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PAUL RICŒUR

POETICS AND RELIGION

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THE HERMENEUTICS OF PAUL RICŒUR

IMPLICATIONS FOR HOMILETICS AND PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

Within the pastoral and practical disciplines of theology, there is one discipline in particular, whose interest in Paul Ricœur's hermeneutics merits discussion. Rather surprisingly, this discussion has hardly taken place, at least in the French speaking world, both catholic and protestant. This discipline is homiletics, or the art of liturgical preaching[1]. Indeed, although Ricœur himself did not develop a specific reflection on homiletics[2], the impact of his work 'on the frontier' of philosophy, theology and exegesis is hailed by all those theologians who paid a tribute to the French thinker after his death[3]. The Pontifical Biblical Commission considers his textual hermeneutics to be one of the absolutely indispensable contributions of contemporary hermeneutics for the interpretation of Scripture in the Catholic Church[4] and can thus offer precious impulses

1. This is probably due to the scarcity of homiletic literature in the French language, especially in the French speaking catholic world. I attempted to establish the benefits of Ricœurian hermeneutics for homiletics in my habilitation thesis *Prêcher l'Ancien Testament aujourd'hui: Un défi herméneutique. À l'épreuve de la situation homilétique contemporaine aux États-Unis et à la lumière du Document de la Commission Biblique Pontificale "Le peuple juif et ses Saintes Écritures dans la Bible chrétienne"* (Théologie pratique en dialogue, 29), Fribourg, Academic Press, 2006, 480-518 mainly, as well as in a few articles, namely *Exégètes et prédicateurs à l'écoute de Paul Ricœur*, in *Écritures* 10 (1995) 93-107; *Théologiens, exégètes et pasteurs à l'école de Paul Ricœur*, in *Foi et Vie* 105 (2006) 19-34; *Paul Ricœur (1913-2005) et la Bible*, in *Revue des sciences religieuses* 80 (2006) 1-20.

2. With the exception of a contribution to the *Cahiers de l'Association des Pasteurs de France*, as part of the volume *Herméneutique … Actualisation … Prédication*, published together with R. Parmentier – H. Blocher in July of 1990 (P. Ricœur's lecture *Herméneutique: Les finalités de l'exégèse biblique*, pp. 3-20) and recently reedited in P. Ricœur, *Herméneutique de la Bible* – H. Blocher, *Prédication de la Bible* – R. Parmentier, *Actualisation de la Bible*, Paris, L'Harmathan, 2005 (P. Ricœur's article on pp. 7-40).

3. For example the articles by D. Müller, *Paul Ricœur (1913-2005): Un philosophe aux prises avec la théologie*, in *Revue théologique de Louvain* 37 (2006) 161-178; E. Lévy, *Le statut du texte biblique à la lumière de l'herméneutique de Ricœur*, in *Revue de théologie et de philosophie* 138 (2006) 355-368; A. Thomasset, *Paul Ricœur et la Bible: Poétique et argumentation*, in F. Mies (ed.), *Bible et philosophie: Les lumières de la raison* (Connaître et croire, 14; Le livre et le rouleau, 30), Namur, Presses Universitaires de Namur; Bruxelles, Lessius, 2007, 99-124; G. Vincent, *La religion de Ricœur* (La religion des philosophes), Paris, L'Atelier, 2008.

4. In the document of the said Pontifical Biblical Commission, *L'interprétation de la Bible dans l'Église*, Paris, Cerf, 1994, pp. 66-69. My own *L'herméneutique philosophique*

for this particular type of textual interpretation required by the homiletic undertaking, which the reformed practical theologian Bernard Reymond calls 'homiletic exegesis'[5].

Moreover, Ricœur himself has given some evocative illustrations in his English sermons, contained in *L'herméneutique biblique*, which I have translated and introduced[6], rendering its 'paradigmatic' style into French[7]. There is nothing like a real sermon to verify the pertinence of a homiletic theory!

Among the disciplines of practical theology, the following article will therefore concentrate primarily on the homiletic discipline, with the hope of thereby bringing a fresh contribution to the subject[8]. We will attempt to work out the benefits that can be gained by contemporary homiletic research and practice by consulting the philosophical and biblical hermeneutics of P. Ricœur, following three principal guidelines: sensitivity towards the literary form of preached texts, as well as for the variety of discursive modes of the biblical Canon (for a preaching attuned to the different literary genres of Scripture); attention to the innovative force of the poetical-metaphorical language of scriptural as well as of homiletic texts (for an imaginative preaching); the recognition of the role of the

de Paul Ricœur et son importance pour l'exégèse biblique: En débat avec la New Yale Theology School (La nuit surveillée), Paris, Cerf; St-Maurice, St-Augustin, 2004, incidentally, is an extensive commentary of the part of the Roman document dedicated to Ricœurian hermeneutics.

5. B. Reymond, *De vive voix: Oraliture et prédication* (Pratique, 18), Geneva, Labor et Fides, 1998, pp. 107-114.

6. P. Ricœur, *L'herméneutique biblique* (trans. and introd. by F.-X. Amherdt) (La nuit surveillée), Paris, Cerf; St-Maurice, St-Augustin, 2001.

7. *Listening to the Parables: Once More Astonished* (*À l'écoute des paraboles: Une fois de plus étonnés*), *ibid.*, 256-265 ['parabolic' homily on Mt 13,31-33.45-46, held originally in 1974 in the Rockefeller chapel at the University of Chicago]; *Whoever Loses Their Life for My Sake Will Find It* (*Celui qui perd sa vie à cause de moi la trouvera*), *ibid.*, 266-272 ['proverbial' homily on Mt 16,25, held on November 25th 1984 at the same location]; and *The Memory of Suffering* (*La mémoire de la souffrance*) [an address with multiple scriptural references (Gn 12,3; Dt 4,9; 6,12; Jr 31,29-30), held on the Holocaust Memorial Day, 1989 during the interreligious celebration of the Emmanuel Congregation in Chicago].

8. According to my own research, only three essays have explored the validity of Ricœurian thought for the art of preaching: an already old article by H. Braunschweiger, *Auf dem Weg zu einer poetischen Homiletik: Einige Aspekte der Hermeneutik Ricœurs als Impuls für die Homiletik*, in *Evangelische Theologie* 39 (1979) 127-143; the compendium by W. Konrad, *Hermeneutik im Spannungsfeld von Exegese und Homiletik: Predigt als Rede- und Leseakt* (Europäische Hochschulschriften. Reihe XXIII: Theologie, 633), Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang, 1988; and the more specific Dutch work by J.C. Vaessen, *Tussen Schrift en preek: Ontwerp van een analysemodel voor de bijbelinterpretatie in preken met gebruikmaking van de tekstuele hermeneutiek van Paul Ricœur*, Kampen, Kok, 1997.

reader / listener, hearing the Scriptures and the homily (for a preaching as an oral discursive act – for the preacher – and an act of hearing – for the congregation) in the homiletical conversation.

