), i.e. here one every three weeks, which is reasonable given all the other work that I did from 1972 – 2007 – I think that was when I retired from the MA in C.M.M.

But how do I interpret and assess this? On the face of it, numerically there are far more Sermons that major on the fundamentals of the Christianity faith than under any other heading. Jesus Christ, Christianity life, Christianity and the Bible account for 569 of the 890 Sermons viz some 64%. Clearly my preaching is, and rightly so, Christian centred, but it is all set in the given socio-religious contexts as profoundly as possible: in this sense it is extrovert not introvert and its dynamic is centrifugal not centripetal. Consequently it is simply not possible from these figures to deduce the relative attention given to Christianity and its theology in contradistinction to its socio-religious application and relevance in specific contexts. And, in any case, if it were possible to quantify these things, how is the numerical distribution to be assessed? Reflecting on this, I realised that the concept in the back of my mind was summed up in the world 'balance' i.e. equal or essential attention being given to matters of faith, doctrine and Christianity religious praxis and to the nature and authority if religious and secular contexts in which we, preacher and congregation, had to make sense, determine their implications for ministry and mission and live out on vocations. Having articulated this, I am increasingly doubtful that it is a realistic or reliable evaluation foil.

What however can be reliably deduced from the lists is that whilst my preaching is and remains faithfully Christ and Christian centred it avoids being narrowly circumscribed because it addresses directly contextual issues beyond its religious circumference.

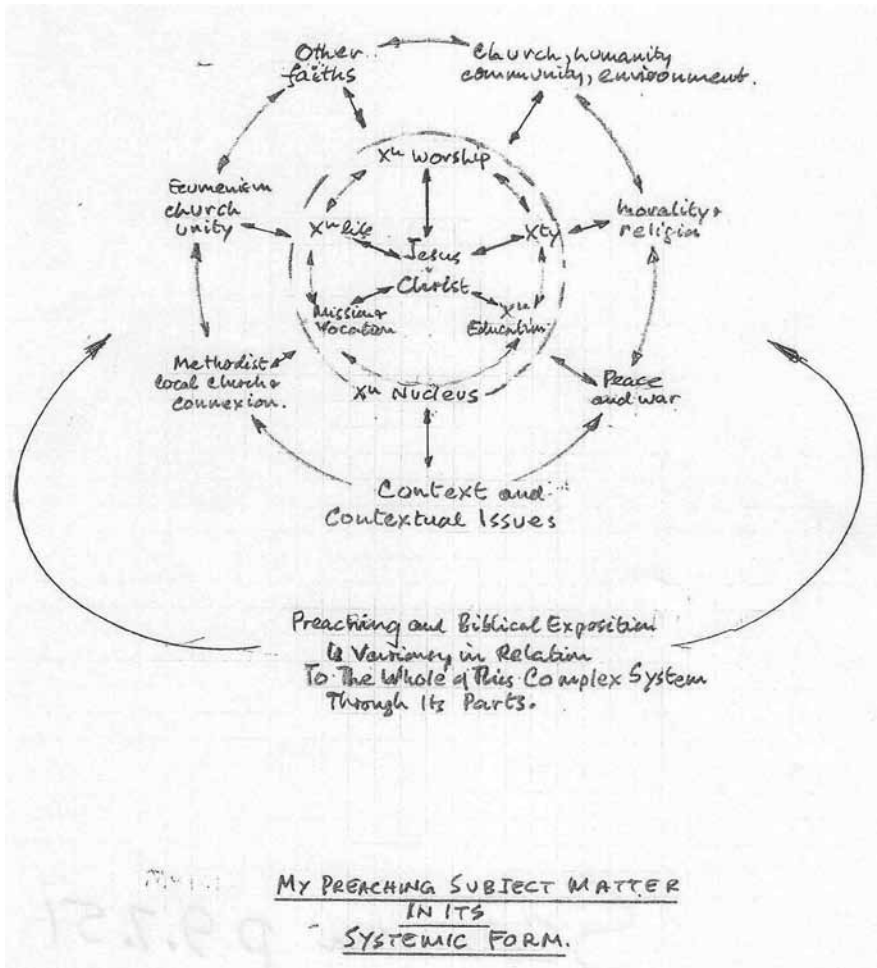
But in any case this was a sixty-year overview. How did the 'balance' undulate as my preaching ministry unfolded stage by stage? And what would this show?

At this stage in my reflections, I found myself nonplussed! I felt I had come down a cul-de-sac.

## **6. Breakthrough of a Systemic Perspective**

As I cogitated my dilemma and felt sorry for myself, it suddenly dawned upon me that these subjects are systemically interrelated. This was an exciting dramatic breakthrough. All my lists, useful as they are for some purposes, imply that the subjects are linearly discrete and were holding restricting/restraining me to this perspective and blinding me to others' perspective. I had become fixated on lists which prevented me up to this point from seeing the obvious reality, the subjects form a system or systems of discrete parts which are complexly, systemically interrelated. My preaching has systemic dimensions! All this, which immediately resonated into my work on the

analysis and design of church and community work, because increasingly clear as I drew the diagram on the next page. My excitement grew as I realized that this diagrammatic model of the systemic configuration on the subject matter of my preaching ministry also and equally represented Christianity at work in individuals, groups and Christian organisations in the church and in the contemporarily would context in which they exists, live, work and witness. In fact, they are mirror models that gives the preaching version of the systemic perspective its authenticity. This model, based on emergent subject matter, indicates that I have been preaching to the whole Christian project in context – essentially just what I should have done and should continue to do.



A note on the diagram. Basically it is a systemic model showing in a tidy form discrete parts of preaching subject matter which interact in anything but a tidy way in my inner being in the normal way of things : the dynamics are mysteries and not represented in the figure; but it is systemic not systematic. Parts came together unbidden, almost mysteriously, in the preparation of a sermon. They overlap and uniform each other. (In an earlier attempt at constructing the diagram, I tried but failed to show the parts as overlapping circles). Inspiration, Divine inspiration through the promptings of the Holy Spirit, I believe is operative in my best moments of Sermon preparation. At least that is how I interpret and understand any experience. Whilst full dimension cannot easily be represented diagrammatically – I am thinking of the creative interaction of source of the parts and the contributions of the Holy Spirit – I have neither intent nor desire to ignore them. Authentic preaching is of God who commissions it, authorises it through call me, empowers me and brings life to my preaching. Nor am I wanting or intending to rationalise through analysis that which is existentially my stories. All I am trying to do is to throw a little more light upon the preaching ministry in which I have been/am engaged.

Central to the diagram or model is Jesus Christ because incarnate, risen and ascended he is at the heart of Christian enterprise and preaching. Ideally Christians are in creative relationships with him and through him into God; they express that relationship variously in and through worship, private devotion, their lines of pursuing the mission of the church and their Christian vocations, individually and collectively in the church and the world. I have preached on all these aspects which engender Christian community life centred on Christianity. This is central to my preaching ministry so I have called it the ‘Christian Nucleus’. To fulfil its destiny and propose, this nucleus, must relate to its context and critical contextual issues, this I have represented by one outer circle and listed around its circumference aspects of context and contextual issues upon which I have preached : Methodism, the local church, ecumenism and church, unity and other; faiths and contextual issues – church, humanity, community and environment, morality and religion, peace and war.

Initially I wanted to put Biblical exposition in the Christian Nucleus but then saw that it, along with preaching, related to the whole complex of subjects and positioned it accordingly.

I need to remind myself that I am not trying, at this stage, to map out in lists or in a diagrammatic model the major elements in the whole Christian project but to devise a way of formulating the actual content of my preaching ministry which helps me to think about it realistically and

reflectively. However, it is deeply gratifying to discover that I had been guided over the years to preach on so comprehensive pattern of the essentials of Christianity and the context in which it worked out (and continues to do so) its mission during my ministry. Essentially, my preaching ministry was formed not by a pre-determined plan or programme existentially stage by stage although it was shaped by the Christian year and latterly by following the testimony.

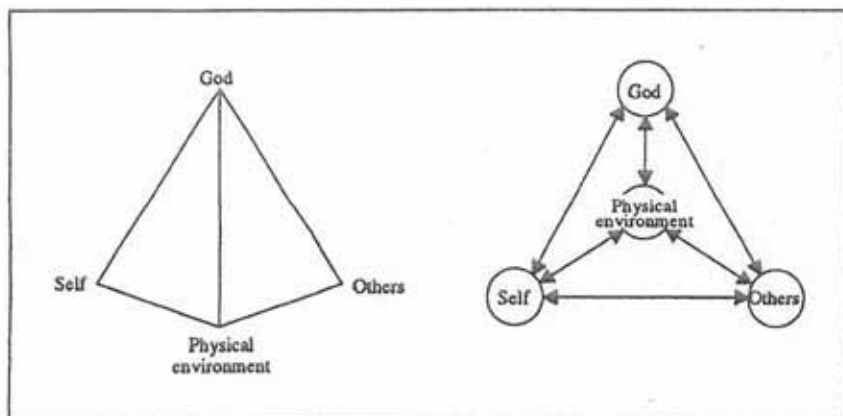
Immediately that I had identified this systemic way of looking at the subject matter of my preaching ministry, I embraced it enthusiastically. I began to see things quite differently and all kind of thoughts and insights inspired me. Whilst I have not previously consciously conceptualised the subject matter in this way at some unconscious level, I feel my preaching ministry has been influenced, inspired, morally direct systemically. This is not surprising because it correlates closely and naturally with my systemic to church and community work, analysis, design and consultancy which I had consciously practised from the late-1970s sermons onwards if not earlier.<sup>18</sup>

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18 In *Analysis and Design*, for instance, I constructed what I described the 'trihedral relationships' which is a systemic model. (pp 234 – 236) and distinguished between linear and multiple causation and systems thinking (pp 188 – 189). See following pages.

Thus, within and beyond the human relationships that are the normative stuff of community work, there are human-divine relationships and mystical experiences which must be the stuff of church and community development work. These relationships exercise spiritual authority in the lives of those who experience them and frequently determine vocational choices and apostolates. When they are in good repair they engender commitment to human well being and they enthuse and energize people. Whether in good repair or not, their influence, like that of unknown reference groups, can be profound and quite beyond logical deduction. But, whilst mystical experiences and spiritual relationships are clearly important in development work, they do not get the attention they deserve because they cause problems for development workers. For one thing, they are even more difficult to understand and analyse than human relationships—and they are difficult enough. There is widespread embarrassment in talking about them and many people are sceptical about them. It is all too easy to neglect them, as, I am sorry to say, I have done at times. It is so much easier to talk about beliefs than about “spiritual relationships”.

One of the models that helps me to take all this into account is a trihedral of relationships, a triangular pyramid. The points represent self, others, the physical environment and God. The lines represent the relationships. To my mind's eye it looks something like Figure 10:1.



Presentation 1.

A Trihedral of Relationships

People would model these relationships differently. They might, for instance, invert Figure 10:1 or lay it on its side to show God as the ground of all being and to avoid hierarchical inferences. Some people might substitute an ideology for God. However this might be, for me this trihedral of relationships underlies all human affairs, even though it is impossible to define with accuracy all the lines—they are easily blurred by the way in which human and divine relationships infuse each other. Aspects of it may be covered and confused by institutions, churches, communities, groups or individuals, or by the way disciplines variously focus on individuals (counselling, case work, psychotherapy), on collectives (sociology, anthropology), on God (theology), or on the physical environment (physical scientists, technicians, artisans).

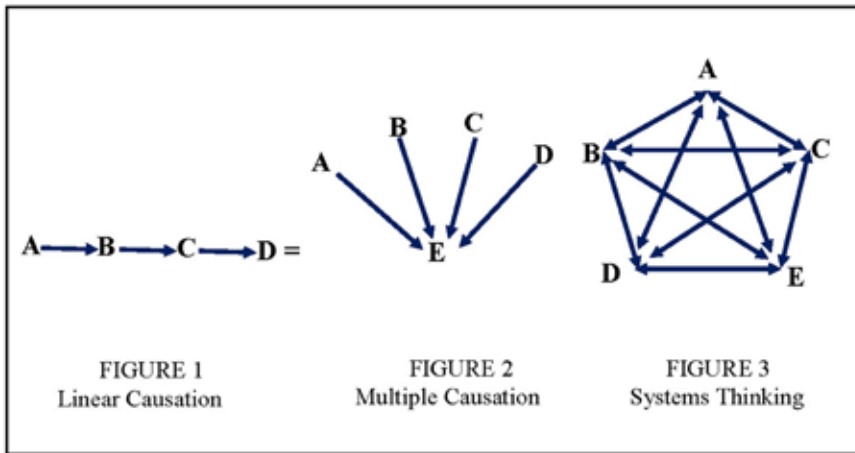
Then again, the shape is constantly changing because the relationships are inter-related. Change one and the others are changed. Indeed Jesus teaches us that restoring our relationship with God involves first mending our relationships with others.<sup>22</sup> Working with people in church and community variously involves working with them individually and collectively on each and all the relationships, sometimes focusing on one and sometimes on another of them, systematically and haphazardly as circumstances require.

Whichever aspect we are concentrating upon, we will make our best contributions when we work consciously to the whole, whatever our own beliefs might be: easier said than done. The processes are designed to help us do just that by assisting us to work with people on their needs and the issues that interest them in and from the area of human experience marked out by self, others and the physical environment and through beliefs to as much of their mystical experiences and spiritual relationships as people need and can work on; no less and no more.

What I am trying to do through working to this trihedral of relationships is to emulate the ministry of Christ. Essentially, as I see it, through his life, death and resurrection Jesus is *giving* people to each other, to God and to the world which he loves in satisfying, creative, loving relationships. An event at the crucifixion epitomizes this for me in an enacted parable. John describes it in this way: "Jesus saw his mother, with the disciple whom he loved standing beside her. He said to her, 'Mother, there is your son'; and to the disciple, 'There is your mother'; and from that moment the disciple took her into his home".<sup>23</sup> Jesus gave them to each other in one of the most sacred of human relationships, mother and son, as he gave himself to both of them and established a new triangle of loving relationships.

## Presentation 2 – Systemic Causation

What I am finding particularly useful are systemic hypotheses, an idea I got from a particular approach to family therapy and organisation behaviour. Such hypothesis relate to human systems and the functional, structural and affective relationships between their parts. Consequently they are more about systemic and multiple causation than linear causation. I have not found this easy to grasp and apply but my efforts to do so have given me a much more comprehensive perspective on situations and paid high dividends.



### THREE FORMS OF CAUSATION

In Figure 1: A causes B; B causes C; C causes D; D causes E

Figure 2 is also linear thinking

Figure 3 is different: A, B, Church and D come together as interdependent forces to cause E through the complex interaction between them.

These two presentations illustrate my thinking about and approach to systemic relationships and causation. Both concepts are fundamentals in my preaching and, as illustrated above, is my understanding and interpretation of the substance of my preaching.

## 7. Reflections on the Systemic Perspective in my Preaching<sup>19</sup>

Discovering or being discovered by this systemic perspective on my preaching is stimulating and facilitating my reflections: I am seeing, remembering and recalling things differently; thoughts are occurring and interacting with the lists. Here I want to capture some of them.

### *(a) Visceral<sup>20</sup> purposes focussed on operational Christian Systems*

Attempting to make some sense of a kaleidoscopic cascade of inchoate thoughts prompted by the systemic perspective led me to try to deduce from the actualities of my preaching the visceral objectives that motivated me during the early part of my ministry I discern three:

- to convert people to Christian and church and induct and confirm them as active members of the Methodist church, Methodism;
- to help Christians grow in faith and to be better informed about Christianity to be increasingly committed to living it;
- to redress things which challenge the veracity and viability of Christianity, or appear to do so, and undermine the confidence and faith of Christians. ('Things' could be secular and religious movements in thought, behaviour and culture, natural disasters etc).

The first of these, an evangelical objective, I pursued enthusiastically during the first phase of my ministry but not, as far as I know, with any great success.<sup>21</sup> I was never entirely comfortable with it as practised traditionally. But I felt guilty when I didn't engage in evangelism and something of a failure when I didn't win converts. Whilst I gave up overt evangelism, and certainly on the 'aggressive evangelism' of the commando campaigns, I

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19 1.4.12

20 The term is borrowed from Bruce Rahtje, a biblical experiential theologian, who differentiated between public, head of visceral theology (V.T.). V.T. is the theology we show we believe through a lifestyle, values and commitments, i.e. through our feeling self). (*A & D* pp 240 – 241). Other people make similar distinctions using different terminology which I cannot recall at the moment.

21 In my early days, I did make 'appeals' but I cannot remember anyone coming forward. People have been converted through my preaching, e.g. George Stokes and a whole group of 11 – 14 year olds from the Llanelli and Carmarthen circuits were converted when Tom, David and I had a weekend for them.

have never disowned or abandoned the first objective. Objectives 2 & 3 I have pursued assiduously and enjoyed doing so (throughout my ministry and I am still doing so): they are entirely within my comfort zone; the second is a developmental objective, the third is related to apologetics. They are, of course, interrelated: pursuing the third, apologetic, effectively can promote the second, development and the first, conversion.

<sup>22</sup>Another objective has now come into being as a consequence of the dawning upon my consciousness of the systemic perspective of the subject matter of my preaching which I am finding exciting. It is:

- to induce, maintain and develop effective Christian operational systems of thought, belief and action, first in myself as a Christian preacher, and then, as I do so, in others and in the socio-religious and spiritual collectives in which we live and pursue our vocations in Christianity.

Although it is only now that I have become consciously aware of this objective, made it explicit, I realise that it has guided and influenced my preaching since my Parchmore days if not earlier. I recognise it as a deep seated intuitive visceral objective, integrated into my being without being apprehended by my mind or articulated. Looking back it makes so much sense of the subjects I chose to preach on – or was chosen by. Pursuing this objective involves, *inter alia*, giving critical attention to systems of thought, belief and behaviour, Christian and secular, and how they are working and malfunctioning in order to determine how to strengthen, develop, reinforce and repair them so that they will function better and more efficiently. It involves preaching on things which are problematical to me and to others. In all of this, I draw upon my experience of my own systems of belief, taught and action as well as upon those of others. Whatever preaching does for others, it is most likely to be effective if my preparation and my preaching positively affects me and my life: it is anything but the perfect preacher correcting imperfect systems; it is the imperfect preacher hopefully affecting my own and other human socio-spiritual and religious systems. Nor do I aim to impose my system of spirituality and Christianity upon other people. (Everyone has their own system, however elementary or sophisticated which must be respected; they need help to build them upon to replace them. It is spiritually criminal to challenge or undermine them without helping them to secure for themselves something more substantial no matter how undesirable their existing system may appear to be.) That was my aim up to the time that I adopted the non-directive approach to working with

people in the late-1960s. Indeed, it was what I was taught and generally expected to do or to try to do. From the time that I adopted this approach in my work, a substantive aim in my preaching is to get people to think for themselves and to come to their own decisions about their belief and action – to think, that is, about what I say and the promptings of the Holy Spirit when I preach to think about their inner affective and intellectual responses in relation to their systems of belief and action. I aim to challenge and stimulate them to think and think again. So my preaching assist to promote interactive processes in me, between me and my thought and members of congregations and more importantly between us all.

To be aware during preaching of this interactive process is one of the most incredible experiences that I have from time to time. It is a high existential experience, a spiritual existential experience of being listened<sup>23</sup> to God even as one is preaching, of hearing and being heard of feeling that I and the congregation are in the presence of God, having an audience with him. The intensity and reality of it all is awesome. It is reminiscent of Rudolf Otto's concept of the numinous, Buber's of I and Thou and I and We and of what the Welsh call the *hwyyl*.

This applies not only when I am pursuing the fourth objective but also

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23 Writing in a book about any experienced listening in consultancy sessions and being listened to I wrote: The "listening associated with this attention has the power to draw things from the depths of our experience, memory and consciousness. It is, of course, not without some strain. E.R. Ackerley in a persona memoir to E.M. Forster expressed this very effectively:

When I was alone with him and his unselfconscious listening attention was turned upon me – attention which I felt was hearing not only the things said but the motive in saying it – I experienced a sense of strain, as though more and more were expected of me than I believed myself to contain. To be really listened to is a very serious matter."

And Roger Graef after speaking of the "stillness of his presence as a listener" said this of the oral historian Tony Parker:

The power of his silence created a vacuum which invited others to fill it. But he had not switched off: the quality of his attention made it clear he was taking in every word."

These accounts resonate with my experience of being listened to by T.R. Batten, I would simply add that because it is a serious matter it is also a creative one. Sadly in the early days of my consultancy experience most consulators said that they had not been listened to in this way in relation to their work."

*CMM* pp 38-29.

when I am pursuing the other three, that is in my preaching as an evangelist, a pastor or as an apologist.

As noted already, this means that my preaching is all of a piece with the ways in which I engage with people in church, community and consultancy work. Systemics is central to the way in which I go about analysing, designing and evaluating church and community work. The aim is not to create perfect systems of belief and behaviour – that is utopian – but working systems fit for purpose and sufficiently malleable for adjustment, correction and development.

## **[REHABILITATION TO MY CORE VOCATIONAL WORK, JULY 2012 : A CONNECTING NOTE**

This is a highly significant, if not momentous, occasion for me: at long last after four months I am able to return to these Notes. Thanks be to God. My previous entry was on the 3rd March 2012. For some weeks I have been at a loss to know what caused me to stop at this point, a month before Molly's death. A note about the work to be done to complete Part Two: II (reflecting on the substance of my preaching) and the possible sequence of other work to be done indicates that initially the break was quite deliberate and carefully planned. Considering this note more carefully and consulting my diary, I realise that I put the work aside temporarily to write a second submission to the Ministries' Committee about in-service and pre-service training or consultancy in response to the summons of the consultation re the Fruitful Field Report. The note also shows that I intended to revise the position paper on my 'literary estate' prepared in connection with my 2011 will, 17th May 2011 (Thank God we revised our wills together). This work was not done, but needs to be because I have done extensive work on my papers in the past year and I am currently exploring the housing of my 'personal archives'. My diary shows I had services to prepare for and reminds me of the break we took because we both felt desperately in need of one at Harkness Hall, that was a propitious and blessed event – the last of so many holidays we had shared and enjoyed over a period of some sixty-three years. So, what mercifully we did not know was to be the last month of our lives together was busy and blessed and a time when we were happily and expectantly preparing for our 'Jubilee' wedding lunch with members of the extended family – but sadly that was not to be.

Three of the most horrendous months of my life followed : Molly's tragic death and then some five weeks later I was suddenly struck down by the most vicious, aggressive and debilitating virus. For the best part of six

weeks it caused me to lose 1½ stone and to be very weak. (I have described this and my struggle to honour my promise to Donald Nicholson that I would conduct his funeral services in a journal note dated 24.6.12). Now I feel well on the way to recovery for which I am so profoundly thankful and pleased, grateful and thrilled to be back writing these notes. On the 28th June, I wrote a journal note, ‘Taking Stock’ which shows that, whilst there is much still to do, I have made considerable progress in rehabilitating myself domestically (as a single person living on my own, personally and workwise; it is that progress which enables me to take up these notes again.

Re-acquainting myself with what I last wrote and my notes about the next stage of my writing programme was a daunting experience excited as I was by the prospect of continuing with the work. My heart dropped and momentarily my energy level dipped! During the past four months, I have realised somewhat painfully and regretfully that I lost much of the momentum and the overview that I had gained through sorting out background material, updating records and indexes researching what I had written on preaching. Over the months I have accepted this partially but not entirely with some profound regrets and a considerable measure of disappointment not least because the quality of what follows – or at least some of it – will not be the same standard as what I have already written, not that that is exceptional. I will just have, as they say, to ‘dig deep’, because I do not see how I can regain the fine tuning of the overview and perspective I had in February – I have neither the heart nor the will to do so.

Quite unexpectedly there a subtle change is taking place in relation to my approach to these notes I feel. Without any prior notice, thoughts appeared in my mind about what I might do next! This is a new dimension to my orientation to my future vocational work; unsought but not unwelcome. Whilst I have no idea what that work might be nor any intention to actively try to identify it (I feel I ought to wait for it to come to me if my feeling has any substance) the thought suggested to me that deep within myself I am seeking a desiring closure to writing these notes. This has surfaced. Not that I wish to rush and skimp the work because I don’t. But it may be saying something about how I do the work and what I aim to achieve.

At this point I suddenly remembered where I had put extensive preparatory notes for the next section of work which I remember doing but had searched for in vain! Hallelujah! Now all the working papers are in place – and in mind! I feel much more sanguine about the standard (a better word, I think, than ‘quality’) of the next phase.

As I was writing these notes I found myself thinking of them and the

progress made and the promise for future work that they contain as my birthday present to myself.

### ***(b) A Tidy Concept Dynamically Variable in Action<sup>24</sup>***

Reading through section 6 above re-connected me with the systemic nature of my preaching and re-kindled my excitement for it. But then I thought is my description of it especially the diagram on p 954 all too tidy? Inevitably it is because as I have already said I cannot or have not been able to exemplify, represent or illustrate the dynamic of the system. For instance at various times the creative interaction between some aspects/subject is more active than that between the others forming creative sub-systems which at best are just that sub-systems operating as integral to the system as a whole, viz, holistically. At other times one or two elements in subjects can dominate in either a constructive or destructive manner. Parts can be added or atrophied, just as organs can be transplanted in human beings or removed, variously to the advantage and disadvantage of the system. In fact, without intending to belabour the point, the functioning shape of the system is for ever changing giving active prominence to a part of cluster of parts. Also the system has the power/ability to reshape, reforming, adapt, rejuvenated itself through, for instance, a scriptural text, a spiritual issue or a burning social issue exciting or challenging or informing the system or parts of it. (A concept central to “Chaos Theory”).<sup>25</sup> So the spirit moves within the system and blows where it listeth, inspiring me as a preacher. To some extent, therefore, my previous system have a life of its own even though once I became conscious of it and conceptualised it, I have conscious power over it in addition to whatever ways it influences me unconsciously which I have noted above. I am now thinking of my preaching ministry quite differently.

### ***(c) An Organic Take on My Systems Approach***

Not surprisingly thinking systemically in these ways led me to consider the organic model used by Paul to such telling effect in expanding his understanding of Christian collectives as Christ’s body (1 Corinthians 12 etc). This way of looking at the systemic nature of preaching shows just how important vital organs are to effective preaching. The inner circle of

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<sup>24</sup> 7.7.12

<sup>25</sup> In preparation for preaching the system can be in chaos as I find all too often and which I describe in various places and especially in *Sustaining Preachers and Preaching*, pp 56 – 58.q

the diagrams on p 954, I now see, presents, or can be seen to do so, the vital organs of my preaching ministry brought to life by the blood flowing from my call to preach. Together they form the organism of my life as a preacher – a body within a body which operates through preaching on one subject or another (the outer circle of the diagram) to members of the body of Christ as they gather to worship in various congregations to which I am privileged to minister. Thinking organically in this illuminates my systemic thinking about the nature of my ministry, it brings it to life by humanizing it and saves it from becoming too mechanical – something to which the engineer in me is all to prove!

So, as I a preacher used to assure that my preaching body/life is as fit for purpose as I can make it – inspired, called, motivated, equipped ..... suitably.

