

A WITNESS TO THE CITY: A HOMILETICAL THEOLOGY FOR URBAN PREACHING

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Introduction

Preaching is a demanding calling. This has always been the case, I suspect, and in the twenty-first century these demands are as intense as ever, with each preaching situation presenting its own unique difficulties. There are some contexts, however, that present the preacher with challenges more complex than others. After preaching to a rural congregation in Cobourg, Ontario, for almost ten years, I took a position at a church in Toronto and immediately began to preach to an urban audience. The differences were many. New challenges emerged, both in preaching to those who were already members of the church as well as to those in our community whom we were trying to reach.

This comes as no surprise to anyone who is the least bit familiar with the contrast between urban and rural life. Although the differences between the two have narrowed in recent decades, there was a stark contrast between these two congregations. One was almost completely Caucasian, the other highly multi-ethnic. One was located in a town where church attendance was higher than the national average with little evidence of non-Christian religion. The other was in an area that was less churched, and where there was evidence of many non-Christian faith groups.

This provokes the question, “Does the diversity found in the city demand a particular homiletical theology?” Further, what kind of homiletical strategy could make preachers effective in urban ministry?

In this paper I want to propose that the answer to the first question is both “yes” and “no.” This is not because I don’t want to take a clear stand

(I say defensively, trying to convince myself!) We should recognize that the homiletical strategy necessary for urban preaching is much like any preaching strategy that tries to address the postmodern culture in which we work. But I want to emphasize that in preaching to an urban Canadian audience, there are dynamics in play that make the kind of strategy I want to present here even more important. Urban preaching heightens the demand for a specific homiletical theology. If we are called to preach in the city, our approach must take into account the realities of Canadian urban life. If it does not, we may weaken our long-term effectiveness.

1. A Glimpse at Rural and Urban Canada

While this paper does not intend to present a detailed comparison of differences between rural and urban areas, it is useful to consider comparisons in some key areas in order to appreciate the need for a homiletical strategy attuned to the demands of urban Canada.

The following statistics, while rudimentary, illustrate significant differences between urban and rural populations across the country.¹

Ontario

	Toronto	Cobourg
Population	2,481,494	17,170
Ethnicity		
Born in Canada	48.3% (1,198,815)	86.7% (14,890)
Foreign Born	48.9% (1,214,630)	10.8% (1,855)
Religion		
Non-Christian Faiths	19.5% (485,400)	0.7% (125)
No Religious Beliefs	18.6% (463,165)	16.5% (2,850)
Education: University Degree		
Age 20-34	36.4%	14.6%
Age 35-44	36.3%	15.9%
Age 45-64	29.6%	16.2%

1. These statistics are taken from the 2001 Canadian Census accessed at <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/Profil01/CP01/>.

Alberta

	Edmonton	Brooks
Population	666,104	11,604
Ethnicity		
Born in Canada	76.3% (508,830)	90.1% (10,460)
Foreign Born	21.5% (143,335)	8.0% (930)
Religion		
Non-Christian Faiths	8.4% (56,000)	2.5% (295)
No Religious Beliefs	24.0% (160,150)	22.4% (2,610)
Education: University Degree		
Age 20-34	22.9%	8.7%
Age 35-44	21.93%	8.5%
Age 45-64	24.1%	10.0%

British Columbia

	Vancouver	Cranbrook
Population	545,671	18,476
Ethnicity		
Born in Canada	51.2% (279,510)	90.5% (16,735)
Foreign Born	45.3% (247,635)	8.0% (1,485)
Religion		
Non-Christian Faiths	15.1% (82,500)	0.8% (165)
No Religious Beliefs	41.7% (227,925)	29.9% (5,525)
Education: University Degree		
Age 20-34	39.7%	11.2%
Age 35-44	37.7%	11.0%
Age 45-64	33.0%	14.7%

This brief comparison of urban–rural demographics reveals at least three key differences between urban populations and rural ones that certainly should have an effect on our approach to preaching. First, the number of people born outside Canada, often from non-anglo ethnic groups, is much larger in urban areas. This is true throughout Canada. Nine of Canada’s ten largest cities have immigrant populations of 16% or higher (Quebec City is the only exception with less than 5%).² Of those who immigrated to

2. Eric Fong, “Immigration and the City,” in Harry H. Hiller (ed.), *Urban Canada: Sociological Perspectives* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 117-37 (122).

