6-2018

Preaching Connection into Detachment: A Homiletical Model for Nurturing People Influenced by New Age Ideologies

Graham Jesse Baird

dmin-fpcoord@fuller.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.fuller.edu/dmin

Part of the Christianity Commons

Recommended Citation


https://digitalcommons.fuller.edu/dmin/320
Ministry Focus Paper Approval Sheet

This ministry focus paper entitled

PREACHING CONNECTION INTO DETACHMENT:
A HOMILETICAL MODEL FOR NURTURING PEOPLE INFLUENCED BY
NEW AGE IDEOLOGIES

Written by

GRAHAM JESSE BAIRD

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

has been accepted by the Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary

upon the recommendation of the undersigned readers:

Date Received: June 19, 2018
PREACHING CONNECTION INTO DETACHMENT:
A HOMILETICAL MODEL FOR NURTURING PEOPLE INFLUENCED BY
NEW AGE IDEOLOGIES

A MINISTRY FOCUS PAPER
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY
GRAHAM JESSE BAIRD
JANUARY 2018
ABSTRACT

Preaching Connection into Detachment
Graham Jesse Baird
Doctor of Ministry
School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary
2018

This paper is aimed to assist people who have been influenced by New Age ideologies to become acquainted with the essential message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ through the primary theological medium of preaching. This thesis was implemented and tested at the Goleta Presbyterian Church in Goleta, California.

This study uses the homiletical models of Karl Barth to explore a significant inroad for individuals who have been influenced by Buddhism. One of Buddhism’s primary paradigms is that all people who seek transcendence do so from the starting point of “no-self” (Anatman). Christianity teaches that the first step of salvation begins with confession. A parallel between the two concepts is examined. To test this hypothesis the Goleta Presbyterian congregation was offered a four-month preaching regimen. A baseline Christological survey was conducted which demonstrated the otherwise unconventional belief systems found in the church. Follow-up interviews and empirical evidence was collected and analyzed for signs of personal transformation.

This study concludes that people who have been influenced by New Age Ideologies can experience significant spiritual transformation through the primary theological medium of preaching. Because of this study, members of Goleta Presbyterian Church showed a slightly higher appreciation of the essentials of the Christian gospel. While it is impossible to determine whether there was a definitive causal connection between preaching and these measurable outcomes, it does point to a strong correlative connection. Because around thirty-seven percent of the congregation did not take part in the survey, it cannot conclusively be said that preaching alone was singularly transformative in this church system. These results should only be viewed as a preliminary finding. The project is deeply appreciative of the contributions of the Goleta Presbyterian Church toward further understanding of this important subject matter.

Content Reader: Michael Pasqurello III, Ph.D.

Words: 289
To my family: Star, Haley, Sheena, and Ewan, who have taught me that the best preaching takes place not in the pulpit of a church, but in the living room of every home.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am deeply appreciative of the Goleta Presbyterian Church for reminding me once again that it is possible to function as a healthy church in the modern era, and at the same time be kind and caring, to all people with whom you come into contact. Thank you to my wife Star and my three children, Haley, Sheena and Ewan for their abiding faith with me through this five-year process of academic and spiritual growth. Without them, I would not be the person I am today.
### TABLE OF CONTENTS

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

iv

**PART ONE: MINISTRY CONTEXT**

**INTRODUCTION**

1

Chapter 1. MINISTRY CONTEXT AND INHERENT BARRIERS 16

**PART TWO: THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION**

Chapter 2. LITERATURE REVIEW 44

Chapter 3. A THEOLOGY OF CONVERSION TO THE CHRISTIAN FAITH THROUGH EFFECTIVE PREACHING 72

**PART THREE: MINISTRY PRACTICE**

Chapter 4. MINISTRY PLAN 95

Chapter 5. IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS AND EVALUATION OF OUTCOMES 130

**SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

**APPENDICES** [148]

**BIBLIOGRAPHY** [178]
GLOSSARY

Project Thesis Definitions

Homiletical – (Gr. homiletikos, from homilos), “the assembled crowd,” “throng.”¹

Model – “A representation of something in words or numbers that can be used to tell what is likely to happen if particular facts are considered as true.”²

Nurture – “Something that nourishes.”³

New Age Ideology – “An eclectic hotchpotch of beliefs, practices and ways of life, which can be identified as a singular phenomenon having to do with the human condition and how it can be transformed.”⁴

Neo-Buddhist Theological Terminology

Anatman – “No-soul,” “No-self.”⁵

Co-origination – “The mutual dependence of all things from the beginning of the world.”⁶

Enlightenment – “A permanently altered experience of reality,” “Living totally in the now.”⁷

Jinen – “The attitude of pure spontaneity and naturalness.”⁸

¹ Gove, Philip Babcock, Webster’s Third New International Dictionary, 1083.
² Ibid., 1451.
³ Ibid., 1552.
⁶ Ibid., 26
⁷ Ibid., 24
⁸ Ibid., 19
**Mu** – “Nothing.”

**Samsara** – “The great process,” “The eternal journey of self,” “The wheel of life,” “Living in the now.”

**Shunyata** – “Emptiness and fullness simultaneously,” “Where the ego is dissolved.”

**The Great Death** – “The radical evil that exists as a foundation beneath the struggle to do good, but causes us to do evil.”

---


10 Vroom, *No Other Gods*, 16.

11 Ibid., 17.

12 Ibid., 19.
PART ONE

MINISTRY CONTEXT
INTRODUCTION

It would be hard to place a date or a time on when the first sermon in the history of the world was originally delivered. An Old Testament historian might say that the first sermon was preached by Adam himself, to his newly formed wife, Eve, after first setting eyes upon God’s second human creation: “Therefore, shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh” (Gn 2:23-24). A New Testament scholar might cite John the Baptist as having preached the first sermon in history: “After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie,” (Mk 1:7). A theologian might put forward Elohim at the beginning of creation as having preached the first sermon, by forming the world and the universe through the utterance of a small mouthful of verbs and syllables; “And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light,” (Gn 1:3). An anthropologist or an evolutionary human biologist might say that the first sermon ever uttered was a hand painting etched upon the wall in the oldest-discovered cave painting in human history in Contabria, Spain, in the year 39000 BC. Contained within the essential question of when the first sermon was preached, is an understanding of what exactly a sermon consists. For some, the answer to this question is a well-articulated argument or course of action. For others, a sermon is merely an expression of one person’s faith or belief system to another. In describing what a sermon consists of, perhaps it is best to paraphrase a quote from the great modern music composer Noel Gallagher, “Preaching is in the ear of the beholder.”

1 Unless otherwise noted, all biblical verses are from the New International Version.
Regardless of when the first sermon was preached, there is little doubt of two ideas. First, preaching, as a theological medium and artform, has evolved considerably through the centuries. From the Aristotelian speaking models derived from classical Greek rhetoric that Peter and Paul employ in the book of Acts, “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say” (Ac 2:14), to the oratorically lyrical styles of the preachers of the United States in the early 1950’s, “There is no rest in the heart of God until he knows that you are at rest in His grace,” to the more casual teaching styles of preachers like Rick Warren at Saddleback Community Church, “God is looking for people to use, and if you can get usable, he will wear you out,” preaching has moved through almost as many permutations and changes as there are different kinds of people and cultures on the face of the earth.

The second truth that this project demonstrates is that when preaching is done effectively with wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, and discernment (1 Cor. 12:8-10), the so-called gifts of the Spirit, it can also be transformative for the human body, mind, and soul. To this end, the modern day Methodist preacher Will Willimon reflects on the thoughts of the reformer Martin Luther; “Where the word of God is rightly preached… demons are unleashed.” It must be noted at the outset that Willimon’s own reflections and writings about preaching, especially as they are understood through the eyes of the late twentieth-century theologian, Karl Barth, weigh

---


heavily in the overall trajectory of this research project. Willimon’s interpretations on Barth’s theology of preaching act as a foundational paradigm for the entirety of this study. With this in mind, the history of the Christian faith bears testament to the bedrock theological principle that when ordinary people are exposed to the sometimes equally ordinary words of Scripture, spoken from the mouth of an ordinary preacher, lives can be changed, new courses of action can be embarked upon, and eternal trajectories can be altered. Even self-described agnostics and existentialist Christian thinkers and theologians who generally do not believe in the actual life and historical person of Jesus, or the historical reality of the resurrection of Christ, such as R. Bultmann and Heidegger, have tended to believe in the transformative power of the proclamation of the spoken Word. Bultmann writes, “Contemporary Christian proclamation is faced with the question whether, when it demands faith from men and women, it expects them to acknowledge this mythical world picture from the past [if so,] it would be the task of theology to demythologize the Christian proclamation.”

---


---

My Spiritual Journey in Preaching

The power of preaching in my life has played an evolutionary role in my ministry. As a child, I grew up listening to my father, my grandfather, and my great-grandfather preach, all of whom were ordained Presbyterian ministers. All my homiletical progenitors served in churches in the Intermountain West of the United States and California. This West Coast preaching tradition featured a more pedestrian, rudimentary, and accessible
version of the gospel of Jesus Christ, than was perhaps evident in the more formulaic and systematic forms of theology, such as those which were taught by C. Hodge, or which stemmed from eastern institutions (Princeton, Harvard, Yale, Gordon Conwell Seminary). More importantly, my preaching progenitors were heavily influenced by a strong “sovereignty of God” preaching tradition that was so prevalent among early Protestant reformers:

Truly God claims omnipotence to himself, and would have us to acknowledge it—not the vain, indolent, slumbering omnipotence which sophists feign, but vigilant, efficacious, energetic, and ever active—not an omnipotence which may only acts as a general principle of confused motion, as in ordering a stream to keep within the channel once prescribed to it, but one which is intent on individual and special movements.5

In my adolescent years, I was exposed to more modern voices that came from the West Coast evangelical preaching tradition. The most influential of these for me was the preaching of Earl Palmer, pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Berkeley, California, and University Presbyterian Church of Seattle, Washington. Palmer, as he described in an interview conducted during the Fuller Doctor of Ministry program, was influenced by many of the great preaching luminaries of his time:

John Mackay at Princeton was probably the greatest I remember. Helmut Thielicke was one of the greatest preachers I have ever heard. John Stott was a great influence. Daryl Johnson is one of the greatest living preachers. Ray Steadman. Billy Graham. It wasn’t Billy’s preaching, but the quality of the man that was impressive. He had integrity. That was the same as Dr. Munger at Berkeley. Dr. Munger wasn’t such a strong preacher but, his integrity never strayed.6


Like many of Palmer’s preaching influences, John Stott, Billy Graham, and Bob Munger have also been highly influential in my own life and ministry. Later, when I became ordained as a Presbyterian pastor, I discovered the preaching of more modern conversational preachers and teachers. Of this list, the most influential have been John Ortberg, Nicky Gumbel, Erwin McManus, Bill Hybels, Craig Groeschel, Andy Stanley, and Rob Bell. In each instance, the transformative impact on my life has not simply been the dissemination of information or the transmission of ideas, but the transformative power of the Holy Spirit to change within me not just my thinking, but my larger life’s trajectory.

In my own ministry settings, preaching has played an equally transformative role. In my nearly twenty years as an ordained pastor, I have served in several different kinds of congregational settings. Most of my ministry has been in the arena of New Church Development (NCD). I have started three new churches, the most notable being Highlands Church of Paso Robles, California. In these pastoral settings, preaching has mostly served as a way of helping outsiders of the faith to become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ. I also served as senior pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Colorado Springs. In this setting, preaching ignited a spark of the Christian faith for people who had accepted Christ as their Savior many years before, but who now found themselves languishing in a faith system beset by boredom and intransigence. I have served in two interim pastoral settings (one of them being the primary focus of this paper—Goleta Presbyterian Church). In each of these settings, preaching has been a catalyst for change in individual lives, and in the collective life of the congregation as
a whole. In my current call setting, as senior pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Burlingame, California, preaching is proving to be an essential ingredient in revitalizing an entire church system.

**An Emblemizing Illustration**

After three months of serving as Stated Supply Pastor of Goleta Presbyterian Church, I received a phone call one bright and sunny Tuesday morning. In most churches that I had served, there was always a secretary or a volunteer that answered phone calls that came into the church and intercepted them before the pastor or pastors had a chance to respond. Because of the relatively smaller size of this congregation, however, and its minimal staff, I have made it a practice answer my own phone calls and field my own ministerial interceptions. The voice on the other end of the line told me that he had lost something at the church the week before. “What,” I asked, “did you lose? A pair of glasses? An umbrella? A Bible?” “No,” he said, “I lost my Buddhist prayer beads.” Now, having served mostly evangelically-oriented churches before this call, this was a request I had not heard before. The man told me that his name was John, and that he was a Buddhist monk and priest in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. He said he had been attending one of the support groups the church hosts throughout the week when he had misplaced his *Mala* beads while meditating amongst the succulent plants on the relatively sizable church property.

---

6 *Mala* is a Sanskrit word which means “garland.” Mala beads are usually made up of 108 individual pieces representing the so-called 108 various mortal desires of mankind and used for Buddhist mantra meditative practices.
After learning John’s story, I asked him if there was anything specifically that I could do for him as pastor of the church. He informed me that he had been suffering for a long time with several health problems. These problems, he explained, were deeply debilitating and a constant source of pain and anguish. I offered to pray for him. Quite to my surprise, John readily accepted my offer to pray. Before praying, I wondered to myself what sort of prayer would be appropriate for a Buddhist priest. Not knowing anything specifically about Buddhism at the time, I decided to throw all caution to the wind and simply pray a Christian prayer; “Dear Lord, thank you for this day, thank you for the power of your Holy Spirit. John is suffering from many health problems today. He also lost something very special to him. You made John in your image, and you can put John back together again by the power of your healing hand. Be with John today, heal him of his many physical ailments, and help him with his recovery. And most of all, help him to find his prayer beads. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.” After the prayer, John thanked me profusely and expressed great appreciation for the kindness the church had shown to him, and the friendliness that he had experienced there.

This formative connectional experience between an outsider to the Christian faith, who hailed not from the ranks of the “de-churched” or “un-churched,” that I had been more accustomed to experience in most other spheres of my ministry, caused me to completely re-evaluate this ministry setting. I wondered how many other people in the church had connections to Buddhism. To what extent were Buddhist and New Age Ideologies a prevalent aspect in the church’s theology? What were some of the actual differences between Christian theology and Buddhist theology? To what extent was the theology of Goleta Presbyterian Church a syncretistic mix of Eastern religious practices
and Christianity? Most important, what would it take to help other people in the church, like John, to be exposed to and transformed by the radically different and salvific presence of Jesus Christ in their midst? Throughout the research journey to answer these questions, they have lodged in my mind, and have been at the forefront of my, I daresay, “consciousness,” as I have written this research project.

The Goleta Challenge

Goleta Presbyterian Church (GPC) is an extremely unique congregational setting. Goleta is a small city of around 30,000 residents that is situated on the edge of Santa Barbara County. Its economic makeup has historically been more abject, and its financial where-with-all has been substantially less than its two more “well-heeled” counterparts in Santa Barbara and Montecito. Because of this, Goleta has largely been looked down upon as the “poor man’s Santa Barbara.”

Goleta Presbyterian Church began in 1959. Soon after its inception, two completely different strands of influence merged together to form what can be described as a very eclectic confluence of theologies, cultures, and backgrounds. The first strand was the “AC Delco Wisconsin Exodus” group. This strand makes up around 80 percent of the congregants of GPC, most of whom are now above the age of seventy. The second strand, and the primary focus of this paper, is a group that coalesced in the 1960’s, and who may be described as a part of a “Neo-Buddhist, Unitarian, Human Potential Movement.” This second strand comprises around one-third of the current congregation—around fifty-four members. The church’s founding pastor openly espoused many of the popular new age ideologies of the time, which were then nascent in
the academic culture of the University of Santa Barbara. With the merger of the 1960’s Santa Barbara New Age pluralism and the AC Delco Midwestern Engineering culture, a unique convergence of ideologies, cultures, systems, and communities developed. The current congregational context is a result of this synchronicity. The primary focus of this paper is an attempt to help the members of this congregation who are a part of the New Age Ideologies (mainly Neo-Buddhist) group to become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ, primarily through the medium of preaching. The principle challenge herein is not an acceptance of Christ as a historical figure, but the exclusive acceptance of Christ as a personal Savior.

**Preaching as a Revelatory Medium**

The late Prime Minister of Great Britain, Benjamin Disraeli, observed that “The greatest good you can do for another is not just to share your riches, but to reveal to him his own.” If this is true, then it must also be said that great preaching is about not just about sharing the riches found within the Christian faith, but about revealing the resources found within the hearts of individual believers and within the corpus of a local congregation. To this end, this doctoral project develops a homiletical model for helping Goleta Presbyterian Church discover a sharper sense of the abundant life found in the person, nature, and witness of Jesus Christ.

The Reformed notion of preaching (homiletics) is not simply that it is “a speech delivered before an assembled group of people,” but that by some mysterious and

---

powerful work of the Holy Spirit, it represents the voice of God to a local congregation.

There are many benefits of a homiletical approach, as opposed to a more programatically-based ministry approach, in helping those who are outside of the Christian faith to become fully devoted followers of Christ.

The writing and thinking of the late twentieth-century theologian Karl Barth, as interpreted by and understood through the modern day preaching lens of Will Willimon, can be applied to a context that is primarily Neo-Buddhist. Indeed, an alternative title for this project might have been, “Barth and Buddha.” Barth’s primary theology stems from the idea that preaching must be conducted from a standpoint of an emptying of self. In Barth’s mind, the sermon should not reflect the thoughts of the preacher, but rather the thoughts of God for the congregation. In Barth’s own words, transliterated through the thoughts of Willimon; “God either shows up or He doesn’t.”9 Theology literally means, “God-talk.”10 This idea of Barth’s correlates exactly with the Neo-Buddhist notion of Shunyata or “emptiness, nothingness.”11 There are many other connections, correlations, and it must be said, vast differences between Barth and Buddhist thought, which this paper attempts to explain in greater detail.

The Author’s Pastoral/Preaching Role

I have served as Stated Supply Pastor at Goleta for exactly one year. A Stated

---


10 Ibid., 48.

Supply Pastor has a very specified calling where the Presbytery of a local area places a pastor within the context of a congregational setting for a temporary and short period: “A Stated Supply Pastor, is a minister of the Word and Sacrament approved by the committee on ministry to be elected for a term of not less than two years nor more than four years by the vote of the COM committee. The relationship shall be established by the Presbytery.”¹² This specified designation as “Stated Supply Pastor” offers a unique opportunity for me to be both an insider to the congregational system as well as an outsider to the congregational system. The Stated Supply is a temporary figure in the life of a congregation. Therefore, a Stated Supply contributes a more neutral and objective voice and perspective to offer academic analysis.

The primary call and focus of this pastoral assignment, by nature of its definition, is to preach for this local congregation. While a Stated Supply Pastor is permitted to offer more programmatic changes and additions to a local call setting, the primary function and purpose is to offer the Sunday sermon, and weekly Bible studies throughout the week. This almost exclusive focus on preaching, as opposed to other church growth/culture concepts (Missional Church Movement, Simple Church, Healthy Church), allows for a uniquely controlled ministry setting and pastoral approach. In other words, other types of church development models can be ruled out as determinative in the outcomes of this project primarily because they were not allowed to be implemented due to the nature of the call. Even though preaching has been the only pastoral impetus, there are very significant changes and results that are shown as correlative outcomes. After just one year

of preaching, there have been five adult baptisms, three of which emerged out of the previously described population sample, the 1960’s Neo-Buddhist, Unitarian, Human Potential Movement strand of the church. Therefore, it must be said that, preaching heretofore has represented a significant and transformative factor in the initial phases of helping even more people become baptized into the Christian faith as the church moves forward.

**Project Organization**

This doctoral project has three main sections and five chapters. Part one establishes a background and context for this unique ministry setting. This first chapter shows how Goleta Presbyterian Church, which began in 1959 as an offshoot of First Presbyterian Church of Santa Barbara, and launched in the caldron of the turbulent 1960’s, is a unique congregation and appropriate for study as a paradigmatic exemplar of many similar churches who have members that are influenced by New Age ideologies throughout the United States.

Part two offers a larger literary milieu and theological framework for a qualified study of this congregation. This section explores the journey from non-belief in Christianity to belief in the Christian faith that an outsider to the church often experiences. This spiritual journey is examined by first understanding what a profile of a nonbeliever looks like by studying famous prominent conversions, first-hand confessional accounts, historical conversion narratives, and the unique characteristics that often make up a Buddhist non-believer’s experiences. In the second part of this chapter,
there is an examination of “outsider-sensitive” homiletical methods and models. Most preaching courses and textbooks written today are essentially about how to re-instill pre-existing Christian notions and theologies into people who already have been introduced to the Christian faith. In many cases, and ironically, most preaching is designed for people who are already fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ. The third part of this chapter examines the process by which an individual can move from being persuaded by effective Christ-centered sermons, to further Christian nurture through the incorporation of the basics of the Christian faith into everyday application and practice.

Chapter three establishes a theological framework for connecting people who are outside the Christian faith with Jesus Christ. At the most fundamental level, the reason that preaching is effective is because the Christian faith is founded upon the idea that God created all things by literally speaking them into being (Jn 1:1). Words formed by the Creator in turn formed all living matter. By extension, from a Reformed standpoint, as the spoken Word is central to worship, and as the preacher utters such words, there is a similar creative enterprise at work. Finally, by extension, as the listener hears the spoken Word, there is a third level of creative enterprise, in the living out of the gospel. Section two deals with the reality that the words spoken by God and the preacher are uttered into an existentially fallen world. This section addresses the topic of the universality of humanity’s fallen nature. Finally, section three demonstrates the end goal of effective preaching is ultimately the reconciliation of the human soul with God, with oneself, and with the larger community.

---

13 The author is using the term “outsider-sensitive” as opposed to “seeker-sensitive” because of the otherwise more pejorative connotations of the latter designation.
Part three, chapters four and five, offers the attempted ministry outcomes, and the implementation process to evaluate the overall success of this endeavor. Chapter Four offers a ministry plan that underlines the merits and sensitivities of a homiletical approach that was used as a transformative tool in the personal lives of congregants at Goleta Presbyterian Church. This chapter establishes the three primary goals of this project: increased number of baptisms (quantitative), deeper spiritual self-reflection (qualitative), and ongoing personal development (application). This chapter offers a glimpse into the content of the strategy through the focus of the year in preaching. Finally, section establishes the target population of this study, which is veiled within the confidentiality of the larger congregation, for the purposes of not inadvertently disturbing the development of the actual target population. A crucial component to this is the basic truth that no true evangelical transformation can occur if people feel they are being studied as a “means” to an academic end. Co-participants in the leadership of this study include an ordained commissioned lay pastor who is a long-term member of the church, and two key leaders of the church who are chairmen of the property and finance committees.

Chapter five offers an implementation process for this doctoral project, including a time of concerted prayer by an outside sample before initiation. Then, the implementation involves a four-month timeline from August to November 2017. While four months is a short time frame when compared to the relatively longer membership span of Goleta Presbyterian Church members, this study nonetheless, establishes a sample segment, and potential trend-line of spiritual growth. The resource base for this project will be highly minimalistic and not require any outside funding. Finally, this
chapter offers a qualitative and quantitative assessment plan. An outside group of assessors from Fuller Theological Seminary and project overseers in the DMin department will ultimately assess academic merits of the project as it moves through its various permutations.

**Sensitivity and Love for Those in Other Belief Systems**

A final word needs to be said about the sensitivity and love required of a researcher who is studying and analyzing people who belong to other belief systems. The Bible is clear about the concept that “All people are made in the image of God” (Gn 2:27). When God created humanity, He placed a bit of himself into it—into all humans. A posture of sensitivity and Christian love must be present when a person who belongs to another belief system, is analyzed, studied, or deconstructed. Although this paper observes descriptive differences between people who hold various beliefs, and specifically those of the Neo-Buddhist faith tradition, there is no intention to demean, diminish, or take a pejorative posture toward individuals who hold these beliefs.\(^\text{14}\)

\(^{14}\) If there is any descriptive analysis in this paper which is perceived as painting members of another faith system as anything less than respected, I sincerely apologize. It is my hope that the reader will understand that it is with the utmost love and desire for betterment that the ideas within this paper and concepts have been proffered.
CHAPTER 1

MINISTRY CONTEXT AND INHERENT BARRIERS

The great twentieth-century ethnographer, anthropologist, and social-scientist, Clifford Geertz, famously observed in his seminal anthropological work the concept of culture can be defined as “a system of historically transmitted meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life.”¹ Later, in his study of religion, church, and specifically “church culture” as a primary means of transmitting values, Geertz articulated the way religious systems can both embody, and reflect the cultural surroundings that they occupy.² Culture simultaneously creates and reflects religious meaning.

This mirror-like relationship is directly reflected in a local congregational community context. Though Geertz’s anthropological and ethnographic studies were primarily based around local native cultures in and around the Indian Ocean (specifically

---


Javanese cultures located in modern day Indonesia), he spent an entire career cross-applying a system of religious meanings to the larger society. These ideas were not new to Geertz. His own intellectual influences were, among others, Franz Overbeck, who wrote *Christentum und Kultur*. In this work, Overbeck outlines, in a more bombastic way, the inter-reliance and inter-dependency between the Christian religious structure and “culture.”

In more recent years, Nancy Ammerman carried Geertz and Overbeck’s idea further, and more concretely in her analysis of a cultural understanding of a local congregation:

> A cultural frame asks you to imagine the congregation you are studying as a group that has invented ways of being together that are uniquely its own. Even if much of what the congregation’s members do has been borrowed from the larger culture, their very being together has given them a distinct identity. Culture includes all the things a group does together—its rituals, its ways of treating newcomers, its work and its play.

When the study of culture is “transmitted,” from an anthropological standpoint, this is often referred to as cultural anthropology, or ethnographic study. The word “ethnography” stems from the Greek preface ἔθνος, which means “folk, people or nation,” and the Greek suffix γράφω, which means “to write.” So, ethnography is literally a writing down of the behaviors, traits, tropes, and other characteristics of a group of people. Religious ethnography, then, is quite literally; “a writing about people in a religious culture.”

---


Mary Clark Moschalla, a religious cultural anthropologist herself, in a similar way to Ammerman, applies the notion of ethnographic study to a local congregational system: “Writing ethnography involves decoding signs, behaviors, and stories, in such a way as to ‘read’ the culture that they represent.” In this way, a church and a local congregation can be seen as a living textbook of information that contains tomes of rich historical, contextual, and sociological information. The symbiotic relationship between a local congregation and a local culture, and conversely a local culture and a local congregation, and the transmission of this culture and set of meanings to a larger societal context, makes the specific milieu within which a local congregation exists an important place to begin research. To derive a true and comprehensive cultural understanding of a unique congregational setting, a church ethnographer must look to the history of a specific place, its economic background, and other elements which place a church into a larger religious understanding of the religious and ecclesiastical tropes of a specific region, and the immediate context in which a church exists.

