PREACHING IN PRACTICE

Through the proclamation of the word of God and preaching, the people of God are united in Christ and led to celebrate God's saving deeds. Having recognized the presence of Christ in the scriptures proclaimed, Christians are moved to offer continual praise and thanksgiving to the Father in the Church's liturgical rites and in their daily lives.

This issue of the Bulletin presents a collection of articles on preaching which consider the nature and function of the homily, the use of language, and practical suggestions for the preparation and delivery of the homily. Two of the articles originated as papers which were presented at recent liturgical gatherings in Canada. The remaining articles are reprinted from current books on preaching which have proven helpful to those entrusted with the important ministry of announcing the Good News in the liturgical assembly.
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The Homily

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The Sunday Eucharist is a privileged point of encounter between a local Christian community and its priest. Within this Eucharistic celebration the homily is a moment when this encounter can be especially intense and personal. We want now to look at the nature and function of this form of preaching, to relate it to the issues we have already raised in speaking of the assembly and the preacher, and finally to suggest a method for building and preaching the homily.

The Homily and Faith

Like all preaching, the homily is directed to faith. As Paul writes, “But how shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe unless they have heard of him? And how can they hear unless there is someone to preach?” (Romans 10: 14). Some preaching is directed to people who have not heard the Gospel and is meant to lead them to an initial acceptance of Jesus Christ as Savior. Other forms of preaching are directed to a deeper understanding of the faith or to its ethical implications.

The homily is preaching of another kind. It may well include evangelization, catechesis, and exhortation, but its primary purpose is to be found in the fact that it is, in the words of the Second Vatican Council, “a part of the liturgy itself” (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, n. 52). The very meaning and function of the homily is determined by its relation to the liturgical action of which it is a part. It flows from the Scriptures which are read at that liturgical celebration, or, more broadly, from the Scriptures which undergird its prayers and actions, and it enables the congregation to participate in the celebration with faith.

The fact that the homily is addressed to a congregation of believers who have gathered to worship indicates that its purpose is not conversion from radical unbelief to belief. A homily presupposes faith. Nor does the homily primarily concern itself with a systematic theological understanding of the faith. The liturgical gathering is not primarily an educational assembly. Rather
the homily is preached in order that a community of believers who have gathered to celebrate the liturgy may do so more deeply and more fully — more faithfully — and thus be formed for Christian witness in the world.¹

### Faith as Interpretation

To say that preaching, the homily included, is directed to faith is another way of saying that preaching is involved in the task of interpretation. “Faith” can be defined as a way of seeing or interpreting the world. The way we interpret the world, in turn, determines the way we relate to it. For example, if we believe that a particular race or class of people are our enemies, we will relate to them with suspicion and hostility. A friendly gesture will be interpreted not as a genuine sign of good will but as a ruse to get us to lower our guard. On the other hand, if we believe that a group of people are our friends, we will tend to excuse even a hostile gesture with the explanation that there must have been some mistake: they didn’t recognize us or we have misinterpreted their gesture. Our “faith” in the way things are has led us to live in the world in a way that corresponds to what we believe about it.

The Christian interprets the world not as a hostile and evil place, but as a creation of a loving God who did not allow it to destroy itself, but sent his Son to rescue it. The Christian response to the world, then, is one of acceptance and affirmation — along with the recognition that it is still awaiting its full redemption.

One of the most important, and most specifically human, ways in which faith is communicated to individuals and communities is through language. The way we speak about our world expresses the way we think about it and interpret it. One of the reasons we speak about our world at all is to share our vision of the world with others. The preacher is a Christian specially charged with sharing the Christian vision of the world as the creation of a loving God. Into this world human beings unleashed the powers of sin and death. These powers have been met, however, by God through his Son Jesus Christ, in whom he is at work not only to restore creation, but to transform it into a new heaven and a new earth.

¹ While the homily is not the same as catechetical instruction, as Pope Paul VI makes clear in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* (nos. 43 and 44), the homily can certainly be a means of catechesis for Christian communities. The homilist who preaches from the Scriptures as these are arranged in the lectionary over a three-year cycle of Sundays and feasts will certainly deal with all the major truths of the faith. It will still be necessary, however, to provide educational opportunities in and through which the faithful can reflect more deeply on the meaning of these truths and on their concrete contemporary implications for Christian life. In the early church such a systematic presentation of the truths of the faith was given to the newly baptized in the post-baptismal preaching known as mystagogy.
Faith Leading to a Response

When one hears and accepts this vision of the world, this way of interpreting reality, a response is required. That response can take many forms. Sometimes it will be appropriate to call people to repentance for the way they have helped to spread the destructive powers of sin in the world. At other times the preacher will invite the congregation to devote themselves to some specific action as a way of sharing in the redemptive and creative word of God. However, the response that is most general and appropriate “at all times and in every place” is the response of praise and thanksgiving (Eucharist).

When we accept the good news that the ultimate root and source of our being is not some faceless Prime Mover, not a merciless judge, but a prodigally loving Father who calls us to share in his love and to spread it to others, we sense that it is indeed right to give him thanks and praise.

Although we have received this good news, believed in it, and sealed our belief in the sacrament of baptism, we need to rediscover the truth of it again and again in our lives. Our faith grows weak, we are deceived by appearances, overwhelmed by suffering, plagued by doubt, anguished by the dreadful silence of God. And yet we gather for Eucharist, awaiting a word that will rekindle the spark of faith and enable us to recognize once again the presence of a loving God in our lives. We come to break bread in the hope that we will be able to do so with hearts burning. We come expecting to hear a Word from the Lord that will again help us to see the meaning of our lives in such a way that we will be able to say, with faith and conviction, “It is right to give him thanks and praise.”

The preacher then has a formidable task: to speak from the Scriptures (those inspired documents of our tradition that hand down to us the way the first believers interpreted the world) to a gathered congregation in such a way that those assembled will be able to worship God in spirit and truth, and then go forth to love and serve the Lord. But while the task is formidable, it is not impossible, especially if one goes about it with purpose and method.

The Homily and the Lectionary

The homily is not so much on the Scriptures as from and through them. In the Roman Catholic tradition, the selection of texts to be read at the Eucharistic liturgy is normally not left to the preacher, but is determined ahead of time and presented in the form of a lectionary. The basic purpose of a lectionary is twofold: to ensure that the Scripture texts appropriate to a feast or season are read at that time, and to provide for a comprehensive reading of the Scriptures. Thus, we find in the lectionary two principles guiding the selection of texts: the thematic principle (readings chosen to correspond to the “theme” of a feast or season), and the lectio continua principle (readings taken in order from a book of the Bible which is being read over a given period of time).
In the section of the lectionary entitled "Masses for Various Occasions," we find the thematic principle at work in a way that corresponds more closely to what some liturgical planners refer to as the theme of a liturgy: e.g., readings appropriate for Christian unity, or for peace and justice. Such thematic liturgies have their place, as the lectionary title indicates, on various or special occasions, rather than at the regular Sunday liturgy.2

It is to these given texts that the preacher turns to prepare the homily for a community that will gather for the Sunday liturgy. Since the purpose of the homily is to enable the gathered congregation to celebrate the liturgy with faith, the preacher does not so much attempt to explain the Scriptures as to interpret the human situation through the Scriptures. In other words, the goal of the liturgical preacher is not to interpret a text of the Bible (as would be the case in teaching a Scripture class) as much as to draw on the texts of the Bible as they are presented in the lectionary to interpret peoples' lives. To be even more precise, the preacher's purpose will be to turn to these Scriptures to interpret peoples' lives in such a way that they will be able to celebrate Eucharist — or be reconciled with God and one another, or be baptized into the Body of Christ, depending on the particular liturgy that is being celebrated.3

To preach from the Scriptures in this way means that we have to "get behind them," as it were. We have to hear these texts as real words addressed to real people. Scholarly methods of interpreting Scripture can help us do this by putting us in touch with the life situations that originated these texts, or by making us more aware of the different ways language can function as a conveyer of meaning. But scholarly methods are not enough. As we emphasized in the second chapter, the preacher needs to listen to these texts meditatively and prayerfully.

As preachers we go to the Scriptures saying, "What is the human situation to which these texts were originally addressed? To what human concerns and questions might these same texts have spoken through the Church's history? What is the human situation to which they can speak today? How can they help us to understand, to interpret our lives in such a way that we can turn to God with praise and thanksgiving?" Only when we approach the Scriptures in this way do they have any possibility of becoming a living word for us and for others.

Such prayerful listening to the text demands time, not just the time of actual reading and praying and studying but, just as importantly, the time of standing back and letting the text dwell in our unconscious mind. This period

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2 A fuller description of the principles guiding the choice of readings can be found in the introduction to lectionary. These principles should be familiar to all preachers, for a knowledge of how and why passages of Scripture are assigned to certain times and feasts provides an important key to the liturgical interpretation of those readings in preaching.

of "incubation," as it is often called, is essential to all human creative effort. It is especially important for the homilist when reflecting upon texts which have become overly familiar, or which seem inappropriate for a given situation. With the use of a lectionary, the readings assigned for a particular day may seem to have little to say to a specific congregation at a specific time in its life. However, if the text and the actual human situation are allowed to interact with one another, a powerful interpretative word of faith will often emerge. But for this to happen we need to dwell with the text and allow it to dwell with us. Only then will the text reveal new meaning to us, a new and fresh way of interpreting and speaking about our world.\(^4\)

**The Homily, the Congregation, and Homily Services**

If the homily must be faithful to the Scriptures for it to be the living Word of God, it must also be faithful to the congregation to whom this living Word of God is addressed. The homily will be effective in enabling a community to worship God with praise and thanksgiving only if individuals in that community recognize there a word that responds to the implicit or explicit questions of their lives.

There are many ways in which priests get to know their congregations and allow themselves to be known by them: involvement with parish organizations, individual and family counseling, social contacts, visits to the sick and the bereaved, planning for weddings and baptisms, the sacrament of reconciliation, and, equally as important, simply being with people as a friend and member of the community. The preacher will be able to draw on all these contacts when he turns to the Scriptures to seek there a Word from the Lord for the lives of his people.

This pastoral dimension of the homily is the principal reason why some homily services, especially those that do little more than provide ready-to-preach homilies, can actually be a hindrance to effective preaching. Since the homily is integrally related to the liturgy, and since liturgy presupposes a community that gathers to celebrate it, the homily is by definition related to a community. Homily services can be helpful in the interpretation of scriptural texts (though generally not as much as some basic exegetical resources) and give some ideas on how these texts can be related to contemporary human concerns. But they cannot provide individual preachers with specific indications of how these texts can be heard by the particular congregations to whom they will preach.

Homily services can provide valuable assistance to the preacher when they are concerned to relate the interpretation of the lectionary texts to the liturgical season in which they appear, and when they are attentive to the *lectio continua*

\(^4\) Ibid. nos. 8-10.
principles of the lectionary. They may also be helpful in suggesting some possibilities for the development of a homily, or in providing suitable examples and illustrations. The primary help that a good homily service will offer is to make available to the preacher recent exegetical work on the specific texts that appear in the lectionary and to indicate some ways in which this biblical word can be heard in the present as God's Word to his people. They can never replace the homilist's own prayer, study and work.

The Homily and the Liturgy of the Eucharist

A homily is not a talk given on the occasion of a liturgical celebration. It is "a part of the liturgy itself." In the Eucharistic celebration the homily points to the presence of God in people's lives and then leads a congregation into the Eucharist, providing, as it were, the motive for celebrating the Eucharist in this time and place.5

This integral relation of the homily to the liturgy of the Eucharist which follows the liturgy of the word has implications for the way in which the homily is composed and delivered. In the first place, the homily should flow quite naturally out of the readings and into the liturgical action that follows. To set the homily apart by beginning or ending it with a sign of the cross6, or by delivering it in a style that is totally different from the style used in the rest of the liturgy, might only reinforce the impression that the homily is simply a 'talk given on the occasion of a liturgical gathering, one that could just as well be given at another time and in another context.

Although the preaching of the homily properly belongs to the presiding minister of the Eucharistic celebration, there may occasionally be times when it is fitting for someone else, priest or deacon, to preach. On these occasions the integral relation of the homily to the rest of the liturgy will be safeguarded if the preacher is present and actively involved in the whole of the liturgical celebration. The practice of having a preacher slip in to read the Gospel and preach the homily, and then slip out again, does not do justice to the liturgical integrity of the homily.

5 Ibid. n. 24.

6 With regard to the sign of the cross before and after the homily, the Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship gave the following official responsum in 1973:

Query: Is it advisable to invite the faithful to bless themselves before or after the homily, to address a salutation to them, for example, "Praised be Jesus Christ"? Reply: It all depends on lawful local custom. But generally speaking it is inadvisable to continue such customs because they have their origin in preaching outside Mass. The homily is part of the liturgy; the people have already blessed themselves and received the greeting at the beginning of Mass. It is better, then, not to have a repetition before or after the homily. Source: Notitiae 9 (1973) 178.
Homiletic Style

As regards the structure and style of the homily, we can take a lead from the use of the Greek word homileo in the New Testament. While the etymology of the word suggests communicating with a crowd, its actual use in the New Testament implies a more personal and conversational form of address than that used by the classical Greek orator. The word is employed in reference to the conversation two disciples engaged in on their way to Emmaus (Luke 24: 14) and of the conversation Antonius Felix, Procurator of Judea, had with Paul when the latter was held prisoner in Caesarea (Acts 24: 26). The New Testament usage suggests that a homily should sound more like a personal conversation, albeit a conversation on matters of utmost importance, than like a speech or a classroom lecture. What we should strive for is a style that is purposeful and personal, avoiding whatever sounds casual and chatty on the one extreme or impersonal and detached on the other.

One of the ways we can move toward a more personal style of address in our homilies is by the way we structure them. Many homilies seem to fall into the same three-part pattern: “In today’s readings . . . This reminds us . . . Therefore let us . . .” The very structure of such homilies gives the impression that the preacher’s principal purpose is to interpret scriptural texts rather than communicate with real people, and that he interprets these texts primarily to extract ethical demands to impose on a congregation. Such preachers may offer good advice, but they are rarely heard as preachers of good news, and this very fact tends to distance them from their listeners.

Another way of structuring the homily, and one that is more in keeping with its function of enabling people to celebrate the liturgy with deepened faith, is to begin with a description of a contemporary human situation which is evoked by the scriptural texts, rather than with an interpretation or reiteration of the text. After the human situation has been addressed, the homilist can turn to the Scriptures to interpret this situation, showing how the God described therein is also present and active in our lives today. The conclusion of the homily can then be an invitation to praise this God who wills to be lovingly and powerfully present in the lives of his people.

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7 Keryssein, “To proclaim,” is the word most frequently used for preaching in the New Testament. The word “presupposes that the preachers are heralds who announce simply that which they are commissioned to announce, not in their own name, but by the authority of the one who sends them” (John L. McKenzie, Dictionary of the Bible, p. 689). Although the practice of first-century Jewish synagogues may have included explanations and applications of the Scriptures as part of the regular service, the New Testament itself does not use a specific technical word to describe the kind of preaching we refer to as a “homily,” that is, the exposition of a text of Scripture which takes place in and as a part of a liturgical celebration. The word homileo does appear in the New Testament, and its usage there can provide a way to understand a homiletic approach to preaching as distinguished from preaching addressed to unbelievers (kerygma).