Canada between 1991 and 2001, 88% settled in one of Canada's five largest cities.³ Secondly, many new Canadians bring their faith traditions with them, and continue to practice them in their new land. Because most immigrants stay in the city, there are more adherents of non-Christian religions in the city than in rural settings. Thirdly, educational levels are much higher in Canadian cities than in rural areas. This may reflect the number and kind of employment opportunities available in the city as opposed to rural areas. Of course, many other issues that flavour urban ministry could be considered, such as fluidity of the population and concentrated poverty and crime, just to name a few.⁴

These sociological realities of the urban setting, combined with the prevailing postmodern ethos of Canadian culture in general, where meta-narratives are treated with suspicion, and authoritarian voices are shunned as untrustworthy, calls for a homiletical approach that meets these challenges. Contextualization is a historic practice of the Christian church and is essential to its missional nature. Preaching in the Canadian urban context demands a contextualized homiletic. So we turn to the question: how can preachers faithfully proclaim the gospel in the context of the post-modernism and cultural diversity of our major cities?

2. A Homiletical Theology for Urban Preaching

a. Situating our Context

It goes without saying that our context is not that of John Calvin in Geneva, where he preached to a society that was Christian in its official commitments and where heresy was not just doctrinal deviation but a threat to civil order. The community shared the preacher's foundational ideals and values. There was a certain homogeneity in the culture. People had a reasonable level of biblical knowledge and an appreciation for

3. Fong, "Immigration and the City," p. 121. These cities are Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, Ottawa–Gatineau, and Calgary.

4. See Larry S. Bourne, "Urban Canada in Transition to the Twenty-First Century: Trends, Issues, and Visions," in Trudi Bunting and Pierre Filion (eds.), *Canadian Cities in Transition: The Twenty-First Century* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 26-51.

common symbols and images.⁵ This allowed the renowned theologian and preacher to speak with the assumption that the preaching office has an inherent authority. The preacher's words were given respect; they were to be trusted. Preachers in a Canadian setting do not have such a luxury, especially in the urban setting.

Old Testament scholar and homiletician, Walter Brueggemann, writes,

There was a time, perhaps 250 years ago, when a Christian preacher could count on the shared premises of the listening community, reflective of a large theological consensus. There was a time, when the *assumption of God* completely dominated Western imagination, and the holy Catholic Church roughly uttered the shared consensus of all parties. That consensus was rough and perhaps not very healthy, but at least the preacher could work from it.⁶

This situation may have been an anomaly as opposed to the norm, but it certainly presents a great contrast to our day. With the lack of anything close to a Christian cultural consensus in Canada, our situation may be more like that of ancient Israel when they were in exile in Babylonia. They lived in a culture that marginalized and even rejected their God and his laws.

This is not to equate our experience with the horrors of displacement experienced by the people of Judah in 587 BCE, but it is to assert that exile is not merely geographic. As Brueggemann says, "Exile is not primarily geographical, but it is social, moral and cultural."⁷ Exile is, in its very essence, living away from home. This is at the heart of Christian faith, as we live away from our ultimate eschatological home. We experience exile now as we understand ourselves to be a distinct people: a people called by God to be *his* people, a people who see the world in a different way, who are defined by a relationship with the God we understand to be supreme, who seek to live our lives in a way that is consistent with this belief, often in ways very different from those of the dominant culture. That is why the

5. See John H. Leith, "Calvin's Doctrine of the Proclamation of the Word and its Significance for Today," in Timothy George (ed.), *John Calvin and the Church* (Louisville, KY: Westminster / John Knox Press, 1990), pp. 206-29.

6. Walter Brueggemann, *Deep Memory, Exuberant Hope: Contested Truth in a Post-Christian World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), p. 1.

7. Walter Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home: Preaching among Exiles* (Louisville, KY: Westminster / John Knox Press, 1997), p. 2.

authors of the New Testament refer to the church as “strangers and aliens” in the world (Jas 1:1; 1 Pet. 1:1). Such is exile.