Karl Barth, in some estimations “the greatest theologian of our time, and perhaps ever,” would, from his desk in Basil, Switzerland, heartily disagree with the entire formulation of attempting to understand any sort of religious context. For Barth, context was a medium and an element that was meant to be overcome and transcended, and not in any way understood, melded, or assimilated with. As Willimon observes, “Barth would

---


6 Willimon, William H., *Conversations with Barth on Preaching*, 3.

7 Ibid., 3.
be adamantly opposed to the current enthusiasm for theologizing from ‘experience’ or theology that is ‘contextual.’” For the purposes of this project, this double tension of understanding and studying context, and then simultaneously pushing context away, plays a formative role in this project’s academic perspective. A central theme is understanding the ways in which the primary pillars of New Age ideology relate with Christian culture, and at the same time push culture away. In a unique way, Geertz and Overbeck and “Barth and Buddha” converge and diverge through the ongoing development of this research project.

Santa Barbara/Goleta Development

In 1959, the city of Santa Barbara, situated on the Central-Coast of California, was not the bustling multibillion-dollar, beach city, tourist and retirement metropolis that it is today. The population of Santa Barbara at the time was only 58,768 people, a far cry from the 91,196 residents in the year 2014.8 Official population statistics for 1959 are not available for the city of Goleta since it was not incorporated as an official township until 2002. One could say the lack of incorporation of Goleta as an official township is an emblem of the secondary consideration and estimation the community has occupied in the fabric of the larger Santa Barbara community until very recently. The economy of Santa Barbara in 1959 consisted mostly of a few downtown stores, hotels, beach houses along the coast, and a fledgling restaurant industry. Petroleum products and their

---

maritime dispersal to cities surrounding Santa Barbara through its ports were a mainstay of the local economy.

In 1958, the year before the contextual framework of this writing project takes place, The Standard Oil of California had just erected its first off-shore oil platform in Santa Barbara Channel. Because of this, there was an immediate sizeable influx of oil money among some of the most affluent residents of the area. The economic disparity between those who had wealth and those that did not became particularly apparent at this juncture. Those who had “means” tended to live and settle in Montecito and Santa Barbara. Those that did not lived in Goleta or Carpenteria, a beach community located just to the south of Santa Barbara.

Goleta was always more of a farming, ranching, and service industry community than a beach and tourist destination. A topographical analysis of Goleta in the late 1950s and early 1960s reveals a community that consisted mostly of arable farm land. Italian immigrants, having considerably less economic means than their neighbors in Santa Barbara, and who migrated mostly from areas surrounding Tuscany in Italy (Santa Barbara’s Mediterranean counterpart), settled in Goleta. Many of the original Italian settlers still live in Goleta. Brimming with lemon orchards, walnut groves, and avocado and almond trees, Goleta was the agrarian community that existed on the fringes of the otherwise sleepy, yet wealthy neighborhoods of Santa Barbara.

AC Delco Exodus from Wisconsin

---

In that same year, Goleta experienced a major population change when 1,960 people (a veritable 5 percent growth ratio), mostly from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, moved en masse from the Midwest to Goleta.\textsuperscript{10} AC Spark Plug Division, a branch of General Motors Corporation, had just received a major financial grant from the Federal Government to set-up a “Defense System Division” in order to establish a “Defense Research Laboratory which was to be located in Goleta, California.”\textsuperscript{11} The main purpose of this Goleta division of AC Delco, from the standpoint of the United States Federal Government and defense industry, was to continue to develop specialized military systems to thwart the bourgeoning arms race during the Cold War. These defense systems included everything from bombing navigation computers, to auto stabilized gun-sights, to internally guided missiles and gyroscopes. Many of the projects that AC Delco was working on, like the Apollo Moon Lander project, remain classified to this day, resulting in a current secretive personality type of the individuals who built these systems. Nonetheless, these systems were seminal in the US/Soviet space race.

In practical terms, this influx of people from Milwaukee to the community of Goleta doubled the population base of the entire area. Where the Goleta community previously consisted of a handful of ranchers and farmers, it was now comprised of primarily engineers and scientists. A smaller quotient of people in the community came from the University of California, Santa Barbara, which was located only three miles


\textsuperscript{11} The Delco History Book Committee, \textit{Nothing Left to Chance: From the Ocean Depths to Outer Space} (Santa Barbara, CA: Wilson Printing, 2008), Section 1-4.
from downtown Goleta. 1959 also happens to be the year that Goleta Presbyterian
Church, the primary focus of this paper, was founded.

**Primary Stages of Church Development**

In 1959, the Presbyterian Church (USA), in terms of church growth, membership,
and attendance was in its apogee. More people were attending Presbyterian churches in
the mid and late 1950s than at any other time in its existence. A post-World War II boom,
beginning with the end of the war in 1945, caused church attendance in the United States
to grow. Mainline denominations, of which the Presbyterian Church was one of the most
established, were the center of religious life. Families, eager to begin again as American
GIs, fresh back from a brutal war with Germany and Japan, where death and chaos
reigned on the battlefield, saw the immediate importance of joining local congregations
and becoming members of local churches. The personal focus of joining a church, for
brand new families just back from the war, was seen to be as crucial a decision as where
their children went to school, where a person worked, or how a family paid for food and
clothes. Mainstream religious Protestant culture, and in this case, the Presbyterian
Church, existed at the very center of standard societal norms and structures.

In 1959, the Santa Barbara Presbytery, based, it must be underlined, in Santa
Barbara and not Goleta, decided to start two new churches: The St. Andrews Presbyterian
Church of Santa Barbara, and the Goleta Presbyterian Church of Goleta (GPC). GPC was
initially made up mostly of transplants from Milwaukee, Wisconsin with the AC Delco
Defense Division of the Federal Government. The other group that comprised the initial
church plant consisted of local lemon farmers, walnut and almond growers, and ranchers.
The first handful of congregants, around twenty in number, met in many different
locations throughout downtown Goleta and Santa Barbara. The list of initial church sites included a beauty parlor, a bowling alley, a restaurant, and even a local mortuary.

As of July 2017, there are around ten charter members still attending. From 1959-1969, a group of around 200-300 members coalesced. Many of these original members and attendees are still members of the church. Of the current 163 members of Goleta Presbyterian Church, around 71.84 percent of them have attended for more than twenty years, and most of this group began to attend the church in the first ten-year period of its existence (See Appendix A). In the early stages of GPC, they met in beauty parlors, pizza restaurants, movie theaters, and local homes and backyards. In other words, the church has experienced very little change since its inception. What this means is that the church has not experienced much turnover since its initial inception. This consistent, foundational, and primary population base of the congregation has both contributed to the church’s overall stability, and at the same time occasionally made it hard for outsiders to break in to the otherwise solidified and concretized relationships that were founded in the church’s initial stages by a diaspora of transplants.

GPC’s initial purpose for existence had less to do with theological differentiation or orthodoxy than it had to do with building relationships and community development. Rev. Dr. Gordon Hess, a forty-year resident of Goleta, an ordained Presbyterian pastor, and a practicing psychologist and therapist in Santa Barbara, has said that “GPC has always had more of a relational purpose for existence, than a propositional purpose for existence. The relationships have always been more important than the belief systems. It has tended towards a psychological and human potential movement influence over a rigid
theological framework. GPC has mostly had a universalist approach to salvation, that focused on grace over doctrine.”  

Psychology and Theology at GPC

There are five main trajectories of thought that have comprised the historical American Psychological Movement. These include the psychoanalytic approach (Freud), the behavioral approach (Skinner), the emotional approach (Rogers), the cognitive approach, and the neurochemical approach. In broad terms, these theoretical perspectives correlate with a study of the human conscious and subconscious, or “the belief that environment is what causes us to behave differently or suffer illnesses, the use of emotional processing and emotional expression in relation to a stressful situation, the process of how we think, and the way thought processes impact the way that a person behaves, and the unique way that the biology and chemistry of the human brain is constructed.”

Behavioral therapy insists that behavior impacts thought. From the 1970’s to the 1980’s, particularly on the West Coast of the United States, and interestingly mostly focused in Southern California and cities like Santa Barbara, the therapeutic arm of the psychological sciences has tended toward a usurpation of the primary concepts embedded within the behavioral, emotional, and cognitive approaches: the focus on self and self-


13 This is better known as the “person-centered approach.”

improvement. In broad terms, these varying approaches are often gleaned from and selectively sorted through by their students and practitioners, as if choosing from a panoply of ideas. The incorporation of these approaches has sometimes been referred to as being a part of the Human Potential Movement (HPM).

The Human Potential Movement, which found its genesis in the tumultuous counter-cultural and counter-intellectual cauldron of the 1960’s, played a major role in the cultural make-up of Santa Barbara, and thus Goleta Presbyterian Church. The primary thrust of this mode of thinking is that vast human potential can be accessed from within the human mind, body, and soul if a person has the right psychological and spiritual tools to do so.

One of the psychological founders of HPM includes Abraham Maslow, whose primary contribution was the “hierarchy of needs.” Maslow’s main thesis was that all human beings have basic needs, and when these basic needs are met, they can transcend themselves and their contexts by processes of “self-improvement.” HPM concepts were later applied to Scientology and the Esalen Retreat Center and movement in Big Sur, California, just four hours from Goleta.

Traces and Influences of HPM, the Esalen community, and Scientology can be found throughout GPC’s history and congregational makeup. The founding pastor, a graduate of the more theologically progressive McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago, had as a primary church building principle to “build bridges between peoples.”

15 Several members of Goleta Presbyterian Church were previously a part of the

Scientology community in Goleta, led by Reed Slatkin an ordained minister of the Church of Scientology in the Goleta Valley. The church library features a substantial collection of books on Eastern Religion, HPM, and self-help. The current elder for Spiritual Formation describes himself as a Buddhist/Christian. A long-time previous pastor now serves as co-director of a spiritual renewal center, whose mission is to “be a sanctuary of peace for individuals as they renew purpose, strengthen community, and increase their effectiveness in the world,” and whose stated goals are to “foster understanding and respect for diverse cultural and spiritual traditions.” In many ways, several of the features of the mission statement and the stated goals of this spiritual retreat center, including “sanctuary,” “renewal,” “community,” “increased effectiveness,” “understanding and respect,” “diverse cultural and spiritual traditions,” can function as a kind of de facto mission statement for GPC.

The Santa Barbara Counterculture Movement

Though Santa Barbara was not as permeated by the countercultural movements and Civil Rights expressions of the early 1960s as other university cities in California, there was, nonetheless, a very substantial countercultural movement. Many social theorists have said that the University of California, Santa Barbara’s (UCSB) counterculture expression was more prolonged in terms of civil unrest, than other college


18 It should be noted that these descriptors of GPC should be seen as a way of understanding the unique cultural, contextual, and congregational makeup of the church, rather than as a pejorative or defamatory designation.
campuses in California. Where most university cities experienced a countercultural phenomenon that piqued in 1963 with the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, and later in 1968 with that of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., Santa Barbara’s countercultural movement lasted at least twenty years.

Some theorists even suggest that Santa Barbara is still experiencing a latent countercultural expression and experience. This consistent and prolonged period of social expression and unrest plays a determinative role in the overall culture of Santa Barbara. A recent exhibition at UCSB’s library featured, in colorful detail, many aspects of this unrest that occurred at the time. According to the authors of this exhibition; “The period of the 1960’s until the 1980’s was time of protests, marches and demonstrations. Some of the many issues that inspired people to activism were farm workers’ rights, women’s rights, and fair housing and tenants’ rights. Flashpoint issues included police brutality, opposition to the Vietnam war, and racial and educational inequalities.”¹⁹ Two of the most famous civil rights marches and demonstrations around the flashpoint of workers’ rights, immigrant populations, and anti-Vietnam protests were the Chicano Moratorium, and the 1971 Marcha de la Reconquista.²⁰ Both of these public demonstrations, though they took place on a statewide level, had major impacts and expressions on the UCSB campus.

This generalized civil unrest and latent “slow boil” countercultural expression through these demonstrations also played a significant role in the early development of


²⁰ Ibid.
GPC. Because the church was founded in 1959, and because its initial primary population base was centered around the federal government defense industry, the “military industrial complex,” a kind of silent, internal, congregational conflict began to emerge between students, members of the youth group, and attending professors at UCSB who were caught up in the Civil Rights Movement, and the original congregational status quo that moved there from the Midwest. A collision course of sorts was launched between these two otherwise disparate groups within the community.

For the most part, a culture\textsuperscript{21} to “agree to disagree,” and a conscientious decision not to enter into any kind of conflict developed at Goleta Presbyterian Church. For fear that these two collisional forces might, in fact, cause the brand new congregational structure to implode, a mutual decision to not engage in dispute developed between the two sides. A philosophy of non-engagement and non-conflict-oriented discussion was established, and a tonality of “community first” was conveyed. The lasting impact of this congregational culture of non-conflict became a part of the unspoken cultural DNA of Goleta Presbyterian Church, which lives on into the present. In 2017, a Mission Study was conducted by the session of Goleta Presbyterian Church, the data of which is seminal to the formulation of this paper. One of the key elders of the church articulated some of these tensions in a congregational survey: “GPC is theologically diverse, from near-fundamentalist to very ‘progressive’—but with a conscious commitment to respect one another across those potential divides. Perhaps sometimes this leads us to be overly cautious and controversy-averse, in what we talk about together in community and in

\textsuperscript{21} Utilizing C. Geertz’s previously cited formulation of “culture.”
sub-communities.”22 This mutually agreed upon decision to avert conflict by not addressing it helped Goleta Presbyterian Church preserve its existence, instead of being destroyed like many other congregations within close-proximity to civil unrest near college campuses in the 1960’s. It also thwarted any real, actual, and honest human interpersonal engagement.

Neo-Buddhism in Santa Barbara

While there are hundreds of different religious institutions and churches in the Santa Barbara area, Buddhism represents a central belief system for the county and communities at large. It is difficult to say exactly how many people in Santa Barbara are regular participants and followers of the Buddhist religion, because, for various cultural and religious reasons, most people who follow the teachings of one of its many sects and strains, do not identify “Buddhism” as their religious belief system in census reports. However, a quick survey of the churches and meditation sites around the city, including Buddhist Church of Santa Barbara, Bodhi Path Religious Center, Odiyana Dharma Circle and Institute, Mahakankala Buddhist Center, Tibetan Buddhist Santa Barbara, Buddhist Temple Montecito, and Sgi-USA Santa Barbara, reveals the wide number of Buddhist and New Age23 centers of worship that are available to people who live in Santa Barbara. In addition to these official religious Buddhist facilities, a vast array of other Buddhist meditation facilities can be found throughout the entire county (Free Meditation Santa

---

22 Ernie Tamminga (PhD), Internal study conducted by session, Interview by the author, Goleta. March 17, 2017. Italics added.

23 Although the terms “Buddhist” and “New Age” are not entirely coterminous, they are used throughout this project somewhat as synonymous terms.
Barbara, Santa Barbara Meditation Retreat). Entire Buddhist counseling facilities, such as Santa Barbara County Buddhist Therapist, are available for those who want psychological counseling from a Buddhist perspective. Pacifica Graduate Institute, whose mission statement is to “foster creative learning and research in the fields of psychology and mythological studies, framed in the traditions of depth psychology,” is located in Santa Barbara, and offers several doctoral degree programs based on Buddhist meditation practices. An understanding of Buddhism’s impact and primary formulations in Santa Barbara and Goleta, requires a more macrocosmic understanding of the entire faith system.

Buddhism is one of the oldest religious systems in the world. As such, it is considered by most religious scholars, with an adherent base encompassing around 7.1 percent of the world’s population, and around 488 million followers around the world, to be one of the primary religions of the world. Buddhism is one of the four major (great) religions of the world. The German-Swiss philosopher and religious theorist, Karl Jaspers, who was heavily influenced by Buddhism in his own theological framework, has said that Buddhism, along with Confucianism, Zoroastrianism, Judeo-Christianity, Hinduism, and Classical Homeric and Socratic Greek philosophy, are hallmarks of the primary religious cultures of the world. These hallmarks or facets act,

---


27 Ibid.
according to Jaspers, like “Axials” within a larger framework which encompasses a much larger “Axial Age” (German, “Achsenzeit”). He writes, “Confucius and Lao-Tse were living in China, all the schools of Chinese philosophy came into being including those of Mo Ti, Chuang Tse, Lieh Tzu and a host of others; India produced Upanishads and Buddha, and like China, ran the whole gamut of philosophical possibilities down to materialism, skepticism, and nihilism.”

Jaspers is significant for the application and study of Buddhism in the Santa Barbara area because of his own heavy influence in the fields of Eastern mysticism and psychology, and his syncretistic blend of these different approaches. Pacifica University, among other institutions of higher learning in Santa Barbara, offers a similar fluid blend from psychological to Eastern philosophical approaches, resembling a Jasperian faith. The Santa Barbara strain of Buddhism is also heavily influenced by a more mystical approach to Eastern religion and psychological study.

There are many different strands and practices of Buddhism around the world, which fall into two categories: Theravada (School of Elders), and Mahayana (The Great Vehicle). From these two primary groups, a vast number of subsets exist in varying forms and permutations. A few of the major expressions of this faith system include Pure Land, Zen, Nichiren Buddhism, Shingon and Tiantai. Most Americans who practice Buddhism as form of meditation or spirituality tend to do so by usurping a mélange of these expressions of the faith. This “self-selected” and blended version of Buddhism can

---

roughly be considered and defined, for the purposes of this paper, as a Neo-Buddhistic belief system or a New Age ideology. While the concept of a New Age ideology is much more encompassing than simply Buddhism, in the Santa Barbara area, Buddhism has played a more significant role in the formulation of New Age practice. Another word for the eclectic mix of religion and spiritual practice would be “pluralism.” In the words of Hendrik Vroom, professor of the philosophy of religion at Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam; “Our culture has become pluralistic: Christianity is no longer the dominant belief system. Interest in religion is on the increase again after declining in the 1970’s . . . Eastern religions have attracted a great deal of interest.”

The University of California, Santa Barbara (located just three miles from GPC) has featured, for many years, one of the leading programs in Near Eastern Religion in the world. One of the largest collections in the United States for books on Eastern Religions, ARC, is housed at the UCSB library. Within the Department of Religious Studies, one of the primary voices, and leading professors in the field of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Christianity at the UCSB was Professor Raimon Panikkar-Alemany.

Panikkar-Alemany was a Spanish Catholic priest and an ordained Hindu Holy Man. His specialty was comparative religion, and he held doctorates in philosophy, chemistry, and theology from leading European universities. In his own words, “I left Europe for India as a Christian, I discovered I was a Hindu and returned as a Buddhist without ever having ceased to be a Christian.” This seemingly totally porous


relationship and connection between Christianity and Buddhism and other Eastern philosophies, a kind of religious syncretism, is emblematic of the larger trend towards syncretistic thinking that can be found in many Santa Barbara churches. Specific to this project, this approach to Christianity and Buddhism also exists in multifarious ways at Goleta Presbyterian Church. Panikkar, as an educator in the field of Eastern religions and philosophies, has had a very significant impact on the congregation. As but one example of this, the elder for Spiritual Formation who is currently a member of the Goleta session (elder board), studied under Panikkar and received a supervision from him as a Ph.D. supervisor. Around ten to fifteen members of the current Goleta congregation have received education from Panikkar. The overall impact of these Buddhist expressions at GPC is a latent and unspoken, but concretely visible theological framework of “generalized spirituality,” “community harmony,” “reflection and meditation,” and “internal mindfulness.” A recently written purpose/vision statement, constructed by the session of GPC, reveals these Buddhistic influences:

Goleta Presbyterian Church reflects the spiritual needs of the community at large, promoting harmony within, and providing beautiful spaces for reflection, inspiration, and worship of God; thinking with the mind and teachings of Christ; intent on living and carrying out our Mission and Plan in all our works.31

**Other “New Age” Ideologies**

In addition to Neo-Buddhism as a strong component in the cultural milieu of Goleta Presbyterian Church, there have been other primary influences of New Age

---

ideology. The two most prominent of these are Scientology and Neopaganism—and more specifically, “Earth Religion.” Scientology may be considered less of a formal religion, or an “Axial” hallmark, as the previously cited K. Jaspers might describe it, than an assorted collection of religious beliefs and practices. Founded in 1954 by American author L. Ron Hubbard, only five years before the official start of Goleta Presbyterian Church, Scientology bases its core religious paradigm around the concept of “Dianetics.” Dianetics is an invented word by Hubbard and his followers and relates to the psychological power of healing through a process of recalling, processing, and re-framing previously traumatic psychological experiences.³² Followers are encouraged to relate and process previous psychological injuries, while at the same time being “reprogrammed” in a healthier way.

The religion is also based on the Latin word “scio” which, when roughly translated, means “to know” or “to discern.” Adherents of the religious group must learn to discern their own life path, and to make the “right personal choices” within that system. While on its surface, there is no relationship to Buddhism in any way, one obvious connection point is the fact that there is no centralized doctrine or set of beliefs within either tradition. In the words of the famous religious historian, Huston Smith; “Buddha preached a religion devoid of authority. His attack on authority was double edged. On the one hand he wanted to break the monopolistic grip of the Brahmins on the

religious discoveries to date, and a good part of his reform consisted of no more than making generally known what had hitherto been the property of only a few.”

It is possible to derive a deeper psychological understanding of the affinity that many members of the Goleta Presbyterian Church have for Buddhism and Scientology from a basic aversion to authority in general. There has always been a bit of a rebel-like quality to the members of the congregation who see official authority structures, like the directly ecclesiastical authority of the Santa Barbara Presbytery, as counter to the overall health of the congregation. In some ways, this theologically motivated aversion to authority structures has preserved and protected the unique identity of Goleta Presbyterian Church, and in some ways, has thwarted its forward movement. This tension between accepting and rejecting authority also plays into this project’s need for utter sensitivity when it comes to developing a homiletical model for helping members of the church to move away from New Age and Scientology to become more fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ. It must also be underlined, by way of understanding context, that several members of Goleta Presbyterian Church were members of the Church of Scientology of Santa Barbara, prior to becoming regular attendees of GPC.

The other main New Age ideology that continues to influence GPC is Neopaganism, or “Earth Religion.” While the expression of “Earth Religion” does not revolve around any formalized practice or goddess (e.g. Gaia), it finds its primary expression through recognition of Earth Day, and the veritable worship of solar and lunar equinoxes. In 2017, the city of Santa Barbara hosted an Earth Day celebration through the

---

33 Huston Smith, *The Religions of Man*, 104.
Community Environmental Council. The celebrations for that particular year included Vinyasa Flow Yoga, Bee-Friendly Plants, an Environmental Hero Award, and speeches from the City Mayor and County Supervisor. Many members from the congregation attended this year’s Earth Day events. The syncretistic nature of the celebration, which included forms of Eastern Yoga, environmental education, and community leadership support, is a significant factor for the purposes of this project. The Goleta congregation’s organizational identity stems from this extremely fluid blend of eclectic religious practices. One example of this within the liturgical structure of worship is the recognition of Earth Day in church every year. The Sunday after Easter is recognized by many Christian churches as the second Sunday of Easter, continually focusing on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. At Goleta Presbyterian, the focus of this second Sunday after Easter has been around Earth Day.

Other examples of an “Earth focus” by the congregation are evident. Though the church uses very little electricity, elders recently met to research the possibility of purchasing solar panels for the church. The overall grounds of the church, around three acres, are mostly left free to grow for fear that that grooming or cultivating them in any way might detract from the natural state of the grounds themselves. It is possible that this “natural state” condition of the church grounds has internal significance for the congregation in their sense of Earth religious practices. In theological terms, it might be said that the gardens themselves are emblematic of the spiritual condition of the

congregation. As GPC might be averse to cultivating or pruning the plants and foliage on the church grounds, so might some of the members be averse to “cultivating” or “pruning” in their own personal spiritual journeys.

The adversity to trim foliage or plants on the GPC grounds may also come from Buddhist theological concepts. As Hendrik Vroom points out, “Because the human ‘ego’ lapses, all people, animals, and plants are experienced as elements of relatedness, and one is filled with compassion equally for all.”35 The Buddhist theological notion of karuna is basically that wisdom and compassion must be shown for all living things. So, the grounds of the church are somewhat emblematic of the unspoken theology which undergirds the congregation.

**Secondary Stages of Church Development**

Goleta Presbyterian Church has had four primary pastors, each of whom brought to the church, as all pastor’s do, their own unique flavor of culture, theology, and ministry. These four separate ministries may be described as falling into the following four basic categories: Foundational/Civil Rights Years, Community/Practical Years, Relational/Fluid Theological Years, and Inward/Detached Years (See Appendix B). Because the “Foundational/Civil Rights” time period of GPC has been heavily discussed in the first section of this chapter, further analysis time-period is not necessary. A brief analysis of the next three stages of the church (the secondary stages) will be helpful for further understanding of the cultural ministry context of this congregation. However,

---

35 Hendrik Vroom, *No Other Gods*, 34.
placing these four stages of GPC’s development into a more generalized church development framework is also helpful.

The world of growth experts and church developers have provided many different models for the natural trajectory and life cycle of a healthy church. In Christian Schwarz’s book, *Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches*, he outlines four primary stages of a healthy church’s maturation. These stages include: stage one (finding the lost, winning the lost, incorporating believers, discipling believers), stage two (strengthening family life, cultivating congregational life, mobilizing members, developing leaders), stage three (contextualizing the church, structuring the church, evangelizing the community, multiplying congregations), and stage four (increasing world awareness, sending and supporting national missionaries, bridging into unreached groups).  

George Bullard, in his paper, *The Lifecycle and Stages of Church Development*, takes a more “life-cycle view” of the natural life of a congregation. He has outlined the following stages of a church’s life: Growth (birth, infancy, childhood, adolescence, and adulthood) Prime or Plateau (maturity), Development (empty nest and adulthood), and Aging (old age and death). These are just two models for the life and stage development of a healthy church. There are hundreds of other examples in the world of church

---


development. Utilizing these two models can help to better understand the four various stages of the life of GPC.

**Community/Practical Years**

The Community/Practical years of GPC’s development lasted from about 1972 to 1989. Coming on the heels of the close of the American involvement in the Vietnam War, and the resignation of Richard Nixon as president, most communities in California sought to find an equilibrium once again. For GPC, this stage consisted of solidifying the congregation into a more unified group. Most of the focus of these years revolved around community barbecues, outreach events, and gatherings. A building was constructed on the original three-acre parcel of land that was donated to the church by a local rancher named Shirrell, the name of the street on which the church now sits. The first building, a non-descript, box-shaped main frame building, now called the “Fellowship Hall,” and its adjacent five classrooms, served as a multipurpose facility to the church. The building was erected from cinder blocks and store-bought windows.

There was no ornamentation to the building except for a large Celtic cross which hung outside. The non-ornate quality of the first building construction speaks to the relative parsimony of church finances, which still exists to this day, and to the “no-nonsense nature” of the congregation. Different than the highly ornate and Gothic building of downtown First Presbyterian Church, Santa Barbara, the building in Goleta could have resembled a barn for ranch storage. The philosophy of frugality, and the original structures are extant in the GPC congregation to this day.
The second pastorate lasted for seventeen years and consisted of a very light biblical approach. Sermons by the second pastor were marked by colorful illustrations which often emphasized the importance of community and mutual harmony and peace. A syncretistic approach to theology was often allowed and encouraged. One wedding which took place in the church at the time, from members who are still with the congregation, featured elements of Hindu theology, Buddhist theology, and Christian theology. Community dinners and potlucks were provided for members of the church and students from UCSB who attended. Potlucks and community dinners remain a mainstay of the congregation, with at least three major potlucks a year taking place in the Fellowship Hall.

