


# A Spirit-Word-Community hermeneutic for the 'preaching as reimagination' approach

**Author:**Neil Pembroke<sup>1</sup> **Affiliation:**

<sup>1</sup>School of Historical and Philosophical Inquiry, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia

**Corresponding author:**

Neil Pembroke,  
n.pembroke@uq.edu.au

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Walter Brueggemann offers an important approach to preaching that he describes as 'reimagining the world'. He suggests that such imagining must be Spirit-led. It is argued that this homiletic strategy requires a fuller hermeneutic description than Brueggemann offers. A Spirit-Word-Community hermeneutic is commended. The Spirit leads and inspires. 'Word' is taken to mean the canonical witness to divine revelation. It is assumed to be normative for the belief and practice of the Christian Church. The way the world is reimagined needs to correlate with the Word. The act of checking the accuracy of the correlation, however, is not left to the individual preacher; it is the work of community.

**Contribution:** The article contributes to the focus and scope of the journal through providing a correlation of hermeneutic theory – especially that of Paul Ricoeur – and homiletic thought. The aim is to provide a rigorously developed hermeneutic for preaching with suggestions as to how it can be used in practice.

**Keywords:** homiletics; preaching method; hermeneutics; Ricoeur; imaginative preaching; spirit-led preaching; Spirit-Word-Community; correlational preaching; Brueggemann.

I am convinced that an important task in preaching is engaging the biblical witness to imagine an alternate world to the one constructed by the dominant social, political and economic powers of the day. The construction of the world we inhabit is assumed by many to simply reflect the way things are. The thought that there could be a substantially different ordering of socio-political and economic life is never seriously entertained by such people. However, sustained engagement with the story of Israel and the story of Jesus suggests a different view on this.

I have been significantly helped in forming this view by the work of Brueggemann (1995, 1997, 1998, 2002, 2011). His thinking, in turn, was stimulated by the work of Paul Ricoeur on narrative and hermeneutics. Ricoeur borrowed the idea of *mimesis* from Aristotle's *Poetics*. *Mimesis* refers to a poetic imitation or creative representation of life. According to Ricoeur (1984:52–87), there are three moments in this creative representation: prefiguration, configuration and refiguration.

The author configures a world through emplotment. In the act of reading, the world of the reader collides with an artistically configured one. The result is a refiguration of the reader's world. It is this idea that captured Brueggemann's imagination. In his book, *Disruptive Grace*, he acknowledges the major impact that Ricoeur's work on narrative and hermeneutics has had on him:

[T]he world of interpretation was opened up to me through the writings of Paul Ricoeur ... Ricoeur has made available to me the generative force of imagination, which in evangelical parlance amounts to the 'work of the Spirit'. (p. 363)

Earlier in the book, he has an essay entitled, 'Spirit-Led Imagination: Reality Practiced in a Sub-Version'. In that essay, he construes worship as consisting of 'humanly constructed acts of imagination designed to advocate a perspective' (Brueggemann 2011:238). Brueggemann goes on to say that these images are received and entertained to communicate a view of the world that is different from the taken-for-granted one. In response to the anticipated concern that these images might simply be 'made up' by a creative (and fallible) human mind, he contends that they are trustworthy when they are received from God's Spirit. It is the Spirit who bears witness and moves in the faith of the community to 'give voice to the odd truth of our common life' (Brueggemann 2011:239).

**Note:** Special Collection: Scholarly Voices, sub-edited by Yolanda Dreyer (University of Pretoria).

The hermeneutic problem that is raised here is this: How can preachers control their tendency to project a world that they personally find compelling, but which is only loosely connected to the story of Israel and the story of Jesus? The issue, then, is that whilst the imagination is powerful and generative, to remain faithful it needs parameters to keep it aligned with the biblical witness. The argument advanced in this essay is that Brueggemann's suggestion that openness to the guidance of the Spirit keeps the imagination of the preacher on track does not go far enough. What is required, I contend, is engagement with the Spirit as the Spirit speaks through the *community*. In reimagining the world, the preacher needs to work within the tension arc of Spirit-Word-Community. It is the twofold act of the Spirit speaking through the community and the preacher listening well that ensures that she or he remains aligned with the Word.

