

**EP:** Young people today do seem to be more attuned to factors of authenticity than I remember from my younger years. Their radar just seems to be more sensitive to it. If something doesn't feel authentic they automatically devalue it.

This is not to denigrate technology *per se*, but “slick” has got to be really good not to become offensive. Even something as innocuous as PowerPoint can be intrusive. Some speakers and preachers use it and other technologies ostensibly to reinforce communication, but I'm not so sure it always aids in ways they hope, or even helps get or keep people's attention. Such things can put a buffer or barrier between speaker and audience. The argument that multi-sensory presentation heightens communication may carry some weight, but it also can simply lead to sensory overload. In public speaking or preaching it can derail any expectation or onus of imagination on the part of sermon-hearers. Despite this, the human mind is still enormously capable of imagination.

**MD:** First and foremost, is a biblical vision of God our focus in worship today? Does our worship help make clearer who God is? Does our pattern of worship testify to the character of God? Would our worship offer a visiting observer a consistent portrayal of the God of the Bible? Would we or that visitor recognize our need to respond to God's initiatives in our lives, or are we so focused on how we worship that we have forgotten who we worship?

**EP:** Helpful distinctions.

**MD:** Earl is there anything you'd like to reiterate or add to our conversation?

**EP:** Well, for us to remember that worship always has two aspects: a downward, revelatory one, and an upward, experiential and responsive one. Revelation always informs experience, and not the other way around, but we continually do need to ask ourselves as leaders how to better connect with people, to be in tune with what draws them to worship in the first place. What made you want to believe, to trust in the trustworthiness of Christ? What makes you want to worship, to grow, to serve? How does worship address and help fulfill these goals?

Part of a pastor's opportunity (responsibility) is to get to know parishioners' “journey stories,” their joys and concerns, their challenges and fears—what's happening to them and around them inside and outside of church. The best teachers all believe that their students won't survive in the world without learning their subject matter. It's that important to them.

to wine story obviously justifies the Lord's Supper." Give me a break! That miracle baffled everyone at Cana in John's account just as much as everyone since. This kind of approach eviscerates preaching. How can you take the text seriously? You can't preach on that.

Or, for example, Dibelius suggests,<sup>7</sup> that certain second- or third-century pseudo-Pauline authors wrote in 2 Timothy about Lois and Eunice, Timothy's supposed grandmother and mother, in order somehow to show the importance of the church's role in cultivating the faith of young Christians. These women are written off as mere fabrications. These supposed Jewish mothers and their care for Timothy are only acknowledgements that the church has Jewish roots. So an elaborate handling of Lois and Eunice as symbols of this Jewish root system is concocted.

Now, you're a preacher and are supposed to preach this? I'm glad for more recent scholars like Luke Timothy Johnson, who've basically said, "No, this isn't what happened. This makes no sense at all. This is just silliness. The letter was written by St. Paul about real people." Of course, this is my own view.

Or think of how Helmut Thielicke, in his theological ethics, contrasts Paul Tillich and Karl Barth. Tillich raises his "correlation questions" and goes to the so-called "Easter Faith" of the church for answers. Barth, on the other hand, starts with the text then moves to the world. Then the collisions occur. For example, the Barmen Declaration, which he largely wrote, doesn't even mention Nazism or the Aryan Paragraph. But it moves indirectly to and collides with the premises behind them to state the faith of the confessing church in World War II Germany.

Thielicke calls this the biblical theological model of Barth versus the theoretical speculative model of Tillich. Guess which one of these theologians has been more durable? Tillich is so stylized, so stuck in a certain frame of reference. It didn't ring true to begin with, and still doesn't ring true. James McCord, who was president of Princeton Seminary, said, "Today's relevance is tomorrow's irrelevance."

Where Tillich begs the question, as do some modern approaches to preaching, is in the essential method, that more or less says, "I get to ask the questions. I only ask the questions to which I want answers." This amounts to controlling the story. Compare Paul as we've already seen in 1 Corinthians 15. He essentially is saying, "No, there is a concrete truth. We may prophesy, but our word is not final."