This points me back to my emphasis over the year of the importance of multi-modelling and the dangers of mono-modelling.

### ***(d) Overall Impact on Me<sup>26</sup>***

‘Discovering’, stumbling across the systemic nature of my preaching ministry through personal elementary reflective research into its actualities has affirmed my belief in and convictions about and need for preachers to actively engage in such processes and for more broad based thorough-giving research into them and publicity of the results. The paucity of what I have described as the ‘working dynamics’ of a preacher’s working and vocational life <sup>27</sup> depresses me – or is it simply that I am not aware of it? Equally it animates and excites me not least because of its enormous potential as a working tool of my preaching praxis: it has the power illuminating it for me and helping me to improve and develop it. More widely it is a conceptual aid to pre- and in-service training of preachers and of providing counselling, consultancy and support for preachers. I regret not having come across it at an earlier stage in my ministry. Sadly, it reveals the inadequacy of the general analytical understanding of inner formative processes operating consciously upon the formation of preachers and their praxis. ‘The fields are white unto harvest!’

The excitement of the discovery was tinged with regret that I had not realised the systemic nature of my ministry earlier as I felt that this insight would have helped me to shape my ministry stage by stage. When I shared

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26 8.7.12

27 See *Sustaining Preachers & Preaching* Part Two.

the discovery and the regret with Colin Lake he commented that had that occurred I may well have been so conscious of and concentrating upon the systemic concept and reading off its implications that I would not have paid sufficient attention to the prompting processes and voices that created it. I am only partly convinced not least because I feel so stimulated by the prospect of examining my own ministry – past, present and future – in relation to the insight, sharing it with others and using it in consultancy and discussions with other people about their preaching ministries.

More generally, I find this experience enlivening me and reviving me. It gloriously and happily affirms the importance and value of writing these Notes and generates new energies to engage in the task. How wonderful it is to be so vigorously absorbed and engaged once more in writing them in my 84th year. Moreover, I am enjoying doing so in a way that I have not over the past year or two.<sup>28</sup> Thanks be to God.

## **8. Family And Community Worship and Parade Services**

Parade services were a significant regular monthly feature of the morning's services in Wesley Hall, Anerly and Parchmore churches. Previously I had experienced military parade services whilst I was in the army and in the Grosvenor Road church but prior to my ministry in London I had very little experience of parade services for organizations such as the Boys Brigade. This was new to me. Something other than a traditional preaching service was clearly required. So, drawing upon my experience of giving children's and young people's addresses and teaching, I started to craft services, which I considered more suitable. I found this very interesting and creative. Two or three short connected addresses, replaced sermons and service tended to be more interactive than traditional services.

Then, in the 1960s, in association with the newly introduced syllabus for experiential education in Sunday schools and churches, monthly acts of family worship came into vogue. I found myself in the vanguard of this

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28 A couple of days ago it came to me quite suddenly that I was enjoying life as well as work and getting on with things with greater zest than I have for possibly two or three years. Even though this was reassuring and the sense of well-being associated with it indicated the future had some real promise, I felt guilty as though the positive feelings were a betrayal of Molly and our relationship. Possibly it was/is an indication of the way in which things had eaten into the quality of our life more recently. But we did have a great time at Harkness Hall in March, thank God. I must reflect further on this elsewhere.

movement locally as a circuit minister, regionally as the youth secretary for the London South East District and nationally through my work with the Methodist Youth Department and as one of the contributors from 1968 to 1972 to *Partners In Learning: Weekly lesson material for those engaged in Christian Education, based on the British Lessons Council's syllabus Experience and Faith*. Working on family services of worship led me to develop the practice of scripting them so that each part contributed to the overall theme and was seen to do so. Also, I was actively involved in promoting the practice of family worship more widely.

In the early days I suspect that parade services and family worship were separate, but later, they merged. But I am not sure about this: tracing the developments in detail will be difficult if not impossible for me to do and would add little to my present purposes. To correspond more closely with the emphasis during my Parchmore ministry on church and community development, I introduced the idea of community worship, which subsumed parade services and family worship. Dorothy Household, and I worked together closely on developing the services as an integral part of the Christian education programme, which she headed up. They became popular and effective.

So for ten years I was involved in preparing and conducting parade services and family and community worship. Doing this was a rich seam of my work, particularly during my years at Parchmore. Community worship at Parchmore was increasingly more closely integrated with the comprehensive Christian education programme headed up by Dorothy Household. (cf *The Parchmore Partnership*, pp 43-46). This led to me, planning annual programmes of community worship with the staff of the educational programme. A copy of the one for 1970-71 is in the 'family and community work worship' file, along with my notes for most of the services. As I sorted out the papers, the brevity of the notes from which I had led these services struck me. My involvement in organising and leading this kind of worship more or less ended after I left Parchmore in 1972.

Extant preparatory notes for these services are in the 'family and community work worship' file. I have put them in date order but I have not listed them in the same way that I have the sermons.<sup>29</sup>

## 9. My Approach to and Use of the Bible

The Bible has been, and remains, fundamental to the whole of my Christian vocational life and particularly to my preaching ministry: it is my touchstone, primary reference for all matters of my religious and secular life, a unique inspired but not inerrant spiritual text, the most important influence in the genesis of my spirituality and religious life and the guide to my understanding of Christ and Christianity. Here I concentrate on my approach to it, my attitude towards it, my reverence and respect for it with reference to my preaching ministry. Inevitably that has not only been and remains various but also it has changed over the sixty two years of my preaching life – hopefully for the better. In this piece I am able only to highlight things of outstanding importance that have remained with me; inevitably so much of the detail has been forgotten.

### *(a) My Current Approach to Hermeneutics and The Bible*

I started life as a Biblical and Christian fundamentalist but soon found this position to be intellectually and spiritually untenable for me. Quite quickly I became what I have remained, not least through the ministry of Garfield Evans (variously referred to in these Notes) , what I can best describe as a Biblically centred Christian, convinced by and living seriously under the authority of the Scriptures which, whilst believing in their uniqueness, I approached them openly and critically with due reverence. My time at Richmond College affirmed me in this approach, informed and refined it and gave me the basic academic knowledge and equipment to pursue and develop and draw upon it to better effect. I emerged from Richmond an enthusiastic for ‘Biblical Theology’, and that approach has remained with me.

Ten years ago, concerned about my Bible reading and study I reviewed my approach to Biblical criticism and exegesis. (Hermeneutics was a topic raised by the local preachers in the in-service training programme I was facilitating at the time. See *Sustaining Preachers and Preaching*, Chapter 11. So, this was also prompting me to clarify my own position!) As my approach has not changed since I did that review I can do no better here than to present the body of my thinking as Appendix III and my description of my position with which I conclude in these notes.

## ***A Reflective Note on My Approach to Hermeneutics and The Bible***

What follows is an attempt to outline/profile where I now am in relation to hermeneutics and the Bible; a reader for my own spiritual well-being and development; a minister and preacher; a church and community worker; consultant, researcher and rector. (note CFD Moule p13). I am turning to this from the notes I made on the 2nd June 2002 (cf pp 2-3) at a much later date than I expected to. In those notes I said that literary (synchronic rather than diachronic) and canonical approaches commended themselves to me but not to the neglect of the literal sense of scripture and all that means for the use of critical apparatus (cf p7).

As a consequence of doing this reading on hermeneutics I have become clearer about my status as a biblical exegete. When first I read what Brown & Schneiders said about professional and general readers (p 7) I was disturbed, distressed and dejected. It brought to the surface my inferiority feelings and my shame because I am not fluent in biblical languages and more of a biblical scholar (cf pp 1 & 3). At my worst moments I can feel something of a charlatan or an impostor. Once again I felt the pain of not being skilled at Greek and Hebrew. Brown & Schneiders say that without such skills I cannot have a professional knowledge of the scriptures. How well I remember the Reverend Harry Lockwood saying similar things to me about being a minister when he came to preach at Carmarthen in connection with the Centenary Seminar in October 1961. It seared my soul. It was, of course, implicit in my training at Richmond. Dr Marcus Ward came into my study when I had been at college a few weeks. It was an afternoon. He had an enormous scarf wrapped several times around his neck, I remember. He said he had been thinking a lot about me and the way I was struggling with Greek and Hebrew and had come to the conclusion that in spite of that there was, he believed, still a place for me in the ministry and that he had come to tell me that as a pastoral act of encouragement. The unmistakable underlying message was that I couldn't be a first class minister but that there would be jobs to do, he thought, as a second class one. And he came close to saying so in a roundabout way. He might have been a good biblical scholar, but by no means outstanding or brilliant by any standards, but he was inept as a pastor and tutor. All this has been a burden over the years.

To return to B & S's claim that I cannot be a professional biblical reader without biblical languages, I am not simply a general reader. What am I? Certainly I am not a professional biblical scholar. But I am a working

minister, a preacher, a church and community development practitioner, a researcher, a theoretician, a consultant and a tutor or these things. Moreover, my approach to my work is thoroughgoing and professional. I have learnt various disciplinary languages sufficiently well to be the things I have just listed. From my own professional position and stance I use the bible professionally, not as an amateur, in relation to my discipline and in all my work: I use all the apparatus available to me and draw upon the work of able biblical scholarship and their professional ability. Not being a biblical scholar, therefore, does not mean that I am not a professional student and user of the Bible. I am. Moreover, I have insights into the Bible which came from my professional competences which biblical scholars may or may not have. For instance my extended studies into and my experience of reflective praxis and studying church and community work situations equip me for the practice of reader-response criticism: I am trained to read situations. As I write it occurs to me that all this could be turned around in a more positive manner from one which could appear to be a defensive stance to one which is constructively affirmative. I could do this by spelling out what I bring to the study of the Bible from my professional perspective on ministry: what are the professional insights and tools I bring to it? And other professionals could do the same. This demonstrates that biblical scholars do not have the only professional means of entry in to the biblical text nor do they have exclusive professional (or spiritual) rights upon it. Professional polymaths have, of course, access to various professional perspectives on the Bible, but they are in a minority.

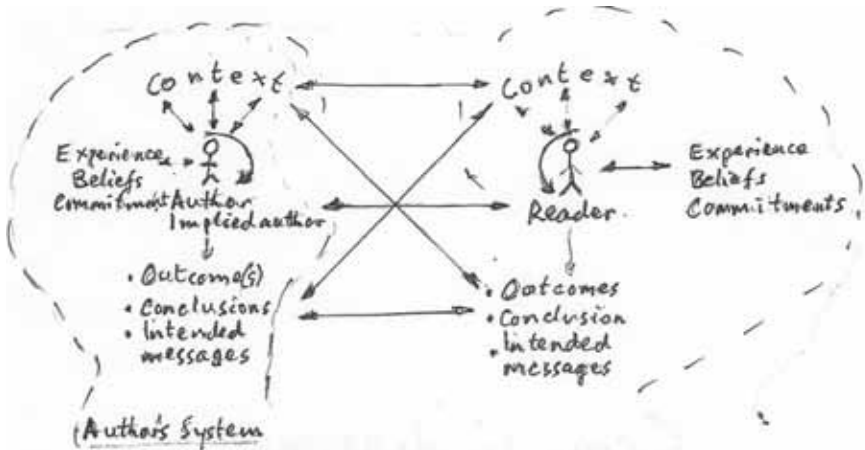
This exercise is helping me to clarify my position and to feel much, much better about my professionalism. The effects are manifold. For one thing it impacts the way in which I view and read the Bible: generally; for my spiritual well-being and development; as a preacher who wishes to preach exegetically, contextually, existentially according to the lectionary; in relation to my profession and vocation as a minister. For, another, it makes me feel infinitely better about myself. The whole of my life and work is suffused by my professional approach to ministry and mission; my approach to the Bible is suffused by this professional approach. Amongst other things this means that I do not have to define myself as a “general reader” as I thought I was going to have to do. My orientation and approach are singular, unified, the methods are many.

Certainly, one of the things that this exercise has done is to raise my guard against eisegesis.

Now to noting critical aspects in the approach to the reading, study and use of the Bible to which I aspire and variously practice. They are as follows:

1. I do take the “literal sense of scripture” and the various ways of determining what the author(s) intended (cf pp 6 & 7). Inter alia this involves:
  - a. Trying to make sure that my search for relevance does not canonize what I believe and my biases.
  - b. Taking into proper account literary and canonical forms as far as possible.
2. Habitually seeking the more-than-literal sense of scripture (p 8) whilst guarding against eisegesis to which I have a propensity.
3. I practise aspects of contextual literary criticism (pp 9-11) and I wish to do so in a more thoroughgoing way. Aspects which particularly interest me are:
  - a. Rhetorical criticism (9);
  - b. Sociological and psychological criticism (10);
  - c. Phenomenological criticism (10);
  - d. Reader-response criticism (12)
  - e. Implied author and implied reader concepts (13);
  - f. Canonical criticism (2, 10).

These aspects led me to see the reading and study of the scripture as a systemic exercise.



### Reader's System

There are several systems in operation: the author's personal, internal system (psychological); the author's contextual system (socio-religious); the reader's similar system; the interaction between these systems when reader not author experiences is a reader-response system. The author's system is about what text meant; the reader's system is about what text means (cf p 11). By way of summary, I practise an approach which involves exploring

what the text meant (the literal sense etc.)

what the text means to me now (the more-than-literal sense etc.). (cf p 11)

This makes me what Tom Slater described me to be, an existential preacher and I would add practitioner.

My hope is that this modelling will develop and mature.

### ***b) Experience and the Christian Year***

During the 1960s I was deeply involved in giving Bible studies at Methodist Youth Department (MYD) summer schools and subsequently in the introduction of experiential education into the Methodist Church.<sup>30</sup> This had a great widespread effect upon me and my ministry. It introduced me to and confirmed me in an experiential approach to teaching the Bible. Undoubtedly that influenced my preaching especially in the way in which I drew upon my own experience in sermons and the way in which I attempt to use various forms of experience (persona and that of others in the Bible and life generally) to speak to the experience of members of congregations and to generate new individual and collective spiritual experiences, insights and understandings. This resonated/jelled profoundly with my decision at the outset of my ministry in Carmarthen to preach out of and within my experience<sup>31</sup> and with my commitment to reflective learning from experience.<sup>32</sup>

Additional to its emphasis on teaching the Bible through experience, the experiential educational movement equally stressed the importance of educational programmes following and relating closely to the principal events and festivals of the Christian year. A practise much reflected in some

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30 As I am writing this section, viz. 9, out of sequence, I have not written about this aspect of my ministry but intended to do so. When I do, it will be possible to access it through the indexes.

31 I intend to develop this in III below.

32 See for example Part 2.

sections of Methodism including the Church I first attended as a child. My adult experience of Methodism was quite different and Richmond College schooled and confirmed me in this liturgical approach to the Christian year. This approach gave an annual cyclical rhythm to my preaching ministry. Amongst other things this disciplined me to preach on all the principal events of the Christian year and to address the cardinal doctrines, their basis in the Bible and their theology. And, clearly, this approach to the Christian year, provides the overall framework for the lectionaries and to the whole question of lectionary preaching to which I now turn. A subject on which I wrote last year.

### ***(c) Inspirational and Lectionary Preaching***

<sup>33</sup>A significant shift in my approach to my preaching ministry occurred through the emphasis placed upon lectionary based services and sermons imposed by my superintended minister at Chelsea Methodist Church, 1986-93. He was most insistent that ministers and local preachers in the Circuit followed the lectionary readings faithfully and required that the set readings were read and that sermons were preached from them. Up to that point in my ministry I had followed inter promptings and convictions and feelings that this or that was something about which I should preach. Consciously and continually I was searching for what I believed God wanted me to say, God's word, as it were. That word came in an infinite number of ways as did the inspiration that accompanied it: through reading the Bible, prayer, secular and spiritual writings, human encounters, events, problems, ecclesiastical, political, social and religious topics of the day, my own spiritual experiences, positive and negative... In fact any aspect of life could be and was the initiating cause of a sermon; the smallest incident could trigger off exciting new thoughts and insights; a word in the Bible or a newspaper suddenly stands out and the idea for a sermon is born or rather conceived; a sermon could start from any source however unlikely or unpromising it might be. I was – and still am – ever alert to the word of God, expecting it from anywhere during day or night, forever scanning and delving into my experience through analysis and reflection to find it. Yet when it comes, it comes unbidden as from nowhere spontaneously. It animates me; sheds new light with extraordinary powers of illumination; it reveals and commissions and mandates. Such experiences are wonderful, out of this world; they transport me to new levels of seeing, believing and understanding. When that is not present, and often it isn't, sermon preparation is hell. Having got my theme, at least in the way I have described in its most wonderful

form, I searched for texts (if a text was not the source of my inspiration), readings, hymns, material for the sermon from which to build up an act of worship which, holistically developed and hopefully communicated the theme. (Prayers were always extempore except when using a set liturgy.)

From the time I began to preach (c1950) to Malcolm Braddy becoming my superintendent in 1986, this was the nature of my approach, the way I went about discovering, finding, receiving the subject matter of my ministry. The lectionary had no part in this. Indeed for much of the period to the best of my knowledge Methodism did not have a lectionary and if it did I was unaware of it.

<sup>34</sup>So up to this point what sort of a preacher had I been? My style did not fit neatly into any one category. Certainly I was not a thorough-going expository preacher although my sermons were biblically based, informed and illustrated. From leaving college I was committed to 'biblical theology'; my preaching was true to what I understood by that and therefore rooted in biblical theology. But my starting point was not always a particular text or passage of the Bible. Nonetheless, I like to think I threw light upon passages, drew understanding from these and in that sense expanded the scriptures. Neither was a 'popular preacher'. Nor do I think I was a 'narrative preacher'. During the early years of Braddy's superintendency a very fine black Methodist minister from the USA joined the congregation whilst he was studying for his Ph.D. on the book of Revelation. After one service at which I preached he used what I thought was a very telling phrase to describe my style of preaching. I cannot recall it with certainty but I think it was that I was a 'philosophical' preacher. That doesn't quite fit. Certainly I was an analytical or reflective preacher; some say that I invariably throw a new light upon a subject that suggests that I am something of an original preacher. After reading Harry Williams' book, *The True Wilderness* in the first year of my active ministry in Carmarthen, I committed myself as he had done to being true to my experience. Later I came to understand that as preaching 'from experience, through experience, to experience'. So I draw heavily upon my personal experience and that of others. In summary form that means I was a biblically oriented, philosophical, analytical, reflective, experiential preacher but not an exclusively expository preacher as commonly understood nor a lectionary preacher.

Unsurprisingly, I resisted adopting lectionary preaching as normative. Eventually I agreed for several reasons: given my commitment to the importance of experience I felt I ought to give it a trial to test it out through

practice and to be able to discuss it from experience; I was an associate minister in a one minister circuit comprising two churches which meant that to stand against the policy could have been divisive as the local preachers were going along with it; in some ways my relationship with Braddy was uneasy and insecure and it was important that I should maintain as good a relationship with him as possible for the well-being of the Churches and of Avec. So I complied and gained from it.

An enormous advantage was the security of a given starting point – or arranged starting points as there were several set passages – which was enormously helpful when inspiration from other sources was absent! Then there was the sense of solidarity which came from knowing that others were working on the same material and occasionally opportunities to swap notes and exchange ideas with other preachers. That could be quite revealing about the richness and varieties of preaching – and sometimes disappointing. But probably the most important things I got apart from progressive and continuous planned study of the Bible related to expository preachings following the lectionary made me a better expository preacher. I grappled with texts and passages which would have passed me by previously. I was made to face up to them and very often to preach on them to my own benefit and that of others. Tackling tricky texts made me a more rounded preacher and possibly a more honest one and made me more biblically centered. From 1986 onwards I have been in circuits where lectionary preaching has been more or less normative but not universally practices by all ministry and preachers! Notwithstanding, I did not jettison nor depart from my previous approach to discovering what I should preach about. That was and remained the bedrock of my approach and still is. My approach is something like this. I continue my broad based scanning, that is an integral part of my contribution as a preacher, my operational, spiritual and theological constitution. I bring that and what is emerging from it to the lectionary passages set for the particular service. I read and reflect on the lectionary readings and try to discover what they might be saying to me. In the light of that I muse about what is on my heart from my scanning of my contemporary and personal experience and life. Without any conscious effort on my part, they interact, speak to one another or don't. Gradually – or sometimes suddenly – out of the mishmash a focal issue or theme or point for preaching emerges. That can be directly from the lectionary reading or from my scanning illustrated by the readings or reinforced by them. I pursue what emerges as I am best able. Sometimes, however, there is no match or resonance between what is on my mind and heart, burdening my soul. When this happens I try to avoid the temptation of distorting texts or using them upon which to hang/attach my concerns,

ideas, thoughts, convictions etc; that is simply dishonest and dishonourable practice distorting the Word of God of which, God forgive me, I have been guilty. Then I have to make choices: stay with the lectionary readings and see where they take me; pursue the theme that is really alive for me and find other texts and/or readings. (For the sake of continuity week by week of the readings publically, I often keep them if I preach from another text and then allow them to speak to the congregation if not to me.) So, I have adopted into my original preaching praxis careful attention to the lectionary. It is not always an easy marriage! My first loyalty is to my substantive praxis and twenty five years of using the lectionary has not changed that, it has simply increased the dimensions of my scanning and made me a better and more frequent expository preacher and my preaching more expository and biblically grounded. AS I write, it occurs to me that essentially I am an existential preacher sensitive to and attempting to be true to my spiritual and secular experiences or understanding of life.<sup>35</sup>

### ***(d) Residual Guilt and Regret About Not Keeping Up My Biblical Scholarship***

Whilst I was never going to be a biblical scholar, I gained through a lot of hard work in college and during my first four years in ministry levels of proficiency in N.T. Greek and biblical studies adequate for circuit ministry. Indeed, when I was in Anerley I was able to conduct a fraternal bible study quite comfortably on the Greek text of a particular passage! (It was done partly to rebuke the fundamentalists in that group that I was a serious student of the Bible.) But, from that point onwards I gradually lost it through the work I did on youth work and church and community development. For some time I did courses for Sunday school teachers and youth workers on bible studies – on the English text, of course. I never had any Hebrew. Now I struggle to read the simplest Greek text and, as I note in Appendix III, I have neglected my bible reading and study over the years. I deeply regret this and feel guilty about it. The intensity of these feelings varies but they never go away; for much of the time they are, mercifully, dormant.

Here I wish to note two or three things that have put what actually happened as my vocation evolved from the mid-sixties onwards into a better perspective and ameliorates the sense of neglect and guilt. Undoubtedly I was called of God to do the work I did in the field of church

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35 See this interesting article: Lysons, Kenneth. (2004). Why I am not a Lectionary Preacher. *Expository Times*. 115. 262-265. 10.1177/001452460411500804.

and community development; I was constrained by Him to concentrate on it and to stay within that discipline; moreover, I was empowered by Him to become a skilled reflective practitioner and, to my surprise, a capable theoretician developing the praxis of new fields of work and a prolific author documenting large swathes of action research over many years. Under God I became a scholar in this field. Throughout I drew upon my knowledge gained by biblical studies and theological studies. My preaching was closely related to this work: it drew upon it, was informed by it and promoted it by giving expressions to some of its values, insights and implications for Christians and the Church. All in all I became a scholar in a vital field, much neglected, of church work and the training of clergy and laity in the praxis of it. Doing this took everything that I had and stretched me to the limits of if not beyond my intellectual and energy limits and my spiritual resources. There is simply no way that I could have done this work and pursue my biblical studies to the standard of excellence I would have loved to have achieved. As I have no regrets about doing the work in the field of church and community development – indeed I consider myself enormously privileged to have been accorded by God such a wonderful, important and creative vocation – logically I should have no regrets or guilt about not having done things such as biblical studies, pastoral and devotional writing etc. which, had I attempted to do them would have compromised my core vocation and what transpired to be my life's work. (Similarly I had to forgo leisure, sleep, family time about which I have also got regrets and some guilt.) But I am not entirely logical! I am a sentient being. They were sacrifices to be made, part of the professional and personal costs I had to make, and by default Molly had to make, in order to do what I had to do and to be and become what I became. Writing this is helping me to come to terms with these things and, indeed, to go further than I have ever gone before and say that I am glad that I did make the sacrifices because the rewards outweighed the costs and enormously so. I could never have given to biblical scholarship the equivalent of what I have given to church and community development and consultancy: biblical scholars abound, sadly that is not true of my discipline.

Providentially there is a reverse return as it were. What I have learnt from church and community development has informed my biblical studies. I gave some expression to this in Appendix III. And, wonderfully, I was able to use my professional ability in the in-service training of preachers here in Leeds North East Circuit for some ten years plus the time spent in writing the book and setting up the website over a period of three to four years.

Writing to David Gamble about this work in December 2009 I said the

following which I quote as an appropriate way of concluding this section:

Sharing this work has been a most interesting, worthwhile, satisfying and privileged aspect of my recent ministry and my retirement! There is a sense in which it has brought me full circle to my original call to preach, which has always been at the heart of my vocation. Two major aspects of my ministry are being brought together through the application to preachers and preaching of the ways and means of supporting and training works in church and community development work in their ministry that has occupied so much of my ministry. I thank God for the opportunity to round off my ministry in this way.

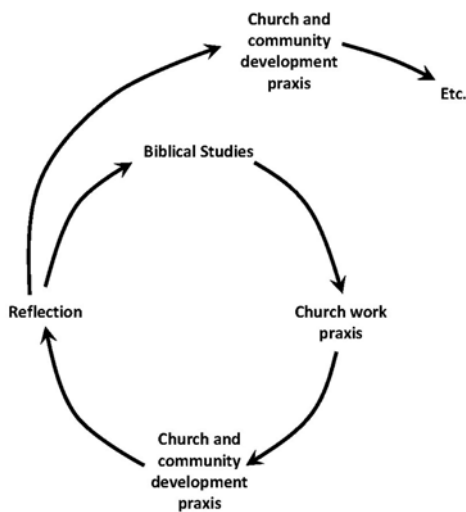
### *An afterthought(s)*<sup>36</sup>

Undoubtedly, my engagement with church and community development, p70-75, Avec and all that followed in relation to consultancy causes and work and my greatly blessed and privileged association with TRB, CW and all my colleagues, added enormously to my understanding of the ministry of Christ, Christianity and the Bible. Exciting and vitally important insights into human nature and ways of working with people in church and society for development were discovered and treasured through this work – insights and understandings I could never have gained from independent traditional Biblical studies and scholarship. But once glimmered and gained they richly enhanced my understanding and exegesis of the Bible and this thus my Biblical scholarship. In time the deeper understanding of the Scriptures and of Christ and Christianity that went with it, enriched my ministry in and through church and community development through extraordinarily creative and complex interactive, interdisciplinary synthesizing processes. How important and wonderful is that? I have been extraordinarily fortunate. It would have been nice to have been a polymath who could have kept up in a more rigorous way several disciplines which cluster creatively but I am becoming increasingly thankful for what I have been given and slightly less prone to bemoan what I haven't!!

Writing these notes is making inroads into one of the key objectives – to correct/adjust/redeem distorted and unhelpful and unhealthy perspectives I might have – do have! – on my life and vocational choices and performances.