Let me define my terms. By 'Word' I mean the canonical witness to divine revelation. I take it to be normative for the belief and practice of the Christian Church. The way the world is reimagined by the preacher needs to correlate with the Word. For assistance in this correlational task, the preacher engages the best wisdom of the community. I construe 'community' in broad terms. It includes the local faith community, the contemporary global community of faith and those who make up the long tradition of critical biblical exegesis and theological reflection. Some may wonder at my inclusion of non-experts in this community. It is true that members of the local faith community most often lack the expertise of the educated pastor and therefore will sometimes be less than helpful when it comes to interpretation of the Word. I include them because in my experience parishioners often have something of real value to offer when it comes to the task of using biblical thinking to reconfigure the world we inhabit.

Operating with appropriate controls in place, then, is a fundamental requirement for responsible reimagining of our world. Working with appropriate sources of inspiration is also important; the way the alternate world is imagined needs not only to be responsible, it also needs to rouse and stimulate the congregation to thought and action. The Spirit uses many and varied sources to inspire a preacher. I therefore widen the scope of 'community' to include relevant thinkers in the non-theological world (psychologists, philosophers, sociologists, artists and more). Adding this last element to the definition of community is controversial. Those in the conservative evangelical, Charismatic, Pentecostal, and Barthian camps, together with many in the progressive evangelical and post-liberal schools (with perhaps some exceptions), will be quite uncomfortable with a correlational approach to biblically grounded theological reflection. For them, drawing upon insights from disciplines such as psychology and philosophy introduces alien terms that distort the true meaning of the Word. I therefore need to build an argument for the necessity of, and value in, responsible engagement with the non-theological intellectual community.

Before getting to that important task, I will present Brueggemann's idea of preaching as reimagination. This will be followed by a discussion of various pneumatic hermeneutics. I hope to show that a Spirit-Word dialectic is inadequate. What is required is a fully comprehensive model that connects these elements to community.

## Brueggemann's notion of preaching as reimagining the world

Above, I indicated that Brueggemann has been significantly influenced in his thinking about the essential nature of preaching by Ricoeur's suggestion that narrative fiction has the power to remake or redescribe a world. Ricoeur, in turn, was stimulated in his thinking on narrative by the thought of Aristotle in his *Poetics*. In that work, Aristotle is interested in the relationship between *muthos* and *mimesis*. In using the latter term, Aristotle recognised that poetry imitates or creatively represents human action. Whilst Ricoeur borrows the concepts of emplotment and mimetic activity, he moves beyond the boundaries of drama and epic in Aristotle's *Poetics*. Ricoeur's project is the reconfiguration of the entire narrative field. He designates the three moments in the construction and reception of a work of narrative fiction as *mimesis*<sub>1</sub>, *mimesis*<sub>2</sub> and *mimesis*<sub>3</sub> (Ricoeur 1984:52–87).

*Mimesis*<sub>1</sub> refers to the preunderstanding, basic competence or *prefiguration* required for a narrative to be created and understood. That is, both the narrator and the listener or reader need to know how a good story is constructed. There is a certain structure, together with particular dynamics, in such a story that both narrator and listener or reader need to understand: '[E]very narrative presupposes a familiarity with terms such as agent, goal, means, circumstance, help, hostility, cooperation, conflict, success, failure, etc. on the part of its narrator and any listener' (Ricoeur 1984:55).

Ricoeur (1984:46) refers to *mimesis*<sub>2</sub> as 'the *mimesis* of creation' and the 'pivotal point' in the process. This second mimetic moment indicates the process of *configuration* or emplotment:

A story ... must be more than just an enumeration of events in serial order; it must organize them into an intelligible whole... In short, emplotment is the operation that draws a configuration out of a simple succession. (p. 65)

*Mimesis*<sub>3</sub>, finally, is associated with the reception of the work. It 'marks the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the hearer or reader' (Ricoeur 1984:71). A work of narrative fiction has the capacity to *reconfigure* a world. It has (Ricoeur 1991):

[T]he power to 'remake' reality and, within the framework of narrative fiction in particular, to remake real praxis to the extent that the text intentionally aims at a horizon of a new reality that we may call a world. (p. 10)

It is this capacity of a narrative to remake or redescribe the world of action that sparked Brueggemann's thinking on

preaching. Employing her or his imaginative powers in engaging the text, the preacher redescribes the world. In his essay, 'Cadences that Redescribe: Speech among Exiles', Brueggemann associates the 'situation-transforming capacity' in the 'salvation oracles' of Second Isaiah with Ricoeur's notion of redescription of the world (Brueggemann 1997:18). He goes on to suggest these speech acts authorise the church 'to identify and redescribe this present place as the arena in which the rule of the creator and liberator God is working a wondrous newness' (Brueggemann 1997:21).

