

Editor's Notes

C. K. ROBERTSON*

“We’ve got a God who has something to say to us!” It is probably little surprise to any reader that those words come from Presiding Bishop Michael Bruce Curry.¹ After fifteen years serving as bishop of the Diocese of North Carolina, in 2015 he was elected and installed as the twenty-seventh presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church, the first African American to serve as chief pastor and primate of the denomination or, in his words, the CEO—chief evangelistic officer—of the Episcopal Branch of the Jesus Movement. He was quite clear from well before the election that he would bring a focus on evangelism and reconciliation, and quickly became well known throughout both the church and the global Anglican Communion of which the Episcopal Church is a constituent part.²

Thirty years ago, I wrote a booklet entitled *The Kerygma of Billy Graham*.³ Graham was, without dispute, the foremost preacher in the last half of twentieth-century American Christianity. While some scoffed at his fervor or criticized his politics, thousands of people at a time flocked to hear the evangelist from North Carolina in stadiums

* C. K. Robertson is Canon to the Presiding Bishop for Ministry beyond the Episcopal Church and Distinguished Visiting Professor at General Theological Seminary. He is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and former executive director of the award-winning “Film Clips for Character Education” program. He also serves as general editor of the Studies in Episcopal & Anglican Theology series (Peter Lang Publishing), and has written over a dozen books, including *Barnabas vs. Paul* and *Why Go to Church?*

¹ “Preaching Moment 011: Michael Curry,” Center for Biblical Preaching at Luther Seminary, 2007, accessed online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9w7sLNR7dAQ>.

² “The fact that Curry is African American, a descendant of slaves, leading an overwhelmingly white denomination often characterized as ‘God’s frozen chosen,’ merely adds to his aura.” See Randall Balmer, “Love Is the Only Way: How a Black Preacher’s Royal Wedding Address Showed the Power of a Good Sermon,” *The Washington Post*, May 21, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2018/05/21/love-is-the-only-way-how-a-black-preachers-royal-wedding-address-showed-the-power-of-a-good-sermon/?utm_term=.a61b60ed92f9.

³ Winter Park, Fla.: Worldwide Press, 1987. Adapted from a senior thesis for Virginia Tech, the booklet was published and used in the Billy Graham Schools of Evangelism.

throughout the country and around the world. This past year, in a historic moment on May 19, 2018, Bishop Curry—another evangelist from North Carolina—preached at the royal wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle, now the Duke and Duchess of Sussex. It has been said that his thirteen-and-a-half-minute message on the power of love was seen by over two billion people, as the presiding bishop became, quite simply, the most famous preacher in the world.⁴

I had the pleasure of taking the initial call to explore the possibility of him preaching at the royal wedding and then accompanying him on that historic trip. (Yes, it is true that his initial reaction to hearing about the invitation was to ask if it was an April Fool’s prank). How fascinating to watch the faces of royal family members, celebrities, and other wedding guests in St. George’s Chapel, Windsor, as Bishop Curry preached. Expressions ranged from shock to bemusement to rapt attention. One thing, however, is certain: no one was bored! He quoted various scriptural passages, an African American spiritual, a biblical scholar, a French Jesuit, and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. And, yes, he said a little something about love. Years ago, he himself noted, “Preaching needs to have a message.”⁵ The message that people heard that day was all about love, a magnificent, divine love made manifest in the person of Jesus.⁶ In fact, love is mentioned over sixty times in that one sermon, and not in a merely sentimental sense—he was quite clear about that—but rather as a choice, an intentional decision, God’s decision to love us, our decision to love God and one another. This, then, is Michael Curry’s *kerygma*, and has been for many years.⁷ And on that spring day, before a global audience, Bishop Curry did what he has done so many times before. He reminded everyone that

⁴ Blair Donovan, “Royal Wedding by the Numbers: 10 Jaw-Dropping Facts and Figures from Prince Harry and Meghan Markle’s Wedding,” *Brides*, May 21, 2018, <https://www.brides.com/story/royal-wedding-by-the-numbers>.

⁵ “Preaching Moment 72: Michael Curry,” Center for Biblical Preaching at Luther Seminary, 2008, accessed online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=09BeGUinykQ> (1:03/2:43).

⁶ A beautifully illustrated gift book appropriately titled *The Power of Love* and containing the text of this message as well as other select sermons of Michael Curry is available through Avery Press, an imprint of Penguin (New York: 2018).