Relational/Fluid Theological Years

The third pastorate of the church lasted from 1991 to 2008. This third pastorate lasted the same amount of time as the second—seventeen years. The longevity of the second and third pastorates of the church speaks to the relative stability of the congregation, and to the overall happiness of the pastors to remain in the church community. Whereas the second stage of development of GPC was marked by an openness to accepting the beliefs of other religious systems, the third stage of development was marked by an intentional inclusion and outreach to other faith systems. The sermons of this time-period were marked by almost no Bible application or inclusion. The Sunday messages delivered by the pastor were in a very casual, almost “chatty” style, often from a bar stool up front. Seminars and workshops were offered to congregants from many of the various world religions, including Islam, Buddhism,
Hinduism, and Eastern Mysticism. The main ingredient that kept the congregation together during this time, was, as suggested by the title of this stage: relationship. Personal relationships with the pastor maintained a sense of staff relations, congregational connection, and pastoral care.

The pastor, and the church in general, maintained a non-judgmental position towards the congregation of whatever belief system they were attracted to at the time. One member, who remains an active member of the congregation, confides, “I don’t believe in Jesus as a God, exactly. Jesus probably existed, but he was just a teacher. God is more of a force-field of power in the universe, that is bigger than I am. I like to think about that force-field as something that I might connect with again someday when I die.”

Interestingly, there were also several members of the congregation at this time who were more evangelical or even “fundamentalist” in their belief-set. Another member, who served as director of the youth program at the time, serves as Synod Executive of the Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians (ECO) today.

The congregation reached an apex of church membership during this time-period, growing to around four hundred members. A second building, a sanctuary, was built during this time-period. Characteristically, the sanctuary was paid for not with a loan from a local bank, as is the custom in many congregations, but with the internal loans of members of the congregation that formed a kind of co-op to pay for the new building. Earth Day celebrations were introduced to the church at this time. The pastor of the third

---

38 Chris Grant, Interview by author. Goleta, CA. September 27, 2016.

39 ECO is a more conservative denomination that broke away from PCUSA in 2014 mostly over conflict involving the question of the ordination and recognition of same-gender couples.
stage stepped down in 2008 to eventually become co-director of *La Casa de María*, a “Center for Spiritual Renewal” located in Santa Barbara. A sampling of the courses offered at *La Casa de María* is illuminative of the kinds of courses that were once offered at GPC during the third pastor’s term: “Free contemplative practice sessions are offered three times weekly, two in the Christian contemplative tradition, and one in Buddhist Mindfulness. Twice weekly a Yoga and Mindfulness Movement Class is offered for a modest fee.”

Strong global and local missions programs were developed in the third stage of the church. It is striking that during this period around ten to fifteen percent of the general budget of the church went to mission outreach.

**Inward/Detached Years**

The fourth stage of the church lasted for just seven years and can be marked by a general sense of inwardness and detachment. This period saw a noticeable decline in attendance, with around half the congregation leaving for various reasons. This term saw a somewhat more structured approach to ministry, and at the same time a degree of rigidity. Staff meetings ceased to take place, and all relations with the pastor were confined to one-on-one relationships. Many of the more prominent voices and individuals in the church left over a denominational split, or simply began to attend other churches. The pastor introduced a strong element of feminism into the church philosophy and structure which offered a tone of more equality but tended to agitate the original culture of the AC Delco group that was more traditional in its lifestyles. Somewhere during the

---

fourth stage of the church, the pastor suffered a nervous breakdown. Only some of the
congregation’s members were made aware of the pastor’s psychological state. As a result,
a tone of detachment took place during this place, and a general sense of confusion arose
regarding direction for the church. Many of the buildings and grounds of the church fell
into great disrepair.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Any serious research project must demonstrate an understanding of current and historical examples of academic study that are associated with a specific area of focus. While an exhaustive analysis of all the possible examples of academic work is impossible within the confines of the limited space of a doctoral project, a small sampling of significant works that have contributed to the author’s overall understanding of a subject area is essential. To this end, the following five books have been chosen to review by the author. These books fall into two different categories, each of which are germane to this research project. These include: Christian Conversion: Historical and Contemporary Examples and Homiletical Methods and Models.

Christian Conversion: Historical and Contemporary Examples

Editors Hugh T. Kerr and John M. Mulder, both leaders in the world of theological inquiry and religious academic research, in editing the book Famous
Conversions,¹ have compiled an essential collection of confessional accounts and conversion stories of some of the most well-respected Christian thinkers, preachers, writers, and missionaries in the history of the world. Kerr formerly served as the Warfield Professor of Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary, and as editor of the ecumenical theological quarterly publication, Theology Today. Mulder formerly served as a professor of historical theology and served as president of Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. Kerr is author of many articles and a dozen books such as Our Life in God’s Light, and a devotional titled, Our Life With the Bible.² Mulder has been equally prolific and impactful in the field of theological studies, though less public since his self-described “fall from grace” and leadership of Louisville Theological Seminary in 2002.³ Mulder’s theological works include Vital Signs: The Promise of Mainstream Protestantism, and several books about Woodrow Wilson.

Mulder has recently republished the book Famous Conversions, under the new title Finding God: A Treasury of Conversion Stories. In writing this book’s sequel, Mulder has included several newer profiles of Christian conversions, some of which include Bill Wilson, the founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, and the rock singer Bono, lead singer of the band U2.

¹ Hugh T Kerr and John M. Mulder, Famous Conversions (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdman’s Publishing Co, 1983), 265.


Conversion narratives, or “Confessions” have long been a hallmark of the Christian experience ever since the very genesis of the Christian faith. The process by which “an outsider to the faith” becomes “an insider to the faith” has sometimes followed a well-trodden and familiar path that is almost formulaic in its dimensions. These dimensions, as are evidenced in the documentation provided by Kerr and Mulder, are as follows: first, a self-recognition of a person having “lived a life of sin,” or has an ongoing and ubiquitous sense of “fallenness,” second, a vision or a revelation of God to the individual in question, which often has emotional dimensions, third, a commitment of the individual to live a life of faith with Christ, fourth, almost a formulaic “reversion” into a personal sense of sinfulness, fifth, a second epiphany or conversion experience which is more cognitive than it is emotional in nature, and sixth, the vocational life of a new believer changing and redirecting to some area of ministry.

What is unique about Kerr and Mulder’s book is that it goes into great detail about the unique ways that people, within this customary rubric, have come to faith. The book begins with the lives of St. Paul and Augustine and concludes with the lives of John Cogley and Thomas Merton. Every theological perspective and professional trajectory imaginable is evidenced in this book. Many of those who wrote confessions were academics like C.S. Lewis and Malcolm Muggeridge, others were labor leaders like Samuel Shoemaker, or drinkers, gamblers, and horse-racers like Peter Cartwright. Each of these faith narratives is different in their own way, and each convey deep individual truths which are helpfully articulated in this conversion primer.

One of the fascinating aspects of this book are the less-discussed aspects of a person’s coming to the Christian faith. Although the typical hallmarks of conversion are
almost all present in the sixty narratives, lesser known details are also articulated, which form a kind of pattern of conversion. For example, almost all the conversion narratives are promulgated by “night of the soul” experiences that occur during the night. One example of this would be the conversion narrative of Therese of Lisieux who wrote, “It was on December 25, 1886, that I received the grace of emerging from childhood—the grace of my complete conversion. We went to midnight mass where I had the joy of receiving almighty God.”

Following in the same pattern, almost all of the other narratives occur at night, when the would-be believer is experiencing higher levels of guilt, sin, or a sense of “fallenness.”

Another fascinating and recurring factor of conversion present in these narratives is an individual’s relationship with their parents. In some cases, those who convert have a very positive relationship with a primary parental figure. One example of many is of Peter Cartwright who wrote, “My mother sprang from her bed, and was soon on her knees by my side, praying for me, and exhorting me to look to Christ for mercy, and then and there I promised the Lord that if he would spare me, I would seek and serve him; and I never fully broke that promise.”

There are an equal number of conversion narratives mentioned in Famous Conversions about people whose relationship with their primary parental figure or figures was more negative. The best example of these might be C.F. Andrews who wrote, “The

---

5 Ibid., 97.
long line of ancestors from which my father descended were hardy Puritans.” What is interesting is that whether an individual has a positive or a negative experience with their own family of origin, it is almost always the case that parental figures play an important role in the faith journey and conversion narrative of all people. This is especially surprising since many occur later in life.

It is beneficial to analyze the conversion narrative of editor John M. Mulder, who experienced a kind of second conversion in his life from the time that he wrote the original version of Famous Conversions in 1983, to the time that he wrote the second edition, Finding God: A Treasury of Conversion Stories, in 2012. By his own account, Mulder rose very quickly to the heights of academic esteem and fame in religious circles in 1981 when he was just thirty-five years of age, and he sunk to the depths of it in 2002 when he resigned as longtime president of Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary because of sexual misconduct with adult women during his term. This point bears a moment of focus because Mulder experienced a second conversion, not so different than the ones that others experienced in his book, (Dorothy Day), after a life of self-described “sinful behavior.”

In Mulder’s own words he observes, “What I did was terribly wrong. It was a violation of my marriage vows, my ordination vows. I will always live with the pain of having deceived other people.” However, in a subsequent thought, Mulder offers, “I don’t consider (the pre-crisis) part of my life a period in which I was absent from God or God was absent from my life. My subsequent experience did represent a kind of descent into

---

6 Ibid., 175.
an abyss of loneliness and despair and coming out of it, and a sense of belonging to God and a new sense of mission.”7 This information about Mulder’s life gives the book a kind of double-layered meaning that includes not just the transformative narratives of those people for whom the book is written, but about the conversion narrative of the editor himself, as he continues to be transformed and converted into God’s image and plan for his life.

Although the book Famous Conversions does not have one singular thesis or central argument, per se, several metatheses can be gleaned from it. First, and foremost, Kerr and Mulder seem to suggest that all people, no matter their life background, are capable of conversion transformation. All people, it would seem, have an inherent sense of fallenness and sin, and people are capable of eschewing that sense of fallenness through a personal relationship with Christ. A second metathesis might be that even though all people have an innate sense of their own sin, all experience this sin in different ways. Some individuals have participated in life experiences, like Augustine, who was libertine in his relationship with women before becoming a Christian, which make them sinful. Others simply have a life experience or an overall characterological outlook that recognizes the abject chasm within the center of every human heart. Francis Thompson, who wrote The Hound of Heaven, embodies this simultaneous desire for, and aversion for God, in his seminal poem:

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;  
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;  
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways  
Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears

7 Peter Smith, “Fallen Presbyterian Leader Finds Path to Renewal,” 1.
I hid from Him, and under running laughter.  

The exact audience for this book is non-descript. While the narratives are short, being only two or three pages each, they are not easy reading. In some cases, for example the profile of Albert Schweitzer, the narratives are like reading very esoteric theology or philosophy. In other cases, the narratives read as an acerbic socially ironic commentary, as was the case with Evelyn Waugh. This book is not for the novice reader or theological thinker. However, if a person is interested in the mechanisms of conversion, or the contexts of conversion, as this author is, it is an invaluable treasure trove of confessional narratives.

It is impossible to compare this book to other conversion primers, since, prior to the writing of this book, very few, if any of them existed. In this way, Kerr and Mulder have trodden out new territory upon which the serious theological thinker may follow-up. In the end, Kerr and Mulder seem to be invoking the readers of this conversion primer to search their own hearts to determine where they may stand on the conversion continuum. A final chapter of this book might include the reader’s own spiritual autobiography. To construct such a document, the reader would have to, as the sixty other profiles before him/her have done, search their hearts for their true standing with God, with themselves, and the world, and find in the final analysis that they are lacking any ability for self-transformation that might emerge from their own reductive and wanting selves.

**Christian Conversion: Buddhist Examples**

Hendrik Vroom, professor of the philosophy of religion at the Faculties of

---

8 Kerr and Mulder, *Famous Conversions*, 145.
Theology and Philosophy of Vrije Universiteit in the Netherlands, has written *No Other Gods: Christian Belief in Dialogue with Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam*, an extremely helpful book about the basics of many Eastern religions and their dialogical engagement with the main precepts of the Christian faith. Hendrik Vroom, not to be confused with the famous nineteenth-century African-American merchant and theologian, nor the sixteenth-century Dutch painter by the same name, is a leader in the field of Buddhist/Christian engagement. Vroom has written several other academic treatises on religious dialogue, the most famous of which is most likely *Religions and the Truth: Philosophical Reflections and Perspectives*. As a professor in Amsterdam, Vroom offers a unique perspective within a city context of which Amsterdam is one of the most diverse population centers in the world. Vroom’s in depth understanding of many world religions means that he is able to write more than an apologia of the Christian faith, but rather a helpful comparative analysis of the similarities and differences found within each of the world’s primary religious traditions.

The word “dialogue” stems from the Greek word *dialegesthai*, which means to “converse with.” Taking this basic definition, Vroom, extends the meaning and expounds upon it more fully in his application of the phrase, “critical dialogue,” and its relation to varying religious perspectives. Vroom defines critical dialogue as the “examination of that which others actually believe, articulation of one’s own belief, readiness to learn

---


from one another, and open discussion on mutual criticism.”11 As such, Vroom’s goal of this book is, as the title would suggest, to encourage critical dialogue between the four primary religious traditions of Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam. For purposes in which he does not state in this book, Judaism is left out of this dialogical framework. Although Vroom, outside of the introductory comments about dialogue, does not directly address how such dialogue might best be engaged between these four primary religious traditions, he does offer a quick summary of the similarities and differences between them.

As other reviews of this book have noted, Vroom is less at ease with Hinduism than he is with its theological and religious progeny in Buddhism and Islam.12 For the purposes of this research project, however, Vroom’s expertise in the area of Buddhism is ideal. In a very detailed first chapter, Vroom lays out several primary characteristics of Buddhist thought. One of these includes the notion of “no-self” or shinyata.13 Shinyata is the process by which a Buddhist adherent empties their own soul of any recognition of self. Vroom compares this process, in broad terms, to the Christian notion of confession, but says that the Christian adherent can learn a lot from the Buddhist meditative world about this emptying. Another seminal idea discussed in this chapter on Buddhism is the interconnectedness of all things—dependent co-originality. Dependence, or

---

11 Hendrik Vroom, No Other Gods, 4.


13 Hendrik Vroom, No Other Gods, 4.
interdependence is the idea that all living things, plants, animals, and humans, were connected in the beginning, and that the goal of the Buddhist adherent is to find this connection once again through the process of samsara. This concept of samsara also relates to notions of good and evil. Good and evil, as formulations, are simply two sides of the same coin. This fluidity of moral norms is obviously quite different than the Christian notions of justice, good, evil, and the quest for salvation.

One of Vroom’s most important ideas in this book is his notion that the main difference between Buddhism and Christianity is its overall trajectory. For Buddhism, freedom from all things of this world occurs at the end of a long journey of faith and meditation. This freedom occurs only when the individual frees him or herself from the attachments of this world. On the other hand, for the Christian, “Freedom lies at the beginning of the path.” The journey for the Christian begins with acceptance of Christ as Savior, along with a request for the forgiveness of sins. The path then quickly moves toward a three-fold journey of “faith, hope and love” (1 Cor 13). Love, says Vroom, leads to notions of justice and mercy which are not relative notions, as they are in the Buddhist tradition.

Vroom shows less expertise in the areas of Hinduism and Islam as they relate to the Christian dialogue. Vroom can be excused from this apparent lack of expertise in the case of Hinduism because of its total vastness as a subject matter. There are as many different Hindu gods as there are different languages and dialects spoken in India. Islam as well, with its basis on Mohamed as a prophet and not a “god-figure” per se, lends less

\[14\] Ibid., 41.
to a direct comparison or dialogue than does Buddhism. The final chapter of this book articulates more generalized differences between Western and Eastern modes of thought. These differences emphasize the concepts of absolutism and exclusivity, whether all these religious paths are simply different dimensions of the “same God,” and whether, in the final analysis, Christianity is a “better faith” than the others. On this final question, Vroom says that Christianity is not better than other faith traditions, but must be informed, first and foremost by, “the gospel.”

The primary purpose of Vroom’s work seems to be to create a forum in which critical analysis of the varying world religious traditions can take place. Vroom’s primary thesis is that true critical dialogue can only occur when adherents of a unique religious tradition are honest and concrete in their own theological convictions. In other words, dialogue can only take place between people of two differing and fixed positions. However, within this dialogical framework is also an inherent flaw. If, as Vroom states in his concluding paragraph, no religious tradition is superior to another, then true dialogue between adherents of this tradition is impossible. All religions are comparative, and therefore reductive. The writing of this book seems to be somewhat user friendly, and might be useful for basic practitioners of each of the main religious perspectives. Yet, Vroom offers no “how to” section in his work. A myriad of questions may arise in the mind of the reader: Where should such dialogues between religions take place? In churches, mosques, Buddhist temples? How should they take place? Should there be a moderator between the faith traditions, or should each adherent be their own moderator?

15 Ibid., 162.
Can an individual, or a “self,” who adheres to a particular faith actually step out of that faith and honestly communicate with another in another faith, or are such dialogues, in the end, impossible? Because, as Vroom himself states, “The self, in the being the self, is not the self.” 16

Vroom’s most helpful analysis, for the purposes of this research project, are in the arena of “detachment.” Part of the reason for the title of this project is that a basic notion of Buddhism is the quest for eternal detachment. A homiletical approach for helping people influenced by New Age ideologies is to help people to become reconnected or reattached. Vroom writes, “Love is a positive attachment. Hate is a negative attachment, but all attachment, positive as well as negative is problematic.” 17 In essence, the goal in Christian preaching is foremost to share the beauty, love, and affection of God for all God’s people. A helpful approach will be to “teach people to become ‘attached’ to that which is good and beautiful and to each other, and to worry about the oppressed and about those who suffer more than others.” 18

**Homiletical Methods and Models from Barth**

William H. Willimon, former Dean of the Chapel at Duke University, former bishop in the United Methodist Church, current Professor of the Practice of Christian Ministry at Duke University, and a voice to an entire generation of preachers in the United States, has written a very significant book about Karl Barth, and specifically,

16 Ibid., 17.

17 Ibid., 36.

18 Ibid., 41.
Barth’s contributions to the theology of public proclamation and preaching: 

*Conversations with Barth on Preaching.*\(^ {19}\) Willimon is a widely published author, and a partial list of his works, numbering sixty books, includes *Sunday Dinner: The Lord’s Supper and the Christian Life,*\(^ {20}\) *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Christian Ministry,*\(^ {21}\) and *Who Will Be Saved?*\(^ {22}\) Willimon has served on the faculties of many theological institutions, and has most recently served as an adjunct teaching professor at Fuller Theological Seminary. He frequently writes and thinks with his friend and colleague, and resident philosopher, ethicist, and theologian, Stanley Hauerwas. Willimon currently serves as editor-at-large of *The Christian Century* magazine.

Books about the late, great twentieth-century theologian Karl Barth are almost as voluminous as the amount of work that Barth himself completed in his lifetime. Most of these books about Barth focus on specific attributes of his theological contributions, namely, the doctrine of the Trinity, and the exact nature and dispensation of Christian revelation. Differing from other contemporaneous scholars of Barth, Willimon has written an insightful book about Barth’s contributions to preaching. He observes that though much has been written about other aspects of classical theology, “of Barth as teacher and preacher, little has been said.”\(^ {23}\) Barth was first and foremost a preacher and

---

\(^ {19}\) William H. Willimon, *Conversations with Barth on Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 266.


\(^ {23}\) William H. Willimon, *Conversations with Karl Barth,* 1.
not an academic and preached in many different contextual settings. These include a small congregation at the beginning of his ministry in Sanfinwil, and later a prison in Germany. Of preaching, Barth said, “In every age, the church’s preaching has been sick.”

Willimon gleans from many aspects of the art of preaching from Barth, but probably the most important of them is the notion that the word “theology” quite literally translates in the Greek to “God speech”—theo-logoi. As Barth himself said, the act of preaching was akin to “God speaking.” Further, the “preaching of the word of God is no less than the Word of God.” The goal of the effective preacher, then, is not to offer a deeply rhetorical thought-piece from the preacher’s own perspective about God or the world, but rather to get out of the way of the sermon and allow God to speak to the congregation through the scriptural text. Barth is extremely critical of most modern preaching approaches (for example those of Helmet Thieleke), as well as more classical rhetorical approaches (such as within the writings of Augustine). Barth strongly criticizes ancient notions of classical rhetoric that stem from Aristotle, which claim that a rhetorician must study the context of a congregation before knowing how to speak to them. Barth feels that many of these ancient ideas of preaching have unhelpfully infused the sermons of modern day preachers.

As the title of this book would suggest, conversation plays an important role in understanding the theology of Karl Barth, and an even more important role in

24 Ibid., 127.
25 Ibid., 93.
26 Ibid., 127.
understanding the act of public proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Conversation, as it relates to Karl Barth, can be understood on many levels. First and foremost, it is an allusion to the dialectical understanding of God. God wants to engage the creation with conversation. This is not a one-way conversation (a monologue), but it is a two-way dialectic or a dialogue (two-speeches). God speaks, individuals listen and respond. God listens, and speaks again, Individuals listen again, and so it repeats throughout the history of humanity.

The existential “conversation” begins with creation. Genesis 1:3 tells that God brought creation into existence through a sermon, “And God said . . .” The book of John begins with the reminder that, “In the beginning was the Word . . .” (John 1:1). Barth believes that the main conversation with humanity begins with Christmas. On Christmas morning God began an ongoing person-to-person conversation with His creation.

Conversation can also be understood through the classical notion of dialectic as was first presented by Socrates. Socrates taught his pupils through a method known for its give and take between his students. The truth, therefore, comes out at the end of the dialogue, not at the beginning of the stated assertion. Also, a sermon never ends with the end of the sermon. A sermon, like a dialogue, simply continues ad infinitum. Karl Barth insists the same is true of Christianity. In an ironic twist, one of Barth’s last conversations

---

27 William H. Willimon, Conversations with Karl Barth on Preaching, 67.
before he died in 1968 included the exclamation, “God will reign!” God’s supremacy and omnipotency are the final words of the conversation.

Willimon offers some important insights about Barth’s view of unbelievers, and the role preaching can play in bringing an outsider to faith. Most important is the notion that “God comes down to us when God desires, and it is not up to us.” God speaks, or God does not speak. Most preachers attempt, in Willimon’s words, to try to connect with the outsider to the faith by understanding his or her context. How is the outsider feeling? Who is he or she? What are their needs and wants? However, according to Barth, the outside context can never be fully understood except by knowing that all humans need redemption through Christ alone.

Following this train of thought, most modern preachers, Willimon and Barth believe, try to build from that initial connection of the listener, a bridge which takes the listener up to God. This is wrong, according to Willimon and Barth. The only effective preaching is when a God on high reaches down to the listener and speaks to them in the catastrophic language of the Bible. God comes down from the mountain; the preacher does not take the listener to its peak.

Once when Barth was asked in a public lecture about outsiders to the Christian faith, and how to communicate effectively with them, Barth said, “I don’t care about that.” What Barth meant by this is that God will speak to the outsider when and how He wishes—even through extra-biblical material (for example in the fields of math, science,

28 Ibid., 19.
29 Ibid., 19.
depth psychology, and music). Perhaps most helpful for the preacher who is attempting to communicate with an outsider to the faith is that there is an emotional distance between Barth and the non-believer. In a very real sense, Barth lets the outsider to the faith alone, and lets them hear God’s voice on their own.\footnote{Ibid., 179.} Further, Barth would say that, “Even Gentiles can be used for purposes of God’s proclamation,”\footnote{Ibid., 193.} and most of all, “The Bible does not belong to the Church!”\footnote{Ibid., 29.}

Important to this specific research project, Willimon articulates some important ideas of Barth’s as they relate to Buddhism and Eastern religious practice, and the vast difference between Christianity and Buddhism. Neither he nor Barth feel that deep meditation or self-deprivation can lead the individual to a deeper understanding of God. Barth was highly skeptical of the German philosopher/theologian Schliermacher who said that “The innermost sanctuary of life is feeling (Geschtalt).”\footnote{Ibid., 6.}

Though in both Buddhism and Christianity there must be a ridding of one’s own self before God can effectively begin to enter the interior life of the individual, there is nothing that the individual can do on his or her own to help propagate this process of self-negation. No amount of prayer, meditation, or self-negation can bring the listener any closer to God. There are also some similarities between Barth’s formulations and Buddhism as Willimon articulates them. Neither Barth nor Buddhists care much about relevance to society. The goal of the Christian is to connect with God, the goal of the
Buddhist is to arrive at “no-self” and then _sanyasi_. Barth continually invokes a word that is important to Buddhist thought: awakening. An awakening is a moment when the revelation of God breaks through to the listener. Barth seems to suggest that it happens primarily in the mind, which is also consistent with Buddhist thought. Some of Barth’s critics would later say that, similar to Buddhism, one of Barth’s understandings of salvation was that it could be achieved noetically, or mentally. To this criticism, Barth might surely riposte with his famous response to E. Brunner, “_Nein!_”

In the end, it must be asked whether Willimon meets his own objectives to shed light on the specific contributions of Barth to preaching. Throughout _Conversations with Karl Barth on Preaching_, Willimon suggests in various ways that only preachers can understand other preachers. However, is there really a Barthian formula or homiletical model to preaching? With Barth it is all theory and relationship with Christ. Perhaps because Barth wrote so voluminously on so many different topics it is hard to effectively “pin-down” any one homiletical approach, except the ones that are laid out in broad terms in this review. He does not offer any concrete ways that a Barthian homiletical approach can be implemented. In this way, Willimon and Barth raise more questions about preaching than they answer. How exactly does the preacher get out of the way of his or her own public proclamation? How does God’s truth dispense from the lips of the preacher to the congregation? What are metrics for understanding whether a sermon is effective or not? How does a preacher eschew a sermon of rhetorical flourish, when, in truth, all speech is rhetorical whether it wants to be or not?

Willimon attempts to address this Barthian contradiction in his section “More than Heralds,” stating that “The great test for the validity of Barth’s claim that he is
willfully disinterested in rhetorical matters, that is, speech from our end of the divine-conversation, is to ask anyone to pick up a volume of *Church Dogmatics* and read it.”[^34]

Here Willimon says that even though Barth detested rhetoric, that Barth was the most rhetorical of writers, employing all kinds of rhetorical devices from classical antiquity (such as irony, narrative, surprise, and hyperbole). In the end, one wonders if both Barth and Willimon have set up a standard for public proclamation that is impossible for any human being, including these two great theologians, to meet. He says that though he loves Barth’s thinking on preaching, that he does not feel that he embodies Barth’s homiletical model in any effective way. Perhaps that, in the end, is the point of this book—to show that only Christ himself can attest to the glories of the kingdom of God.