According to Brueggemann (1995:316), a foundational idea in this approach to preaching is that a script has world-making power. The most powerful scripting tradition in the Euro-American world, he suggests, is the Enlightenment (Brueggemann 1995:318). In the economic sphere, it exercises its hegemony through consumerism and the credo 'more is better'. When it comes to the political domain, its force is felt in the privilege of European superiority, power and colonialism.

Clearly, the Church (along with all people of good will) should be deeply troubled by the dominance of the Enlightenment script. Transformation is an urgent task. The path is not through didacticism or through arrogantly asserting an alternative ideology, but rather through (Brueggemann 1995):

[T]he playful entertainment of another scripting of reality that may subvert the old given text and its interpretation and lead to the embrace of an alternative text and its redescription of reality [emphasis in the original]. (p. 319)

The biblical corpus offers this alternative script and preaching is construed by Brueggemann as imagining the world through this rival scripting.

The world produced in the preaching event is never the dominant version (Brueggemann 1998:199). Rather, the version of the world that is offered lives under the dominant one (i.e. consumerism and political hegemony as scripted by the Western Enlightenment). Preaching can therefore be construed as 'subversion' (Brueggemann 1998):

It is *sub-version* because we must fly low, stay under the radar, and hope not to be detected too soon; sub-version, because it does indeed intend to *sub-vert* the dominant version and to empower a community of *sub-versives* who are determined to practice their lives according to a different way of imaging [emphasis in the original]. (p. 200)

A major problem with talking about imagining an alternative world is subjectivity. The imagination can run free and take us a long way from the world of the Bible. The images that are offered may be 'made-up' rather than biblically authorised ones. For this reason, Brueggemann (2011) called for a 'Spirit-led imagination' in generating a subversion of reality:

[I]n the community of faith, to 'imagine' does not mean 'to make up.' It means, rather, to receive, entertain, and host images of reality that are outside the accepted given. If, however, we say we 'receive' images, then we may ask, receive from whom? ...

The answer we give is that what [is imagined] is given by God's Spirit, for it is the Spirit who bears witness. It is the Spirit who has given Israel freedom to recognize and acknowledge YHWH as savior from slavery. It is the Spirit who gives us eyes to see and selves to notice the recurring and constant fidelity of God. (pp. 238–239)

It would be nice to conclude the discussion at this point. After all, on the surface at least, it is all looking rather sound. So far, we have recognised that there is a dominant version of reality that is destructive and needs to be subverted through a biblically inspired reimagining of the world. Furthermore, we have observed that this act of reimagination needs to be Spirit-led. But sadly, I need to throw a monkey wrench into the conversation. There are preachers who claim to be led by the Spirit but who preach death rather than life. Hanson (1995) highlighted this well by referring to the David Koresh 'wrench':

At the Mt Carmel Compound in Waco, Texas, Scripture was the guide, the community was the gathering of the baptized, and the Spirit was declared to be the enabler in spiritual interpretation. Claiming the gifts of the Spirit, David Koresh placed himself beyond universally recognized standards of human decency and led his community not to life but to death. (pp. 8–9)

What is required to support preaching as redescription of the world is a more comprehensive hermeneutic than the Spirit-led option. I suggest that such a hermeneutic is captured in the term 'Spirit-Word-Community'. I accept that in referring to the role of the Spirit in disciplining the preacher's imagination, Brueggemann tacitly acknowledges the function of the community of faith. He accepts, of course, that the Spirit works in and through the community. My contention is that this aspect needs explicit reference and investigation. We need to describe a fully developed pneumatic hermeneutic. It is to this task that we now turn.