8 The continuing ability of Scripture texts to speak to situations that are temporally and culturally distinct from those to which they were originally addressed is one way in which the canonicity of the Scriptures continues to be affirmed by the church. The canon is, in fact, composed of those writings which the church considers too important to forget because they address issues which are present in every generation, albeit in different garb and guises.
The point of the preceding paragraph is not to substitute a new straight jacket for an old one. There is no one correct form for the homily. On occasion it may be a dramatic and engaging story, on another a well-reasoned exposition of a biblical theme showing its relevance to the contemporary situation, or the liturgical day, feast or season. It might also take the form of a dialogue between two preachers or involve the approved local use of visual or audio media. Ideally, the form and style will be determined by the form and style of the Scriptures from which it flows, by the character of the liturgy of which it is a part, and by the composition and expectations of the congregation to which it is addressed, and not exclusively by the preference of the preacher.

Whatever its form, the function of the Eucharistic homily is to enable people to lift up their hearts, to praise and thank the Lord for his presence in their lives. It will do this more effectively if the language it uses is specific, graphic, and imaginative. The more we can turn to the picture language of the poet and the storyteller, the more we will be able to preach in a way that invites people to respond from the heart as well as from the mind.

The Limits and Possibilities of Liturgical Preaching

But isn't all this too limited a view of preaching? Does it really respond to the needs of the people? Doesn't regular Sunday preaching have to take into account the ignorance of the Scriptures on the part of large numbers of Catholics, even those who participate regularly in the Sunday Eucharist, and deal in some systematic way with the fundamentals of the faith? Is there not a crying need for regular and sustained teaching about the moral imperatives that flow from an acceptance of the Good News? What about all those times when people's lives are shattered, when they simply are psychologically incapable of offering God praise and thanks, when it seems they have nothing to be thankful for? How do we speak to all the people in our congregations who have yet to hear the basic Gospel message calling them to faith and conversation, or who may even need a form of preaching that heightens their sensitivity to basic human realities and in this way readies them for the hearing of the Gospel?

In the last analysis the only proper response to these questions is a pastoral one. Priests will have to decide what form of preaching is most suitable for a particular congregation at a particular time. We would simply like to make two points here. First of all, social science research contends that the oral presentation of a single person is not a particularly effective way to impart new information or to bring about a change in attitude or behavior. It is, however, well suited to make explicit or to reinforce attitudes or knowledge previously held. The homily, therefore, which normally is an oral presentation by a single person, will be less effective as a means of instruction and/or exhortation than of interpretation — that is, as a means of enabling people to recognize the implications, in liturgy and in life, of the faith that is already theirs.
The second point to be made is that the liturgical homily, which draws on the Scriptures to interpret peoples' lives in such a way that they can recognize the saving presence of God and turn to him with praise and thanksgiving, does not exclude doctrinal instruction and moral exhortation. Such instruction and exhortation, however, are here situated in a broader context, namely, in the recognition of God's active presence in the lives of the people and the praise and thanksgiving that this response elicits.9

It may very well be that what God is doing in the life of a congregation at some particular moment is asking them to change in a way that is demanding and disorienting. The homily can be one way of helping to bring about that change, and it can still lead to a response of praise and thanksgiving by showing that our former way of life, comfortable as it may have been was a way that led to death, while the new way, with all of its demands and difficulties, is a way that leads to life.

But even though the liturgical homily can incorporate instruction and exhortation, it will not be able to carry the whole weight of the Church's preaching. There will still need to be special times and occasions for preaching that addresses human values in such a way as to dispose the hearers to be open to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, preaching intended to bring the hearers to an inner conversion of heart, and preaching intended to instruct the faithful in matters of doctrine or morality. These three kinds of preaching — sometimes referred to as pre-evangelization, evangelization, and catechesis — can be found today in evangelistic gatherings, the adult catechumenate, youth ministry programs, spiritual renewal programs, Bible study groups and many forms of religious education.

The homily can complement all these forms of preaching by attending more specifically to what it is to accomplish. Such would be to show how and where the mystery of our faith, focused upon by that day's Scripture readings, is occurring in our lives. This would bring the hearers to a more explicit and deepened faith, to an expression of that faith in the liturgical celebration and, following the celebration, in their life and work.

But is it really possible to create this readiness for praise and thanksgiving in congregations as large and diverse as those in which many of us minister? In these congregations some people will be feeling a sense of loss because of a

9 In the Apostolic Exhortation, On Catechesis in Our Time, 1979, n. 48, Pope John Paul II observes, "Respecting the specific nature and proper cadence of this setting" (i.e., liturgy, especially the Eucharistic assembly), the homily takes up again the journey of faith put forward by catechesis and brings it to its natural fulfillment. At the same time it encourages the Lord's disciples to begin anew each day their spiritual journey in truth, adoration and thanksgiving. Accordingly, one can say that the catechetical teaching, too, finds its source and fulfillment in the Eucharist, within the whole circle of the liturgical year.

"Preaching, centered upon the Bible texts, must then in its own way make it possible to familiarize the faithful with the whole of the mysteries of the faith and the norms of Christian living .... " Cf. also: Sharing the Light of Faith, An Official Commentary on the National Catechetical Directory for Catholics of the United States, 1981, p. 54, Office of Publishing Services, U.S.C.C., Washington, D.C.
recent bereavement; some facing marital difficulties; some having problems adjusting emotionally to school, job, home or community; some struggling with a deep sense of guilt stemming from their inability to deal maturely with their sexuality, or because of their addiction to drugs or alcohol. Others in our congregations will be struggling with the relevance of the Gospel to oppressive economic structures to world peace, or to the many forms of discrimination in our society. Is it really possible to say to these people, "Look at the way in which God is present in your lives and turn to him with praise and thanksgiving?"

Obviously, it will not always be easy to do this. And we will never be able to do it, at least not with any honesty and integrity, if we have not recognized the active presence of God in our own lives, as broken and shattered as they may be, and out of that brokenness affirm that it is still good to praise him and even to give him thanks. We need to remember in situations like this that our celebration of the Eucharist is done in memory of Jesus Christ who, on the night before he died, turned to God and praised and thanked him out of the very depths of his distress. Praise and thanksgiving, therefore do not automatically imply the presence of euphoria.

We can and must praise God even when we do not feel like it, for praise and thanksgiving are rooted in and grow out of faith, not feeling, a faith which interprets this world by saying that in spite of appearances often to the contrary, our God is a loving God. It is for this reason that even at the time of death, we celebrate a Eucharist, because we believe that for his faithful ones life is changed, not, as appearances would seem to indicate, taken away.

The challenge to preachers then is to reflect on human life with the aid of the Word of God and to show by their preaching, as by their lives, that in every place and at every time it is indeed right to praise and thank the Lord.
Is Church Teaching Neglected When The Lectionary Is Preached?

Gerard S. Sloyan, a priest of the Diocese of Trenton, is a professor of religion at Temple University, where he teaches the New Testament. This article originated as the third annual St. Basil's Lecture on Preaching at the University of St. Michael's College, Toronto, 3 November 1986. This article appeared in Worship, Volume 61, Number 2, March 1987, copyright © 1987 by the Order of Saint Benedict, Collegeville, Minnesota. Used by permission of the Order of Saint Benedict, Collegeville, Minnesota.

I should like to make case that the best assurance that the ancient faith will be preserved and promoted in the hearing of believers is that the Bible is preached at the Sunday liturgy in and out of season. Does anyone doubt that this is so? Yes, some think that preaching from the Bible only will leave some basic Christian truths untaught, some great ethical questions unexamined. Others think that the existential question of the moment is paramount for the bearer - what is sometimes called "topicality," which any use of the Bible must subserve. Let us see if either is true.

My first argument for preaching uninterruptedly from the lectionary is from tradition. This is the most solid argument that can be made because the church has never put any argument before it. We do and pray and think what has been done from apostolic times insofar as this can be discovered from its best witness, the books of the two "testaments." This does not mean that our faith or practice will be identical with that of one or two or four hundred years ago. It precisely does not mean that. Often apostolic tradition is partially obscured by subsequent, less worthy traditions which can be in the ascendant for as much as a millennium. The process of refinement, purification, return to the sources is never ending. In the process there is always forward movement; not everything is a backward glance. Tradition is a living, vibrant thing. It is the life of a community which passes on to subsequent generations the faith and action it has received as experienced in its own place and time.
In the matter of preaching Christ, our earliest practice was to proclaim the Scriptures of the Jews which speak of the promise of God to Israel. This promise, from Jesus' resurrection onward, was thought of as fulfilled in him in its beginnings, and in those terms was the earliest proclamation. There is no recourse in the New Testament to the philosophers or the poets save for a few random snatches floating around in Paul's head and the kind of standard Jewish apologia for monotheism you find at the beginning of the Areopagus speech (Acts 17). The culture is drawn upon for examples, to be sure — how it goes in the fields and on the sea, in the marketplace and the law court. But the chief court of appeals in preaching Christ is the sacred page: Law, Prophets and Writings, to which Jesus' own interpretations and those of the New Testament writers are appended.

This Scripture would have been the Palestinian targums rather than the Hebrew text in the Aramaic-speaking churches, but of these churches we have almost no record. It was certainly the Septuagint Greek translation, by and large, employed by the first and second century Christian writings which we do possess — the canonical ones and those declared, after a long process, non-canonical. Thumb through any New Testament translation which prints its biblical quotations in italics or gives citations from that source in footnotes or sidenotes and you will see what a tissue of the Jewish Scriptures the New Testament is. It is more than that. Its entire fabric is a series of midrashim — homiletic expansions — on the biblical text.

We do not know from the New Testament exactly how the Septuagint Bible was read from or drawn upon in the weekly assembly, assuming that there was a weekly assembly from earliest times. We have to wait for Justin in the mid-second century to tell us from Rome that “on the day called Sunday there is a meeting in one place of those who live in the cities or the country, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read as long as time permits” (I Apology, 67). One can see how the gospels are thus early being associated with the Hebrew writings as Scripture, although it is doubtful that many or any churches had all four of them in this early date. Much earlier than Justin, Luke's gospel had Jesus interpret to the Emmaus-road disciples “every passage of Scripture which referred to him” “beginning with Moses and all the prophets” (Lk. 24: 27); then, a little later: “Everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms [that is, the whole collection for which the Hebrew acronym is “Tanak”] had to be fulfilled” (v. 44).

It will not come as news to any Christian with a little learning that the early church was in its origins a Jewish group to whom some non-Jews were joined, which thought itself Israel, nor that it relied so heavily on apostolic-era writings, to be reckoned as Scripture on a par with the Septuagint. Perhaps not so many know how much longer it was — the 390s, in fact — before all twenty-seven New Testament books were acknowledged universally as canonical. The transition from the choices of lectors or presiders to fixed lectionary patterns on the model of the Jewish Torah portions of the haftarah, readings from the
prophets, is a very hard matter to trace. But no Christian in the Catholic tradi-
tion is surprised to learn that reading a New Testament selection and an Old,
usually in parallel, is an ancient practice. Lectionaries were for long the sole
access Christians had to the Bible, when scrolls and codexes were expensive
and congregations found whole Bibles hard to obtain. The greater wonder for
the many reared on fifty-two epistle and gospel selections, Catholics, Orthodox
and some Protestants alike, is likely to be that Hebrew Scripture readings as a
constant should ever have dropped out of the picture.

None of this, however, precisely answers the question we have set our­selves: is church teaching neglected when the Bible is preached through the
lectionary in and out of season? The liturgy of any sacrament — even reconcil­
iation in recent times — cannot be imagined in which portions of the Bible are
not proclaimed. But liturgies in which the Bible is read is not the same thing as
celebrations in which the Bible is preached.

Contemporary Teaching

Everyone is sadly familiar with the situation in which three portions of
Scripture are read out — enriching, ennobling, often enigmatic — and none is
preached on. Those congregations may hear interesting discourses or sermons
but they never hear homilies, which by definition are explorations of the sacred
text.

The much commoner experience is to hear a single thought developed
which takes its rise from one of the readings, most often the gospel. There is no
fault to be found there provided that the development is a homily. The four
evangelists wrote closely packed proclamations of Jesus Christ, not trivial
moralties. To have a single thought suggested to one by a gospel phrase and
then to develop it in a way that the evangelist would not recognize is to trivialize
a great proclamatory literature. All the inspired writers were moralists, you
may be sure. They were primarily that. Living as sons and daughters of the
covenant, living the Jesus Christ within oneself was their great concern. But
living a great faith tradition trivially? By no means! For Jewish and gentle
Christians it was a deeply committed following of first the Law, then the law of
Christ, or none at all.

I speak of being faithful to one reading or to two when they have elements
in common — there could be brief reference to the third, a quotation perhaps
— and I commend it as a homily. In the near-total departure from any one or
all of the readings there is nothing to commend. Yet many earnest preachers are
distressed by the restriction they feel imposed on them by the three biblical
selections because these are so foreign to their own and to their hearers’ expe­
rience. What sense can be made of an ancient military threat or a cryptic phrase
in a prophetic book, or even an agricultural or business practice from Jesus’
day which bears little relation to our own? Earnest preachers, in a commend-
able search for relevance, find themselves preaching from the biblical texts fairly infrequently and on the biblical texts almost not at all. This practice affects the most earnest of preachers. There is no need to speak of the artful dodges of the less than earnest, their vacuous rephrasings of a text just read, delivered without half of the evangelists' art or the Savior's power. They should not be castigated. They are unable at this point in their lives to do serious preaching. One day some profound life experience may bring about a change, committing them for the first time to the painfully difficult task of proclaiming God's word.

Some homilists who care about the task very much have the problem that, even if the three-year cycle of readings were to be artfully developed by them in the pulpit, Christian people would miss out on much important postbiblical tradition. These homilists are men and in sacred orders. Women who preach are still so few and so select that their level of skill runs higher. The members of the clergy committed seriously to the preaching task who fear that lectionary or other Bible preaching can be a threat to adult Christian conviction are both older and male. They tend to have had a more rigorous systematic and ethical or moral training than a biblical or patristic one. They come face to face daily with Christian ignorance — to them shocking ignorance — of matters that were once second nature to church-active adults. They are asking for a change, a reversion to former practice.

People do not seem to know much about grace any more. They are fairly unenthusiastic and certainly ill-informed about purgatory and the communion of saints. The laws on marriage or who may be a sponsor at baptism or confirmation escape them utterly. Inquiries preparatory to marriage reveal that common residence ("cohabitation" has such a lubricious ring) is at least as usual as separate residence. In light of all this, the role of Cyrus king of Persia in Israel's deliverance and Moses' upraised arms while Joshua fought the Amalekites do not seem to cry out for extended development. As to St. Paul's declaration (Rom. 8:30) that those whom God predestined to be conformed to the likeness of the Son were also called, then justified, then glorified, it seems too fraught with theological perils to be useful pulpit material. Worse still, developing these texts can seem a waste of precious instructional time while people flounder in their ignorance.

I am not trying to create a straw man. I am trying to acknowledge the anguish of the pastoral heart which observes six Sundays in a row providing the preacher with no more than two or three solid leads in all for sermon development.

Let us face the facts: rich though Scripture is in the aggregate, it is capable of some fairly jejune combinations as chosen by the lectionary framers. More seriously still, many devoted homilists were not educated well in the Bible as the book of the church. It was presented to them as a set of critical problems. They simply are not at home in it. How strong, then, is the case for a syllabus of
homily topics over a three-year period which uses the Bible illustratively, as it attempts a relatively complete treatment of Christian faith and practice? In this best-case scenario, the topics treated would be subservient to the readings, meaning that the fourth commandment would not be followed a week later by the fifth but that disrespect and disregard of parents, especially by adults, would regularly be assured an airing. So would murderous thoughts, the horror of taking an adult human life and the equally horrifying act of lying with another’s spouse all appear somewhere in the three-year scheme. As introductory to the Sunday instruction, the best biblical pronouncements would be put forward and the church teaching would be derived from them.