## Another afterthought<sup>37</sup>

6am What follows owes much, I think, to an idea I came across the other day through reading John McNeill's Ph.D. thesis, 'The Hermeneutics of Wisdom', something I wish to pursue further. When I was writing the preceding pages I was searching in my mind for some way of representing diagrammatically the relationship between biblical scholarship and church and community development. But it evaded me. As I woke the idea was in my mind of the hermeneutics of other disciplines expressed as a hermeneutic circle of cycle based on the pastoral cycle.<sup>38</sup>



Biblical studies and scholarship informs – church work praxis which proves to be ineffective – discover church and community development praxis is effective and facilitates church and community development work and proves to be consonant with biblical exegesis – church and community development reflective praxis enhances biblical understanding and contributes to Biblical studies and scholarship and subsequent church or community development praxis. Hence the church and community

development praxis is a valuable allied discipline to Biblical scholarship and studies. So the hermeneutic circle of church allied disciplines, in this case Biblical and church and community development praxis – but it could be another discipline – pastoral counselling, consulting etc.

<sup>37</sup> 14.7.12

<sup>38</sup> See *Sustaining Preachers and Preaching*, p 54 ? and the chapter 4 generally.

## 10. Phases, Patterns, Emphases and Preoccupations

<sup>39</sup>As I approached writing this section all I feel up to is to reflect and reminisce on phases, patters, emphases and preoccupations not to analyze and structure things as I am want to do. Clearly discernible phases are the periods when I was:

- a) A local preacher and candidate for the ministry;
- b) A theological student and minister in training;
- c) A probationer and ordained circuit minister;
- d) A sector minister engaged on Project 70-75;
- e) A sector and associate circuit minister and director of Avec;
- f) An active supernumerary minister first in the Victoria and Chelsea Circuit and the in the Leeds North-East

Each had its own patterns, emphases, preoccupations, opportunities and problems. Somewhat impressionistically I will attempt to reflect on each in turn. My preaching has been done in churches in the context of services of worship, for the most part in Methodist Churches, but also occasionally in churches of all the principal denominations. During each phase I have been to and located in a particular circuit either as a local preacher or a circuit or sector minister or as a supernumerary. Consequently, whatever my status might have been, my preaching ministry has been essentially circuit based and oriented.

### ***(a) Local Preacher and Candidate for the Ministry***

<sup>40</sup>Earlier in these Notes I have written about my life as a local preacher and my lay ministry in Tel-el-Kebir and the Aldershot and Farnborough Circuit . Whilst I was in this circuit I was also a candidate for the ministry and then for three years a theological student at Richmond. I have written about this too . Here I am going to record thoughts that come to my mind as I reflect.

From an early stage in my life I had an interest in and a desire to preach – a propensity, inclination, predisposition to preaching and being a preacher? During an early religious spell in my life – probably during

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39 2.7.12

40 23.7.12

the period when I was 11-13 years of age, but I cannot be sure – I used to write sermons and show them to Mr Frank Nuttall, a local preacher shop keeper, for his comment. I never preached them! So there was a natural inbuilt attraction to preaching. But it was not until I actually started to preach, first out of necessity in Tel-el-Kebir and then later out of a sense of call, that it took hold on my life and reshaped me vocationally. From the beginning I realized that I had a gift for it and that I was good at it: inwardly this was quietly and humbly confirmed through my self-knowledge as it was outwardly by what people said to me about my call to, my gifts for preaching and their various experiences of my preaching minister. This does not mean that I have found preaching and preparation for it easy: I have had to work very hard at it and, I have depressed black moments as I have struggled with my material and lack of confidence and self-doubt. (See, for instance, *Sustaining Preachers and Preaching*, pp 55-70. Nonetheless, through over sixty years of my preaching ministry I have used a persistent sense of call which still beckons me on, the continuing inner assurance that I am a good and acceptable preacher and the humbling but gratifying experience of generous testimonies that my preaching ministry is acceptable and helpful and applauded. All this has been a powerful formative influence upon me. Whatever it may have achieved in the lives of others and the work of the Church to its own members and in the world; it has given me a great vocation to preach and minister; it has secured me in Christ's ongoing ministry and assured me that I have an honourable place in it and his great Commission (Matthew 28:20) and God's vocational purposes for the Church; it has given me a profound sense of my Christian identity, self-worth or destiny; and it has enhanced my self-confidence. I have had a partial awareness of some of this but up to this point I have not realized how powerful and far reaching has been the impact of my call to preach, my status and identity as a recognized lay and then ordained preacher and the privilege of preaching up me, my human and spiritual formation and development and my sense of being used of God. As I write this I am somewhat overwhelmed by a sense of deep gratitude and a feeling of unworthiness that I have been and continue to be the recipient of such enormous gifts and blessings. Thanks be to God that I am one of his and Mr Wesley's preachers. Oh, that others may have been as blessed by my ministry of preaching as I have been.

All this was enhanced by becoming a candidate for the ministry!

## ***(b) A Theological Student and Minister in Training***

Much that is relevant to this section is covered by what I have said about Richmond College (see index) and my preaching, which whilst it remained firmly based in the Aldershot and Farnborough Circuit, was much extended by my obligatory participation on the student preaching plan. This took me to churches in a wide area and involved much travelling and, regrettably long Sundays away from home. As a student I had a status somewhere between a local preacher and an ordained minister: I wore a clerical collar for preaching engagements and so could be mistaken for a minister but I could not preside at communion services nor had I pastoral charge; but it added status – something which I am now very comfortable but to my shame I enjoyed at the time. The extent of my preaching and its nature remained much the same but informed by what I was learning and things theological and biblical which were exciting me at the time – and possibly a display of my elementary ‘scholarship’! But it was not pastorally based. There were memorable events <sup>41</sup> associated with these appointments and we used to exchange anecdotes when we returned to college. However, enjoyable and profitable as these experiences were, it was from the preacher training

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41 Several came to mind. After a convivial day with my host when I preached in Littlehampton am and pm, he drove me to the station. As I got out of the car I said “Thank you brother!” His body stiffened and his face froze! Since then I am careful who I call brother and even more so, bro. (6 Sept, 1955.) On the 1st July 1956 I preached in the evening to a large congregation at the Rivercourt Church in the Hammersmith area. A man of the road sat alone in the left hand block of seats. I was preaching freely to a most attentive congregation. When I came to the conclusion of my sermon there was an atmosphere of rapt attention. As I was about to make my final point, the man of the road started to snore extremely loudly, some heads turn, the climax was shattered. To cap things as he was leaving he asked me for 5/- for a meal! I have just discovered I have written about this and other incidents!

However, there is one more incident that came to mind. On the 6th July 1958, I was to take morning and evening services as Lee Common, some six miles from Amersham. Having now got a car, we decided that Molly and Janice would accompany me and we would have a picnic lunch and tea. I told the super what I planned and would not need hospitality. It was a beautiful day and a lovely country church. As we entered the church the steward, a Mr Ghost, muttered something and ran out. When he came back he said he was our host for the day and that he had been to tell his wife that we would be three not one for lunch and tea! They entertained us most graciously and generously. We took the picnic basket home!

program within college that I benefited most. During term time there was a preaching service in the college chapel open to visitors conducted by first year students in turn. This was followed by a ‘crit class’ of the students of the year led by Norman Goldhawk, and ably so with pastoral kindness and understanding. A fellow student was required to give an appraisal of the service and the sermon as an introduction to an open discussion which was generally fair and balanced and at time insightful and critical. Tutors in turn (other than Goldhawk I think) were appointed to have a private tutorial with the student. (Harold Roberts was appointed to one particular student. But he never called him to a tutorial to the great relief of the student. Two years later in his final year, realizing the potential value of the appraisal by such an eminent minister, the student approached Dr Roberts rather tentatively. Without any hesitation, as though the service had taken place the previous day, Dr Roberts went into a most helpful detailed discussion with a clear memory of hymns, prayers, text and sermon! This anecdote became part of the folklore of Richmond.)

<sup>42</sup>As I browsed through my diaries for 1955-58 to check on the details of the anecdotes, I was impressed by the breadth and variety of my preaching experience during this period. It would be interesting to list and classify it.

Another thing I noted was an entry for the 15th July 1956 which recorded that I was paid 31/6 for a preaching engagement(s) and I added that I could not get used to being paid for preaching. Every so often I feel the same even now.

In my case the appointed tutor was Clive Thexton. To my surprise he was most complimentary about my preaching and said he thought I had a gift for it. Then he said that as he listed to and reflected on the sermon how he saw what I was doing to be like someone painting a picture in words which gradually took shape and that he knew when the sermon came to its rightful conclusion when the picture was completed. (As I write I can see Rolf Harris on TV drawing pictures which suddenly with the last few strokes, revealed their nature. As a child I saw Romany, The Rev Bramwell Evans, do the same. Immediately I recognized this to be profoundly true; it came as an exciting moment of revelation, a denouement. Whilst I had not thought of this analogy in relation to my preaching, from the earliest days in my preaching life I had the experience – and still have – of putting parts of the ‘argument’ in the context of the sermon into places one by one until the argument or thesis or message is completed: the building blocks are in place. And I know when I have done that and when I have failed to do so. I

sense it intuitively and experientially. The verbal picture is complete. I am forever grateful to Clive. His analogy is the nearest I can get to describing the existential process; each picture is slightly but significantly different even when preached from the same manuscript! Sermons are pictures of spiritual realities; windows of my soul.

Writing this, led me to make a connection between this kind of preaching and the diagrams and models I draw. Strangely I do not use diagrams in preaching as I do in training courses and consultancy work. I do not know why. But I do use them in thinking about preaching (see *Sustaining Preachers and Preaching*) and in preparing sermons as I think my way through complex and tricky subject matters. The diagrams and models that evolve inform my preaching in several ways: they deepen and sharpen my thinking whether they are ‘picturing’ or ‘disclosure’ models; they greatly assist me to structure and order my material in written form; they help me to construct verbal pictures as I preach; they help me to use appropriate body language for non-verbal communication as I preach – for instance I draw pictures in the air and refer back to them pointing to the parts as though there was a diagram in the air. I had not previously thought my way through this and articulated it. Diagrammatic representation complement the verbal representation of realities by presenting them in different ‘languages’. I am reminded that, a distinguished economist and Nobel Prize winner, Sir John Hicks, is reputed to have said that he always explains his propositional in words, in diagrams and in mathematics and only publishes when he can do all three<sup>43</sup>. I am not sure about mathematics and preaching!

Doing this has made me start thinking again about why so much contemporary use of illustrations in services and sermons on screen and through PowerPoint presentations I find so unhelpful and irritating. It now occurs to me that it does not engage with their subject matter in the same creative and insightful ways that diagramming and modelling does – or can do which are ‘rich’ pictures. One reason is that much of it, to use Ian Ramsay’s terminology, is ‘pictorial’ modelling (some of offensively

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43 See *Analysis and Design*, p 175.

simplistic and facile) rather than ‘disclosure’ modelling. Picturing modelling does, of course, have its uses and properly deployed can be a powerful and emotional way of communicating but it is ‘disclosure’ modelling that helps insightful and revelatory thinking; it is a proper aid to ‘breaking the word’.

### *c) Circuit Ministry*

<sup>44</sup>For fourteen years, 1958-72 I was a circuit minister, two years as a probationer and then as an ordained minister – what is now known as a presbyter. I served in three circuits: Llanelly and Carmarthen (4yrs), Sydenham and Forest Hill (4yrs), Croydon (6yrs). In Llanelly and Carmarthen I had pastoral charge of four churches (Carmarthen, Pontardulais, Kidwelly and Burry Port) and preached in the eight circuit churches. In Sydenham, Forest Hill I had pastoral charge of two churches (Wesley Hall Sydenham and Averley) and preached in the seven circuit churches; in Croydon I had pastoral charge of one church (Parchmore) and preached in the seven circuit churches. My preaching was well and in some cases very well received.

Llanelly and Carmarthen circuit was an excellent place in which to develop any preaching. Culturally the people highly valued the art of preaching and greatly enjoyed good preaching to which they gave themselves. Their spontaneous responses and existential participation gave life and excitement to preachers and preaching. They were highly responsive and appreciative of my enthusiasm for biblical theology – although mistakenly at one stage I felt they were not. I became convinced that the things that had fired me in College were of no interest to most of the members. The very fine body of local preachers were. They responded enthusiastically to meetings I convened in the manse and a programme of team preaching that evolved; the notes are still on file. Mr Williams, a greatly respected local preacher in his mid-eighties at the time, was asked to read the first paper. When he had given his paper, he stood and said he would leave because he couldn’t hear a word that was said. What he said was impressive and moving and stimulated a rich discussion. The next morning I met him outside the manse, he lived in the same road not far away, gripped my arm with a vice like grip and insisted that I tell him what had happened after he left and, as with so many similar conversations, neighbours discussed them with me afterwards! Some of the sermons I preached stand out in my memory and we will come to them in a later section.

Eventually I realized that the frustration mentioned earlier derived

from my inability to share much of what I had gained in College through sermons. Preaching frequently and regularly to the same congregations provided opportunities which I delighted in to pursue themes sequentially and systematically. This presented openings I had rarely had (taking linked services in the Presbyterian Church in Aldershot during long vacations was the only similar experience that I had had) but that was not sufficient. I needed to complement my preaching with systematic teaching. A practice which I started in Llanelly and Carmarthen and combined in the other two circuits and was well supported. I discuss it below. Sufficient here to make the point of my need to preach and teach without confusing these two different disciplines and activities.

Pastoral work was a vital part for me of a Circuit Minister. I took it very seriously; I was both preacher and pastor (and, of course administrator!). Members of churches and communities saw me, as their minister or a minister, gave me privileged pastoral access to the sacred ground of their homes and lives during ordinary and extraordinary periods of births, marriages, deaths, sickness, success and the routine times that linked them. My pastoral purpose was to engage with them respectfully but profoundly in depth in relation to anything that was important to them or troubling, remembering them and their beliefs and the Christian faith. Fundamentally, my approach was to do this for its own sake. Inevitably and in a sense incidentally, however, I gained insights and understandings that extrapolated and informed my preaching. Pastoral work revealed pastoral, moral and spiritual needs which needed attention over and beyond pastoral relationships. Consequently, for the first time for me, I was experiencing within me a dialectical interaction between the two principal stands in my circuit, ministry: pastoralia and preaching. Any interaction which introduced/opens up extraordinarily tricky queries related to other pertinent works and preaching. Those I struggle with are:

- The danger and temptations of ‘using’ (misusing) by design or default, pastoral relationships to gain information surreptitiously for preaching purposes or to inform policy making; that corrupts a pastoral relationship and compromises a minister’s integrity.
- When it is right to use information which has emerged from wholesome pastoral relationships without breaking confidences and hurting people and when it is right, how to do so without people feeling ‘got at’, betrayed etc.<sup>45</sup>

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45 I had a particularly painful experience of this. A lady in the second circuit Mrs. Kathleen Mercer, had become a very close friend both to Molly and me.

- -Preaching sermons which are relevant to pastoral needs revealed by pastoral discussions with a member or members of a congregation but which did not derive from these discussions.

<sup>46</sup>Gradually in the next circuits, I became involved in open youth and community work, which led to extensive involvement in church and community development in the third circuit. Alongside this I also became committed to and engaged in introducing and practicing experimental Christian education into Methodism generally and the churches of which I had partial charge especially. Section 9:1 shows that these developments profoundly affected the nature of my ministry permanently. They also impacted my preaching ministry. Experimental education led me to introduce first family and then community worship (scripts in my sermon files.) *Inter alia*, this involved discovering appropriate ways of communicating to children and young people and adults what I aimed to communicate to adults through sermons in what is now described as ‘all-age-worship’. There was, of course, an educational element in these means of communicating but they were not, neither in design, intent or practice, teaching sessions. What I was about was all-age-preaching in the context of all-age-worship in a comprehensive church. To achieve this I/we had to avoid swinging from adult centered worship/preaching to child centered

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We had much in common and explored all kinds of spiritual and theological subjects in considerable depth face to face and through correspondence – she wrote very well. She never recovered from the sudden and premature death of her husband which happened immediately before I knew her. Much of our early discussions were about this event and her reaction to it. About three years into our friendship, we had a meaningful discussion about an issue of great importance. I developed the theme and preached it without any reference to our discussions. There was simply no way in which anyone could have known the connection or to make it. I thought she would find it helpful. She came to see me the next day in a state of deep distress. She thought I had betrayed her and her confidence and was sure everyone would know about our conversation. I was taken by complete surprise and I too was deeply distressed. I apologized profoundly and profusely and tried to reassure her that no-one could possibly trace what I had said back to her but to no avail. Many attempts I made at a reconciliation failed. She was quite bitter, as she had been about her husband’s death. Our friendship was irrevocably broken. She retained her friendship with Molly throughout her life but I was dead to her. The awful thing is, or should I say the disturbing/frightening thing is that I could do the same thing again because I could not have foreseen the effects. Indeed, all kinds of discussions have led me to preach services which those whom I had had the discussions, found helpful.

as so often happened in the old tradition of ‘children’s addresses! This was demanding, but when it worked - and it did not always do so – it was great and deeply satisfying all round.

Embracing open youth work and the new directive approach to church and community development as a legitimate and necessary part of the ministry and mission of our churches, impacted my preaching differently. These changes involved changes in my theology and spirituality which had to be reflected in my preaching if I was to maintain my integrity and discharge my responsibilities to help church members to find a theology and spirituality but would underpin and inform the new patterns in which we were effectively engaged. Laudable and necessary as it was to take up this difficult task seriously, it was fraught with subtle dangers. For instance it was all too easy to use my privileged position as minister and preacher, not simply to express my own beliefs about these developments but to persuade/convince others and even to get at those who did not agree with the church entering these fields of work. Passing over the line between expanding my beliefs and misusing my position to manipulate – and that line is so easily crossed by default because it is not always easy to discern it – is unacceptable and unpardonable in situations where members of congregations have no immediate right of reply. To my shame I did that in my enthusiasm to promote the development in the work<sup>47</sup>. The proper place to debate the issue was in the workshops we organized (see The Parchmore Partnership) and that we right vigorously! I discuss below how I tackled this problem in relation to Project 70-75.

My introduction to and my commitment to the non-directive approach to working with people<sup>48</sup> challenged my understanding of the nature of preaching, which I felt was a directive activity. Eventually, I found a new way for me of thinking about the nature of preaching which makes it consistent with the nda. The discovery came through a remarkable article by Dr William Berger, ‘Preaching and Counselling.’ He suggests that preaching, like counseling – and by extension like the nda to working with people – is about promoting ‘personal inner dialogues’, stimulating and helping people to think for themselves and to come to their own conclusions. That is an understanding I was feeling after but had been unable to formulate

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47 And I did that in spite of a commitment to use what verbal skills that I have, not simply for my own purposes but for those of others. See *Analysis and Design* p 177.

48 See *Analysis and Design*, 176-179 cf *Consultancy, Ministry and Mission* p369 and 326. I have written extensively about the nda and worship for people and their development and the praxis of each consultancy.

or articulate. From that point onwards, it was what I have consciously and seriously tried to do through my preaching, based in part, on my own inner dialogues.

### ***d) Sector Ministry: Project 70-75 and Avec***

<sup>49</sup>Throughout my time as sector minister I continued to preach in the Muswell Hill and Forest Hill Circuits during my time on Project 70-75 and in Chelsea and Forest Hill Circuits whilst I was in Avec and the early years of my retirement. The Muswell Hill (Highgate?) circuit received my preaching with enthusiasm as did some of the churches covered by the ecumenical project (see Churches and Communities). Aware of the kind of issues discussed on pp99-100, I prepared a brief for myself and discussed it with my colleagues. A copy of this paper follows; the working notes from which I drafted it are appended, see Appendix V. Undoubtedly, the thinking behind these notes contributed significantly to any acceptance of one as a preacher as well as the Project Work and to the effectiveness of my preaching. Further, they guided and influenced me throughout my sector ministry. However, if I were writing them now I would have cast up some of the points as ‘noxious’ or avoidances (see *Analysis and Design* pp 122-125 for a discussion of the nature of these facts and their uses in purposeful planning). For instance, the sixth ‘method’ is really a noxious and is better expressed as are, ‘to avoid people thinking.....’ And the points discussed on pp 99-100 are readily expressed as noxious.

To avoid:

- members of congregations feeling I am ‘getting at’ them;
- preaching on things which, to be fair, should be presented in a context designed for egalitarian face to face exchanges;
- being tendentious;
- being seen as a lopsided/one track minded/offensive/simple themed/ manipulative preacher with pet themes..... Etc

As a revisit these notes after many years, I am impressed by and encouraged by the way in which I arrived to use and preach on the insights I had gained from community development (method one) and its relevance to the mission of the church (method four). Also that I was intent upon complementing by preaching with structured discussions on any topics related to Christianity and human life (method five).

All my preaching subsequent to the mid 1960’s has been informed by

the insights gained through my experiences of church and community development and consultancy work – how could it be otherwise because this work occupied large swathes of my life and was my ministry. Increasingly I found I could do so without referring to the origins of the insights – they simply became part of me and my acquired wisdom such as it was.

[Confidential]

To my colleagues in Project 70-75

This was part of my preparation for taking services in Hornsey. I share it with you in the hope that we can discuss it sometime.

George

PURPOSE in Preaching and Leading Worship

To help all those involved in an act of worship (including myself) to:

- find in each other and in God ways of meeting some of our 'religious', 'spiritual' and human needs whether these be for 'comfort' or 'challenge'.
- gain new insights into: the being of God as revealed in Jesus Christ; his purposes for and his relationships to, the world, and the nature of Christian mission;
- have a better understanding of themselves, their relationships with others within and without the churches, their purposes and their vocation as Christians in the church, the home and the world;
- establish their identity as a group of Christians;
- support each other and to find support in their faith as they come to terms with new ideas, re-orientate their thinking, face difficulties and problems;
- consider and compare in a critical way various ways of achieving their purposes in the church and the world;
- make informed judgements on matters of faith and conduct;
- are able to make free informed decisions and act upon

them.

Method

By:

helping people to meditate and think about themselves, the Christian faith, the mission of the church and especially the insights I have gained from community development in ways consonant to the non-directive approach to working with individuals and groups;

- helping them to pray, worship and communicate with each other in the light of the ideas and information available;
- helping them to look at the different aspects of subjects and all the available relevant information;
- sharing with them my ideas about, and my experiences and understanding of, God as revealed in Jesus Christ, his relationship to the world, the mission of the church with special reference to the church and community development;
- leading structured discussions on any topics related to Christianity and human life;
- avoiding people thinking I can talk only about community development and the church;
- becoming accepted by them as someone interested in them as people, their worries, concerns, problems and purposes and desirous of ministering to them;
- meeting those worship expectations willingly and without question which I can do without compromising my integrity and my commitment to the non-directive approach to working with people;
- preaching from experience to experience in such ways that people are stimulated to have a dialogue with themselves and their God.

16th October 1972]

Throughout my time as a sector minister I was without pastoral charge except for one year, 1985-86 when I was acting superintendent of the

Victoria and Chelsea Circuit. In fact I have not had pastoral charge of a church since I left Parchmore in 1972, 40 years! But for twenty two years, 1976-1998, I was an associate minister at Victoria and Chelsea and became very closely involved with life and work of those two churches and I had rich, howbeit informal pastoral ministry to many of the people. Chelsea was very much my spiritual home and the people there drew out of me some of my best preaching and, as will become clear later, after I had left I returned to preach some of my most effective sermons and what became memorable and special occasions.

### *e) Retirement*

In my retirement I continued to preach in Sydenham and Forest Hill and Chelsea until I moved to Leeds and then in the Leeds NE Circuit. Roundhay, Alwoodley, Trinity and particularly Lidgett drew out of me, much as Chelsea and Victoria did, some of my best preaching. Also from 2000 to 2010, I was deeply involved in the in-service training of preachers in Leeds NE. This led to a website (<http://www.preacherdevelopment.uk7.net>) and to a book, *Sustaining Preachers and Preaching* in which the work is documented.

So preaching has been a core activity throughout my ministry.

## **II. Sermons I Failed to Preach**

The idea for this section came from an article by George K. Barr in the *Expository Times* (April 2004 Vol 115 No. 7)<sup>50</sup>

When I originally thought of this title I thought I would have much to say. To my surprise I now find that I have very little to say; of itself that might be significant. Certainly, I did not have at any stage a long-term preaching schedule of sermon ideas. For years I kept a file of 'ideas for sermons' which became quite bulky. Strangely I never drew upon it and I think I have binned it. Sermons emerged stage by stage in the ways already described (cf II.6 and 9c et al).

As I tried to think about sermons that I had failed to preach I did wonder if I had neglected preaching on the nature of God, sin and prayer. I came to the conclusion that the first two of these I had preached on but not as the major theme, they were subordinate themes of countless sermons. Prayer, I think I have neglected. Indeed, I have been long convinced that teaching people how to pray is not given sufficient attention. But is it a topic on

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50 <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/001452460411500702>

which to preach, save to exhort people to pray? I am not sure; neither am I clear how you teach people to pray or how they learn. Certainly, the art is variously communicated by example, experience of people praying, meaningful acts of corporate prayer in private or in public and by osmosis. Perhaps it is 'caught rather than taught'. Consequently, the way in which preachers, ministers and priests pray with people and during services of worship is of enormous importance: at best it is experientially valuable when it becomes a means of grace and takes people into the presence of God and into an 'I/Them' relational experience. This can happen through all kinds of liturgical prayers but for me, it is more likely to happen through extempore prayer. Whilst I use set liturgies and very occasionally write out prayers list topics, I invariably pray extempore in preaching services. For the main part, I do not know what I am about to say or how I will pray until I start praying: I sense I 'open' myself to my inner thoughts and, importantly, to my feelings and those of others through attuning myself to the people, context and ethos in the congregation and beyond intercessory prayer. The act of praying in this way communicates something about prayer. The almost universal contemporary practice in the Methodist Church of 'reading/praying' prayers written by other people troubles me greatly. It can lead people to feel (possibly rather than think) that the proper/correct way to address God is through reading extremely well-written and polished prayers rather than in our own words spoken from heart and mind directly. True prayer is not about being word perfect but in loving dialogue with God; am I/Their relationship.

Being out of circuit ministry since 1972, means that I have not been able, because of that and the nature of my work, to engage in a preaching ministry to 'my people' week upon week. That was a significant part of the sacrificial cost of pursuing what I believe to be my God-given vocation in church and community development and consultancy work, practice, researching and writing. I have some quiet mild (rather than acute) regrets about that for the preaching I would have done and the preacher I would have become. However that might have been my heart is full of gratitude to God and the church for the preaching ministry that I have been privileged to exercise over these years, it has been rich, rewarding, a source of much joy (and of course pain) and deeply satisfying. The other work I did has not eclipsed only curtailed my preaching vocation which has been indicated. Thanks be to God.

PS. <sup>51</sup>I often wonder if I comforted people/congregations when I should have challenged them and challenged them when I should have

comforted them. Cf. a book by Glock, Charles Y, Ringer Benjamin B, Babbie Earl R, *To Comfort and to Challenge*. (1967, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California) which challenged (I say) me greatly. Notes in shelf file, 'Summary of Notes of Books'.

At one time I preached on a few occasions about miracles but it seems not addressed subject directly since 1960's. Done so indirectly when look at credibility of N.T. Stories. But this needs checking out.