In this respect, the evolution of the philosophy of language according to P. Ricœur is in line with the change of directions taken by the reformed and catholic homiletics between 1960-1970, distancing itself from the radical dialectical *theology of the Word* of Karl Barth as well as from the analysis of existence in the light of the kerygmatic core of the gospels by Rudolf Bultmann, both of which manifest a certain mistrust of the 'all too human' factors of preaching, including its essentially linguistic nature. The 'linguistic approach' in Ricœurian philosophy is in line with the much stronger attention paid to the literary and narrative texture of Scripture and to their rhetorical scope by the biblical studies in general, and by homiletic exegesis in particular, in the years following the Second Vatican Council.

I. A Preaching Attuned to the Different Literary Genres of Scripture

1. *The Triad 'Preacher – Text – Congregation'*

All ecclesial preaching involves a relation to one or multiple texts of the Scripture, being a place where humanity today can receive the indispensable confrontation with divine revelation, not reducible to mundane wisdom nor to philosophical teachings or a consensus morality. Within the Catholic Church, since the last Council (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 52), we speak of a 'homily' for liturgical preaching, in the sense of a 'familiar discourse' on the suggested scriptural passages, including times when the sermon is of a more thematic or casual nature[9].

Within the homiletic triad 'preacher – text – congregation', Ricœurian hermeneutics can contribute in a significant way to finding a balance, permitting the biblical texts to be a framework granting the preacher and listeners a guaranteed space for reading and active hearing[10]. Indeed,

9. Cf. in this regard J. Baumgartner, *Verkündigung im Rahmen der Liturgie*, in G. Schüepp (ed.), *Handbuch zur Predigt*, Zürich – Einsiedeln – Köln, Herder, 1982, 433-458; F. Wintzer, *Textpredigt und Themapredigt*, in Id. (ed.), *Praktische Theologie*, Neukirchen-Vluyn, Neukirchener Verlag, 1982, 81-115, pp. 83-85.

10. G. Theissen, *Zeichensprache des Glaubens: Chancen der Predigt heute*, Gütersloh, Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1994, p. 735; H.J. Venetz, *Das Neue Testament als Anrede Gottes an den Menschen heute*, in Schüepp (ed.), *Handbuch zur Predigt* (n. 9), 153-186, pp. 183-185.

Ricœur roots the central thesis of his textual hermeneutics on the intercrossing between the world of the text, conceived as the set of possibilities of 'lifeworlds' ('Lebenswelt') intended by the text, with the world of the reader in the act of reading[11].

Within this context, the French philosopher recommends the use of the explanatory procedures of scholarly-scientific exegesis – and this is equally valid for the preacher – as a second stage on the hermeneutic arc, permitting the passage from a first naive apprehension of the text to a third moment, which he calls comprehension, or thoughtful, confessing and responsible reading, before offering a practical application to the congregation in the homily[12]. Indeed, each written text is an instance of structured discourse, a work marked by its composition, style and literary form. The world of the text presents itself to the reader by means of these objective characteristics[13], thus delimiting a sphere of possible interpretations, authorizing both a legitimate hermeneutical plurality and at the same time disqualifying certain inappropriate lectures (a regulated plurality)[14].

2. *A Plural Naming of God*

In this respect, at the heart of the 'great intertext', the Bible, Ricœurian hermeneutics puts a special emphasis on the presence and the crossing of the different modes of discourse – narrative, legislative, prophetical, sapiential and hymnal[15] – and on the interaction of the three ways of articulating the relationship between the spoken Word and Scripture, such as the Rabbinic triad 'Torah – Prophets – Writings' brings to light[16]. Ricœur advocates for a synchronic reading of the biblical writings, which, following Paul Beauchamp, he calls an 'intertextual and resolutely teleological structuralism' in the sense that, on the one hand, the narrated events, detached from their original 'Sitz-im-Leben' are made contemporary to

11. Cf. my thesis *L'herméneutique philosophique de Paul Ricœur* (n. 4), pp. 210-212.

12. *Ibid*., pp. 418-433; P. Ricœur, *Herméneutique: Les finalités de l'exégèse biblique*, in Centre Thomas More, *La Bible en philosophie: Approches contemporaines*, Paris, Cerf, 1983, 33-48.

13. For the categories of a text, see my thesis *L'herméneutique philosophique de Paul Ricœur* (n. 4), pp. 103-115.

14. For the categories of the interpretation of a text, cf. *ibid*., pp. 115-137.

15. Cf. e.g., P. Ricœur, *Temps biblique*, in *Archivio di filosofia* 53 (1985) 23-35, pp. 26-27.

16. Cf. especially P. Ricœur, *'Comme si la Bible n'existait que lue…' Exorde*, in P. Bovati – R. Meynet (eds.), *Ouvrir les Écritures: Mélanges offerts à Paul Beauchamp* (Lectio Divina, 162), Paris, Cerf, 1995, 21-28, pp. 22-23.

one another in their 'Sitz-im-Wort' through the act of reading; and on the other hand, all the genres are formed, from the inside, by an internal dynamics which pushes them towards an eschatological accomplishment, towards a 'telos'[17].

Ricœur shows that attached to each literary genre is a particular type of religious confession[18], and thus that the naming of God is not monotone, but polyphonic within the enclosed space of the Canon. The task of interpreting the text must lie in seizing the work of the biblical text upon itself, the circulation of the divine naming within the framework of the 'great code' of Scripture[19] (such as the great Actor of history in the third person, the voice behind the voice of the prophet or the Author of the Law in the first person, the Thou of the hymns or the 'absent presence' of sapiential reflection). Corresponding to the polycentricism of the naming of God is indeed, according to the schema 'call – response' dear to our author[20], a plurality of types of the believing subject, exposing himself to the confrontation generated by the text: a rooted identity, both narrative and ethical; shaken by the prophetic calling; or both singularized and at the same time universalized by the Wisdom literature[21].

Finally, what is true for the Old Testament is continued in the New: according to Ricœur, each discursive mode in which the prism of Revelation is diffracted in the New Testament (narratives, parables, wisdom sayings, homilies, prayers, hymns, epistles, confessions of faith, apocalyptical discourses…) adds its own voice to the polyphonic witness of God brought forward by the Christian Scriptures[22].

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 24-27.

18. Cf. e.g., P. Ricœur, *La philosophie et la spécificité du langage religieux*, in *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses* 55 (1975) 13-26; *Nommer Dieu*, in *Études théologiques et religieuses* 52 (1977) 498-508.

19. According to N. Frye's expression (in *La Bible et la littérature*, 2 vols., I: *Le Grand Code*, Paris, Seuil, 1984; II: *La Parole souveraine*, Paris, Seuil, 1994), taken up again by Ricœur (*Expérience et langage dans le discours religieux*, in J.F. Courtine [éd.], *Phénoménologie et théologie*, Paris, Centurion, 1992, 25-28). In this context, cf. D. Frey, *Paul Ricœur, lecteur du Grand Code*, in *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses* 80 (2000) 263-282.

20. Cf. e.g., his essay *Le sujet convoqué: À l'école des récits de vocation prophétique*, in *Revue de l'Institut catholique de Paris* 28 (1988) 83-99; and in this regard, the study by A.P. Gauthier, *Paul Ricœur et l'agir responsable: Les figures bibliques du prophète et du témoin*, Lyon, Profac, 2001.