What Christians do and do not believe about the incarnation is important; how the triune godhead indwells the baptized even though attribution is made to the Holy Spirit alone is at the heart of being a Christian; why symbolic acts called sacraments are channels of grace, if and in the measure that the symbolism comes home to the participant, is the very reality of corporate sacramental prayer; all this needs exposition. These are important matters to a church which has been committed to them in some form of expression since apostolic times. How can one honestly say that people live by these traditions if they do not have them regularly recalled to their minds in adult fashion? (I am trying to express the problem as clearly as I can before addressing myself to it.)

Ignorance of the things that pertain to God has never been held in honor in the church. It is now widely feared that confining preaching to expositions of selected portions of the Scriptures alone is contributing to such ignorance.

**Nature of Homily**

We have to do a little sorting out before this pastoral problem can be attached properly. The primary thing at issue is the efficacy or non-efficacy of the homily, not only that it should be effective but how it should be effective. The homily, for its part, is primarily worship or praise which is also thanksgiving and petition, like the total liturgical act. Commentary on the word does not stand apart from the remainder of divine service; it is not different from it in kind. The eucharistic act praises God for the deed done on our behalf in Jesus Christ through the power of the Spirit. The homily must do that as much as the biblical readings, the eucharistic prayer (the “canon” or “anaphora”) and the communion rite. The homily is not primarily instructional, although if people learn from it there is no harm done. They will forget what they learned from it. But they may not forget the primary reason for which it was preached and heard. That reason is exhortation and encouragement. The observation may sound perverse since the bane of our worship lives is the large helpings of the hortatory we are treated to, while being congratulated often for displays of religious behavior which Jesus had a very poor view of.

Exhortation and encouragement. Our God has done great things for us which we call the mystery of our redemption. They are inseparable from the
one divine graciousness which has as its other aspects the apparently prior and posterior mysteries of creation and sanctification. God does all that is done in us through the Son and in the Spirit. Jesus Christ is the sacrament, the palpable manifestation of that gracious deed which peaked in his crucifixion and resurrection. We gather to celebrate that and only that, even though its expression in our lives is manifold. No gathering for public prayer, the eucharistic assembly above all, can be devoted to anything but the one mystery of human redemption. This means that this mystery must be proclaimed bodily and explored in the liturgy's prayers and in its actions from every possible angle.

The homily no less than any other part of a sacramental rite invites us to a consideration of the riches that are ours in Christ Jesus. It invites us to respond to the gracious offer that is held out to us. No gift is effective in its intent unless it is willingly received and made the most of. God's grace can achieve a total transformation in us if we will let it. But this requires an exposition of its terms, a careful analysis of its gratuity, a warning of the unhappiness in store if the gift is not accepted. In a word the mystery of God's love, which in our regard holds out reconciliation and at the end of the ages salvation, is the one thing which must be preached at every meal in which the holy bread is eaten and the cup of salvation drunk. Quite simply, expounding the biblical deliverance achieves this best. These books have no other message.

**Historical Developments**

Over the centuries the basic gift offer which we call “gospel” was challenged. The community's responses were expressed in creeds and councils, in exegetical and systematic expositions later summarized in catechisms and aid books for the literate, much later in discussions of human moral choices more philosophically based than evangelically. Why was any of it done? All in aid of clarity over what the divine gift consisted in and how best it could be responded to. The gnostic challenge had a specious appeal to intellectuals, telling them that they were the spirit people while lesser breeds wallowed in their psychic or sarkic state. At root the gnostic systems impugned the material creation, the work of a God who brought it into being and rescued it from perversion of its purpose in a deed we call redemption.

The relation of Jesus Christ to God was the next major challenge to be met. In Jesus' Jewish human being he was a creature but what was to be said of the divine in him? Was that creaturely as well? The basic question at the time was how anyone who was fully divine could be thought of as suffering. Arius supposed that whatever was begotten in him could only be creature; so did the monarchians of Alexandria generally. The church in council — never mind the passion of the catechumen Constantine for a tidy religion in his empire — thought otherwise, namely that the first-born of all creation through whom all else was made was divine in the sense of being God of very God. Half a century passed before the laconic ending of the creed of Nicaea, “and I believe in the
Holy Spirit," was spelled out to mean that this Spirit was divine in the same sense that God and Word are. The baptismal formula from Matthew and the other doxological prayer practice of the church were what settled that. You did not baptize into new life or conclude the great anaphora in the name of a Spirit who was less than fully divine concrete reality ("person") of godhead.

The fifth century struggles you know. The settlement at Ephesus called Mary the God-bearer in a formulation which perilously skirted the one-nature position of Eutyches. A correction at Chalcedon gave the Antiochenes some brief vindication over the Alexandrians but basically pleased no one with its pragmatic compromise. Then came the century and a half up to A.D. 600 in which the Cyrillians who had lost the hypostatic union battle won the war. These struggles were terribly important, all of them, to enable a church of East and West to say what catholic and orthodox faith meant when it used the words of the Bible. You must say the same of the controversy over grace and election, the place of Mary and the saints in the story of salvation, the power of the symbols called sacraments and their ministers in the order of grace, the many eucharistic presences of Christ, the power of the inspired word of Scripture to move to conversion and faith. All of those issues matter greatly; for, while they do not enable us to comprehend the mystery of the divine-human relation, they provide us with a language to keep from saying false and foolish things about it as we expound the Scriptures. I cannot imagine a scrap of argument against a rigorous theological and historical education touching on both East and West to prepare the homilist. A biblical one alone, especially if it is critical only and knows nothing of the typology of the inspired poets, simply will not do.

Bible and Theology

Some say there are sins of omission in the theological education of the '80s but I cannot pass judgment on the charge. I have never been close to the seminary education. But one error in pastoral practice I am sure we must not make again is to impose upon the Bible a creedal grid which makes the Bible say those things and only things that the great doctrinal struggles — and the lesser, largely forgotten ones ("descendit ad inferna" or "ad inferos") — resulted in. We have been that route. We have made the Bible the handmaid of theology — theology whose sole raison d'être is to be the handmaid of the Bible. It is by no means as if the picture language of a book of tales, which is what the Bible largely is, will do as the milk of simple folk, while systematic doctrinal and ethical teaching is meat for the mature. It is not that way at all. It is a matter of two symbolic languages — that of the Scriptures and that of philosophy and history — helping us not say wrong things about God. One of these languages was devised in aid of the other and not vice versa. The ancillary tongue, theology, buttressed by a corpus of laws based on the Roman ius publicum and not the gospel, may not supplant the tongue that was first spoken, as Jacob the heel-gripper supplanted Esau.
Israelite history said of that struggle, retrospectively, "Well, it was all right because the father of Judah had to win and Ishmael’s father had to lose." We of the great tradition churches — I delight in belonging to an ancient one — have done something very close to that in glorifying the supplanter. We have called the theological offspring superior to its biblical parent. We have put human reflection on the divine word above that word — not in aid of it, a move which one can only applaud — but above it. You know some of the tragic outcomes: purgatory reckoned on a par with the parousia; the Roman bishopric — a treasure of the whole church — threatening the exercise of apostolic office of all who hold it; the undeniable reality of assisting or cooperating grace reckoned superior to the graced life itself and even to the uncreated grace which is alternatively Christ or the Holy Spirit.

**Biblical Preaching**

The Bible is the great corrective to all the false starts and near misses of Christian history. It does nothing to threaten the valid developments of genuine tradition. It does everything to threaten the ephemeral doctrines, the ephemeral pieties, the human traditions so we readily confuse with the divinely authored tradition. It causes aberrations from the straight path of apostolic faith to be seen for what they are and get us back to the "way" which is Christ.

I am convinced of this. Yet I have no illusions about the hardships of biblical preaching, especially in a communion which has for many centuries featured not it but a catechetical distillate derived from it. Not least of these hardships is the fact that the Bible has become the possession of Protestants and Catholics alike in the last 150 years under the aspect of its historicity. Those who would preach biblically are solely tempted by their educations to tell congregations what "really happened," that and little more. If this is the Scylla of the modern pulpit, its Charybdis is the false historicism that is history’s fiercest enemy: the mentality that "it all happened just as it says because God cannot lie." Such is the legacy which beleagured nineteenth-century Protestants have left, via the “Princeton theology,” in response to the Darwinian challenge: a biblical inerrancy in historical categories, forever confusing what is genuinely inerrant about the Bible. Catholic fundamentalism in the pulpit does not have these same ideological roots. It is more a result of the failure of preachers to study in preparation for preaching, which omission makes them fall back on childhood understandings. The clear channel between these two rocks is a presentation of the Bible as national epic when it is epic, archaic legislation when it is legislation, poetry and drama and *kerygma* and correspondence at white heat when it is any of the above.

We use the phrase in casual exchange: “Well, of course, it’s not written in stone.” Most of the Bible is not written in stone. It is the living, century to century, decade to decade, day to day life of a people with its God: Israel always, then Israel to which a growing, largely undigested gentile component has been
added. This is the story of the people which we are. It is our story in our antecedents and in our birthing period. Our only calling as a believing community is to be faithful forever to the terms of our conception, birth and infancy.

You can see why I think an excellent theological education is the essential preparation for a career of preaching. In it, homiletics understood as biblical proclamation is the center. The one thing homiletics cannot be is an "auxiliary discipline," any more than liturgy or music can be. They are the heart of the presider-proclaimer's preparation, with critical Bible study, systematic and moral theology, and world and church history essentially auxiliary to the main venture.

What does this mean for letting deacons preach after an evening's weekly study over a three-year period? It is likely to be disastrous unless they have been highly perceptive persons throughout their lay lives. But then, the ordination of any candidate after exposure to even the finest theological education will be disastrous if the candidate is not a highly perceptive person.

**Lectionary Situation**

Given the optimum readying for the task of expounding God's word, does it not all break down in face of the reality of the lectionary situation? There is a certain randomness to the respective Matthew, Mark and Luke years with intercalations from John as they relate to passages of the Hebrew Bible, the latter chosen on a typological, *preparatio evangelica* principle and not for their independent worth. The modified *lectio continua* which determines the second readings goes its own way as it tries frantically to give the hearer snatches of the epistolary literature and Acts, Hebrews and Revelation before the three years are out. The imperfections of any lectionary must be granted, whether they be the current four in use in English-speaking North America or any improved versions of them. But they are the Bible, and well read, they cannot but convey great nourishment.

There exists the possibility of conveying the thought structure of any one evangelist — it is too early to call it a "theology" — through regular proclamation of his gospel to the same congregation over the course of a year. Discipleship in Mark is not identical with that in Matthew who edits him; the christology of Luke differs from that of Matthew even as they employ their common or Q texts to serve different purposes; and John is always different in what he does from the other three. Each of the four, in fact, has a distinctive idea of the mystery of the great God — and Paul's is different still. You cannot think of a human state of heart or mind, a human reaction to any challenge in the following of Christ that is not mirrored deeply in the gospels. The Hebrew Bible stories, with all their crudity and violence, penetrate the human condition in unparalleled fashion. It is the story of the people Israel of a far-off day but it is also our story. There is nothing human that is not found there in some form;
there is nothing Christian that is not found there in some proleptic and even present form. One needs to have a jejune imagination indeed not to be able to go from those readings directly — not by some wildly circuitous route — to the greed that inevitably corrupts, to overkill masquerading as the first line of a nation’s defense, to the ravishing of women for male pleasure, to the big government lie and the crafty domestic deceit. It is all there crying out to be exposed.

The Bible sees to it that ethical treatments cannot easily be confined to the moral lapses of individuals in a day when the great moral problems that plague us are social and systemic: lying expense sheets, half-remembered adulteries in the sodden haze of a convention, abortions for the young to save the respectable family’s reputation, the determination to be rich as the only way to be happy. They are social evils, all of them. The making of wars for wealth and out of national pride, the furthering of evil economic systems, the billion dollar pornographic industry are all, to be sure, beyond the power of most worshiping congregations to affect immediately. The social aspect of the darkness in the human heart is a stronger force than most individuals can cope with. This evil can only be coped with corporately, by a people united in its countercultural ethos. The Bible in both testaments knows the reality of peoplehood and the near futility of individual response to pandemic evil. Resistance to such evil must be preached biblically and lived biblically. The prospect is terrifying in our fragmented culture but we have no other option. The alternative is to preach a nonbiblical morality of individual response which has all the dim prospects of an advertising slogan like “Just say no.”

“Whoever is near to me is near the fire,” says a non-canonical logion attributed to Jesus. It is true. Preaching consistently on the gospels or the Pauline corpus, whether in tones of the fieriest prophetic exhortation or the placid paraenesis of the pastoral epistles, keeps one close to the sun of righteousness, Jesus Christ. It keeps a homilist from pressing, for example, for any form of penitential discipline as if it were sacrosanct for all the ages, since reliance on the cross and resurrection must be at the heart of any ritual expression of reconciliation. Staying close to the New Testament, in which the threefold ministry of the second century had scarcely emerged, helps to relativize the ministerial function. Community servants there must be — I trust I am not confused about the spiritual powers that my presbyteral order commands — but a homilist needs to know how incidental they are to the full power of the Spirit that resides in the church. If one stays close to the Mosaic books, the prophets and the writings and above all the apostolic testimonies, one does not press upon hearers contingent developments in the West of the twelfth or the seventeenth century. This posture does not lead to biblical archaism, it leads to modernity. In it every movement of our time is subjected to scrutiny through the prism of a scriptural relation of the community to God. One needs to know the developments of subsequent ages, of course; but one uses them wisely in closing the gap between the two hermeneutical horizons of a far-off revelatory age and an age of insistent demands outside the church door.
Homilists in touch with their people's lives meet the challenge of a particular Sunday or season. One need not be too inventive to see a real relation, not a forced one, between what is written on the sacred page and a factory closing, a brutal murder in the parish, a tense educational situation in the school district. The preacher who consistently thinks biblically will have no problem in making the relation.

**Liturgical Homily**

The major feasts of Christ, like those of Mary and the apostles, give ample opportunity to preach on the mysteries of the incarnation and redemption, always soteriologically as the New Testament does. Every Pauline lectionary reading is a springboard for considering God's gracious deed in Christ, the graced life that has been held out to us. Most of them are intelligently hortatory rather than doctrinal. The preacher who genuinely fears, after having preached the three-year cycle four or five times, that certain doctrinal or ethical developments of the centuries are getting short shrift — from him, that is — should sit down and carefully plot a correction of the omissions over the next few months. This cannot be done, of course, without serious study of the upcoming texts. None should be forced to lead into a disquisition it is totally unrelated to. People are not stupid. They may not be able to articulate the principles of a liturgical homily but they certainly know which preachers cavalierly set aside God's word just proclaimed, to interrupt the flow of the worship service with a word of their own. Not even the reiterated claim "the church teaches," can mask the fact that what we have here is what this man, impatient with the church, teaches.

Let us say that the preacher has worked the whole problem out in his thoughts and is still convinced that his people need more teaching and less of the proclamation and encouragement featured by the lectionary. Let him then be a teacher in the parish bulletin, the optimum place for this genre. Church bulletins are read avidly for content, although as homilies improve an undernourished people will devour them less and less.

One consideration has yet to be raised. It is the frustration many homilists feel who consistently try to preach from the Bible and suspect it is a land unknown to their hearers except for the thirteen or fifteen minutes they are engaged with them. This is especially the case with clergy who are regular visitors to congregations but are not able to influence policy toward enlarging the people's Bible knowledge. One can speak frequently from the pulpit on the value of individual Bible reading, but this probably does not accomplish much. Preaching from the Bible in the pulpit may help; likewise going before and beyond the prescribed readings to establish their context, or moving around in the Bible to other texts which speak to those the homilist is examining. But
there is no substitute for having large numbers of congregants doing regular Bible study in groups if homilists would have them get the most out of their preaching.