<sup>52</sup>For many years I have longed to preach at an ordination service, but to my deep regret I have never been invited to do so, I would like to have known what such an occasion would draw out of me and the kind of sermon I would have preached. The nearest I got to it was the invitation to preach at the service accepting a local preacher on to full plan at Chelsea, Jack Sammons.

### **III. Reflections on the Praxis of my Preaching**

#### ***Contents***

1. Theological emphases
2. My vocation to preach, position, work and preaching
3. Preaching and teaching
4. My understanding of my approach
5. Towards modelling my praxis

Now I turn to reflections on my preaching ministry.

#### **1. Theological Emphases**

<sup>53</sup>Following the section on inspirational and lectionary preaching and when I was trying to think my way into this section on phases, patterns etc, I produced the chart presented on the next page, 'My Ministry overview of phases and characteristics' <sup>54</sup>. It is a useful charting of some of the significant variables in my preaching ministry and self explanatory.

Reflecting on my ministry in another way I can see that in order to address contextual and contemporary issues of concern I was a preacher who was variously:

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<sup>52</sup> 3.9.12

<sup>53</sup> 6.8.12

<sup>54</sup> On reflection this chart may have been better placed in the next section.

- a Christian apologist; (for instance, I tried to make a reasoned defence for the Christian faith in relation to scientific and technological developments to demonstrate the validity of the scriptures).
- a commentator and would be interpreter of events which seemed to undermine Christianity and the existence and goodness of God.
- an applied theologian working out various aspects of Christian praxis in the contemporary world and the implications of the faith for personal and social living and political action in challenging and moving moral times.

I think it would be possible to group and classify my sermons in relation to these functions I performed as a preacher in contradistinctive to doing so as a reflective practitioner in the fields of church and community development – but I am not going to do, although I did cast my mind over some of my sermons to test out there characteristics. This combination and interplay of these functions made for effective ministry. As my ministry has evolved I believe the function of applied theologian has been strengthened especially as I become more and more engaged in church and community development and consultancy work: my applied work has influenced and strengthened my preaching ministry; it has earthed it.

A significant shift in my overall theological approach in the late 1970's through work I did with the Community Development Group of the Methodist Church and the research 'core group' organized by David Jenkins during the time that he was the Director of the William Temple Foundation. It was from thinking and operating from a salvation model of the work of Christ to a combined creation/evolutionary model combined with a Christ centered salvation model. This model represents God active in creation and then through Jesus Christ active within the created and throughout it to save and redeem it. Both processes have initial starting points and distinctive acts with continuously promote evolutionary processes<sup>55</sup>. This was a breakthrough in my thinking: it provided a comprehensive theological framework for my understanding of a commitment to the unique and essential saving work of Christ and the praxis of Church and community development work. This has influenced and informed all my subsequent work and preaching.

## 2. My vocation to preach, position, work

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55 I wrote about this in *Diagrammatic Modelling: An Aid to Theological Reflection in Church and Community Development Work*, 1980. See also Sermon 271.

Characteristics	Phases	Characteristics
<div> <div> <p>Without pastoral charge</p> <p>Preaching widely</p> </div> <div> <p>With pastoral charge</p> <p>Predominantly and increasingly in churches for which I had pastoral charge &amp; Christ Church.</p> </div> </div>	<p>Local preacher</p> <p>Ministerial student</p> <p>Current Ministry</p> <p>Catmarches</p> <p>Gylstanham and Akerley</p> <p>Parishmore</p>	<p>Biblical text.</p> <p>Preaching &amp; talking on bible &amp; comparative religion</p> <p>Preaching on many such acts.</p> <p>Family worship</p> <p>Preaching on ch &amp; col</p> <p>Commit to fans with preaching &amp; ad.</p> <p>Preaching in sync with action.</p> <p>Family and community worship</p>
<p>Pastoral charge</p> <p>Predominantly in Horsecor Forest Hill Circuit.</p> <p>Predominantly in Chelsea, Victoria &amp; Forest.</p>	<p>Project 70-75 &amp; Sector Ministry</p> <p>Area &amp; Chelsea as Associate Minister</p> <p>Pastoral involvement.</p>	<p>Ch &amp; col &amp; ad.</p> <p>Sector Ministry</p> <p>Ecumenical preaching started.</p>
<p>at Vicar</p> <p>Predominantly in Forest Hill, Chelsea and Leeds, NE.</p>	<p>Supernumerary Ministry</p> <p>Postgraduate teaching</p> <p>Leeds, particularly Lidgate.</p>	<p>Exploring nature of preaching</p> <p>Sustaining preachers and preaching &amp; promoting their development</p> <p>Addressing new questions &amp; x-attitudes.</p>
		<p>Inspired &amp; expository preaching</p> <p>Preaching in relation to overall creative themes which gradually intertwined as my ministry progressed.</p> <p>Inspired &amp; Ecumenical</p>

MY MINISTRY: Overview of Phases and Characteristics.

## and preaching

Much of what I have written in this section is about the effects of my official position in the church and the Christian mission developmental work in which I was engaged upon:

- my ability to pursue my preaching vocation;
- me as a preacher and my preaching;
- the actualities of my preaching.

Each position presented me with opportunities, potential difficulties and restrictions. For instance, when I was a local preacher status accrued to me from being unpaid and working full-time in a secular job. Being financially independent of the church meant that I was not paid to preach; I did so entirely out of conviction not as ‘my job’. My mother saw these characteristics to be very important considerations (compare 8.38 to 43). They contributed to my integrity and independence, and freed me to concentrate on preaching. But then again, ordination adds greatly to the preacher is standing in the church. Pastoral charge of local churches gave me privileged entry into what was happening in people’s lives and their spirituality, which earthed informed my preaching. At some cost, and I discovered just how much care, however, had to exercise in drawing upon the insights gained in preaching; by default it was all too easy for me to breach confidences and cause offence. When I did not have pastoral charge I did not have access to the insights but I was free from the dangers that such insights could bring. Embracing the non-directive approach challenged me to rethink my approach to ministry and to preaching. At first, this was most disconcerting but eventually it led me to a richer understanding of the nature of preaching which gave me much deeper and profound satisfaction in this aspect of my ministry. Importantly, it also meant that my preaching was entirely consistent with my non-directive approach to the way in which I work with people in mission and ministry. Further, working as a sector minister developing particular aspects of Christian ministry and mission, such as community development and work consultancy, inevitably informed my preaching. At best I used what I was learning and valuing to good effect in sermons. This too had its dangers; I could be seen, for instance, to be somewhat one- sided or narrowly and self interestedly using my preaching opportunities to promote my special interests.

In short, I found myself realizing that, during each of the six periods of my ministry, critical interactions, some of them quite subtle, were active

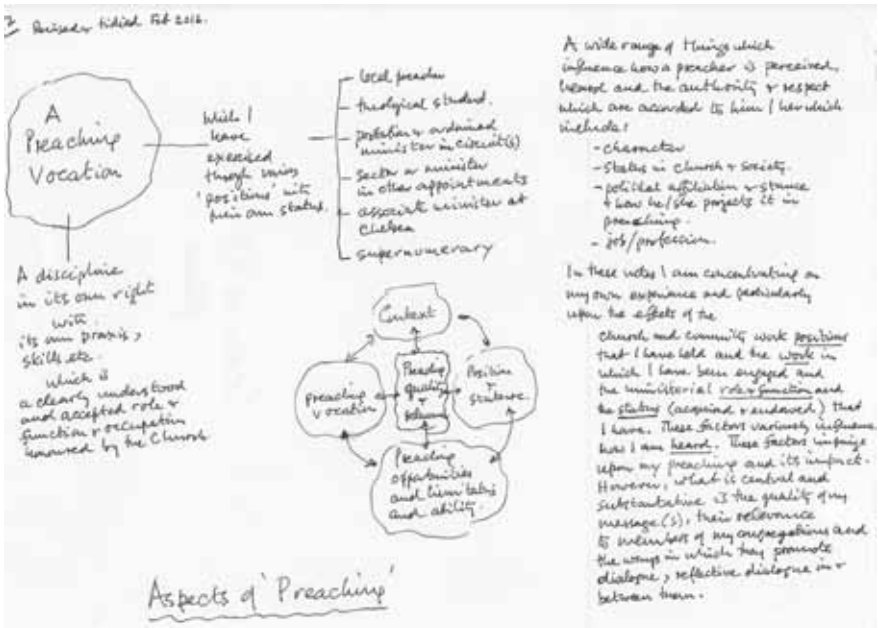
between my vocation to preach, my position, work and the actualities of my preaching. (Incidentally I arrived at this triangulation by modelling it.) Each position I held in the church had its own status, which provided me with preaching openings and restrictions.

However, I came to realize that I was over estimating the impact of position status upon my preaching ministry. The status ascribed to me by members of congregations is influenced by many other factors such as people's assessment of: the way in which I live my Christian life; my ability to preach; the value people place upon the work in which I am or have been engaged: whether my preaching is helpful or not; my intellectual and spiritual integrity: my ability and willingness to address rather than avoid complex social religious events which, because they are difficult to reconcile with Christian understanding of the nature of God, can challenge, and even undermine faith and introduce doubt. (From time to time members of congregations have said that it was this latter attribute of my preaching ministry that they particularly valued.) Undoubtedly, such individual and collective assessments have greatly influenced my ability or inability to preach to good effect. Positive assessments by congregations generate anticipation and expectation, which, especially when I am aware of them, draw out from my finest inspired preaching which is most likely to be effective. (Opposition and negative assessments can, of course, stimulate me to better preaching.). Gradually, further reflection on the actualities of my experience, convinced me that this kind of assessment has persistently overridden the effects of my position and vocational work upon my status. This subjective judgement I find convincing even though I cannot possibly quantify the relative and combined effects of these different forms of ascribed status.

On further reflection, whilst remaining convinced about these various influential factors upon my preaching status and effectiveness, I realized, that it is God's call to a living vital vocational preaching ministry and the Holy Spirit's facilitating of it, that, makes it what it is and, gives me an ascribed spiritual status of true and inestimable value and evokes from congregations a corresponding acquired status. This status, essentially humble, is of paramount importance to me. It overrides and evaluates all other status giving factors. Essentially, it is given by God, not acquired by me, and which I accept and respect with great humility as a pearl of great price. It is my belief in and conviction about my call, which has sustained me through the ups and downs of my own evaluation of my status and authority as a preacher and that of others and saves me from over or under estimating myself and my ministry. Thanks be to God.

### 3. Preaching and Teaching

It is easier to say what preaching is not than what it is: it is not teaching although it can be educative nor is it lecturing; it is not acting or performing although it has elements of those activities in it; it is not an extended commercial or an act of propaganda although it may resemble that and it does commend Christian and Christianity. Philip Brooks' definition is much quoted, the "communication of truth through personality". Neil Richardson discussed its nature in our book *Sustaining Preachers and Preaching* (see pp 11f and more generally Chapter 1). For me it is a way of communicating to groups of people quite different from any other way in which I do so. Precisely how it differs and is unique defines my paves of description. As I experience it, it is a distinctive way of feeling, thinking, speaking and relating to God and congregations in God's presence and power with its own mood and mode of communicating congruent with and determined by expressing holy things and exploring spiritual routes of enormous significance and importance. Somehow the quality of the content of the preaching transforms the medium by which it is being communicated – preaching of the Word becomes a sacramental act, breaking the word in the sacramental act of preaching, the sacrament of the word. Consequently preaching is transformed into a unique act of communicating in the same



mysterious way that bread and wine are transformed in the Eucharist into holy elements. In truth, in preaching the nature of the message transforms that of the messenger and the medium of communication. Words, words, words – and I still haven't been able to describe its uniqueness.

However, it is precisely because preaching is not teaching that it is unsuitable and unable to do what preaching and lecturing can do. Trying to teach through sermons denudes preaching of its uniqueness. Desperate to communicate more than I could through preaching led me to supplement my preaching ministry with short teaching sessions first in Carmarthen and then throughout my Circuit ministry. Details are presented in Appendix VII, Circuit Ministry Teaching sessions. These were extremely well received.

As I was sorting through papers I came across long forgotten notes of a talk I gave in 1968. I include it here because it sheds light on how I saw the relationship between preaching and teaching.

#### SOME NOTES ON THE LOCAL PREACHER'S ROLE IN VIEW OF THE EDUCATIONAL CHANGES TO BE INTRODUCED INTO THE METHODIST CHURCH, OCTOBER 1968

A new era of Christian education is opening in the life of the Methodist Church. The British Lessons Council Syllabus for 1968 – 1969 Experience and Faith' has been devised in the light of research into the mythology of learning and knowledge gained from experiment in new teaching techniques. There are Study Notes for all age-groups, including unclear groups. This 'comprehensive' approach to our educational work has many implications for the office and function of the local preacher. It affords an opportunity for him to forge new links between his work as teacher and those who are engaged in teaching.

It is essential that he should understand this revolution in religious education. To this end, he should study 'Experience and Faith' unclear, from October onwards, this will be an invaluable reference book, explaining the basic principles which underlie the 'experiential' approach. Together, it will enable him, if he wishes, to relate his message and the worship he conducts to the Sunday School, Junior Church and adult training programme. The children's address is on the way out, but the few minutes which the children spend in the Church can be a most important prelude to their learning period - and there is no need for the preacher to steal the thunder of the Sunday School staff. The child's experience in church, even though brief, has a formative influence on his subsequent attitude to worship. Therefore it must not only be relevant, but must be seen to be so by the child; it must be 'real' for the whole congregation, otherwise its falseness will be apparent to young and old alike. Worship must be neither childish on the one hand

nor so sophisticated on the other hand that the younger members of the congregation become 'bored'.

Monthly parade and family services can be the consummation of a series of lessons. The young people would be helped to see their work in the setting of the Church's life and work and at the same time there is educational advantage for the adults; for both the worship becomes moving and meaningful. As part of his preparation for the Service, the preacher would have to talk to Sunday School teachers and the young people – more work but the end-product would prove the value of such effort.

Some Churches do not provide such regular opportunities for family services, but more and more try to gather together their whole family for the great Christian festivals. It is important that the B.L.C. syllabus is geared to the Christian calendar and thus 'provides the framework of theological truth'; it gives opportunity for 'recurrent encounters with the themes of the Christian faith' and it offers 'an underlying principle for the education programme of the whole Church'. Unclear the understanding co-operation of the preacher, most of this will be achieved.

But the preacher can do even more. If, by introducing B.L.C. syllabus themes, he enables his congregation to think, at an adult level, about the subject matter which is also engaging the attention of the junior Church, he is contributing to an overall pattern of Christian education in a way which could achieve remarkable results. The dinner-tables, where members of his congregation subsequently find themselves, then become places of real dialogue between young people and their parents. Leaders meeting these young people at week night activities could find that they had common ideas to discuss. The educational processes are thus reinforced by processes of community interest, are means of bridging the gap between adult and youth is provided and opportunities for theme and team preaching become apparent.

I have worked over the implications of the new approach to Christian education with several Sunday School teachers. They recognise their need for help in thinking through their theology and in relating their experience of life to Biblical truth. The new methods make great demands on teachers} 'resource people' are most necessary to assist them to think through their spiritual experience. Trained local preachers should be able to meet this need most effectively. The preachers do not become teachers - but they can be ministers and pastors to teachers thus using their skill to the honour of their calling. Other people can give training in educational techniques; the preacher's contribution is that of enabling teachers to interpret

God's activity in their lives; a vital precursor to the communication of religious concepts and ideas.

I do not wish the preacher to become a teacher, worship to become a lesson, the Church to be a classroom, the sermon a lecture or the sacraments a demonstration. I do wish worship to be spiritually illuminating and a real activity which allows us to express with fervour and sincerity all that we understand about God in Christ, at our life and about ourselves. I wish it to be an experience, a sublime experience, a real experience. And, if this is to be so, preacher and teacher must needs co-operate.

Sgd. G. LOVELL

8 April 1968

## 4. My Understanding of My Approach

The focus in this section is upon those things which have informed, motivated and guided me as a preacher, the ways in which I approach preaching and actually preached and the way in which I presented and projected myself in pulpits,

Over the years my understanding has gradually developed of what I must try to achieve through my preaching and how I can best do so if I am to pursue and fulfil my vocation and honour my calling to that form of ministry. The result is that my approach to preaching and my practice of it focus on a cluster of specifics that can be variously described as conditions, guidelines, aims, rubrics, and principles.

Of all the sections in this part, this was the one I have most looked forward to writing. I foresaw it as an enjoyable, satisfying and straightforward exercise of writing down the principles that guide my preaching because I had done some writing and preaching about the subject matter. Consequently, I was ill prepared for the difficulties I unexpectedly encountered and the worst experience of writer's block I have experienced this year. First, I had problems in classifying the preaching properties I wished to describe - were they about the nature of preaching or principles or purposes or objectives or methods? To my surprise and consternation I could not decide and, as my books work demonstrate, I had been so clear about distinctions between these things in my church and community development and consultancy work. Second, I drifted from reviewing, describing and reflecting on the concepts that have been formative in my preaching - the task I was supposed to be engaged in - to the beginnings of a treatise on the preaching properties that should inform preaching generally; a much more difficult task! Somehow or other, thank God, after two or three days and nights in a most unpleasant limbo I extricated myself!

Eventually, but not without much difficulty and many drafts, I hammered out the following points. They emerge from reflecting on the evolution of my preaching praxis. Together, they form the best statement I can make of my current working praxis but not of all stages of it. I did not start with a statement of my praxis and then set out to put it into practice. It didn't work like that. I have established it retrospectively, at various stages as I have gained new insights into its nature. What I am presenting is the best statement of my praxis or code of practice that I can make; it is not a general theory of preaching praxis. As the evolution and genesis of the elements of this code of practice is as revealing as their articulation; I will first state them as clearly and sharply as I can roughly in the order in which I became aware of and committed to them (in some cases they were influencing me before I became conscious of them) and then describe them and relate how and why they became important aspects of my preaching praxis.

## **Prerequisites:**

1. I must not allow my instinctive and insatiable desire to feel good about my preaching and my appetite for approval, gratitude and praise to be a primary motive and to deflect me from being challenging and controversial when required.

2. My preaching must ring true to my experience and life and be seen to do so.

3. My preaching must present and commend Christ and Christianity and their importance and relevance convincingly. That is fundamental to my preaching ministry.

4. As appropriate, I must engage in forthright, informed, rational apologetic engagement with events and issues that challenge and disturb Christians and undermine their confidence in Christianity and their faith i.e. contextual preaching is essential.

## **Objectives:**

My overarching objectives are:

1. to promote the Christian faith and the spiritual and moral well-being and development of Christians and Christian communities, societies and organizations;

2. to contribute to the generation of the spiritual and moral development of people of all faiths and none and the development of socio-religious

communities societies and organizations;

3. to promote creative relationships between people of all faiths and none.

My derivative objectives are to help Christians:

4. to know their religious identity and to differentiate themselves in creative relationships with others;

5. to think for themselves and especially about those things which are essential for their wellbeing, individuation and salvation that, for one reason or another, they fail to consider;

6. to articulate their faith, and to engage in in-depth conversations with those with whom they live and associate, within the church and beyond, about matters of belief, faith, doubt, perplexity and concern;

7. to be confident, informed and self-confessing Christians in critical, irenic relationships with those committed to other faiths, beliefs and philosophies and working creatively with them for overall human and religious well-being and development and inclusive communal communities and relationships.

### **Rubrics for my Preaching:**

1. My preaching and sermons that diagnose and deconstruct most also prescribe, reconstruct and synthesize.

2. My preaching assumes that members of congregations want to be taken seriously and do not want to be entertained or patronized and are capable of responding to rigorous but accessible preaching and sermons.

### **Prerequisite 1: Self-managed control of my appetite for approval is essential**

It is with some considerable regret if not remorse that I have to admit that it is the first time that I have attempted to face up to the fact of and the implications of my instinctive and insatiable desire to feel good about my preaching and my appetite for approval, gratitude and praise. Insatiable may be too strong a word. Certainly I need it even though paradoxically I can be embarrassed by it. I need it for reassurance to counter my sense of feeling that I have become vulnerable through exposing what I really feel and believe about things of great importance to me and aspects of my emotional and spiritual inner being.

After preaching from my heart as well as my mind I feel naked in public. I also need it to overcome feelings of lack of self-confidence in my ability and myself and my performances. Molly met many of these needs. I will miss her support more than I can ever say. It was not what she said, though that was important, but, as Catherine says, she glowed when I preached well.

At times I feared that self-gratification is too strong a motive in my preaching life. There is no doubt that positive feedback encourages me to do and sustains me as I do the hard work required in private far from the public eye and endure the agony and heart searching when experiencing preacher's block. But then critical opposition has similar effects as appreciation. Having faced this danger head on I have come to the conclusion that whilst it is an instinctive driving force, it is not the primary nor the substantive and most powerful one. My call to preach is my fundamental motivation as I have already said, I preach to fulfil my vocation and because the need to burns inside me and to achieve the outcomes listed above which I have wrested from the depths of my being where they are deeply embedded and from a careful scrutiny of my experience to ensure they were written into it. I am deeply committed to them.

Having searched my heart and experience, I cannot think of an incident where my desire for approval etc has deflected me from preaching on controversial issues but I have struggled when I knew that what I was to preach would offend or challenge some people. And I have had to work hard at my material to find ways of getting people to think about things differently, to open their minds to new insights and possibly change them and to avoid gratuitous offence and hurt. Nonetheless remaining continuously vigilant of the danger of deflection from saying hard things is essential. Above all, I have tried to retain my independence, to differentiate myself as a preacher without becoming distant from people and reality, to remain my own man humbly.

## **Prerequisite 2: being true to my experience** <sup>56</sup>

This prerequisite has profoundly influenced my preaching ministry from the outset of my time in circuit as a probationer. During my first winter in Carmarthen I read – or more precisely I absorbed slowly as a devotional exercise – H.A. William's book, *The True Wilderness*. In the introduction to this book of sermons preached in the Chapel of Trinity College, Cambridge

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<sup>56</sup> This asset of my approach is one of those about which I have preached to preachers. See sermon 518.

where he was tutor-chaplain to men studying for the theological trips, he says that:

Unless what I proposed to say came from the depths of my own experience, I was struck dumb. (p10)

... What was withheld from me was the ability to transmit second-hand convictions, whatever their source ... All I could speak of were those things which I had proved true in my own experience by living them and thus knowing them at first hand. It may comfort some people to label this procedure as existentialism ... (p11).

He based this on the conviction that, 'Christian truth ... must be in the blood as well as in the brain' (p9). I was utterly gripped and convinced by this and committed myself without reserve to do the same, to preach out of my experience. For one thing it seemed a right and genuine approach and for another it resonated with my commitment to and excitement about Martin Buber and his philosophy of human engagement (cf 8.65, 89f). Of course this did not preclude me preaching or referring to things which were outside of my own experience providing that I made it clear that this was the case. During the 1960's my understanding of what it meant for me to be true to my own experience and yet to explore and indeed to preach beyond it was expanded and refined by my introduction to experimental education and my becoming committed to it. I was particularly impressed by Hubery's dictum, 'from experience, through experience, to experience'. And of course preaching from, through and to experience is only one aspect of the spectrum of preaching which must of necessity be exploratory, imaginative and expository and apologetic in relation to a range of moral, theological, doctrinal, spiritual, secular ... issues and the experience and convictions of others. Feigning experience we do not have is out!

[Rev Dr Thomas B. Slater attended Chelsea Methodist Church for two or more years while studying for a Ph.D. at King's College, describe me as an 'existential preacher' He is now a Prof of New Testament language and literature in the USA. ]

## **Prerequisite 3: presenting and commanding Jesus Christ and Christianity**

<sup>57</sup>My commitment to this prerequisite is fundamental to my preaching ministry. My commitment to it has not wavered but my understanding

of its implications for my (not anyone else's necessarily) preaching praxis has changed greatly over the years. Undoubtedly, in the early years of my preaching ministry a dominant motive was to convert people to Christ and some services and sermons were aimed specifically to achieve just that. Doing this did not come easily to me: making appeals was not natural to me, I felt ill at ease on the comparatively few occasions on which I did so, a little embarrassed. Possibly for that reason, I was not good at it and had little success. However, for some time, possibly up to the beginning of my Circuit ministry, because I was convinced it was the high water mark of effective (evangelical) preaching. Eventually, by default rather than design, I think, I gave over preaching overtly and directly for decisions or even thinking about doing so. What I do or attempt to do is and through all my preaching is to commend Christ and Christianity as vigorously and convincingly as I possible can be showing in every way that I can – through biblical exegesis, working at modes and means of application, theological and philosophical argument and plain reason and logic, demonstration, personal testimony – that they are highly relevant and uniquely essential to human well-being, individualism and salvation. I try to do so with humility and proper and appropriate deference to the inherent difficulties of applied and theological Christianity and the range of invaluable questions and interactive problems related to personal and corporate human life and destiny and to those who hold different ideas about religion and spirituality. I also try to do so by assiduously working to achieve the specific outcomes described below. Should any of this result directly or indirectly in people 'coming to Christ', in faith development and extension, in gaining new insights, hope, I rejoice greatly.

Over the years I have gradually grown into this broad cased commendation of Christianity as I have seen and grappled with its application and particularly its application to tricky and controversial human and moral issues. New insights have been gained and given as I have sought to be comprehensive without losing my Christo-centered focus compromising my Christian identity and inheritance and the uniqueness of Christ in a movement, which I have found compelling and irresistible but not without spiritual angst through it has been rewarding and liberating, from being a Christian conditioned and predicted towards exclude exclusivism to being a Christian progressively committed to religious and spiritual inclusivism.

PS. Attempting to explain this point has made me realize that whilst I am entirely committed to the approach that has emerged and have been for a long time – possibly since the late 1960's, it has not always been so.

Being exhorted to be or become more evangelical has, at various times

and in different ways, thrown me and made me feel guilty and evoke emotional responses; such is the power of this concept of ministry and the depth to which I had at one time been convinced by it. During my time in Carmarthen I used to take special mid week preaching services at Carew. They were great occasions, I loved them. Marjorie Sanderson Williams used to accompany me to sing – she came from Narberth. A vivid memory remains of arriving on a lovely summers day to this lovely village to find a sumptuous tea laid out on the lawn – the event was masterminded by a family of preachers and bakers, I think they were called Brock.

On one occasion Mr Brock senior drew me aside between the afternoon and evening services/rallies and, holding my arm affectionately, he asked, in a quiet and most intimate voice almost whispering in my ear, ‘When did you last lead someone to the Lord’, I was stumped and confused by a sense of failure and guilt. I cannot remember my reply. Such was the power of this view of preaching and ministry over me then. It has diminished but not entirely gone. Clearly it is one of the ministries essential to the overall ministry of the Church as is mine. But this was not for me.