## A pneumatic hermeneutic: From Spirit-Word to Spirit-Word-Community

Over the past 35 years we have witnessed a great deal of scholarly attention to the task of developing a pneumatic hermeneutic. For some scholars engaged in this work, attention is directed exclusively at the Word-Spirit dialectic. For example, in his book entitled *Spirit-Led Preaching*, Heisler (2007:63) identified 'the three testimonies of preaching' as Scripture, the Holy Spirit and the preacher. Heisler (2007) further stated that a major aim of the book is to 'establish a positive theology of the Spirit's role in preaching by building upon the theological fusion of Word and Spirit' (p. 3). Heisler (2007) described the Word-Spirit dialectic in these terms:

The Word activates the Spirit, and the Spirit authenticates the Word. The Word is the instrument of the Spirit, and the Spirit is the implement of the Word. The Word is the written witness, and the Spirit is the inward witness. In terms of preaching, the Word is the source and substance of our preaching, and the Spirit is the supernatural power of our preaching. (p. 62)

Rick Moore finds the basis for his construction of the Word-Spirit (or in his terms 'Canon-Charisma') dialectic in the book of Deuteronomy (Moore 1992). Moore (1992:76) found in chapters 4 and 5 of the book 'sustained reflection' on 'the dialectical and complementary relationship between canonical word and ... charismatic revelation'. In Deuteronomy, 'charismatic revelation' is associated with the office of the prophet: 'Yahweh your God will raise up a prophet like me from your midst, from amongst your kindred; him you shall heed' (18:15). Moore observes that alongside this affirmation of the central place for ongoing charismatic revelation, Deuteronomy recognises the indispensable role that the written canon has in Israel:

When he [the king] sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, obtained from the Levitical priests. It is to be with him, and he should read it all the days of his life. (17:8–19)

Moore (1992) suggested that what Deuteronomy presents is 'two revelatory channels, that of canonical writing and charismatic speech' (p. 79). Moreover, the way that they are discussed suggests a view that may be characterised as a 'dynamic integration' (p. 91). Such an integrated approach allows us to avoid the twin evils of 'a Spirit-less Word (rationalism)' and a 'Word-less Spirit (subjectivism)' (p. 91).

Moore (2000) continued his reflection on the Word-Spirit dialectic in a later article. There he expresses dissatisfaction with the Reformed principle of *Sola Scriptura*. This principle, he argues, claims to capture the whole truth of responsible theological reflection, but in fact only grasps a part of it. It fails to recognise the need for a Spirit-led approach to a biblically grounded theology. In place of *Sola Scriptura*, Moore suggests *Solus Spiritus*. It seems on the surface that such a move suffers from the same problem as Luther's formulation – namely, it captures only one half of the pairing. As may be expected, Moore is well aware that others might jump to this conclusion. In response he says this: 'It will always be *Solus Spiritus with the Scripture*, because the Spirit always attends Scripture, which has all come forth *from* the Spirit [emphasis in the original]' (Moore 2000:13).

The major insight that these and other authors wish to draw out in their work on the Word-Spirit dialectic is the gift that each partner brings. The Spirit for her part gifts the Christian community with freedom. There are a number of examples in the New Testament of the community setting aside what had previously been considered to be binding scriptural injunctions. When the Spirit came upon the Caesareans and the Galatians, a decision was made that circumcision was no longer a requirement (Ac 10–11; 15:7–11; Gal 2:7–9; 3:2–5). And yet, we know that circumcision was a clear divine command, a sign of 'an everlasting covenant' (Gen 17:9–14) (Dunn 2012:155; cf. Pinnock 2009:159–160). Jesus, the Spirit-anointed prophet, felt free to override the scriptural principle of 'a tooth for a tooth' and replace it with the higher ethical calling of love of one's enemies. In similar fashion, he set

aside clean and unclean food laws and refused the law concerning permission for divorce.

The Word, on the other hand, is a gift because it controls a tendency to take unwarranted liberty in the name of Spirit-inspiration. Both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament record numerous examples of false along with true prophets. In order to discern whether or not a teaching is genuinely of God, it needs to be held to the light that the Word casts. If a false spirit is at work, the light will show up the deficiencies, distortions and destructive tendencies.

In John's gospel, we read of a Paraclete who will lead the community into 'all truth' (Jn 16:13). Note that it is *all* truth rather than *new* truth. The danger of a leader claiming to be Spirit-inspired inventing 'truth' is the reason that many theologians distinguish between the Word as an inspired product and Spirit-led interpretation as illumination. However, it seems acceptable to talk about both the canonical deposit and contemporary insights as inspired by the Spirit, as long as we maintain a distinction between new truth, on the one hand and biblical truth in a new light, on the other. The Word is fixed and definitive, but new light breaks forth from it when interpreters open themselves to the leading of the Spirit (cf. Pinnock 1993:3–4, 2009:162).

