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Eduard R. Riegert

Sarma Eglite

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# Political Preaching: Treading the Razor's Edge

Eduard R. Riegert

*Professor of Homiletics, Waterloo Lutheran Seminary*

Sarma Eglite

*Pastor, Latvian Lutheran Church of Boston*

## Introduction

Edmund A. Steimle, long time Professor of Homiletics in Philadelphia and New York, observed that he had been an admirer of the preaching of James S. Stewart of Edinburgh until he discovered that, though Stewart's published sermons came from the time of World War II, "one could not even guess the context from reading the sermons. They were and are 'timeless sermons,' addressed solely to the private sector of the individual's life."<sup>1</sup>

Steimle, on the contrary, insisted that

... the fabric of the sermon will be worldly, secular, through and through...[T]he sermon will be studded with allusions to the facts and fancies and news events which make the newspapers: international tensions and conglomerates, Northern Ireland, the Middle East, the energy crisis, abortion, the obituary columns, stock-market fluctuations, inflation, legislative tangles in Congress, Dear Abby, black power and white power-structures, the daily horoscope, Peanuts, the NFL or the NBA... as well as with allusions to the facts and fancies and happenings which rarely if ever make the newspapers: the meaningless, sordid, lonely waiting for death in a sleazy nursing home, the bleak despair when by some trick of the economy a fifty-five year-old man is laid off... the flush of joy at falling in love or welcoming the first child... The fabric of the sermon will, like the fabric of the Bible, reflect the actual world in which we live—all of it!<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, James Stewart's seeming silence on the brutal facts of war also receive our sympathy—especially so from the advantage of our long look back. How does one preach at such a time? For that matter, how did we preach during the Gulf

War? No doubt we offered prayer; but did it get into the sermon in any kind of significant and theological way?

The perils of preaching "politically" are easy enough to state: presuming the (divine) right of one's nation's cause and the un-rightness of the "enemy's" cause; presuming that God is on our side; allowing the fervor of war propaganda to shape our thinking; identifying "victory" with God's "salvation"; even adopting the Norse mythological equation of the warrior's death with entry into Valhalla. The perils are daunting enough to make preachers retreat into the private sector of the individual's life. How does one walk the razor's edge?

Let us state the question as bluntly as possible: how does one preach politically? The question is not hypothetical. It confronts all of us at least annually when red poppies blossom on lapels; it prods us as UN peace-keepers ponder their role. The fact is, every preacher, by the simple fact of living in a political milieu, preaches politically. One cannot even read many pericopes without already making political statements (e.g., Amos 5:21-24; Luke 4:16-30; John 2:13-22; Romans 13:1-7; not even to mention Apocalyptic literature). The Reign of God, we are discovering with the help of our Third World sisters and brothers, challenges the "powers that be".<sup>3</sup>

The question confronts us most poignantly, perhaps, as ethnic communities struggle to realize their "national dream". How does the preacher walk the razor's edge in the political fervor of ethnic hopes, dreams, grievances, and tragedies?

Here is one preacher. On 15 June 1989 Sarma Eglite, then pastor of Peace Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church in Ottawa, was invited to preach at the XVII Ecumenical Memorial Service to commemorate "the tragedy of the Baltic and Ukrainian Nations", held in Notre-Dame Basilica, Ottawa. The service was sponsored by the Ottawa Estonian Society, the Latvian-Canadian Community of Ottawa, the Lithuanian-Canadian Community of Ottawa, and the Ukrainian-Canadian Committee—Ottawa Branch. The worship bulletin states: "Once a year the Balts—Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians—together with Ukrainians gather to remember the mass genocide of their countrymen at the hands of the Soviets and to pray for an end to the continuing suppression of their national cultures, languages and religion." Joining the commemoration "in sympathy" were the Ottawa branches

of the Byelorussian Canadian Alliance, the Czechoslovak Association of Canada, the Canadian Polish Congress, and the Slovak National League, as well as the Hungarian Canadian Community in Ottawa.

We have the privilege of hearing the sermon six years after its delivery, thus knowing that the immediate prayers of this service have in large measure been answered.

