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Canadian Identity: A Mixed Blessing For Preachers?

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I have been assigned the topic of preaching the gospel in Canada. I understand “preaching the gospel” to refer to Jesus Christ and I understand “in Canada” to imply that where one preaches affects how and what one preaches. As an ordained minister in the United Church of Canada,¹ I am accustomed to having my faith identity formally linked with my national identity. Canadian identity does affect proclamation, but *which* Canadian identity (since society is not uniform), and how does it affect the message proclaimed? I will suggest that Canadian identity, like any national identity, poses mixed blessings for preachers.

I. Preaching the Gospel

First we go to the identity of the gospel. At one time, what was meant by the gospel may have seemed self-evident, that is, it was the message the church proclaimed about Jesus Christ; moreover, Hebrews says, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (13:8). But what was once safely assumed no longer can be. Often what was understood by the gospel was confused with culture and civil religion. Lucy Rose and several other homileticians are therefore suspicious of words like, *revelation, meaning, truth, Word, testimony* and *kerygma*,² words that we might invoke to speak about gospel. For them all biblical interpretation is tentative and partisan and all truth claims need to be negotiated. The kerygma, of course, is not a set of fixed doctrines. Rose was rightly suspicious of how preachers invoke such terms to condone worldviews that have little to do with the Bible.³ How Christ is understood may vary from context to context and how the kerygma is formulated needs to be negotiated anew in each setting.

Nonetheless, there is considerable consistency to the kerygma as it is expressed in the biblical witness. The good news is a story that has a beginning and an end. However we may frame it, it has to do

with the saving action of a Triune God who was present in the Exodus and the return to the Promised Land. It has to do with the life, death, resurrection and ascension to glory of Jesus Christ. It has to do with the ongoing correction, comfort, guidance and empowerment of the church in and through the Holy Spirit. Whether or not one belongs to a creedal church that requires affirmation of a creed, the ancient creeds are part of our common background as Christians and give effective summaries of the faith, as do in varying degrees our hymns and prayers.

Preaching the gospel will nonetheless vary from place to place in how the gospel is expressed, and in saying what the story means for the community at hand in a particular place and time. Each generation must articulate the gospel anew and for each setting. In the process of what is traditionally called the application of Scripture one is appropriately tentative, or at least humble, allowing for the possibility of sin or error in pointing to what God intends in the present moment. Several dangers are evident.

One danger in preaching the gospel concerns social justice. Preachers can and must say without any hesitation what is and what is not the gospel; they cannot be faithful and at the same time stand by and give assent by silence or inaction to racism, intolerance, bigotry, violence, greed, hatred, injustice and the like. Now, Jesus came to fulfill the law not to make a new one; yet that is precisely a danger for preachers who are sensitive to social needs in their preaching. Social justice becomes a new law. Often it is proclaimed separate from the gospel, or no distinction is made between it and the causes that it may lead followers to support. The cause gets preached, not the faith, not the relationship with Jesus Christ who leads us and empowers us in the Holy Spirit to work and mission.

A second danger in preaching the gospel is the temptation to possess it, like some static thing. The gospel is not something we own by having heard it, or that we possess through our baptism and dedication of our lives to Christ; rather, it is good news that needs to be sought anew for each step along the way. Preachers rightly rely on scholarly and prayerful study of the biblical text to discern revelation. Far from being something to possess, the gospel is something that takes possession of us! It may well turn familiar worlds on end and challenge familiar practices and attitudes. There is a certain consistency to the gospel in that the life mission and message of Jesus

Christ remains fundamentally the same, yet what God intends in difficult situations requires dependence upon God, as is appropriate given that we are speaking of a relationship.

As great as any danger facing preachers of the gospel today, not just in Canada, is confusing the fruits of essential historical analysis of texts with their meaning as scripture for the church. Preachers need historical critical awareness; historical criticism yields data about the reliability of texts, different versions, the situations in which they were written or edited, their contexts, what they meant and what they mean. However, not all historical critics or biblical commentators feel comfortable in speaking of the Bible as the Word of God since the discipline of history encourages sticking to data and facts. Not surprisingly, many commentators who are loyal first to their academic discipline do not seek God or address faith, or they treat God in the Bible in peripheral ways.