21. P. Ricœur, *Herméneutique de l'idée de Révélation*, in *La Révélation*, Bruxelles, Saint-Louis, 1977, 15-54, 207-236, p. 37. In this regard, cf. among others J. Greisch, *Paul Ricœur: L'itinérance du sens* (Krisis), Grenoble, Million, 2001, p. 427.

22. P. Ricœur, *Vers une théologie narrative: Sa nécessité, ses ressources, ses difficultés*, in *L'herméneutique biblique*, 326-342, p. 339.

3. *Homiletic Implications: Respect for the Variety of Literary Genres*[23]

The homiletic implications of these Ricœurian considerations are vast: one cannot preach about a miracle narrative as one would about an extract from a letter of St. Paul; a homily of a parable can in no circumstance be reduced to a dogmatic affirmation or a moral teaching[24]. Composition, form and style of a text express its communication profile and its pragmatic aim. A single model for preaching cannot cover all the texts: it is the responsibility of the contemporary preachers to retrieve from each text the type of rhetorical interpellation which the considered passages address – according to their literary genre – to the community of Israel and to the Church in the Name of God, in order to bring about a second reading (relecture) for today's situation, on the same register or on its extension.

The diversity of biblical rhetorical forms must therefore be reflected in the plurality of the acts of homiletic discourse: by exploiting the 'theologoumena' specific to the different discursive modes of Scripture, the preachers will give great attention to the structures of the underlying human experience, or, to quote Wittgenstein, to the scriptural 'Wortspiel' or 'play of words'[25].

This has been the subject of Anglo-Saxon homiletic researches, some of which make explicit reference to the biblical hermeneutics of Ricœur. In particular, on the American continent, T.G. Long[26] and E. Achtmeier[27]; and in the German-speaking world the 'Gestalthomiletik' of K. Meyer zu Uptrup[28]: starting at the communicative effect aimed at by the preached texts, the homiletic discourse can take the form of either an argumentative discussion with the congregation, a reflection on the complicated theological content (epistles, teachings), or of an active interaction between the preacher and the congregation, provoking a conversion in the latter (prophetic oracle, exhortation), or otherwise of a prayerful

23. For a fuller development of the homiletic implications of an acknowledgement of the diversity of discursive forms, cf. chapter IX of my book *Prêcher l'Ancien Testament aujourd'hui* (n. 1), pp. 480-517.

24. Cf. Ricœur's studies on the parable conceived as a metaphorical narrative kept in an extravagant tension by a border expression like 'the Kingdom of God', collected in *L'herméneutique biblique* (pp. 147-255), entitled *Paul Ricœur et l'herméneutique biblique: La forme narrative. Le procès métaphorique. La spécificité du langage religieux.*

25. Cf. Greisch, *Paul Ricœur: L'itinérance du sens* (n. 21), pp. 434-435.

26. T.G. Long, *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible*, Philadelphia, PA, Fortress, 1989.

27. E. Achtmeier, *Preaching from the Old Testament*, Louisville, KY, Westminster – John Knox Press, 1989. Its tendency is, however, to consider the whole of the literary genres as falling into the field of a more global narrative.

28. K. Meyer zu Uptrup, *Gestalthomiletik: Wie wir heute predigen können*, Stuttgart, Calwer, 1986.

meditation or a poetic invitation lifting the entire being of the auditors beyond the conceptual considerations, by the aid of an image or a symbol (psalm, parable)…

Following Ricœur, the preachers would therefore have a serious interest in completing the diachronic approach of the historical-critical method by a synchronic lecture, corresponding to the rich diversity of biblical literature, and thus avoid falling into the leveling and monotony of sermons which are always constructed according to the same model: always existential, or dogmatic, or centered upon the listener, or psychological, or paraphrasing the text… As H.D. Preuss puts it in his work on the preaching of the Old Testament:

> There is a close relation between the literary mode of the text and the type of preaching … The 'modes of expression' of the texts are found again, in an analogous way, in the types of preaching. One should also make the congregation experience the biblical texts in multiple ways, so that in analogy to these texts, experiences of God in different forms and in different contexts can be aroused[29].

Returning to the narrative, the preachers would have the advantage of learning from the biblical redactors who weave their kerygmatic message from the train of events, who bring in God's Person either directly, or by means of an angelic 'messenger', or 'behind the scenes', or finally by leaving the full initiative to the human actors. Why not occasionally adopt the ways of the prophets, by sharing with the listeners a 'vision' (cf. Za 2,5-11), or a 'song' (cf. Is 5,1), by leading them into a 'dispute' (cf. Ez 37,11), by 'bringing them to court' (cf. Mi 6,3), respectively by assuming the 'I' of Yahweh in the role of his spokesperson for today? "What prevents the preacher, other than shyness, from entering into the act of prophetical proclamation to break the monotony of the sermon"[30]? Why doesn't the homily transform itself from time to time into prayer or lamentation before God, lending its expression to the inquiries which many believers carry within themselves without daring to express them? It's up to the preacher to give them a voice and a form according to the structure used by the Psalms. "For it is by the often audacious manner with which the Psalms interrogate God that one discovers who he is and what we can expect from his Grace"[31].

29. H.D. Preuss, *Das Alte Testament in christlicher Predigt*, Stuttgart, Kohlhammer, 1984, p. 182, we translate.

30. S. Amsler, *L'Ancien Testament et la prédication de l'Évangile*, in *Pratique et théologie* (Pratiques, 1), Genève, Labor et Fides, 1989, 131-139, p. 136.

31. S. Amsler, *Le texte de l'Ancien Testament et la prédication chrétienne, quel rapport?*, in *Cahiers de l'Institut Romand de Pastorale* 10 (1991) 15-22, p. 20.

Of course, preaching an exhortation of the Epistles of St. Paul, a pericope from the Apocalypse or a passage of the Sermon on the Mount from the first gospel (Mt 5–7) does not imply formally transforming the sermon into a letter addressed to the community, into a vision of the end of times for today, nor into a teaching 'in the style of Jesus'. Capturing the rhetorical effect of the literary genres does not imply a formal imitation – after all, who could pretend to achieve such a thing? – but rather to assess how they say what they say, and to what type of confession of faith each mode gives birth. And this is without speaking of the intertextual play between the four texts recommended by the Sunday liturgy[32], to which Ricœur is particularly sensitive[33]. Speaking of the way in which the Bible articulates temporality, he declares in a synthetic manner:

> The biblical model of time rests upon the polarity between narrative and hymn, as well as upon the mediation between 'telling' and 'praising': by the Law and its temporal anteriority, by the Prophets and their eschatological time, by Wisdom and its eternity[34].

For M.I. Wallace, commentator of Ricœur, it is only by blending the discursive modes of the Canon with the Wisdom writings that scriptural preaching is fully enabled to give meaning to the existence of contemporary communities:

> The sapiential literature of Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, and Lamentations challenges the totalizing impulses of narrative literatures that purport to emplot all experience on a time line with a clear beginning, middle and end. Wisdom contents that life in *media res* is riddled with such brokenness and 'vanity' that it can never be subsumed under the hegemony of the supreme plot … In the contest between narrative and wisdom, new possibilities of being-in-time are unleashed that question easy resolutions of the problem of existence according to the symmetry of the master story. We need stories in order to make sense of the temporal existence, but stories unaided by the tonic of wisdom degenerate into simplifying life's insoluble ambiguities. Wisdom is attuned to the fragility and suffering of existence in a way that narrative is not … Without wisdom, narrative inevitably drifts toward a triumphalism insensitive to the power of time to rewrite one's personal plots – and even destroy the putative narrative coherence of one's life[35].