## The Sermon

### Blessed Are Those Who Hunger and Thirst For Righteousness

Today is a day of sorrow, pain and turmoil. Today is a day for remembering the tragedy of our nations: the famine in the Ukraine in 1932 and 1933; the mass deportations in the Baltic countries June 13th and 14th, 1941. I was not yet born, but I remember the events as my grandfather has shared experiences with me. He, along with my mother, uncle and grandmother were on the lengthy lists of those to be deported. They were among the lucky ones, because they weren't home that night. They haven't been home since. I remember the story of an elderly woman as she recounted her experiences of being shipped to Siberia. I remember the story of the Baltic deportations as recorded by Prof. Egil Grislis of Manitoba:

With the mind's eye we can still see the large number of freight cars gathered at the various Baltic railway stations. During the night of June 14, 1941, communist police followed their carefully prepared lists and went from door to door, arresting tens of thousands of the Baltic people. Families were immediately separated....The freight cars for the long journey to Siberia had no regular toilet facilities except a small hole in the floor, the only window of each car was barred with barbed wire. All of the freight cars were overcrowded and there was not even enough space to stretch out on the floor. Cries for water, cries of anguish and soon enough the cries of the dying could be heard from those trains.<sup>4</sup>

I remember and will never forget the story of Rutina U., a fourteen year old girl who was deported not once, but twice for five years each time, and who has shared with hundreds her story of life in exile in her book *Dear God, I Wanted to Live!*

We worked and lived like slaves. We received no wages for our work, only that small amount of bread that was temptingly dangled



in front of our noses as if we were dogs. One day there was a heartbreaking event: several Latvian women had been found frozen to death in a snowdrift. They had set out for the nearest village to trade some of their last items of clothing for food to bring home to their small children.<sup>5</sup>

I have read eyewitness accounts about the induced famine in the Ukraine: of whole villages being wiped out; of mass burials; acts of cannibalism; of starving peasants eating grass, leaves, bark, mice, dogs and cats; of babies that look like “embryos out of alcohol bottles”; of soldiers shooting peasants gathering kernels of grain from already harvested fields; of villages in which every soul had perished and in which every house contained bodies of the last to die. I remember the horror, the terror and the gross inhumanity recorded in these accounts.

While these stories are not ones of my personal experience, they nevertheless are a part of ‘my story’. This story is part of the history of my people; it is also a segment of the history of your people. It is our history. It is our story.

Our story—with the mind’s eye we see the horrors that our people and others have experienced and continue to experience today. We could cite endless records from the mass deportations of Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians, and not from June 13 and 14, 1941 alone, but from the second Soviet occupation when the deportations easily surpassed the first horrors. We could cite statistics from deportations that haven’t ceased, but have continued through the years. We could mention the appalling number of casualties from the Soviets’ artificially induced famine in the Ukraine. It is simply unbelievable that millions of people starved in a country that produces over 25% of the entire grain supply for the Soviet Union. A famine in the breadbasket that produced 69 million tons of grain and that exported 1.3 million tons of grain that same year. We could mention other such horrors as the Holocaust, and the imposing of martial law in China today.

We have gathered to recall these incidents, to pay our respects to those of our, and other, nations who have died an unjust death. As Elie Wiesel, Nobel Peace Prize winner, has said, “Let us tell tales. Tales of fear and tales of night....Let us tell tales of times gone mad. Of humanity gone mad. Of man’s ultimate suffering.”<sup>6</sup> We do this every year—why? Because we dare not forget!!!

We dare not forget! We tell these stories to our children, to our friends, to anyone who will listen because we dare not forget. Today our children, our future, lay flowers by a wreath we would rather neither have nor see—a wreath symbolizing pain, death and injustice. Our children lay flowers by this wreath so that our story will one day become theirs.

Our stories have stood with us through times of happiness as well as in the face of evil and of suffering. Our stories have forced us to struggle with the injustices of this world. Our stories have created in us a hunger and thirst for righteousness, a hunger and thirst for peace and for justice. Our history has conceived not simply a passive and occasional hunger pang, but a craving that causes us to actively seek righteousness. We want our children to have this same gnawing hunger and this same unquenchable thirst for righteousness. Therefore every year we remember....