A related danger is preaching pericopes or units of Scripture. Teachers of preaching used to warn about the dangers of preaching individual verses of Scripture, isolated from their contexts, the danger being that one can make the text say what one wants it to say. We have not been so vigilant about the danger of preaching pericopes. In fact, we defend our current practice, for by considering an entire form or thought unit, we actually honour the text and do it justice. Preaching pericopes wherever possible is one way to safeguard accurate interpretation. The problem is that Jesus commanded us everywhere and in all things to proclaim the gospel. He did not say preach a passage from the lectionary, or an Old Testament narrative, or preach a psalm, or a lesson from the synoptics or an epistle. His command is theological in nature, and the gospel is often not the apparent subject of a biblical pericope. In fact, a biblical pericope, wherever it is found, needs to be conceived as an essential window to the gospel even when it does not contain it – as an instrument for its proclamation. Perhaps in homiletics we need a dual understanding of text: The specific text that we preach, text 1, enables us to preach the larger Christian story, text 2, that is the gospel as it is found through analogy or echo anywhere in the Bible. The preaching of text 1 may even be said to be incomplete if text 2 has not been adequately represented.

How do preachers locate the gospel in their biblical texts? What is the revelational dimension of texts that preachers may seek? I

contend that the gospel and revelation have something to do with the character and purpose of God as revealed in and through the particular text (text 1) at hand. Even before students begin their exegetical exercises I have them ask a question that is the authentic starting place of the homiletical enterprise: What is God doing in or behind this text? The text may not mention God and may only focus on what those who follow God are supposed to do. Does asking our starting question not skew the text? I argue that such a question begins to allow the text to function as Scripture for the church. If a text does not mention God, it implies something about who God is, what God does, and what God empowers. Revelation in the text relates to both the Giver and the receivers of that revelation. In other words, preaching the gospel has to do with God and God's saving actions and cannot rightly be represented by focus only on humanity and what we are to do. Good news should feel like good news, be experienced as good news, lighten people's burdens, and cast them on the infinite resources of a God who loves and cares for them. This is rightly understood in African American preaching that leads to celebration.

Exactly how the gospel is to be heard by each individual and congregation cannot be presumed, indeed it is the work of the Spirit, but the gospel calls people to repentance and can be presumed to call for change and recommitment to the ministry of Christ. The exact individual or congregational action cannot often be prescribed, however, for this would turn the gospel into a new law, but courses of action may be suggested, always from the perspective of invitation and what the Holy Spirit enables. The places of need to which we as preachers invite people are places where they may expect to encounter the risen Christ and be fed through reliance upon his grace. The translation of the gospel message into specific actions in the life of faith is largely a matter of individual and ecclesial discernment with the help of the Holy Spirit. The preacher assists in this process not by leaving the gospel message open-ended but by providing concrete examples of what appropriate discipleship might look like, in the hope that such examples will engage the imagination of the listeners and inspire their own ministries.

II. Canadian Identity and Preaching the Gospel

How does all of this relate to being Canadian? Here we engage a

second level of Christian identity. Of course when we speak of national identity we are often and necessarily reliant in part upon impressions, and many of my own will be evident here. Katherine Morrison recently published a scholarly study of Canadian identity,⁴ and her chapters deal with matters distinctly Canadian: history; nature; a sense of place; the role of religion and the church; ideals of equality in gender, ethnicity, and class; non-violence of international peacekeeping and gun-control; and the importance of humour. It would be natural for national identity to play out in the pulpits of our nation in terms of some of these categories, but in what ways does this happen and what is its theological significance? For every attribute of Canadian identity we will name there are possibilities and dangers for the pulpit, blessings and curses. National identity may be said to be a mixed blessing for the pulpit.

Who Are We?

Few things are more typically Canadian than to ask, "Who are we?" Part of Canadian identity is in fact insecurity about identity. Canadians typically are highly conscious and perhaps overly concerned with national identity and national recognition. Canadian academics like myself (perhaps even here) often go out of their way to bring in Canadian references in the same way that the entertainment and sports sections of Canadian newspapers and magazines look for Canadian angles in world sports. Some of this is pride in what our nation has accomplished not just in terms of athletics, but also generally in terms of an open and caring democratic society, a country with a strong tradition of social welfare that is respected world-wide as a good place to live. I suspect that most of our pulpits reflect this pride uncritically and often with humour. Good humour is appropriate to the gospel, and preachers are rightly use their own natural humour even on serious topics.