A number of authors contend that the task of measuring fresh insights and perspectives that are claimed as fruits of the Spirit against the standard of the definitive word of God in Jesus is not something that is best performed by an individual. Discernment of true from false spirits benefits from checking with the views of others in the community. An individual has limited experience, knowledge and understanding; she or he may be saved from error by listening to the best wisdom the community has to offer.

It is not that the authors mentioned here are necessarily ignorant of this important fact. It is implied in their writings. However, I endorse a hermeneutic in which the implied is made explicit. What is required is a dynamic integration involving Spirit, Word and community (Cartledge 2012; Dunn 2012; Hanson 1995; Pinnock 1993; Thomas 1994; Yong 2002).

It is not necessary to present all the various proposals for a Spirit-Word-Community hermeneutic here. The common element is a recognition that the best wisdom of the tradition can never be captured by a solitary interpreter. Pinnock (1993) captured well this essential insight:

The milieu of our seeking God's leading is the community which is called the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim 3:15) ... The truth does not depend on my grasping it or understanding it as a solitary person ... Individual judgments ought to be submitted to the larger judgments of the fellowship. (p. 16)

A particularly interesting approach to developing the Spirit-Word-Community model is offered by Thomas (1994). He draws his hermeneutic out of the record of the deliberations

of the Jerusalem Council (Ac 15:1–29). As is well known, the council came together to consider the question of whether Gentiles should be required to convert to Judaism in order to become full members of the Christian fellowship. Paul and Barnabas arrived in Jerusalem with reports of Judaizers who were demanding that Gentile believers be circumcised and instructed to keep the law of Moses.

After a long discussion had taken place, Peter stands to address the council. He draws attention to the work of God in the hearts and minds of the Gentiles. God testified to them by giving them the Holy Spirit. God cleansed their hearts by faith. The burden that some want to place on the Gentile converts is interpreted by Peter as testing God.

Next Barnabas and Paul speak. They tell of the signs and wonders that God has carried out through them in the midst of the Gentile communities. Finally, James rises to speak, he adds that Peter's reading of the situation, centring as it does on God's gracious action, agrees with the prophetic testimony. To make the point, he quotes from Amos 9:11–12.

Noting this pattern, Thomas (1994) highlighted the fact that the council begins with the experience of its members and only later gives attention to Scripture. It is clear that the earliest fellowship assigned a good deal of weight to their community experience in the decision-making process.

Based on the recorded experience of the first Church Council, Thomas (1994) offered certain perspectives on each element in his Spirit-Word-Community hermeneutic. He begins with the community. He notes that despite the fact that James is acknowledged as having a leadership role, Luke regards the decision as coming from the community under the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Thomas also notes the prominent place the Holy Spirit is given in the discussion. It is not simply that the final decision is represented as being good to the Holy Spirit, but the previous activity of the Holy Spirit in the experience of the group is a feature. With this in mind, Thomas (1994) felt compelled to point out that:

Such explicit dependence upon the Holy Spirit in this interpretive process goes far beyond the rather tame claims regarding 'illumination' which many conservatives (and Pentecostals) have often made regarding the Spirit's role in interpretation. (p. 49)

Lastly, Thomas (1994) turned his attention to Scripture. He notes that the Amos text was chosen from quite a large selection of relevant texts, many of which endorse exclusion of Gentiles. What this suggests is that the Holy Spirit was at work in the community guiding the selection of the scriptural text. Thomas (1994) further observed that Scripture was also the source of guidance in terms of establishing the minimal *Torah* stipulations that would be imposed. With all this in view, he concludes that:

[W]hile the biblical text was assigned and functioned with a great deal of authority in this hermeneutical approach ... in contrast to the way in which propositional approaches to the issue of authority function, Acts 15 reveals that the text's authority is not unrelated to its relevance to the community, its own diversity of teaching on a given topic, and the role which the Scripture plays in the constructing of temporary or transitional stipulations for the sake of fellowship in the community. (p. 50)

Thomas (1994) went on to demonstrate the three-way dynamic integration at work in going to Scripture and the experience of the community under the leading of the Spirit to develop a position on the role of women in the ministry of the church. It is not necessary for our purposes to follow his discussion in all its details. What I am particularly interested in is the way in which he defines the community. It consists of (Thomas 1994):

[T]hose individuals called out of the world by God who have experienced salvation through Jesus Christ and are empowered by the Holy Spirit to do the work of ministry in the present world. (p. 51)

This community could be a single, local community of faith or a whole denomination. So in assembling data to aid one's interpretive work, an important source will be the experience of Spirit-filled Christians who have witnessed women in ministry, together with the testimony of the women themselves.