Our story is an unpleasant one. It is a story for which God promises a blessing. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled." This is not a statement, but an exclamation. There is no catch. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, who hunger and thirst for goodness, uprightness, who desire to do what God requires. Our text doesn't say blessed are those who have attained righteousness, but blessed are those who, as a starving person hungers and thirsts for nourishment in order to survive, hunger and thirst for righteousness as a matter of life and death, for their hunger will be satisfied; they will be filled to the point of satiation. They are promised the blessedness of God. They are promised an entrance into the life that God has promised and God alone can give.

This is a hunger that we, the Ukrainians, Balts and others gathered here this evening, understand. This is a craving for right to prevail. This hunger is a heartfelt prayer for peace and justice, not only for our nations, but for all of humanity. This thirst is a feeling of being parched, of being unable to continue, of needing to be refreshed—not only for our sake, but for the sake of others who are suffering from any form of injustice.

Luke gives a different version: Woe to you that are full now, for you shall hunger (6:25). This hunger or thirst isn't for retribution or power, but a deep-seated desire for God's work, for God's will, to be done, for a righteousness that even through

suffering can attain the ultimate victory—to be satisfied—to have this hunger and thirst fully satiated by God. Today, standing in the light of our faith, confronted with loss, brutality, murder and inhumanity, our hunger and thirst for righteousness is piercingly felt. We are aching for and seeking a righteousness that transcends the need for retribution, a righteousness where power is not the deciding factor, a righteousness that transforms victims into victors.

This we can observe in China. Clearly the students are victims. They were mowed down in Tiananmen Square; those left alive are now being hunted to be arrested. One thousand students are in custody. Thousands are dead. More are being executed. The students are the victims, but at the same time, they are also victors. In this week's *Time* magazine and on the news last week we saw one man hold up an entire column of tanks. He was pleading with them to stop and to retreat. The decision? The tanks stopped. We cheered the man because of his courage in his convictions. We applauded him because he was willing to stand up for his ideals, hopes and dreams for democracy. He, as were many others, was prepared to die for his convictions. The people of China are witnessing to their hunger and thirst for righteousness. Nothing but righteousness can quench this thirst.

The tanks eventually continued on their way because the man's friends pulled him aside. The government were the victors—their might prevailed. While they were victors in the sense of power, this is not so in the case of world opinion. In that they are defeated; the true victors are the students.

In Tuesday's evening edition of the *Ottawa Citizen*, Andrew Higgins wrote: "With truth turned firmly on its head, everyone knows that soldiers, not the people they massacred, were the only true victims." In China, the Baltic, and the Ukraine, the people are victors. World opinion scorns the brutal governments and commends the people.

In Latvia as well as in other Soviet-occupied countries, the people are willing to sacrifice their wellbeing for the sake of righteousness. In Latvia, June 14, 1986 was the day of the first mass demonstration after more than forty years of Soviet oppression. People were willing to stand up and speak up for their rights. They were willing to pay the cost for singing folk



songs and placing flowers at their freedom monument in memory of those deported and/or murdered by the Soviet regime. The time to speak, instead of to be silent, had finally arrived.

The cost of speaking and standing up varied—imprisonment, exile, losing the chance for higher education. The price was paid by many; people were willing to sacrifice their well-being for the sake of righteousness. This movement has grown rapidly. Today all dates of importance to the Latvian people are once again remembered by laying flowers at the freedom monument. On November 18th of last year [1988], the 70th anniversary of Latvia's independence, I was fortunate enough to be in Latvia. Over 15,000 people had gathered at the monument. One couldn't see the monument's base for the sea of flowers. The people had gathered despite knowing that the tanks from Afghanistan had been moved to the Baltic borders. I must confess that I was quite apprehensive that day, wondering what will happen next. I was bewildered by the courage of my people. There they stood—thousands!