There can be a negative side to Canadian identity as well. New immigrants (especially racial minorities) often experience their own lack of Canadian identity as a social barrier to jobs. American graduate students and visitors often speak of a measure of anti-Americanism that they find in Canada, a topic that Canada's consul-general to New York, Pamela Wallin, recently raised in her address to the Carleton University Alumni Association.⁵ Unfortunately there are many groups in Canadian society that may feel themselves to be

‘other’ and unwelcome. It may be that preachers do not do enough to identify the problem and to hear their voices. We may not sufficiently frame the issue of Canadian identity from a theological perspective. As Christians we are first and foremost citizens of Christ, and our first allegiance is appropriately there. Secondly we may be citizens of Canada, and good governance, social stability, and institutions for health, education and justice are in service to God. One way to assist our country in being welcoming may be to for pulpits to draw more attention to this important distinction: our national identities are important, but they are always secondary to our common identity as children of God.

Canadians are not Americans

Because of the size and importance of our immediate southern neighbor, Canadian identity has long been spoken about negatively: who we are is defined in terms of not being American. Numerous public instances come to mind: The late Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau once described Canada as being “in bed with an elephant.” Comedian Rick Mercer ran his “Talking To Americans” segment as a regular feature of *This Hour Has 22 Minutes* on CBC television, in which he played on American ignorance of Canada. An episode of *The Simpsons* had the cartoon family travel to Canada and the show had one of the highest Canadian ratings as Canadians sought how Americans interpreted them. The ‘average Joe,’ featured in the television ad for Molson Brewing in 2000, worked himself from a (very Canadian) calm conversational manner into a (very un-Canadian) rant:

I have a Prime Minister, not a President. I speak English and French, NOT American, and I pronounce it *about*, not *a boot*. I can proudly sew my country’s flag on my backpack. I believe in peace keeping, *not* policing. *diversity*, *not* assimilation, and *that the beaver is a truly proud and noble animal. A toque is a hat, a chesterfield is a couch, and it is pronounced ‘zed’ not ‘zee’ – ‘zed’!*¹⁶

The ad climaxes with, “I am Canadian!” while “Land of Hope and Glory” plays in the background, and ends with Joe politely saying, “Thank you.”

As is the case with satire, there is a cutting edge to all of this. One might expect some of that edginess to play itself out in Canadian pulpits, in a negative manner similar to the media, but fortunately this

may not be the case. Of course American television programs, movies, cultural and news events are cited frequently in Canadian pulpits, and American political and cultural events are commonly alluded to in sermons and prayers. Yet with the recent exception of the last two times the United States went to war in Iraq, rarely is the United States critiqued from the pulpit, at least to my knowledge. This lack of critique may be surprising, since one poll recently indicated 80% of Canadians disagree with American foreign policy under the current President George Bush. One reason may be that Americans are in many congregations, many Canadians have close friends and relatives who are American, and most congregational members easily identify with Democrats or Republicans in American politics. In other words, ‘cheap shots’ tend not to be welcome from the pulpit on matters either Canadian or American.

A Nation of Rich Natural Resources

I believe it was comedian Douglas Copeland who once quipped, “Canada consists of ten provinces and a vast wasteland – Ottawa.” Canadian identity remains linked to our vast land mass and wilderness, rich oil reserves, a supply of one-seventh of the world’s fresh water, and numerous other natural resources in a country of relatively small population. Rugged landscape and climate helped to inspire Margaret Atwood’s *Survival*,⁷ where she argued that survival was the dominant theme in Canadian literature.

It would be interesting to know whether her thesis holds for the pulpit, where one suspects that nature plays a significant role through countless anecdotal references to nature’s beauty, danger, and cold winters. In my own denomination references to the doctrine of creation tend to be far more frequent than references to, say, the end times or eschatology (is there a connection?). In fact, eschatology in the pulpit tends mostly to be confined to a few Sundays in Advent and to funeral sermons. Preachers may well think that it is easier for congregational members to connect with creation than with the end times, or that Canadian sensibilities are more challenged by contemplation of the end. Whatever the reason, eschatology is a much neglected and commonly misunderstood doctrine in my own denomination. Every biblical text needs to be read in light of the beginning and the end of the Bible, and the end is both comforting and hopeful. The old world will pass away, including the vast

wilderness, the stars and the sun, yet that Christ makes all things new is a wonderful promise.