**Homiletical Methods and Models from Willimon**

In 2005, William H. Willimon was asked to deliver the Jamison Jones lectures at Duke University. This is a lecture series that is offered annually at Duke and features luminary thinkers from around the world. The assigned topic was, “How to Keep Preaching Fresh.” A very good book, *Undone by Easter: Keeping Preaching Fresh*,[^35] is derived from the manuscripts of those lectures. As has been stated, Willimon is formerly the Chaplain of Duke University, and currently serves as Professor of Practice and Christian Ministry at Duke. Importantly, Willimon is sometimes associated with the “post-liberal movement” theological perspective and “narrative thought.” Willimon is

[^34]: Ibid., 189.

primarily a story teller in the pulpit. He regularly invokes irony in his writing and his teaching. In 1996, he was named by Baylor University as one of the twelve great preachers of the English language.\(^{36}\) In the words of one preaching contemporary, Tom Long, “For nearly four decades, William H. Willimon has been a singular voice in American preaching. His rare blend of wit and wisdom, prophetic jabbing and pastoral nurturing, biblical insight and common sense, poetic soarings and country store musings have made him a welcome and refreshing presence in pulpits across the country and around the world.”

One of the hardest tasks for any preacher with any amount of experience, or of any age, is how to continue to preach the same texts, on the same religious holidays, in the same congregation, year after year, and still “keep preaching fresh.” Because of the limited time that a preacher has to prepare for a sermon on any given Sunday, and because of the repetitive nature of the texts that are preached, this is no easy undertaking. To this basic challenge Willimon offers four primary areas of thought, which can be boiled down into these main headings: the heresy of new things, the inherent nature of time, the value of repetition, and the ultimate disruption of time.

In the first area of thought, Willimon suggests that there really is nothing new in preaching or in theology, and an attempt to offer something new from the pulpit is a futile exercise. Willimon even suggests that, “What is called ‘postmodern’ may simply be modernity raised to an even higher level of hubris—‘most-modern’.”\(^{37}\) Ecclesiastes 1:9


reads, “What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again, there is nothing new under the sun.” Willimon says that it is the pagan civilization that has been expressed in the fear articulated by Aristotle that, “Can it be that all things pass away?” This articulation by Willimon offers the preacher a level of comfort and peace in the notion that a Sunday sermon is not supposed to be a “new thing.” A Sunday sermon should sound like the sermon that is offered the week before, and the month before, and the year before. This may be an encapsulation by the great Middle Eastern theologian Ken Bailey, who, when referring to an ancient proverb said, “If it’s new it isn’t true, if it’s true it isn’t new.” What is more important, according to Willimon, is not to capture newness in the pulpit, but rather an immediacy. He reminds us that Mark’s favorite word in the Gospel of Mark is, EUTHYS, (literally translated “immediately,” or “now”).

This second formulation of immediacy moves Willimon to his second main area of thought—time. He discusses the importance of time for a preacher, not so much from the standpoint of a fixed philosophical notion (Chronos/Kairos), but rather, as a means of effectively sharing the gospel. Willimon points out that for an effective therapist, it is not so much a question of saying the right things to a client, but rather that the correct concepts are offered at the right time: “The therapist must be patient, must allow the client to talk, and talk, and wait and wait for just the right time.” Equally, an effective preacher must know the right time to share a particular idea with a congregation. Just

---

38 Ibid., 7.
39 Ibid., 10.
40 Ibid., 24.
because something may be a good idea, does not mean that the congregation is ready to hear it.

He then moves to the notion that what is radical about the Christian gospel is that Christ literally stole back time for himself. Time, though it was an invention by humans, is something that Jesus takes back when he goes to the cross and dies for us and comes back to life again. Literally, the resurrection is about the recapturing of time. The only thing that makes time distinctive for humans is that it eventually runs out—in death. With victory over death, God steals back time. He says that ultimately time is a delusional notion for humans: “In attempting to make time our own, without God, we no longer have time.”

Willimon’s third section, and presumably third lecture, deals with the importance of repetition in Christian preaching. Ever the student of Barth, he emphasizes Barth’s love of repetition, even though Barth purportedly eschewed any form of formal rhetoric. Barth’s favorite composer was Mozart, who made it an essential part of his compositions to repeat phrases and refrains of music again and again. Willimon goes through the history of thought from Tolstoy to Kierkegaard, and shows how each of these writers and thinkers utilized repetition effectively. He lifts up the thoughts of Wittgenstein who said, “I have only attempted to think what other people have thought.” He beautifully lifts up the thoughts of G. K. Chesterton who once said that “Almighty God is a bit like a young child, saying every single morning to the sun, ‘Again!’”

41 Ibid. 34
42 Ibid., 54.
43 Ibid., 56.
preacher stands up each Sunday and says, “Again!” In lifting up the merits of repetition, Willimon seems to be saying that even as God has no trouble repeating old things, neither should the preacher be afraid of repeating them Sunday after Sunday.

It is in the final section of this book Willimon expands upon helping the Christian preacher connect with someone who is in a New Age ideology. He says that in the *Tao Te Ching*, the “divine is apophatic, ineffable and unspeakable, or else it is not divine.” In a sense, the divine is a kind of nothingness that cannot even be spoken. He says that Christianity takes an entirely different approach to this notion, that “Unlike the Tao, God tells us God’s name.” In other words, it is the staking out of God’s-self which inherently makes God, God. In Christianity God is a “something,” in New Age thought God is numinous nothing. The preacher must attempt every single Sunday, Willimon says, to “raise the dead.” This means that the preacher does not just speak of the risen Christ from death, but that, like God, the preacher steals back time for the congregation. Here, he quotes Bonhoeffer who insists, “Preaching is the Christ himself walking through his congregation as the word.” Willimon finishes his lecture series with a somewhat aggressive and salty end as he speaks to fellow Christian pastors. He claims that it is not the congregants who need to be freshened up, but the preachers: “All you good church people, you now weeded-out, post Easter elite, truly committed and naturally religious ones take note. The people most reluctant to believe in resurrection—when we get one—is us!”

---

44 Ibid. 76.

45 Ibid. 90.

46 Ibid., 97.
The basic premise of Willimon’s lectures and book is that it is an act of folly for the preacher to attempt to try to offer anything new from the pulpit. New methods of communication, specifically Powerpoint presentations, videos, and “how to” preaching styles actually detract from the Christian message rather than adding to them. It is my suspicion that the reason Willimon takes such an approach has something to do with his own generational prejudices against modernist and post-modernist approaches. Preaching, as he has done, from a marble pulpit in a huge sanctuary cathedral at Duke these many years, has caused Willimon, it would seem, to be against new things. There is no way to do Powerpoints in a cathedral effectively, so they are not necessary. The Jamison lectures themselves are offered to, what appears to be, a group of older preachers. In this sense, Willimon is most likely “preaching to the choir.”

One wonders how well this talk would fare with a younger, more technologically focused audience. This work is less scholarly than his previously reviewed book on Barth, but his references to famous names in classical philosophical thought are no less prevalent. This book is a “Who’s Who” list of great thinkers who have lived and made offerings down through the ages. In the entire book, he has taken a characteristic approach of his, which he employs in many of his sermons, to seemingly say, “Wait, not so fast! You are not so new! You are not as cool as you think!” He writes for the ear and for the mind, which makes his style of writing easy to digest even if the reader may or may not agree with all his ideas. In the end, it must be said that Willimon has a phenomenal mind of his own and is a superb speaker and writer who will likely go down in history as one of the great voices in the Methodist tradition (along with Wesley), if not the larger Christian community.
Homiletics: Practice and Praxis

Thomas Long, who serves as The Bandy Professor of Preaching at the Candler School of Theology at Emory University, is widely considered to be one of the leading preaching experts in the United States today. He holds a Ph.D. in homiletics from Princeton Theological Seminary, an institution where he also taught homiletics and theology for many years. Long’s academic works include: *Preaching from Memory to Hope,*47 and *Beyond the Worship Wars: Building Vital and Faithful Worship.*48 In 1996, Long was named one of the twelve most effective preachers in the English-speaking world by Baylor University.49 *The Witness of Preaching*50 was named one of the twenty-five most influential preaching books written in the last twenty-five years.

Through the years, many different images have been utilized to describe the experience of preaching. Some of the most famous of these, which Long articulates in this book are herald, pastor, and storyteller. Long takes painstaking time to offer the pros and cons of each of these preaching perspective: “The Herald has not been the most helpful image for preaching [because it] does not take context seriously enough.”51 As the title would suggest, Long develops a new primary image for the art and act of preaching: the witness.

47 Long, Thomas G. *Preaching from Memory to Hope* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2009)

48 Long, Thomas G. *Beyond the Worship Wars: Building Vital and Faithful Worship* (Alban Institute, 2001)


51 Ibid, 19, 26.
He describes the process of being a witness in both biblical and practical terms. From a biblical standpoint, the English word for witness comes from the Greek word for martyr. So, a witness, in Long’s formulation, is a person who is willing to lay down their life for a specific cause or idea. The early witnesses were, in many cases, also martyrs for the faith. In more practical and pedestrian terms, a witness is also a person who sits in a jury box during a trial and tells the courtroom what he or she sees or has experienced. In Long’s words, the witness does not have to present the material with oratorical flourish or colorful detail, but rather simply states the facts as they understand them to be. To quote a famous aphorism about a witness to the scene of a crime, a policeman says to a bystander, “Just the facts man…just the facts.” So, Long asserts, as W. Bruggeman has also said, “Preachers should see themselves as scribes.”\(^5^2\)

Perhaps Long’s largest contribution to the art and topic of homiletics is his coverage of the basic rudiments of the “form of preaching.” Long suggests that a basic quandary in every church is how the pastor enters the room; “how ministers and priests make their entrances into the sanctuary.”\(^5^3\) Does the pastor walk in through the back or through a small side door in the side of the chancel? Does the pastor sit in the front row or in a big large “throne” up front? Does the preacher walk to the middle of the room or climb up into a large pulpit? These questions represent metaphors for how a community interfaces with and has expectations about the gospel of Jesus Christ. Most of all, Long suggests a congregation always needs to have “an air expectancy” about the sermon. In

\(^5^2\) Ibid., 126.

\(^5^3\) Ibid., 1.
one of Long’s funniest ripostes about timing in a sermon, he reutilizes the thoughts of the German Reformer, Martin Luther, who said, “When you see your hearers most attentive, then conclude.”

It seems that Long is most comfortable in relating the preaching ideas and themes of one of the great preachers of the late twentieth century, Fred Craddock. Craddock was famous for the “inductive style of preaching,” which is a counterpoint to the more traditional “deductive style of preaching.” In inductive preaching, the preacher offers a series of ideas and illustrations which eventually coalesce in the main point of the sermon, as opposed to the more traditional style of stating at the outset what the sermon is about and then offering arguments as to why that is true. Craddock developed many seminal ideas about the art of preaching. One of them was the use of illustrations, asserting an illustration does not need to just be used to make a point, but that rather, it may be the point: “A story may carry in its bosom the whole message.” An example of this might be the famous sermon that the late great preacher, Louis Evans Sr., offered at Hollywood First Presbyterian Church, where the whole sermon about gossip became a story of a vulture circling its meat on the ground, and then finally engorging itself.

Long offers many helpful ideas about the preparation of preaching after the sermon is written, in his second-to-last chapter titled “From Desk to Pulpit.” Long emphasizes the value of practicing a sermon, not so much from the standpoint of rehearsing the delivery as, “placing yourself in the role of the listener.”

---

54 Ibid., 192.
55 Ibid., 203.
56 Ibid., 230.
preacher orally goes through a sermon, it is the first time anyone has ever heard it. Long also reminds the preacher that ultimately the sermon does not belong to him or herself, but “to those who are listening and who help to create it.” A sermonic exercise is a living thing and cannot be captured on paper or ultimately controlled. When a sermon leaves the mouth of the preacher, it takes on a life of its own in the hearts, minds, and souls of the listeners themselves.

It is difficult to gauge how successful Long ultimately is in his own stated goal for this book of creating a new model of preaching as the witness. While he begins with a helpful discussion of the witness image, he fails to elaborate on the concept in any way throughout the book. In some ways, the work falls prey to one of the great criticisms of all sermons, that Long himself raises in this book, that they set up an expectation for what they ultimately do not fulfill. Even though this is the case, this book does offer many very important and helpful ideas about preaching in the modern and post-modern context.

Ultimately, what is most helpful is the conveyance of recognition of the fragility of the human behind the sermon. Long’s own experience as a seasoned and successful preacher, and his own humanity therein, are evident in all the ideas put forward in this book. Long discusses the loneliness of preaching, and the sense of vulnerability in offering God’s Word week in and week out. So, in the end, Long’s greatest contribution to preaching is the transparency of the preacher behind the writing of this book.

---

57 Ibid., 226.
CHAPTER 3

A THEOLOGY OF CONVERSION TO THE CHRISTIAN FAITH THROUGH EFFECTIVE PREACHING

A Homiletical Theology of Karl Barth

Any homiletical model that is built upon the writings and thinking of Karl Barth must begin with the basic acknowledgment that Barth’s primarily theological piece, his fourteen-volume work, *Church Dogmatics*, was written originally as a basic aide and primer for preachers. In Barth’s own words; “My whole theology, you see, is fundamentally a theology for parsons. It grew out of my own situation when I had to teach and preach and counsel a little.” Interestingly, Barth never received a Ph.D. mostly because he saw his primary responsibility being the care and the nurture of the local church and the local pastor: “Most of his effort was spent on the Sunday sermon, sermon preparation being the most ‘political’ activity.” Of course, the irony that any preacher,

---


3 Ibid., 13.
who constructively works on their sermons every week in a conscientious way, would ever have time to read fourteen volumes of any set, no less voluminous tomes likes these, often containing extremely arcane theological concepts, has not been lost on any preacher that has lived, following the *Dogmatics* initial publication in 1932. Add to this the fact that, though fourteen volumes, “Barth never completed his work, never finished his theology, as if to say that, with a living God, there is always something else left to be heard and left to be said.”4 The task for any modern preacher to be able to wrap their minds around the entire corpus of Barth’s theology on preaching is indeed a herculean task.

Of his own theology of preaching, Barth is, no doubt, the best source. However, if Barth was to choose the perfect type of professional to interpret his ideas, it would be the preacher. Willimon suggests this when he says, “Considering the purposes of Barth’s theology, and its particular challenges, I do not think that anyone should venture to interpret Barth who is not a preacher, that is, without being a participant in the Holy Spirit-dependent task that Barth assumes.”5 Because I am also a preacher who prepares multiple sermons each week, because of the magnitude of the material involved in researching this body of work, and due to the congregational contextual nature of this particular research project, I have primarily relied upon verifiable secondary sources to glean the truths of Barth on the topic of preaching. To this end, I have relied heavily on William Willimon’s, *Conversations With Karl Barth on Preaching*. A smattering of

4 Ibid., 3.

5 Ibid., 4.
primary source material has also been utilized, drawing mostly on the *Church Dogmatics* themselves. Another helpful source on the role of prayer especially for the preacher, by Karl Barth himself, simply called *Prayer*, has been utilized throughout this chapter. A special attempt has been made to find inroads as to where the primary theme of this paper, Neo-Buddhism the conversion process, and an Orthodox understanding of Christianity intersect.

The most important image to retain regarding Barth’s own view of preaching, and secondarily preaching as a means of conveying theology is a painting that hung just above his desk “from the days as a young pastor until his death, referring to it fifty-one times in his writings.” The painting is by the German Expressionist painter Mathis Grunewald, titled, “John the Baptist.” The painting [See Appendix F] depicts Jesus Christ hanging on a cross, while striking a tortuous pose, fingers erect in pain, head down, body sagging. Off to one side is Mary, the mother of Jesus, in a near swoon of empathy for her crucified Son. Off to the other side is a man standing straight and holding a copy of the Bible, pointing directly at the cross upon which Jesus hangs. In Barth’s mind, the role of every preacher is to embody the example of John the Baptist as much as possible. The primary responsibility of every preacher is to testify to the death and subsequent resurrection of Christ. Any other superfluous or flowery rhetoric or ornament that would be found in a sermon, according to Barth, is unhelpful to the homiletical proclamation goal.

---


7 Ibid., 5.
The Sermon as Dialogue

One of the most important ideas in Barth’s theology is that a sermon is a dialogical (dialectic) activity. “Barth wrote theology dialectically (dia, two + lectos speaker) because the dynamic subject matter (the Trinity and its perichorietic movement) demanded a means of engagement that was dynamic and energetic.” The dialogue begins in antiquity with God speaking to the original authors of the Bible. God spoke to Moses in the writing of the Torah, to Luke in the writing of the third Gospel, and to Paul in the writing of the epistles. Barth believes that God continues to speak to modern day pastors and preachers through the holy Scripture, through the outside world, through intensive study, through one another’s wise counsel, and mostly through prayer. It was through the writings of Anselm that Barth learned that, “all theology is a practice of prayer.”

The writing of a sermon, then, is not initially a speaking or a writing activity, but it is first and foremost a listening activity. Following this logic, the dialogue between God and the preacher does not stop with the preacher’s writing of the sermon during the week, but it continues from the pulpit, where, as Barth would have it, God continues to speak to the congregation via the preacher. Barth loved to point to the Greek word, THEO-LOGOI (in English, theology) as meaning in its most literal sense, “God Speaks.” He believed that the preacher’s own words would never be able to “do justice to the Word,” always

---

8 William H. Willimon, Conversations with Barth on Preaching, 67.

9 Ibid., 19.

10 Ibid., 143.
getting in the way of God’s words. Barth himself said that “Most of our words, spoken or heard, are an inhuman and barbaric affair because we will not speak or listen to one another.”\textsuperscript{11} In Karl Barth’s aptly named, \textit{Table Talk}, he states,

“Conversation takes place when one party has something new and interesting to say to the other. Only then is conversation an event. One must say something engaging and original, something with an element of mystery. The Church must sound strange to the world if it is not to be dull . . . As theologians we must be obedient to the Word.”\textsuperscript{12}

In this way, for Barth, the preacher offering a public proclamation of the Gospel is simply the oracular vehicle for God who wants to speak every week to a congregation.

Barth posits the very origin of formal education (pedagogy) relies heavily on the give and take of ideas, of the back and forth of argument, and of the pro and con positions on any given subject. In other words, to train people in critical thought, two people are pitted against each other. The best examples come from the ancient Greeks who employed a way to teach the act of thinking by pitting two people against each other in an intellectual battle. One of the oldest, and most ancient forms of education is the Socratic Method.\textsuperscript{13} Though the term was not actually coined by Socrates, and it is doubtful that he ever employed it, The Socratic Method remains as the most famous means of educating young students in the art of critical thinking and philosophical thought. In short, it is an argumentative dialogue that takes place between two individuals. An example of the Socratic Method, as it might be used for children can be found in Appendix G.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 143.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 1-2.

\textsuperscript{13} The Socratic Method is also known as Maieutics or the Elenctic Method.
While Barth does not draw on Socrates’ ideas very heavily in his own theology, he does regularly invoke the ideas and formulas of Socrates’ primary pupil from Greek classical antiquity, Plato, on a regular basis. Barth asserts, “The truth of God is written by the prophets of Israel, by Plato and their like.”\textsuperscript{14} The dialogic or dialectic form of conversational debate develops into its own field of formal and classical logic. Barth imagined that a sermonic process might take up a similar dialogical or dialectical approach. Notice in the example in Appendix G how the subtle differences in the questions from person one, lead person two to see that that their original proposition was not as truthful or did not hold as much water as they had hoped. It is this back and forth, dialogical, dialectical style which has been thought of as the best way to sharpen a young mind, through thousands of years of history. Barth would submit that this form of dialectic is, in some measure, also what constitutes a good sermon.

Willimon intentionally draws on the idea of dialogue in the title \textit{Conversations with Barth}. A conversation is, of course, a dialogue. In every dialogue there is a person who speaks and a person who listens. Then, the person who has been listening has a chance to speak. In a true and effective dialogue, both individuals must be willing to receive the information that they are given, process it, assimilate it, perhaps disagree with it, and then respond. According to Barth, true and healthy conversation never actually ends. It simply continues until both parties decide to stop conversing. Following this, in Barth’s mind, a conclusion to a sermon is never the actual conclusion. A sermon simply

\textsuperscript{14} Willimon, \textit{Conversations with Barth on Preaching}, 16.
pauses the conversation between God and the congregation, only to take it up again the following week.

**High Christology and High View of Scripture**

The theologian Gilbert Bilezikian observes there are at least three main currents of opinion about the way that the Bible, as a primary religious source document, should be viewed. The first current is the low view of the Bible as revelation. Within this broad category are two main groups which include the secular approach and the Bibliolatry approach. The secular approach sees Scripture as merely a “human document”\(^{15}\) like any other form of popular literature. The Bibliolatry view is that the Bible may be inspired, but they do not apply the ideas that are contained within it to their own lives. The second current of opinion is known as the mediating view of Scripture which holds that the Bible essentially contains the Word of God, and that it becomes a “subjective revelation”\(^{16}\) for the person who believes it. This second current might also be considered postmodern since truth, for the post-modernist, is a subjective reality. The final and highest current is the high view of the Bible as revelation.\(^{17}\) This final current views the Bible as God’s objectively revealed truth to humanity. It is the one that best describes Barth’s view of Scripture. To him, Scripture was one of God’s most important revelations to the world. Scripture was and is the Revelation to the world.

\(^{15}\) Bilezikian, Gilbert, *Christianity 101* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993), 21.

\(^{16}\) Ibid.

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 22.
Barth’s high view of Scripture has direct implications for his theological method as it relates to preaching. For most modern preachers, the task is to, throughout the sermon, help lead a congregation from a metaphorical campsite at the bottom of a mountain, to the top where it will presumably meet God for a few moments, and then carefully guide it back down to the base camp. Barth did the opposite in his preaching. The sermon must, to extend the metaphor, begin at the very top of the mountain where God exists, and remain there for the entirety of the whole message. The most influential figure for Barth in this idea was fellow pastor and contemporary, Christoph Blumhardt. Barth said; “Blumhardt always begins right away with God’s presence, might, and purpose: he starts out from God; he does not begin by climbing upwards toward Him by means of contemplation and deliberation.”18 Barth believed that most preachers waste too much time on the trek and do not spend enough time with the purpose for the trek, being in the presence of a living Savior. In Barth’s own words, “Either God speaks, or he does not.”19

Barth’s high view of Scripture also has implications for his understanding of and desire to connect with context or culture. For Barth, culture and context were to be overcome and ignored, rather than connected with. This notion was drawn mostly from the fact that the culture (Kultur20) of Germany in the late 1800s and early 1900s was rife with antisemitism and social decay. Most Protestant theologians and pastors were highly

---

18 William H. Willimon, Conversations with Barth on Preaching, 10.
19 Ibid., 19.
20 The concept of Kultur in a mid-twentieth century German context also, quite nefariously, was used by leaders of the Nazi movement to espouse white nationalist ideology. Both Barth and I strongly reject such usages or understandings of the term.
enamored by some of the newer schools of lower and higher Biblical and textual criticism. Most pastors had eschewed any existence of objective truth or even historical truth from the Bible, and were more concerned with helping their congregants arrive at a more ethereal and subjective, generalized truth, an “inner Jesus.”

Later, in the 1930s and 1940s when the Nazis had gained full power in the German government, and SS officers were known to regularly stand at the back of the sanctuary and “observe” the sermon, Barth took the approach of essentially ignoring the culture altogether. Barth very rarely, if ever, spoke against the Nazis themselves, but rather believed that the best way of eradicating the plague of Hitler was to speak above it rather than to address it directly. This avoidance of context and culture has led some critiques to suggest that Barth may have had a “child-like naivete about Scripture.” However, according to Willimon, that “enabled him to see and hear things that we more serious adults miss.”

**Barth’s Openness to Non-Christian Thinking**

Though Barth adhered to a particularly high view of Scripture, this did not prohibit him or prevent him from drawing upon a dizzying and vast array of extra-canonical thinkers and non-Christian schools of academic thought. Barth read and studied widely, including the ancient Greek philosophers Aristotle and Plato, Roman historians Cicero and Virgil, and more modern German philosophers such as Hume, Kant, and Nietzsche. Barth took particular umbrage with the ideas of one modern philosopher and


22 Ibid., 24.
theologian, Schleiermacher, who he believed to rely too heavily on “the innermost sanctuary of life—feeling”\(^\text{23}\) (German, *geschalt, einfüllung*). For Barth, feeling was never something that could be fully trusted, and he therefore reviled the work of Schleiermacher and other Enlightenment thinkers like Schiller and Goethe. To the great dismay of many of his contemporaries, perhaps first and foremost was Bultmann, Barth read about modern mythology, and psychopathology and depth psychology. Writing about a conversion narrative, Barth notes, “Like similar events in the New Testament, the occurrence during with Blumhardt heard this cry, ‘Jesus is Victor,’ has three aspects. On the first, it is realistically explained in the sense of ancient modern *mythology*. On the second, it is explained in terms of modern *psychopathology or depth psychology*.\(^\text{24}\)

Mythology, Psychopathology, and Depth Psychology, of the variety of a Sigmund Freud, Karl Jung, or from a more modern interlocutor, Joseph Campbell, was highly disparaged in most academic and theological circles during Barth’s time. That Barth would even invoke their ideas in a formulation of his own, speaks to the ubiquity of his thinking, and the generosity of his orthodoxy. This fact about Barth’s own openness to read the works of people outside of the Christian world, so to speak, offers important inroads into the practical connection between Barth’s theology, Neo-Buddhist ideology, and the immediate and modern-day context of Goleta and Santa Barbara.

**A Cursory Understanding of Neo-Buddhism**

One of the essential theological components of Buddhist thought is the notion of

\(^\text{23}\) Ibid., 61.

\(^\text{24}\) Ibid., 31. Emphasis added.
“no-self” or “emptiness.” For some Buddhist religious scholars this concept is known as *Shunyata*. Other religious scholars have ascribed different names to this attainment. Notably, the religious scholar, Karen Armstrong, has identified this attempt for “emptiness” of the soul as *Ceto-vimutti*. Roughly translated, this means and equates to “‘the release of the mind,’ a synonym for enlightenment and the achievement of *Nibbana.*”\(^{25}\) Still other Buddhist scholars have identified this theological understanding as “The Middle Path.”\(^{26}\)

Adding to the complexity of defining the exact nature of the “emptiness” for which the Buddhist strives is the fact that there are many different strains of Buddhism, all varying slightly in their nomenclature or the definitional components. For the purposes of this paper, this author has focused exclusively on the “Zen Philosophers” or the Kyoto School of Buddhism. The religious scholar, Vroom, poses this concept of *Shunyata* from the Kyoto School in the following terms: “Buddhists and Christians say that we must learn to let go. We must empty ourselves of the self and realize the no-self. Buddhists teach the emptiness (*Shunyata*): the ‘ego,’ as it were, as *dissolved*. When we are no longer an ‘ego’ that wants to control and to satisfy desires, then we can accept whatever happens.”\(^{27}\) The achievement of “no-self,” then, is one of the primary goals of the Buddhist religious adherent. For the Buddhist adherent, when a person embodies the self, they are not the full self. When individuals are centered on themselves, they are not


completely who they were meant to be. When a person is ego-focused, he or she cannot grasp the fullness of the divine, found within the self and the universe. Vroom articulates this premise by explaining,

The human ego is actually a collection of desires that defines the self-image. The entire “self” of which we are aware is actually composed of ideas about ourselves: we think “I still have to do this,” “if I do that, it will be ok”; or “if only that doesn’t happen.” Thus our “ego” consists of the ideals, images, and ideas about the reality of the life that we—partly consciously, partly unconsciously—have constructed around our “self” over the course of our lives.