## **Pre-requisite 4: Apologetic Contextual Engagement**

Throughout my preaching ministry I have engaged, as and when I was able and the opportunity presented itself, in forthright, informed, rational and apologetic ways with events and issues that challenged and disturbed me and other thinking people, Christians and non-Christians and undermined their confidence in Christianity and their faith. It is not that I made a conscious choice to engage with the social, political and religious contexts in this way: I was drawn into it; I simply engaged as it were automatically into these things; I could do no other. Had I tried to frustrate this part of my nature and character, I would have felt I had betrayed my calling with all the guilt feelings that that would have engendered. A paper I gave in 1962 probably to the Carmarthen ministers’ fraternal and the ministers’ fellowship on the 9th, 11th, 12th April, which I came across as I pruned my files and had long forgotten about it, indicates how seriously I was taking contextual issues fifty years ago in the last year of my ministry in my first circuit. I entitled it, ‘The External Environment of Our Ministry in the Second Half of the 20th Century!’<sup>58</sup> At that stage I felt there were five things to which Christians need to pay especial attention : science; materialism, communication, humanism, nationalism. (As part of my probation studies, I had written an extended essay – it would be called a

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58 See Appendix VIII.

dissertation now! – on communism. I came across it when sorting out my papers. It had been highly commended as being original by an anonymous marker. It was only then that I recognised the handwriting as that of Edward Rogers whose classical book on communism was the set piece. I was deeply moved.) Later, on a scrap of paper I had written an aide-memoire to myself for future use of the material in which I added further topics different religions; search for synthesism; search for Christian unity; space age.<sup>59</sup> And noted that Christianity to be matched to this! Contextual engagement is essential. Preaching apart, the main way in which I did so was through church and community development. And as I have noted elsewhere my professional experience in this field informed my preaching and particularly my approach to it.

It would be an interesting exercise to scan my preaching to justify pre-contextual issues that I have addressed. But I am not going to yield to the temptation now! Certainly I have continued to work over the years to the agenda I set myself in 1962 and have since extended.

## *Objectives*

Originally this section was entitled ‘intended outcomes’. However, after many days of writing and thinking on ‘intended outcomes’, I came to a painful impasse: I simply could not write confidently and convincingly the last of four points. Eventually I realised that I had to backtrack to the beginning of this section and edit and re-write the numerous pages of what I had thought were completed text! Moreover, I think I may well have to draft, type and edit rather than simply write this piece because it is so nuanced.

Some of the difficulties I encountered stem, I think, from attempt to respond realistically and with integrity to the seizure shifts in:

- my approach to and beliefs about apologetics, mission and inter-faith proselytising and evangelism;
- the social and religious composition of Britain and the relationships between people of different faiths;
- the range of beliefs and life styles represented in Methodist congregation which is accepted as normative;
- writing about ‘intended outcomes’ rather than objectives.

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<sup>59</sup> I had done quite a bit of homework and thinking on all these subjects.

So I re-wrote the 'outcomes' as objectives as above.

Expanding on the other points briefly in order to make them clearer. When I started to preach, I accepted without question the assumption that the fundamental purposes of the church were to convert all people to Christianity and that included devout people of other faiths as well as those of none; to create a Christian socio-political society and context and in the given situation this inevitably involved imposing Christian values and standards upon non-Christians. The argument being that Britain was a Christian country, or should be, even though self-evidently it was not, and as such all people whatever their beliefs should live within a legal and cultural framework based in the dominant Christian ethics and values of the period. Even though I must have known in the depths of my being that these two purposes were unattainable, utopian, I aligned myself and my preaching with them and pursued them vigorously rationalising the negative effects of them. For instance, conversion of individuals could or did cause family tension and faction; good non-Christians could and did resent the church imposing what they considered to be restrictions upon them and their lives. And, of course, these purposes related to making people not only Christians but Methodists!

Radical changes have taken place in the nature of British society. The first part of my ministry was to white people in Christians communities: there were no representatives of other faiths; I do not even remember meeting any Jews or seeing synagogues in West Wales. Now I live in a multi-racial and multi-faith society and in a circuit with some black congregations. In Carmarthen I was deeply involved in initiating ecumenical meetings, and avant-garde movement. Now, ecumenism is established and inter-faith dialogue commonplace.

Congregations have changed enormously: the theological and spiritual homogeneity has given way to heterogeneity; behavioural and moral standards have changed to represent more nearly tune of society; formality has given way to informality relationships and dress code.

Through taking tune changes seriously, I find that the preaching outcomes to which I aspire have changed gradualistically in quite profound ways. As I have moved in religious exclusionism to social and religious inclusionism. Several things have provoked, promoted and facilitated it. Briefly stated they are:

- acute pastoral problems caused by religious extremism;
- engaging in open rather than closed youth work in the 1960's;

- working with and ministering to people of different ethnic backgrounds;
- encounters with people of different faiths;
- embracing the experimental approach to Christian Education and the non-directive approach to church and community development and consultancy work in the 1960s;
- working ecumenically especially in and through Parchmore, Project 70- 75 and Avec;
- the thinking and writings of Hans Küng from the late-1980s.

Working out and acting upon the implications of these changes for my preaching at each stage of their evolution has been demanding. It required sensitivity to context, effects of changes in the outcomes for which I arrived and remain faithfully to my calling and Christian heritage. At best these factors in combination engendered creative tensions. Attention focussed on different outcomes at various stages of this evolutionary process. My purposes in this section are best served not by trying to establish the outcomes upon which I concentrated at various stages but on attempting to set out the outcomes that have emerged and to which I now aspire, listed above.

Commitment to these objectives inevitably means I experience the tensions that exist between them: between, that is, commanding Christianity and helping people to develop their own faith systems and to think critically, creatively and realistically about them; between being committed to Christianity and considering it to be unique and, if I am honest, superior to other faith systems analysed respecting those who hold them; between assessing other faiths critically and relating to their adherents as equals and establishing egalitarian working relationships. But that is where my faith journey has taken me and the position from which I must preach. Some may say that these objectives are virtually exclusive. Now to comment on the objectives in turn.

My overarching objectives 1, 2 & 3: to promote Christian faith, the spiritual and moral development of people of all faiths and more and creative relations between them.

By and large these objectives are self-explanatory. This wide spectrum of objectives includes helping people to come to faith which, hopefully, is but one stage, howbeit an important one in the ongoing processes of development.

My understandings of the stages and processes of development was greatly enhanced by my studies of the works of Piaget, James Fowler, Laurence Kohlberg and Carol Gilligan. Clearly, understanding them informed my preaching as well as my work.

Much of what I have said so far has been about the possible impact of my preaching on individuals. But preaching can also affect the life and development of congregations and groups. So I aim and hope for both – collective and personal outcomes of my preaching. I aim for both outcomes because it is vitally important that they occur concurrently and interact so that individual development processes engender and support collective ones and vice versa. Preaching can contribute much to the development of what Fowler calls ‘communities of faith’, which he says have five functions:

1. the provision of a *shared core story*;
2. the provision of opportunities for people to participate in the central passion of the *shared core story*;
3. the formation of *affections*, and, I would add, *commitment*, in accordance with (a) and (b);
4. the generation of *virtues*, moral strengths and action skills;
5. the development and maintenance of the *practical and particular shape of worldly vocation* in each life in the community of mission, i.e. an ecology of vocation.<sup>60</sup>

Through my preaching, I aim/hope to help congregations and groups to acquire and develop their ability to perform these functions even more effectively and efficiently. My contribution is small and diminishing.

All this underlines the importance of preaching to congregations in acts of worship which have the potential to enhance and reinforce the effect of preaching in achieving these outcomes. Clearly, the quality and effectiveness of preaching and worship are increasingly seen to be interrelated and much more effort goes into the design of and preparation for worship than in previous days in my experience. It was common, for instance, during the first decade for two of my preaching life for the worship leading up to the Sermon to be described as ‘preliminaries’ and for the Lords’ supper to be a separate entity to the main preaching service. It followed on but only after the preacher/minister had gone to the door to say farewell to those who were leaning – often in my experience the larger part of the congregation.

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60 I discuss these in *Consultancy Ministry & Mission* p. 267

All that has changed through radical momentous liturgical revolutions. But there was a time, to my shame, when I too, as worshipper and preacher thought of the service before the Sermon is preached nearer to the middle of the service giving opportunities to affect the tenor and tune of the subsequent worship and for people to respond to the preaching inwardly and outwardly in the holdings context and atmosphere of worship. That is at best at worst .. !

### **Objective 4: to help people to be secure in their religious and spiritual identity and to self-differentiate themselves.**

Clearly it is very important that Christians – and for that matter people of other faiths – understand their spiritual and religious identity and feel comfortable and confident in and with it. People secure in their own identity are better able to relate to others and events than those who are not sure who or what they are. It enables them to differentiate themselves, be their own religious and spiritual person. Self-differentiation of itself is not too difficult and can be dysfunctional. Self-differentiation must be complemented by keeping in touch with others and context.<sup>61</sup> That is healthy but it can be difficult.

### **Objective 5 : to help people think for themselves about things that really matter.**

Almost fifty years ago I became consciously committed to doing all I could in my ministry and church and community development work to stimulate, encourage, get and help people to think for themselves about things in general and particularly about those things that matter and especially those things to do with their well-being, individuals and salvation. Some of these things they may not be able to think about unaided and other things they may simply not want to think about! Getting people to think for themselves and to decide for themselves having seriously considered the implications for them and others and to take responsibility for their decisions to take action, is absolutely essential. This is due to the principal ways in which they own their decisions and possess their faith and beliefs – that is in as much as any of us own them. And the deeper and more profoundly that they/we think, individually and collectively, the greater the intellectual grasp that they have upon them and the associated emotions.

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61 I discuss this in relation to Readership in *Analysis and Design*, pp 26-29f

However, it was not until 1972 that I realised that preaching was a way to promote (or inhibit) such thinking processes. It was through an article by Dr W. J. Berger, a Dutch Jesuit priest.<sup>62</sup> From the time that I had been committed to this approach through adopting the non-directive approach, I had been uneasy and confused about how preachings, commonly understood as a directive activity, could be reconciled to it. Realising that it could be a means of promoting thoughtful non-directive processes, and that in fact by default rather than design. I had been doing that, came as a great release to me.

Whilst sorting through my papers I came across some faded pencil notes on a slip of paper written about my appointment to preaching undated but I think had been during my Parchmore ministry. In there I emphasise the importance of inner dialogue – in me and others – then I wrote “I think up to now I have been thinking and preaching [negatively] as not selling – setting things in the round, [exploring] pros and cons..... This [promoting inner dialogue] is a breakthrough into another way of thinking about [and approaching preaching].”]

Clearly the more secure and comfortable are with their faith, the more able they are to weather those things which have the potential to undermine and challenge it and to help others to do the same and to discuss their faith with others. Moreover, those who have been helped and encouraged to think for themselves and have come to value this approach, are more likely to encourage others to think for themselves and to be able to help them to do so. These outcomes are extremely important as they promote thinking people of various faiths and stages of development, thinking Christians, congregations, churches.

Encouraging and helping people to think about things that they want to think about is not too difficult. What is difficult is to get people to think about things which they do not want to think about but used to and to think in radically different ways. That is a primary task, a salvific task, that I was called to. A task of great responsibility which weighs heavy upon me because amongst the things people often don't want to think about are those which are of critical importance to their spiritual and moral well-being, individualistic and salvation. A task I have failed to engage in effectively in my preaching and pastoral work and personal life all too often for comfort. God forgive me. When I rise to it, I know that there is

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62 Baroness Yvonne B Van Drakellin, for many years President of the Grail from its inception in England, introduced me to this article, see letter in Appendage IV.

challenge and comfort in this kind of preaching for my congregations and myself. [Preaching that is little more than religious entertainment – and I hear too much of it – is a flight from this awesome responsibility and that is why it distresses me.]

All of this is about the human side of the act of preaching. At best it works in harmony with the work of the Holy Spirit which I believe stimulates and helps us to think for ourselves. Jesus' parables certainly do and were meant to. Therein is the ultimate justification of this approach for me.

**Objective 6: to help people to converse creatively and with satisfaction about matters of importance to their well-being and salvation.**

Another breakthrough in my understanding of the kind of outcomes I should be aiming for through my preaching occurred in the mid-nineties when I realised the importance of 'conversations' in the life and the work of Christians, congregations and churches and the fact preaching could play in promoting them. (cf Sermons 418). But it was only in 2003/4 when I read a book by Patricia Shaw<sup>63</sup> that I realised just how important they were in the consultancy work<sup>64</sup> in which I was engaged and, more importantly, for the life and work of the church and myself as one of its preachers. Amongst other things it led to a Sermons I preached in the Chelsea Methodist Church.<sup>65</sup> As that sets out my thinking then and now, I can do no better than include extracts relevant to this section immediately after the following points. Preaching can promote and prime good conversations. This point quite naturally follows the previous one because creative thinking leads to, facilitates and informs creative conversations. Further there are similarities between the two activities: it is, for instance, not difficult to get people talking about things they wish to, it is much more difficult to talk about and to get others to talk about things we don't want to and find difficult to do. It is difficult to 'loose the stammering tongue'<sup>66</sup> over spiritual and deeply personal matters of faith. That is my task as a preacher, to help people find

63 Shaw, Patricia (2002) *Changing Conversations in Organisations: A Complexity Approach to Change* (Routledge).

64 See *Consultancy Modes & Models* (Cliff College Publishing) pp 218 – 219.

65 This Sermon was written for the Centenary Service of Celebrations at Chelsea Methodist Church. I gave it the title, 'Chelsea Church: A House of Conversations'. (it is 5473). At the request of the minister, The Rev Ted Davies, the church leaders Molly typed it up so that they could use it as a basis of a church away weekend and for a working group. I have, in fact, used a later version because it sets relevant points out better.

66 CF *Methodist Hymn Book* 584.

that faith and spiritual voice. I take that seriously. Then, again, members of congregations who can converse intelligently about their faith can promote Christianity widely through being ambassadors of it. When writing about the nature of congregations and the functions they can perform, I made the following points:

*Congregations are hubs of human networks and so have the potential for spreading the Christian faith whether or not they are representative of society and the communities of which they are a part.*

When dispersed, members of congregations are in association and contact with people in all kinds of Christian and secular groups who are not normally in the congregation. What can be described as secondary congregations are formed when they use what they have heard in services in their conversations and arguments with family members, friends, people in other church groups and organisations, workmates, colleagues and total strangers. So unknowingly, preachers can help and prepare members of congregations to be ‘secondary preachers’ and advocates and apologists of Christianity.<sup>67</sup>

When members of congregations use what they have gained from sermons in their conversations they are, in a sense, a ‘secondary preachers’ to ‘secondary congregations’ and perform important missionary outreach functions. I have done it!

### **Extracts from a Sermon**

#### **Human and Divine Conversations: Fundamental to Christian Life, Fellowship, Ministry and Mission**

##### **1. Importance and power of conversations**

One of the things that stands out from my fifty years of ordained ministry is the countless number of memorable and meaningful conversations with all kinds of people in a vast number of contexts and situations -- after services, over dinner tables, after weddings and funerals, and even in the gents toilets! Some were with individuals and others with groups; mainly changed how I thought about things quite dramatically; others challenged and rebuked me and changed my behaviour. A few of them were providential. It was almost as though God was speaking to me through others or that Jesus was a third party in the conversations.

##### ***In institutions and churches***

In 2003/4, at a time when I was thinking seriously about the creative and

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67 *Sustaining Preachers and Preaching : A Practical Guide* p. 74, cf 178

transformative power of good conversations and the destructive power of bad ones, Professor Patricia Shaw published a new book in an academic series entitled *Changing Conversations in Organizations*. The title, grabbed me. The double entendre is intended. The book is about changing the kinds of conversations in organizations and about the changes in conversations in organizations and about conversations that change organizations and people in them.

As I got into the book I became more excited. It is not an easy read. It is about, wait for it, a complexity and chaos theory approach to promoting organizational change. These theories have been developed in various branches of the natural and social sciences. Be quite clear, I am giving this the serious attention it deserves but I am no expert on it. A popular expression of it is in the saying, "A butterfly flaps its wings in Hüng and there is a typhoon in America." These theories are about X the way in which things are intricately intertwined and interactive and unpredictable: they can self-organise themselves; they can create order or chaos; they can be adaptive; they can cause stability or instability. At the edge of chaos small variations have a disproportionate effect on things as a whole - the so-called butterfly effect. We see this through terrorism, mass killings and natural disasters. This is enough about this phenomenon for our purpose which is to say that in relation to all this after years of action research, a group of professors are saying that working creatively with chaos and complexity in organizations involves the living craft of participating in open conversation after conversation at all levels. It is they say, those kinds of conversations, which are keys to dealing with complexity. They get right into the heart of human processes and make creative connections between things in complex systems, which would otherwise be random and unconnected. It allows patterns, purposes, direction and energy to emerge. It generates meaning and innovative action. This is illustrated in the book by an account of the way in which countless hours of conversation transformed an organization. Through engaging in such conversations in Northern Ireland, not least when she went to the Maze Prison, Mo Mowlam steered the faction from war to peace.

In the early 1940's a quite remarkable article on networks and grapevines was published. It argued convincingly that the conversational traffic on grapevines and networks has a profound effect on personal and social development -- it has the power to implement, negate, and confirm decisions made by Church and by governments committees. Experience I had illustrates this. Many years ago I chaired a meeting about whether or not to buy a minibus for use in community work. The discussions and decisions were carefully structured. Nobody could be in any doubt about the outcome. As I walked down the stairs after the meeting behind two people most involved in the action to be taken, I heard one of them says to the other, 'what are we going to do then about this minibus?'

## **2. Jesus' Conversations And Conversing**

All that is in the grand tradition of Jesus. He preached few sermons, and even those were not sermons, as we now know them. Most of the teaching came through conversations. The gospels can be seen as a collection of Jesus' conversations before his death and after his resurrection. Conversations with all kinds of people: conversations with historical figures on the Mount of Transfiguration and in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the cross; conversations with God. They were about human life and problems; they were about how he was going to deal with sin and save us; they were about the nature of God. They were/are mind-blowing conversations: brief, powerful, penetrating, memorable, elegant.

People said that no one ever taught and spoke as he did. They could not understand where a lad from Nazareth had got it all from. The men who walked and talked with him on the Emmaus Road said of the experience; "Did not our hearts burn within us"? His presence and words set them on fire. No wonder that John's opening theme in his gospel and First Epistle is the word of life; the logos, through which all things were created and which became flesh. So all these conversations are the words of the Word of God. They are the human conversations of the Divine Word. Christianity and the Church owe much to the raft of Jesus' conversations. They give life and meaning to our faith. They are the touchstone of our thinking, theology and ethics; they guide our interpersonal behaviour; they are the ground of our Christian being. Sermons are based on them. These conversations, not creeds, bring to life all the issues related to faith.

Incredibly, those who compiled the gospels brought together collections of conversations and events, which cover all essential aspects of human life and salvation. They link together the human and divine. They are endlessly adaptable. They bring profound spiritual and moral order out of human and religious chaos and complexity. They knit together past, present and future. And they enable people in every generation and context to do the same. How marvellous that Jesus' conversational approach prefigured by two thousand years Patricia Shaw's "discovery" about complexity, chaos and conversations that change organizations.

## **3. Conversing With Jesus And Others**

Ours is the thrilling but awesome task of conversing with Jesus and of conversing with others in His name and stead. I want to focus on some of the implications of this task, which is profoundly human and spiritual; down to earth, grounded in the kingdom and yet heavenly.

### ***Ongoing conversations with Jesus***

One-way of doing this is to interact with Jesus' earthly conversations: to think about them; to preach about them; to pray our way into them; to study them; to listen to them. Another way is through talking to and listening to Jesus directly; having conversations with him. This is one of the amazing attributes of God's being; Universal experience shows that God is available to all, all the time, at the same time in any and all languages. The mind boggles. The lines are open and you do not have to go through the rigour of option buttons either! When we speak out of these conversations we are more likely to speak for Christ and to continue his conversations.

### ***Conversations with others in the Church and in the World***

There are several different kinds of conversations in which all of us are involved in one way or another.

***MissiologicaI conversations.*** (I pursue this point in the comments on Objective 7)

***Apologetics Conversations*** (see above)

Closely related to this missiological commission is the task and responsibility to enter into conversations about all kinds of social, ethical and political issues.

### ***Every day conversations, of all kinds***

Amongst other things, engaging in these conversations involves listening In depth, paying attention, genuine interest, single-minded concentration.

## **Conclusion**

As we are all continuously engaged in a wide range of conversations, conversing is the most readily available means of exploring and communicating our faith over a very wide range of human contacts. It is our responsibility to use and cultivate our opportunities. It will enable us to find our way forward in the complexity and chaos experience both in the church and the world. The quality of our conversations with God and people in the Church and the world will determine the quality of our personal

and corporate lives and relationships, our witness and our service in the church. And the quality of our lives will determine the quality of our conversations.

**Objective 7: to help people Christians to relate creatively to people committed to other faiths.**

It is now fifty years since I gave series of talks on Christ and some living religions of the world'. My aim was to present as true picture as I could of these religions from the position of an outside observer. But I was biased. Undoubtedly my Christian bias showed through. I was speaking as a committed Christian who believed that Christianity was not only a preferred but a better religious and spiritual religion that Christ was the saviour of the world who would ultimately draw all people unto him. There was a tacit understanding between me and the members of my audience that it would be better if people of other religions were converted. Indeed we were all committed to a vigorous missionary programme to achieve just that. My present opposition is somewhat different. In 1986 I was introduced to a different approach to people of other faiths by a lecture of Hans Kung and subsequently by reading some of his books. I have preached about this. Basically, it involves accepting other faiths as a permanent part of the religious life of the world in general and in our country and local communities in particular. And, instead of trying to evangelize and proselytize from them, engage in rigorous dialogue with them. Accepting this is a seismic shift in approach to mission. Kung expressed it powerfully as follows:

No peace amongst the nations  
without peace amongst the religions.  
No peace amongst the religions  
without dialogue between the religions.  
No dialogue between the religions  
without investigation of the foundations of religion.

The vital importance of this approach is not difficult to see: it is a natural extension of the emphasis in the church and beyond on egalitarian participation and open dialogue; in part it is forced upon us by the external necessity to find ways of overcoming conflict, war and terrorism generated by right wing extremists who justify it through religion. Its broader importance and significance is that it is a way to discover ways in which people of other faiths can discover each other and work together for the common religious and spiritual well-being of our communities and world. Undoubtedly such dialogue will lead to the discovery of new religious insights, truths and practices. Such dialogue may well change the religious map of the future.

My preaching aims to orientate people to such an approach and attitude to other faiths and to encourage them to engage in such dialogue and to help them to be able to do so in their contacts with people of other faith.

In 1994-5 I was privileged to work with Howard Mellor and Kenneth

Cracknell in the inauguration of post-graduate MA in Evangelism at Cliff College (awarded by the University of Sheffield) and then, from 1995 to 2001 to be a member of the core staff team led by Martyn Atkins that delivered it. As the core staff team sat in all the lectures, I found myself in the privileged position of learning about missiology from leading exponents of this comparatively new discipline and I was introduced to the outstanding work of David Bosch. Combined all this had an enormous impact upon my understanding of the nature of Christian mission and inter-faith relationships which, in turn, radically affected my preaching and my church and community development and community work. My book, *Consultancy, Ministry & Mission* shows that it gave me a missiological framework for my professional praxis of this discipline.

## Additional Note

Amongst the Sermons I have preached on this subject are : 46, 509 , 512 & 518.

In November 2007 I preached a Sermon at Lidgett Park Methodist Church about boundaries (Progressive Christian Network which I did under the title of *Changing Boundaries Belief and Behaviour* which is pertinent to this section. Below are the headings of two of the sections which illustrate some of the things I preach about – though not necessarily in this kind of language!

Basics of a quadripartite (fourfold) strategy for creative responses to boundaries between different systems of belief and behaviour

1. Accept and seek to understand the different secular and Religious communities that form our context.
2. Build ourselves up as Christians for dialogue and collaboration for the common good.
3. Start where people are and engage with them from within their boundaries for their wellbeing and development.
4. Work altruistically with others for moral codes and modes of spirituality, which attract broad based consensus.

Some Beliefs Basic to the Quadripartite Strategy Consonant with Different Faith Systems

This quadripartite strategy is based upon a cluster of beliefs which determine our mental, spiritual, personal stance towards other people and how we relate to them and interrelate. Let me try to articulate some of them

in a personal way.

- I do not view my own beliefs and interpretations as absolutely correct and all others by definition as wrong.
- I recognize that different theoretical interpretations, including my own, reflect different contexts, perspectives and biases.
- However, I do not regard all theological positions as equally valid or that it does not matter what people believe because it clearly does.
- I am committed to hold theory lightly, to live with uncertainty and ambiguity, and to be prepared to revise my views through reflective practice because I accept my fallibility. (This is known as fallibilism.)
- No individual or group has a monopoly of truth.
- I realize that my theological approach is a “map”, and that a map is never the actual territory. Although I believe that my map is the best, I accept, at least in theory, that some of others may be better than mine because I can only know in part I Corinthians 13: 12
- One of the functions of the Christian Church and other faiths is to facilitate dialogue at all levels, which explores and challenges another’s culture, social and ideological biases and beliefs. This presupposes that I see other Christians and people of other faiths, not as rivals or opponents but as partners even if we are passionately convinced that their views are in need of major correction.
- Therefore I live by faith as well as reason.
- Theology must always be relevant and contextual.
- I have the right and duty to share my understanding of the faith with others whilst granting them the right to do the same.
- But no individual has the monopoly of the truth.

This quadripartite strategy avoids leaving us with a morass of subjectivism and relationism by fostering creative tensions between my faith commitment and theological perceptions and those of others from whom I differ.

## **Rubrics for my Preaching**

**Rubric 1: Sermons that diagnose/deconstruct must also prescribe, reconstruct and synthesize**

Remaining faithful to this rubric avoids or minimises the danger of taking away from the faith and beliefs of people without putting something in its place; never deconstruct without reconstructing. It also builds up confidence in congregations that they are not going to be left in a spiritual limbo which they cannot extract themselves unaided. Trust in preachers enables people to explore doubts and difficult issues what otherwise they simply would not do. I have engaged in diagnosing and synthesizing on a wide range of controversial issues. (It is a process I habitually use in church and community and consultancy work in relation to problems, cases, work situations. (See *Analysis & Design*).

In 2005 I decided to preach a Sermon on this kind or process, i.e. to make overt the kind of sequences. When I came to write about it, I described it as 'process preaching'. (See *Sustaining Preachers and Preaching*, pp 78-9 discuss this kind of preaching; Appendix 5 gives an edited version of the notes of the Sermon I preached on the subject. See Appendage I). A key idea is that a 'simplicities' which I got from Russell Hindmarsen (see Appendage I).

## ***Rubric 2: Taking People Seriously***

When first I started preached I was very worried about my ability to meet what I thought was public expectation: humour. 'Popular' preachers all seemed to be good at illustrating their Sermons with wit and humour and I was not good at all at this. Agonising over this eventually led me to the conclusion that what people needed and many wanted was insights into the Christian faith spiritual experience and Christian living. Coming to this conclusion was an enormous relief because I felt this was something I could work at profitably; it was something that I could do and wanted to do; it was natural to me. That has guided my preaching ministry. Over the years I have found people have responded to that and to rigorous but accessible Sermons. I have become a bit better at using humour – mainly that which is intrinsic to the subject matter or situation, that arises naturally from them. I am useless at funny stories and jokes; not only do I avoid them but find their gratuitous use deeply offensive.