A Nation of Increasing Ethnic and Racial Diversity

Canada has not had a melting pot practice for identity. The French and English have existed as two solitudes, as Hugh MacLennan portrayed in his novel;⁸ had he been writing today he might have added the solitude of native Canadians and other groups. Since World War II, immigration patterns have changed dramatically away from Great Britain to the British Commonwealth and beyond, and now when one speaks of Canadian identity one needs also to ask, 'which identity?', for there are many. Toronto has been named by the United Nations as the most multicultural city in the world, with over 100 languages spoken every day. Regional identity, including rumblings of Western separatism and special status for Quebec, has also become more noticeable, attesting to many identities, not one.

The United Church of Canada, like some other denominations, has not kept up with the increasing diversification of Canadian society. It remains predominantly Anglo-Saxon and white in its ethnic and racial make-up. We like to think we are welcoming of others, and we may be, but the terms of that welcome may be our own. James R. Nieman and Thomas G. Rogers document how preachers in multi-ethnic congregations benefit from regular meetings with representatives groups as a way to ensure that their various stories and concerns are raised in sermons.⁹ My denomination also has largely failed to reach out with success to youth, a key factor in our diminishing membership rolls. We have been comparatively slow to adopt music and service formats geared to youth and have offered little formal training for youth ministry. In this regard our own insistence on higher education for clergy, for all of its benefits, may work against us: many of the young people who are attracted to youth ministry in Pentecostal churches, for example, are not aspiring toward university education; moreover they come through an educational system in their churches in which they learn and know the Bible and talk about their faith. Youth is an issue that many pulpits, my denomination as a whole and its theological schools seem largely ineffective to date in addressing. The issues are complex and no ready solution seems apparent. Still, there can be no solution separate from ensuring that the gospel of Jesus Christ is what is preached.

A Kinder Gentler Nation

When George Bush, senior, was running for President, he said that he wanted “a kinder gentler nation,” by which some Canadians took him to mean Canada. Canada historically is a kind and gentle nation, though a look at our history also shows violence and neglect. Still, of the many things contributing to unity “from sea to shining sea,” including the CBC (valued even in Quebec as Société Radio-Canada), the railway (which made confederation possible and helped make Pierre Berton a cultural icon¹⁰) and the Trans-Canada Highway, arguably the most treasured aspect of Canadian identity is universal health care. Even with the difficulties the medical system has experienced in recent years from under-funding, soaring costs, and extended wait lists, the health care system is a tangible expression of the value Canadians place on kindness and caring for one’s neighbour. Many of Canada’s churches played an important historical role in establishing Medicare; it is an essential resource for healthy communities and not least in helping churches and other groups to care for the needy and homeless.

Other national institutions reflect our being kind and gentle: (1) Our military has largely been committed to peacekeeping operations. (2) We have important gun control laws that stem from how land was settled: in Canada the law in the form of the Northwest Mounted Police preceded many of the settlers, whereas in the United States the settlers normally were followed by the law and bore weapons. (3) The Canadian Bill of Rights is a significant attempt at a universal declaration of human rights charter, even though it is enshrined in the constitution. Passed on August 10, 1960, it assures the following freedoms:

It is hereby recognized and declared that in Canada there have existed and shall continue to exist without discrimination by reason of race, national origin, colour, religion or sex, the following human rights and fundamental freedoms, namely:

- a) the right of the individual to life, liberty, security of the person and enjoyment of property, and the right not to be deprived thereof except by due process of law;
- b) the right of the individual to equality before the law and the protection of the law;
- c) freedom of religion;
- d) freedom of speech;
- e) freedom of assembly and association;
- f) freedom of the press.¹¹

The Bill of Rights plays an important role in attracting immigrants to Canada for it helps to ensure that they will be able to retain their own language and culture while participating in a new one. The ideal of equality in gender, ethnicity, and class offers the hope of improvement in life-style. The Bill also is important in ensuring that diverse groups co-exist in harmony and with respect of one another.