In this respect, if those responsible for the liturgical lectionaries in the Catholic Church were to study Ricœur, no doubt they would correct cer-

32. In this context, cf. chapter VIII of my book *Prêcher l'Ancien Testament aujourd'hui* (n. 1), pp. 430-479.

33. Cf. e.g., *Temps biblique* (n. 15), pp. 28-34.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

35. M.I. Wallace, *Introduction*, in P. Ricœur, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative and Imagination*, Minneapolis, MN, Augsburg Fortress, 1995, 1-32, p. 27.

tain lacunas which are currently to be found therein[36]: in today's Sunday Lectionary, thirteen books are not at all represented, including the Song (!) (also Judges, Ruth, 1 Chronicles, Esdras, Esther, Tob, Judith, 1 Maccabees, Lamentations, Obadiah, Nahum, Haggai), some important biblical themes are missing[37], including the drama of the human condition according to Job and Ecclesiastes (with one exception), the great ethically charged narratives like the history of David's relationship with Nabal and Abigail (1 Sm 25) replaced by a few parenetic exhortations to virtue, as contained in the Book of Proverbs[38], the radical criticism of wealth and power by prophets like Micah and Amos, the accents in favor of social justice found in Leviticus (the clearance of debts for the jubilee) and Deuteronomy (the earth belongs to God alone)…[39], without mentioning the exclusion of numerous female figures like the heroines Esther and Judith, the prophet Miriam (Ex 15,20) or Deborah the victorious (Jdc 5,1-31)[40].

Are we not depriving ourselves of a precious potential which would have the ability to meet the contingent situations of many faith communities who continue to gather around the Word of God? The polyphonic character of biblical revelation, the polycentrism and pluridimensionalism of the scriptural Canon which Ricœur has so well explained, constitute indeed invaluable resources for contemporary preachers who have to face a multitude of community contexts, concerns and circumstances[41]

36. Cf. in this matter G. Gafus, *Das Alte Testament in der Perikopenordnung: Bibeltheologische Perspektiven zur Auswahl der Lesungen an den Sonntagen und Feiertagen* (Europäische Hochschulschriften. Reihe XXIII: Theologie, 687), Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang, 2000.

37. F.J. Ortkemper has made a suggestive list of these in his essay *In der Leseordnung vernachlässigte Texte aus dem Alten Testament*, in G. Steins (ed.), *Leseordnung: Altes und Neues Testament in der Liturgie* (Gottesvolk, Sonderheft), Stuttgart, Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1997, 165-173.

38. G.S. Sloyan, *The Lectionary as a Context for Interpretation*, in *Interpretation* 31 (1977) 131-138, pp. 136-137.

39. J.L. Gonzalez – C.G. Gonzalez, *The Liberating Pulpit*, Nashville, TN, Wipf & Stock, 1994, pp. 41-44.

40. Cf. W. Bühlmann, *'Denn ich bin Gott, nicht ein Mensch' (Hos 11,9 EÜ): Das bibelpastorale Defizit der (Sonn- und werktäglichen) Perikopenordnung der Messfeier*, in I. Riedel-Spangenberger – E. Zenger (eds.), *"Gott bin ich, kein Mann": Beiträge zur Hermeneutik der biblischen Gottesrede*, Paderborn, Schöningh, 2006, 357-369, p. 359.

41. This is in line with one of the primary concerns of American homilists who, faced with the indifference of their parishioners, seek new ways to speak to them in a relevant way. We mention here, among others, S. Hauerwas – W.H. Willimon, *Preaching to Strangers: Evangelism in Today's World*, Louisville, KY, Westminster – John Knox Press, 1992; J.R. Veter, Jr., *Crisis Preaching: Personal and Public*, Nashville, TN, Abingdon, 1998; and J.R. Nieman – T.G. Rogers, *Preaching to Every Pew: Cross-Cultural Strategies*, Minneapolis, MN, Geneva Press, 2001.

and can prove to be a precious help in the exercise of their mission of evangelizing in a perspective of a proposal of faith[42].

And where there is a liberty in the choice of the text, that is, in the context of the celebration of the sacraments (baptism, confirmation, marriage, anointing of the sick), funerals, sacramentals, or any other type of celebration including a sermon (penitential celebrations, vigils, the office of the liturgy of the hours), why not bring to light the various colors of Scripture, taking into account the homiletic situation at hand? In the case of a funeral, for example, the preacher could make use of the register of wisdom texts (Job, Proverbs, Psalms) which offer the advantage of describing the condition of mankind in the concrete dimensions of its existence, including the tragic ones.

II. An Esthetic Preaching, Conceived as a Work open to the Imagination of the Listeners

1. *The Innovative Force of the Religious Language*

With the growing interest for the role of the listeners within the process of homiletic communication, as witnessed in these last decades, a new attention has been given to the efficiency of a sermon[43]. In this perspective, key words have emerged, describing the impact of a homily, such as 'innovation'[44] or 'intervention'[45]. With the latter term, the German homilist R. Zerfass describes the action of preaching as interrupting not only the flow of the liturgy, but that of existence, in order to permit the therapeutic force of the New Testament to reach the members of the congregation in their anxieties and their inner conflicts, and in order to guide them towards a change of behavior. Zerfass builds upon Jesus'

42. As expressed in *Lettre aux catholiques de France*, by the Évêques français, *Proposer la foi dans la société actuelle*, Paris, Cerf, 1996. This is the opinion of A. Join-Lambert, *Du sermon à l'homélie: Nouvelles questions théologiques et pastorales*, in *Nouvelle revue théologique* 126 (2004) 68-85, p. 84. My recent essay goes in this direction as well, entitled *L'art de la prédication: Réflexions et suggestions pour une proposition de foi homilétique*, in *Revue des sciences religieuses* 82 (2008) 547-566.

43. Under the influence also of works on the performance of 'speech acts', according to J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1962 (Fr. trans.: *Quand dire, c'est faire*, Paris, Seuil, 1970) and J.R. Searle, *Speech Acts*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1969 (Fr. trans.: *Les actes de langage*, Paris, Hermann, 1972).

44. P. Düsterfeld, *Predigt und Kompetenz: Hermeneutische und sprachtheoretische Überlegungen zur Fundierung einer homiletischen Methode*, Düsseldorf, Patmos, 1978 (introductory chapter).

45. R. Zerfass, *Grundkurs Predigt*. Bd. I: *Textpredigt*, Düsseldorf, Patmos, 1992, pp. 14-41.

model sermon given to Simon the Pharisee, when a sinner comes to anoint his feet, by which the master from Nazareth tries to bring the notable to a change of consciousness (Lk 7,36-50). This concept of 'intervention–interruption' risks leaving aside other meanings which the biblical discourse entails, such as consolation, encouragement, pacification or support. But it comes close to what the hermeneutics of P. Ricœur says about the relation of scriptural language with reality – which is one of the subjects discussed in this book.