The ultimate goal for the Buddhist religious adherent is to reach Nibbana,\(^\text{28}\) which can be defined as a condition where the individual reaches “Extinction [or] blowing out,”\(^\text{29}\) the extinction of self which brings enlightenment and liberation from pain (dukkha). Again, because of the complexity of this notion, many Buddhist teachers and scholars have turned to the poetry of ancient Buddhist monks (\textit{Maitraya natha} – 270-350AD):

Neither is it asserted
That all (the Elements) are unreal,
Nor are they all realities;
Because there is existence,
And also non-existence,
And (again) existence:
This is the Middle Path!\(^\text{30}\)

One of the most salient critiques of the Buddhist notion of Shunyata, is that, when taken at face value, this desire for personal attainment through the emptying of self is quite simple and beautiful. The theological notion that the self leads to bad things, and that the goal of an individual should be to vacate the self is an attractive idea. However,

\(^{28}\) The Sanskrit word for this and the more common form is “Nirvana”

\(^{29}\) Armstrong, \textit{Buddha}, 203.

\(^{30}\) Gard, \textit{Buddhism}, 129.
and ironically, nothing at all is simple about the Buddhist adherent’s attempt for attainment of this virtue. Within the corpus of Buddhist thought, there is no outer salvific figure (a messiah) that can help the individual attain this form of enlightenment. Only by following a complex and rigid theological formula of an eight-fold religious path, can the individual even begin the quest for no-Self. Once on this eight-fold path, if any one of the steps is left incomplete, the adherent must start over. In this way, a critique of Buddhism can be made that what appears simple on the outside, is completely complex on the inside. Ultimately, there is a works based theological dimension to Buddhism itself.

Some religious scholars find important inroads between Christianity’s notion of atonement and the Buddhist notion of Shunyata. Perhaps Vroom has gone the furthest in finding helpful inroads between the two religions: “Christianity and Buddhism overlap with regard to the emptiness of the no-self (anatman). Given the further context of each faith, there are also no fundamental differences. The emptiness of the no-self in Christian belief is ‘filled’ with ‘Christ’ and is a new ‘self’ that is guided by Christ, rather than a no-self.” Yet, herein lies the great contradiction in this line of reasoning and basic premise. Though one could make an argument that the Christian theological notions of expiation and propitiation align with the Buddhist notions of Shunyata, there are also vast oceanic differences between the two.


32 Vroom, No Other Gods, 16.
The evangelical biblical scholar Gilbert Bilezikian delineates these Christian concepts under the basic theological framework which recognizes that “In the moral order, satisfaction has to be rendered for wrongdoing. In most ancient religions, this satisfaction was offered by means of sacrifices. For Christians, the all-sufficient, once-for-all sacrifice was offered when Christ died on the cross for the sins of the world.”

The essential difference between the two notions found in Buddhism and Christianity are worlds apart when one considers the external salvific figure of Jesus Christ found in Christianity, and the non-existent “self” found within Buddhism.

**Christian Inroads to Potential Conversion of Adherents of Neo-Buddhist Ideologies**

A conscientious comparative study of Buddhism and Christianity, even for the purposes of sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with outsiders to the faith, must acknowledge the vast differences between Buddhism and Christianity. In the first place, Buddha (ne: Sidhatta Gotama), never himself claims to be any sort of deity. Though later adherents to the faith have often imbued Buddha with a kind of salvific presence, Buddha, himself, never did. Attempting to emphasize the essential non-incarnated nature of Buddha, and the questioning of any sort of authority figure at all, one ninth century Zen Buddhist master, Lin-Chi, once said; “If you meet the Buddha, kill the Buddha!”

This can be contrasted with Jesus Christ who, throughout his entire ministry, points to the salvific nature of an individual having a relationship with the Messiah. One of the best

---


examples of this can be found in the Gospel of John where, upon being asked by the Pharisees if Jesus is the Christ, Jesus responds by saying, “Yes, you know me, and you know where I come from. I am not here on my own, but he who sent me is true. You do not know him, but I know him, because I am from him and he sent me” (Jn 7:28-29). The closest parallel that can be found in Buddhist sacred texts to the acknowledgment of deity status would be when Buddha says, “He who sees me, sees the dhamma [the teaching], and he who sees the dhamma sees me.”35 The difference between offering yourself as a connection to God (Jesus), and offering yourself as a connection to a teaching (Buddha), is a grand-canyon’s difference in interpretation. In addition to this, there is a large number of self-references to self-identification as the Messiah by Christ (Jn 11:25; 14:6; 8:12; 15:5). However, most of that which has historically been connected to Buddha as primary source material can, at best, be seen as a type of self meditation on life, being that “The Buddha always insisted that his teaching was based entirely on his own experience.”36

The second glaring difference between Buddhism and Christianity is the scant, if perhaps non-existent, historical contextual evidence that the Buddha ever existed, or that any of the events that are attributed to his life ever took place. In Armstrong’s observation, “There is not a single incident in the [Buddhist] scriptures that we can honestly affirm to be historically true.”37 Most of what we attribute to the life of Buddha involves a belief more in the “legend of the Buddha” than in an actual figure that existed,

35 Ibid., xx.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid., xxi.
by most historical accounts, around the year 483 BC. The difference with Christianity is again striking. In the Christian accounts of the life of Jesus, there are numerous historical reference points to draw from. One example of this would be the visit of the Magi in Matthew 2:1: “After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod . . .” In this one passage, there are two historical facts to draw from. First, historians know that the city of Bethlehem definitely existed in Judea in the first century. Second, the Jewish historian Josephus writes a great deal about a leader that lived within Judea in the first century named, Herodes. This historical difference between the two religious traditions points to the fundamental objective truth about the existence of Jesus and the fundamental subjective truth about the life of Buddha.

**Barth and Buddha**

While the figures of Barth and Buddha are salient polar opposites, a comparison between the theologies of both individuals can be helpful as a starting point for the possibility of a larger conversation between Christians and Buddhists. One difference is that, for Barth, the ultimate purpose for the Christian journey, so to speak, is the essential quality of freedom. Barth would identify this freedom as freedom from sin, death, self, and finally, freedom in Christ. According to Barth, the journey of freedom happens at the beginning of the faith journey. This is evident as he writes, “The Gospel requires faith. It can therefore be neither directly communicated nor directly apprehended . . . Indeed only when that which is believed on is hidden, can it provide an opportunity for faith.”

---

38 Herod I, otherwise known as “Herod the Great”

Buddha, freedom is also the goal of the faith journey, and yet that freedom can only be found at the end of the human experience. Ultimate freedom of self can only be found when one has arrived at the end of the “great process” (samsara). Vroom insists, “People are elements in the great process (samsara) of which they are a part.”40 In this way, Buddhism may be seen as having aspects of a works-based theological perspective, and Christianity, in its most basic form, embodies a grace-based theological perspective.

One important inroad between Barth and Buddha, and hence Christians and Buddhists, lies in a word that both thinkers invoked throughout their writings—awakening. When Barth referred to an awakening, he almost always used it as a way of describing the work that “God does in us when we are awakened by the revelatory Word of God.”41 In Barth’s own words:

We should set alongside the concept of illumination that of awakening. Yet it is not so compelling a word as illumination. Awakening is instructive, because the reference in both the New Testament passages which mention it is not to Jews or Gentiles or children of the world but quite unmistakably to Christians and therefore to those who are already called . . . as people who are indeed awakened, roused and awake.42

Throughout Barth’s voluminous writings he refers to the concept of awakening on many occasions. Buddhists also invoke the concept of awakening throughout their theology. The actual name, Buddha, in fact means, “Enlightened or Awakened One.”43 Buddhists discover an awakening through adherence to the teaching (dhamma) and experience inner

---

40 Vroom, No Other Gods, 17.
41 Willimon, Conversations with Barth on Preaching, 65.
42 Ibid., 66.
43 Armstrong, Buddha, 202.
transformation, by achieving release from the pains of the world and life’s sufferings. Although it would be a mistake to see a similar truth found in the versions of awakening of both figures, an occasional invocation of the use of the word “awakening” to people who adhere to a Buddhist theological framework could be helpful in finding a common language which binds both faith traditions.

Another interesting inroad between the thoughts of Barth and Buddha might be on the doctrine and the concept of evil itself. For Barth, evil was not something to be over or under interpreted. Barth goes to great length in his Church Dogmatics to describe evil in its many permutations and manifestations in the world, as the opposite of creation. In the beginning of creation was “reason,” Barth, suggests. With the Fall of man there is “nothing.” Hence, Barth calls evil “nothingness” (Gr: Das Nichte). Evil is a “non-being . . . this lack of objective existence of evil only exists in our ‘blind eyes.”’

This characterization of evil as a “nothing” is quite startling on its face, as Barth wrote and taught during the time of the Nazi movement in Germany. As SS guards stood at the back of his classrooms, Barth must have occasionally looked at them and thought, or said, “Das es Nichte!”—“They are nothing!”

For the Buddhist, the concepts of good and evil as inherent qualities in and of themselves, are something to both be aware of, but also to transcend. In the words of one Zen Master named Masao Abe, “My personal experience was such that, the more I tried to do good and avoid evil, the more I realized that I was far removed from good and bound by evil. My moral life resulted in the realization of the radical evil at the bottom of

44 Ibid., 80.
the fight between good and evil, and my fundamental ignorance of the ultimate truth.”

For the Buddhist, good and evil must be transcended, or else the individual is stuck in a constant state of “radical evil.” Ultimately, good and evil are interwoven with life, and the individual must transcend them through the dhamma. For Barth, evil, or “Nothingness is that which brought Jesus Christ to the cross, and that which is defeated there. Only from the standpoint of Jesus Christ, his birth, death and resurrection, do we see it in reality and truth, without the temptation to treat it as something inclusive or relative, or to conceive of it dialectically and thus render it innocuous. From this standpoint we see it with fear and trembling as the adversary with whom God and God alone can cope.”

The Self-Assertive Self

E. Stanley Jones, the great evangelist to India who wrote the Christ of the Indian Road, put his finger on one of the central tensions with all religious expression: “I have unwittingly run into the central problem in religion—The problem of the self-assertive self.” What Jones meant by the “self-assertive self” is that the human being finds it impossible to do anything in this life that does not at some level gain affirmation, remuneration, recognition or acclamation from others. Individuals cannot get away from the self, no matter how much they try. Jones’ breakthrough is important to the conversation about how to help Neo-Buddhists develop a relationship with Christ for

---

45 Vroom, No Other Gods, 18.

46 Willimon, Conversations with Barth on Preaching, 81.

many reasons. First, Jones’ entire religious and ministerial context was mostly towards Hinduism, but also Buddhism. In his ministry, Jones developed a kind of “Christian Ashram” as a way of connecting Christians with those who outside the faith. Second, a central facet of Buddhism is the evacuation of self (Shunyata). Third, and perhaps most importantly, it was Jones’ own personal conversion experience. In Jones’ own words, “It took an emotional upheaval to carry me across from a self-preoccupied life to a Christ-preoccupied life.”

“One on One” Dialogue Can Work Better with Buddhists

One idea that may seem antithetical to the entire trajectory of this research project is that some have found that conversion of those who come from an Eastern Religious background actually works better one on one, than, for example, through the process of preaching a sermon from a pulpit. The great missionary, Samuel Shoemaker, found this to be the case in his pivotal outreach to students in Peking, China in 1918, who came from Confucianist and Buddhist backgrounds. After giving a Bible class to a group of young businesspeople who were not Christian, and having a breakthrough encounter with one student, Shoemaker wrote,

> Crossing the threshold I prayed god to tell me what to say. And it seemed to come to me, “Tell him what happened to you last night.” My Chinese friend asked me to sit down, and in a pair of creaky wicker chairs we began to talk. “I believe you have been interested in my class,” I began, “but not satisfied with it. The fault has been mine. May I tell you something that happened to me last night?” He listened to my story intently and when I had finished surprised me with, “I wish that could happen to me.” “It can if you will let God in completely.” And that day he made

48 Ibid., 180.

49 Ibid., 182.
his decision and found Christ. This I the way I began to be interested in one person at a time. After this I sought out individual after individual.\textsuperscript{50}

While sharing broad themes of faith can work from the standpoint of pulpit preaching, an essential ingredient is the individual one-on-one follow-up with people of the Buddhist faith who have questions but are not ultimately sure about the full acceptance of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

**The Lin Yutang Exemplar**

Perhaps no other conversion story of an individual who has come from an Eastern Religions background into a Christian background is more compelling than the narrative of Lin Yutang. Lin Lutang was born in the late 1800s and lived until 1976. Though he was born in China and raised with Christian parenting, indeed, Yutang’s own father was a Presbyterian minister, he became an ardent Confucianist. It was not until 1959 that he became a Christian while listening to a sermon at Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York City by the late great preacher, Dr. David Read. Many aspects of Yutang’s conversion experience, and theological insights found therein, are helpful for this research project. Asked why Yutang decided to return to Christianity, he said, “I wish to re-enter that knowledge of God and love of God which Jesus revealed with such clarity and simplicity.”\textsuperscript{51} Clarity, and simplicity are mainstays of most Eastern religious practices. Such simplicity can be found in Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and Hinduism. The level of complexity involved in many forms of meditation is often

---

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 197. Emphasis added.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 205.
confusing and discombobulating. The simplicity and clarity found in the teachings of Jesus, however, are often life transformative.

Another departure that Yutang made from Confucianism to Christianity can be found in the notion that the evacuation or emptying of self is simply not enough to sustain any individual. In Yutang’s own words, “Man needs contact with a Power outside himself that is greater than himself. I believe that Christianity, because of what Christ revealed, offers man incomparably the best way to God.” Although certain forms of Buddhism offer inroads to the possibility of a higher power, most forms of Eastern religion either negate the existence of God, as such, or find the centerpiece of the existence of God within the individual.

Yutang also found many unsettling similarities between modern humanism, Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. He points specifically to Confucius who, in the eighteenth century, inspired many leading rationalists such as Voltaire, Diderot, and Leibnitz. Yutang relates,

Like humanism, Confucianism, for all the high morality of its teachings, was not good enough simply because man on his own had so often and so disastrously shown he was not that good. Buddhism, though a religion of mercy, is based on the philosophy that all this sensuous world is only an illusion. The best the Buddhist has to say to humans and the most he has to offer to the world is, “The pity of it all.” Teachings of Taoism come very near to the Sermon on the Mount. But the back-to-nature and beware-of-progress appeal inherent in Taoism is neither congenial to the modern soul nor helpful in solving man’s modern problems.54

52 Ibid., 206.

53 See reference to Ammitai Buddhism in previous section.

54 Ibid., 207.
Yutang’s experience with being an ardent follower of Confucianism, and his own scathing critiques of many Eastern religions are helpful in assisting a preacher and pastor to understand the practices and praxes that are inherent in sharing the Christian faith with people who adhere to these religious perspectives. In the final analysis, it was the person of Jesus that was most compelling for Yutang; “No one ever spoke like Jesus. He spoke of God the Father as one who knew him and was identified with him in the fullness of knowledge and love. No other teacher of men revealed such personal knowledge or such a sense of personal identity with God. The result was his astounding claim: ‘He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.’”\(^{55}\) In a similar way, an effective preacher of the Word of God can convey the fullness of knowledge and love through the person of Jesus Christ in the modern preaching context.

\(^{55}\) Ibid., 208.
CHAPTER 4
MINISTRY PLAN

Every effective ministry initiative must begin with a plan of action. Of course, ministry plans in and of themselves often change along the way or are even jettisoned for some other ministry trajectory altogether, but alas, they are essential. As one devout Presbyterian and five-star US General and President, Dwight Eisenhower once said; “Plans are nothing, planning is everything.”¹ Most ministry plans follow a three-fold metric that includes an initial period of prayer and discernment, then a process of implementation and execution, and then finally a means by which to measure of concrete outcomes that are achieved as a direct result of the initiative. Perhaps the best model for this comes from Jesus’ own ministry. His overall goal or plan for his ministry, his “macro-plan,” was the salvation of the world. It is best summed up by Jesus’ emphatic life’s mission statement offered in the Gospel of Luke: “The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” (Lk 19:10).

At the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, he takes an intentional forty-day departure from the world to pray and discern the scope of his own ministry. As told in Matthew 4:2, “After fasting forty days and forty nights he was hungry.” Although Jesus’ time in the desert included more than simply listening to God’s voice, it certainly was a time of discernment. Then, Jesus begins the execution of his ministry by preaching: “From that time on Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent for the kingdom of heaven has come’” (Mt 4:17). It is crucial to note that Jesus’ ministry begins with preaching. In other words, Jesus employs a homiletical model for his ministry.

Throughout Jesus’ ministry there are countless examples of smaller quantifiable metrics for determining the success of his ministry. After the seventy-two disciples he sent out return, he essentially asks all of them for a quantifiable account of their own ministry. They respond with quantifiable results: “The seventy-two returned with joy and said, “Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name” (Lk 10:17). Though none of the Gospel writers record it, one can almost hear Jesus asking the seventy-two a series of follow-up questions: How many demons submitted to you? What were the demons’ names? What types of demons were they? When they submitted, did they just run away, or did they fall down on the ground? What were the people’s experiences after the demons left them? Were their lives better or were they pretty much the same? How do you feel as disciples after having accomplished this great ministry goal? Of course, the ultimate determination of the success of Jesus’ ministry was the cross itself, and finally, Jesus’ resurrection and conquering of death three days later.

My ministry plan has essentially followed Jesus’ ministry’s model: prayer and discernment followed by implementation and execution, and finally, quantifiable
measurements of outcomes. Within this rubric, this research project began about a year before its focused implementation with a season of prayer and discernment. Every single day, I committed myself to praying for the Goleta Presbyterian Church congregation and its receptivity to the preaching of the Word every Sunday. Then, as this chapter shows, there was a focused four-month process where the Goleta congregation was introduced to a preaching schedule that was particularly sensitive to people who have been influenced by New-Age ideologies and Neo-Buddhist influences. A baseline survey was conducted for the entire congregation that determined a foundational understanding of GPC’s Christological framework. Finally, a qualitative assessment was made about participation in the principles mainstays of the Christian faith: baptism, communion, mission involvement, and community life.

**The Theological Value of a Homiletical Witnessing Model**

A word should be offered about the value of implementing a homiletical model verses another kind of witnessing model within this congregational setting. The number of ways in which non-believers become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ are manifold. As has been shown previously, people often experience conversion at night, when they are on their own, alone with their thoughts and God’s purposes. Others find that a retreat away from home is the best method for experiencing firsthand the Christian faith. One of the oldest methods to convey the Christian faith, however, is through the Sunday sermon. The actual proclamation of the Word, spoken from the lips of a teacher or pastor, is still the most effective conveyance of the witness of the faith.
One needs only to turn to the Bible for examples of effective witnessing to people who are outside the faith through preaching the Gospel. As has just been said, Jesus’ own ministry begins with preaching. The Gospel of Mark, generally recognized to be the oldest account of the life of Jesus says; “After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming [preaching] the good news of God” (Mk 1:14). The Apostle Peter begins his ministry on Pentecost with preaching: “Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd. Fellow Jews . . .” (Ac 2:14). The Apostle Paul’s ministry, probably the best example in the Bible of a person of faith reaching outsiders of the Judeo-Christian faith, also begins his ministry with preaching. As soon as Paul arrives in Damascus, after his earth-shaking conversion on the road to that city, the book of Acts says that “At once [Paul] began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God” (Ac 9:20). It might even be asserted that Moses, arguably the greatest prophet of the Old Testament, began his ministry of exodus with preaching a sermon to Pharaoh: “Afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel said, ‘Let my people go” (Ex 5:1).

The merits of employing a homiletical model specifically in the Goleta Presbyterian Church setting are exponential. Most important, preaching, or the proclamation of the Word, in its best instances is an exercise of safe engagement. A sermon allows the congregant or the listener to engage the message of God from a safe place. The listener enters the church on his or her own volition. They can attend every week, or just once. They then sit wherever they feel comfortable. They are invited to participate in the singing of hymns or the reading of liturgy, but they are not required to. They can get up and leave the sanctuary whenever they feel like it, or they can sit
throughout the worship service. The listener can have eye contact with the preacher or they can just look down. If the listener desires more anonymity, a person can sit in the balcony or at the back of the church. Every Sunday, I intentionally say, “Welcome to Goleta Presbyterian Church. This is a safe place to connect with God from whichever faith background you come from. You will be respected here.” The listener can agree with the message or disagree with it. A sermonic exercise is, in fact, a safer communicational exercise than a one-on-one conversation with someone. A sanctuary with an audience is a more anonymous experience. If a person is in a person-to-person conversation with someone, if they disagree, they are usually required to voice their opinion. However, a listener in a congregational setting only needs to think about their point of view, or perhaps, not come back to that church ever again.

**A Church Community as an Ethnographic Site**

The research paradigm this study is employing is derived mostly from the world of Anthropology and Ethnography. The word “ethnography” is a two-part Greek word that means; ἕθνος ethnos “folk, people, nation” and γράφω grapho “I write.” So, an ethnography is a systematic writing of an account of a particular people group. The history of great ethnographers, and thus great anthropologists, begins in the mid 1800’s with Lewis H. Morgan (1818-1881), Franz Boas (1858-1942), and Bronislaw Molinowski (1858-1942).

Morgan’s groundbreaking ethnography titled *League of the Iriquois*, attempts to capture on paper the unique cultural particularities of the, then dwindling, Iriquois nation. Morgan’s primary contribution was towards the concept of kinship, the intricate web of
social alliances that form an independent culture. Though Morgan’s work focused primarily on marriage patterns (bifurcate merging), kinship can be a helpful application to a church culture. Questions surrounding the concepts of how faith is a socialized manifestation of a culture directly apply.

Franz Boas’ primary contribution to the field of ethnography was the concept of cultural relativism, which, in ethnographic terms refers to the notion that all people see the world through their own cultural lenses and judge the world based on their own cultural perspectives. This concept can be helpful when applied to GPC because applying a more traditional understanding of what a typical Christ follower might look like will both prove to be alien to the specific culture, and an insufficient metric. For example, as a pastor and researcher, I am sure that there are probably numerous people in the congregation who would not call themselves Christians, Christ-followers, saved or born again, even though, in matter of fact Jesus is the only one they worship, they have in fact been saved, and have experienced born again conversion experiences.

Molinowski’s primary contribution to ethnography was through the introduction of the concept of participant observation, the notion that the closer that an ethnographer is to a unique system, the better that researcher is in understanding the nuanced “tropes and mannerisms” of that culture. In more recent years, other models for studying a unique church culture have risen out of the early anthropological work of Morgan, Boas and

---

2 An ethnographic understanding of “cultural relativism” is not to be confused with a more theological understanding of the term, the latter of which tends to connote to more of a religiously fluid understanding of a person’s moral and ethical life, as is reflected in the larger cultural milieu.
Molinowski. Principle among these approaches has been the work of Mary Clark Moschella, depicted in *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice*.

The primary research paradigm of this project hails from the work of these three anthropological luminaries: Morgan, Boas, and Molinowski. In every congregational setting there is a large system of kinship relationships determined by many disparate factors such as age, socio-economic background, gender, ethnicity, geographical proximity to the church, longevity of membership, inclusion or exclusion into the inner workings and mechanisms of the church, depth of involvement in church activities, and actual physical proximity to the pastor.\(^3\) Boas’ contribution about cultural relativism is also a helpful rubric as it applies to Goleta Presbyterian. GPC, like all congregations, tends to see the world through their own myopic lenses or cultural perspectives. Those who adhere to a descriptively New Age ideology within that culture, see Christianity as more of a curiosity or enigma than an actual truth they should necessarily apply to their lives. There is even a level of culturally infused skepticism about the Presbytery,\(^4\) situated directly adjacent to the church property.

 Outsiders to the unique cultural system are seen in an adversarial light simply because they are outsiders to the GPC culture. Of course, it would also be incorrect to say that there is just one cultural lens through which the entire church views the world. Within a congregation of approximately 166 members, as is the case with GPC, there are

\(^3\) In any staff structure, but possibly most acutely noticeable in a church staff structure, the actual distance a person’s desk or office is from the pastor’s desk or office, can determine the amount of authority or respect a person receives in that administrative system.

\(^4\) A Presbytery is the overriding mid-governmental leadership structure for the Presbyterian Church (USA).
probably at least sixteen different cultural lenses. Finally, I have employed Molinowski’s concept of participant observation at every level to develop extremely close ties with the congregation, while studying them from an ethnographic standpoint.

Ethical Tensions Involved in Utilizing a Discrete Congregation for a Research Project

No church or local congregation should ever, in any ideal circumstances, be utilized for purposes other than the conveyance of Christ’s gospel. Even secular programs and activities that take place in a church setting must, at some level, be interpreted as contributing to the overall building up of the kingdom of God in a specific community. The book of Acts articulates the primary purpose of the church by way of a finite list of activities and functions: the apostles’ teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, prayer, the selling of property, giving to the needy, and meeting together in the temple courts (Acts 2:42-46). There is no mention of the conducting of research projects or the writing of papers. This is not to say that the writing of a research paper about a congregation is an inherently deleterious activity, but that it simply falls outside the bounds of the original and typical functions of a church. Following this logic, the writing of a research paper about a specific congregation, and evaluating that congregation based on the results of research that is conducted with the corpus of the church, might be argued, has the potential for treading on some marginal lines of ethical responsibility. Add to this the added challenge of conducting an ethnographic study of a discrete group of people without having the study itself impact the unique culture in an adverse way, the researcher is presented with some interesting challenges.
Considering all these factors, I have striven to be as transparent as possible with the congregation throughout this research process. The attendees of GPC have all been made aware that I am writing a paper about their own congregational setting for a Doctor of Ministry Program at Fuller Theological Seminary. The congregation knows that the broad topic of the thesis is the study of how Christianity and New Age ideology intersect and differ within this setting. The questionnaire that was completed was done so with the full knowledge that the research provided therein would be used for this study. The congregation has been given the opportunity not to participate in the questionnaire or be mentioned in the paper. Finally, key leaders within the congregation have been alerted to the exact specifics of the research taking place.