What does a “kind and gentle” Canada have to do with preaching the gospel? It has much to do with it and three perspectives may be highlighted. First, since loving one’s neighbour seems partly enshrined in the social welfare dimensions of the law, it is perhaps easy for people in the pews to confuse being a good Canadian with being a good Christian. It is easy for churches to become social clubs, to lose sight of the needy and to think that the social system provides adequately and equally for everyone, which is not the social reality. Being a good citizen by upholding the laws and participating in community affairs is not the same thing as being a disciple of Christ. The latter may involve the former but it means going further, modeling one’s life on the self-giving of Christ, being willing to sacrifice for others without any expectation of reward, even to the point of offering one’s life. One result of living in a kind and gentle land is that the pulpit needs to be intentional in addressing discipleship.

Second, the pervasive impression of Canada as kind and gentle may discourage prophetic preaching, which may be one reason that Canadian pulpits are often as bland and nice as Canadians are often stereotyped to be. Humourist Will Ferguson claims that he has discovered the Canadian dream: “success without risk.”¹² Risking may not be the Canadian way, and yet risking is part of the gospel. A call to preach the gospel is a call to take risks on behalf of others. Of course preachers risk whenever they claim in faith where God is acting for justice today and whenever they raise issues of prophetic and pastoral concern.

Third, Canada’s ‘kind and gentle’ side is not experienced by everyone. Social inequity, injustice and racism is present in Canada. Native peoples continue to suffer; thousands of people are homeless in our cities, including many youths; unemployment, domestic violence, and drug and alcohol addiction is present in all communities; and maintaining education and health care are issues that will only

grow in importance as baby-boomers age. John Calvin once said that church governance was in pursuit of the spiritual and inward realm of God and thereby fostered right worship and sound doctrine, while civil government “in some measure, begins the heavenly kingdom in us, even now upon earth and in this mortal and evanescent life commences immortal and incorruptible blessedness”.¹³ Social matters are of concern to God, for they concern the welfare of God’s children, and they need to be part of a revisioning of prophetic preaching in a culture of general affluence.

One Nation Among Many

Canadians may not wave their flag, but they at least wear it on a lapel pin when they travel abroad and they are proud of the role Canada plays on the world stage. Canada’s global commitment is evident in foreign aid, peacekeeping, participation in the G8, NATO, the United Nations, exchange programs and the like, all of which speaks to Canada’s credentials as a good global citizen. Canadian media gives the impression of being more global in outlook than much of the media in the United States, which by contrast often seems preoccupied with regional and national issues, an impression reinforced by the lack of news of Canada in the United States. Canadian preaching may also reflect openness to global issues; the good news in the pulpit may in fact gain some of its character from mindset that Canadian media fosters. Canadian sermons do seem to demonstrate more global awareness than typical American sermons. Indeed we may be willing to be more prophetic with issues like the genocide current in the Darfur region of the Sudan, or the suffering of people in other places of war, than we are about some of our own issues that may seem less safe to raise.

III. Giving Priority to the Gospel

Some people may think it would be best to preach if Canadian or any other national identity would be ignored, if we as preachers would just preach the gospel. Such thinking seems misplaced, though some sermons attempt to accomplish just this. Canadian identity merely acknowledges that humans are social creatures, we organize ourselves with God’s help in national groupings that ultimately affect our outlook on the world and how effective communication can happen. If we were not talking about national identity we would have

to talk about some other kind of worldly identity, because that is who we are, we have dual citizenship though our primary allegiance is always to God. Said another way, the gospel only becomes good news when it connects to people where they live, in the circumstances of their lives, in the ways they interact with each other and God.

Issues of national identity form the backdrop of preaching and in the normal course of affairs they will come to the foreground frequently and without fanfare. When we isolate various aspects of Canadian identity, as we have begun to do above, and contemplate how they affect the pulpit, we can end up distorting the picture and thinking that the Canadian sermon will be loaded with ethical issues and prophetic pronouncements. Some preachers no doubt do this and their sermons typically are more dedicated to expounding an issue than to expounding a biblical text. Such preaching might not be considered biblical. There was once a time when biblical sermons normally ran for an hour and people did not run off after church, when the sermon genre was suited to ethical discussion. That may no longer be the case. Ethics takes time. Ethical discussion is needed with difficult issues and requires a fair representation of the arguments in order to provide informed guidance. Almost by definition, ethical issues are controversial issues. To deal with them in a sermon of twenty-five minutes or less, the current norm in my denomination, is problematic without some kind of complementary educational forum. This is not to say that it cannot and is not being done, often with considerable effect.