## **5. Towards Modelling My Praxis**

Last night when I was thinking about writing this section, I found myself quite daunted. To my great joy and relief when I awoke this morning I found myself thinking about my preaching model in ways that I had not thought before. I saw the essential model as a dynamic interactive one. The dynamic is generated by the processes of applying relevant aspects of Christianity – or trying to do so – to one aspect or another of importance

and profound significance to me as the preacher and to members of the congregation and to the wider society. These are no less than three dimensions of these processes: interaction with Christian beliefs, doctrines and Biblical texts; interaction with by / our socio-religious context and contextual issues; interaction with my inner self and with congregations. In these notes I have shown that these are systemic. Moreover, these three sub-systems of these processes form a large interactive system operative in preparation for preaching appointments and in the events. Those engaging in these systemic processes, as preacher or as a member of the congregation through the preaching, openly and expectantly can experience multiple changes in understanding, insights, commitment, attitudes, behaviour, belief... They can come to a difference understanding etc., for instance, of Christianity or the Bible or themselves or their context. Consequently the actual model is my preaching ministry is of a dynamic interactive process changed with the energy and power to disturb and change preacher and people because it is empowered by the Holy Spirit when it is true to Christ and the gospel. That means that it is spiritually and humanly existential. Changes are unpredictable and their significance incalculable.<sup>68</sup> Essentially, therefore, reflection in their actualities of my preaching ministry as set out in these extended notes, show that essentially the model I practise from and through is of applied preacher (as in an applied mathematician). Preaching is, therefore, for me, an applied theological art and science. Communicating and transmitting these dynamic processes so that others can engage in them to live out their Christian lives, is, therefore an important part of preaching. This is what I was trying to achieve through 'process preaching' referred to in Rubrics above. These preaching processes tune into and give expression to the living vital stream of Christianity which stems from Christ and his ministry.

Such a model is so different from those which see preaching as transmitting a message, howbeit a gospel message. I hear much of such preaching and it leaves me deeply frustrated and even angry!

A rather crude attempt to model this diagrammatically is given later.

A sharp, possibly over-sharp, understanding of what I try to achieve through these dynamic interactive processes came to me in one of those moments when things seem so clear. I feel the need to record it here. Concurrently I am trying to do the following things.

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<sup>68</sup> They may occur much later from seeds planted as in Jesus' parables see, Kenneth Cracknell's comments on logos spermatikos in *Justice, Courtesy & Love*, pp 118 – 218.

## **In relation to individuals**

1. To introduce people to Christianity and to build up Christians in faith and in their understanding of their identity who are able to live Christian lives and to engage with the world as the encounter and experience it. Inter alia, this involves helping people to face up to features of their Christian praxis which are variably questionable, doubtful, dysfunctional, unhealthy ... and to take remedial action.
2. To preach in a voice which is true to my Christian faith which nonetheless, speaks to people of all faiths and more: that is preaching inter-personal integrity and with proper respect to any responsibilities and vows as a Methodist Minister to people of any and all faiths and helping them to develop their own faith whatever that might be, accepting and respecting their faith position. Is this what Paul meant by being all things to all people? This enables me, a committed preacher of a denomination of one faith to be heard by people of all denominations and religious, hopefully profitably. Finding such a preaching voice is important in an oecumenical / inter-faith context.

## **In relation to secular and religious collectives**

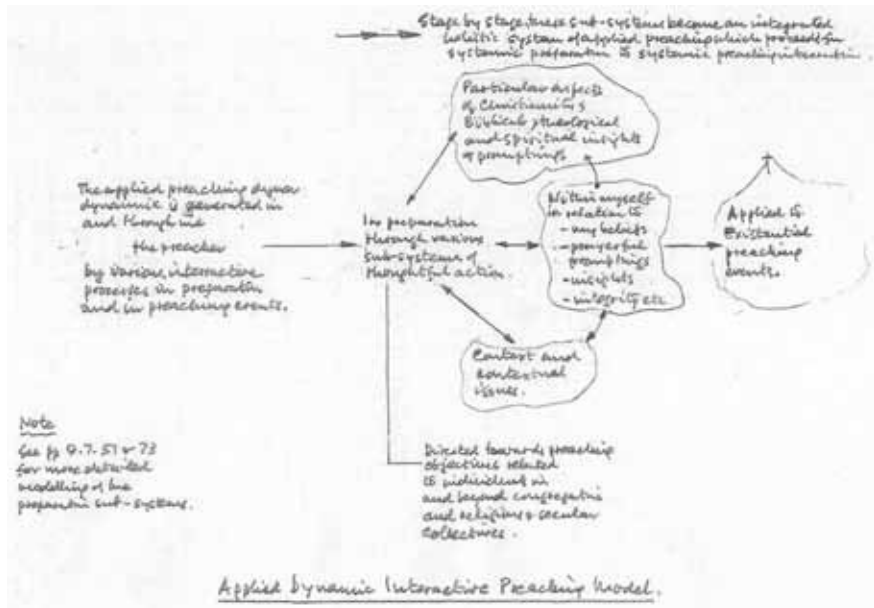
3. To build up Christian congregations, organisations and communities.
4. To build up multi-racial and faith communities which contribute to human and spiritual well-being and development and avoid dysfunctional violent conflict. Societies, that is, that are good places in which to live irrespective of religious convictions.

### **In relation to individuals and secular and religious collectives**

5. To stimulate and help Christians and non-Christians to make their best contributions towards the well-being of people in community and towards developing and shaping their socio-religious communities to be increasingly more desirable human and spiritual societies.
6. To stimulate and help people to make creative responses and to take remedial action in as far as it is possible in relation to dysfunctional mishmash between individuals and communities.
7. To stimulate and help people to engage in the interrelated development of : individuals and socio-religious collectives; churches and communities; Christians and non-Christians; people and their

environment; the human and spiritual. (See *Telling Experiences*, p9; *The Church & Community Development*, pp 33 ff, et al and Sermon 436)

All of this and more is implicit in any model of applied preaching ministry. It is not difficult to see that my preaching and my work in church and community development and consultancy are closely related, as we will see, interactive. They are all of a piece.



## PART THREE: CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS AND REMINISCENCES

### A textual epilogue

#### *Contents*

1. Sermons on preaching
  2. Gratitude for support and affirmation
  3. Memorable sermons and preaching events
  4. In conclusion: overarching reflections
- A Conclusion to Section 9.7

Four sections are planned for this part which brings c 9.7 to a conclusion.

# 1. Sermons on Preaching

Whilst I did not have the opportunity I would so much liked to have had to preach at an ordination service, I was privileged to be invited to preach to a congregation and to preachers and worship leaders. These Sermons complement the in-service training of preachers for some ten years which I greatly valued (see *Sustaining Preachers and Preaching*). They were:

- a) A charge to Jack Sammons at his recognition service at Chelsea Methodist Church on the 22nd September 1996. I entitled it 'Celebrating preaching as a pearl in the Christian liturgical crown: promoting serious spiritual conversations' (Sermon 418 on the 'Preaching File'). It was preached before I had read Patricia Shaw's book which was not published until six years later.
- b) The second was preached to the Local Preachers at their July meeting communion service in the Leeds N.E. Circuit on 5th July 2004. This was on the same theme but post my reading of Shaw. I entitled it: 'Preaching as stimulating transformative conversations.' Parodying the then current concept of the 'big society', I talked about the 'big conversation'. (Sermon 482).
- c) The third was preached to the local preachers and Worship Leaders at their July communion service in the Leeds N.E. Circuit on 8th July 2010. It was entitled 'Cardinal Features of Preaching and Worship'. (Sermon 518). The subjects considered were: preaching and worship and experience; Sermons that synthesize, metaphors in preaching and worship.

There was a very enthusiastic response to this Sermon especially from John Summerwill+69 and Andrew Atkins who wrote to me a very moving and humbling e-mail reproducing overleaf.

From: "Andrew Atkins" <rev.andrew07@btinternet.com>

To: "George Lovell" <mandglovell@talktalk.net>

Sent: 08 July 2010 23:12

Subject: Preaching

Evening George

I am not a person who says much of the top of my head – I very much like to reflect on what I hear and come back, in time with reasoned/thought

about comments.

I know I said a brief thank you tonight but that wasn't sufficient for the evening.

I have over these past few months been ... well let's say bombarded with stuff. Some of it good and very helpful in my journey with God, including new writers (well new to me anyway) who have helped me through my thought process and enabled me to put into words (my own words that is) what I have been wanting to share in my preaching for some time. Conversations with friends old and new who constantly challenge me in my own thinking and in helping them to process their thoughts and understanding of God. Some of it though has been not so good, and some very difficult both in terms of dealing with and just hearing.

If I am honest, and I always try to be, you could say life was getting a big foggy, a bit swampy and I was beginning to struggle with this bombardment.

What you shared with us tonight somehow blew away that fog and enabled me to find again the path which I knew was always there but somehow covered or hidden. Not only were you hugely inspiring but also very encouraging for me as a, dare I say it, young preacher.

Perhaps the thing I needed reassuring about most was your comment, and please excuse the paraphrase or inaccuracy, "what when you are faced with the mystery and majesty of God it's not time to put on your thinking cap, but time to take off your shoes with awe, reverence and wonder". I have always believed that but have in these past few months had it squeezed out of me a bit. It was good to hear it again from someone who I respect greatly.

I hope these ramblings make some sort of sense to you.

Many many congratulations on your 50 years of ordination and preaching and leading people to worship and in broadening their experience of the divine.

Thank you again for tonight.

Every blessing

Andrew

## **2. Gratitude for Support and Affirmation**

Mercifully I never doubted my call to preach over all the years but that it did not mean that I had unwavering confidence in my ability to perform effectively to my own satisfaction and that of others in the actualities and

particularities of preaching engagements. Anything but. Frequently especially in relation to special appointments when I knew that much was required and expected, my self-confidence in my material, my courage and my move wavered. Extended experience of emotional turbulence and various degrees of self-doubt and questioning of my self-worth which dispersed like morning mist in the bright light of a good outcome – which was invariably the case, did not assuage these feelings although it helped me to contend with and contain them. Personal support, affirmation and encouragement and prayers from people who knew me and whose judgements I trusted, greatly helped me through these painful but mostly creative preparatory experience. First and foremost amongst those who proffered such help was Molly. Not only did she put up with my anxiety and depression but she also gave me moral and spiritual support through her unshakeable belief in my call and my ability for over sixty years. During most of those years she read my Sermon scripts, generally on a Saturday evening. Moreover, when Sermons and services really worked, she glowed with pride and was pleased and excited in her association and identification with what had been achieved, as though it had been her own, and told me what people had said to her with much satisfaction. Then, as the creative tension of the event was released and the excitement faded, I unwound and needed repeated reassurance that things had indeed pan well. Molly was there just as she was when they had not gone well or badly. This self-giving of her was a precious gift to me, self-effacing and self-giving. I will miss it enormously; how I wish she were here to read these lines. (I had no idea that this was going to spill out. It has moved and exhausted me. Molly got much real satisfaction from it all but please God give her the great reward she undoubtedly deserves. Two others supported and affirmed me in similar ways, Dorothy Household and Catherine Widdicombe. Both were equally selfless. They introduced a more critical appraisal to the discussion of content and Catherine still does of course. The quality of their affective support and affirmation was/is similar to that Molly gave me but not as extensive.

I am so fortunate and blessed to have had such a qualitative and quantitative support. I am full of gratitude to them and to God.

Another kind of support and affirmation has profoundly affected my preaching. For want of a better word I think of it as ‘congregational support’. I use this term because throughout my ministry there have been congregations that I felt believed in and rejoiced in my preaching ministry. I knew this instinctively and through what individuals said to me and invitations I received to take ‘special’ services. They are for too numerous

for me to mention here but I want to highlight some of them.

At the outset of my ministry churches in the Aldershot & Farnborough circuits affirmed that I had both a call to preach and preaching gifts. Three congregations in particular did this and did so in humbling and convincing ways: Grosvenor Road (it was a member of this congregation, Cora Black, who said that you do not know him until you have heard him preach!); Cora (Mrs Ricketts was a mother-in-God to me); Farnborough Street. All the churches in the Llanelli & Carmarthen Circuit but especially Carmarthen, Kidwelly and Pontarddulais and Hall Street, notably affirmed my preaching ministry and welcomed it and rejoiced in but also convinced and assured me that I was a good if not outstanding preacher and that my future as a preacher was full of promise. (Vincent Taylor who was a minister in the Circuit stationed at Carmarthen during the First World War in a letter to me on 19th April 1959 said, 'I trust you yourself are happy at Carmarthen. It gives you an opportunity to [words are missing].

Whilst I was a circuit minister in the Sydenham and Forest Hill Circuit, my preaching was well received in most of the churches especially by the young people apart that is from my main church, Wesley Hall. When I returned as a sector minister in 1972 my public ministry was extremely well received in Wesley Hall(!) and particularly in Forest Hill until we left in 1998 – and indeed since.

In the Croydon Circuit my preaching ministry was generally well received in all the congregations but particularly in Shirley and Addiscombe but it was somewhat overshadowed by my concentration in church and community development work and the attention given to it by the circuit.

Whilst I was an associate minister in Chelsea & Victoria (c1976 – 1998) my preaching ministry was reinstated. It was greatly appreciated and valued in both congregations. My preaching reached new levels. By now insights from my church and community development work were becoming integrated into my preaching ministry. Some of my outstanding Sermons were preached during this period and when I return as a guest preacher. These congregations and members and ministers affirmed my preaching and general ministry and helped me to grow in stature and maturity.

My preaching ministry in Leeds N.E. Circuit has been extremely well received after a sluggish start. Trinity was the first congregation that affirmed and welcomed me as a preacher and endorsed my preaching ministry. That was in October 1998. Roscoe and the other churches followed. Then, things clicked at Lidgett. (I refused to move of my early

Sermons there a very astute and intelligent woman, Cora Black, said, ‘I didn’t understand what you were on about at all’. Later she became most appreciative of my preaching!). I don’t know what happened but things changed radically and this congregation has drawn out of me some of my best and most insightful preaching. That is until Jane Craske decided not to plan me there for two-and-a-half years. (I have journalled extensively about this extraordinary act of jealous self-protection which caused Molly and me enormous pain and engendered much anger in us.). The significance of Lidgett congregation’s appreciation is considered in the next section.

A large number of individuals variously gave expression to the affirmation, appreciation and support of these congregations. I am thankful to them. Writing all this could seem somewhat self-opinionated and conceited. Strangely it humbles me. The enormous privilege of being called and empowered by God to such a wonderful ministry makes me feel greatly privileged. He has made much of fairly ordinary material. Thanks be to God. I am proud to have been and still to be a servant of the servants and one of the Wesley’s preachers.

### **3. Memorable Sermons and Preaching Events<sup>69</sup>**

My first attempt at this section led to an impasse, a revision of Part III and a more realistic approach to this section. (See Journal Notes 31.8.12 and 5.9.12). During the months I have been writing three notes on my preaching ministry. I have noted Sermons and events which were particularly significant as they came to mind in anticipation of this section. The emerging list seemed manageable until I started to browse through my Sermon registers which led to it being extended. Writing about this list was a task I did not feel I wanted to tackle. Additional to the size of the task, there were other problems: I became acutely conscious that all Sermons and services were/are significant and focussing on some could appear to compromise this; I did not want to present a distorted picture of my ministry; and yet whilst I thought seriously of doing so, I did not want to abandon the section. Eventually I decided to write about the Sermons and services and came to mind readily in contradistinction to those recalled by reading through records. They may not be a representative or balanced sample but they are indicative of what is memorable. And when all is said and done, these are notes open to additions and not a manuscript for publication. I have to keep on reminding myself of this because of my

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69 5.9.12

propensity to drift towards the latter approach when I am committed to the former! In this section I deal with the Sermons preached from the beginning of my circuit ministry in Carmarthen in September 1958 and following the evolution of my ministry chronologically – or roughly so! Sermons are referenced; they are on file. Generally speaking I have taken the first date on which they were preached or when they were preached in churches for which I had partial responsibilities. Economically as possible, I have tried to indicate their substance – mostly apparent from the titles – and why/how they were significant.

## **The Christian Year & Festivals**

Preaching the round of the Christian year and the festivals was very important to me and deeply satisfying. The Sermons spelt out the theological and spiritual bedrock of my Christian life and ministry. The overview of the themes and subject matter on which I preached is given by the titles of the Sermons presented in Appendage II: Sermons & Talks, March 2012 under the headings : Advent & Incarnation; Covenant; Crucifixion; Harvest; New Year Festival; Peace & War and Remembrance; Resurrection; Transfiguration; Whit Sunday & Pentecost. So many memorable Sermons and preaching events associated with the high days of the Christian calendar.

## **Carmarthen and Llanelli Sermons and Services, 1958 – 62**

Two of the memorable Sermons I preached during this period were on morality and religion. They were prompted by and a response to a very active cells of the Moral Rearmament Movement in West Wales with its emphasis on absolutes – love, truth and honesty. I had two unfortunate and difficult experiences. One came from the Methodist Minister in Haverford west and a group he led in that area and in the S.W. District. They brought great pressure upon me – including hand delivered letters late at night and telephone calls – to become a member. Rational discussion was not possible. The other was personal and pastoral and somewhat tragic. It related to Mr Raymond and Mrs Ida Freeman: a married couple in their 50's I suppose in Pontarddulais both local preachers, church leaders. My problems centred around Mrs F. (I never addressed them by their Christian names nor they me. That was the protocol of the period). More of those later. She particularly was a convinced Moral Rearmament member. Mr F developed serious eye problems. By chance in providence I visited him in Llanelli hospital to find him most distressed. The consultant surgeon had just told him that he must have one of his eyes removed; if he didn't

he would be in danger of losing his sight completely. The operation was urgently needed. Mr F by far the stronger character who dominated him, was adamant he told me that he must not have surgery. God would heal him if he had absolute faith. Even though I knew we both would incur the wrath and venom his wife, I advised and persuaded him to have the operation and helped him to decide to do so. His sight was saved – and his job in the steel works. One was a critiqued Moral Re-armament on 5.2.61. It is undernumbered in the morality and religion file. The other Sermon, drawing on an earlier one on the difference between a ‘good man and a Christian (sic) set out to sow that people do good (and bad) for different faith and ethical systems; the goals of religion and ethics differ; religion includes activities and beliefs such as prayer and worship that ethics does not; that the centre of religion is God, of ethics man (sic). (See Sermon 134, preached on 16.10.58).

Over the years I also addressed other heresies such as ‘scientology’ (III 1968 – 9).

<sup>70</sup>On Thursday, 7th April 1960 at 7pm a circuit service saw the reopening of Wesley Methodist Chapel Carmarthen after the installation of a new ceiling, relighting and redecoration. <sup>71</sup> A great occasion some twenty months into my ministry in Carmarthen. One of the things that stimulated me to promote this project was a response from several people to my attempts to encourage them to come back to or get more involved in the life, work of the Church. They said Wesley had never been the same since a fire destroyed the ceiling which had not been replaced; the acoustics for singing had never been the same since. Replace the ceiling and renovate and we will be back! In my experience and naivety I believed them. Consequently flushed with the success of achieving the renovation at no small cost I was full of enthusiasm when I came to preach my Sermon: Two windows and a door being the principal points in the theological architecture of the Church. I don’t think I announced the full title! I preached about a window on heaven, a window on the world and an open door on both with great fervour in the belief that the visual renovation of the chapel would lead to (be the door to) spiritual reward if not revival. As I write I can see myself standing in the pulpit and singing with great intensity (I was on a high because I sensed the Sermon had gone well and evolved deep responses as only the Welsh can make) the lives:

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<sup>70</sup> 7.9.12

<sup>71</sup> The renovation were seen to be part of the Centenary celebrations in 1961 or the preparation for them

Open a door which earth and hell  
Many strive to shut, but strive in vain; ....

My whole being was praying and willing them. As I write I can feel the emotion flowing back into me. The lives are underlined in my order of service (see next page) which indicates I announced the hymn by reading those lines as an appeal from the bottom of my heart. We had a lovely chapel but no renaissance. Many years later developers closed those historic doors but new doors were opened and remain open! Those lines have been a personal prayer theme throughout my ministry.

Forty years later I was drawn to the same theme when I was invited to Chelsea to preach at the reopening of the Narthex & Café on the 2nd September 2000.

Returning to the Carmarthen Sermons I developed the theme to open door hospitality ministry and door opening ministry (Sermon 451) I was moved when Klaus Huber wrote a book commissioned by the Circuit Leadership Team for the occasion of Chelsea Methodist Church's Centenary in April 2003 (at which I was also privileged to preach) entitled 'A Ministry of Open Doors!'. More on this later.

1961 saw an interesting group of sermons to which I add one in 1962, they were on:

- Inner history (the importance of the inner life of Christians 21.1.61. Inner life and history file).
- Three conversions (importance of conversion Christ, Church and the world. 7.5.61 – 559, Conversion file).
- Fear, friend and fate (three interrelated conditions 4.4.9-6-1 5131 fear file).
- Dividends of religion (as capital invested by God and people) dividends received – power, fruits of the spirit, shareholders in the kingdom; capital redeemed in resurrection. 26.11.61 – 5.7.7. Preached to redress false understandings and expectations of the dividends of Christianity in particular and religion in general.)
- Retrospect and response (look back in love not anger, a response to John Osborne's look back in anger. 31.12.61 – 528 New Year Festival file)
- Quiet please! (a protest against and an antidote to a noisy world. 13.5.62 – 5165. Quietness file)

some all the people involved in the chapel but invited to Mr Harvey, found a S. Wake & Board and to that Evans in his 185000 advice. part of the congregation - letters will make great day for our Wesley friends. The bills are not all in yet! but they are likely to add up to between £300 and £1000. So far we have been given £500 - £450 and the SS have offered to pay for the lights. By pure coincidence & not by any design it is the Centenary Fund's treasurer's birthday. Most fortunately for us - no hospital because things in mind a collection will not be taken from the SS towards paying for the work that has been done.

Refused to

Widened  
Thanks to Mrs Jones  
Catherine  
Part of Centenary  
Money  
Mrs W. W. W. W.  
Collection  
4/26-14-9

ST. JAMES'S CHURCH, CARDIFF.

## WESLEY METHODIST CHURCH CARDIFF

Order of Service on the occasion of the re-opening of the Chapel after renovation, lighting and redecoration.

Conducted by: The Revs. H. EVANS and G. LOVELL.  
At 7 p.m. on the 7th April, 1960

### HYMN (No. 9 in the W.M.S.)

O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness!  
Bow down before Him, His glory proclaim;  
With gold of obedience and incense of devotion,  
Kneel and adore Him, the Lord is His name.

For we to meet His voice in the wilderness  
Of the poor wealth there would rather be there;  
Trust in His beauty and love in its wilderness;  
There are the offerings to lay on His altar.

Low in His tent lay the burden of holiness,  
High on His tent He will bear it for ever,  
Gather the harvest, and never the provision,  
Gathering the sheep to my tent for ever.

Then, though we bring them in morning and midnight,  
He will accept his dinner that is best;  
Mornings of joy give for evenings of sorrow,  
Trust for our morning, and hope for our rest.

O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness!  
Bow down before Him, His glory proclaim;  
With gold of obedience and incense of devotion,  
Kneel and adore Him, the Lord is His name. Amen.

Anna Southwell - house  
Wickham - industry

### PRAYER OF INVOCATION.

#### HYMN (No. 71 in the W.M.S.)

How precious, how divinely holy,  
O Lord of Hosts, Thy dwellings are!  
With strong desires our spirits faint  
To meet the multitude of Thy saints.

How are the saints that sit at  
high,  
Around Thy throne of majesty;  
Thy brightness glories shine down,  
And all their work is praise and love.

How get the saints that sit at  
high,  
How they intend Thy grace;  
How they intend Thy grace;  
And with Thy face and love Thy saints.

How are the men whose hearts are  
high,  
To find the way to God's gate;  
Ours is their strength, and through the  
And they have open their hearts to God.

Directed they walk with growing  
strength,  
Till all shall meet in heaven at  
length;  
Till all before Thy face appear,  
And live in nature's morning time.

### BIBLE READING.

1 KINGS 22-33-35, 54-61 & ch. vi-1-2.

### AN ACT OF DEDICATION.

#### HYMN (No. 102 in the W.M.S.)

Let Him to whom we now belong  
His services right meet,  
And take up every thankful song  
And every loving word.

His joyful status in His own,  
Who taught us with a voice;  
The Christian lives in Christ's grace,  
To cheer alone be able.

Join, then, once at last again,  
Full of our hearts' desire,  
And let us in Thy glory live  
And in Thy name unite.

Our work and holiness we sing;  
With joy we enter Thee;  
Our all, no longer ours, but Thine  
To all eternity. Amen.

### NOTICES AND COLLECTION.

#### HYMN (No. 102 in the W.M.S.)

Center in our hearts,  
On His alone we build;  
With His true name alone  
The courts of heaven are filled;  
On His great love our hopes we place,  
Of present grace and life above.

O then, with hymns of praise  
These hallowed courts shall ring;  
Our voices we will raise  
The Three in One to sing.  
And thus proclaim in perfect song,  
Back head and heart, that glorify  
Thee.

Then, gathering God, do Thou  
For entrance draw nigh;  
Accept each faithful love,  
And each each faithful gift;  
In perfect dinner to all who pray  
Each day Thy blessings pour.

How may we give from heaven  
The grace which we impart;  
And may that grace, more given,  
Be with us evermore,  
Until that day when all the time  
To suffer not are called away. Amen.

### SERMON.

#### HYMN (No. 104 in the W.M.S.)

Woe shall we offer our good Lord,  
For nothing, for His boundless  
love?  
Faint would we His great name  
praise,  
And worship at such lowly place.

Great object of our growing love,  
To whom we more than all we  
own,  
Open the fountain from above,  
And let it flow full with Thy love.

So shall our lives Thy power  
show,  
The great for every sinners free;  
Till all mankind shall know Thy  
name,  
Shall all mankind and their hands  
be free.

Open a flow which earth and hell  
may give us all, but give us  
all;  
In Thy most holy to be dwell,  
And in our gracious faith meet.

O multiply the worker's and!  
And build we every house shall  
know,  
Throughout the world Thy gospel  
spread,  
The everlasting truth declare.

We all, in perfect love revealed,  
Shall know the goodness of Thy  
name,  
Stand in the temple of our God  
As pillars, and go not to rest.

### BENEDICTION.

Wickham - house  
Cardiff - industry

A Service for the Recovery of the Unity of Christ's Church held at St Peter's Carmarthen on Tuesday, January 17th 1961. At least I think that is the date on which I was invited to preach at the Parish Church. (To my great disappointment and frustration I cannot find some of the papers associated with this august occasion. I would not have destroyed them knowingly). I believe I was the first non-conformist to preach from that pulpit, certainly in living memory at the time. It was associated with my early attempts at promoting ecumenical development amongst the clergy and churches in the Town and particularly with my angry response to a directive by the Bishop of St David's proscribing Anglican clergy in his form sharing and their allowing ministry to participate in Anglican offices which to my amazement was headlined in the *Carmarthen Journal*! Intent to tell that stay more fully in the section about my Carmarthen ministry when I hope I will have found some background papers! I cannot find the notes from which I preached at St Peter's but I have notes of two sermons I preached in Wesley Methodist Church Carmarthen in 1960 on Christian Unity. One on the 22nd of April 1960 on 1 Corinthians 12:27, 'Now ye are the Body of Christ' and the other on John 17:11, 21:23 and 10:16 on the Unity of the Church on the 2nd June 1960. Both at morning services. The latter refers to the Bishop's directive. My hunch is that I drew these sermons when I preached in St Peter's because as I recall it, it was at short notice. If so, the content of the St Peter's sermon would be about the nature and importance of unity and ways to achieve it which at the time I was arguing was: by working together socially; by sharing together especially in the Lord's supper, by fellowship; by growing together; by studying together, conferring and debating. (So much like my inter-faith agenda and my emphasis on dialogue. My work in church and c.d. lived out so much by ecumenical agenda to which I was committed in 1960 and applied myself to seriously for forty years from the late 60's). The sermons are in the Church Unity file.