As much as I appreciate Thomas' general approach and the helpful insights he offers, I contend that this view of community is too narrow. I suggest that under the umbrella of 'community' we need to draw in both the tradition of theological reflection and the best wisdom available in the non-theological community. The reason should be obvious: In order to inform our interpretative process as fully as possible, it is necessary to consult as widely as possible. The suggestion that such consultation should include the best thinking in the Christian heritage is non-controversial. But the same cannot be said of the call to engage with secular thought (Psychology, Philosophy, Sociology and more). In support of this contention, I note that God's truth needs to be heard wherever it is spoken. We have every reason to expect that the Spirit speaks outside the four walls of the Church. All humans are created in the image of God and therefore have a capacity to seek wisdom, to live in love, and to know truth. As all people are loved by God, it is to be expected that the Spirit will come to them with truth. Wherever we find genuine wisdom, we can be sure that the Spirit has been active. These cursory comments will need to suffice for the moment. The issue of responsible engagement with the non-theological community will be discussed much more fully here.

In taking this comprehensive approach to defining community, I am aligned with Yong's (2002) Spirit-Word-Community hermeneutic. What is especially helpful in Yong's approach is that he continually highlights the way the elements in the hermeneutic connect with each other via a tension arc. At the

end of a very long, sophisticated and complex discussion, Yong summarises his articulation of the trilogical and trialecical relationships between the three elements. He dismisses adherence to *sola scriptura*, *sola traditus*, or *sola communitas* and replaces them with an approach in which each dimension is accorded its particular place and in which each operates through a tensile relationship with the others. Not only do the *sola* slogans need to go, but also hermeneutic models constructed around dyadic relations (Yong 2002):

[I]f the *solas* which have laid claim to hermeneutical and methodological rule need to be rejected, so do the various dyadic combinations. Theological interpretation that functions either monologically or dialogically will always struggle to achieve clarity, coherence, and relevance. The absence of the Spirit from the hermeneutical spiral means a lifeless repetition of the Word by the tradition. The absence of the Word means the domination of either enthusiasm or anarchy (or both) in the tradition. The absence of tradition means a primitivistic, biblicistic, [*sic*] fundamentalistic, [*sic*] and enthusiastic orientation. (p. 314)

What Yong argues for is, to my mind, undoubtedly correct. We have already noticed the tension arc that exists between Word and Spirit. Under the inspiration of the Spirit, Jesus and the apostles took the liberty of overriding what had up to that point in time been hallowed Scriptural injunctions (e.g. circumcision, food purity laws) and principles (e.g. divorce is permissible). On the other hand, the Spirit has only restricted freedom in inspiring and guiding the faithful; she binds herself to the biblical canon (cf. Pinnock 1993:12). With this in mind, it was suggested that the inspiration the Spirit brings to the interpretive community results not in new truth but in a new light on the Word.

In a similar fashion, the relationship between the faith community's tradition and the biblical canon should be construed as tensile. I concur with the line taken by theologians such as Yong (2002:308–309) and Brown (1999). They contend that we should view tradition as neither secondary nor reactionary. Brown (1999) saw it, rather, as 'the motor that sustains revelation both within and Scripture and beyond' (p. 1). He even goes so far as to suggest that tradition has the right to revise certain biblical perspectives. But the reverse also applies. It is also the case that the biblical canon has the authority to critique later theological traditions. He expresses the dialectic relationship this way:

While not denying the right of Scripture to offer a critique of later elements in the tradition, there is also ... an equal right of later tradition to critique Scripture, and this is what makes it inappropriate to speak of one always acting as the norm for the other. Instead, a dialogue must take place, with now one yielding, now the other. (p. 111)