In any case, the purpose of being attentive in the pulpit to what is Canadian is not to serve politics or ideology. It is rather to be sensitive to the needs of listeners and to be more effective in proclaiming the gospel by addressing specific situations. We do not proclaim Canada but the good news as it applies to Canada and abroad, to Canadians and all others. We normally pray for but do not promote Canada *per se*, but we promote God and all of God's children wherever they may be. A 1970s radio show on the CBC held a competition whose goal was to compose the conclusion to the phrase: "As Canadian as ...". The winning entry read: "As Canadian as possible, under the circumstances."¹⁴ Perhaps the winning entry may stand as a rubric for how Canadian identity comes into sermons.

How does the gospel address social and pastoral concerns in the sermon? Students familiar with my work will forgive me if here I

reiterate a few basic principles that may guide preachers. The fact that seeking consensus is a typically, though not peculiarly, Canadian endeavor (I note the name of this journal) may or may not have any impact on my own thought. I have been striving for some years to identify some consensus in homiletical thought, notably to identify an underlying homiletical grammar that guides excellent biblical preaching. I have argued recently in *The Four Pages of the Sermon*¹⁵ that all sermons, whatever form they adopt, can be analyzed and assessed by their treatment of: Page One, trouble in the Bible (judgement, law, sin, brokenness, suffering); Page Two, trouble in our world; Page Three, grace in the Bible (forgiveness, gospel, salvation, healing, justice); and Page Four, grace in our world. Preachers composing sermons can employ this basic grammar as a method that moves through the pages in order or otherwise, but the approach is a grammar before it is a method. It represents preaching as a theological task, the purpose being to preach the gospel not a biblical text on its own isolated from the rest of the Bible and the larger gospel story. As a theological task, it assumes that the gospel calls for repentance and change. Sermons also appropriately cast hearers on God's gracious resources that, by grace and through the Holy Spirit, empower Christ's followers to do what is needed.

Elsewhere I have traced the extent of the contemporary trouble/grace school and I claim that it is the largest homiletical school today, including representatives from all of the major denominations across the theological spectrum, including African-American homiletics.¹⁶ Numerous homileticians, including another Canadian, Stephen Farris, write about the importance of preaching grace, and of preaching grace even from texts that seem not to contain it,¹⁷ or the inverse. The usual complaint about such an approach is that it places a grid over the biblical text and calls for the text to conform to it. The alternative is what has been uncritically practiced for much of history: trouble is preached if the text deals with trouble and grace is preached if the text deals with grace. At least as common, even when texts deal with grace preachers convert them into trouble. Trouble puts the burden on humanity to do something while grace puts the burden on God and God has already accepted that burden in Jesus Christ. Sermons that focus on trouble inevitably focus on required human actions and thus are anthropocentric; they cannot significantly end in hope, as sermons arguably should end.

Christ said "...you will find rest for your souls. My yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:29b-30); Paul speaks of a "God of hope" (Romans 15:13).

Against this criticism of imposing a grid one may make the following brief comments: trouble and grace are not so much a grid that one takes to a text as they are two sides of God's unified Word, wherever it may be found. If a text is read without the discernment of one or the other, the text being examined may be simply too small. I am puzzled when I hear of a preaching series on, for instance, units of Job, as though every part of Job does not need to be interpreted by its ending. If trouble or grace is not found in a text, the fault may also lie with the reader. Even the harshest command from God implies something about God's love and grace. When a preacher refuses to acknowledge this, it may be the result of lack of instruction in how to find it or it may be a choice of the preacher and not an actual determination of the text itself.

When used as a grammar of preaching, these four pages put a safeguard in place to ensure that sermons not become overrun with social or ideological concerns. Grace means focus on what God is doing in or behind the biblical text, thus a turn to grace in the sermon means a turn to God, a return to the biblical text, an engagement of traditional teachings of the church (i.e. systematic or constructive theology), and the discernment of some divine response to the trouble found in the Bible and our world and an invitation to join the work of Christ. The outcome is not an answer to a problem, as law/gospel is sometimes misinterpreted to represent; rather the outcome and the good news is an ongoing relationship with Christ in and through the Holy Spirit, and it is within the framework of that relationship that solutions or answers, if they are to be found, will be found.