Arriving at the Church I was shown to a robing room where to my great surprise a large number of Anglican clergy, these must have been forty or fifty, were robing and engaged in animated conversation. It was a full-dress parade with the Bishop himself present. I was the only non-Anglican present. All I had to do was to don my gown and hood over a shabby suit. No-one spoke to me. I can feel the space around me. I was isolated and intimated in this alien and unfriendly – to me but certainly not to each other – setting and culture. Somehow I kept my nerve and dignity. The Archdeacon who was also the parish priest, The Venerable W. Ungood Jacob (The Vicar of St Peter's Carmarthen!) was a good friend. I had a good relationship with him, we spoke the same theological language. When I entered the pulpit I was greatly encouraged to see Mr and Mrs

Hindley and many other Wesley people sitting under the pulpit; support, encouragement, affective and pride beamed from them; I felt uplifted. Responses said I preached well. What a privilege and challenge for a newly ordained young minister.

## **Sydenham and Forest Hill Sermons and Services, 1962 - 66**

<sup>72</sup>My preaching ministry was well received in the Circuit, quite enthusiastically in some churches and by some individuals. Notably by young people and young adults: it was the beginning of my ordained ministry of young people. Some people came immediately to mind: Mr Tredinnick of Anerley and Ray Bannister and Mrs Kathleen Mercer of Wesley Hall Sydenham. Mrs M has already been mentioned, she copied out a book of quotations for me which is on my shelves. A Sermon I preached following the publication of *Honest to God* got an enthusiastic response in several churches. The one I most vividly remember was the service at Central Methodist Church (later known as Forest Hill Methodist Church) on the 19th May 1963 at a morning service entitled ‘The God Who Is! A small very excited group headed by Bill & Joan Tate surrounded me after the service. In the animated conversation they indicated that this was the religious/spiritual breakthrough they had been waiting for. So much of what the Bishop John Robinson had written and I said reciprocated with their own thinking which they had considered unorthodox. They felt spiritually released and vindicated. One of the points I made was that we should not confuse mental (or pictorial or disclosure models) with the actualities and realities they aim to represent. (The Sermon notes are in the *Honest to God* file). I also wrote an article about this book in the *The Link*, the Wesley Hall Journal, No. 3, New Series, June 1963 (see above).

The only other Sermon that came to mind was one I preached on ‘Baffling Behaviour’. (Sermon 55 in *Morality & Religion* file). The text was JBP’s translation of Romans 7: 14:25 ‘My own behaviour baffles me. For I find myself not doing what I really want to do but....’ My theme was that Christians should not be as baffled and shocked by human behaviour as they so often are because baffling behaviour is intrinsic to human behaviour of Christians and non-Christians alike – but that does not make it, or should not make it acceptable or condoned.

Then there was an unforgettable event when I preached at the Salvation Army Citadel in Penge. It was the first pulpit exchange organized by the

newly formed ecumenical fraternal. Prior discussion about how we should dress led us to decide to follow our own practices. For me that meant cassock and bands and sometimes gown and hood. On this occasion it was cassock and bands. After prayers the Sergeant Major marched me into the hall. I took one step forward and two back in shock: the auditorium and balcony were full, some two hundred people and all were SA soldiers in uniform apart from maybe half a dozen; I was taken aback it was like an army parade service that I experienced as a National Serviceman and at Grosvenor Road. As I walked in, a woman said in a voice everyone could hear in a cockney accent, 'Cor, look what he is wearing!' Inwardly I was saying much the same. A commentary on inter-denominational dynamics. This was on the 23rd January 1966. I gave my testimony my call to ministry, spoke to the children about 'living stories' and preached in being body to Christianity 1 Corinthians 12:12 (see above).

Reflecting on this period I think I was drawing on my previous preaching ministry and giving considerable attention to working with the church young people throughout the Circuit with Sister Linda Castley developing family worship and Sunday School work and open youth work. So it was

*The Link: Journal of Wesley Hall, Synchro.*  
Number Three New Series June 1963.

From my  
Study  
Window

by  
The Rev. George Lovell, B.D.



"HONEST TO GOD."

During this past few months Christianity has been very much in the news. The excitement and controversy aroused by the Anglican-Methodist Union plans has been overshadowed by the fervor of debate following the publication of the Bishop of Woolwich's book 'Honest to God'. It is not an assistant of books to read, but you will obtain great help in reading and understanding the book from a pamphlet by the Archbishop of Canterbury, 'Image Old and New' (S.P.C.K. 1/6d.). If you can't read 'Honest to God' you ought at least to read what the Archbishop has written.

I am glad this book has been written by Dr. Robinson and that it is being read, discussed and written about. Although I must admit that some who write about it don't seem to have read it! The most rabid antagonists I have spoken to have not read the book. This is not being honest to God, the Bishop of Woolwich nor to themselves. Misunderstandings and misinterpretations are inevitable. I say this partly in self-defence! Indeed the Bishop says: "I cannot claim to have understood all that I am trying to transmit" (p.21). However, there are those who are pouring personal abuse over the Bishop instead of engaging in the theological debate he has instigated. Don't listen to them. Such activity is both cheap and sinful. It reveals both lack of charity of spirit and lack of clarity of thought. We ought to listen to any man who tries to express his beliefs

honestly and is honest enough to God, his fellow men and himself to disclose his certainty and doubt, his belief and disbeliever. These are deeply personal things. Discuss the ideas in relation to the person and the person in relation to the ideas. This will help to clarify the situation. Volleys of abuse are not on the target and simply in the danger of all engaged in the debate. This book, if as convinced, will do much good. It will cause Christians and non-Christians, possibly unwillingly, to think again about the faith. A new understanding is likely to emerge studded with new insights - and I hope, a new enthusiasm for and confidence in Christianity.

Let me in the few lines I can give to this subject spotlight what I consider to be central and constructive in the Bishop's book. Everyone has some mental image of God. For some the image is clear, for others blurred and indistinct in the pages world images are made of metal. In the Western world they are mainly mental. Whether they are mental or metal it is most difficult always to differentiate between the image and the God. I have a mental picture of my father. That picture may be more truly representative of him than photographs or physical vision, but it is still not my father. Only the mentally deranged would make the mistake of confusing the two. In the same way the image of God set up in religion the image and God must not be confused. People who are spiritually confused make this confusion. Against this confusion the Bishop is making a frontal attack: "For the Christian gospel is in perpetual conflict with the image of God set up in the minds of men, even of Christians, as they seek in each generation to fulfil an essential purpose, to focus the unknowable, to enclose the inexhaustible, so that ordinary men and women can get their minds round God and have something on which to fix their imagination and prayers. But as soon as they become a substitute for God, as soon as they become God, so that what is not embodied in the image is excluded or denied, then we have a new idolatry and our very word of judgement has to fail." (p.125)

In making this distinction Dr. Robinson has done us a great service. Our images may be nothing like God. We have a right to our images if they are based securely upon the facts of His own personal revelation in Jesus Christ who is described in the New Testament as 'the image of God'. The mental images of the philosophically minded will be abstract, of the practical minded plain and personal, of the child unashamedly anthropomorphic. I don't think this variation matters at all provided they are based upon an experience of Jesus. We have every right to our images of God, we need them to express our faith. Jesus realised this and spoke in parables, in picture language. But the very multiplicity of the images He employed is an indication that no one human concept can completely convey the nature of God to the myopic spiritual nature of fallen humanity. Think of some of them: God is Father, King, Judge, Love, Absent Landlord, Jesus said He is the Light of the World, the Son of Man, the Good Shepherd, the Good and the True, the Truth and the Way.

The reactions to this book are many and various. Some people have started to defend their images of God, others have begun to remodel theirs, and a few have adopted new images and ideas. Note the emphasis on images, images, images - not on God. Some think that God has been bowed out of His Church and world by a Bishop! Such talk shows that the people concerned have confused God with their image of Him. Pagans believe they destroy their gods by smashing their metal images. If I change my mental image of my father it doesn't necessarily mean that he has changed. In all probability the change would be in me. If I lost my mental image of my father through loss of memory or brain damage, it does not mean that my father dies. Similarly with God. We do not change or destroy Him by changing or losing our mental picture of Him. Mental pictures of anyone or anything are interpretative rather than creative.

Dr. Robinson claims to have gained this spiritual release from the story of Athens before the Court of the Areopagus (pp 124-127, Acts 17: 18-34).

a time to adapting myself to a preaching ministry to younger people or more precisely a communicating ministry. This was quite different to what I envisaged I would be about when I accepted and prepared for the appointment which I foresaw and dreamt of as developing and exercising a preaching ministry in Wesley Hall which was modelled as a central hall – tip up seats, platform, gallery ... But it was not to be.

## Croydon Circuit Sermons and Services, 1966 – 72

Overall, this was much as in Sydenham & Forest Hill : preaching well received throughout the Circuit but not the central feature of my ministry which was church and community development work on a wide front including a large church and open youth work programme and a comprehensive Christian education programme (see *The Parchmore*

Paul 'did the religious sights' whilst waiting in Athens and was exasperated to see how the city was full of idols. In his Aeropagus speech he says: "Men of Athens, I see that in everything that concerns religion you are uncommonly scrupulous. For as I was going round looking at the objects of your worship, I noticed among other things an altar bearing the inscription 'To the Unknown God.' Idols, temples, images, ritual, priests, philosophy did not make him known. The Athenians realised he could not be known from their images. They did not confuse God with the images they had made. Our images may help us. It is evidential that they don't make much impact on our world, our scientific-technological 20th century world. God will be unknown to this generation if we stick to our own images. Our task is to present Christ, the Living Image of the Living God, and allow Him to communicate Himself to the minds and spirits and souls of modern men. To do this we may have to use new images.

Having smashed many images and made the plea of which I have written, the Bishop proceeds to produce new images from the storehouse of Tillich, Bonhoeffer and Lewis. God is the 'Ground of our Being', 'The Beyond discovered in the depth of existence'. Jesus is the 'Man for others! He seeks a 'religionless Christianity'. These ideas are by no means new. I have gained much from them. It is what the Bishop excludes in prayer and the objectivity of God which concern me most. These new images will help some, probably a minority, but Dr. Robinson's challenge faces us all.

By way of a conclusion the Bishop says, "What looks like being required of us, reluctant as we may be for the effort involved, is a radically new mould, or meta-morphosis, of Christian belief and practice. Such a recasting will, I am convinced, leave the fundamental truth of the Gospel unaffected. But it means that we have to be prepared for everything to go into the melting – even our most cherished religious categories and moral absolutes. And the first thing we must be ready to let go is our image of God himself." I think this is an exaggeration to make his

point. Everything except the New Testament and the unique revelation of God in Jesus Christ must periodically 'go in to the melting'. But both the New Testament and Jesus have unique powers of communicating the saving love of God to people of every age, language, culture and education. Before he brings the book to its close the Bishop quotes Professor Herbert Butterfield's famous principle: "Held to Christ, and for the rest be totally uncommitted". I endorse this and without agreeing with all the Bishop has written I must say that I consider anyone who ventures into the vast no-man's land between the church and the world holding to Christ and allowing all other things to go, as the Bishop has done, is a very brave man.

.....

*Partnership* pp 36 – 49). (In addition to that work I was deeply involved in researching what I was doing for a PhD and developing church and community development regionally and nationally.) Also along with the comprehensive Christian educational programme – Dorothy Household was a prime worker in this – and integral to it we were developing first family and then community acts of worship and a comprehensive worship programme for all ages. (See Chapter 6 of *The Parchmore Partnership*.)

As I browsed through my papers in preparation for writing this section I came across a long forgotten draft in pencil entitled ‘Outline Ideas for a Book of Sermons! Examining in I realised that it was in fact a list of the Sermons preached at and structured around six phases in the development of the work of Parchmore during my ministry. This list shows that deliberately, thoughtfully and purposefully my preaching was designed to provide support, theological underpinning and spiritual framework to all we were doing carefully and systematically to develop the theory and practice of church and community development described in *The Parchmore Partnership*.<sup>73</sup> My preaching was prompted by and ordered with the Parchmore Project stage by stage: it arose from it rather than imposed upon it, the Sermons were reflecting on and responses to experience; they were locally contextual and thus given birth by the shared collective experiences of the people and minister of Parchmore – and some of those experiences were exciting whilst others were searing. At some stage – unfortunately the document is undated but I think it was drawn up during or soon after the period of ‘real trouble’ in the Youth Centre in 1968 – 69, see *The Parchmore Partnership* pp 53 – 6 as the last Sermon listed was preached 2.2.69 – must have discerned the pattern and written it down hastily. I did not take the idea any further and forgot all about it. How I wish I had included it in *The Parchmore Partnership*! An interesting exercise would be to complete the list to the end of my ministry at Parchmore!

A recognizable version of the original is presented on the following two pages. I have deliberately resisted editing or annotating it because I want

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73 10.9.12 - As I compiled the list, I found myself checking out these papers and whether there was any attempt to improve my views or persuade others to accept them. I think not for two or three reasons : I was so thoroughly non-directive at that time; they were laid on one side of all the other thinking, as it were, they were not applied; they were reflective offerings for people to reflect on in relation to their own experience and thinking; in that sense they were more like parables than applied theology and spirituality – or emergent theology; no one said that they were impositions and they certainly would have done so if they had felt they were!

to allow it to speak for itself: I have added the dates when the Sermons were preached at Parchmore (I preached some of them at other churches in the Circuit which were intimately involved in the project). Most of the titles are expressive or indications of the content of the Sermons and the notes from which I preached them are on file. Below I add some brief notes on some of the Sermons particularly those I had intended to comment on before I became aware of the importance/significance of this list. The original is in the back-up papers file.

When I came to work through the list in detail I could not find any evidence that I had preached three of the Sermons on the list of Parchmore, so I reviewed them! Also one or two were in the wrong date sequence, so I neared them. I have added some explanatory notes.

Prior to finding this list and saving its sequence I had made notes of Sermons produced at Parchmore which I found memorable. All but one of those were not on the above list. Two of them were preached in the last phase on the above list, the remainder were in the final period of my ministry. I have added the two to the list in the appropriate place. The others I have listed as belonging to another phase, Reconstruction, Consolidation & Development.

### **Preparatory Period**

Considering the scheme  
Teach-in  
Permission to continue  
Batten's course  
Going to tender

Sermon 1: A Changing Church in a Changing World; 4.9.66. am  
Sermon 10: Reviewing Resources; 9.10.66 pm  
Sermon 36: Pragmatic Change; 5.2.67 pm  
Sermon 37: Glazed Walls; 12.2.67 am  
Sermon 38: In Community with Christ; 12.2.67 pm  
Sermon 44: Resurrection and Creation; 26.3.67 pm

### **On Vacating The Old Church**

Sermon 46: I Believe in The Holy Catholic Church; 9.4.67 pm  
Sermon 49: Underdeveloped; 30.4.67 pm  
Sermon 58: Acceptance; 25.6.67 pm  
Sermon 59: Three Conversions to Christ, Church and World; 2.7.67 pm  
Sermon 72: Biblical Search for Community; 8.10.67 pm  
Sermon 73: Three Speeds of the Christian Life; 22.10.67 pm

- Sermon 75: Plots and Plans; 5.11.67 am  
Sermon 74: Spiritual Mobility; 5.11.67 pm  
Sermon 84: Crisis of Purpose; 21.1.68 am  
Sermon 86: Conflict of Interests; 4.2.68 pm  
Sermon 91: Prayers of Engagement; 10.3.68  
Sermon 69: Church and Community; 12.5.68 pm

### **In the Wilderness**

#### **?Trouble in the Club?**

- Sermon 96: The Way of Non-Violence; 8.4.68  
Preached in St Paul's, ecumenical service 8pm.  
Sermon 69: Church and Community; 12.5.68 pm

### **Opening of the New Church and Centre: first few months in them**

- Sermon 11/12: Church as Bricks & Body; 19.5.68 City worship am  
Sermon 102: Power for the People; 2.6.68 pm  
Sermon 106: Neighbourliness; 14.7.68 pm  
Sermon 116: Christian Education for Changes; 20.10.68

### **Sermons I Preached During Six Critical Stages of my Parchmore Ministry From September 1966 to June 1972**

#### **Real Trouble!**

- Sermon 106: The Interior Drama of the Kingdom; 14.7.68 (added)  
Sermon 77: Dividends of Religion; 4.8.68 (added)  
Sermon 177: Sense of Failure; 3.11.68  
Sermon 114/7: It Isn't Fair; 24.11.68 am Community Worship  
Sermon 118: Divine Disturbance; 1.12.68 pm  
Sermon 28: Retrospect and Response; 19.1.69 am  
Sermon 120: Fathers and Sons; 2.2.69 pm  
Sermon 14: Why Mission?; 20.7.69 am  
Sermon 109: Working in Christ's World; 1.9.69 pm

### **Reconstruction; Consolidation and Development (Added section to original list)**

- Sermon 142: Jesus' Ability to Get to the Root of the Matter; 5.10.69  
Sermon 153: Man, His Environment and God; 1.3.70  
Sermon 159: The Trihedral of Relationships; 27.3.70  
Sermon 193: Tale of Three Cities; 21.2.71  
Sermon 200: Christian Distinctiveness; 2.5.71  
Sermon 222: Work, Talk and Worship; 18.1.72  
Sermon 233: Christian Identity; 4.6.72

## Notes on Some of the Sermons and Titles

Most of the titles are self-explanatory and their relevance obvious. Here I attempt to elucidate those that might not be so and to add a few notes about some of the sermons.

- Sermon 37:     Glazed Walls i.e. walls through which people can see but not pass.
- Sermon 49:     Underdeveloped, I examined the causes and nature of underdevelopment.
- Sermon 58:     Acceptance, we were faced with the enormous challenge of accepting and working with and providing hospitality to people who differed significantly from us in faith and culture as we developed the Parchmore project.
- Sermon 84:     Crisis of purpose – we were finding it very difficult to define and agree our purposes and to distinguish them from objectives.
- Sermon 86:     Conflict of interests – we were experiencing this painfully!
- Sermon 106:    The interior drama of the Kingdom: an attempt to counterbalance the emphasis on action and the ‘outwardness’ of Christian developmental work.
- Sermon 120:    Fathers & Sons, the creative interaction between and their respective positions and contributions.

Sermon 159: The trihedral of relationships: Christ’s essential ministry is about giving us to ourselves, to each other and to God in the deepest and most satisfying of human social and spiritual relationships which are salvific. This forms a trihedral of relationships between self; God; others and our physical environment. (I wrote about this in *Analysis and Design*, pp 234-236). [I first preached it at a united service on Good Friday, 27.3.70, in St John’s Baptist Church, Thornton Heath. When we returned home, Dorothy Household was in a most disturbed and disturbing mental state. As she ran up the stairs to her room she called not to me, “You have no right to do that to us”. To this day I do not know what she meant and what had upset her. Most things we talked out thoroughly. But strangely not this. However, I have preached versions of it many times. When I preached in the Albert Road Methodist Church in 3.4.77, it led to George Stokes’ conversion. ].

Sermon 200:Christian distinctiveness and 233, Christian identity were about the vital importance of knowing who we are and being able to differentiate in broad based relating across social, racial, religious and spiritual boundaries.

<sup>74</sup>One other sermon/service I wish to mention here which was not related to Parchmore. It was a deeply moving morning communion service at Shirley Methodist Church two days after the Aberfan disaster when a large slag heap slipped and engulfed a primary school killing a large number of children and some teachers on the 21st October 1966. Abandoning my carefully prepared service and sermon I hastily reorganized the service to reach out in deep heartfelt sympathy to the people of Aberfan. The tragedy stirred some any memories and emotions from my childhood and my ministry in Wales. How well I remember the tension and anxiety when the pit whistle blew to signal through at the mine some 200 yards from where we lived and in which my father worked. Notes from which I preached are in the 'providence file' / no. My memory is of leaving my notes and preaching from my heart and my experience in empathy not working any attempt to answer the theology implications of the 'why' which was being asked. It was deeply moving for me and for the large middle class congregation who knew city work but not mining.

<sup>75</sup>[As I sorted out the 'preaching' appointments and correspondence file' I realized that during my time in Circuit ministry I was in considerable demand and a guest preacher/speaker beyond the churches for which I had pastoral responsibility and the Circuits in which I served and that this demand was greatly reduced after I became a sector minister. Why? Had I stayed in pastoral local ministry this would probably have continued. Possible reasons: quite deliberately I reduced my preaching load in order to concentrate on church c.d. and consultancy work, I had to; gradually I became seen as something of a specialist in these areas of work rather than as a preacher in the church generally. I have some regrets that other work meant I did not develop my full potential as a preacher. That was a considerable sacrifice and cost which I feel even though I do not regret the privilege of making contributions to other disciplines.]

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74 11.9.12

75 25.9.12

## **Sector and Retirement Ministry Sermons and Services, 1972-2012**

My time as a sector minister started when I left Parchmore in 1972 and ended with my official retirement in 1994. For a large part of this time I was an associate minister in the Victoria and Chelsea Circuit i.e. from 1976-1998 when we moved to Leeds. For one of these years, 1985-1986. During this period I was on the plan of four circuits: the Highgate Circuit, 1972-76; Sydenham and Forest Hill and concurrently the Victoria and Chelsea Circuits, 1976-98; Leeds N.E. Circuit, 1998 to date and still counting!

[At this point I find myself struggling to know how best to continue and to resist the danger of drifting into reviewing my preaching during this period! This would be an enormous task, about which I am ambivalent! I must stick to my plan!]

### **The Highgate Circuit, 1972-1976**

Earlier I wrote about establishing my purposes for this period which I think have guided me throughout. This was a rich seam of my preaching ministry enthusiastically received particularly in Middle Lane and Holly Park Churches which were in Hornsey that was geographically at the heart of Project 70-75 and by Aubrey Meres, Beavis Ridley, a young couple in Holly Park, David Palmer and his wife. I believe he was an architect; he became a minister and has had a distinguished ministry. No sermons or services stand out at this moment except, that is for a service I took eleven days after the Tower Bomb, on the 28th July 1974, in Middle Lane Methodist Church in the morning (strangely I did not preach again in that church). The title of the sermons was 'Peace of God'. (Notes on next page). In part it was based on the address I gave at Dorothy's funeral. Notes and address are in the shelf file; 'Addresses at Family Funerals and Weddings'. I preached the same sermon in the evening at Holly Park. Both occasions were moving and therapeutic.

#### **Peace of God S248**

Peace is my parting gift to you, my own peace such as the world cannot give.  
John 14:27 \*

It is inevitable that what I said today is related to what I have experienced during the last eleven days when my family were involved in the Tower bomb explosion. It grows out of those experiences. Eleven days that seems as many months because it has been lived at such a unclear speed. All the colours and contours of life, the unclear and the dark, the valleys or the heights – I have experienced so vividly. The theme that has recurred is

one so much throughout these days and nights is that of peace. I have felt something of it too as I/we were held in the prayers of so many people. I felt I was secure even when my life was translucent. I wish to make these points.

[Points 1,23 see my address at Dorothy's funeral service]

1. The experiences have reinforced my belief that the only way to peace is the way of Christ. People talk about war / violence / guerilla warfare as a way to peace. They are talking about war not peace.

Way of peace.

Jesus weeps

2 Cor. 4:1 – 5:1, 5

Hymns

673 7

50 50

292 292

503 503

502 502

2. I have felt the force of good rise with those of a policeman stopped me in the street, and thanked me ...

Docs –

Taxi driver

Car driver from Lithuania

Bristol & West Building Soc

Letters ...

But how I wish these would rise in the mundane!

3. Love heals and saves

Xt changed bitterness at cross.

Conclusion

Still being affected.

This Peace will support us until our souls calm again. Like a sea in which we can pitch, roll, sink, flounder ... but it always holds us up.

This is the sermon I preached at Middle Lane and Holly on the 28th July 1974 i.e. 11 days after Dorothy's murder. I had been planned there and decided to keep the appointments.

I believe that the work of Project 70-75 was enhanced by my preaching in several ways: it reassured Methodist people that there was a Christian rationale at the heart of the Project which generated trust and helped them

to trust that it even though they might be struggling with the praxis of church and community development; it helped those who were and those who were not engaged in the Project to get to know me as a Methodist minister whose preaching was acceptable to them and for me to get to know them and to have a place in the heart of the worshipping communities of the Circuit; it gave to me and to other members of the Team moral, spiritual and prayerful support. It also led to me being the Project preacher as well as worker. (A similar thing happened to Patrick Fitzgerald in the Roman Catholic churches, but not, I think, to John Budd and the Anglicans.

## **Sydenham and Forest Hill Circuit**

Molly and I lived in this Circuit from 1972 to 1998 and throughout this period attended Forest Hill Methodist Church whenever I was not preaching in Victoria and Chelsea. I preached in the Circuit by my basic preaching commitment was to the Victoria and Chelsea Circuit which had first call on my services and before that the Highgate Circuit (1972-6). Generally speaking I preached the same services in both circuits but there were more enthusiastically received in Chelsea and Victoria than in Forest Hill and the remainder of the Circuit.

One sermon does stand out, Faith and Doubt (255) which I preached in the Central Church, Forest Hill on 4.7.76. This was a theme upon which I preached from time to time. Over the years I developed the theme. For instance, a sermon I preached in Chelsea and elsewhere was entitled, 'The proof of faith in faith i.e., the actual existence of faith is of itself existential proof of its living reality' (s 309, 4.10.87 et al). Then I added courage to faith and doubt in a sermon on the 'ebb and flow of faith and belief' (396, 19.3.95). Another sermon was, 'Faith in Action' (372, 5.2.94).

## **Chelsea and Victoria Circuit, 1976-1998 and Subsequent Visits**

Mention has already been made of the important contributions to my preaching ministry made by these two churches. A sermon that generated a lot of interest at Chelsea (and elsewhere to a lesser extent) was 'To have and to be' (s 270, 24.2.80) based on Erich Fromm's thesis about two modes of existence that struggle for the spirit of human beings: the 'having' mode and the 'being' mode. My text was 'For a man's (sic) life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions'. (Luke 12.15 REV). This is one of the examples of my church and community development studies and book informed my preaching. It was at Chelsea that I first preached on Hans King's thesis about peace among the religious (S326, 13.11.88) much

developed later (cf S512 etc.) and already referred to. Also, at Chelsea I preached on personal and collective vocations much developed later not least through my extended discussions with Prof Peter Howdle on medical and ministerial vocations in preparation for his key note speech at Vice-President of Conference in 2002 (S376, 7.5.95). This is another case of my work in church and community development and consultancy influencing and informing my theological understanding of and my preaching. (See 'vocation' in my book, *Consultancy, Ministry and Mission*. Later I developed the theme of 'vocational dissonance' in a sermon I preached at Alwoodley (see S467, 23.6.02). Another significant sermon I first preached at Chelsea Methodist Church was on 'voluntary, purposeful, vocational, self-displacement' (S389, 18.9.94). Henri Nouwen's book, *Compassion* was the inspiration behind this sermon. Jesus is seen doing just this in the Temptations dialogue (Matthew 4:1-11) and in the Garden of Gethsemane, 'Yet not my will but time'. This has much to say to discipleship and servant ministry.