⁷ A decade before, Michael Curry addressed the media at the 2008 Lambeth Conference, saying, “There’s something compelling about sharing the love of Jesus that matters to individuals, and matters to the life of the world.” “Bishop Michael Curry Addresses Media at Lambeth Conference,” the Episcopal Church, July 23, 2008. Accessed online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ereAyF5DKWM>.

God indeed has something to say to us, and in doing so, gave very clear evidence for the importance and power of preaching.

The theme of this special issue of the *Anglican Theological Review*, "Preaching in the Episcopal Tradition," is, at least in part, a testament to the impact of the presiding bishop's personal ministry of proclamation, as well as the church's discernment first in calling a natural-born preacher to be its leader in 2015, and then in renewing its institutional commitment to evangelism (as well as racial reconciliation and the care of creation) at the 79th General Convention in 2018, in Austin, Texas.⁸ As with another special issue of the *ATR* that I had the pleasure of guest editing with Ellen K. Wondra in Winter 2010—"Leadership for Mission"—I hope that this issue will have a broader distribution than usual, and serve as a useful collection of resources for on-the-ground preachers and practitioners of ministry. Everything in this compilation is intended to be not only interesting, but also accessible and practical for both academics and nonacademics alike. This is the hope of the *ATR* board, as well as the Episcopal Preaching Foundation (EPF), cosponsor of this special issue. As you no doubt have already seen, Bishop Michael Curry himself offered the foreword for the issue, and EPF board chair Gary Shilling penned the preface. The remaining contents are divided into three longer academic articles, four shorter pieces in our Practicing Theology section, an introduction to preaching in the twenty-first century followed by three sermons with commentary selected by the EPF leadership, a reflection on a respected figure in preaching, a longer review article, and other individual reviews of books on preaching, as well as the usual impressive array of general book reviews and a half-dozen poems. Contributors were intentionally sought out because of their expertise and experience in the areas covered here.

In the first article, **Clair W. McPherson** walks us through two thousand years of great sermons, choosing ten specific examples from diverse time periods and circumstances to see how each meets the classic criteria of context, craft, and *kerygma*. Beginning with Jesus' own Sermon on the Plain, we go on to examine the comparisons and

⁸ Bishop Curry often points out that this commitment to these three missional "pillars" would not be possible if not for the hard work that was done by his predecessors and other leaders in preceding years. In this way, he reiterates a long-held belief that "we can't do ministry by ourselves . . . we need to walk together." "Preaching Moment 23: Michael Curry," Center for Biblical Preaching at Luther Seminary, 2008, accessed online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7VRYJ9iykJe>.

contrasts in Gregory of Nyssa's sermon for St. Stephen's Day, and the mystic retelling of the biblical narrative by the medieval abbot, Rabanus Maurus. The tenth-century Wulfstan, Archbishop of York, offers a view of the sermon as poetry, while two centuries later Bernard of Clairvaux presents a web-like interweaving of scripture. The English reformer Thomas Cranmer matches the sermon to the Prayer Book, while the Anglican-turned-Roman Catholic John Henry Newman considers the art of analogy. Martin Luther King Jr. points to the healing power of confession, while Susan Hill of Church of the Holy Apostles in present-day New York City uses an artful opening to help us go deeper into the realm of paradox. Finally, Basil the Great shows us what the end of a sermon can do in connecting the message with the personal contexts of those listening.

Biblical scholar **Douglas C. Mohrmann** explores the power of preaching in the New Testament, using as his focal point Romans 1:16–17, with its bold assertion that the oral proclamation of good news is indeed the power of God for salvation. The essay proceeds to address three key questions: What exactly is preaching in the New Testament? What is the function of New Testament preaching? And how does it actually work? As he guides us through his responses to these questions, Mohrmann touches on the ramifications of the early Christian message for Second Temple Judaism, as well as the relationship between apostolic proclamation that reaches and transforms people (*kerygma*) and intentional discipleship (*didaché*). Significant attention is given to the social functions of speech acts, thereby showing the power of a clear message in preaching and how this carries into our own time through various liturgical forms.

In his overview on black Anglican preaching, **Harold T. Lewis** reminds all who might speak of the gospel being “color-blind” that black Anglican preachers have consistently faced the challenge of preaching a message that takes seriously the struggle of those who “live, move, breathe, and have their being in the African American community,” while doing this in the context of a predominantly white, elitist church. Such preachers, Lewis contends, are called to preach in such a way that they comfort the afflicted *and* afflict the comforted, consistently challenging the church to indeed be the church! Citing persons and situations as seemingly diverse as Desmond Tutu standing up against apartheid in South Africa and athletes taking the knee

in present-day America, he walks us through two centuries of black preaching, with special attention given to the experience of black women in the pulpit and the concept of womanism. The reality of institutional racism and sexism that exist in the Episcopal Church and its various counterparts explains the emphasis on catholicity in black Anglican preaching, and also points to the importance of continuing this homiletical mission into the future.