For the French philosopher, the poetic language possesses indeed the evocative power of creating a reality horizon different from the common empirical experience. Ricœur makes the metaphore the model of semantic innovation and of the enlargement of the possibilities of living in the world ('heuristic fiction') given by all fictional language. This metaphorical effect, however, does not come about on its own, but requires the active participation of the reader / listener[46].

As it has already been mentioned before[47], our author applies his theory of the metaphorical process in a paradigmatic manner to the parabolic narratives of Jesus: the world of everyday life described by the parables finds itself troubled and unsettled by an unexpected element of the narrative structure. This creates a paradoxical tension which points towards the real object of the discourse, the Kingdom of God as announced by Jesus.

Ricœur thus makes of this metaphorical logic of 'extravagance', introduced into the discourse by the border-expressions 'God', 'Kingdom' and 'Christ', the uniqueness not only of the parables, but of all religious language: the reality of God can ultimately never be expressed in direct-descriptive language, but only in the metaphorical-poetic mode. The force of the biblical-religious language consists henceforward less in giving instructions for action, political speeches or philosophical affirmations, but rather in opening new spaces and fresh dimensions of reality that the recipients can hope to appropriate. This language addresses itself just as much to the imagination as it does to the will[48]: for the reader-listener the task consists in letting himself first be disoriented in his way of being, in particular by the criticism of the illusions of his ego, before reorienting himself according to the new perspective portrayed by the

46. Cf. chapter 4 of my thesis *L'herméneutique philosophique de Paul Ricœur* (n. 4), pp. 139-212.

47. Cf. above n. 24. In this matter, cf. *ibid.*, pp. 251-286.

48. P. Ricœur, *La Bible et l'imagination*, in *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses* 66 (1982) 339-360, p. 360; Braunschweiger, *Auf dem Weg zu einer poetischen Homiletik* (n. 8), p. 32.

revealed texts, a phenomenon which the spiritual tradition calls 'conversion'. This abandonment of the self is thus only the negative condition for the reaffirmation of the authentic self. The reader only distances himself from himself in order to 'find himself' again in an improved fashion and to reclaim the deepest dimensions of himself.

Also the specific efficiency of the religious language does not consist first of all in discursive arguments, nor in an authoritative exhortation, nor even in a rhetorical impression, but rather in the creative imagination that works with the biblical corpus and opens it beyond its discursive enclosure to the reality of the transcendent being called 'God' who is its world. This new world of the 'Kingdom', projected by the scriptural text, creates a distance to the ordinary world by its border-expressions which traverse its structural horizon. And it is in the very imagination of the readers confronted with the text that this new being configures itself. For the 'new' reality portrayed by the Word of God to refigure the reality of the reader, the latter must 'play with' the imaginative variations of his subjectivity. Such a playful dimension in the distancing of oneself from oneself permits the recipient to set free, in his subjectivity, possibilities of 'metamorphosis' that answer to the new possibilities freed by the text in the vision of reality. In this way, the reader can reply to the poetry of the discourse by a poetry of existence, by means of an act polarized by the economy of overabundance and giving, and by a witness to the freedom restored through hope[49].

2. *The Homily as an 'Open Work of Art'*

In the same manner, we owe the Italian semiotician Umberto Eco the concept of an 'open work of art'[50], which designates this innovative capacity which the metaphorical discourse contains in its relation to reality. This notion has been abundantly transposed into the field of homiletics in an essay by G.M. Martin[51], to the point where some have come to speak simply of an 'open homily'[52]. This description corresponds more

49. On the variations of imaginative appropriation, cf. P. Ricœur, *Herméneutique philosophique et herméneutique biblique*, in F. Bovon – G. Rouiller (eds.), *Exegesis: Problèmes de méthode et exercices de lecture (Genèse 22 et Luc 15)*, Neuchâtel – Paris, Delachaux & Niestlé, 1975, 216-228, pp. 227-228; as well as my thesis *L'herméneutique philosophique de Paul Ricœur* (n. 4), pp. 442-448.

50. U. Eco, *L'œuvre ouverte*, Paris, Seuil, 1965 (Italian original: *Opera Aperta*, Milano, Bompiani, 1962).

51. G.M. Martin, *Predigt als offenes Kunstwerk? Zum Dialog zwischen Homiletik und Rezeptionsästhetik*, in *Evangelische Theologie* 44 (1984) 46-58.

52. As does A. Beutel, *Offene Predigt: Homiletische Bemerkungen zu Sprache und Sache*, in *Pastoraltheologie* 77 (1988) 518-537.

widely to a change of paradigm in the homiletic universe around the 1990's where a particular interest for the esthetics of reception succeeded the predominant orientation towards the communication sciences that were common at the time[53].

Just as the biblical texts are open to a plurality of readings and act like partitions in need of performance[54], so also the preaching which 'performs' them – to take up a language dear to American homiletics, which is strongly marked by esthetics[55] – is open to a multitude of 'hearings' of which the preacher is not in control. In the homiletic conversation, which we will take up again in the third section, the listener is an active partner. It is he, ultimately, who performs the partition of the homily, a phenomenon which W. Engemann calls 'auredit' or heard text, perceived by the ear of the listener, in correspondence and contrast to the 'manuscript', that is, to the text written by the hand of the preacher[56].

The advantages of such an esthetic conception of the 'multivocal homily' are numerous: on the one hand, it frees the preacher of the burden of feeling obliged to give THE meaning of the biblical text to his parishioners; and it engages the congregation in an active responsibility, since it is up to them to 'determine the meaning' among the possibilities offered. This is the best means of fighting the boredom into which they sometimes fear to fall[57]. Further, it underlines the role of the liturgy as

53. This is attested e.g., by the congress of the German-speaking homiletic society, whose acts have been published by E. GARHAMMER – H.G. SCHÖTTLER under the title *Predigt als offenes Kunstwerk: Homiletik und Rezeptionsästhetik*, München, Don Bosco, 1988, and the recent publication of the same G.M. MARTIN, *Predigt und Liturgie ästhetisch: Wahrnehmung – Kunst – Lebenskunst* (Christentum heute, 5), Stuttgart, Kohlhammer, 2003. This esthetical direction holds true for all of the practical theological disciplines, as discussed e.g., in A. GRÖZINGER, *Praktische Theologie und Ästhetik*, München, Kaiser, 1991. It concerns in particular the structural analogies between literature, poetry and theology in their different complementary and sometimes opposite attempts to throw some light on the mystery of human existence (cf. K.J. KUSCHEL, *Vielleicht hält Gott sich einige Dichter…*, Mainz, Matthias-Grünewald, 1991). See my recent publication, together with Franziska Loretan: F. LORETAN-SALAMIN – F.-X. AMHERDT, *Prédication: Un langage qui sonne juste* (Perspectives pastorales, 3), St-Maurice, St-Augustin, 2009, where we suggest a poetic renewal of the homiletic language, based upon the literary thought of the German poet Hilde Domin.