For Calvin, and maybe for former generations of Canadians, exile was less intense. The church had a form of cultural power that came about as a result of the strength of both the Catholic and Protestant movements. The general Christian consensus that was latent in Canadian culture in the early part of the twentieth century made the church’s “exile” comfortable.⁸ The shifting sands of postmodern culture and the changing landscape of urban settings have made it far less comfortable.

The dramatic changes in the Canadian social landscape over the last 30 years have radically repositioned the church in our society. This is not to lay blame or even to lament this loss too loudly. It is not to blame new Canadians for coming to this land they now call home, and in which they have every right to celebrate their culture and practice their faith. To hastily decry our current cultural context is to overlook aspects of postmodern thought and society that give hope for cultural renewal. It is, however, essential that we recognize the displacement.

b. *Testimony as Homiletical Method*

If we do not recognize the cultural transitions and the results they have generated, we are ill-equipped for ministry in this culture. If, indeed, exile is a useful motif for the church’s self understanding, it is clear that we need a homiletical theology that is able to address such realities. Stepping into this void, Brueggemann sees “testimony” as an extremely viable homiletical tool. He understands testimony, which was at the heart of ancient Israel’s practice while in exile, as the way forward in an increasingly uninterested (at best) and hostile (at worst) culture. He writes,

The genre of *testimony* (as bid for assent), rather than *proclamation* (on assumption of universal consensus), is how ancient Israel proceeded to claim truth in a like situation. It is how we might, I suggest, rethink the sermon.⁹

8. See Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity: The Protestant Churches and Social Welfare in Canada, 1900–1940* (Montreal: McGill – Queens University Press, 1996). The authors outline the significant influence of the church on Canadian culture during the first half of the last century.

9. Brueggemann, *Deep Memory*, p. 19.

Brueggemann provides a careful study of numerous Old Testament texts and their speech constructions to argue his case for the appropriateness of this motif.¹⁰ He contends that testimony provides an alternate mode of knowledge. It need be no less certain, though it may lack the positivistic objectivism of former models and ways of knowing.¹¹ Of particular note is the role of Second Isaiah, who most fully embodies the attempt to testify about Yahweh and his ways while in the midst of Babylonian captivity, where Israel's truth claims were marginalized and their legitimacy questioned not only by the dominant culture but also by those belonging to the exiled community. Deutero-Isaiah offers a subversive testimony to his people that Yahweh reigns and hope is alive (Isa. 40:10-11; 41:10) and that Israel still has a crucial role to play among the nations (52:7-10). This occurs in the midst of the powerlessness of captivity in a foreign land, the desolation of the cherished temple, the sacking of Jerusalem and the seeming end of the Davidic monarchy. In this context, Isaiah's speech is a "counter testimony," a word that offers a different vision of reality, one that is rooted in God-given hope and calls for a subversive certainty that believes God will bring about Israel's restoration despite all the surrounding evidence to the contrary.

The postmodern milieu of twenty-first-century Canadian life, particularly in our pluralized cities, calls for an equally bold and even subversive truth-speech. It calls for a truth "from below" in the face of a "stronger truth" that is hegemonic.¹² Thus, for Brueggemann, the paradigm of testimony, used so effectively by the ancient prophet in an exilic context, is once again necessary.

c. *The Courtroom as Metaphor*

Brueggemann's use of the courtroom analogy shows what he means by testimony. He posits that in the court, those summoned to be witnesses come to tell what they know. Their claims are not loud, arrogant or

10. Brueggemann, *Deep Memory*, p. 19. Indeed the whole of Brueggemann's project is founded upon this testimony motif.

11. Brueggemann, *Deep Memory*, p. 19. See p. 119 n. 6, where Brueggemann acknowledges the helpfulness of C.A.J. Coady, *Testimony: A Philosophical Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

12. Brueggemann, *Deep Memory*, p. 21.

sweeping. They are modest, but can most certainly be powerful and compelling. Making these claims usually calls for courage on the part of the speakers. Their claims are local in that they make no grand claim other than that the testimony is about what the witness has seen, heard and experienced. The testimonies are characteristically fragmented as they tell only part of the whole story. But they can be highly persuasive and powerful, having the ability to sway the jury and influence the verdict. Finally, these claims as presented by faithful witnesses are also contested and open to cross-examination and counter-testimony.¹³