This commemoration of Latvia's shortlived independence ended with a study in contrasts. I was invited to a home where a group of singers had gathered. The home was clean, but run down. The paint was old and peeling; the furniture well worn. The people were dressed in clothes that had seen better days. They were my age, already looking grey. The setting depressed me. Yet there was hope—a single candle burning in the window. A single candle symbolizing the hunger and the thirst for righteousness—for a free and independent Latvia. These candles could be seen across Latvia that night. A single candle in a window, songs and shining eyes made me rethink my priorities and values. Songs were sung asking for God's guidance and help, a song's refrain: "Mosties, tauta! Gaisma aust!" Latvians, wake up! Arise, for day is beginning to dawn. The time to speak up has arrived! Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness!

Blessed—this isn't a promise for future happiness. This isn't a promise that all will end as we wish, that our countries will soon be free and that justice will defeat evil in our lifetime. While this might happen, Scripture doesn't promise us that. What is promised is a blessedness independent of outside circumstances, a blessedness, a sense of wellbeing that comes from the desire to enter a right relationship with God. A blessedness



that comes from the reevaluation of priorities and values. A blessedness that comes from discovering which things matter and which don't. A blessedness that comes from longing and striving to live a just and a good life, to help others in their struggles. A blessedness that comes from putting one's trust in God.

In China the students are victims. Those who starved in the famine of the Ukraine and the Balts who were deported were all victims. Jesus was also a victim. He realized that even in the midst of injustice, brutality, the struggle of might, and his suffering that he could entrust his life to God. We have a choice: to allow cold and brutal force to kill our spirit and quench our desire for righteousness or to persevere in our struggle against victimization of any sort. Evil is to be cursed and detested. Those who victimize are cursed. Victims stand under the blessing of the cross. Through the power of the cross, victims become victors.

We commend ourselves into the hands of God, not as victims, but as persons who hunger and thirst for God's righteousness. This also is a part of our history, the part that helps give our story meaning, a part that helps us to endure in the face of the things we don't and cannot understand—including evil, injustice and suffering. Elie Wiesel said: "Surely I would like to understand, but I know I never shall. Even when I have read all the documents, gathered all the testimony, heard all the judgements, all the ideas, all the theories, I still will not understand. And so I am afraid."<sup>7</sup> I too am afraid. I know that I am not alone in the fear that the tanks and soldiers will end up in my country and other countries. We don't understand why this has to be so. Nevertheless, we entrust ourselves to God's care. This helps us to stand firm in our faith, the faith that blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, to stand firm even while afraid, even while under pressure to be disloyal and to shrug and say it really doesn't matter, because evil is greater and more powerful than good. Into God's hands we commend ourselves and our people, our countries: Canada and our native lands.

This is part of the story that we remember today, a part that we are teaching our children. Entrusting ourselves and our loved ones to God's care is an essential part of hungering

and thirsting for righteousness. This part of our story will help us become filled.

Today we remember our story; today we remember: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled."

### Commentary

The text from the Beatitudes, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled" (Matthew 5:6), not only forms the theme of the sermon but gives it its driving power in that it permits the juxtaposition of the harsh experience of un-righteousness and the yearning for the restoration and achievement of righteousness. It is a fine choice of text. It also makes clear the razor's edge: on the one side is the equation of "righteousness" with the political cause of liberation from Soviet subjugation and the redress of profound horrors; on the other side is the reality of the Reign of God in its "now but not yet" eschatological dimension. The recital of vast injustices (which need to be remembered—cf. the Exodus and the Passion narratives) forcefully pull the preacher and the hearers to the former side, and she has to work hard to maintain the latter side. So after the major recital of injustices she deftly acknowledges the hunger and thirst for righteousness, and at once locates it as a blessing from God. The Tiananmen massacre allows her hearers to achieve some distance from their own experiences of oppression, and to contemplate an analogy which helps to bring clarification, perspective, and meaning to those experiences. Yet this tips her over to the "political side" again as she calls for engagement in the work of "righteousness", and she has to speak forcefully of the promise of righteousness as independent of circumstances, and therefore requiring a stance of faith in God.