**Barth As a Methodological Vehicle for Christ**

It should be stated emphatically, at the outset, that the goal of this research project is not to connect the members of the Goleta Presbyterian Church to Karl Barth, but rather to connect the members of GPC to Christ. Christ, and a personal relationship with him is the end goal, not learning the nuances of Karl Barth’s theology. As such, Barth may be utilized as a vehicle for connecting people to Christ. To extend the vehicle metaphor another step, just as the goal of a racecar driver who races in the Indianapolis 500, is not to understand the mechanics of the car he or she may be driving, but rather to win the race. In this sense, the goal of preaching through a Barthian lens is to help people, as the Apostle Paul would say, “get the prize” (1 Cor 9:24) of salvation.

Knowing aspects of the unique features of the car may help the driver to understand the car better, however, nuanced specifics about how the fuel injection system
functions or how the spark plugs connect to the ignition is not necessary. In fact, getting “bogged down” in the details of the mechanics of a specific racecar may, in fact, get in the way of the driver’s ultimate success in winning the race. This may seem obvious, however, many researchers working on a paper like this may be prone to begin with a Sunday school class on “Karl Barth’s *Dogmatics,*” or a class on “The Preaching of Karl Barth.” Many novice preachers might be prone to pepper a sermon on a given Sunday with quotes from Karl Barth, or to lift sections of his sermons and offer them as the sermon for that morning. “Nien!” as Karl Barth might say. This approach would be antithetical to his theology, which requires that the preacher rid any sermonic exercise of anything but the Word of God.

With this as a basic understanding, there are several specific ways that I plan on utilizing Barth in a concrete way from the pulpit. The first and most important way that Barth’s theology can be used as a vehicle is at the beginning of each sermon, through the invocation of prayer. Barth believed that every sermonic exercise, in the hands of a conscientious preacher, had the possibility of becoming the actual words of God for a specific congregation, but only through the invocation, and one might say, transformation of prayer. Quoting Luther, Barth says, “For we know that our defense lies in prayer alone. We are too weak to resist the Devil and his vassals. Let us hold fast to the weapons of the Christian; they enable us to combat the Devil.”5 To this end, the beginning of every sermon that I offer the congregation over the four month study period begins with a prayer like this: “Dear Lord, I pray that by some miracle of the Holy Spirit, that these

words of mine in this message, would not just be another sermon, but rather, by some
miracle of your Holy Spirit, your actual words to us this morning. For we are hungry for
your truth and your transformation in our lives.” After these words are prayed, Karl Barth
and I agree that the sermon takes on a different sort of dimension of permeability and
transformative power in the life of a congregation.

Willimon has said of his own preaching, even after writing a veritable preaching
tome about Barth, “I am not Barthian. For one thing Barth was notoriously hard on his
disciples [much like Jesus]. For another, I’m too much the Wesleyan, sanctification,
pietist [three things Barth despised] to follow him to the end. And as a preacher, I care
more for my listeners than Barth seems to care.”6 The same may be said of my preaching.
While I am not a pietist or a Wesleyan, strictly speaking, I do care a great deal about my
congregation. Through my preaching, I employ too much the use of a large degree of
what Aristotle would term *Ethos* and *Pathos*, to be considered a true Barthian. Barth
greatly discouraged the use of personal encomium, or narrative and joke telling from the
pulpit. Because of this, many who have listened to the preaching of Barth sometimes find
it to be very heavily laden, and indeed, boring. It should be noted that all these preaching
tricks are mechanisms that I employ on a regular basis, and are, indeed, integral to my
preaching style. However, an ear towards Barth’s emphasis on exclusively preaching the
Word of God has been a helpful starting point in conveying the truths found in Scripture
to the Goleta Presbyterian congregation.

---

6 William Willimon, *Conversations with Barth on Preaching*, (Abingdon Press, Nashville: 2006),
3.
As has been said, Barth believed that the perfect sermonic exercise starts at the proverbial top of the mountain, where God exists with the congregation, rather than leading the congregation to the top of the mountain during the delivery of the sermon, and then, as it were, leading them back down the mountain. Consider this introduction by Karl Barth to one of his sermons: “The promise of the Word of God is not as such an empty pledge which always stands, as it were, confronting a person. It is the transposing of a person into the wholly new state of one who has accepted and appropriated the promise, so that irrespective of his attitude to it he no longer lives without his promise but with it.”7 This complex introductory sentence, five lines long, complete with many commas and intersecting ideas, was typical for Karl Barth. The listener had to begin the process of receiving the sermon with his or her thinking cap on. Barth’s introductory style is very different from my own, which often includes: “We want to welcome you this morning to Goleta Presbyterian Church. If you are here for the first time, we welcome you again, and pray that the Holy Spirit meets you where you are.” While I do not employ quite as pithy of a style of introduction as Barth’s, a more straight-forward delivery of the truth of the Bible has been helpful.

A last comment must be made here about the application of Karl Barth in a preaching setting that is heavily influenced by Neo-Buddhist ideologies, as is the focus of this project at GPC. Strictly speaking, Buddhists do not believe in God. As has been said by the religious scholar, Karen Armstrong, “Buddhists must motivate themselves and rely

7 Ibid., 239.
on their own efforts, not on a charismatic leader.”

The goal of the ardent Buddhist is not to worship a being that is higher than oneself, but rather try to, on one’s own accord, through concentration (Dharana), release the mind (Ceto-vimutti), and eventually achieve a state of, enlightenment (Buddha-mind).

Most of the preaching that has taken place in the past sixty years at Goleta Presbyterian Church has been of the variety of a lecture about an idea of God, or a presentation about a mythology of God, or an exposition about aspects of a Christian God. Therefore, the very act of claiming the extremely high revelatory nature of the existence of God through a person named Jesus Christ, who was both human and God simultaneously, and who saved the world from its sins, is an earthshakingly different kind of preaching than this church has ever experienced before.

Quantitative and Qualitative Goals of Research Project

The goals of this research project are five-fold: more adult baptisms, a fuller and richer experience of holy communion, a more nuanced and intimate experience of prayer, a deeper integration and engagement of the Christian faith in the active participation of mission work in the community and the world, and a more faith-filled community life experience by members and attendees of Goleta Presbyterian. These goals have essentially been articulated at the forefront of the entire project in conversations with the congregation, session, and research partners. They have been lifted up in various and sundry ways throughout my pastoral leadership in worship and within the body of the sermons themselves.


9 Ibid., 202-203.
Baptism

First, the goal is to have more people baptized into the Christian faith at Goleta Presbyterian Church. The early church saw baptism as an essential sign and symbol of the work of the Holy Spirit in a person’s life. After hearing Peter’s sermon at Pentecost, “Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day” (Ac 2:41). Luke, who, by historical reputation was a doctor, was by occupational proclivity, always focused on accurate detail and on numbers. The number of baptisms that were conducted by Peter is a specific one, and not a symbolic one—three-thousand. Those three-thousand people who were baptized on Pentecost was to be viewed as a direct sign of the efficacy and potency of the Holy Spirit in the early life of the church. The number of baptisms conducted at Goleta Presbyterian Church is a quantifiable number.

Prior to the beginning of this specific research project, on Easter Sunday 2016, there were five adult baptisms. This number, five, is more adult baptisms than have ever been conducted in any previous year of the church. Actually, it is more baptisms than have been conducted in the past ten years of the church’s life. As in the early church, at Goleta Presbyterian, more baptisms may also be viewed as a direct sign of the work of the Holy Spirit. Because this church is Presbyterian, more infant or child baptisms are also included in the goal. While infant baptisms cannot gauge the impact of a Barthian
homiletical approach on a particular individual, they can indicate the level to which the child’s parents are impacted by the preaching of the Word.

Communion

A more Christological, and therefore transformative, experience of the sacrament of communion for members of GPC is the second goal of this research project. This goal might be more of a qualitative goal. The exact “quality” of a person’s experience in communion is certainly difficult to measure. The first communion ever was the Last Supper, offered by Jesus on the week of Passover in the upper room. What was the quality of that communion experience? The Gospels tell us that there was a peculiar mixture of fear, confusion, curiosity, and wonderment. The Gospel of Matthew says that upon receiving news that Jesus would be betrayed, the disciples “were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, ‘Surely you don’t mean me, Lord’” (Mt 26:22).

The Gospel of Mark underlines the point about the first communion experience the disciples being one sadness but concludes by saying that when the meal was over “they all sung a hymn” (Mk 14:19-26). Might it be that the goal of a more biblically experiential communion is namely the encouragement of a congregation to bring the full swath of human emotion (anger, sadness, confusion, doubt, resolution, fear) to the Lord’s Table? The answer is an indefatigable yes. Karl Barth’s own theological understanding of the Lord’s Table is an equally impossible task to undertake for the simple reason that he ended his Church Dogmatics before having a chance to write on the topic. For Barth,

\[\text{\footnotesize 10}\] It should be noted that Karl Barth was highly ambivalent about the practice of infant baptisms in general, so a Barthian metric for infant baptism may be viewed as slightly contradictory for this research project.
Jesus Christ, the living and revelational Word, was the actual sacrament of Christ, rather than an emphasis on the elements of communion or the liturgy itself; “revelation means sacrament, i.e., the self-witness of God . . . in the form of creaturely objectivity and therefore in a form which is adapted to our creaturely knowledge.”

What about a quantifiable metric for the practice of communion? While it might be possible to count up the number of people who partake in holy communion on any given Sunday, or within any congregational setting, it might be unseemly, or indeed inappropriate, for the pastor of the church to be observed as counting people who are coming to the front of the church (“Fifteen—this is the bread of life,” “Sixteen—this is the blood of Christ”) to take communion. Even if the number of people who took communion was a quantifiable metric, it still would not tell the researcher very much about the exact efficacy of the transformative nature of communion in a congregational setting. How could a researcher know or discern if a congregant believed the bread and juice on a given Sunday was an “outward sign of the inner work of the Holy Spirit” and a living symbol of the body and the blood of Christ? This would be impossible to measure. While such measurements are impossible to undertake, an emphasis by the pastor who is conducting communion on the real, concrete, and living truth about Jesus Christ, in a congregational setting where communion has been viewed as more of a rote ritual of mythology, must by its very nature, have a transformative impact on a congregation.

Prayer

One of the striking features of the spiritual life of Goleta Presbyterian Church, given its occasional affinity for New Age ideology, is their active participation in the practice of intercessory prayer. Every week, prayer concerns are written to a group of people on a public email list, and people on that list are asked to pray for healing for certain individuals who are suffering from physical, emotional, or practical maladies. Whether there is actual prayer that results from these prayer requests or how people pray is not known. It has occurred to me that the prayer team at GPC functions, for some on the team, as more of a means of remaining connected to each other’s lives, than as an actual prayer team. While it would be an overgeneralization to say that all the members of the prayer team are not praying for each other’s needs, it might accurately be said that sending out the concerns of the church to one another plays a similar role in this congregational setting as perhaps the “weekly mail” section does on a radio episode of *Prairie Home Companion* with Garrison Keillor. The prayer list is a way of keeping in touch with one another and monitoring each other’s lives. There is also a very active visitation team at GPC that sometimes uses the prayer list as a way of knowing who to visit in the hospital.

At least one of the members of the prayer team takes part in a regular and religious practice of Buddhist meditative thought. The practice of Buddhist meditative thought might be a significant inroad to more spiritual Christian depth at GPC. As the

---

12 One interesting note here is that of the twenty-six people who are on the prayer team, five of the members have left the church for various reasons but remain on the prayer team. This may point to the ongoing interconnected community aspect of the GPC congregation, more than it does to the actual focus on prayer.
thinker Hendrik Vroom has said, in a paraphrased form, the Christian church can learn a great deal from the Buddhist attention to personal formation and deepening. Modern culture offers many opportunities for distraction. For instance, the number of different films available is overwhelming. For religion one must draw on deeper levels of existence, and meditation attempts to achieve this process of deepening and reversal.\footnote{Hendrik Vroom, \textit{No Other Gods: Christian Belief in Dialogue with Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam}. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Pub., 1996), 12.}

Drawing upon the lessons and meditative practices found in Buddhism, a deeper understanding of prayer life at GPC is one of the goals of this research study. Karl Barth can also be helpful in this formulation. While Barth eschewed notions of Eastern meditative prayer, his emphasis on the dispensation of divine revelation through daily and regular prayer is seminal to his theology.

**Mission**

Another notable fact of ministry life at Goleta Presbyterian is the amount of time and money the church dedicates towards mission every year. The annual budget of GPC is around $300,000 per annum. The budget allocation for mission is between $30,000 and $40,000 a year. In addition to the money that the church gives from its deacons fund (around $5,000 to $10,000) a year, the amount dedicated to mission is roughly twelve to fifteen percent of the total budget of the church. While some of these supplements come from designated accounts and endowment funds, this allocation points towards the significant focus the church places on mission. In addition to these funds, the congregation is very active both individually and collectively in mission work around the
community and the world. Significant mission partners include The Isla Vista Youth
Project, the Alzheimer’s Association, The Goleta Creek Restoration Project, and
Transition House.

Further, the congregation has dedicated significant resources and time into the
country of Ghana through direct work and support of Patriensa Presbyterian Church.
Perhaps the most significant way that Goleta Presbyterian contributes to the missional
welfare of the surrounding community is through its “backdoor neighborhood” of
disabled people. Several years ago, GPC built a twenty-apartment care facility for people
with special needs and disabilities. This special needs community participates in a
significant way in weekly worship services,14 and the general community life.

While the congregation contributes significant money and time to mission, it is
less clear how these “missional activities” are connected to the faith and religious
grounding found in the ministry of Jesus and the Gospel accounts. As Darrell Guder has
observed in his seminal work Missional Church,

Mission is the result of God’s initiative, rooted in God’s purposes to restore and
heal creation. “Mission” means “sending,” and it is the central biblical theme
describing the purpose of God’s action in human history. God’s mission began
with the call of Israel to receive God’s blessings in order to be a blessing to the
nations. God’s mission unfolded in the history of God’s people across the
centuries recorded in Scripture, and it reached its revelatory climax in the
incarnation of God’s work of salvation in Jesus ministering, crucified, and
resurrected.15

14 Around ten individuals from this “special needs” community worship with GPC on a regular
basis.

15 Darrell L. Guder, Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America
To what extent does GPC do mission work from a standpoint of being rooted in God’s purposes? Do they know God’s purposes? To what extent is the work that the GPC congregation does a direct result of being “sent,” and how much of it is simply rooted in an ethic of philanthropy and good will? It is my contention that the reason that a congregation does mission is as important, or perhaps more important, than the actual work that a congregation does in a community.

It has been noted by some scholars the scant attention that Karl Barth, even though he wrote voluminously, devoted to the topic of mission. Scott Waldron writes, “It is disconcerting to the missionary-minded reader to discover that within the more than 8,000 pages of systematic theology, Barth devotes a mere four and one half pages to the topic of foreign missions.”16 As many scholars have pointed out however, this fact is due to the particular context, nature, time period, and place within which Barth was writing, Nazi Germany, and within the rootedness that Barth found himself in the incarnational, “revelational” nature of the Word of God. Even though this is the case, a deeper understanding of the reasons for mission as a direct extension of being in a personal relationship with Christ, is one of the goals of this project.

Community Life

The final goal of this research project will be to instill a deeper and richer sense of community life and fellowship as is exemplified in Scripture, and which has long been a part of the Christian life experience. Perhaps no other facet of the Christian experience

describes GPC better than a church that shares intentional community with one another. As noted in chapter one, the second major epoch of this congregation, the community life/practical years, lasting almost two full decades, was focused almost entirely on community and fellowship experiences. The church defined itself almost exclusively as a group of people who shared life together in backyard barbecues, potlucks, Christmas and Easter brunches, Fall kickoff parties, youth get-togethers, chili cook-offs, and everything in between. The first building that was constructed in the church was the “Fellowship Hall,” and today it remains as the center of much of the life of this congregation. The mission/vision statement that the church recently spent six-months discerning whether to rewrite or not, but ultimately decided to keep, begins with the words, “A community of faith.” Community is a hallmark of this church.

As has been noted about other internal metrics of this congregation, it is unclear the degree to which community life, as the church understands it, is rooted in a common experience of faith, and how much of it is more of a social setting for the knitting together and the maintenance of ongoing friendships. For the early church, community, as understood through the Greek word *koinonia* (κοινωνία), was a direct result and expression of the presence of the Holy Spirit within a faith community. The word is used nineteen times in the Greek New Testament to refer to a binding together, sharing, partnering, joint participation, and gift giving that occurs around the central focus of the Lord’s Table. Because of the diverse theological views of many members of the GPC faith community, it would be impossible to externally impose a theology of Christology as a catalyzing ingredient in bringing people together. In fact, such an approach might achieve the opposite of bringing people together and might cause many to flee the
otherwise self-perceived “inclusive” nature of the church. However, more community consciousness around the central witness of the cross might serve as a binding agent in a community that often maintains a sense of community through avoidance of controversial topics and divisive issues. A community life of *koinonia* is the final goal of this research project.

**Research Methods and Practices**

A relatively narrow timeline of four months (July-October 2017) has been established for this research project. This four-month timeline equates to exactly one-third of the total time that I served this congregation as a stated supply pastor. The time of year, from late Summer to the middle of Fall, is an ideal time to engage a homiletical with a congregation, because these are the months when most people at GPC are present in the ministry context.\(^{17}\) Part of the reason for this narrow time frame derives from the fact that I was called to a new congregational setting in November 2017.

**GPC Christology Questionnaire**

A confidential online questionnaire is distributed to the entire membership of GPC (166 members) at the beginning of the research process. The actual format of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix C. It is to be sent within a larger “mission study” analysis of the congregation that was conducted by the local congregation and mandated by the Church Development Committee of the Santa Barbara Presbytery. The foremost purpose for the mission study, as stated to the congregation, is to glean information that is

\[^{17}\text{The most popular months for vacation in Goleta, because of the school systems and the retired nature of the congregation are Winter and Spring.}\]

116
necessary for the calling of the next pastor of the church. It is also made clear that some of the questions asked in the survey are a part of a larger research project being conducted by the pastor of the church for the Doctor of Ministry program at Fuller Theological Seminary. The congregation is informed that they are not required to participate in the survey, and that they can opt out of the research process. In other words, no pressure is put on them whatsoever to participate in this survey.

The questions in the survey have been approved by a special mission study committee, made up of a cross-section of the congregation. It is important to note, for the purposes of this research project, and from an ethnographic anthropological standpoint of “participant observation,” that members of the mission study team are approved, generated, and edited by the group that is being studied. The questions, therefore, that will be generated, will say as much about the congregation and their perspectives in faith, as the actual answers themselves. See Appendix D for a list of the questions asked.

Explanation and Rationale of Christology Questions

Each of the questions posed to the GPC congregation through this confidential survey are to be asked with a particular intention and goal in mind. Here are some of the rationale behind the questions that are asked of the congregation. The first question reads, “For the next 5 years, how should the congregation’s emphasis and efforts be directed?” This question was developed by the mission study team; however, it helps establish a baseline of what the congregation feels is an important focus for the next five years. If a majority of the congregation feel that spiritual growth or increased Bible study is
important, then it offers a possible inroad for more of a Christological understanding of current ministries. If not, this can offer helpful information as well.

The second question asks participants to rate the skills and qualities they most want to see in a pastor. This question was also developed by the mission study team. However, once again, it can be used to develop a baseline of what people view the role of a pastor to be within a particular congregation. If the congregation sees the pastor in a spiritual framework, that will be helpful information. On the other hand, it is equally as relevant for informational purposes if the congregation sees the pastor in more of an administrative light.

Question three asks, “What do you value in a Sunday sermon?” This question was also developed by the mission study team. Because this research project is about developing a homiletical model for helping people who have been influenced by New Age ideologies, the answers provided can help me know exactly what model of preaching is best received. One thing is almost certain—a purely Barthian preaching approach may not be that well received.

Next, participants are asked, “Overall, what do you value in the church service?” This question, developed by the mission study team, offers perhaps the most illuminating insight into the life and nature and context of the GPC congregation. The reader should notice that there is no mention of the Sunday sermon, message, or the homily, even on the list of things that this church views as important to a quality worship service.

The following question reads, “When describing yourself to a friend, how would you self-identify?” I developed this question which attempts to establish how members of the congregation perceive themselves, self-identify, and present themselves to the larger
community, in terms of their identity in Christ. It should be noted that the term “self-identify” has become a catchphrase in modern academic circles in and around the University of Santa Barbara, and so it is familiar to the respondent and a comfortable way to describe oneself to others.

Question number six asks, “What is your belief about the Bible?” followed by a list of choices. I supplied this question. It attempts to understand how members of the congregation view the role of Scripture in their own lives and the life of the GPC faith community.

Next, participants are asked which member of the Holy Trinity they mostly resonate with. I posed this question to the congregation, in an attempt to understand the congregation’s sophistication level regarding an understanding of the different persons of the Holy Trinity. Also, a preponderant answer towards the second person of the Trinity, Jesus, may indicate the level of a person’s personal relationship with God.

The next question is, “How would you describe your relationship with Jesus?” I supplied this question to establish the level of Christology within the congregation. If members have a high Christology, believing Jesus is God, it will be determinant in understanding the nature of a member’s relationship with Christ. The inverse dynamic of having a low Christology, is also a possibility.

The ninth question reads, “What aspect of Jesus’ essential being do you most relate with?” I developed this question which also attempts to understand the level of Christology within the membership. If a member views Jesus as simply another human being, then the potential to view Christ as a vehicle for personal salvation diminishes.
Finally, the last question asks, “What is your favorite part of Jesus’ teaching and ministry?” with a list of possible responses. I contributed this final question to detect the level of understanding that members of the church have with the nature of Jesus, who he was, what he represented, and perhaps most of all, which aspect that they most relate with.

It should be noted that I would have like to have asked a few questions of which the mission study team did not approve but would have been helpful for the basic purposes of this research project. The questions that were outright rejected by the mission study team that would have been helpful are: Is Jesus the only road to salvation, or are there other faith systems that also can lead to a person’s eternal salvation? Have you been influenced by other theological perspectives other than Christianity? If so, what are these influences (Buddhism, Confucianism, Scientology, Hinduism, Unitarianism, Earth Worship)? Do you take part in Buddhist meditative practices? Do you do Yoga regularly? If so, how do these Buddhist meditative practices help your life?

Inherent Bias and Skew in the Congregational Questionnaire

All qualitative research methodologies have inherent biases and perspectives which contribute to the potential of skewing the results in deleterious ways. The way a question is posed, the frame it takes, and the intent behind its asking all play a role in how that question is answered. As has been noted by research expert Nancy Vhymeister, “The answers to questions will help me discern meaning. I will also ask what the writer wants
me to know and believe after reading this piece.” For example, if a research group conducted a telephone survey and asked a respondent, “What quality about the President of the United States do you most dislike? Speeches, tweets or television interviews?” the way the question is asked will impact the results. What if the respondent does not dislike anything about the President? What if the respondent dislikes certain things, but these are not listed in the questionnaire? These results will offer a bias and skew the eventual results. Nearly all qualitative research, it must be noted, is in some way, necessarily biased.

It must honestly be stated that, like all research projects, this study has biases. I am an evangelical Christian seeking to move GPC congregation from a New Age ideological perspective to a more Christ-centered one. The research questionnaire, because it is part of a larger mission study process for the purpose of attempting to hire a new pastor to the church, could contain an internal flaw. What if people answer questions in a way that they hope the researchers or the Santa Barbara Presbytery will approve of? What if the congregation, by taking part in the questionnaire, believes that their answers and whether they are honest or not, will necessarily impact the future of the congregation in adverse or beneficial ways? It should simply be noted that I am aware of the internal disparities and potential inconsistencies in this qualitative research approach.

**Homiletical Model and Preaching Schedule of Research Project**

One of the advantageous features of the GPC congregation as a site for a research

---

project such as this one is that it is relatively small in number at 166 members, and because of this, the population sample is containable and countable. Further, the congregation has a largely community-based congregational sensibility to it. For example, it is not unheard of for this congregation to raise their hands at the beginning of worship and ask a question about an announcement that is being made. A recent example of this occurred when a woman from the congregation, totally unsolicited and out of the blue, asked a question about the financial status of the congregation moving forward, and whether the church had enough money to pay its bills. While on the one hand this very casual approach to worship can at times be an interruption into the overall practice of worshipping God, it also provides a perfect milieu from which to conduct a dialectical, dialogical preaching method.

To this end, I have incorporated questions to the congregation in every one of the messages that are preached. There have also been call-response types of stylistic mechanisms used in each of the messages. Each sermon in this study is carefully constructed in a dialogical way. While the sermons do not follow Socratic speaking in their dialectical method, they employ much of Barth’s inclination towards the sermon being a living and breathing conversation between God and the congregation.

Sovereignty of God Preaching Model

Consistent with Barth’s theology and high Christological approach, the sermons that will be offered in this project assume that the congregation will meet the pastor at the top of the mountain, rather than being led up the mountain to meet Him. The sermons preached assume that God exists in the form of the man/God named Jesus who came to
save the world from sin. The sermons do not take an apologetic approach to argue for the existence of God, or to convince the congregation that Jesus is God, but convey in real and personal terms the living existence of Jesus Christ and the transformative power of Christ to change lives. In a similarly Barthian fashion, the sermons attempt to drop the listeners into the life of the New Testament listeners who sat at the feet of Jesus and listened, rather than to take the listener on a theological journey to the first century world of the Middle East. The listeners find themselves at the feet of Jesus, rather than journey towards Jesus. Though preaching to many Neo-Buddhist congregants, the sermons will not shy away from the sovereign nature of Christ nor the salvific power of Jesus in daily life. At the same time, the sermons will accentuate the human qualities of Jesus.

A Goal to Avoid a Comparative Religious Studies Perspective

It might be argued at a comparative religious studies approach to preaching might be effective when preaching to so many adherents of other world religions. For example, a preacher might say, “Buddha said this,” but “Jesus said this.” However, this approach would neither employ the heart of a Barthian theological approach nor, in the end, be very effective. What is missing in this congregational setting is not more information about Jesus or Buddha, but a connection with the living and transformational nature of a relationship with Jesus the Christ. Also, when speaking to audiences of different theological, cultural, or ideological perspectives it can be a perilous venture for a preacher to point out the obvious differences in perspective. For example, when preaching to a group of Native Americans, it might seem both pejorative, disrespectful, and rhetorically unhelpful to use illustrations about Sitting Bull or Chief Joseph. In the
same way, a comparative approach with New Age theology would be detrimental to the extreme in this preaching context.

A “Grunwaldian” Preaching Methodology

Grunwald’s famous painting, “John the Baptist” (see Appendix F), is my primary image as I construct sermons relevant to the congregation. Grunwald’s famous painting, shows John the Baptist pointing to Jesus on the cross. To this end, as a researcher, I attempt to remove myself from the center of the text or be the focus of the preaching attempt. This is a difficult task since my own preaching style tends towards a highly relationship-based approach and a personal illustrative approach. Up to this point in the life of my preaching, I have developed sermons that are mostly “Ethos” based (Aristotle), and less “Logos” based (Barth).