This metaphor, rooted as it is in Israel's exilic life, is offered as the key to understanding faithful speech in an environment where speech about Yahweh is increasingly alternative. Thus, in keeping with the courtroom metaphor, the sermon is relocated from the judge's bench to the witness box.¹⁴ Put in a historical context, it would be right to understand that Calvin preached from the judge's bench when he mounted his pulpit in Geneva. He spoke from the place of authority, offering binding verdicts that were expected to be followed and accepted. In the courtroom model, today's preacher serves most effectively speaking from the witness stand, as one who is offering testimony to the court. It is speech given as evidence, open to cross-examination and counter-testimony, with the hope that it will persuade the listener that the truth offered is indeed the appropriate way to construe reality.

d. *Biblical Use of Testimony as a Motif*

Brueggeman illustrates his point with the words of Isa. 43:8-13, where God invites his witnesses into a theological contest between themselves and witnesses to other gods. This is one of several "trial speeches" in Isaiah. These are daring speeches, as they go straight to the nerve center of the Babylonian empire, its religious cult. Isaiah uses the rhetoric of a civil case, where the outcome turns on a claim and its admission or dismissal.¹⁵

13. Brueggemann, *Deep Memory*, p. 19. See also Walter Brueggeman, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), for a full exploration of the courtroom metaphor.

14. Brueggemann, *Deep Memory*, p. 21.

15. Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), p. 63.

Isaiah 43:8-13 signals a change in these speeches, however, as God calls Israel to be his witnesses. Previously, in Isa. 41:1-5 and 21-29, God has spoken as his own witness, but in chapter 43, the Israelites are now called to bear witness and testify on behalf of their God against the witnesses of the foreign gods.

Isaiah 41–43 includes a summons to the nations to gather and to bring witnesses to justify themselves. In v. 10, the people of Israel are summoned to witness on their God’s behalf even though they are referred to as blind and deaf (Isa. 43:8; cf. 42:19; 6:9-10). Nonetheless, they are deemed to be the only ones qualified to give testimony on Yahweh’s behalf. Using the courtroom image, he calls them to act faithfully against the claims of those from other nations who try to justify themselves and make a case against God’s superiority. The contest is one of truth claims, spoken by witnesses, of which Israel is one. They are to offer their counter-testimony against that of the other nations who testify for their gods. Everything depends upon the witnesses. It is not about convincing proofs, but rather about compelling testimony. It is because Israel is instructed, authorized and empowered by God to tell the assembled nations about the Yahwistic version of truth that there is a possibility for the story of the world to be narrated differently.¹⁶

Such discourse is ongoing in the story of God, his people and their life in this world. In another contest of truth claims, and in a very different courtroom, Pilate asks Jesus, “What is truth?” (Jn 18:38). This question is endlessly posed and rings in the ears of the faithful. It calls for testimony.¹⁷

In the New Testament, the author of Acts records Jesus’ words to his disciples in Acts 1:8: “and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” New Testament scholar, I. Howard Marshall, remarks that we can take Acts 1:8 as a summary of the whole book’s contents.¹⁸ Indeed, Luke’s second volume is designed to depict the apostles giving testimony, or bearing witness, to the

16. Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40–66* (Westminster Bible Companion; Louisville, KY: Westminster / John Knox Press, 1998), p. 57.

17. Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40–66*, p. 57.

18. I. Howard Marshall, *Acts* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries; Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980), p. 25.

resurrection in particular, and to the whole of the Christian message in general.¹⁹ To do this, the author employs the word built on the root *martur-* (e.g. *martureō* and *marturion*, “bear witness” and “testimony”) to depict a central theme of his book.

These words refer to the Twelve and their role as special witnesses, as well as to Paul and ultimately to the Christian community as a whole as they give testimony to the world regarding the action of God in Christ.²⁰ Studies have demonstrated that these terms have the same “forensic” or legal overtones as the courtroom analogy in Isaiah.²¹

The speeches of major characters in Acts are often testimonies of people who have been chosen to bear witness to Jesus and his saving activities. They simply tell what they have experienced.²² In fact, several studies have suggested that it is not just the speeches, but the entire book of Acts that operates as a witness. It has been suggested that the “we passages” in sections of the work help endorse this idea as they indicate that the author was a witness of the message of the witnesses.²³ Given the forensic overtones of the word *marturion*, it amounts to “Luke offering legally acceptable evidence for Christ which will be admitted as valid in the wider court of life itself. The readers stand in that law court, not bearing testimony, but listening to the testimony Acts provides.”²⁴ Once the readers render their verdict, they too have the opportunity to become witnesses and bear further testimony to what they believe to be true.