It seems to me that the preacher essentially dares to take the role of a "weeping prophet" very much like Jeremiah (vis-a-vis an "angry prophet" like Amos), in that she both stands weeping among the oppressed and yet brings a word of God to them and to their circumstances. If so, then Jeremiah can be of considerable use to us in examining what she is doing. Jeremiah ministered precisely to people sliding into and experiencing political upheaval and exile. Walter Brueggemann

helps us identify some of the crucial attempts by Jeremiah as he walked the razor's edge in preaching to people in a time of national peril.<sup>8</sup>

Note, first, that the preacher *makes the pain public*. Brueggemann observed that Jeremiah brought pain, numbness, and the deep sense of injustice into speech. While drawing principally upon her knowledge of Latvian suffering, she takes pains to recall the subjugation experience of other Baltic peoples, the Ukraine, China, and the Jewish Holocaust. Making the pain public—as we have learned from grief therapy and from the victims of abuse—is extremely important. It is also extremely important for the “ruling powers” to hear this voice. The church is learning from the Third World about being the voice of the voiceless so that, first of all, the pain is heard.

Ee Kon Kim, Professor of Old Testament at Hanshin University, Seoul, Korea, argues that the pattern of “outcry—salvation” is clearly traceable through the Old Testament and appears as well in the New. The Exodus is put into motion when Yahweh hears the outcry of Israel in Egypt; again and again in the Wilderness the people cry out (for food, water, or in despair) and Yahweh hears and delivers. The pattern continues in Judges, the Lament Psalms, etc., and in the healing miracles of the Gospels. Kim concludes,

[T]he rhetorical structure of “outcry—salvation” . . . can be seen as a theological framework that explains how God works through human history of affliction. Indeed, humanity meets God in, through, and by the history of outcry. The “outcry” to God of every suffering people, like that of the Hebrews in Egypt, operates as the only place where we meet God by the dialogical interaction of human lament and divine intervention.<sup>9</sup>

“Making the pain public” is therefore therapeutic, a protest against the powers that be, and the creation of an arena where God can be encountered.

Note, secondly, that the preacher is *helping to open up a closed history*. Jeremiah, so Brueggemann pointed out, was articulating history “from underneath”. Our histories, until recently, have invariably been written from the top down, that is, from the perspective of the “shapers” and “makers” of history (usually leading politicians and people with power). Invariably such history is “closed” in the sense that it is “behind us” and thus has no revelatory power. (We rarely “learn from



history"! ) Jeremiah, however, does history from underneath, from the victim's perspective, and thus it becomes revelatory of what in fact is going on as overagainst, say, "official lines", "propaganda", and ideologies. "The vocation of the community gathered around the Scriptures," said Brueggemann, "is to open the historical process when rulers want to close it."<sup>10</sup> So our preacher will not allow the events of 1941 in the Baltics, nor the official famine in the Ukraine, nor the brutal facts of Tiananmen Square to be "closed". Unrighteousness must be remembered and recited in order to keep history open.

This is, in effect, the search for TRUTH as overagainst "official" truth. Therefore, here is located a danger for the preacher (as for the historian and the victim!), namely, the presumption that the TRUTH lies with the victim. For Christians, as for Jews and adherents of other religions, this presumption is reined in by a humble stance before God. Our preacher, though she recounts movingly her experience of sharing the courage of the Latvians at their celebration of the 70th anniversary of Latvian independence, notes at once that God's guidance and help were asked for. Nevertheless, this is a moment of imbalance, and requires the firm affirmation of God's independence and the need for trust. It is, perhaps, the shakiest moment in the sermon.

Note, thirdly, that the preacher *discloses an alternate world*. On the one hand Jeremiah is hugely realistic: Babylon cannot be avoided; it will do no good at all to try to flee from her (chap. 42). One cannot flee from reality. But, on the other hand, God, who pulls down and builds up (1:10), is busy fashioning a new covenant (31:31-34). Running through the tangled web of the human story are the steady threads of God's story. So it was in the story of Joseph (notice how only at the very end does God "appear"! ), so in the story of Israel, of Jesus, of the church, and of human history. Surely one of the reasons why the Jews have constantly been scapegoated is that they have persisted in asserting another history and another world; Christians have been less persistent, yet the church at its best has been the church in persecution.