Movements like "Renew" and especially the post-Renew study groups — the adult Bible circles which some Protestants have long been familiar with — begin to save biblical preaching from being a new frustration in Christian life, a matter of playing symphonies for the deaf, describing sunsets to the blind. The Bible is the book of Christians but it cannot become such merely by declaring that it is so. Sharing it in medicine-dropper quantities in a weekly liturgy is not a large improvement. There must be continuing, concerted efforts to share with believers their biblical heritage, or the whole approach to preaching which the lectionary scheme envisions is negated.

A concluding illustration of the relation of lectionary preaching to doctrine may prove helpful here. In the Roman calendar the medieval feast of All Souls fell on a Sunday last year. The prescribed readings were from the beginning of Daniel, chapter 12, the end of Romans, chapter 8, and the part of John 17 where Jesus says he means to bring all his friends to the glory that is his Father's gift to him. Were the purgatorial fires of Jewish apocalyptic via reflection on the fate of the "lapsed" of the third century and Gregory the Great's explication of this theological conclusion preached on, that day, in Catholic pulpits around the world? Probably. But not with any great encouragement from the biblical texts. What these affirm strongly is that the love of Christ for us is so great that no separation from him, whether long or short, can be thought of as final. It seems that nothing can stifle the instinct of Christians to improve the lot of their beloved dead with prayers. But nothing can overcome the biblical teaching that, for lovers of the Lord, the victory has already been assured. A biblical homily on the feast of All Souls, like that on anything long believed and taught by the church, is assured a marvelous centrality as the gospel of Jesus Christ. Preaching in any other mold but that will shortly prove erratic, eccentric or, God forbid, heretical. It can do worse. It can be trivial.

None of these possibilities lies open when a biblical foundation is provided by the lectionary for all that the church believes and teaches about the mystery of Christ.
THE WORD MADE FLESH TODAY

Does Language Make a Difference?

Walter J. Burghardt, S.J.

Walter J. Burghardt, S.J. is a theologian in residence at Georgetown University. This article originated as one lecture in a series on Preaching the Word at Atlantic School of Theology, Halifax, 30 April — 1 May 1987. The article is reprinted from Preaching: the art & the craft, copyright © 1987 by Walter Burghardt, S.J. Used by permission of Paulist Press.

I begin this book by speaking... words. Understandably, for a word is the ordinary medium for a preacher’s message. Like it or not, I have no choice but to put a subject and a verb together, shape phrases and clauses and sentences and paragraphs, make sense and persuade and inspire through conventional symbols of speech.

Webster’s Second Edition Unabridged defines a word as “an articulate sound or series of sounds which, through conventional association with some fixed meaning, symbolizes and communicates an idea...” It all sounds dull as dishwater. Till you escape from sheer definitions and let your mind, memory, and imagination take wing. Let go...

Three stages capture the movement of my thought: the word... made flesh... today. (1) What is “word”? (2) What kind of word is enfleshed in the liturgical homily? (3) How can the homiletic word be enfleshed today, be incarnated for this believing people?

I come to you a weaver of words. Every since I can remember, I have been seduced by syllables. In grade school my brother and I began the great American novel; to no one’s surprise, it aborted. In high school I delighted in debate — either side of any question. But it was the Jesuit juniorate that genuinely
focused my verbal future; for there I reveled in the rhythms of the Greeks and Romans, waltzed to English word masters.

I wept to the prophetic plaints of Aeschylus' Cassandra, laughed to the mocking irony of Aristophanes, even croaked to the music of his frogs: "Brekekekex, ko-ax, ko-ax." I agonized with gentle Sophocles over the incest of Oedipus, joined the closing chorus: "Wait to see life's ending ere thou count one mortal blest." I thrilled to Demosthenes assailing Athenian peace-at-any-price, was turned on by his classic description of panic in Athens that begins Hespera men gar en ("Evening had already fallen"). In imagination I invaded Plato's cave and its prisoners, stared transfixed at the fire and the shadows of reality on the wall. Time and again I wept at Socrates' parting words: "I go to die, and you to live; but which of us goes to the better lot, is known to none but God." For all his verbiage, Cicero's command of the idiom could still excite me — whether castigating the conspirator Catiline or analyzing old age. I memorized vast sections of Homer, particularly organ sounds like polyphoioisboio thaasses, the shore of "the loud-resounding sea"; found a foreshadowing of the Christ-event in Vergil's Fourth Eclogue: "magnus ab integro saeclorum nascitur ordo;/ iam redit et Virgo . . ." I wrote Latin odes in imitation of Horace's "integer vitae," his "carpe diem" (live today!), his "nunc est bibendum" (it's cocktail time). And many a night I fell asleep, chastely, in the Lesbian arms of Sappho.

On the English scene, Shakespeare's artistry was ceaseless delight. Henry V roaming the camp at night, musing on the burdens of kings: "What infinite heart's ease/ Must kings neglect, that private men enjoy!" Romeo forsaking his very name for Juliet: "Call me but love, and I'll be new baptiz'd." Hamlet's "native hue of resolution . . . sicklied o'er with the pale case of thought." Shylock's ageless cry of the Jew: "If you prick us, do we not bleed?"

1 Cf. Oedipus the King, lines 1528-30.
3 Cf. Republic 7, 1 ff.
4 Plato. Apology 42.
5 Iliad 1, 34.
6 Fourth Eclogue, lines 5-6.
7 Odes 1, 17.
8 Odes 1, 11.
9 Odes 1, 37.
13 The Merchant of Venice. Act 3, Scene 1.
There was more than Avon's bard, of course. With Francis Thompson, I fled the Hound of Heaven's "majestic speed, deliberate instancy." I resonated to Gerard Manley Hopkins comparing the Blessed Virgin to the air we breathe:

If I have understood,
She holds high motherhood
Towards all our ghostly good
And plays in grace her part
About man's beating heart,
Laying, like air's fine flood,
The deathdance in his blood;
Yet no part but what will
Be Christ our Saviour still. 14

With Cyrano in his last hour, I watched the Venetian-red leaves fall to the ground:

Yes — they know how to die. A little way
From the branch to the earth, a little fear
Of mingling with the common dust — and yet
They go down gracefully — fall that seems
Like flying. 15

With Carl Sandburg, I experienced Chicago as the "hog butcher of the world"; went "down to the seas again" with John Masefield; sang an ode to Shelley's west wind, "thou breath of Autumn's being"; looked with Keats into Chapman's Homer; blew bugles with Tennyson to "set the wild echoes flying"; heard the revolutionary rustling of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*.

Newman's periodic sentences entranced me, and sermons such as "The Second Spring" revealed how fact and reason could be infused with imagination and intuition. The paradoxes of Chesterton, that huge man with sombrero, swordstick, and cape, captured my fancy — from the incredible insights into Aquinas to the tantalizing, perhaps debatable "There is a Catholic way of teaching everything, even the alphabet, if only to teach it in such a way as at the same time to teach that those who learn it must not look down on those who don't."

There was all this, and much more. But it was in theology at rural Woodstock in Maryland that words took flesh, that what might have been dilettante seduction became Christian life and death. For in theology the word took on unexpected meaning. In the Old Testament, I discovered, the word is wondrously alive. As John L. McKenzie was to phrase it years later, the spoken word for the Israelites was


a distinct reality charged with power. It has power because it emerges from a source of power which, in releasing it, must in a way release itself. The basic concept of the word is the word-thing. The power of the word . . . posits the reality which it signifies. But in so doing it also posits the reality which speaks the word. No one can speak without revealing himself; and the reality which he posits is identified with himself. Thus the word is dianoetic as well as dynamic. It confers intelligibility upon the thing, and it discloses the character of the person who utters the word. 16

That is why God's word is particularly powerful.

In the New Testament, I discovered, the word as a distinct reality charged with power is fulfilled to perfection. God not only expresses Himself in human syllables; He expresses Himself in a Word that is itself a person. The same personal Word God utters from eternity. He uttered on a midnight clear — to us. "In Jesus Christ is fulfilled the word as a distinct being; as a dynamic creative entity; as that which gives form and intelligibility to the reality which it signifies; as the self-revelation of God; as a point of personal encounter between God and man." 17

The word, I learned from St. James, is a perilous thing. "We use it to bless the Lord and Father, but we also use it to curse men and women who are made in God's image" (Jas 3: 9). And still, in St. Paul's eyes, the word is an indispensable thing. "How are men and women to call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher?" (Rom 10: 14).

Words, I learned from experience, can be weapons, and words can be healing. Words can unite in friendship or sever in enmity. Words can unlock who I am or mask me from others. Two words, "Sieg Heil," bloodied the face of Europe; three words, "Here I stand," divided the body of Christendom. Words have made slaves and freed slaves, have declared war and imposed peace. Words sentence to death ("You shall be hanged by the neck") and words restore to life ("Your sins are forgiven"). Words declare a marriage dead, and words covenant a life together in love. Words charm and repel, amuse and anger, reveal and conceal, chill and warm. Words clarify and words obscure. A word from Washington rained down atomic hell on Hiroshima; words from an altar change bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ.

With all this, I feel no guilt in being a weaver of words. A word is real; a word is sacred; a word is powerful; a word is . . . I.

17 Ibid. 206
This leads to the second level of my argument; for our “word” here is not just any word, it is a liturgical word. If your experience goes back to mid-century, you remember how little the “liturgy of the word” once mattered. A brief but pungent proof: You could miss the whole liturgy of the word without having to confess it. Gloria and Credo, Epistle and Gospel and the homily — you could come in out of the cold after all these were said and done, and still “hear Mass,” still fulfill your obligation. No manual of morality did more than rap your knuckles lightly.

Why? Because the sole stress was on the sacrifice. One word alone was all-important; the consecratory word. Here was the Real Presence; here was the efficacious word, objectively infallible, utterly trustworthy, limpidly clear. No worry about the person, about reader or preacher, songstress or danseuse. No need for lips to be touched by live coals; enough that they whispered distinctly “This is my body.” The back of the priest was more symbolic than his face; for the true priest was the hidden priest, the Christ of the sacrifice.

Today’s liturgical attitude is refreshingly different, more balanced. In Vatican II’s wake, there is fresh stress on the whole word as a locus where God transpires, comes to light. Music, readings, homily, dance — God is there (or can be there), a real presence. My focus is on one of those four liturgical “words, the word that is homily.

What is the liturgical homily, the homiletic word? If you prefer chaste Roman rhetoric, you have an official definition from the Congregation of Rites in 1964: “an unfolding either of some facet of the readings of Sacred Scripture or of some other text taken from the Ordinary or from the Proper of the Mass of the day, taking into consideration either the mystery being celebrated or the special needs of the listeners.” From this text, two concerns ought to dominate the homily and its preparation: liturgy and people — this liturgy and this people. This liturgy, because in the Lectionary and the Missal we find the substance of what is to be preached: in the words of Vatican II, “the proclamation of God’s wonderful works in the history of salvation” — a proclamation that

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18 For the different modes of Christ’s presence in liturgical celebrations, see chapter I-E in the instruction *Eucharisticum mysterium* of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, May 25, 1967 (translation in Austin Flannery, O.P., ed., *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* [Northport, N.Y.: Costello, 1975] 109). Note especially the final sentence: Christ’s presence under the species of the Eucharist “is called ‘real’ not in an exclusive sense, as if the other kinds of presence were not real, but *par excellence.*” The words are taken from Paul VI’s encyclical *Mysterium fidei* (AAS 57 [1965] 764).

19 For simplicity’s sake, I shall concentrate on the homily within the Mass; what I say can be applied *mutatis mutandis* to other liturgical events, e.g., a communal penance service.

“should draw its content mainly from scriptural and liturgical sources.” This people, because in the liturgy “God’s wonderful works” are not just read, not just remembered; they are re-presented, made effectively present. In the words of the Council fathers, “the mystery of Christ ... is made present and active within us.”

The first concern, this liturgical event, the mystery, is the background for the second concern, this people, “the mystery made present.” Because it is the indispensable background for the proclamation, for the word made flesh today, I devote to it this second main point. And I suggest that here four critical demands have fashioned four problems which prevent today’s homily from being any better than yesterday’s sermon: fear of Sacred Scripture, ignorance of contemporary theology, unawareness of liturgical prayer, and lack of proper preparation. A word on each.

First, fear of Scripture. For all too many priests, the Bible is a no-no; they dare not touch it. “The exegetes have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.” What Jesus himself said, the words the Word proclaimed, the exegetes have hidden like Easter eggs, and the faithful in their paschal finery run around in circles trying to find them. And what do we come up with? What the early Church thought Jesus said or meant, or would have said if ... . Miracles are out, the Magi barely in. Was Jesus virginally conceived, or is virginal conception a physical way of expressing a spiritual reality? Did Jesus “physically” rise from the rock, or doesn’t the question make any sense any more? And — more bad news — stop looking for some specifically Christian content to morality that leaps out of the Bible; that, some moralists say, is highly dubious.

And the Old Testament? Forget it! Oust it from the rectory! It no longer announces Christ. Mary is not in Genesis 3: 15, Jesus not in Isaiah 7: 14; the priest is no longer prefigured in Melchizedek, the Mass in Malachi. The Song of Songs is secular eroticism and would be banned in Boston; the prophets preached social justice.

Scripture is indeed a mystery, if only because it is God’s plan hidden in God from eternity. But it is a mystery revealed. The word of God that is Scripture is a unique, incomparable way in which God speaks to us, reveals Himself, challenges us, graces us. Here we come to know Christ as nowhere else. That is why St. Jerome could say that ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ. Difficult as it is, Scripture is still the single most important source for any Christian preacher. Not even dogma supplants Scripture in dignity or content. As Vatican II confessed, the magisterium “is not above the word of God, but serves it ...”

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21 Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, no. 35.
22 Ibid.
23 Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, no. 10.
Let me be blunt. I have no special competence in Scripture that gives me a head start over the parish priest. We have the same sources: meditation on the word and recourse to the commentaries. Prayer and sweat. When I preached at Catholic University for the golden jubilee of patristic scholar John Quasten’s ordination, the liturgical readings emphasized wisdom. They forced me back on biblical dictionaries, on Kittel and Léon Dufour. It was there I discovered who the wise man is, and what he does that is so wise, and how he comes to be wise. When I preached to the Catholic University community on Holy Thursday, I was faced with the frustrating foot-washing Gospel. As so often, I turned to Raymond Brown’s commentary on John. From mild sweat came bright light: two interpretations of the foot-washing in Johannine circles — and both exciting. Indeed Brown destroyed some old seminary simplicities; but, like more genuine scholars, he uprooted only to plant more richly.24

A second obstacle is ignorance of theology. Theology is indispensable for the word because it is the Church’s ceaseless effort to understand the word. Once again, an obvious problem: Where do you look? Mid-century theology may have been boring, but you could trust seminary professors to do what Pius XII expected of theologians: “show how the doctrines taught by the living magisterium are found explicitly or implicitly in Scripture and in divine tradition.”25 For that you look in vain: The manuals have vanished, and each theologian has his or her theology — from Baum to Tracy, from Ruether to Rahner, from Curran to McCormick. Theologians question everything, from the first sin to the Second Coming, from abortion to bestiality. Is there any help for the homilist?

Frankly, I see nothing but band-aid remedies until we fill a neuralgic priestly need: continuing education of the clergy. The Church’s search for understanding did not grind to a halt when I took my last theology exam; nor is the meaning of God’s word preserved immobile in a Vatican capsule. Our basic Christian words, the words we preach, must be constantly recaptured, rethought: God, Christ, and Spirit; sin and redemption; church and sacraments; justice and love; death and resurrection. Books like Dulles’ Models of the Church, periodic reports like the annual “Moral Notes” in Theological Studies—these can help. But until the clergy can read theology with understanding and a critical eye, liturgical homiletics will continue to be impoverished.