7. Dibelius and Conzelmann, *Pastoral Epistles*, 98.

I can't really say I'd given him all these great truths, or mentored him, or spent a long time discipling him. But at least I'd introduced him to Jesus Christ. He didn't say, "Oh, your wonderful teaching on this or that always stuck with me." He just said, "When I dismissed Jesus as an idea or a person, he still haunted me."

So, yes, I believe we have to take the long view. In his final letter, it was a mature St. Paul who near the end of his life wasn't desperate or frantic. He just told Timothy, "Fulfill your ministry. God will show you." I like that. Arrogant teachers don't say that. They say, "I've shown you!" Not Paul. Now, he wasn't shy to say, "Timothy, you've learned some important things from me, by watching me." After all, the young man was from Lystra. Paul had been pretty well beaten up there. Timothy knew that, as well as Paul's steadiness and faithfulness. So, after fifty-five years of ministry, the more I like this model, this day-to-day, week-to-week steadiness and faithfulness.

**MD:** Let's shift direction a bit. What about the so-called "New Homiletic?" As I understand it, it's related to a sense of preaching only as shared story. Might it involve suspicion about objective (much less propositional) truth being contained in the biblical witness? We can only trust our own sense about it, what we think about it, or what we share in it. If this is so, it seems to me that an objective ground of reality and authority is lost, or at least has shifted, or is elusive. The best a preacher can hope to do is preach in a way that everyone can recognize their own story in what's being said, and share in it with others.

**EP:** While helpful in other ways, some aspects of critical scholarship contribute to this mistrust by suggesting that the message of the text shouldn't be taken at face value, or that what it purports to mean is not appropriate for us today because it was framed at a time when the church just needed to teach about one thing or another, and came up with a helpful story.

For example, think of Bultmann's conjectures<sup>6</sup> about John's gospel account of Jesus' first miracle turning water to wine at a wedding in Galilee. He suggests that the early church needed to validate the practice of the Lord's Supper, or that it needed to counter views at the time about wine and Greek gods, to offer some sort of Christian response or reinterpretation. So this water to wine story was concocted. This so affects the way we read this passage! It's form criticism gone crazy. When they ask, "What was the setting in the church that generated this story?" then say, "Oh the water

6. Bultmann, *Gospel of John*, 118.

a king can speak indifferently about what it's like to be a king and to give a great kingly gift. God knows how to speak about God.<sup>3</sup>

He does it just right. As you say, God will validate himself.

EP: It may not be today. It may not be tomorrow. One worship service will never capture everyone. But, like Timothy, we're going to work hard, but wait it out. Take the long view (*makrothumia*), not the short one (*epithumia*). Don't let runaway desires to make it all happen today take over. Take time. Don't panic.

Obviously, it isn't a monastic solution that Paul is urging. He's not telling Timothy to withdraw. But he is advising him not to be deceived (3:13) by false teachers and teaching.

The word for deceiver (*planos*) comes from the Greek verb that means "to wander" or "lead astray." The Greeks didn't know what Copernicus knew, but they did recognize that some stars twinkled and some didn't. The ones that didn't twinkle, however, wandered. They moved across the sky. These were the planets, and the Greeks knew that if you tried to navigate by them at sea, you'd be lost. If you set your sights on Venus or Mars you wouldn't get where you wanted. John uses the same word in his first letter. "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves" (*planaō*) (1:8). We're detoured. We're adrift. We're vectored. It's not the truth.

In a way, we have to help people who are adrift, who've vectored off course, who've lost their way. But we don't do this by condemning them. We help them by teaching through whatever the difficulty is, and showing them how material the Scriptures are. This is why Paul tells Timothy to hold fast to what he has learned, even from childhood: the sacred writings, that is, the text, the OT and by implication the NT. As Calvin emphasized, the OT by anticipation will always bring us to its living center Jesus Christ. The NT by witness will always bring us to its living center: Jesus Christ. The text is not a *planos* (planet). It's not a wandering star. It's a twinkling star. We can navigate safely and securely by it.

This is why Paul's advice to Timothy is so important, and so important to the thrust of what you're urging for worship: trust the text to bring the people to God, not the community, not the church. I love the church. I love its fellowship, but the church can be a *planos*. Remember what Karl Barth says, "The church moves through history in understanding and in

3. Cf. Pascal, "Theology & Philosophy," 236.