54. Cf. R. LISCHER, *'Performing' the Scripture: Die Schrift 'darstellend'*, in *Pastoraltheologie* 70 (1981) 136-149.

55. M. NICOL, *Preaching as Performing Act: Ästhetische Homiletik in den USA*, in *Pastoraltheologie* 89 (2000) 435-453; *Predigtkunst: Ästhetische Überlegungen zur homiletischen Praxis*, in *Praktische Theologie* 35 (2000) 19-24.

56. Cf. W. ENGEMANN, *Der Spielraum der Predigt und der Ernst der Verkündigung*, in GARHAMMER – SCHÖTTLER (eds.), *Predigt als offenes Kunstwerk* (n. 53), p. 192.

57. Cf. the evocative title of a mischievous publication by a group of pastoral theologians from Lyon, P. THOMAS, *Si vous vous ennuyez pendant le sermon*, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 1998.

overall frame and interpretative context of the sermon, since the ritual elements are also part of the formal esthetics and since the whole of the liturgical system (prayers, admonitions, Eucharistic Prayer, other prayers, song texts, the layout of space and architecture, the floral and decorative language, ritual and sacramental gestures…) contributes through the effect of intertextuality to the guidance of the believers' participatory listening, their discernment and their appropriation. Finally, this permits the people of God to better integrate the exegetical results to which Ricœurian hermeneutics clearly subscribes, that is, the irreducible multivocality of the biblical text[58], open to a pluralistic future reception, to being inscribed into a tradition – or rather a series of traditions (its 'Nachgeschichte' or 'Wirkungsgeschichte'), which, from then on, are a part of its multidimensional meaning, such as it is handed over to commentators in the present day[59].

To speak of a homily as an 'open and multivocal work of art' does not, of course, disqualify the methodical exegetical work, necessary to delimit the field of potential plausible interpretations. Neither does this mean that the preacher should feel forced, in opposition to the danger mentioned before, to explore all the connotations liberated by the text – after all, who would be capable of doing so? Nor does it mean that preaching should clothe itself in a lyrical, complex and abstruse language, which would be contra-productive, hindering a majority of listeners to reach their own understanding of the message and to authentically rewrite the text of their own life[60]. Furthermore, the degree of the 'pluridimensionality' of the texts varies according to the passages concerned: the parables do not have the same degree of ambiguity as an exhortation or legislation[61].

Ricœur recognizes this himself: because the whole of the texts belong to the same scriptural Canon, to the same horizon of the border-expression 'Kingdom of God', which indicates the focal point in infinity, it is possible to find this extravagant 'metaphoricity' everywhere, which con-

58. P. Ricœur, Fides quaerens intellectum: *Antécédents bibliques?*, in *Archivio di filosofia* 68 (1990) 19-42, reprinted in *Lectures 3*, 327-354, p. 340.

59. Cf. *Penser la Bible*, pp. 8-14.

60. In his essay *Homilie und Poesie: Über ein enges, aber nicht immer einfaches Verwandtschaftsverhältnis*, in *Theologie und Glaube* 85 (1995) 64-79, K. Müller warns against any form of instrumentalization of poetry for a homily, but at the same time invites the preacher to enrich their language and vocabulary through the study of poetry.

61. This is H. Schöer's criticism of the concept of an 'open work of art', which he claims is applied to homiletics in an insufficiently differentiated manner by G.M. Martin (cf. H. Schöer, *Umberto Eco als Predigthelfer? Fragen an Gerhard Marcel Martin*, in *Evangelische Theologie* 44 [1984] 58-63).

stitutes the characteristics of the religious language. For Ricœur, indeed, the word 'God' works like 'an arrow of meaning' with a double power: the power to "gather all the meanings issued in the partial discourses" of the Canon, and the power to "open a horizon which breaks out of the enclosed discourse"[62].

3. *A Metaphorical-Imaginative and 'Ambiguous' Homiletic Language*

Since all the texts of Scripture have the Name of God as theme and goal, the language of the ecclesial homily must take account of the reality of this transcendent God "revealed as hidden"[63], known as unknown. Since the Name of God constitutes the joining element and points to the incompleteness of all literary genres of the Scriptures[64], the homily that tries to proclaim him cannot reduce itself to being mere description, teaching or exhortation.

What are we then to conclude for the language of preaching? It demands first of all an imaginative and symbolic form of communication, in the manner of Christ's parables[65], so as to correspond to the creative type of 'refiguration' of reality, which the biblical texts contain, and carry the whole being of the listener into a dynamic which is both emotional, spiritual and cognitive, susceptible to lead them to a transfigured action. This does not, of course, mean that each homily must take on the form of a parable. However, this implies for the preacher the development of a pastoral sensitivity aiming at training his listeners in a 'playful' manner in the new world, liberated by the scriptural text, and inviting them to pursue for themselves this imaginative game to the point where they make their own universe from the Kingdom and desire to enter into it. Secondly, it requires a type of narrative structure which combines the indicative and the imperative, affirmation and command, presence and promise, and even unveiling the Divine without obliterating the dark, lacking and suffering aspects which remain in our times. Thirdly, it

62. Ricœur, *Herméneutique philosophique et herméneutique biblique* (n. 49), p. 224.

63. Culminating in the enigmatic formula "I am that I am" from Ex 3,14, abundantly commented by Ricœur, which in a way preserves the incognito side of God more than it reveals it (cf. *Nommer Dieu* [n. 18], p. 501; Fides quaerens intellectum [n. 58], p. 341; *Vers une théologie narrative* [n. 22], p. 335). On this matter, cf. my thesis *L'herméneutique philosophique de Paul Ricœur* (n. 4), pp. 311-322.

64. Cf. my thesis *L'herméneutique philosophique de Paul Ricœur* (n. 4), pp. 301-305.

65. Cf. the analogy established between parable and preaching by M. Dutzmann, *Gleichniserzählungen Jesu als Texte evangelischer Predigt*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990, especially pp. 188-199.

requires maintaining a certain type of tension between that which is and that which is to come, between the 'already' and the 'not yet', in order to give rise to an ethical and vigilant activity in the listeners. Such a tension-laden language can reflect the intrinsic link that unites the self-manifestation of God with the sending of the prophet to the people that struggles to recognize its Lord, and thus provoke an existential conversion in the listeners[66]. Fourthly, the preaching language demands that a mode of dialogical conversation be established between the intrinsic questioning divine 'I' and the congregation which is confronted with it, between the always faithful divine initiative and the ever 'recalcitrant' human reply[67].

In line with U. Eco, W. Engemann even pleas for a voluntarily ambiguous preaching in order to escape the redundancy of closed and 'sealed-off' sermons which, by wanting to explain the texts, end up asphyxiating the listeners by the univocity of their discourse[68]. The pluridimensionality of the biblical Scriptures, which Ricœurian hermeneutics talks about, as well as their power to reshape without end the experience of the readers, find an echo in the plea of the German homilist: preaching must cultivate a certain ambiguity, because the texts which it comments upon do the same to varying degrees: ultimately, the Scriptures only outline the mystery of the Kingdom and eternity without ever succeeding in capturing it[69]. Further, the homily is called to preserve empty, unoccupied spaces into which the listeners can slide and thanks to which they add their own contribution to the construction of the meaning. This is not possible for them if the meaning of the sermon is given to them entirely

66. P. Ricœur, *D'un Testament à l'autre: Essai d'herméneutique biblique*, in D. Marguerat – J. Zumstein (eds.), *La mémoire et le temps*, Genève, Labor et Fides, 1991, 299-309, p. 303.