24 For the homilist’s consolation, the acts of Vatican II reveal a concern not to require of the homilist “a mere exegesis of the scriptural section of the liturgy but, connected freely with the text of one of the lessons or even of another detail in the word or rite of the liturgy itself, (the homily) should rather offer instruction for the religious and moral life of the faithful . . . . During the two festival circles of the Church’s year it would be devoted more to the facts of salvation and their consequences, but outside these circles it would be all the more open for all the questions of the moral order of life. In all cases it should in some way, as mystagogical sermon, lead the faithful inwardly into the service, be in harmony with it and facilitate its inner celebration, rather than stand independently beside it” (Josef Andreas Jungmann, “Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy,” in Herbert Vorgrimler, ed., Commentary on the Documents of Vatican III [New York: Herder and Herder, 1967] 38).

25 Humani generis (Denzinger-Schonmetzer [ed. 32] 3886 [2314]).
A third obstacle: unawareness of prayer — liturgical prayer. John Gallen's thesis is well known: “What the contemporary reform of the Church’s liturgy needs most in this moment of its history is the discovery of liturgy as prayer.”

Liturgical prayer, like all prayer, is a response. The God of mystery touches me, touches the worshipping community, with His presence. The initiative comes from God — not present coldly, abstractly, distantly, but laying hold of me, laying hold of the believing community, at the very core of our being. Prayer is our response to this kind of presence, to the thrilling action of God within us.

But what manner of prayer is the liturgical response? On your answer depends in large measure the kind of homily you construct. For me, prayer is fundamentally and ultimately “sacrifice of praise.” Not that I downgrade conversion, petition, thanksgiving. I claim that all three are subsumed ritually in a glorious doxology: Glory to God . . . . In the liturgy I celebrate God. Oh, I do not minimize man or woman. I simply claim that liturgy will be a humanizing experience to the extent that, in playing before God, the human person becomes increasingly image of God. To become human is to praise God.

The point is, the homily is liturgy. In Jungmann’s strong sentence, the homily “should emanate from the consciousness that although it is freely created by the liturgist, it is liturgy itself.” And the liturgy is prayer. Conclusion? The homily is prayer. The logic is impeccable; only the meaning is debatable. When you proclaim “God’s wonderful works,” when you help re-present the mystery that is Christ, when with human words you touch the Christ-event to this particular people, what manner of prayer is this? Is it prayer at all?

An examination of conscience, then, to humble the homilist: What is your theology of prayer? Of liturgical prayer? Of homiletic prayer? Do you have one?

The fourth obstacle is the kind of devil that cannot be overcome even by prayer and fasting. To me, the unprepared homilist is a menace. I do not minimize divine inspiration; I simply suggest it is rarely allotted to the lazy. Here I resonate to a story told me some years ago at Belmont Abbey by the famed Baptist biblicist and preacher Dale Moody. A student in his Spirit course at the Louisville seminary wasn’t meeting the professor’s expectations. So Dr. Moody called him in and (in a delightful drawl I cannot reproduce) said: “Son, you’re not doin’ all that well in my course on the Holy Spirit. You been studyin’?” “Dr. Moody,” the young man replied, “I don’t have to study about the Spirit; I’m led by the Spirit.” “Son,” Moody asked, “that Spirit ever lead you to the library? If He doesn’t soon, you’re in deep trouble.”

28 Jungmann, “Completion” 38. See also Inter oecumenici 3, no. 55: If there is a set program of homilies for certain times, it should still preserve an intimate nexus with the more important times and feasts of the liturgical year or with the mystery of the redemption; “for the homily is part of the liturgy of the day.”
The homilist is in deep trouble if the Spirit does not lead him — lead him to the chapel indeed, but lead him to the library as well.

Implicit in these four obstacles is the major thrust of this second point: The mystery must be preached — God’s wonderful works in the story of salvation. From the Spirit of God moving over the waters and a loving God toiling over clay, through the first sin and the first death, through covenant after covenant to the final covenant in God’s blood, down to today’s “signs of the times,” the word must take flesh. Despite the difficulties, God’s wonderful works must be preached, especially as they surge up from Scripture and the liturgy. If they are poorly proclaimed, the liturgy will be less effective in making God’s works effectively present.

III

This leads to the third level of my argument. I have spoken of the word, and of the word made flesh in the liturgical homily. Now the crucial issue: How can the word be made flesh today? So far, the power of the word and the need for the word. Now, how do you incarnate the word for this people? How can the mystery be made present, not for the Jews of 27 or the Gentiles of 57, but for this congregation in 1987?

Here two realities come together in striking fashion: the insight of the theologian and the hunger of the people. In a typically perceptive article, Yves Congar has addressed the problem of liturgical preaching. \(^{29}\) He locates three links between word and worship. First, Christian worship is an anamnesis: it is an actualizing memory, an active re-presentation, “of the acts by which God intervened to make a covenant with us and to save us,” so that these acts “keep their operative value for the believers of all ages, who make them actual again in the Spirit when they celebrate these acts of faith and thanksgiving.”\(^{30}\) But the liturgy’s insights “are more or less veiled”; liturgical texts and forms tend to be immobilized, with rare exceptions are the same for all, whatever their condition; the connection between the Church’s sacraments and Christ’s pasch is not instantly recognizable. What the homily does is extend the immemorial symbols to a particular time and place, a particular people. \(^{31}\) The old is expressed anew; it must be, to come alive, to keep alive, to make alive.

Second, worship is a witness to faith — faith being “my response to God’s action communicated to me through his Word.”\(^{32}\) The sacraments, Aquinas


\(^{30}\) Ibid. 54

\(^{31}\) Cf. ibid. 55-56.

\(^{32}\) Ibid. 56.
insisted, are sacraments of faith. In what sense? Because, Vatican II explains the sacraments "not only presuppose faith, but by words and objects they also nourish, strengthen, and express it." But the peril of liturgy is that it can be impersonal. The homily personalizes what the rite expresses in a common and general way. It should rouse the faith of this people more personally than is possible for liturgical symbols and ritual actions.

Third, Christian worship is a spiritual sacrifice: It consists basically in accepting gratefully God's Eucharistic gift and in uniting to it the spiritual offering of our concrete existence, our total life. The specific function of the homily is not only to explain the liturgical mystery, but to bring the faithful into the mystery "by throwing light on their life so that they can unite it to this mystery." Says Congar in a startling sentence: "I could quote a whole series of ancient texts, all saying more or less that if in one country Mass was celebrated for thirty years without preaching and in another there was preaching for thirty years without the Mass, people would be more Christian in the country where there was preaching."

Theological insight is reinforced by people hunger. Our people are hurting. Not merely the millions consciously squirming in the pews, but the uncounted Christians who are hungry and do not know why. To deepen their Christian living, at times to make it endurable, the homily should throw light on their life in such a way that they can link human living to the paschal mystery. It is not primarily a matter of facts, biblical and theological information. They hurt because, on the one hand, the ritual does not express their faith experience, the symbols do not symbolize, God's wonderful works are just too wonder-full, and, on the other hand, the homilist who should bring liturgy and life together apparently does not know how. He does not speak to their hungers.

What to do? My pressing plea will force you back to my first point; my recommendation revolves around words. That first point was not a tour de force, not narcissistic autobiography. We homilists will not link worship to life unless we become translators. What that involves staggered me in 1978 when I read a remarkable article on justice as a culture problem by that fine Fordham sociologist Joseph Fitzpatrick. In part he wrote:

... I don't know whether you've read Father Andre Dupeyrat's wonderful little book, *Savage Papua*. Among the Papuans the pig is

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33 Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, no. 59.

34 Cf. Congar, "Sacramental Worship and Preaching" 58-59. See also Vatican II, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, no. 4: "In the Christian community itself, especially among those who seem to understand or believe little of what they practice, the preaching of the word is required for the very administration of the sacraments; for these are sacraments of faith, and faith is born of the word and nourished by it."

35 Congar, "Sacramental Worship and Preaching" 60.

36 Ibid. 62.
a sacred animal. The women may nurse the pigs at their breast if there is no sow around to nurse them. In our Scriptures the sacred animal is the lamb. “Behold the lamb of God.” This meant absolutely nothing to the Papuans. In order to communicate to the Papuans what “Lamb of God” meant among the Hebrews, Dupeyrat would have to say “Christ is the pig of God.” Jesus a pig! In New York? Imagine my going into the pulpit in New York and saying “Glory to God and praise, and to the Lord Jesus who is the pig of God.” Yet if I want to communicate to the Papuans the meaning that is communicated to us and to the Hebrews and to the religious tradition of the West, I have to learn what their meanings are.

This is not easy to take. There is no intrinsic relation between the Lamb and the Savior. He was born among the people for whom the lamb was the source of good and the source of clothing, the great economic basis of their life and their society. And the pig was a scavenger. In the parable of the Prodigal, the son is described as reaching a hopeless state of degradation — he was feeding pigs. The most wonderful thing a Papuan can do is to feed pigs. Note how these basic economic realities become symbols. Religious meanings become projected in them and they become the context in which our psychological and emotional response to them as religious symbols eventually gets put in place. Then if you take the symbol away and put another in its place, our religious experience starts to turn upside down.

The Papuan pig is not only instructive for missionaries; it is a paradigm for every preacher. In preaching, I must translate. God’s definitive revelation was indeed given through the divine Word, but it “uses human words that were already current and loaded with overtones from the surrounding world.” When that revelation is translated into dogma or interpreted by theology, it is not yet the preacher’s word; it is jargon-infested and culture-conditioned. I do not mean it is not true, is not instinct with profound meaning. I am simply saying that neither the sounds of ancient Samaria nor the rhetoric of Rome or Rahner can pour forth from today’s pulpit unchanged, unaltered, unconverted. Not if we intend to be heard.

My constant question must be: What do these words say to this congregation? Karl Rahner put it concisely: “The preacher should be able to hear his own sermon with the ears of his actual audience.”

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39 Ibid. 21.

40 Ibid. 25.
expressed the same idea more captivatingly: "I do not know what I have said until I understand what you have heard." What does this audience hear when I say "church"? Institution? Community? Sacrament? Herald? Servant? Disciple? Does their experience of "church" conjure up the qualities of love and tenderness I associate with my physical mother? And "holy" has taken on triumphalistic overtones for Christians who see themselves, their community, and especially Rome as more sinful than saintly.

Take a more likely example, the monosyllable that makes the world go round: love. Here, if anywhere, the committed Christian confronts confusion. On the one hand, the whole Christian "thing" is love, or it is hoax. On this, God's own word rings loud and clear: God is Love; whatever exists, man or mountain, blue marlin or robin redbreast, stems from love divine; out of love God gave His only Son to earth and cross; on the twin command of love rest the law and the prophets; love towers above faith and hope; unless I love my brothers and sisters, I cannot claim to love God.

On the other hand, the word "love" is frightfully mangled, manipulated. Dr. James Shannon put it vividly to a Christian Family Movement seminar: We use love to describe "the motive for the voluntary death of Jesus Christ on Calvary, the subject matter of hard pornographic movies, the bond of affection between Flower Children at Woodstock, the intimate union of a husband and a wife, and the unbuttoned promiscuity of Fire Island on a weekend." And so he suggested a moratorium on the word "love"; during the moratorium, experiment with other words, words that say precisely what we mean. I would add: Let not the liturgist sell short those who just sing about love — where the naked syllables ("When you say love, you've said it all") are admittedly inadequate, but the beat, the rhythm, the music makes for meaning.

Admit it: The homiletic movement from Scripture through theology and prayer to the present liturgical movement is a frightening function, a dismaying task. It is not simply a matter of escaping the malapropism — not imitating the acting mayor of New York City who assured a Harlem audience: "My face may be white, but my heart is as black as yours." What is time-consuming and soul-searing in each homily's preparation is that I must (1) grasp the genuine meaning of a word as it emerged from the mouth of Jeremiah or the pen of Paul or the contemplation of a Johannine community, (2) touch it to the paschal mystery celebrated by the Church, and (3) transform it so that the word takes on the personal and cultural clothes of this moment, of these believers. Here is the agony of preparation, here its occasional ecstasy.

I am not boasting when I confess that I consume four hours in preparation for every minute in the pulpit. Some of it goes into research, sheer information. In preaching on the Bread of Life, for example, it was important for me to discover that Jesus' discourse in John 6 is colored by two themes; scholars call

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41 National Catholic Reporter, Sept. 15, 1972, 2.
them the sapiential and the sacramental. Jesus feeds us with his word and he feeds us with his flesh; the "bread from heaven" which "gives life to the world" (Jn. 6: 33) is God's revelation and Christ's flesh. Some of those hours are spent in mulling, over days at times — what this scriptural data might have to say to a community living the paschal mystery today — until a promising central idea bursts forth. Ah yes: In today's context of human hungers, talk about the Bread of Life will sound awfully empty, suspiciously hollow, unless we who feed on the Eucharistic Christ are ourselves eucharists for the life of the world. It is a question of real presence. If I am to be a eucharist for the life of the world, my feeding on the flesh of Christ must take me from church to world. I must begin to be present to others, present where they are, present in ways that respond to their needs, to their hungers. I must be present — not merely my money or my mind — somewhat hidden at times but always totally committed, because as a Christian, as a Christ, my life is love and only love can bring life.

From that point my hours are given over to . . . words. Precisely here is a preacher's crucifixion. A word is not an entry in Webster; it is colored by living experience. The Eucharist is indeed a bread that gives life; but when you hear the word "life," you hear something quite different from the 200,000 skin-and-bones starving who "live" in the streets of Calcutta, build tiny fires to cook scraps of food, defecate at curbstones, curl up against a wall to sleep — perhaps to die. Yes, a word is real, is sacred, is powerful, but inevitably a word is . . . I. This makes a double demand on a preacher: I must sense what my people hear, and I must say what I mean.

But clarity is not enough. A homily is not a catechism or a manual of dogma or a textbook in theology. The word flings forth a challenge; it is a summons to decision; God wants a reply. In Semmelroth's words, "in the word of preaching the flood of historical redemptive events is grasped and brought before man for his decision. Again and again men are addressed in preaching and moved to fashion their lives in accordance with what is said."42 But really, are they so moved? God's grace is indeed all-powerful, but it dashes against two powerful Catholic adversaries: a homilist dead below the larynx, and a minimal vocabulary dominated by abstract nouns ending in -tion. If I am to persuade, my whole person should be aflame with what I proclaim. If I am to move, the words I utter must be chosen with care and love, with sweat and fire. That is why, before I set pen to paper, I listen to Beethoven or Tchaikovsky, Vivaldi or Mary Lou Williams, Edith Piaf or the theme from "Doctor Zhivago"; I read poetry aloud, Shakespeare or Hopkins, T.S. Eliot or e.e. cummings — something to turn me on, so that the end result will not sound like a Roman rescript or a laundry list. To challenge, the word must come alive.

Ultimately, I am the word, the word that is heard. And — I say it fearfully — it is not a clever rhetorician the people need, but a holy homilist. Holy in

what sense? Because aware that I am only a word, not the word: If God does not speak through me, I am “a noisy gong, a clanging cymbal” (1 Cor. 13: 1). Because my homily is a prayer: In preparation and pulpit, I stand before God in praise of Him, not of my own rhetorical perfection. Because aware of my own weakness: I too need the word I preach, I too need forgiveness, I too am vulnerable, I am a wounded healer. Because, like my hearers, I too ceaselessly murmur “I believe, Lord, help my unbelief.” Because I am in love: with the things of God, with the people of God, with God Himself. Because the hungers of God’s family are my hungers: When they bleed, I weep. Unless some of this breaks through, the word may indeed be proclaimed, but it will hardly be heard. The word is... I.