In this sense, Acts begins to develop preaching patterns for the church to follow. Luke seems quite clear that “testimony” was the apostolic method

19. C.K. Barrett, *Acts: A Shorter Commentary* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2002), p. 6.
20. Peter Bolt, “Mission and Witness,” in I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson (eds.), *Witness to the Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 191-214 (192).
21. Bolt, “Mission and Witness,” p. 193.
22. F.F. Bruce notes the many places where this term is utilized. See F.F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), p. 103.
23. Bolt, “Mission and Witness,” p. 193. See also, Stanley E. Porter, *Paul in Acts* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2001), especially chapters 2 and 3 where Porter treats the “we” passages extensively.
24. Bolt, “Mission and Witness,” p. 213.

of preaching,²⁵ that is, the apostles offered a testimony of what they had been witnesses to. Paul himself, in Acts 22:18 and 26:22, refers to his speech as testimony. This was an apt strategy in a culture that was as pluralistic as the one into which the gospel was born. It was a culture where the message of Christ was being presented to Jews and Greeks, to the cultured and uncultured, who were listening to the teaching of the apostles as an alternate truth claim. The speakers of this message were witnesses called to testify to and contend for the truth of their God against the competing truth claims of the Roman Empire. Howard Marshall writes, “It is hard to resist the impression that the sermons that appear in Luke’s history of the early church are presented as models for Luke’s readers to use for their own evangelism.”²⁶

3. The Direction and Goal of an Urban Homiletic

Thus, a homiletical theology for today that is rooted in the biblical motif of courtroom testimony puts the preacher in the witness box. It finds its power in persuasion, not in the authority of privileged position. By testimony we do not mean the kind of warm, experience-based ramblings of an old-fashioned Sunday evening church service. Rather it is the speech of the courtroom witness who boldly offers the “truth” to the assembled court—passionately, humbly, clearly, compellingly and persuasively. Such speech is not haughty; it offers rather than insists, even though the witnesses are convinced that what they speak of is right and real. It is informed by hearing, seeing, experiencing and analyzing. Its words are open to cross-examination and counter-testimony. Usually the witness does not even have a chance to clarify or respond. Sometimes even the most faithful witness is made to look foolish or unbelievable. Yet it is testimony that has the power to convict, convince and convert. Such is the speech of the preacher in exile, with authority that flows not from an office but from a powerful testimony of hope and faith. Effective preaching in this postmodern age will come from the witness stand and will see its main function as testimony to a God revealed through a text that has in its view an alternative way of construing the world. It will come as speech from outside

25. Bruce, *Acts*, p. 37.

26. Marshall, *Acts*, p. 33.

the dominant culture, and call for living subversively in a bold endeavor to show the power of God, and of the text, by how we live.

This, then, is the goal of preaching in any age. But it is very important today, and especially in our cities, to help Christians re-imagine their lives as a community of people called to embody the life of Christ in their midst, and thus serve as a light to the city in which they live. Preaching to the city finds its full effect not in its speech from the pulpit to the congregation but in its power to shape a people and to empower the church to become an expression of the truth it proclaims. Just as the testimony of Isaiah was a call to the community of Israel to act as a witness to Yahweh, and the testimony of the apostles as recorded by Luke was intended to form a community and lay foundations for their own behavior as witnesses to the resurrection, the postmodern urban preacher must preach to form a community that can become infinitely more powerful than one single voice can ever be. The power of urban preaching is found in its ability to form a witnessing community. As theologian Kevin Vanhoozer has written,

What is needed then is a translation of the Gospel that goes beyond propositions—a translation that would concretize the Gospel in individual and communal shapes of living. Proclamations of the Gospel must be accompanied by performances that embody in new situations the wisdom and love of God embodied in the cross.²⁷

This is the goal and the real hope of preaching in any setting, and most dramatically in an urban setting where the city is less inclined, because of its diverse ethnic, religious and professional make-up, to embrace unfamiliar propositional claims.