67. P. Ricœur, *Mythe et histoire*, in *L'herméneutique biblique*, 281-304, pp. 301-302. For these four dimensions of the homiletic language, cf. G. Theissen, *Zeichensprache des Glaubens: Chancen der Predigt heute*, Gütersloh, Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1994, pp. 93-106.

68. W. Engemann, *Wider den redundanten Exzess: Semiotisches Plädoyer für eine ergänzungsbedürftige Predigt*, in *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 115 (1990) 786-800; *'Unser Text sagt…': Hermeneutischer Versuch zur Interpretation und Überwindung des 'Texttods' der Predigt*, in *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 93 (1996) 450-480. Cf. also his recent publications *Theologie der Predigt: Grundlagen – Modelle – Konsequenzen* (Arbeiten zur praktischen Theologie, 21), Leipzig, Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2001; *Einführung in die Homiletik* (UTB, 2128), Tübingen – Basel, Francke, 2002; and, together with F.M. Lütze (ed.), *Grundfragen der Predigt: Ein Studienbuch*, Leipzig, Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2006.

69. Cf. the end of *Temps et récit III*, p. 389.

predetermined. To preach ambiguously, symbolically and interrogatively means taking serious the Christian communities[70].

It should be noted here that in a more fundamental theological perspective, the manual of K. Müller, also strongly inspired by the Ricœurian metaphor theology, is developing a theological esthetics capable of reflecting homiletically the entire spectrum of human subjectivity in the light of the Word of God. In an original manner, he mentions among the types of metaphorical discourse irony and humor, which are capable of attracting the attention of the listener and of setting before him a mirror showing his incoherencies, but without hurting him[71].

III. A Conversational Homily

1. *An Omission: 'The Oral Nature of Preaching'*

It is rather striking to notice that within homiletic literature, one has taken fairly little notice of the fact that the preacher is first of all a listener and a reader of the Word, and that thereafter he proclaims an oral discourse created to be heard. The majority of studies concentrate primarily on the different linguistic and textual sciences (the historical-critical method, linguistic studies, semiotics, narrativity, rhetoric, pragmatics…) and consider the different paths that permit to bridge the gap separating the biblical writings, coming from a socio-cultural context of the past, from the preached text, destined to guarantee an actualization for today. It is, however, worth differentiating the various linguistic acts at work in the homiletic process, in order to give value to each stage in its particularity. The Swiss French homilist Bernard Reymond promotes this in part by insisting that in order to achieve his 'homiletic exegesis', the preacher must not only read the Word for which he must provide a commentary, but he must specifically become a 'listener' of the Word: the biblical text is a written manifestation of an oral preaching; to begin by listening to the text being read out loud enables the preacher to then write his manuscript for a new oral proclamation[72].

70. W. Engemann, *Semiotische Homiletik: Prämissen – Analysen – Konsequenzen*, Tübingen – Basel, Francke, 1993.

71. K. Müller, *Homiletik*, Regensburg, Pustet, 1994, especially pp. 83-108; 197-204; 226-234.

72. B. Reymond, *Les défis de l'oralité*, in G. Theissen, *et al*. (eds.), *Le défi homilétique*, Geneva, Labor et Fides, 1994, 227-235. It was, moreover, in the intent of underlining this twofold oral nature of the homiletic discourse that the Reformed French-speaking theologian forged the neologism 'oraliture' in the title of his most recent publication *De vive voix: Oraliture et prédication* (n. 5).

2. *From Oral to Written and Back Again*

In the same framework, the resort to Ricœurian hermeneutics is capable of giving precious impulses to specify the oral / written relation in homiletics.

First of all, among the four categories of the text which he describes (discourse, work, writing and world of the text)[73], Ricœur insists on the differentiation between the act of speaking and listening and that of writing and reading. While in the oral discourse the speaker can explain his topic by a vast repertoire of expressions tied to the situation of his listeners, thanks to the context of face-to-face communication, the author of a written discourse must accept a certain distance to the recipients of his message: once written, it is the world of the text that carries his intention and which, by detaching itself from the original conditions of its production, acquires an autonomy that makes it capable of re-contextualizing itself ad infinitum, in the ever new situations of its future readers[74].

This successive distancing doesn't, however, imply the total disappearance of the author's intention. Even for highly antique works this intention reappears in the category of the 'implicit author', in the sense that he is concealed behind the textual strategy by which he guides the reception process of the reader in this or that direction. Nevertheless, the recipient is not given up to the will of the implicit author: to the contrary, he collaborates actively in the creation of the meaning of the text, in such a way that the understanding of a written text is not achieved by a reproduction of the strategy inscribed by the implicit author, but rather by the coproduction of meaning by a reader who has truly become a co-author.

Thus the understanding of a written text has characteristics which are highly different from the understanding of an oral conversation: the reader must take over a much more important role than the listener, since he can no longer directly question the author of the document, often far removed in time and space. Further, most of the time written texts carry a richer vocabulary and a more complex structure than that used in oral speech – this is especially the case for a scientific communication or a literary or poetic work – since liberated from all constraints tied to the physical presence and the expectations of one's listeners, the author disposes of more time and possibilities to correct his formulations and

73. Cf. my thesis *L'herméneutique philosophique de Paul Ricœur* (n. 4), pp. 103-115.

74. For these criteria of textuality, cf. among others P. Ricœur, *Événement et sens dans le discours*, in M. Philibert, *Paul Ricœur ou la liberté selon l'espérance*, Paris, Seghers, 1971, 177-190; *La fonction herméneutique de la distanciation*, in Bovon – Rouiller (eds.), *Exegesis* (n. 49), 201-215.

achieve an adequate turn of phrase. It is therefore not coincidental that science, literature and also religions with an elaborate theological tradition resort to writing. The higher level of reflection achieved in the act of writing requires in return a more significant investment in the act of reading; this is why a hermeneutics, in the sense of an art of understanding linguistic objects, is necessary most of all for written discourses. Also, the usefulness of methodological instruments are seen in particular when one is trying to objectify and analyze in a second reading the difficulties of understanding brought to light in the first reading, in order to achieve finally, as a third moment, a hermeneutically reflected reception[75].