Dear preachers actual and to be: The word can be made flesh today. But only on condition that we take the word seriously, handle it sacredly. Every word: the scriptural word, the sacramental word, the secular word, the homiletic word. For all our pulpit problems, I am not disheartened. I take heart from two disparate sources: the Christian faithful and four lines of verse. In 46 years of priestly preaching, not once have I encountered an unresponsive congregation, not once a believing community that could not be stirred. And on those occasions when I have been most acutely aware of a chasm, of a gulf that yawns between the audience and myself, between their experience and mine, I draw Christian hope from Rod McKuen:

I make words for people I've not met.
those who will not turn to follow after me.
It is for me a kind of loving
A kind of loving, for me.⁴³

Ten Points for Preparation and Delivery of Sunday Sermons

George R. Fitzgerald, C.S.P.

George R. Fitzgerald, a Paulist priest, served for seven years as an instructor in homiletics at the Catholic University of America. This article is reprinted from A Practical Guide To Preaching by George R. Fitzgerald, C.S.P., copyright © 1980 by the Missionary Society of St. Paul the Apostle. Used by permission of Paulist Press.

1. Make Initial Check.
   (a) Next Sunday's texts. Do this on Monday. Read over several times.
   (b) Review next week's schedule. Is it heavy? What will Saturday be like? How are you feeling emotionally? Physically? Block out three or four hours for preparation. (As you become more disciplined and confident in your preaching, four hours will not always be necessary. For some occasions, more than four hours will be a must.)
   (c) World events. TV shows. Try to get a sense of what media or world events might shape the attitudes of your congregation during the week.
   (d) Congregation. What will it be like? Who will be there?
   (e) Liturgical Time and Event (Advent, Lent, Pentecost, Ordinary Time). How can this shape my message?
   (f) Jottings. Jot down ideas from texts, world events, parish happenings during the week — or anticipated events. Jot down thoughts, feelings, hints, reflections which come to mind during the week.
   (g) What ideas come to mind immediately after reading the Scripture selections: stories, examples, associations, comparisons, quotations?

2. Exegete.
   (a) Read at least a couple of commentaries. Compare/contrast them. Do new themes or ideas emerge after reading the commentaries? What did the
writer intend by the passage? Can a news event fit into this? Does the commentary address any specific pastoral problem? Jot down all possible focuses or themes you could preach on after exegeting the passage.

(b) Delineate your topic and subject. Agree on one main focus, one subject, one topic. Keep the focus narrow, and let it dominate the entire sermon.

(c) Exegete your own life over the past week. What areas of faith, hope, and love emerge as strengths or weaknesses?

3. Personal Experience.

(a) Search through your own personal experiences to which the Scripture message or theme speaks. Jot down reminiscences or memories and stories — your story, someone else's story.

(b) Decide how you want to open your sermon. What will be your attention-gainer? Your "ho-hum crasher"? Ask: "What do I want to be the result of this sermon on my congregation? What's my goal, my aim, my purpose? If possible, get laypeople in the parish and/or other priests to discuss the passages with you.

4. Meditate, Reflect, Pray.

(a) Take the stories, memories, exegesis, and events of the week and reflect on the ways in which God met you in them. Make some of this the focus of your daily and weekly meditation and reflection.

(b) How do these Scripture passages reflect, similarly, the ways in which God reveals himself to you today — heals, forgives you, is your light, raises you up, etc.?

5. Structure the Sermon.

(a) Outline and block out. Decide on the introduction. Relate this to the curiosity of the listeners, catching and holding interest.

(b) Decide on key words to be repeated throughout the sermon to keep the congregation focused on the theme (observe TV ads: they repeat the product name or catchy phrases for you to remember).

(c) Develop central theme with clear examples: Point one, e.g., point two, e.g., point three, e.g.

(d) Amplify theme with these examples.

(e) Use direct, clear, simple language. Keep it concrete. Use image words.

(f) Cut out theological or philosophical jargon. Be sensitive to avoid sexist language.

(g) For the conclusion, return to the introduction. Summarize and exhort. Connect conclusion to introduction.
6. **Write/Rewrite.**

(a) Develop the points in the section above. More from outline to prose development. Keep asking: Could I say this more simply? With more imagery? Review, rewrite, cut. “The wastebasket is the writer’s best friend.” Cut — even if it means parting with a gem. Ask: Does this sentence or word hinder or help my sermon? Remember: attention not won in the first couple of minutes is never won at all.

(b) Get rid of the “if’s,” “let us,” “shoulds” and “oughts.”

7. **Stick to Your Scripture Passage.**

(a) Use the Scriptures as they are given to you (as an ordinary rule). Probe them. Do not hop, skip and jump all over the Bible to find texts similar to the one you have. Occasionally you might refer to the previous or following passages to context your thought, or allude to the way another evangelist tells the same story. This should be done only in passing rather than in development.

(b) Avoid excessive Scripture quoting except simply, insofar as it supports and backs up your theme.

8. **Read Aloud.**

(a) Practice in front of a mirror. If possible tape or video-tape. Practice over the public address system. Be conscious of your voice.

(b) Underline words you want to emphasize. Keep refining the sermon as you listen to yourself. Get a feel of delivery and a sense of gestures — when they should occur.

(c) Keep asking: Will the congregation know what I mean when I use this or that word? Does it deal with real life? Or is it esoteric? Unrelated? Is it about their life or speculation about life? Remember: theology often speculates. The Bible deals with concrete circumstances of human life and the ways in which God breaks in.

9. **Conclusion.**

(a) Know it well. Concentrate on it. A bad conclusion can ruin a good sermon. Beautiful structures of words and ideas collapse around bad conclusions.

(b) Relate the conclusion to the beginning. Bring the congregation back to your opening. Summarize and exhort, offering practical applications.
10. Critique.

Arrange for a variety of people — young, elderly, married, single, middle-aged, from various education levels — to give you feedback on your sermons. Does your preaching reach them? Do you get the point across? What concrete suggestions can they make to improve your preaching as a pastoral event? Consider video-taping some of the liturgies at which you are the preacher. This will let you see and hear yourself as the congregations experience you.
From Pulpit to Pew: Communicating the Message

George R. Fitzgerald, C.S.P.

George R. Fitzgerald, a Paulist priest, served for seven years as an instructor in homiletics at the Catholic University of America. This article is reprinted from A Practical Guide To Preaching by George R. Fitzgerald, C.S.P., copyright © 1980 by the Missionary Society of St. Paul the Apostle. Used by permission of Paulist Press.

If ya gonna preach...
Read yourself full
Think yourself clear
Pray yourself hot
and then
Let yourself go!

A Black Preacher

"Faith, then, comes through hearing, and what is heard is the word of Christ. I ask you, have they not heard?"

Rom. 10: 17-18

"I never hear a word Father says. He keeps his head down and mumbles. Why does he bother to preach? I don't even try to listen anymore. It's too much work."

A devout Catholic woman said this to me. She's no exception. Sunday after Sunday, congregations struggle to hear the words of the preacher. Once upon a time, people in the pews would complain that they couldn't hear the priest. The advent of microphones should have solved that problem. It hasn't. Microphones merely amplify the mumbling. Pew sitters still complain.

Way back with Aristotle, people understood the crucial elements for good communication: (1) speaker, (2) speech, (3) audience. Whether delivered from pulpit or podium, desk or deck, classroom or coliseum, attention to all three was a must. Sadly, the audience has too long been neglected.
Communication in the Mass Media

Much is being said about communication today. Daily, Americans listen to masters of the art. ABC, NBC, CBS and PBS bring clear, concise, styled language into our living rooms. Short comments on the news from Eric Sev­ereid, Rod MacLeish, Howard K. Smith, Harry Reasoner and John Chan­cellor are models of syntax, imagery, style and precision. TV also bombards us with junk fare. But the junk is well presented — often convincingly — even though the commentators are reading from a teleprompter or "idiot" cards. Specials, documentaries and drama impress on us the genius of mass media experts. Theirs is a secular ministry of verbal communication, but preachers would do well to imitate their expertise. The object is to get their message across in the most attractive and persuasive way possible. Communication involves both message and mood. It entails not only correct and distinct pronunciation of words in a voice that can be adequately heard, but also encompasses the transfer of emotional color and emphasis from one person to another. When either mood or meaning suffers, communication fails.

Religious Communication

Sacred communication is an attempt to interpret God's gestures to us. The preacher communicates from the pulpit and altar to help people meet Jesus in a saving way. Preaching is saying something about Jesus and ourselves. It is to proclaim what God the Father has done and said through Jesus about God's action in our lives. Preaching is done to give, restore and renew life in the hearer. To do that, we use words, symbols, gestures, signs and silence. As soon as the preacher steps in front of the people, they expect him to say something about God's saving deeds. Because communication is an act and a process, it does not happen just up there in your brain. It moves out of the brain and becomes part of all who hear. The sermon will be received as either negative or positive, according to the ability of your listener to translate your words into images shaped out of his or her needs.

Ministry (not just preaching) is synonymous with communication. Reli­gious ministry's purpose is to help the receiver of the ministry feel that God is near — that he cares, that there is some union or covenant, or communion, with God. The word communication has many cousins: "communion," "community," "communize."

A religious communicator helps his listener to feel at one with God, him­sself, and others. He brings them into union with God through words, images and moods, just as consecrated bread comes into people's lives as Communion with Jesus. A preacher who mumbles, cannot be heard, is inarticulate, unclear and incoherent, cannot expect to be "at one" with his listeners. Neither can he hope to help the congregation be at one with God. Congregations simply turn off the preacher as they would turn off the TV set or radio when there is no kinship of word or mood.
Much in our society focuses attention on the art of communication. There are increasing demands for the preaching person to take more seriously his role as communicator. Liturgy's revival, Eastern prayer, yoga, and body cults make the congregation more attentive to “body language” — what a preacher is saying, symbolically, by his gestures, postures, eye contact (or lack of it). Where is he looking? “Why is he looking down at the pulpit during the entire sermon when I'm out here? He's speaking about the joy of Jesus but he looks like a sad sack. He’s talking about being free in the Lord, but he's as tense as piano wire. Why does he keep rubbing his hands together as if they were sticks being frictioned for fire?”

Like it or not, body communication helps or hinders the message. President Woodrow Wilson put it in a nutshell. Reflecting on his teaching years at Princeton he said: “My strongest impression is that of the infinite capacity of the human mind to resist information.”

**Pastoral Ministry as Communication**

All pastoral ministry is basically communication. It is an attempt to reveal the Christian faith and its freeing grace. The prime goal of the healing and helping profession is to enable people to communicate more freely with God and one another — to be “at one” with God, at one with oneself, at one with others, to share joys, griefs, faith, doubts, so as to feel part of, and a recipient of, God’s saving acts within the community of believers.

A priest who shares his own faith with his congregation does more than tell what he believes; he encourages others to respond by sharing their faith. He taps the faith already in their hearts. He helps them to attain harmony with the Spirit already there. He attunes them to listen to the God praying within them.

A family counselor enables members of a troubled family to communicate with one another so that barriers are broken down. A speech therapist does more than correct stuttering or lisping; he puts new content into a person's self-image and thus opens new ways of relating to others. A preacher who communicates how he senses God's love in everyday life may free others to say how they find God there, too.

By virtue of ministry, then, the ministerial person is, by vocation, a communicator. Ministry is communication and communication is ministry. Jesus is God the Father's communication.

Take a look at your life as a ministerial person and you will see that communication is not just a pulpit event.

You awaken, turn on the radio, and hear the news of the day. *Good Morning, America* and the *Today Show* immediately plunge you into human events — tragedies, wars, fires, famines, floods, earthquakes, snowstorms, kidnapings, riots around the world. People tell their stories — how they fought
cancer with hope, how they stopped smoking, why jogging is like a religious experience, how one person began a worldwide movement to help children who have cerebral palsy. Someone tells us how to cook a gourmet meal with vegetables only, or how personal faith kept hope alive after the loss of a child who died of leukemia.

At breakfast, if you live with other ministerial people, you might talk about plans for the day. "I'm going to spend the day in the hospital participating in a workshop on new approaches to ministering to the terminally ill," or "I'm meeting with the neighborhood ministerial association to explore ways to reach city officials about garbage not being collected in our poor, blighted areas."

You might then look at the newspaper. At some point in the day, you read a book (communication through the printed word), listen to a cassette on preaching to children (communication through the spoken word at long range), then write a rough draft of your upcoming sermon (communication through literary expression for anticipated communication).

The phone rings. On the other end you hear the voice of a desperate woman whose marriage is on the rocks. The doorbell sounds. A relatively calm young man asks to speak to you. During the conversation you size him up by his body language. He is emotionally distraught, tense, and angry. He masks his feelings by trying to be cool. By simply listening and watching, except to nod occasionally or to say "I understand," you communicate acceptance and caring. You establish some "union" or "communion" with him. Your communication of understanding and caring frees him to speak to you truthfully so that you can help him.

And so it is. The day goes on: meetings, talks, homilies, a chat on the street with a parishioner who introduces you to a stranger. Some routine calls. That evening you anoint a dying person. The sacraments are a special kind of communication, through sign and symbol, of the presence of Christ.

Reflecting that night, you realize: "My whole ministry is communication." And then you wonder "What will I preach about this Sunday?" as you nod off to sleep to communicate in your dreams.

**Communication Theory:**

**Source, Encoding, Signal, Decoding, Congregation**

Communication theories abound. The preacher's ministry is helped if he understands at least one of them. The Shannon-Weaver model has five elements to it. (1) The source: that from which (or whom) the message comes — in other words, the preacher. He might decide to use slides, films, tapes, or his own
words, but they are all still part of the source. Then there is (2) encoding: putting the idea into words. Obviously the words make the difference between darkness and light. What words will say best what I want my congregation to hear? It is at this point that the preacher decides whether he will use simple language, images, stories, technical language, theological or psychological jargon. He may decide to be mainly non-verbal: show a picture, flourish a banner, or even use pantomime.

Now the preacher moves into (3) the signal: that is, the carrier of the message. First and obvious are the body parts which God gave us: our lips, tongue, larynx, resonating chambers, etc., which generate the sound. The better tuned up and synchronized these are, the clearer the message. Electrical equipment such as microphones and amplifiers are all part of this.

Through all of this there is the work of (4) decoding the message. This is crucial. The audience or congregation has to do this. This is the point at which the listener makes contact with the source, the preacher. Decoding ministerial communication is critical.

For example, you might decide to encode your sermon in “rock” idiom for teenagers, using their language, music, banners or multimedia. That’s fine for youngsters. But what about older members of the congregation? You may be talking to the wall. The elders have no way to decode this. The words and images are too alien to their understanding of the Gospel. You might subvert your message entirely and reach only a few. A constant challenge in preaching is to encode a message so that the majority of people can decode its meaning.

Last is the destination, or (5) congregation. Your destination as ministerial communicator may range from the lone person sitting across from you in the parlor to the throngs in the pews. To get the message across, the speaker has to know his destination. An exchange of roles occurs at this point. The preacher must put himself into his hearers’ shoes. The congregation has to say, on the other hand, “What would I be saying if I were in his place? What does he mean by that word? Does it mean to him what it means to me? What do ‘eschatological,’ ‘consubstantiation,’ and ‘eternal principle’ mean?”

A recent example comes to mind. Prior to the televised funeral of Pope Paul VI, one channel interviewed a bishop who said that Pope Paul’s greatest contribution was his respect for “natural life.” The bishop didn’t say what he meant by “natural life.” A Protestant person who was watching TV with me asked: “What does he mean by ‘natural life’? Protection of nature, like ecology? Or is he referring to abortion?” I had to answer, “I don’t know.”

I suspected but I didn’t know. In this case, since this bishop wanted to say something specific about Pope Paul’s greatest contribution, he should have communicated more clearly and said exactly what he meant. It was a good case of the source not sizing up the destination. “Natural life” can mean anything from amoeba to zebra, Adam to Zoraster.
David K. Berlo's SMCR Model has four basic concepts of communication: (1) Source (2) Message (3) Channel and (4) Receiver. Like other models, it combines some of all. For Berlo, the preacher, or source, cannot be discussed apart from his communication skills, attitudes, knowledge and the social-culture system in which he was raised.