Whilst this Spirit-Word-Community model may look strong on paper, there will no doubt be readers who are wondering if, in offering such a comprehensive approach to community, too much is asked of the preacher in preparation. Am I expecting, for example, that during the week the preacher will carry out a wide-ranging programme of research that

involves (1) working with biblical dictionaries, concordances and other exegetical tools, along with consulting the best of the contemporary biblical commentaries, (2) consulting biblical commentaries and other relevant works by the leading thinkers in the tradition (Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, etc.), (3) researching current theological and non-theological reflection on the relevant issue and (4) drawing on the wisdom of the local faith community (e.g. assemble a group and join with them in searching for the images in the text that present as most helpful in redescribing the world)? The answer is 'yes', but I need to qualify it. I am now a full-time academic, but it was not always so. For 8 years I served in congregational ministry. I know how busy life gets for a ministry agent. As wonderful as it would be to read very widely in preparing a sermon, covering the work of many of the important ancient and contemporary thinkers, a congregational minister does not have the luxury of allocating the amount of time this would require. In carrying out the weekly research programme, it is therefore necessary to limit the time that one devotes to it. What is required is highly targeted reading. Preachers need to be clever and resourceful to make this work. Consulting the best of the available print and (what is now usually the first port of call) online resources, usually yield pointers to relevant sources from the tradition, the contemporary theological community and the non-theological academy. That is, others have performed the hard work and assembled the kind of source material referred to here. It is also the case that (conscientious) preachers have the practice of reading widely and may well recall relevant ideas and concepts (both theological and non-theological) from previous reading. That is, it is often possible to trade on previous work carried out.

The issue of asking too much in terms of time is an important one. Another concern is that giving non-theological voices a hearing in the community roundtable will lead to distortion of the story that Scripture tells. These voices are considered to be alien to the message of the Bible and therefore bend it out of shape. The final task is to respond to this concern.

## Responsible pulpit engagement with the non-theological community

I have advocated setting up a critical conversation between the text and contemporary modalities of thought. When it comes to an inspired interpretation of Scripture, it is useful to draw on ideas from the non-theological community. Turning to ideas from non-theological sources often sheds fresh light on a text. A classic example of this is Paul Tillich's sermon, 'You are Accepted' (Tillich 1966). Tillich uses terms from existentialist philosophy and psychotherapy to help his listeners grasp more fully the meaning of two central biblical notions. 'Estrangement' is employed to communicate the meaning of sin, and 'acceptance' is used to make the concept of divine grace more accessible.

Brueggemann, for his part, has engaged (amongst other things) the ideas of Freud, Winnicott, Pruyser and other psychological theorists. In his work on Job, for example, he interprets Job's innocence speech and God's response using ideas from Winnicott such as the autistic self, play and magic thinking, illusion and transitional space. Here are two quotes that give sense of this:

It is not forced to suggest that Job has retreated from the 'real world' of his friends because he no longer believes in that world. His experience has shown him that that world does not hold. He has withdrawn to his 'self-world,' and his own suffering, sense of innocence, integrity, and indignation are his only criteria for reality. In Winnicott's sense, Job is an autistic person, who requires that the system be broken on the anvil of personal experience, outside of which there is no compelling reality. (Brueggemann 1991:17)

God speaks to Job of an alternate world ... [God] invites the inhabitants of the autistic and 'real' worlds to a new world of majesty, sovereignty, power, domination, and splendor ... This world uttered by God is, of course, an illusion. It is an illusion because Job's deep hurt is still there and his friends' rules still want and claim too much. It is a playful illusion of imagination that outruns reality. The doxology voiced as ultimatum is 'transitional' like Winnicott's transition, not taken literally but seriously respected as a 'zone of magic possibility'. (Brueggemann 1991:19-20)

The historical context for this approach to preaching is the 'answering theology' of Friedrich Schleiermacher. Schleiermacher engaged Romanticist philosophy to show the 'cultured despisers' of religion that their central concept of 'intuition of the infinite' was actually the foundation of all religious experience. Tillich developed his own version of the method in the 20th century. However, the method used in 'answering theology' is flawed. David Tracy and others argue that it is not a matter of correlating questions from the culture with answers from the theological tradition but rather of correlating questions and answers from both domains (Tracy 1975:46). What is required is a mutually critical dialogue over the nature of authentic individual and social existence between the Christian biblical and theological tradition, on the one hand, and the best minds in the human sciences and philosophy, on the other. This is the method that I contend needs to be employed.

It is important to acknowledge the risk associated with a correlational approach to doing theology. Those who align with the Barthian, post-liberal, evangelical and charismatic traditions contend that drawing on ideas and concepts from the non-theological intellectual community to learn more about the deep meaning in Scripture is dangerous. The danger is that rather than shed new light on the Bible, such an approach results in distortion of its true meaning. This concern certainly needs to be taken seriously. However, I contend that when the concepts from philosophy and the human sciences are judiciously chosen and kept in their proper role of illuminating biblical ideas rather than dominating them, the correlational work will be most fruitful.