3. *A Highly Complex Homiletic Process: A Preaching that is 'Interesting'*

If one applies these philosophical theses to homiletics, one becomes aware of the extreme complexity of the process of preaching, from the hearing of the texts by the preacher – and the congregation! – to the proclamation of the homily from the pulpit and the work of interiorization by the faithful.

a) The preacher is first of all a listener of the biblical texts, destined originally for oral proclamation in front of a community, that have then taken on a written, multiform poetical-literary shape, and that, due to the long reading tradition in which they have been placed, don't permit an immediate understanding. It is in the degree to which the preacher lets himself be dis- and re-oriented by the scriptural passages, that he will be able to reach his audience. Indeed, it is as if the Church had ordered him to go and visit the Lord in his Word, on the Sinai of modern Revelation, before redescending into the valley in order to bear witness of one's encounter and to invite the members of one's listeners to make their own experiences with God, and to then continue these in their everyday lives[76].

b) As a consequence, the preacher becomes a reader and interpreter of the biblical pericopes entrusted to him, which requires of him a first class exegetical formation and a high level of theological reflection. He

75. For the categories of text interpretation and of the act of reading, cf. my thesis *L'herméneutique philosophique de Paul Ricœur* (n. 4), pp. 115-137.

76. In this matter, cf. my publication *Prêcher l'Ancien Testament aujourd'hui* (n. 1), pp. 62-67, and the book by T.G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, Louisville, KY, Westminster, 1989, both of which are heavily influenced by Ricœur's essay *L'herméneutique de témoignage*, in E. Castelli (ed.), *Le témoignage*, Paris, Aubier, 1972, 35-61.

must persuade himself that that which he will finally keep as central point of the texts is neither given by the Magisterium, nor by the most pertinent of commentaries, the best of reviews, or the most recent homilary. The preacher's subjectivity is thus directly sought, as well as the involvement of all his abilities – contrary to the recommendations of the theology of the Word of God "à la K. Barth". Otherwise he risks reducing his homily to a simple paraphrasing of Scripture or to a repetition of a sermon written by someone else. This requires both theological-exegetical and communicational skills, which complete one another without mutually excluding one another: they guarantee that the biblical text be not simply left to the imagination of the listeners (this would mean loosing a great deal of their innovative potential), while at the same time the preacher keeps his own spontaneity. As Ricœur would say, it's about finding a 'homiletic second naiveté' with these old biblical texts, and yet always staying capable of bringing about the new world desired by God[77].

c) Different from other producers of written texts, the preacher finds himself involved simultaneously in two acts of communication. In the act of reading, he communicates by means of the textual strategies with the implicit author, – the latter and his revealed text being themselves inspired by the Holy Spirit, according to the Christian theological point of view: in this hermeneutical dialog he holds a more important responsibility than in everyday speaking. On the other hand, in the explanation he will give, the preacher already has in mind the 'implicit listener' of the reading to whom he will speak. His appropriation of the text is thus multiform.

d) In a first stage of application the preacher tries to figure out the configurative components of the text by playing with them as much as possible and letting them intertwine with his own personal world.

e) Then, in a second stage of application, already during the time of the 'so called homiletic exegesis', he constantly keeps in mind the fact that the intrasubjective appropriation which he is realizing must become an intersubjective presentation of the possibilities of being in the world, in line with those indicated by the revealed texts.

f) And thus, in a third stage of application, he is conscious that preaching is ultimately only accomplished through the understanding of its recipients. He must, therefore, conceive his speaking strategy according to his implicit listeners. The more he knows the members of his congregation in a pastoral manner, their joys and worries, their rebellions and

77. For the notion of 'post-critical second naiveté', cf. *La symbolique du mal*, pp. 326-327, and my *Introduction* to *L'herméneutique biblique* (n. 6), pp. 11-14.

their questions, the more he will hear the contemporary situation of the 'planetary village' our universe has become, and the more his discourse will be to the point for his listeners. This third stage of appropriation, that is, the act of interpretation by the members of the congregation, distinguishes itself from the other two in the sense that the listeners don't (normally) read any written texts or have to give an articulate version of their understanding, but are called to interpret something which is given them to hear. In this case we are dealing with an oral communication unlike the reading of the texts by the preacher. It is preceded by the liturgical proclamation of the commented texts, thus giving the Scripture its statute of living Word, and it benefits from the physical presence of the preacher – his tone of voice, his attitude, his gestures, the quality of his teaching, the entire 'non-verbal' language so important in oral communication.

For sure, in contrast to a direct dialog, the act of preaching almost always comes in the form of a monologue, more distant and less personal. But it differs from a conference – woe to sermons read as a lecture! – inasmuch as it presents itself as the presentation, ripened and meditated by the preacher with his personality and his feelings, of the world of the biblical pericopes to a given congregation, in a way such that the listeners in turn manage to grasp the imaginative possibilities of living in the world as displayed by the texts, and let themselves be transformed by them. In this dialogal perspective the homily is literally – or at least should be! – 'inter-esting', in the etymological sense of the latin word 'interesse', that is, situating itself between the text and the listener[78].

g) The homiletic process thus aims at encouraging the 'saying I' of the listener, of which the preacher knows from the beginning that it will be able to distance itself from its own 'saying I' and take other paths than those suggested by him. For sure, the rhetorical preacher can be tempted to try to 'manipulate' his audience for whom he adopts exactly the point of view he is trying to recommend. But this would be an abuse of his ministry as a servant of the Word: the faithful are to be encouraged, not to be dominated. This is not possible unless they find, within the discourse they receive, free spaces within which they can breathe – think – question, without having the response that God expects of them given to them in the shape of a ready-made 'Amen'[79].

78. Cf. F.B. Craddock, *Prêcher*, Genève, Labor et Fides, 1991, pp. 127-151.

79. In this matter, G. Theissen argues for the homiletic monologue: the preacher can provide a simple and clear presentation of complex themes, he 'gives to think' to the listener, who is at liberty to take his own stance, he doesn't risk letting the direct reactions of his listeners influence him or diverted him away from his own beliefs, and in this way

Conclusion: From the Text to the Homily – A Conversation for Several Voices

Theologians, pastors and preachers who study the philosophical hermeneutics of Paul Ricœur learn to conceive the homily as a dynamic speech which emerges from the interlacing of the various conversations they have from their own world and point of view[80]: the conversation with the world of the revealed Word (the 'world behind the text' of the original conversation, the 'world of the text' of the literary, canonical shape, the 'world in front of the text' put forward for being appropriated by the readers)[81], the conversation with the community of the recipients, its particular color and the diversity of its members, the conversation with the other texts of Scripture and of the contemporary cultural universe (in the play of intertextuality), and finally the conversation with the specific liturgical framework within which the homily takes place, which makes of it a unique and unpredictable event[82].

In pastoral and practical theology, Ricœur helps us not to forget any of the partners of the homiletic dialog. This is not surprising, his work being a conversation by its very nature. He invites us to continue this work, with him, in his absence.

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he can follow through with his thoughts (*Zeichensprache des Glaubens* [n. 67], pp. 141-142).

80. Concerning the conversation for several voices, cf. chapter X of my work *Prêcher l'Ancien Testament aujourd'hui* (n. 1), pp. 518-550.

81. For these three dimensions cf. in particular the review of P. Ricœur in S.M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, Collegeville, MN, Liturgical Press, 1991.

82. According to the expression of American origin 'Preaching as Creative Event' (cf. R.L. Eslinger, *A New Hearing: Living Options in Homiletical Method*, Nashville, TN, Abingdon, 1987, p. 135), taken up by M. Nicol in the sense of a 'dramaturgical preaching' (*Einander ins Bild setzen: Dramaturgische Homiletik*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002).