The message has elements, structure, content, treatment and code. Translated, that means words, sentences, ideas, pictures, music, banners, etc. The way the preacher brings all of these together and organizes the inter-relationship between words and music, banners and visual aids relates to the structure of the elements.

The preacher's central idea determines its content. How does he bring all the elements together to get the listeners to focus on his core message — what he wants them to take from the pew into their homes?

Treatment is the way in which the preacher weaves the web of decisions that determines his content, structure, delivery and personal style. The encoding process in the sermon is the search for persuasive, precise language, illustrations, symbols and images to express the central idea.

The channel of his sermon is simply the “what” he will use to get the message to its destination. Phone? Letter? Senses? Taste? Smell? Body contact? Microphone? Tape recorder? This is the dangerous area. Gimmickry is likely to rear its ugly head at this point. It is the “make or break” point. It is at this juncture that the congregation puts up the most resistance and feels manipulated. It’s at this moment that the congregation sizes up the preacher as real or phony.

**Proclamation as Receivership**

Berlo's theory focuses last on the receiver. This is the congregation. It is in the area of receivership that an interacting occurs. The receiver also has to have listening skills, attitudes, and knowledge. Like the source, the congregation lives in a social and cultural system. Because communication is an interaction process (to become “in-union” with someone else) there is always interaction going on between listener and source. There is constant interplay. The congregation is thinking thoughts — some good, some bad — about the preacher: “Gee, he's good,” or, “I should have stayed in bed!” Rustling in the pews, fidgeting with purses, mulling over the missalettes, wondering who that attractive couple is — these occur here.

The preacher enters into a reverse role. He also becomes a receiver as he observes the pew-receivers. Their facial expressions tell him something; their grimaces, nods, twitching, attention, silence and fidgeting are cueing the
preacher in on their mood: “I'm with you, baby,” or, “Man, sit down!” So the primary receiver (the congregation) is always bringing to the process of communication its own messages, attitudes, openness, withdrawal, antagonisms, boredom — its own knowledge of Scripture, the world, its own pre-conceptions, social attitudes, prejudices, biases, preferences. In a pluralistic congregation, source and receiver may have basic, differing identifications.

This is borne out by a recent conversation with a friend who lives in a suburban parish of a large city noted for its many universities. The educational level of the parish is high. Almost all residents are college graduates; many are professionals: doctors, lawyers, high-level government employees. Many priests from Africa and Asia assist in this parish on Sundays.

My friend complains that it is difficult to understand the English of the assisting priests. For one thing, they use microphones badly, amplifying their halting English. My friend’s further criticism is that these preachers do not understand the culture in which they are living — our culture. They impose their own categories on the congregation. The people feel patronized.

One preacher always speaks as if he is teaching catechism to African children living in remote villages. He cannot identify culturally with his congregation in the United States. A basic ingredient of communication falls by the wayside: interaction. The source lives in a vastly different world than the receiver. Add to this all the other ingredients that are lacking — language, structure, treatment, etc. — and the result is that very little proclamation is taking place.

While this is a whole new issue which requires treatment in another forum, suffice to say that, from the point of view of preaching, it poses a serious pastoral problem.

Many courses in homiletics are entitled along the lines of “Preaching: Verbal Communication” or “The Art of Sacred Communication.” This is good, for it announces preaching as communication, as art.

One layman who teaches communication as a dramatic art form describes good preaching in five steps. He calls them the “psychologically motivated sequence.” It is the unfolding of an idea. This theory is helpful because of its simplicity.

**“Ho-Hum” Crashers; Attention**

There are five steps. The first is (1) attention. This is what “grabs” people. It can be an incident, narrative, image or story. Someone else has called it a “ho-hum” crasher. This appeals to the power of image and imagination in our lives. Our imagination never goes to sleep. Even when the congregation is getting in a catnap during the sermon, imagination is working furiously: daydreams, fantasies, building castles in the sky. The story or incident is an attempt
to crash through all the “ho-hums” in the congregation, to stir their immediate
interests, clear out the cobwebs, dissipate the area between wakefulness and
sleep. The opener in a sermon has to cause the listener to say: “Hmm., I think
I’ll listen.”

Bible characters, an incident from one’s life, a dramatic occurrence during
the week, a statement of self-interest to the congregation — any of these could
be used as attention-getters. The stronger and more direct — the simpler the
attention-getter — the better. “Ho-hum” crashers should revolve around
people, places, happenings, or conversations between characters in Scripture.
People are moved by hearing what events and happenings shape the lives of
others. People identify strongly with other people, places, and events. That is
what feeds us in our lives; it is what feeds our faith. In a negative way, it’s what
feeds gossip columnists. In a positive way, it’s what attracts people to Abigail
Van Buren (“Dear Abby”) and Ann Landers. Knowing the Jesus event and the
people in his life feeds our faith. Attention-getters are about concrete human
events and lives. This is the power of the parable, the myth, the story, the fairy
tale. They are concrete; they appeal to our imagination. Logical or abstract
syllogisms in preaching may feed one’s intellect but rarely nourish one’s heart.

Need

Next in line to attention is (2) need. When the preacher shares an expe­
rience that makes the congregation want to hear more, it is because the listener
feels that what he hears could make a difference in his or her life. Thus is a need
fulfilled. When the preacher touches deeply where the congregation hurts,
fears, despairs or hopes, he has touched “need.”

For example, the preacher may describe an experience of sin that is
universal: the sin of greed. This is rooted in human nature. Most people will
listen. Another universal need is to experience freedom from fear. How does
the preacher touch the need of the congregation — rich or poor, young or old,
lettered or unlettered — to feel loved, forgiven, to feel part of something bigger
than oneself?

This is the problem of loneliness versus communal sharing. When the
preacher is talking about something in life that affects everyone deeply, people
will sit on the edges of their seats and all ears will perk. Abortion, birth control,
infallibility, obedience to authority — all these topics have their place in pas­
toral preaching. However, I’d venture to say that for most people in the pews,
these issues are not crucial to their daily lives, and thus they create little or no
need to listen.

Satisfaction

Next in the motivation sequence is (3) satisfaction. Once you establish a
need in someone, you then try to satisfy it. Pills, meditation cults, drugs,
alcohol - these fulfill some deep need in their users: to escape from or to dull pain, to experience a sense of otherness or to hide from fear. In some way these crutches are salvific and freeing. Only when the congregation experiences a need to be saved can the preacher speak effectively of a Savior.

**Visualization**

Satisfaction relates closely to (4) visualization and image. In the Christian way of things, God becomes visible in Jesus. Jesus shows us the way to salvation by telling stories and parables. The Gospel writers did the same. They create images in my mind. If I were to ask you to accept a way of life in my preaching and to take some action to live that life, then I would want you to visualize what will happen if you don't do this. When the listener in the pew cannot visualize "what would happen if," then it is likely that he will continue doing or living exactly as he is now. Living differently (conversion) needs to be considered better or more fulfilling than living the way one is now. It is the power of the word, the imagination, that joins the Holy Spirit in moving the congregation.

**Action**

Finally, the preacher moves toward (5) action. This is simply encouragement: to speak, pray, act, give, and live in the new directions brought about by the interior movement toward conversion which the sermon has prompted. This encouragement can be a simple pastoral urging to try to find a new direction, to work during the week to see things differently and to try to experience the difference in your life.

For example, there are many stories in Scripture where Jesus speaks to outsiders. Among them are the Canaanite and Samaritan women. He did so usually at the risk of scandalizing the onlookers. These people didn't fit into the category of the "saved" or "worthy." In the context of a sermon, some gentle pastoral encouragement to work toward combating prejudice in the language we use with each other, or toward accepting ethnic or racial groups, is a simple step toward conversion. To pray for a melting away of prejudice or hatred or the habit of stereotyping people is an action step. To correct our children who use words such as "spic," "nigger," "ginzo," or "polack" is a move toward conversion of heart, toward building up a community of love and care. The language we use begins to make a difference in the way we see people and relate to them. This conversion can be a grace that leads to more sensitive and caring relationships, toward understanding Jesus' teaching "to love one another."

I am always impressed with the ways in which businesses train employees on various levels to be more effective communicators. Preaching courses could use their methods without in any way violating the integrity of sacred elocution.
These courses involve appealing presentation, the reaction of the audience to the message, ways and means by which people are moved to listen so that a product can be sold. Congregations have every right to expect that those who preach to them will value communication as an art, even more than those who work to sell commercial products.

**Common Speech Faults**

Finally, a few points about common speech faults. The paperback *A Handbook for Lectors* by William Carr (Paulist Press) articulates common problems of communication — problems which stand in the way of distinctness. Some are obvious: too much voice, too little voice, talking too rapidly, dropping the ends of sentences and words, ellision of words, contraction, drawling, the insertion of "ah, ah, ah," poor enunciation and adding syllables or letters. Poor vocalization qualities (strident, flat, weak voices), inertia, bad pitch, bad emphasis, lulling speech, non-modulated words, bad pause habits, no change of rate, jerkiness, lack of feeling — all of these are the common speech faults on which our message travels to the people.

They are common faults. Asking someone to criticize your speech or listening to yourself on a tape-recorder can be helpful. The first step in improving speech for better communication, of course, is the desire to improve it — and then to practice.

Without this desire, the preacher stands in danger of speaking to deaf ears.

**Conclusion**

It is a happy day when congregations throughout the country grow ever more critical of poor sermons. Expectations are rising. Seminaries, in taking preaching more seriously, are offering a wider range of courses in homiletics. It's a pity, though, that preaching is still not yet on a par with academic courses such as dogma or Scripture. What we need are more preaching courses — from basic speech and communication methods, to preaching content. Preaching is often a course the seminarian "squeezes" into his curriculum. One course suffices before ordination. Why not a preaching course each year of seminary education, beginning with basic communication and writing skills to proclamation? Why not allocate more academic funds for larger homiletics faculties? As priests get busier and busier, there may be a tendency for the sermon to get short shrift. "I don't have time to prepare" is still a common complaint. The preacher is asked to spend his days and weeks in committee meetings, group discussions, and new forms of pastoral outreach on a scale never before so broad. His seminary curriculum prepares him intellectually with the best in theological background. Why not preaching and writing? Seminaries must strive for ways to teach skills of translating the content into words and images
which will move congregations to faith. Without such an effort, noble movements such as evangelization and catechesis are in peril, and a generation hence may spell the end of religious literacy among a broad spectrum of American Catholics.

Those who are serious about buttressing the art of preaching can take comfort in words of an interested critic of the preaching scene: “Not all are ordained to teach. But all are ordained to preach.”

In short, those commissioned to preach are commissioned to communicate.
Concerts in churches

CONGREGATION FOR DIVINE WORSHIP

Prot. N. 1252/87

I. Music in Churches Other than During Liturgical Celebrations

1. The interest shown in music is one of the marks of contemporary culture. The ease with which it is possible to listen at home to classical works, by means of radio, records, cassettes and television, has in no way diminished the pleasure of attending live concerts, but on the contrary has actually enhanced it. This is encouraging, because music and song contribute to elevating the human spirit.

The increase in the number of concerts in general has in some countries given rise to a more frequent use of churches for such events. Various reasons are given for this: local needs, where for example it is not easy to find suitable places; acoustical considerations, for which churches are often ideal; aesthetic reasons, namely the desire to perform in beautiful surroundings; reasons of fittingness, that is to present the works in the setting for which they were originally written; purely practical reasons, for example facilities for organ recitals: in a word, churches are considered to be in many ways apt places for holding a concert.

2. Alongside this contemporary development a new situation has arisen in the Church.

The Scholae cantorum have not had frequent occasion to execute their traditional repertory of sacred polyphonic music within the context of a liturgical celebration.

For this reason, the initiative has been taken to perform this sacred music in church in the form of a concert. The same has happened with Gregorian chant, which has come to form part of concert programs both inside and outside of church.

Another important factor emerges from the so-called “spiritual concerts,” so termed because the music performed in them can be considered as religious, because of the theme chosen, or on account of the nature of the texts set to music, or because of the venue for the performance.
Such events are in some cases accompanied by readings, prayers, and moments of silence. Given such features they can almost be compared to a "devotional exercise."

3. The increased numbers of concerts held in churches have given rise to doubts in the minds of pastors and rectors of churches as to the extent to which such events are really necessary.

A general opening of churches for concerts could give rise to complaints by a number of the faithful, yet on the other hand an outright refusal could lead to some misunderstanding.

Firstly it is necessary to consider the significance and purpose of a Christian church. For this, the Congregation for Divine Worship considers it opportune to propose to the episcopal conferences, and insofar as it concerns them, to the national commissions of liturgy and music, some observations and interpretatoons of the canonical norms concerning the use of churches for various kinds of music: music and song, music of religious inspiration, and music of nonreligious character.

4. At this juncture it is necessary to reread recent documents which treat of the subject, in particular the Constitution on the Liturgy, the Instruction *Musicam sacram* of March 5, 1967, the Instruction *Liturgicae instaurationes* of September 5, 1970, in addition to the prescriptions of the Code of Canon Law, canons 1210, 1213, and 1222.

   In this present letter the primary concern is with musical performances outside of the celebration of the liturgy.

   The Congregation for Divine Worship wishes in this way to help individual bishops to make valid pastoral decisions, bearing in mind the sociocultural situation of the area.

II. Points for Consideration

*The character and purpose of churches*

5. According to tradition as expressed in the Rite for the Dedication of a Church and Altar, churches are primarily places where the people of God gather, and are "made one as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are one, and are the Church, the temple of God built with living stones, in which the Father is worshipped in spirit and in truth." Rightly so, from ancient times the name "church" has been extended to the building in which the Christian community unites to hear the word of God, to pray together, to receive the sacraments, to celebrate the eucharist, and to prolong its celebration in the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament (see Order of the Dedication of a Church, chapter II, no. 1).

Churches, however, cannot be considered simply as public places for any kind of meeting. They are sacred places, that is, "set apart" in a permanent way for divine worship by their dedication and blessing.
As visible constructions, churches are signs of the pilgrim Church on earth; they are images that proclaim the heavenly Jerusalem, places in which are actualized the mystery of the communion between man and God. Both in urban areas and in the countryside, the church remains the house of God, and the sign of his dwelling among men and women. It remains a sacred place, even when no liturgical celebration is taking place.

In a society disturbed by noise, especially in the big cities, churches are also an oasis where people gather, in silence and in prayer, to seek peace of soul and the light of faith.

That will be possible only insofar as churches maintain their specific identity. When churches are used for ends other than those for which they were built, their role as a sign of the Christian mystery is put at risk, with more or less serious harm to the teaching of the faith and to the sensitivity of the People of God, according to the Lord's words: "My house is a house of prayer" (Lk. 19: 46).

**Importance of Sacred Music**

6. Sacred music, whether vocal or instrumental, is of importance. Music is sacred "insofar as it is composed for the celebration of divine worship and possesses integrity of form" (Musicam sacram, no. 4a). The Church considers it a "treasure of inestimable value, greater even than that of any other art," recognizing that it has a "ministerial function in the service of the Lord" (see Liturgy constitution, no. 112); and recommending that it be "preserved and fostered with great care" (Liturgy constitution, no. 114).

Any performance of sacred music which takes place during a celebration, should be fully in harmony with that celebration. This often means that musical compositions which date from a period when the active participation of the faithful was not emphasized as the source of the authentic Christian spirit (Liturgy Constitution, no. 14; Pius X, Tra le sollecitudini) are no longer to be considered suitable for inclusion within liturgical celebrations.