On a lighter note, I include an anecdote which made a service memorable. I was about to take the lunchtime service at Westminster Central Hall on 17th July 1996 (memories of the Tower Bomb) when a steward came into the vestry saying an American lady who was in a highly excited state wish to come before the service. The matter was urgent. Reluctantly because the service was due to start soon and the time schedule for it was tight. Walking by the Central Hall she had seen a bill board on the pavement much as the cutting opposite. She could not believe what she saw, her father was a Methodist minister in the USA; he was the Rev Dr George Lovell too! She thought we might be related! I invited her to the service and afterwards showed her names of the Lovells who had contributed to the Centenary Fund to build the Central Hall. They are recorded in copper plate handwriting in massive volumes. I left them with the volume of the floor open at the page with the Lovell names on it, some of whom lived in Clarke Street, Rishton, taking photos!

This notice appeared in the Methodist Reader, 11.7.96

**CENTRAL HALL, WESTMINSTER**  
THE MEETING PLACE OF THE METHODIST PEOPLE

**SUNDAY JULY 14**  
10.00 am Holy Communion (Chapel)  
11.00 am Morning Worship  
6.30 pm Evening Praise  
Preacher: **REV MARTIN BROADBENT**  
(Chairman, London SW District)  
Superintendent Minister: **Rev Dr Peter Graves**  
Central Hall Choir  
Music Directors: Keith Beniston and John Chapman  
Refreshments after each service

**WEDNESDAY JULY 17**  
Lunchtime Service  
12.45 pm - 1.15 pm  
Preacher: **REV DR GEORGE LOVELL**

**London Lights Celebration**  
**SATURDAY JULY 13, 7.30 pm**  
Speaker: **Joel Edwards**  
Worship Leader: **Michael Hughes**  
AT THE HEART OF WORLD METHODISM

My preaching ministry to Chelsea was extended beyond my time as an associate minister through the gracious invitations of The Rev. Jed Davis and the Leader of the Church to preach on the following occasions. The first was at a reopening of the Narthex on the 2nd September 2000. I preached on 'A Ministry of Open Doors', a sermon about hospitality (S451). The second was on the occasion of the Centenary Celebration, 3rd May 2003 (S473). These were two of the most effective and important sermons I have preached. Copies of my notes were requested and used as a basis for study groups, workshops and policy making and even an away weekend. I was moved and flattered and deeply thankful. Reference has been made already to both of them. Even though an edited extract of the sermon on conventions was incorporated on pp 141-142, I have included the notes of both sermons in Appendix VIII because they describe important aspects of the ministry and work of Chelsea Methodist Church in particular and also of Victoria Methodist Church. Both churches have been very important both in my preaching ministry and my work in Avec. (See Appendix IX celebratory Chelsea services, 2000 and 2003).

## **Lidgett NE Circuit, 1998 – 2012**

Preaching in this Circuit has been fulfilling and creative not least because of the significant differences between the congregations. This is how I described it in *Sustaining Preachers and Preaching*:

The twelve churches in which all the participants preach regularly are situated in a geographical wedge-shaped area of Leeds stretching from the city centre to the outer suburbs and beyond. All have lively ecumenical connections. One of the churches is a small inner city church, three are village churches, one is on a large housing estate, and four are strong suburban churches. Four of them have sizeable congregations. One is a united Methodist/URC church, another houses Methodist and Anglican congregations with some shared services. There are two churches with black majority congregations and the small inner city church hosts active foreign national congregations. (p174).

Of itself congregation variations and their different responses to my preaching are mostly positive – was stimulating, challenging and rewarding. One of the things I am going to focus on is the interactive responses of two churches to my preaching, Alwoodley Park and Lidgett Park Methodist Churches. Alwoodley is a suburban church with a congregation of about 50 whereas Lidgett has one of about 120. Alwoodley was once described as a 'university church' because it had several members who were academics – three or four professors; Lidgett was a lot of professional people, including several senior medical consultants. Both are thinking congregations. During

the first ten years or so my time in the Circuit Professor Alan/Norman Jepson led a class meeting of thinking people at Alwoodley. Several people in Lidgett were/are committed to a radical approach to Christianity as propounded by Bishop John Spong and others and they were members of an economical local group of the international movement, Progressive Christian Network. This group meets in one of the churches in the Circuit. Quite independently, both the Alwoodley and Progressive Christian Network invited me develop at their meetings themes in which I had preached. This was flattering and creative for me and my preaching. These responses and others by various members of the congregation, drew out of me some of the best preaching of my ministry through exciting processes of interactive dialogue. They stimulated me to think more deeply and consequently to preach more profoundly and expectantly. Further, I was stimulated to edit or generally tidy up notes on several sermons by request of the editor of *The Link* (the Lidgett Park magazine) that he publish them. An example of the interaction with the PCN Group relates to a sermon I preached in at Lidgett Park on 4th November 2007 on what I considered to be a pertinent topic for 21st Century Christians, 'Belief, behaviour and religious and secular identity' (509). Part of this sermon was about radical changes in Christian belief and behaviour. In response to the request to develop this theme at a PCN Group meeting I wrote a lecture on changing boundaries in belief and behaviour. This presented an opportunity to explore the sociological and missiological issues associated with these changes. (The outline of this lecture is reproduced on the next two pages). An important feature of this presentation is that quite deliberately it shifts the discussion away from confrontational debate about the merits and demerits of different systems of belief and behavior and boundary changes and their effects to: a critical examination of the actualities of such changes, deliberate and unclear; and the effects and implications for those of any and all beliefs and behavioural patterns; possible ways of dealing with them which are common to all belief systems. So it all reaches out across the boundaries to process of inter-faith, belief and behaviour to collaborative thought and action. In short it seeks a common, substantive, underlying socio-religious agenda.

## **CHANGING BOUNDARIES IN BELIEF AND BEHAVIOUR**

### **Preamble**

Thank you for the invitation and the stimulation that accompanied it to do more thinking on a train of thought that started with a sermon I preached at Lidgett Park Methodist Church in November 2007. That sermon was on "belief, behaviour, religious and secular identity: a pertinent topic for 21st

century Christians”. Through Fred Langley you kindly invited me to speak on that theme today. As I reflected on the sermon and responses to it, I came up with this title.

### **Changing Boundaries in Belief and Behaviour**

The double entendre is intended to suggest that we consider boundaries that have and are changing and what is involved for us in living creatively with those we cannot change and changing those we can.

I am speaking from the area of thought and work that I know best, that of the Christian Church in its contemporary socio-religious context. I make no attempt to cover other areas such as science and technology but it may have something to say to them. I am presenting the position in which I find myself, not a party line. Some may find it unorthodox, whilst others may identify with it in one way or another.

What the Archbishop has said about Shariah Law brings into sharp relief and contention the question of legal and religious boundaries! So, my theme has become topical! Thinking in progress.

Acknowledge main sources: Leslie Griffiths and Jennifer Potter; Philip Meadows; Hans Kung; David

Bosch; David Thomas; Eric Hobsbawn.

My introduction to discussion has the following five sections. (To my surprise I found I had to give more attention to section I than I had anticipated, so don't be tempted to time my introduction by multiplying the time given to that section by five!)

### **I Boundary changes and changing boundaries in belief and behaviour**

1. Commonly experienced changes
2. Societal transformations
3. Changes in religious belief and behaviour
4. National and global boundaries
5. Paradigm changes in Christianity

### **II Functions of boundaries**

### **III Two approaches to boundaries between two or more significantly different systems of belief and behaviour**

1. Groupthink
2. Virtual insidership, an approach to interreligious dialogue

### **IV Basics of a quadripartite (fourfold) strategy for creative responses to boundaries between different systems of belief and behaviour**

1. Accept and seek to understand the different secular and Religious communities that form our context.
2. Build ourselves up as Christians for dialogue and collaboration for the common good.

3.Start where people are and engage with them from within their boundaries for their wellbeing and development.

4.Work altruistically with others for moral codes and modes of spirituality, which attract broad based consensus.

### **V Beliefs and dispositions associated with the quadripartite strategy and skills needed**

1. Beliefs
- 2.Dispositions
- 3.Socio-religious skills

### **Conclusion**

#### **V Some Beliefs Basic to the Quadripartite Strategy Consonant with Different Faith Systems**

This quadripartite strategy is based upon a cluster of beliefs, which determine our mental, spiritual, personal stance towards other people and how we relate to them and interrelate. Le me try to articulate some of them in a personal way.

- I do not view my own beliefs and interpretations as absolutely correct and all others by definition as wrong.
- I recognize that different theoretical interpretations, including my own, reflect different contexts, perspectives and biases.
- However, I do not regard all theological positions as equally valid or that it does not matter what people believe because it clearly does.
- I am committed to hold theory lightly, to live with uncertainty and ambiguity, and to be prepared to revise my views through reflective practice because I accept my fallibility. (This is known as fallibilism. )
- No individual or group has a monopoly of truth.
- I realize that my theological approach is a “map”, and that a map is never the actual territory. Although I believe that my map is the best, I accept, at least in theory, that some of others may be better than mine because I can only know in part I Corinthians 13: 12
- One of the functions of the Christian Church and other faiths is to facilitate dialogue at all levels, which explores and challenges one another’s culture, social and ideological biases and beliefs. This presupposes that I see other Christians and people of other faiths, not as rivals or opponents but as partners even if we are passionately convinced that their views are in need of major correction.
- Therefore I live by faith as well as reason.
- Theology must always be relevant and contextual.
- I have the right and duty to share my understanding of the faith with others whilst granting them the right to do the same.
- But no individual has the monopoly of the truth.

- This quadripartite strategy avoids leaving us with a morass of subjectivism and relationism by fostering creative tensions between my faith commitment and theological perceptions and those of others from whom I differ.

[A few days ago I found myself combining my thoughts about respect for <sup>76</sup>human freedom with those about boundaries and coming up with what for me was the beginning of a new ‘simplicity’.

Respect for human and divine freedom and the behaviour boundaries within which it functions and flourishes.

This needs refining and to be explored in relation to the beliefs which lead to it/undermine and corrupt it. And to the interaction between:

- Our beliefs and behaviour.
- People who differ significantly unclear human and divine freedoms and how they are established and upheld.
- Actual freedoms and self and other imposed boundaries and ideals and how to move from one to the other.

The non-directive concept and approach is a significant player in all this.

Much interesting work to be done here relevant to both ch and c.d. and consultancy and preaching – a service is an embryonic state!]

Other significant sermons/preached at Lidgett and at various other churches in the Circuit were in no particular order:

Two closely related sermons, Christianity as an evolutionary process (514, 15.3.09) and The new creative force in Christ’s Passion (515, 25.10.9). The idea had gripped me that what Christ did was to introduce into and alongside of their ongoing creative process a new creative force of enormous importance. So that there is within the creation a new creation. Moreover that this like other creative forces in the universe is evolutionary.

Towards accessing God (502, 3.12.06)

Commitment Challenge and faith (494, 24.4.05) which I have already discussed.

Scepticism and religious experience (506, 5.8.07)

Two other sermons I want to mention. I preached at Alwoodley at the beginning of the third millennium, a service for which I had long planned. Throughout my ministry I have got much satisfaction in preaching at the beginning of the New Year and on Covenant Sundays. ‘Time’ has always

# NUMBER ELEVEN

CONNECTING THE VICTORIA AND CHELSEA METHODIST CHURCHES

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Dear Friends,

## THE GOSPEL STAR

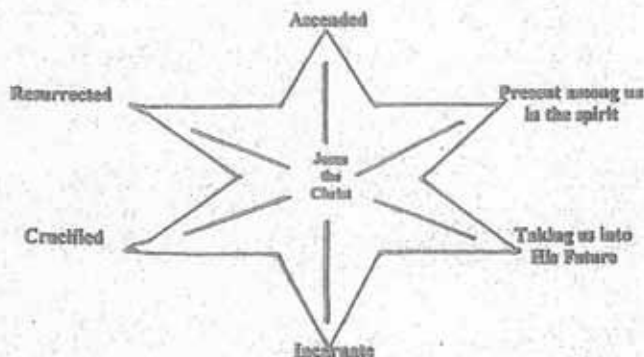
When I am in the presence of a baby or a child, I often find myself wondering what life holds for him/her. What interests will they have? What kind of a person will they be? What kind of job will they do? What are the things by which they will live and for which they will die?

Mary sensed that Jesus had an especial vocation and lived to see just what it was. When we sing carols and contemplate Jesus' birth we already know vital things about his destiny. As I was reflecting along these lines, I came across these two sentences at the end of a magnificent book, "Transforming Mission", by David Bosch.

*The six christological salvific events may never be viewed in isolation from one another. In our mission, we proclaim the incarnate, crucified, resurrected, ascended Christ, present amongst us in the Spirit and taking us into his future as "captives in his triumphal procession" (2 Cor 5 : 14 NEB).*

He goes on to say that each event impinges on all the others and that we must hold on to that otherwise we will have a truncated gospel.

My mind has a trick of putting things into models. To represent and explore these ideas I put them down at the points of a hexagon and joined them all up into double-ended arrows. That showed how they all held together and added significance to each other. Try it for yourself. Then the following star came into my mind.



fascinated me. New Year celebrations have always been special since my childhood in Lancashire where it was celebrated with as much joy and excitement as Christmas. I illustrated my sermon with my version of the ‘Gospel Star’ which I suggested was also our ‘millennium star’. (See below). I emphasized the concept of Christ taking us into his future which secures ours. The sermon was extremely well received. Patrick, my grandson, then 11 years old, brought me down to earth as he went out of church where I was shaking hands. He muttered, ‘Millennium has two I’s in – I had misspelt it with one on the overhead projector slide I had used! The other was when I preached at Harewood Methodist Church, a small house chapel with a handful of members in the Harewood village hard by the gates of the Harewood Grounds on Easter Sunday, 2002 on the way in which Jesus Christ, through his resurrection and the subsequent developments, is universally and eternally accessible as is God and the Holy Spirit. (464, 31.3.02). It was the day after the Queen Mother’s death. Lord Harewood, the Countess of Harewood and three of the younger members of their family were present and, in this very small chapel, sat within feet of the lectern from which I had to conduct the whole service, apart, that is, from the communion. The ceremony contradicted all predictions! Before planning me the Superintendent had taken the unusual step of seeking my permission to do so. He said that the Earl did not favour Methodist ministers, he was invariably late and the service could not commence until he arrived, he probably wouldn’t speak to me before or after the service and he would not wait for a blessing at the communion rail but he would read the lesson. Was I willing to take the service?! I said I was, providing the Earl was told beforehand that I was so that he had the choice of coming or not. On the day, the Earl and Countess arrived some ten minutes before the scheduled time of the service, greeted me and they sat on an older open backed form in the ante-room where everyone gathered. With some annoyance he found he had forgotten his copy of the NEB New Testament. He talked to me about this and how he did not like reading from the AV which in the past he had always done. Recently a large important service he discovered he had to and found it difficult. I found him a copy of the NEB for which he was most grateful. When he went into the chapel, I found he had dropped his copy behind him, took it into him and he said, ‘That’s decent of you old boy’. He read beautifully. The other members of his family were a little late. (He said, ‘They only live across the road and typically they’re late, we’ll have to start if they don’t arrive soon’. Implying he didn’t like to be late. After the service the Countess engaged me as did the younger members in conversation about my sermon which they found an interesting and unusual approach. And the Earl said a courteous farewell! So much for the expectations!

## 4. In Conclusion: Overarching Reflections

This section is as much about memorable and significant preaching places, congregations and churches as about memorable sermons and preaching events. The list reads like a litany: Grosvenor Road, Cove, Farnsborough Street, Carmarthen, Sydenham, Forest Hill, Parchmore, Middle Lane, Holly Park, Chelsea, Victoria, Lidgett Park ... and so many, many more. By and large I have highlighted the first places in which a sermon was preached or the ones in which they had most impact upon congregations or me. Most of these sermons were developed, revised and preached over and again – as were many others. Some over a period of 50 years! These notes do not cover sermons preached at funerals. Notable amongst these is the one I preached on the occasion of Susan Cruise's funeral service at Hinde Street. Central to this was II Corinthians 4:5-5:5. The notes are in the file 'Addresses at Family Funerals and Family Weddings', so close did I feel to Susan and David. (The date of the service was 4th February 1994. (David told me at the time of Molly's death that he has a copy of the notes in a drawer of his desk and that he takes it out and reads it periodically and it always makes him weep.

Memorability and significant were/are determined by first inner feelings that there was something special about a sermon or service, I knew within an instant any other testimony that I had been in touch with and given some expression to something of profound spiritual reality or truth. And secondly by the positive responses of others. These are contemporary assessments, delayed consequences, the spermatikos effects, upon me and others is only revealed by time – and most of that I will never know. Outcomes are eventually in God's hands. I came to phrases first formed in sermons or adopted/borrowed because of my spiritual/theological vocabulary, 'dividends of religion', 'reverence for freedom' following Schweitzer's 'reverence for life', 'courage of fear' came to mind. I came to think of the sermons I describe above as 'working sermons' or 'sermons that work'.

As I wrote this section I came to feel that I am more of a Jesus man or preacher than of Paul. See the Jesus Christ sermon file and particularly my sermon, 'in love with the mind of Christ' (358).

## A Conclusion to Section 9.7

It is with great relief that I reach this point of Section 9.7. There have been times when I despaired of ever doing so. I am so thankful.

Writing this section has been a formidable task as I realized and described in Part One. But it has also been rewarding. Much of it has been written during a difficult and tragic period of my life: the loss of Molly and severe illness that I feared was going to lead to permanent debilitation (see the [note on the rehabilitation of my core vocational work](#) dated 6th July 2012). Thankfully that was not the case, my energy returned fully.

After much preparatory thought and planning, I started to write this Section on the 24th November 2011, broke off for various reasons on 3rd March 2012 and, as I have just said, restarted on the 6th July. So, roughly speaking, it has taken me some six months working time over a period of then months to do the enormous amount of reorganizing files and researching the subject matter and to do the writing up. Most of the work on the files was done before March. During April, May and June I lost much of the momentum I had built up and the sharpness of the overview of the material gained from this preparatory work and the research involved. Providentially I have not only regained the old energy but been given some new energy and the desire to get on with the work. Further, the loss of sharpness of the overview was not as disastrous as I feared. Since July I have, in fact, written 130 of the pages of this Section! And I have gained some new insights which has excited me.

So here I am writing a Conclusion. Thanks be to God! As I foresee and plan it, it will consist of observations about: my satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the section; the way in which my work has informed my preaching and vice versa; my assessment of my preaching abilities and limitations.

## Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction

I am deeply thankful that I have done this section. It was absolutely right to fast track forward to it. It is a natural sequence to *Sustaining Preachers and Preaching* although I did not see it as such until I was well into it. Parts of it, if not the whole lends itself to publication as articles or as monographs on, for instance: the importance of reflective journalling in a preachers' life; prerequisites, purposes and rubrics in preaching; inspirational and lectionary preaching; a systemic perspective on preaching subject matter; a dynamic interactive preaching model. Such a list indicates the range of new insights and understandings of my preaching life and ministry unclear from this extended period of reflective writing on the subject. All this is a source of deep satisfaction as it rounds off my preaching ministry. It is an account of my history as a preacher and an exposition of my theology, spirituality and praxis and its evolution. Therein lives my deep satisfaction

and some dissatisfaction. Aspects of this section find me working out and developing my thoughts of and understanding about preaching, my preaching. Those parts are not records of what I thought before I started to write. That is the case, for instance, in relation to the sub-sections in Part Two leading up to the 'breakthrough of a systemic perspective' (II 1-5) and the subsequent discussion (II 7). This caused me to feel I needed to revise and edit the material as I would for an article or book. But I had not the stomach for that, indeed my lack of energy and sharpness of former years was one of the reasons why the text was not as sharp and concise as I would like, combined with, and in part caused by, the difficulties that broke up the sequence of the work. So, I left the manuscript as a record of the evolution of my thought: how and why it changed as it reflected in the actualization and realities of my ministry in the pulpit. Questions are starting to arise in my mind to what I should do further with this material, a rich quarry for more work and writing! For the time being I am fending them off!

[Having finished this sub-section, I came across notes that I had written earlier about my feeling that the text combined redundant repetition. Later thoughts and insights supplemented earlier ones. This depressed me. I felt in danger of taking short cuts to get it finished because I was ready for completion. But I pulled myself up and gave myself to the work once I had settled for leaving the text as an account of the pilgrimage of my thought. Adding this text is an indication of the need for editing!]

## **My Community Development and Consultancy Work and Preaching**

Ways in which my work influenced my approach to and my understanding of my preaching have emerged at various points: reflective journaling; the non-directive approach; systemics; purposeful thought and action; analytical procedures; modelling. There is less on how my preaching ministry influenced my leading ministry, possibly because it is all pervasive, subtle and elusive. I am a preacher and that will out. Early in the Avec days I remember going to Dublin for a course with the guardians/superiors of the Redemptionist Order in Ireland, they are a preaching order. Critical arrangements went awry. An old priest came to me and put his hand on my shoulder sympathetically and said, 'it will be all right. We preachers know that bad starts can have good outcomes'. I was quite moved because he accepted me as a brother preacher and more so that he recognized that I was a preacher before I was a tutor/lecturer/consultant/ community development worker. It was my vocational status of a preacher that for him and others that gave me an acceptable status. Similarly my status as

an ordained minister aided my acceptance and gained me a hearing about 'new' ideas. I had an immediately recognizable and acceptable position and role in the church. (For others it was my professional expertise in community development and consultancy, of course, that gained me acceptance – and rightly so).

David Gamble gave me another insight into how my preaching praxis had influenced any working praxis – a part of it. I had developed a way of introducing complex subjects succinctly to groups who were about to work at the critically in, say, threes or fours. (Work at them unclear, that is, contradistinction to talking about them discursively). I had done just that on a course for people working at regional and national levels (VIP courses we called them!) and invited them to go into sub-groups but when David said, 'How long have you been using the 'text' method (of preaching) in educational group work?' I was taken aback by the insight. I had not seen the connection between the two apparently quite different activities of preaching and purposeful group work. And, of course, my work in both domains was misused by the same theology and spirituality.

### ***A Self-Assessment***

Fairly early in the writing of this section (26.1.12) quite unexpectedly I found myself reflecting on two questions that came to me: what has made me a good, effective and acceptable preacher? What has prevented me from being a better, more effective and outstanding preacher? Immediately I listed some of my thoughts and since then I have added to them. As it may appear presumptive of me to consider the first of these questions, I have hesitated about including this section. Several things led me to risk appearing presumptive or even arrogant or conceited: I do not think I am any of these; there is considerable evidence that I am seen to be what I feel to be, a good preacher; I do feel I could have been better at preaching; self-knowledge and understanding and awareness are desirable qualities and they can enhance all forms of being and doing; this is an age that emphasizes the importance of these qualities and advocates the practice of self-assessment as desirable in reflective practitioners. So I have listed the points that I have identified not in particular order on the next page. It seems a suitable way of rounding off this section and drowning out some of the implications that have emerged.

## **What has made, helped me to be a good, acceptable preacher?**

A genuine and irresistible call to preach, an unmerited gift of God

My theological education and training through the Methodist Church and at Richmond.

Molly's self-giving and sacrifice, her unwavering belief in my call and the importance of my preaching and my ability and her continuous support.

Enthusiastic responses to and genuine support for my preaching from countless people most notably Dorothy and Catherine.

The deep desire to help people to have better and more satisfying spiritual lives and to share my experience, insights and understandings of Christianity in particular and life in general.

Commitment to preaching experientially and non-directively.

God-given attributes and gifts:

- I can think, am a compulsive, holistic, obsessive thinker;
- Emotionally intelligent, preach from heart as well as mind;
- Empathetic;
- Serious, honest, curious;
- Make unusual meaningful connections;
- Observant;
- Ability to communicate complex ideas simply;
- Analytical, reflective best committed to synthesize, put things together;
- Ability to project myself and willing to expose myself and make myself vulnerable.

Broad-based human and spiritual experience, can make much use of little learning!

Desire to preach and for adulation.

Want to succeed, do not want to fail or to feel I have failed.

Attracted to unusual, novel, new concepts.

Deep used to give public expression to my spirituality and my socio-religious insights.

Everything I do and experience and read becomes food for preaching

Something of an original thinker: can give a new take in things, a normal perspective; think outside the box. Make unusual but telling connections between apparently disparate things.

## **What has presented me from being a better outstanding preacher?**

Paucity of my knowledge and study of the Bible and theology and spirituality and Greek and Hebrew.

Limited ability to use humour.

Not sufficiently extrovert.

Deciding to concentrate on Project 70 – 75, Avec and the praxis of church and community development and consultancy.

Giving time to lecturing, researching and writing.

Not being in pastoral charge for 40 of my 54 years of ministry.

Consequently much less attraction to preaching and experience of it.

Natural reticence.

Fear of failure and pain of exposure.

Intellectual limitations.

Lacking the common touch and the freedom of informality.

The shadow side of what helped.

Being “too deep”

## A Textual Epilogue

As I came to the conclusion of this sections my heart is full of gratitude to God, the Methodist Church, Molly and a vast congregation of people many of whom, like Molly, are numbered in the host of witnesses, the communion of saints. I am humbled by what I have received through my call and sixty years of pulpit ministry. This incredible gift from God has enriched my life enormously, in many ways it has made me and my life. What I have been given is undeserved, all of grace, so freely given. And if that were not enough, I have been allowed and enabled to write a book about preaching with Neil Richardson and to complete this section in the diamond anniversary of my preaching ministry and my marriage: these have been so closely intertwined than only death can sever them, and that it has done but it cannot undo the years when they were intimately are.

It is appropriate that a section on preaching should end with a text. In fact, seeing as I did not start with one, I have two:

I myself (says God) will give you an eloquence and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to resist. (Luke 21.15 as translated in the Divine Office III, p [3703])

Without that I would not have been able to preach.

Do not use harmful words in talking (and preaching). Use only helpful words; the kind that build up and provide what is needed, so that what you say will do good to those also hear you. (A translation of Ephesians 4:29 in the Divine Office III, p [114]).

That I have tried to do.

Amen.

### **See Part 12 for:**

[Appendix I: Working To And From Complexities And Simplicities, An Example Of Process Preaching](#)

[Appendix II: Lists of Sermons and Talks:](#)

[Sermons and lectures, compiled in the 1960s by Dorothy Household](#)

[Sermons and Talks, March 2013](#)

[An Index of Sermons, with and without Biblical Texts](#)