The disclosure of an alternate world is, at its lowest level, the assertion of the possibility of discontinuity: the way things are and the way things are going are not immutable; change is



a possibility. At the highest level—for a Christian preacher—the alternate world is the righteous, healing, peaceable Reign of God. Jesus supremely embodied this world of God's Rule; his parables, his life-style, and his actions kept subverting the conventional world accepted by religious and political leaders alike, and disclosing instead God's world of amazing grace, unimaginable kindness, and strong love. He not only articulated this world, but lived out of it and in it and constantly brought others to it. Those who were making "outcry" were drawn to him; those who were secure in their conventionalities and jealous of them were threatened by him.

The absolutely essential thing for the preacher to realize is that this alternate world cannot be drawn "from our private imaginings which are too weak and domesticated, but only from an authorizing text." One must ask of this text, How might it "redescribe our human life to permit new perceptions, new actions, new compassions, new obedience, new hopes?" The preacher lingers over the text because s/he has

a hunch that [it holds] a prospect of "redescribing" the world, that the world need not be seen through the tired eyes and heard through the uncircumcised ears of the ideology of brutality and anxiety. It need not, but it will be seen and heard only in that way, unless interpretation offers an alternative.<sup>11</sup>

At the very least, the disclosure of this world of God's Rule gives hope; at the next level it liberates the hearers from the weight of perceived and official reality; and at the highest level it shapes the vision to the fulfilment of which energies, resolve, and prayers may be directed.

It is at this point that the sermon we are examining is weakest. The image of oppressed peoples gathered in a threadbare room, lighting their candle and singing (and praying) their songs, is deeply moving; but the references to God's guidance and trust in God are "thin" interpretation. "Hungering and thirsting for righteousness" remains too locked in to the experience of national and personal subjugation; "righteousness" therefore remains pretty much the conventional righteousness of redress of injustice and political liberation. In the six years since this sermon was preached we have seen too vividly, and in too many places, the consequences of such conventional righteousness. The sermon needs to linger with the authorizing text.

Fortunately, in the conclusion of the sermon the bewildering fact of radical evil is brought to the fore. This challenges, implicitly, conventional notions of righteousness as well as notions of human ability to remedy the situation, and it gives depth to "entrusting ourselves and our loved ones into God's care [as] an essential part of hungering and thirsting for righteousness". Yet here is the place for the proclamation of the cross of Christ, which liberates precisely from radical evil.

Speaking of texts from Daniel, Walter Brueggemann observes,

These texts invite us to imagine ourselves afresh, to embrace fresh forms of obedience, and to enjoy fresh forms of freedom. The human question is transformed in Daniel into a question of dangerous hope and daring resistance.... This hope to which the text of Daniel invites us is a deep resolve to hold to a God-given identity, vocation, and destiny.<sup>12</sup>

Perhaps this is a formula for the ultimate purpose of political preaching. We do not simply want to rub raw old or new grievances, nor do we want to foment a simplistic nationalism. We want to redescribe the world usefully and faithfully so that the stereotypes are broken and hope and energy are given for the long, eschatological haul.

## Response

The title assigned to this article, "Political Preaching: Treading the Razor's Edge" intrigued me. I never had thought of this sermon either as political or as treading a razor's edge. Reading the article made me question some basic tenets of sermons and preaching.

A sermon is not, as popular definitions would have it, a discourse on a religious or moral subject. I believe that in preaching, the Word of God is shared with a particular group, at a particular time and in a particular place. The goal is to speak God's Word—to speak a word of hope and love in the midst of hopelessness; to speak a word of order in the midst of chaos; to speak God's Word in the midst of our words and in the midst of our world—its time and place. A sermon opens the hearer to new possibilities. It presents the hearer a new reality—one with God's possibilities and God's reality. In summation, I see a sermon as God's Word—a SPOKEN word—brought into our time and space as an event (as Riegert

implies when he introduces my sermon with the words *hearing* the sermon six years later).

I have two questions: What is a political sermon? Is there such a thing? If so, how does it differ from other sermons that use material from the preacher's experience and knowledge—of medicine, literature, science, psychology, sociology, horticulture, agriculture, the arts, etc.?