Analogous changes of perception and awareness have occurred in other areas involving the artistic aspect of divine worship: for example, the sanctuary has been restructured, with the president's chair, the ambo, and the altar facing the people. Such changes have not been made in a spirit of disregard for the past, but have been deemed necessary in the pursuit of an end of greater importance, namely the active participation of the faithful. The limitation which such changes impose on certain musical works can be overcome by arranging for their performance outside the context of liturgical celebration in a concert of sacred music.

**Organ**

7. The performance of purely instrumental pieces on the organ during liturgical celebrations today is limited. In the past the organ took the place of
the active participation of the faithful, and reduced the people to the role of “silent and inert spectators” of the celebration (Pius XI, *Divini cultus*, no. 9).

It is legitimate for the organ to accompany and sustain the singing either of the assembly or the choir within the celebration. On the other hand, the organ must never be used to accompany the prayers or chants of the celebrant nor the readings proclaimed by the reader or the deacon.

In accordance with tradition, the organ should remain silent during penitential seasons (Lent and Holy Week), during Advent, and the liturgy for the dead. When, however, there is real pastoral need, the organ can be used to support the singing.

It is fitting that the organ be played before and after a celebration as a preparation and conclusion of the celebration.

It is of considerable importance that in all churches, and especially those of some importance, there should be trained musicians and instruments of good quality. Care should be given to the maintenance of organs and respect shown toward their historical character both in form and tone.

### III. Practical Directives

8. The regulation of the use of churches is stipulated by canon 1210 of the Code of Canon Law:

“In a sacred place only those things are to be permitted which serve to exercise or promote worship, piety, and religion. Anything out of harmony with the holiness of the place is forbidden. The Ordinary may, however, for individual cases, permit other uses, provided they are not contrary to the sacred character of the place.”

The principle that the use of the church must not offend the sacredness of the place determines the criteria by which the doors of a church may be opened to a concert of sacred or religious music, as also the concomitant exclusion of every other type of music. The most beautiful symphonic music, for example, is not in itself of religious character. The definition of sacred or religious music depends explicitly on the original intended use of the musical pieces or songs, and likewise on their content. It is not legitimate to provide for the execution in the church of music which is not of religious inspiration and which was composed with a view to performance in a certain precise secular context, irrespective of whether the music would be judged classical or contemporary, of high quality or of a popular nature. On the one hand such performances would not respect the sacred character of the church, and on the other would result in the music being performed in an unsuitable context.

It pertains to the ecclesiastical authority to exercise without constraint its governance of sacred places (see canon 1213), and hence to regulate the use of churches in such a way as to safeguard their sacred character.
9. Sacred music, that is to say, music which was composed for the liturgy, but which for various reasons can no longer be performed during a liturgical celebration, and religious music, that is to say, music inspired by the text of sacred scripture or the liturgy and which has reference to God, the Blessed Virgin Mary, to the saints, or to the Church, may both find a place in the church building, but outside liturgical celebration. The playing of the organ or other musical performance, whether vocal or instrumental, may “serve to promote piety or religion.” In particular they may:

a. Prepare for the major liturgical feasts, or lend to these a more festive character beyond the moment of actual celebration;

b. Bring out the particular character of the different liturgical seasons;

c. Create in churches a setting of beauty conducive to meditation, so as to arouse even in those who are distant from the Church an openness to spiritual values;

d. Create a context which favors and makes accessible the proclamation of God’s word, as for example, a sustained reading of the Gospel;

e. Keep alive the treasures of Church music which must not be lost; musical pieces and songs composed for the liturgy but which cannot in any way be conveniently incorporated into liturgical celebrations in modern times; spiritual music, such as oratorios and religious cantatas which can still serve as vehicles for spiritual communication;

f. Assist visitors and tourists to grasp more fully the sacred character of a church, by means of organ concerts at prearranged times.

10. When the proposal is made that there should be a concert in a church, the Ordinary is to grant the permission “per modum actus.” These concerts should be occasional events. This excludes permission for a series of concerts, for example in the case of a festival or a cycle of concerts.

When the Ordinary considers it to be necessary, he can, in the conditions foreseen in the Code of Canon Law, can. 1222: 2, designate a church that is no longer used for divine service, to be an “auditorium” for the performance of sacred or religious music, and also of music not specifically religious but in keeping with the character of the place.

In this task the bishop should be assisted by the diocesan commission for liturgy and sacred music.

In order that the sacred character of a church be conserved in the matter of concerts, the Ordinary can specify that:

a. Requests are to be made in writing, in good time, indicating the date and time of the proposed concert, the program giving the works and the names of the composers.
b. After having received the authorization of the Ordinary, the rectors and parish priests of the churches should arrange details with the choir and orchestra so that the requisite norms are observed.

c. Entrance to the church must be without payment and open to all.

d. The performers and the audience must be dressed in a manner which is fitting to the sacred character of the place.

e. The musicians and the singers should not be placed in the sanctuary. The greatest respect is to be shown to the altar, the president's chair, and the ambo.

f. The Blessed Sacrament should be, as far as possible, reserved in a side chapel, or in another safe and suitably adorned place (see canon 938: 4).

g. The concert should be presented or introduced not only with historical or technical details, but also in a way that fosters a deeper understanding and an interior participation on the part of the listeners.

h. The organizer of the concert will declare in writing that he accepts legal responsibility for expenses involved, for leaving the church in order, and for any possible damage incurred.

11. The above practical directives should be of assistance to the bishops and rectors of churches in their pastoral responsibility to maintain the sacred character of their churches, designed for sacred celebrations, prayer, and silence.

Such indications should not be interpreted as a lack of interest in the art of music.

The treasury of sacred music is a witness to the way in which the Christian faith promotes culture.

By underlining the true value of sacred or religious music, Christian musicians and members of scholae cantorum should feel that they are being encouraged to continue this tradition and to keep it alive for the service of the faith, as expressed by the Second Vatican Council in its message to artists:

"Do not hesitate to put your talent at the service of the divine truth. The world in which we live has need of beauty in order not to lose hope. Beauty, like truth, fills the heart with joy. And this, thanks to your hands" (Second Vatican Council, Message to Artists, 8 December 1965).

Rome, 5 November 1987

Paul Augustine Card. Mayer, OSB     †Virgilio Noè  
Prefect                        Titular Archbishop of Voncaria
                              Secretary

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How to buy a church organ

Lori Klingbeil

Born in 1961, Lori Klingbeil studied music at The King's College (a Christian liberal arts college) in Edmonton, Alberta for three years, before transferring to the University of Alberta, where she received a Bachelor of Music (Organ Performance) in 1986. She is currently the music director of the German service at Trinity Lutheran Church in Edmonton, and chairperson of the Organ Resource Centre there.

During a relatively brief tenure as a church organist, I have witnessed countless prototypes of how not to buy a church organ. I have been exposed to the worst examples of organ installations only to see other churches quickly follow suit. Saddest of all, I have seen churches at a stage 10, 20, and even 50 years later, stuck with the results of their organ committees’ well-meaning though misinformed decisions.

How do you buy an organ?

Every year, many churches ask this question. In fact, the Church has been asking this question for several hundred years already. Why is it then, that so few church organ committees seem to know what to do and where to begin when charged with the responsibility of selecting a new instrument? Indeed, when many church organ committees approach their work, it is as if they are breaking new ground: church after church spends many committee hours only relearning what other churches have already learned, and the same errors are unknowingly repeated by committee after committee.

How do you buy an organ? This question is not unique to our technological culture; it is an age-old puzzle which stems back to the thirteenth century, when technical advances made it more practical to use organs in Christian worship. By the early fifteenth century, a book by Arnolt Schlick had already appeared which addressed the many difficulties churches were having with the business of acquiring an organ. As organ buyer, the Church, has always found itself in a vulnerable position: it doesn’t possess nor have access to the information and knowledge needed to weigh the options and make an informed decision.

Every few generations, Arnolt Schlick’s advice has been rewritten by different authors, each addressing the complications unique to their cultural
setting. The early 1980s possesses its own contributions to this cycle with the publication of two excellent books, *The Church Organ: A Guide to Selection and Purchase*, by John Ogasapian, and *Organ Planning: Asking the Right Questions*, by John Fesperman: these are described at the end of this article. To these may be added a number of booklets and pamphlets, as well as hundreds (literally!) of articles which have appeared in a variety of denominational and professional organist magazines.

But where does all this information leave the church organ committee? Was the church able to access and make use of this store of knowledge when the time came to buy a new organ?

Despite the excellent contributions of many authors, one is forced to admit that much of this material has had very little impact on the average organ committee. Few churches are aware that it exists, let alone where it can be obtained. This is especially true of magazine articles which are hard to find in back issues.

It appears that the difficulty for church committees in purchasing has never been a lack of information. The difficulty is locating the sources and getting hold of the material.

A few years ago I was given the responsibility of chairing a church organ committee, and experienced much frustration over what seemed to be a "lack of available material" that couldn't be presented to the committee for discussion. It wasn't until after the church had made a decision that this frustration was expressed to the executive of the Royal Canadian College of Organists, a Canadian organization of church musicians. The discussion that ensued eventually led to the formation of the Organ Resource Centre, an information distribution service for churches regarding church organ selection.

The goal of the Organ Resource Centre (ORC) is to provide churches with easy access to a wealth of material that otherwise would remain unknown to them, and to make this material available from one location. The ORC now carries more than 100 articles for which it has obtained reprint permission, and is in a position to distribute to churches at cost (photocopying and handling). To these have been added a number of books and pamphlets especially addressed to the church organ committee. This material covers the wide range of questions an organ committee will face from its inception to the end of its work: organizing the organ committee, fund raising, organ planning for architects, placement of the organ, considerations regarding the decision to purchase a pipe or electronic organ, how to evaluate an organ, and many other questions.

Perhaps the most important characteristic of the ORC is that it provides churches with an objective and "disinterested" source of information. As a nonprofit, volunteer project of the Royal Canadian College of Organists, the ORC remains completely independent of the organ manufacturing business.
As such, it has the potential to become the single most effective and helpful source of information for individual churches regarding church organ selection and purchase.

Choosing a church organ is no easy task. It involves an understanding of the present and future musical needs of the congregation and the role of the organ and music in our worship. It involves a complicated musical instrument whose mechanical and musical merits a committee must learn to grasp and judge. It involves a large sum of money which will be invested in an irrevocable decision that a church will have to live with for many years to come.

The organ committee must do its work well. The committee must educate itself and carefully review its many options:

* Who should be on the organ committee, and what do they have to offer?
* Which criteria will receive overriding attention in the evaluation of instruments: quality of sound? flexibility? cost? ability to accompany congregational singing?
* What is the role of the organ in worship? How does this reflect on the evaluation criteria?
* What are the options? Piano? Reed organ? Electronic organ (various types)? Pipe organ? (which builder?) Tracker or electric action? One-, two-, or three-manual organ?
* Where should the organ and choir be placed? What does this placement suggest about the Church's views on worship and the role of music in worship?

The list of questions and complications a committee must address becomes long and difficult when its work is properly approached. Too often, organ committees take the easy way out by purchasing the most available or most popular instrument. Too many committees fail to give adequate consideration to the purchase of an expensive instrument with which the congregation will have to live for many years.

Selecting a new organ is within the reach of an ad hoc church committee which is willing to do its work. But the committee must take its responsibility seriously, and realize that aside from the church building itself, the organ is likely the single most costly expense demanded of a congregation.

The wise organ committee will begin with a careful study of the issues involved. A recognition of the complexity of the organ committee's task is the first step to a good decision.

* * *
Helpful reading: A comprehensive list of information available from the Organ Resource Centre can be obtained free of charge by writing: Organ Resource Centre, 515 McLeod Building, 10136 - 100 Street, Edmonton, AB T5J 0P1. Telephone (403) 429- 1655.

Four recent publications stand out as indispensable to the church organ committee. All the following are available from the publishers or the ORC:

* Ogasapian, John, *Church Organs: A Guide to Selection and Purchase* (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI 49606): $6.95 (U.S.); ORC price, $10.00 (Canadian), plus postage and handling. Also available for $6.95 (U.S.) from the American Guild of Organists, 815 Second Avenue, Suite 318, New York, NY 10017.

A practical, easy-to-read, 135-page book with many pictures. Contains 18 chapters which deal with various aspects of concern to the organ committee, including a discussion of the organ in worship, architectural considerations, pros and cons of various options (electronic, reed, and pipe organ), selecting and contracting a builder, use of a consultant.

* Fesperman, John, *Organ Planning: Asking the Right Questions.* published as Part IV of the Hymnal Studies Series (The Church Hymnal Corporation, 800 Second Ave., New York, NY 10017); $4.95 (U.S.); ORC price: $7.50 (Canadian), plus postage and handling.

As the title suggests, this book opens with a more philosophical discussion of the organ committee's task, and the place of music in worship. Issues such as integrity, technology, culture, and art are raised in terms of the organ committee's work. Elementary introduction to the use of the organ in the Christian tradition, and explanation of how an organ works. Discussion of acoustical needs of instruments in worship, maintenance, where to obtain advice, and costs. 71 pages.

* Clemens, Philip K., *Choosing a Church Organ* (Mennonite Publishing House, Scottsdale, PA 15683); $75 (U.S.); ORC price: 75 (Canadian), plus postage and handling. A 1983 reprint from Short Hymn-tune Arrangements for Organ.

A 10-page introduction to the organ selection process, zeroing in on the crucial matters. The first question posed is: “What should we know about buying an organ?” Practical suggestions for evaluating an organ and a basic list of options available to the committee. Provides a thorough discussion of the electronic and pipe organ dilemma in forthright and cool-tempered manner.

* Ogasapian, John, and Russell, Carlton T., *Buying an Organ* (American Guild of Organists, 815 Second Ave., Suite 318, New York, NY 10017); $2.00 (U.S.); ORC price: $2.75 (Canadian), plus postage and handling.

An eight-page booklet commissioned by the American Guild of Organists, containing a recently revised and very useful bibliography for further reading. Brief discussion of a variety of topics, including how an organ works, buildings and acoustics, organ consultants, organ placements, costs, unification, electronic organs, and others. Offers a six-step procedure for organizing and chairing an organ committee.

1 ORC bills American patrons in U.S. funds.
NEW EDITOR

Msgr. Patrick Byrne will be leaving the National Liturgical Office and returning to the Diocese of Peterborough where he will become pastor of St. Michael's Parish in Cobourg effective February 1, 1988. During the past 16 years, Msgr. Byrne has been the editor of the National Bulletin on Liturgy. Largely through his efforts, the Bulletin has come to be respected not only in Canada, but throughout the world. Many pastors, liturgists, teachers, students and members of liturgy committees have benefited from the dedication and love for the Church's liturgy which Msgr. Byrne has displayed in the last 80 issues of the Bulletin.

Dr. J. Frank Henderson has been appointed the new editor of the National Bulletin on Liturgy. Dr. Henderson resides in Edmonton and has been active in the liturgical life of Canada for many years as a writer, lecturer and consultant. He was chairperson of the National Council for Liturgy from 1980 to 1985 and presently participates in a variety of international liturgical groups.

NEW PUBLICATION

MARY IN THE LITURGY
Canadian Studies in Liturgy, No. 3

The third issue of Canadian Studies in Liturgy provides further material on Mary's place in the Church's liturgy:

• A Roman document, "Guidelines and Suggestions for Celebrating the Marian Year," has many ideas for the Marian Year and for the years to come.

• Three new Masses of our Lady are included:
  Our Lady of Good Counsel
  Mary, Health of the Sick
  Mary, Queen of Peace

Printed in a format similar to the National Bulletin on Liturgy, this booklet is helpful for parishes, catechists, students of theology, and clergy.

• 72 pages, 17 x 25.5 cm, saddle stitched, $3.50, plus postage and handling.

This book is available from Publications Service at the address on the inside front cover of this Bulletin.