Preaching that shapes the life of a community is best done as preachers see themselves as a part of the overall testimony of the church. It is *this* testimony that finally matters—the embodiment of the gospel in a community and the individual testimonies of faith that its members bear in their own spheres of influence. Every church has an ongoing dialogue that shapes its life and witness. The testimony of preaching is simply one part

27. Kevin Vanhoozer, “Theology and the Condition of Postmodernity: A Report on the Knowledge (of God),” in Kevin Vanhoozer (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 3-25 (24).

of the church's overall testimony to the city. Preachers join the conversation that the church is already engaged in, seeking to offer their preaching as a formative contribution to, but not more important than, the overall conversation of the church. The preacher's testimony is a part of a conversation that shapes and defines a community.²⁸

This again calls for decentralizing the preaching event. Against the view of a traditional reformational theology that presents the sermon as "the word of God," preaching should be properly placed as a part of the life of a people who themselves are designed to be a "word of God," or as Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "a letter of Christ" (2 Cor. 3:3). It is the testimony (or witness) of the church that is the ultimate preaching event. Thus, the sermon needs to contribute to, stimulate and energize the congregation's conversation. It is this living conversation that becomes the testimony to the world through both its speech and its practice of an alternate reality.

4. *Application*

Two points are essential to applying such a homiletical strategy to contemporary preaching.

a. *Preaching Must Tell the Story of God by Being Radically Centered around the Biblical Text*

The goal of this homiletical strategy is not to diminish the role of the sermon or the Bible, but to cast a vision for the preacher as one who takes the stand and offers a daring account of the world as it is narrated by the Bible. Preaching must be Bible-centered if it is to truly offer a distinct and subversive alternative to its hearers. If it is to have formative power for the church it must present a truly biblical perspective, the foundation of Christian identity.

Thus, the preacher's testimony is biblical and expository, a conscientious exploration of the biblical text. It is radically text-centered as it seeks to narrate the scriptural story that informs the congregation's conversation about the text and the God that it reveals.

28. O. Wesley Allen Jr, *The Homiletic of All Believers: A Conversational Approach* (Louisville, KY: Westminster / John Knox Press, 2005), pp. 40-42.

b. *Preaching Must Seek to Continue to Write the Story of our God*

The goal of preaching is to form a community that sees itself as continuing to tell and enact the story of Yahweh through its collective life. As the church is formed by the story of God in Christ, we are also commissioned to be performers of the story and thus to continue its narrative power in our own context.

In the postmodern milieu, where “truth” is most often deemed to be found in individual experience, the text that will be read and scrutinized for its truth is not the Bible, but the church. The goal of preaching is to help form a church “text” fit to be read by the whole world. Thus, the preacher must always preach with the goal of forming a community that practices God’s word. Greater knowledge is never enough; it is only as good as the way it works itself out in the everyday practice of individual and congregational life.

Conclusion

Perhaps the homiletic called for in the Canadian city is not radically different from the homiletic called for in most Canadian settings; however, to preach effectively in the city we must recognize its distinctives and speak in a language and style that is appropriate. The challenge of multi-cultural congregations, religiously plural communities and an educated population must be taken seriously. I am convinced that preaching will be most effective if it offers the gospel in the form of testimony, given from the place of the witness stand. It will be presented with the authority of witnesses who speak with the conviction that what they are offering the court is a true accounting of things. Such speech, as it contributes to the story of a church, has the power to shape a community that embodies a testimony of life to its city.

The rock band U2, in its song “YAHWEH” (which is a prayer; and I think, belongs in our hymnals), sings:

Take this city; a city should be shining on a hill.

Take this city, if it be your will.²⁹

Surely God longs for our cities to be shining lights of love, grace, justice and peace. Such can be the case if communities of exiles are shaped according to a biblical alternate view of the world. Preachers who offer a witness to the subversive acts of Yahweh help form testifying communities that act as witnesses to the city both by what they say and by how they live their life together.

29. Lyrics by Bono with the Edge, “YAHWEH,” from the CD by U2, *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb* (Island Records, Universal Music Publishing, 2004), Catalogue Number 000361302.