Tillich (1957:14) himself acknowledged these potential problems with the method. In a similar vein, Hans Frei laments over what he calls 'the great reversal' the correlational theologians effected. Frei (1974) claimed that for these theologians, interpretation is 'a matter of fitting the biblical story into another world with another story rather than incorporating that world into the biblical story' (p. 130).

Correlational preachers need to hear the warning about 'the great reversal'. It is quite possible to allow the concepts from Psychology or Philosophy to dominate. In this scenario, the message of the text is distorted as the preacher aims for alignment with contemporary intellectual thought. It is therefore imperative that the correlational preacher firmly commits to maintaining the integrity of the text. The interpretive work proceeds properly when the preacher allows the meaning to unfold rather than forcing a connection with a favoured psychological or philosophical theory.

Endorsing a correlational approach to preaching results in conflict with narrative approaches such as the one that Mark Ellingsen advocates. Ellingsen views the task of theology as articulating the character and identity of the world of the Bible. Furthermore, the task of preaching is telling the Bible's stories about how the world is and how it might be under the transforming power of the gospel. Ellingsen (1990) contrasted his approach with that of the correlational preacher:

[W]hen preaching becomes understood as the task of narrating the biblical account, Scripture effectively functions as its own interpreter. It interprets itself insofar as such preaching rejects the imposition of extraneous categories upon itself, and it allows its narratives to speak for themselves. (p. 19)

Ellingsen posited that Scripture is self-interpreting. When it is read through a lens supplied by an 'alien' intellectual discipline, the inevitable result is distortion of its message. I disagree. It is my view that judicious and responsible application of philosophical or psychological thought brings out fresh insights from the text. Such thought can be genuinely inspirational. As Tillich (1957) observed:

[T]he one who reads Ecclesiastes or Job with eyes opened by existentialist analyses will see more in either than he was able to see before. The same is true of many other passages of the Old and New Testaments. (p. 28)

A responsible correlational approach begins with engaging the text with the aid of quality critical and historical work to ensure an in-depth understanding of its *Sitz im Leben*, meaning and purpose. The next step is finding the non-theological sources that genuinely correlate with the text to assist with finding fresh insights. I have used the word 'genuinely' here to highlight the necessity of resisting the temptation to force one's own favourite philosophical or psychological ideas on the text. There is insufficient space available here to illustrate this process in practice. Good examples of correlational preaching are provided by Allen (2004) and Pembroke (2013, 2016).

## Conclusion

Walter Brueggemann offers a theologically robust approach to preaching: the role of the preacher is to reimagine the world under the guidance of the Spirit. The dominant view of the world is shaped by the Enlightenment-inspired values of materialism, consumerism and Western superiority. The Bible imagines an alternate world in which divine sovereignty and grace, reconciliation, inclusion and peace and justice reign. Images generated by the preacher through her or his engagement with the text are not simply creative fabrications; rather, they are Spirit-generated.

It was argued here that whilst Brueggemann's proposal is helpful, it does not go far enough. Such a hermeneutic is necessarily constructed around the freedom-control dialectic. The Spirit sets the imagination of the preacher free, but she also sets definite limits. The three elements in a hermeneutic grounded in 'controlled liberty' (Pinnock) are Spirit, Word and community. It is my view that 'community' needs to be defined broadly. In identifying appropriate images to redescribe the world, preachers need to engage the wisdom of the long exegetical and theological tradition, the local faith community and the contemporary global community of faith.

Operating with appropriate controls is a fundamental requirement for responsible reimagining of our world. Working with appropriate sources of inspiration is another essential factor. The Spirit and the Word are highly important sources of inspiration. Inspiration also comes from the community. Whilst many think of 'community' as referring only to the *faith* community, I expand its reach to include relevant thinkers in the non-theological world (psychologists, philosophers, sociologists and more). Recognising that this is a controversial move, an argument was made for the validity of correlational preaching.

The method that is proposed asks quite a bit of preachers. It is acknowledged that congregational ministers do not have unlimited time for sermon preparation. The approach is practicable if they are clever and resourceful in the way they go about their research and reading. There are short-cuts to the relevant sources, and the reading will be necessarily highly selective.

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