All of this is simply to say that Canadian identity offers blessings and curses to preachers, opportunities and dangers. If preachers are attentive to their calling to preach the gospel, safeguards may be employed that turn Canadian identity into a strength in Canadian preaching. The gospel will be given the priority it deserves and will become the gospel in relation to the situation of the hearers. Canadian identity will serve as an example or illustration of other national identities, with the plain message that all people everywhere are equally God's children and are our brothers and sisters under God.

Notes

- ¹ When the Methodists, Congregationalists and two thirds of the Presbyterians formed the United Church of Canada in 1925, they did so in order to live out Christ's command "that they may all be one" (John 17:21). They hoped for the main protestant denominations of the day to speak with a common voice to serve the country and help shape the culture of a rapidly developing nation. Gone now are the days when the denomination spoke with a single voice, or when its Moderator could speak with the authority that that office once had, and the denomination's influence on governmental affairs has been as much reduced as its numbers. Still, Canadian identity remains key, for there is still an expectation born of history that the United Church will be involved in social affairs. Moreover, the denomination remains committed to serving all of Canada, thus new ministers follow the old Methodist system and go where they are sent anywhere in Canada for their first appointment, and afterward revert to the Presbyterian call system. This sense of a national identity contributes to both to its autonomy and to its strong ecumenical commitments through such organizations as the Canadian Council of Churches, World Council of Churches, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, and the World Methodist Council.
- ² For a discussion of this group see my *Preaching and Homiletical Theory* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004), pp. 135-158.
- ³ Lucy Atkinson Rose, *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Pulpit* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), pp. 99-107.
- ⁴ Katherine Morrison, *Canadians are not Americans: Myths and Literary Traditions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003).
- ⁵ Pamela Wallin spoke of her concern on October 21, 2004: "I am very, very concerned about the Anti-Americanism that I feel and sense in this country, that I read and that I see in the headlines, and that I hear espoused from time to time. It troubles me." She is quoted in "Stay out of Elections in U.S., Martin warns," *Toronto Star*, October 22, 2004, A6.
- ⁶ "I Am Canadian," Molson Canadian Ad, 2000 [online]. Available for viewing on the World Wide Web:
<<http://home7.swipnet.se/~w-72891/CanadianClub/CCsales/ad.html>> (viewed October 22, 2004).
- ⁷ Margaret Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (Toronto: McClellan and Stewart, 2004 [1972]).
- ⁸ Hugh MacLennan, *Two Solitudes* (Toronto: McClellan and Stewart, 2003 [1945]).

- ⁹ James R. Nieman and Thomas G. Rogers, *Preaching to Every Pew: Cross-Cultural Strategies* (Fortress Press, 2002), esp. pp. 139-157.
- ¹⁰ Pierre Burton, *The Last Spike: the Great Railway, 1881-1885* (Toronto: Anchor Canada, 2001 [1971]).
- ¹¹ Canadian Bill of Rights, R.S.C. 1985, Appendix III, An Act for the Recognition and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms [S.C. 1960, c.44], Part I, 1. Available on the World Wide Web: <<http://www.efc.ca/pages/law/canada/BillofRights.html>> (viewed October 22, 2004).
- ¹² Will Ferguson, *Why I Hate Canadians* (Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1997), pp. 190-193.
- ¹³ *Calvin's Institutes*, Book 4:20:2, The Biblical Studies Foundation. Available on the World Wide Web: <<http://www.bible.org/docs/history/calvin/institut/ci400021.html>> (viewed September 20, 2004).
- ¹⁴ I do not recall the name of this show.
- ¹⁵ Paul Scott Wilson, *The Four Pages of the Sermon* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999).
- ¹⁶ Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory*, pp. 73-115.
- ¹⁷ Stephen Farris, "Preaching Law as Gospel: Some Reflections on and from Psalm 119," in *Papers of the Annual Meeting of the Academy of Homiletics*, 1998, pagination not provided. See also Stephen Farris, *Grace: A Preaching Commentary* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2003).