What is a political sermon? A sermon that deals with politics? The *Collins Pocket Dictionary* defines politics as "factional scheming for power". Political preaching would then be preaching for the purpose of gaining power for one side as opposed to another, or seeking a compromise among competing interests, for example, as Riegiert expressed it, "a nation's hopes and God's will". But in that case surely we are doing politics and not preaching! The sermon is then a discourse using religious phraseology to further the preacher's, a group's or a nation's cause or interests. Should a sermon ever be used for this purpose? Surely not!

Secondly, Riegiert defined the razor's edge as "on the one side is the equation of 'righteousness' with the political cause... and the redress of profound horrors; on the other side is the reality of the Reign of God in its 'now but not yet' eschatological dimension." I believe that the struggle in any sermon is in keeping a balance between God's reign and our experience. Political, personal, medical, literary, psychological, etc. examples are only illustrations of the certain experiences of our world and life, which yearn for signs of the Kingdom in our midst. The focus is not the balance between the two, but the speaking of God's Word, Reign, Will, Plan.

If our primary concern in preaching is a question of technique, then the metaphor of "treading the razor's edge" is apt for any preaching. If we set it up that way, on the one side we have God's Word and on the other our world of experience. We then need to follow the correct technique to maintain our balance between both sides. If our primary concern is to proclaim God's Word, then we share honestly, honourably and faithfully our experience and how God's Word speaks to us at a particular time, in a particular situation—whatever the experience—political, scientific, anecdotal or personal.

The sermon is a meeting of God's Word with our world—our family, town, city or nation. The possible points of intersection

are infinite, because God's Word is not a static but a dynamic force. God's Word is a happening in our life! These points of intersection provide us with moments of revelation—glimpses of the Kingdom—and, perhaps occasionally give us the opportunity for prophetic proclamation. When preaching I can only share my, I hope, honest, honourable and faithful hearing of God's Word in the specific time and place I have been asked to speak it. The ultimate horizon is that Word—otherwise I end up doing politics, or walking only on razors' edges.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Edmund A. Steimle, et al. *Preaching the Story* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980) 168.
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid. 166–167.
- <sup>3</sup> See J. L. Gonzalez and C. G. Gonzalez, *Liberation Preaching: The Pulpit and the Oppressed* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980); David Buttrick, *A Captive Voice: The Liberation of Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994).
- <sup>4</sup> Egil Grisliis, "Tragedy and Grace in the Baltics," *Central Canada Lutheran*, 21/3, May 1982.
- <sup>5</sup> Rutina U., *Dear God, I Wanted to Live!* (NY: Gramatadrangs, 1977).
- <sup>6</sup> Elie Wiesel. Beyond the fact that this is a quotation from an article, "Art and Culture After the Holocaust", I have been unable to locate the source.
- <sup>7</sup> Forward to *Jews and Christians After the Holocaust*, ed. Abraham J. Peck (Phil.: Fortress, 1982) ix.
- <sup>8</sup> I draw primarily on his Lutheran Life Lectures, "New Vistas in Prophecy and History," Waterloo Lutheran Seminary, Waterloo, Ontario, 21 January 1983. A similar, though broader ranging, schema may be found in his 1989 Lyman Beecher Lectures at Yale Divinity School, *Finally Comes the Poet: Daring Speech for Proclamation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989) chap. 2.
- <sup>9</sup> Ee Kon Kim, "'Outcry': Its Context in Biblical Theology," *Interpretation*, 42/3, July 1988, 229–239.
- <sup>10</sup> I am quoting my notes of his lecture.
- <sup>11</sup> Walter Brueggemann, "Jeremiah: Intense Criticism/Thin Interpretation," *Interpretation*, 42/3, July 1988, 277, 279. I hasten to explain that in this article Brueggemann examines three recent commentaries on Jeremiah, concluding that they are intensely critical but thin on the kind of interpretation that is helpful to preachers and teachers. The words I have quoted are, in the article, particularly referenced to Jeremiah, but I am convinced they clearly apply to scriptural texts generally.
- <sup>12</sup> Brueggemann, *Finally Comes the Poet*, 115.