The Practicing Theology section opens with an exciting glimpse at the role of preaching in leading a congregation toward vitality, offered by well-known church planter and congregational developer **Susan Brown Snook**. Asserting that the weekly sermon is the clergy-person's best opportunity to communicate with a majority of parishioners, she goes on to examine the importance of preaching for discipleship, for mission, and as a form of leadership. A pastor who wants to see congregational vitality must therefore preach in a way that educates and inspires, as well as helps the congregation form a clear identity and mission.

Tripp Hudgins takes us into the fascinating world of preaching online and the opportunities it opens up that traditional preaching cannot. Hudgins discusses preaching in social media, live-feed, and online "parish" sermons, and the need to teach online preaching in introductory homiletics courses. Pastor and author **Alberto R. Cutié** considers the challenges and opportunities of preaching in multicultural and multilingual contexts. Drawing on his own considerable experience with fellow Latinos in many different locales, Cutié warns against a "one-size-fits-all" approach to preaching, suggesting that it is far more important to "speak the culture" than it is simply to speak the language. On a very practical level, he offers a brief and helpful overview of various models for preaching in two or more languages.

In a dual interview format, **Luis León**, long-term rector of St. John's Lafayette Square, the "church of the presidents," and **Randolph Marshall Hollerith**, dean of Washington National Cathedral, explore what it means to preach in a politically divided age. Speaking from their unique vantage points and acknowledging their own inadequacies, both address wide-ranging questions, including whether or not their message changes on days when they know the president or another political leader is present, how to deal with controversial topics with civility, when to "rock the boat," and how to explore the

interplay between scripture and theology on the one hand and socio-political realities on the other. It is indeed intriguing to see how these two church leaders respectively address the various questions.

The Episcopal Preaching Foundation presents three unique and powerful samples from its treasure chest of sermons, by homiletical luminaries **Samuel Wells**, **Robert C. Wright**, and **Kate Spelman**, introduced by **Stephen Smith**'s short essay on preaching in the twenty-first century. The three sermons include commentary by the preachers. In these messages we catch a glimpse into the power of the pulpit today.

For countless preachers and seminarians, the leading authority on preaching for decades was Fred B. Craddock, whose life and wisdom are remembered in a personal reflection by long-time homiletics professor **William Brosend**. He shows how Craddock, who came of age during a very turbulent period in our country's life (and who died in 2015) quite literally "changed *everything* about preaching at a time when nothing less would do." With a clever riff on the title lyrics from the popular 1960s song, "Turn, Turn, Turn," Brosend illustrates Craddock's call to preachers to turn from the self to the listener, from deductive to inductive preaching, from diatribes to stories. Craddock took seriously the age and culture in which he lived, and the finest way to honor the man and his legacy, as Brosend so aptly puts it, is to work harder at our own preaching.

Meanwhile **Micah Jackson**, recently appointed president of the Bexley-Seabury Seminary Federation, presents a review article of four recent books by today's homiletical experts. Noting this new period of change and increasing cultural diversity all around us, Jackson points to fresh approaches to the task of preaching found in the works of Sally Brown and Luke Powery, Eunjoo Mary Kim, Carolyn Helsel, and Jared Alcántara. Providing substantive analysis of each of the respective works, Jackson shows how together these authors offer "a path of hope and grace" for today's preachers. His article is aptly complemented by seven reviews of other significant books on preaching. Together, this rich group of reviews gives us a broad view of the scope of contributions in the field of homiletics. And, as noted above, this issue—the first to see print in the *Anglican Theological Review*'s second century—also includes the journal's usual impressive collection of poems and general book reviews.



I began this introduction with my personal thoughts on the impact of Presiding Bishop Michael Curry on preaching, the particular subject of this special issue of the *Anglican Theological Review*. But I would be remiss if I did not also say something about a person who has had a profound impact on this journal itself: **Jackie Winter**, who with this issue retires from twenty-nine years as Managing Editor of the *ATR*. It has been a privilege, and a true pleasure, to work closely with Jackie, not only on this but also in her work as secretary of the House of Bishops Theology Committee. Jackie's contributions to the work of theology in the Episcopal Church cannot be adequately measured, and we are all richer for her faithful and effective, albeit often unseen, ministry. I am so thankful that I could guest edit this issue and thereby have one last wonderful opportunity to collaborate with my dear friend and colleague. Thank you, Jackie!