Research Project Preaching Schedule

The sermons of this research project are stretched over a span of four months, from July to October, and consist of eighteen individual sermonic experiences (See Appendix E). There are four main themes over this period of four months. These themes will correlate with four of the stated objectives of this study: baptisms, communion, mission, and community life. Though these topics are not specifically discussed as a focus of the Sunday message, since this would not adhere to the Barthian methodological approach, the more generalized themes are to be touched upon. Again, the goal is not to

---

20 Though Barth began his ministry by preaching topically, he later wrote extensively about the inadequacy of this preaching methodology, and in subsequent years preached almost exclusively in an expository fashion.
educate people about aspects of the Christian faith through this research study, but to bring lives into relationship with Christ. The sermons will last for between twenty and twenty-five minutes. Counting the number of sermons to be preached over the course of four months, the congregation will be exposed to a total of 450 minutes of preaching. Also, though the study is confined to the actual sermon itself, the preacher’s Christological impact on a congregation during the course of a worship service extends to all of its elements: from the greeting at the back door, to the exit at the end.

Sermon Topics and Sermon Lectionary

Over a discrete and finite amount of time, especially a four-month period contained within this research project, it is impossible to cover all the necessary areas of the Christian faith. As Barth discovered, writing the most voluminous compendium of theology tomes on Christian theology, and then in the end realizing that he was not finished even after ten volumes, the number of topics that are necessary for Christians to engage are seemingly endless. However, an attempt has been made to determine the most salient and important topics in a sermon series for this particular population group.

In Appendix E, the reader can find the actual sermon schedule and self-written lectionary that was composed for this project. The sermon topics themselves are broken into four different categories, each with a specific eye towards helping people in Buddhist and New Age ideologies become more fully-devoted followers of Jesus Christ. These categories include: The Basics of the Christian Faith, Community Life in the Christian Faith, Expressions, Responses, and Applications of the Christian Faith, and Beginnings and Endings. The appendix notes how each of the topics involving the Christian faith
were chosen as a counterpoint to an aspect of Buddhist theology. Though Buddhism or its theology is never addressed directly in these sermons, special attention has been paid to addressing a series of pre-existing beliefs or practices from a more traditionally orthodox Christian standpoint.

**Sermon Delivery Method**

In keeping with Barth’s model of a dialogical approach to preaching, I memorize all my messages and deliver them in a conversational tone and delivery style. The messages are first be typed out as a manuscript, but no semblance or sense that the sermon is being communicated form a manuscript occurs. Questions are asked of the congregation when it seems like they do not understand a specific concept. The sermons are designed to feel like a phone conversation with a friend rather than a group lecture. The lectern is not to be used in order to facilitate a more intimate connection with the congregation. The preacher occasionally walks the stage to connect with different parts of the room. Individual people in the church will be engaged with verbally and interloquately during the message. In other words, a classic call and response model is used to highlight people with whom the preacher is trying to connect.

**Random Monthly Evaluations from Members of the Church**

During this four-month project, I conduct random interviews with church members. The interviews and the questions can be found in Appendix J. These questions and interviews are meant to assess rapport and connection with the sermon audience, rather than attempt to determine specific direct influence of the sermons themselves. The reason for this more non-direct approach is because I do not want to appear too
theologically aggressive with the interviewees so that rapport can be maintained. Because those who adhere to the New Age ideological system are highly sensitive to any sort of evangelical approach to ministry, a much more tabula-rosa approach is attempted. These questions and interviews are not designed to be formal, for example with a clip-board and a direct notation of the conversation, to attempt to solicit less stilted and more realistic answers and responses. The ultimate impact of these evaluations is determined, not by the answers to the questions themselves, but rather in the enhanced life of the members in terms of baptisms, communion, mission, and community life.

Target Population of Focus Study

All 166 members of the GPC congregation, participate in this study. Within this larger population, there is a control group and an experimental group. The control group consists of the 112 members who identify themselves as being nominally Christian. The experimental group consists of the fifty-four congregants who either identify as being Neo-Buddhist or who do not identify with any specific form of Christianity. This also includes people who stem from Scientology, Earth Day worship, and other syncretistic practices. Because of the sensitive nature of singling out congregational members based on their personal belief systems, it is nearly impossible to identify the experimental group population in terms of direct impacts of this research project. I recognize this inherent flaw in the overall approach of this project.

Fellow Leadership Participants in Focus Study

In addition to myself, there are three other leadership participants in this study. Two of the other participants are members of the property and finance committee and, it
must be said, pillars of the church. One of these individuals is the chair of the property and finance committee, and the other is a regular participant. Both individuals have PhD’s, and are familiar with the essentials of quantitate and qualitative research practices. One of these people worked for AC Delco, one of the original population groups that started the congregation. The third leadership participant is a long-time member of the church who currently serves as a commissioned lay pastor at GPC. All three of these individuals have institutional memory and understanding of the church, as well as a grasp of the unique aspects of the congregation. None of them come from the Neo-Buddhist branch of the congregation. This may be a benefit, because they are already a part of the Christian faith, yet a detriment, because they are not as well-versed in the nuances of the unique New Age ideologies which make up the congregation.

**The End of the Project is the End of the Ministry**

One unique aspect of this particular call setting, and an inherent facet and reality of this project is that I have been called to this church for a finite amount of time. In practical terms, this project ends at the very same time that my call period ends. The last day of preaching laid out in this study is also the day that I announce to the congregation that I am leaving the church and accepting another call to ministry. The exit of any pastor from any ministry setting always brings a flood of com mingled and convoluted mix of emotions, expression of grief, and feeling of loss.

The departure of an effective pastor from any preaching context ushers in an entirely different set of pastoral and preaching concerns. Questions that every congregation asks themselves when pastors leave tend to fall into seven different discrete
categories: First, “Why is the pastor leaving?” second, “Have we as a congregation done something wrong?” third, “What could we have done differently to keep this pastor?” fourth, “What are the next steps for this church?” fifth, “Who will lead this church in the intervening period?” sixth, “Who will eventually lead this church?” and finally, “What does this exit mean for our overall existential condition as human beings?” Interestingly, this set of questions can both be detrimental to the overall research effort, and at the same time, helpful for the healthy integration of New Age and Christian theologies.

Contained within these essential questions lie some of the most seminal differences between Buddhism and Christianity. For Buddhists, there really is no end to existence. At the heart of Buddhism is the sense that the individual can always find another level of existence and another level of consciousness through the concept of Atman.21 For Christians, on the other hand, all things eventually come to an end: “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die. . .” (Ec 3:1-2). Jesus himself points to the end of all things as he ascends into heaven, “Behold, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age,” (Mt 28:20). The contrast between Buddhism and Christianity on matters of finality can prove to be an instructive pedagogical and theological facet of spiritual growth, even within the bounds of this project.

---

21 “Atman is the eternal, unchangeable Self sought by yogins, ascetics and followers of the Samkhya philosophy.” Armstrong, Buddha, 201.
CHAPTER 5

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS AND EVALUATION OF OUTCOMES

Because this research project has focused primarily on the writings and thinking of the theologian Karl Barth, as it relates to preaching to people who are influenced by New Age Ideologies at GPC, it is appropriate to incorporate into the implementation process one of Barth’s lesser known, but still significant books entitled, simply, *Prayer*. Barth believed that prayer was an essential component of any ministry and evangelism effort. Citing the Protestant reformers of the late sixteenth century, Barth observed, “The Reformation appears to us as a great whole: a labor of research, thinking, preaching, discussion, polemic, and organization. But it was more than all that. From what we know, it was also an act of continuous prayer, an invocation, and, let us add, an act of human beings, of certain persons, and at the same time a response on the part of God.”

Reflecting further upon prayer, Barth invoked the thoughts of the reformer Martin Luther: “For we know that our defense lies in prayer alone. We are too weak to resist the Devil and his vassals. Let us hold fast to the weapons of the Christian; they enable us to combat the Devil. For what has carried off these great victories over the undertakings of

---

our enemies which the Devil has used to put us in subjection, if not the prayers\textsuperscript{2} of certain pious people who rose-up as a rampart to protect us?\textsuperscript{3} To this end, the research project which is in question has had a concerted and well-defined period of prayer long before its actual commencement.

Starting the very first day of the ministry that I have undertaken at GPC, I have prayed every day for the congregation. I began as stated supply pastor in May of 2016 and have focused my prayer attention in this congregational setting on each member of the church, that they would be open to hearing the Word when it was preached, and receptively transformed by the Holy Spirit. In other congregational settings, I would have asked that a specific prayer team be formed to pray for the openness to God’s Word, however, because of the somewhat more secular approach that this church has taken to all spiritual matters, including prayer,\textsuperscript{4} I have taken the more individualized approach of taking this task on myself. In many ways, this individualized approach also reflects the spiritually isolated aspect and nature of this specific call setting. In total, I have prayed for the Goleta Congregation for 425 days prior to the implementation of this study.

**Project Timeline**

In May of 2017, I had a conversation with the three key individuals who have influence in GPC, and who are viewed as pillars by the congregation at large. These

\textsuperscript{2} Emphasis added.

\textsuperscript{3} Ibid., 4.

\textsuperscript{4} As has been mentioned, there is a prayer team/group at GPC but their purpose for meeting is more about informing each other of one another’s ailments, rather than concertedly sharing these physical maladies with God for the purpose of healing and congregational transformation.
individuals included a commissioned lay pastor in the Church who has been a member for thirty years, a chair of property and finance who has a Ph.D. with a specialty in Alzheimer’s disease, and a session member who is on property and finance committee with a vast background in quantitative research methods as an employee at the aforementioned AC Delco for years and was on the Apollo Moon Lander Project team. The professional and ecclesiastical background of these individuals is important because it demonstrates their understanding of higher-level academic research and establishes their ongoing connection to the congregation. As the cultural anthropologist Molinowski has observed in his work on “participant observation,” the longer that a member of a study is a participant in the discrete area of ethnographic research, the more overall understanding and rapport that individual will have in conducting the actual study. A fourth, more technologically-oriented, member of the leadership group was also included for the purpose of tabulating the online survey results.

The conversation with these leaders included an explanation of the research project, the purpose for the study, an overview of how it would be conducted, and a solicitation of their help in collecting the results of the online Christology questions that would be distributed to the congregation. A strong emphasis on the need for confidentiality and utter discretion with the actual result tabulations was also discussed. All participants agreed to the research project’s approach and implementation process.

Session Conversation

In June of 2017 at the regularly called session meeting of the church, the proposal
of this research project was communicated to the session.\(^5\) As moderator of the session, and stated supply pastor of the church, I explained that I wanted to conduct this study as part of my Doctoral project for Fuller Theological Seminary. I explained that this was the final step and assignment to attain my degree. Those in the session were all strongly encouraging of this project and understood its importance. At least one member of the session of the church was a part of the study sample group, a self-identified Buddhist. Another was a self-identified member of the New Age and Earth Worship contingent. I was careful to explain that I did not view them as guinea pigs in this research study, but rather as co-participants in this process, as B. Molinowski would have proscribed.

I offered that I too was hoping to be transformed through the preaching of the Word and the sermons that would be delivered, and that this was not a one-sided learning process. I told the session that whatever the results of the study might be, would not at all be determinative in my overall relationship with them, or my overall assessment of the spiritual depth of the congregation. I also alerted them to the fact that anyone who did not want to participate in this study were welcome to abstain without consequence. The session passed as a motion in the action calendar the approval to carry out this project. Proof of this passing can be found in the church’s official records in the clerk’s report of the GPC records for the month of June 2017.\(^6\)

---

\(^5\) In a Presbyterian congregation, the elder board is known as the “session.”

\(^6\) Because of a confidentiality agreement with the church, a copy of these minutes could not be procured for this research project, even though they are public record, and available in the church archives of the GPC congregation.
Congregation Conversation

In June of 2017, after the session approval of this project to take place at Goleta Presbyterian Church, a letter was sent out by one of the co-leaders in this study explaining that the church was conducting a mission study report for Presbytery that would assist the congregation with the hiring of a new pastor. As a part of this mission study report would be a series of questions that would be part of the pastor’s research project for the purposes of the completion of his degree. Every member was encouraged to participate in this study, but it was also emphasized that no one would be forced to participate. The reason that one of the co-leaders, rather than myself, wrote the letter to the congregation was to prevent people from feeling inappropriately pressured to participate in the study.

 Concurrent with the letter, I had several conversations with the congregation about this study via announcements at the beginning of worship, and within the context of my sermons leading up to it. I explained why I was doing the study, and emphasized that, from my standpoint, it was not simply a matter of completing a degree or finishing a paper, but that my interest was in seeing transformational results within the congregation as a direct result of this focused preaching effort. In this way, the preaching focus was framed as a four-month period of renewal and revival for the entire congregation. I also explained that prior to the launching of this study, that I had dedicated myself to a 425-day conscientious period of prayer and reflection. The congregation as a whole seemed excited about this study and this research project.
Resources

Prior to the start of this research project a ten-week course was conducted by the DMin faculty, principally Dr. Kurt Fredrickson of Fuller Seminary, outlining the steps for the writing of the paper. A colloquium of fellow students functioned as a test group for ideas and processes involved in the writing of this paper. An editing team of colleagues was utilized during the entire process, and fellow pastors and friends of mine acted as a sounding board for emerging and developing ideas.

The Goleta Presbyterian Church sanctuary was the main venue for this homiletical model and project to take place. The sanctuary itself is fairly modern in design and has a light and luminescent feel. The room was built less than ten years ago, and features homemade stained-glass windows drawing mostly from natural scenery such as rivers, clouds, mountains, and streams. Members can sit in pews as close to or as far away from the preacher who preaches without a podium in a conversational way from the middle of the room.

The main office complex of the GPC building is where the tabulation of the questionnaire took place. There is a confidential inner space where the results were stored when collected and tabulated by the aforementioned leadership team. The results of the study were collected digitally as well as manually through the US Postal service and people who voluntarily handed in their questionnaires in. The cost of the survey was minimal and consisted only of the cost of postage. The computer program that was used to tabulate the results and the search engine that gleaned the findings was donated to the church by a member.
Distributing the Christology Questions

In June of 2017, the Christology questions were distributed to the congregation through three separate means. First, the questionnaire was mailed out to members of the church that were not computer literate or who did not have access to internet services. Around twenty out of 166 received mailed and numbered questionnaires. The questionnaire was also made available to people on Sunday mornings at church in the form of a stapled paper document that they could take home and fill out and then bring back. The most important and confidential way that the document was distributed to the congregation was by giving them a web address where they could go to fill out the questionnaire.

A transcript of the actual email that went out to the congregation is included in Appendix H, as well as the name of the online site that could be utilized. A large majority of the congregation, around 130, received the questionnaire through this means. It was emphasized once again to the entire congregation that nobody should feel pressured in any way to participate if they did not feel comfortable in taking part in this study. It was explained to the congregation that they would have two weeks to complete the questionnaire and then return it to one of the leaders. I would not have access to the results until after they were tabulated in order to ensure that there was not any unhelpful skewing of the results.

Tabulation and Interpretation of Christology Questionnaire

In July of 2017 the Christology questionnaire was tabulated, and the results of the tabulations were made known to the lead research team and the entire congregation. It
should be noted that as the results were related there was a palpable level of anxiety in
the congregation about whether the results themselves would cast their own church in a
positive or a more pejorative light. As pastor, I allayed any concerns any members had
about the results and told them how pleased I was with the results, and how proud I was
of the church for completing the survey so efficiently and thoughtfully. The raw data of
the questions related to this research project can be found in Appendix. Out of a
congregation of 166 members, 105 surveys were returned and completed. Though this
study is not utilizing a metric of statistical probability, 7 105 members out of 166
represents a significant population sample from which to derive at least qualitative
analysis from.

It is worth recognizing that 61 members, 37% of the congregation, did not fill out
surveys. While silence, or non-participation in a survey process cannot be viewed as
ultimately determinative in terms of outcome, it does raise several salient and crucial
questions related to this project. Why did members of the church not fill out surveys?
Was abstention a conscious choice, or simply a matter of happenstance? Was the vehicle
for the surveys (online access, paper, mail) a determinant in whether surveys were filled
out or not? Was the quotient of people who did not fill out surveys a part of the New Age
Buddhist sample in the church or was it comprised of some of the more traditional
members? I do not know the answer to these questions, however, I suspect that perhaps
the New Age Buddhist focus group were the ones who did not respond, which may have

---

7 Statistical probability equations are sometimes known as “t-test” or “z-test” equations. This
study has not utilized these statistical metrics for the purposes of determining true probability.
skewed the results away from direct evidence of a causal connection between preaching as an impetus, and spiritual transformation.

Because the questions asked of the congregation were part of their normal congregational Mission Study Process, several of the questions asked of the congregation do not actually apply to this particular research project. In other words, the research method here is utilizing a study embedded within another study. Only the questions that are germane to this project have been analyzed and interpreted. Other questions not related to this project have been left aside as irrelevant to this study. The questions that are relevant to this study are questions seventeen, eighteen, and twenty through twenty-five. For a complete list of all questions, or these specific questions, the reader can refer to a previous section or the Appendix.

**Interpretation and Analysis of Question 17**

Question number seventeen related to the value that a respondent placed on the Sunday sermon. On the question of the importance of Scripture in the corpus of a sermon, nearly 50 (49.45) percent said that Scripture was “more important.” However, for the purposes of this study, it is important to note that 39.56 percent of participants placed Scripture as either being of lesser importance, indicated by the blue, gray, or orange color. A full 2.20 percent said that Scripture was not important at all to the sermon itself. These indices show that the congregation is evenly divided on the importance of Scripture as a central facet of the church life. It is also important to note that 45.3 percent of the church viewed the use of humor in a sermon as of equal importance to the centrality of Scripture.
**Interpretation and Analysis of Question 18**

Question number eighteen related to what respondents viewed as “valuable” in the context of a church service. Only 19.77 percent of respondents viewed interactive prayer as “very important” in a church service. The rest of the indices add up to 80.2 percent of the congregation who do not feel that interactive prayer is a valuable component of worship. It is important to note that 6.98 percent viewed interactive prayer as descriptively unimportant to the value of worship. These indices point to the importance of preaching on prayer and demonstrating the need for prayer in this congregational setting.

**Interpretation and Analysis of Question 20**

Question number twenty related to how people self-identify when describing themselves to a friend. A full 77.67 percent of respondents said they describe themselves as a Christian. Fascinatingly, a total of 12.62% of respondents said that they self-identify themselves as, “Someone open to God, but not a Christian.” In a seeker-friendly church this latter number would be considered to be a good thing because an outreach-oriented congregation needs people within the church who are not of the Christian faith. However, because this congregation can be viewed as more “intransigent” in its movement and growth trajectory, this may indicate more hard and fast adherence to non-Christian paradigms and belief systems. Also, since a full 37 percent of the congregation did not fill out surveys, this number, in my opinion, is likely much higher.
**Interpretation and Analysis of Question 21**

Question number twenty-one related to people’s beliefs about the Bible. The statistics show that only 15.24 percent of the congregation believe that the Bible was “written by God.” Because this first question leans towards the question of Biblical inerrancy, this answer is not surprising. The study shows that 84.76 percent of the respondents believe that the Bible was “inspired by God.” This percentage point was actually a welcome surprise to me, as someone who sees inroads to spiritual transformation in this positive response to God’s inspiration of the Bible. Less heartening to this researcher was the fact that 60 percent of the congregation believes that the Bible is simply a collection of early stories, and 3.81 percent of the respondents believe that Scripture was both fictional and “not true.” This points to the potentially low view of Scripture that the congregation has.\(^8\)

**Interpretation and Analysis of Question 22**

Question number twenty-two relates to which member of the Holy Trinity people in the congregation most resonated with. This question, when taken at face value, is theoretically prone to theological nuances that were even beyond Karl Barth’s knowledge. Barth said of the differences between the three aspects of the Trinity;

> It is obvious that no difference can be or is made here by the distinction which is made in Holy Scripture itself between Yahweh dwelling on Sinai and Yahweh dwelling in Jerusalem, or in the New Testament the distinction between the Father and the Son, or the distinction manifested in the contrasts between Good Friday, Saturday, and Sunday.

\(^8\) A brief mention needs to be made here, as well, about the unique quality and nature of this congregation. Whereas other congregation’s may say that they place a high view on Scripture, it is this researcher’s experience that because of peer pressure in otherwise more “evangelically oriented congregations” these numbers do not always reflect a congregant’s true opinion. This is another way of saying that this congregation is brutally honest in its opinions of all matters—Scriptural and non-scriptural.
Easter and Pentecost. The man who prays to the Father, who believes in the Son and who is moved by the Holy Ghost is a man whom the one Lord meets and unites to Himself.9

This question, however, for the purposes of this research project, impacts sermon construction and focus. Surprisingly, 59.62 percent have a fully Trinitarian view of God, and do not see a difference in any one singular facet of God.

**Interpretation and Analysis of Question 23**

Question number twenty-three attempts to determine which aspect of Jesus’ essential being they most relate with: fully human or fully God. Interestingly, 65.38 percent of the respondents viewed the two essential natures of Jesus’ being as the same. However, very important for this study is the idea that 28.85 percent of the respondents viewed Jesus’ essential nature as being human. This question does not fully bear out a determination of whether these same respondents questioned the divinity of Christ, however, empirical data would indicate that they most likely did question his divinity.

**Interpretation and Analysis of Question 24**

Question number twenty-four asks people what their personal relationship is with Jesus Christ. The difficulty with the formulation of this question is that it asks respondents to check all answers that apply to them, which effectively rules out an understanding of whether an individual has a personal relationship with Christ or not. However, it is significant that 11.88 percent of respondents see Jesus as a “wise teacher,”

---

and 1.98 percent see Jesus as a totally fictional character. 52.48 percent of respondents saw Jesus as their “personal savior.”

**Interpretation and Analysis of Question 25**

Question twenty-five identifies the congregation’s “favorite part of Jesus’ teaching ministry.” Because this question, once again, asks the congregation to answer all that apply, it is impossible to make determinative interpretations of these statistics. However, it is significant that 73.83 percent of respondents viewed Jesus’ “teaching” as more important than they viewed his “salvation” (42.06%), “death on a cross” (34.58%), and “resurrection” (52.34%). This statistic indicates that almost three-quarters of the respondents view Jesus’ didactic life as more important than his salvific life.

**Random Interviews and Empirical Data Collection**

During the four-month window for the completion of the research, I conducted two sets of interviews with one self-identified adherent of Buddhism, and three other members who have been influenced by New Age ideologies. These interviews were less for the direct purpose of trying to determine whether the sermons were having a positive impact on the specific study in question, and more about gaining rapport with individuals in the New Age and Buddhist traditions within the church. It was of great concern that members of the congregation who adhered to these religious traditions would see the research as being one-sided and pejorative. While internal spiritual transformation cannot be evaluated based on the mere feelings or opinions of people who are exposed to effective preaching, a regular “checking-in” dynamic can be helpful for measuring the
amount of rapport, ethos, connection, and cognitive processing that an individual is experiencing. The exact contents of these interviews can be found in Appendix J.

An evaluation of these two interviews reveals individuals who have a highly integrated understanding of life, and who have a relatively sophisticated understanding of spirituality. The interviews did not specifically touch on Christology, but a definite Christology can be determined and gleaned from their answers. The individual in profile 1 had been in recovery from drugs and alcohol for many years prior to my arriving at the church, and a definite sense of a “higher power,” as it is understood in Alcoholics Anonymous, can be detected. The person in Profile 2 clearly has a deeper sense and understanding of Buddhism as a faith system. The second interviewee was most concerned that this researcher understood the extensive education and spiritual training he had experienced before this research project was undertaken. During the course of the study, it is of vast significance to note that the individual from Profile 2 was baptized into the Christian faith and became a self-professing Christian.

Qualitative and Quantitative Analysis of Five Indices of Spiritual Growth in GPC

While four-months is far too narrow to precisely pinpoint a causal connection between preaching and spiritual growth, I observed significant impacts of the five primary indices and spiritual markers which were presented in this paper. The routine ways in which spiritual growth was observed are too numerous to count and would involve an entire separate chapter of this project. Depth of knowledge, adherence to faith systems, general excitement, and encouragement in the lives of members of the
congregation were all in abundant measure. However, regarding this project, the following metrics represent the quantitative and qualitative results of this study.

Baptism

During this study, five adults were baptized. Three were reaffirmations of faith from individuals who felt their personal faith experience had grown cold and wanted to rededicate their lives to Jesus Christ. One of the adult baptisms was an individual who had previously been baptized in a Catholic church as a child, but who felt that that baptism was not truly emblematic of the faith that they were now experiencing. Significantly, one of the adult baptisms came from the Buddhist/New Age sample group to which this project had been attempting to minister. In addition to these five adult baptisms, there were also two infant baptisms, which can be interpreted as signs of a parent’s dedication and devotion to Jesus Christ, and because of this, serve as significant indicators of spiritual growth in the GPC congregation.

Communion

Holy communion was observed four times during the course of this study. While it is impossible to determine the quality of a person’s experience in taking part in the sacrament of communion, a noticeable difference was detected in the members, through their expression of earnestness and devotion as they partook of the elements themselves. A larger number of people who took communion was not detected, but an exact quantifiable number of people who experienced communion was not enumerated during this study. On average, around fifty more people addended worship services during the time I served as interim pastor.
Prayer

The prayer life of the congregation increased during and after the time of the study. Whereas before the project began, the prayer team served more of a function of alerting one another about each other’s medical issues, after the project, there seemed to be more attention on actually offering those prayer needs to God to ask for His intervention. The number of occasions in which people prayed greatly increased during the course of this study. Previously, prayer was seen as something that a person did only on Sundays, and even then, only at the beginning and end of the service. During the study, prayer became a regular part of individual meetings, staff meetings, meal-times, session meetings,¹⁰ hospital visits, home visits, and all other occasions.

Mission and Community Life

There was no discernable difference in the way the GPC congregation undertook the mission outreach of the church or the community life. Honestly speaking, these aspects of the congregation’s life were already quite effectual and outwardly healthy. It is my hope that more integration of faith principles and practices can become a part of GPC’s mission and community life in the future, and the congregants may experience a truer sense of Christ’s purposes behind these activities.

Impact of the Project Upon the Researcher

Although the quote has often been attributed to Karl Barth, it was actually John Stuart Mill who once said, “He who knows only his own side of the case knows little of

¹⁰ There were occasions in which the elders prayed over twenty times at session meetings.
that.” This project has not only been a journey towards knowing the case, or the differing religious views, of a local congregation in which I served, but also in growing from them. My own prayer life has deepened as a result of understanding from my Buddhist friends that prayer is not simply a long list of “to-dos” that one presents to God, but can be a meditative spiritual state in which God reveals himself to the listener and the prayer. This project has shown me that while the earth does not exist as a separate God, it certainly was and is created every day by the God of the universe. I also embrace the extreme importance in seeing that all people are, in essence, actual individuals who adhere to faith systems, and not simply faith systems that adhere to individuals.

This project has shown me that the inroads between some aspects of the Buddhist faith tradition and the essentials of Christianity can be found, and more to the point of this project, that lives can be turned closer to the powerful and salvific life of Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit and through consistent, concerted, and conscientious preaching. Most of all, this project has demonstrated once again how the power of the love of Jesus Christ trumps all differences between people when it is conveyed and relayed in a compassionate and loving way. Karl Barth’s inroads into the New Age world of theology remain a significant method of conveying the gospel of Jesus Christ to people on the fringes of the orthodox Christian faith. For, as one New Age scholar recently posited, as she lifted-up Barth’s thoughts on theology and love, “The best theology would need no advocates; it would prove itself.”12 This fascinating convergence between those


outside the Christian faith and those within it represents the greatest mystery, and potential impact of the gospel of Jesus Christ.
Q2 How long have you lived in this community?

Answered: 113  Skipped: 2

- Less than 1 year: 5.31%
- 1 - 3 years: 2.65%
- 4 - 10 years: 4.42%
- 11 - 19 years: 14.16%
- 20 years or longer: 73.45%
• Founding Pastor – 1959-1969 (Foundational/Civil Rights Years)
• Interim Pastor – 1969-1972
• Second Pastor – 1972-1989 (Community/Practical Years)
• Interim Pastor 1989-1991
• Third Pastor – 1991-2008 (Relational/Fluid Theological Years)
• Interim Pastor – 2008-2010
• Fourth Pastor – 2010-2016 (Inward/Detached Years)
Thank you in advance for your valued participation in this survey. You are considered an important part of our church community. The information you provide here will help to improve GPC's ability to meet your spiritual needs, to acknowledge your opinions, to hear your suggestions, and to see how we can improve as a church.

The results (all answers are anonymous) will then go to the on-going Mission Study Committee which is a guide in our search for a new pastor. Our new pastor will know about us as a result of this survey. Please note: All answers are confidential, and you have the option to skip any question for your own personal reasons.

With Much Appreciation, our thanks to each of you for your time, help, and cooperation!

1. How far away do you live from GPC? *0 - 1 miles *1 – 3 miles *3 + miles
2. How long have you lived in this community?  
*Less than 1 year  
*1 - 3 years  
*4 - 10 years  
*11 - 19 years  
*20 years or longer

3. How often do you attend GPC?  
*Every week  
*Frequently  
*Once in a while  
*Special occasions  
*I am a regular visitor & friend  
*I am a member

4. In the past 5 years, I have participated in: (please mark all that apply)  
*Small Group/Bible Study  
*GPC Book Club  
*Session or Session Committee  
*Peace & Justice  
*Brown Baggers  
*Deacons  
*Transition House  
*Community Kitchen  
*Volunteer Work (Grounds, Secretarial, Cleanup, etc.)  
*Special Music  
*Chancel Choir  
*Praise Band  
*Sunday School  
*Youth Group Activities  
*Love of God (LOG)  
*Adult Fellowship & Adult Education  
*Ghana (sister city in Africa)  
*Questers (women’s Bible Study)  
*Presbytery Committee  
*Star words  
*Dress a Girl  
*Spring Tea for Seniors  
*Blessing of the Animals  
*Community Pancake Breakfast  
*One day Hobby & Craft Show  
*Church Picnic

5. My ethnic group is:  
*American Indian  
*Asian  
*Pacific Islander  
*Hispanic  
*Black  
*White  
*Other (Please specify)

6. My age is:  
*17 or younger  
*18 – 24  
*25 – 34  
*35 – 44  
*45 - 54  
*65 - 74  
*75 - 84  
*85+

7. How many children live in your home?  
*None  
*< 2 years  
*3 – 5 Years  
*6 -11 Years  
*12 -17 Years

8. What is your approximate average annual income?  
*Less than $15,000  
*$15,000 - $24,999  
*$25,000 - $34,999  
*$35,000 - $49,999  
*$50,000 - $74,999  
*$75,000 - $99,999  
*$100,000 - $124,999  
*$125,000 - $149,999  
*$150,000 - $199,999  
*$200,000 & Over

9. What is your highest level of education?  
*Elementary Grammar School  
*High School  
*Associate (Jr. College)  
*College Degree Obtained  
*Bachelor’s Degree  
*Master’s Degree  
*Doctor’s Degree

10. What is your current employment status?  
*Employed Full Time  
*Employed Part Time  
*Unemployed  
*Retired  
*Other (Specify)

11. For the next 5 years, how should the congregation’s emphasis and efforts be directed?  
*Extended programs for children and youth  
*...
Growth in church membership * Training and development of lay leadership * Involvement in mission outreach * Improved congregational ministry: caring for the needs of others * Stewardship; sustaining the church financially * Spiritual growth of individuals * Increased Bible study, seminars, small groups, retreats. * Ministry to the aged * Increased understanding of the Presbyterian governing body

12. I would be willing to support activities that build a sense of community within the congregation such as: Small group discussion Sunday 11:00 - 11:30 Crossroads - Couple’s Retreat, Landscaping opportunities, Campus/grounds clean-up day, Joint activity with Ministry Betel, Little kids’ activity (Breakfast at iHop, for ex.) Hoedown/cross generational activity

13. Please rate the following skills and qualities you most want to see in a Pastor: *Dynamic personnel faith *Knowledge of the Bible & theology *Preaching and teaching *Pastoral Care (Visitation, etc.) *Ability to maintain harmony in the congregation & accept member input *Years of pastoral experience *Administrative Skills *Personal warmth and appearance *Knowledge of Presbytery, Synod & General Assembly programs *Cultivation of new and young members *Builds positive rapport with children

14. Do you have a preference of age range in selection of a pastor? *Yes * No 'Comment:

15. What do you value in a Sunday sermon? *Scripture 'Comment: *Historical context *Visuals and multimedia *Personal Stories *Preaching to current events *Humor *Insight from other scholars/authors *Participation from members of the congregation *Content applicable and challenging to everyday use


17. When describing yourself to a friend, how would you self-identify: a.
A Christian b. A believer  c. Someone open to God, but not sure about it all d. Other

18. What is your belief about the Bible? Circle all that apply. a. Written by God b. Inspired by God c. A collection of early teachings and relevant to my life d. Written without error or mistake e. A helpful story but not really true f. neither true nor helpful

19. Which member of the Holy Trinity do you mostly resonate with? a. Father  b. Son (Jesus Christ)  c. Holy Spirit  d. All. The three are one, not separate

20. How would you describe your relationship with Jesus? Circle all that apply. a. Jesus was a wise teacher, but not God  b. Jesus was a Jewish religious figure, but doesn't relate to me  c. Jesus is my personal savior d. Jesus is God e. Jesus is my personal teacher, guide and inspiration f. Jesus was a fictional character created by 1st century people


22. What is your favorite part of Jesus' teaching and ministry? Circle all that apply. a. Teaching b. Healing c. Salvation d. Stories and parables e. Miracles f. Genuineness and authenticity g. The Cross  h. All of the above

23. What ideas/suggestions do you have that would bring new young families and children into our congregation?
APPENDIX D

Questions of GPC Congregation That Are Directly Applicable to Project

1. For the next 5 years, how should the congregation’s emphasis and efforts be directed?
   ● Extended programs for children and youth
   ● Growth in church membership
   ● Training and development of lay leadership
   ● Involvement in mission outreach
   ● Improved congregational ministry: caring for the needs of others
   ● Stewardship; sustaining the church financially
   ● Spiritual growth of individuals
   ● Increased Bible study, seminars, small groups, retreats
   ● Ministry to the aged
   ● Increased understanding of the Presbyterian governing body

2. Please rate the following skills and qualities you most want to see in a pastor
   ● Dynamic personal faith
   ● Knowledge of the Bible and theology
   ● Preaching and teaching
   ● Pastoral Care (Visitation, etc.)
   ● Ability to maintain harmony in the congregation and accept member input
   ● Years of pastoral experience
   ● Administrative skills
   ● Personal warmth and appearance
   ● Knowledge of Presbytery, Synod & General Assembly programs
   ● Cultivation of new and young members
   ● Builds positive rapport with children

3. What do you value in a Sunday sermon?
   ● Scripture
   ● Historical context
   ● Visual and multi-media
   ● Personal stories
   ● Preaching to current events
   ● Humor
   ● Insight from other scholars/authors
   ● Participation from members of the congregation
   ● Context application and challenging to everyday use
4. Overall, what do you value in the church service?
   - Interactive prayer
   - Responsive liturgy
   - Traditional hymn singing
   - Contemporary music
   - Special music
   - Chancel choir
   - Occasional direct involvement with the congregation

5. When describing yourself to a friend, how would you self-identify?
   a. A Christian
   b. A believer
   c. Someone open to God, but not sure about it all
   d. Other

6. What is your belief about the Bible? Circle all that apply
   - Written by God
   - Inspired by God
   - A collection of early teachings and relevant to my life
   - Written without error or mistake
   - A helpful story but not really true
   - Neither true nor helpful

7. Which member of the Holy Trinity do you mostly resonate with?
   a. Father
   b. Son (Jesus Christ)
   c. Holy Spirit
   d. All. The three are one, not separate

8. How would you describe your relationship with Jesus? Circle all that apply.
   a. Jesus was a wise teacher, but not God
   b. Jesus was a Jewish religious figure, but doesn’t relate to me
   c. Jesus is my personal savior
   d. Jesus is God
   e. Jesus is my personal teacher, guide and inspiration
   f. Jesus was a fictional character created by 1st century people

9. What aspect of Jesus’ essential being do you most relate with?
   a. Jesus as human
   b. Jesus as God
   c. Both – one in the same
10. What is your favorite part of Jesus’ teaching and ministry? Circle all that apply.
   a. Teaching
   b. Healing
   c. Salvation
   d. Stories and parables
   e. Miracles
   f. Genuineness and authenticity
   g. The Cross
   h. All of the above
APPENDIX E

Four-Month Preaching Schedule of Project

The Basics of the Christian Faith

July 2 (Independence Day Weekend)
Sermon: “God’s Joy”
Text: Nehemiah 8:5-17
Theme: One of the most important aspects of God’s being is joyfulness. The prophet Nehemiah reminds us that the, “Joy of the Lord is our strength.” Jesus was also joyful. Though it won’t be discussed as a comparative aspect in this sermon, Buddha is neither joyful, nor sad. Buddha’s face depicts the concept of Jhana.¹ This theme will be tied into our joyfulness about our country on Independence Day Weekend.

July 9
Sermon: “Creed”
Text: Apostles Creed, “I believe in God the father, maker of heaven and earth”
Theme: The theme of this message is that God was at the beginning of all things, creating all things by his power and might. Existence didn’t come into being on its own, God created existence. This concept flies in the face of the notion of the New Age concept of the “eternal return.”²

July 16
Sermon: “Forgiveness”
Text: Matt. 18:21-22
Theme: One of the essential themes of Christianity is the notion of forgiveness. Jesus offers forgiveness on the cross, through the death and resurrection of Christ. In Buddhism, there is really no such thing as forgiveness of sins, but only a kind of “release of the mind” known as, Ceto-vimutti.³


² “The eternal return” is a concept mostly made famous by the social and religious theorist Joseph Campbell that suggests that nothing ever was created, but always existed in some state, and always returns in another state.

³ “Ceto-vimutti is the release of the mind; a synonym for enlightenment and the achievement of Nibbana (Nirvana),” Armstrong, Buddha, 202.
July 23
Sermon: “To Overcome All Things”
Text: John 16:33
Theme: While traveling to India on a mission trip recently, I happened upon a Hindu holy man who was reading his holy books by himself at 3:00AM. Going back to my own room, I found my own scripture, the holy Bible, and began to meditate on these scriptures. When I opened my eyes, I found the scripture for this morning, “Christ has already overcome all things” through the cross. This is an Easter message of hope and salvation offered in July.

July 30
Sermon: “Our Daily Bread”
Text: Matt. 6:9-13
Theme: One of the most important concepts in Christianity is that of living by faith. One of the most concrete expressions of our faith is the idea that God will provide for us, daily. Jesus teaches this in the Sermon on the Mount, and the Lord’s Prayer. “Give us this day, our daily bread.” This concept is actually quite similar to some aspects of Buddhist thought. A Bikkhu is a Buddhist monk who “goes about each day and begs for his daily food.” A seminal difference here is that a Bikkhu is given “daily bread” out of the generosity of the giver’s heart, not the providence of God.

Community Life in the Christian Faith

Aug. 6
Sermon: “Jesus’ First Table Group”
Text: John 2:1-11
Theme: The theme of this message is the sheer joy that Jesus had as he performed his first miracle, the transformation of the water into wine at the wedding in Cana. Jesus’ extravagant joy in taking part in such a viscerally extravagant drink as wine is a contrast to the Buddhist goal of total asceticism known as Brahmacariya. While Christianity also espouses notions of asceticism, they certainly were not practiced in full by Jesus.

Aug. 13
Sermon: “To Be a Sheep”
Text: Psalm 23
Theme: One of the most beautiful texts in the Bible is Psalm 23. In this song of David, the human life, and the life of faith, is compared to being a sheep under the care of the shepherd who is Jesus Christ. Sheep are needy and helpless animals that always require God’s continual care and protection.

---

4 Ibid., 201.
5 “Brahmacariya is the holy life of chastity” and abstinence from all earthly pleasures, “the quest for enlightenment and liberation from pain.” Ibid., 202.
Aug. 20
Sermon: “Marriage”
Text: 1 Cor. 13
Theme: Marriage and family life has always been a center-piece of the Christian faith. While marriage is certainly not a requirement of faith, since Jesus himself was not married, nor were many of the apostles, it represents an essential and central facet of the gifts of God for God’s people. The gift of marriage may be contrasted with the Buddhist notion of Brahmachariya.

Aug. 27
Sermon: “Family”
Theme: Jesus’ family life, like our own family lives, was fraught with many challenges. At the age of twelve, Jesus finds himself in an argument with his parents, Mary and Joseph, about whether he is being obedient or not in staying at the temple and teaching the sages of the faith, as opposed to coming home with them. Very little is known about the early life, or the adult life of Buddha. Buddha did marry and did leave his wife for his spiritual journey, but no details are known or understood about what these dynamics looked like.

Expressions, Responses and Applications of the Christian Faith

Sept. 3
Sermon: “Baptism”
Text: Matt. 3:14
Theme: One of the principle goals of this research project is to invite people to be baptized as an expression of their faith in Christ. This sermon will focus on the meaning of baptism, what baptism represents for the Christian, and the promises of God.

Sept. 10 (Dedication of new GPC church playground)
Sermon: “Repentance”
Text: Acts 2:14-41
Theme: One of the most important expressions or responses to the gift of salvation by Christ is the repentance of the individual sinner. Repentance is a concept that often implies a level of pain or punishment by the supplicant. In this message, the concept of repentance will be understood as simply meaning, “to turn.” The concept of repentance in the Christian faith can be contrasted with the need for proper action and good deeds, Kamma, which lead to transcendence in the Buddhist tradition.

6 Kamma is also known as Karma in the Sanskrit language. “Kamma is good actions or good deeds.” Ibid., 202.
Sept. 17
Sermon: “Giving”
Text: Matt. 6:1-4
Theme: As a part of the Stewardship and financial giving aspect of the church’s annual budget, this sermon will be about the need to give back to God a little bit of what God has given to us. In the sermon on the mount, Jesus reminds us that we should give quietly, and silently, not as the hypocrites were doing in the temple. This idea of giving, in order to escape the bonds of earthly attachments is consistent with the Buddhist notion of *Upadana.*

Sept. 24
Sermon: “Healing”
Text: John 5:1-8
Theme: One of the most powerful texts about healing in the Bible is the time when Jesus healed the man who had been paralyzed by the Sheep Gate Pool. What is significant about this healing story is that the man doesn’t know who Jesus is (Son of God), when he is healed. The point that God doesn’t need us to know who God is in order to heal us will be expressed in this message. There is no equivalent notion of healing in the Buddhist tradition, but only *Nibbana.*

Beginnings and Endings in the Christian Faith

Oct. 1
Sermon: “Flying Solo”
Text: Gen. 28:10-18
Theme: One of the most difficult aspects of the human life is that all of us are essentially alone in this life, with one great exception – God is with us (Emmanuel). Even if we have people around us, we will, all of us, one day, enter eternity as individuals. This concept of individual salvation is somewhat consistent with the notion of *Anatta*, “no soul.” However, Christians believe in the idea that our souls live forever with God through Christ.

Oct. 8
Sermon: “No Pressure”
Text: Acts 21:1-4
Theme: We live in a highly pressurized world. However, one of the facets of Paul’s life was that he seemed to feel unpressured no matter where he went. In this text, we will see

---

7 *Upadana* literally means “clinging” and refers to the things that we form attachments to in this world. Ibid., 204.

8 *Nibbana* literally means “extinction or blowing out.” “The extinction of self brings enlightenment and liberation from pain,” pain, in other words, is not a facet of life that there is any purpose in healing. Ibid., 203.
how even as Paul entered Jerusalem to face a council, he was essentially unpressed. In Buddhism, this aspect of the unpressed life can only be achieved through extreme states of yogic concentration, *Dharana*.

**Oct. 15**  
**Sermon:** “God’s Whisper”  
**Text:** 1 Kings 9:9-19  
**Theme:** God continues to speak to us in many ways in our Christian walk. One of the most significant, and especially so for an adherent to New Age ideology, is the idea that God whispers to us. Elijah was in a cave when God whispered to him.

**Oct. 22**  
**Sermon:** Going When We Feel Ill-Equipped  
**Text:** Exodus 3:1-17  
**Theme:** The congregation will likely sense that I will be leaving because of the times that I have been away from the church recently to interview for another call. Because of this, they are a congregation who are feeling especially vulnerable and ill-equipped to face the future. This sermon will show the congregation how common it is for God’s servants to feel that they are not up to the tasks that God calls us to endeavor.

**Oct. 29 (Reformation Sunday, Graham announces to GPC that he has been called away)**  
**Sermon:** “Be the Pastor”  
**Text:** 1 Peter 2:4-9  
**Theme:** Even as the GPC congregation ponders who their next pastor will be, I will remind them of the “priesthood of all believers” and the notion that as Christians we are all called to be priests, pastors, ministers. This concept is very consistent with the Buddhist notion that all followers are priests and monks.

---

*Dharana* is a process of internal visualization, during which the yogin becomes conscious of his own consciousness.” Ibid., 202.
Painting by German Expressionist painter Mathis Grunewald, entitled “John the Baptist.”
Example of Socratic Dialectical Method

Person 1: Who is the best person to do good to his friends and evil to his enemies when they are sick?
Person 2: A Doctor
Person 1: What about when a person is on the sea, who is the best person to have around?
Person 2: A Sailor
Person 1: Here’s a different question; In what situation is an ethical person best able to do harm to his enemies and do good to his friends?
Person 2: In going to war as an answer to question one, and in negotiating a treaty as an answer to two
Person 1: But when a person is well, they don’t need a physician
Person 2: No
Person 1: And if they are not on the ocean then there is no need for a sailor
Person 2: No
Person 1: So, in peacetime, there is no need for justice?
Person 2: I really don’t think so
Person 1: So, justice may actually be of use in peacetime as well as in war?  

Hi everyone,

In preparation for Sunday’s survey collection, I’ve created a short link that anyone can use to access the survey. If you bring a computer or a tablet, you can access the following URL:

http://tiny.cc/gpcsurvey

This link will take you to the survey, where you can work with another member and immediately input results. You can continually re-use this link. Also, feel free to send this link to anyone who is reporting not receiving the email or would like to take the survey in general (for example, youth groupers or regular visitors).

Let me know if you have any questions.

Michael
APPENDIX I

Q17 What do you value in a Sunday sermon? (Please limit to only 3 as "More Important")

Answered: 102  Skipped: 13

- Scripture: 49.45% 8.79% 2.20%
- Historical context: 40.66% 15.38% 3.30%
- Visuals and multimedia: 54.95% 23.08% 4.40% 6.59%
- Personal stories: 48.91% 15.22%
Q18 What do you value in the church service? (Please limit to only 3 as "More Important")

Answered: 102  Skipped: 13

- Interactive prayer
  - Yellow: 19.77%
  - Green: 14.94%
  - Black: 8.05%

- Responsive liturgy
  - Yellow: 32.56%
  - Green: 36.78%
  - Black: 31.18%

- Traditional hymn singing
  - Yellow: 38.71%
  - Green: 22.58%
  - Black: 4.30%

- Contemporary music
  - Yellow: 26.60%
  - Green: 23.40%
  - Black: 3.23%
Q20 When describing yourself to a friend, how would you self-identify?

Answered: 103  Skipped: 12

- A Christian: 77.67%
- A Believer: 9.71%
- Someone open to God, but ...: 12.62%
Q21 What is your belief about the Bible? Select all that apply.

Answered: 105  Skipped: 10

- Written by God: 15.24%
- Inspired by God: 84.76%
- A collection of early...: 60.00%
- Written without error...: 9.52%
- A helpful story but no...: 3.81%
- Neither true nor helpful: 0.49%
Q22 Which member of the Holy Trinity do you mostly resonate with?

Answered: 104  Skipped: 11

- Father: 13.46%
- Son (Jesus Christ): 18.27%
- Holy Spirit: 8.65%
- All. The three are one, not...: 59.62%
Q23 What aspect of Jesus' essential being do you most relate with?

Answered: 104  Skipped: 11

- Jesus as human: 28.85%
- Jesus as God: 5.77%
- Both - one in the same: 65.38%

Q24 How would you describe your relationship with Jesus? Select all that apply.

Answered: 101  Skipped: 14

- Jesus was a wise teacher: 11.88%
- Jesus was a Jewish: ...
- Jesus is my personal savior: 52.48%
- Jesus is God: 42.57%
- Jesus is my personal: 63.37%
- Jesus was a fictional: 1.98%
Q25 What is your favorite part of Jesus' teaching and ministry? Select all that apply.

Answered: 107  Skipped: 8

- Teaching: 73.83%
- Healing: 55.14%
- Salvation: 42.06%
- Stories and parables: 71.03%
- Miracles: 41.12%
- Genuineness and...: 59.81%
- The Cross: 34.58%
- The Resurrection: 52.34%
APPENDIX J

Interviews with Members of GPC

Profile 1

Profile 1 is 75 years old and lives in Santa Barbara, California. He is an owner of a food service equipment business, though previously he worked in Wyoming as a bar owner, a guide, and a horse packer. Profile 1 has been in recovery for 30 years. He drank and used drugs for 30 years before that, so, in his own words, “I’m now even.” Profile 1 became sober in 1987. Profile 1 is and has been with the church for 16 years. He has two kids of his own, and his wife has two kids of her own. This individual has been married two times before. He says, “This is the third shot, and we are getting it right now.”

What is the best part about your life?

Well, the best part for me is that there has been two halves to my life. Everything has changed since I got sober. See, I had my previous life, and now I have a whole other life. The reason why it’s, uh, so different now, is because as alcoholics, we ourselves are selfish and self-centered. Now that I have God in my life, I think about the consequences of my actions. Before it was how to stay loaded, and never mind the consequences. How to keep drinking and using.

What is the hardest part about your life?

Hmmmm, (long pause), what’s the hardest part of my life? Uhh, that’s a tough one because I feel so blessed. Can I get back to you? I need some time on that one. The hardest part of my life, I guess it’s a good sign that I can’t think of anything to tell you (smiles).

What unfair assumptions do you feel like people make about you?

Well, the most unfair assumptions are the people who haven’t seen me in the last thirty years. The people that are going on the me that I used to be. See, what you don’t understand is that I was an owner of a bar and a restaurant in this little town in Wilson, Wyoming. There’s a lot of people that never knew I got sober—because I left there. That’s where the scene of the wreck was. I loved whiskey and I loved cocaine and I loved fast cars. It’s a fatal combination. And I was out driving a hundred miles an hour while I was loaded one night, and I crashed and rolled my car. In Wilson, Wyoming, my

1 Exact names of individuals have been withheld from this study to protect personal privacy.
nickname was “Blackie.” And when they saw me they were like, “Blackie you are still alive?” It wasn’t going to turn out this way. No one expected me to be alive still. But I am.

What would you most like people to know about who you really are?

Hmmm, I guess that uh, if you pay attention, and you seek, you will find. That’s what happened to me. I started paying attention for the first time when I quit drinking and using. And that’s part of the eleventh step is having a conscious connection with a higher power, whom we call God. And that’s what I learned on this solo expedition with this mule named Freddie. I was on this one-month cross country trek. And this song kept going through my head from the Rolling Stones; “You can’t always get what you, but if you try some-time, you will get what you need.”

**Profile 2**

Profile 2 is 73 years old. He lives in Goleta, California with his wife. He self-describes his religious leaning as a Buddhist with a Christian religious background. Profile 2 has worked in his career as a technology expert and is currently working in videography and video editing. When he is not working in technology, he is involved in Spiritual Direction, but as he says, “That is no way to make a living.” He has a PhD from the University of California, Santa Barbara in Cross Cultural Religious Studies. His study has mainly been with Raimon Panikkar, who was his teacher and his mentor.

What is the best part about your life?

(Laughs), hmm…relationship. Specifically, (his wife). We have been together going on 29 years now. The alternate best part of my life, is the Spirituality, and I can tend to be pretty cosmic, and my wife kind of keeps me grounded.

What is the hardest part about your life?

It would be easy to point toward the current political situation. The current political situation feels to me like a metaphor for the larger divisions that can be found in the world today. I tend to feel those conflicts personally, even though they don’t directly involve me. The core of my studies with Raimon Panikkar, the core of his life’s work, was dialogue. And so, the rejection of dialogue and the taking to its natural opposite, the lack of dialogue and the fomenting of mutual-hatreds is the worst part of my life.

What unfair assumptions do you feel like people sometimes make about you as a Buddhist?

Ummm, several. One, I don’t know if it has anything other to do with my appearance, but right after someone meets me, and finds that I have a PhD, sometimes people expect me to be aloof. Back when I worked in the corporate word, I was very surprised that many people found me to be distant. After that, I practiced my smile in the mirror. Often when I thought I was smiling, as it turns out, I was not.
And then, if I mention that I am Buddhist, there is often the assumption that that world view has to be mutually contradictory with being a Christian. And what they don’t realize is that they are not mutually contradictory, except on the level of stated doctrine and formulas.

What would you most like people to know about who you really are?
I’m really interested in people. Um, people…and living beings. One of my all-time favorite remarks about men was one time my wife was speaking to a mutual friend about me, and I was listening. That person said, “If it has a beating heart then I love it.”

Who is someone who has “gone with” you through thick and thin in your life?
I really value a long-term timeline, long term friendships. My wife is the first one that fits that category. I am still good friends with my former wife who lives here in town. We went through a lot together as well. I have a couple of friends. I’d like to add another person—Mia. We have known each other for better than forty years. I meet with both Toms once a week, over lunch. One of them, his wife is in fairly late stages of Alzheimer’s disease. I hear the latest about Jane, which is hard to listen to. My friend Mia and I have known each other for 40 years. She was an undergraduate while I was a graduate student. Our relationship pretty much includes the whole cosmos. And she’s also ill. She rarely goes out of her apartment. I have a long phone conversation at least once a week. We have a long spiritual practice we do together, that we have been doing for three or four years now.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Grant, Chris. Interview. Goleta, CA. (September 27, 2016).


Moody, Dwight Lyman. *New Sermons, Addresses and Prayers.* Chicago, IL: Goodspeed Publisher, 1877.


Tamminga, Ernie, PhD. Internal study conducted by session. Interview by the author, Goleta, CA. (March 17, 2017).


