

FERGUSON WOOD: CHRISTIAN CONTENTER  
IN THE COSMIC CONTROVERSY

Valerie Schneider and Richard Dean

Even a cursory glance at the contents of the three volumes comprising A History and Criticism of American Public Address<sup>1</sup> indicates a decided critical preference for the "great" orator, the "momentous" occasion, and the "celebrated" speech. Clearly this implies that only the speeches of the famous are worthy of study. In some periods of American history such a claim might be justified, but the far-reaching social changes of the recent past make this conclusion suspect. Local, state, and regional influences are more than ever exerting control. For instance, New York City, once the undisputed intellectual and cultural center of the nation, has steadily lost ground to other geographical areas. Indeed, a rebirth of interest in local history and regional mores is actually influencing the determination of national tastes. The recent fashion of nostalgia has added potency to this development. Also, the prevalent practice of ghostwriting and the manipulative power of the media have managed to elevate mediocre speakers to positions

of national prominence.

Local audiences tend to give blanket acceptance to speakers who appear on national television. They are inclined to be much more critical of local speakers. Yet they probably look more often to these local influentials for guidance in their personal decision-making. Consequently, the local or regional leader who remains influential over a period of years has met well the test of significant persuasive influence. The regional political leader, the influential local pastor, the significant state educator -- all provide a neglected but abundant source for rhetorical analysis. The public ministry of the Reverend Ferguson Wood of Johnson City, Tennessee, is a striking example of this genre.

Born in Houston, Texas, Dr. Wood was reared in St. Louis, Missouri. As a young man he decided that the ministry was clearly his goal. He was graduated from Davidson College and the Union Theological Seminary of Richmond, Virginia. Dr. Wood served pastorates in Tennessee and Alabama in his early years, and was chosen to succeed the famous Peter Marshall at the Westminster Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, Georgia. In 1946 he came to the First Presbyterian Church of Johnson City, Tennessee, where he remained as the active senior minister until his death April 8, 1976, at the age of sixty-six.<sup>2</sup>

Active in church and civic affairs, his accomplishments

were succinctly summarized in an editorial from the  
Johnson City Press-Chronicle:

Dr. Ferguson Wood was the honored and loved minister of First Presbyterian Church. He was also, in a very real sense, the honored and loved minister of the Greater Johnson City community. Leading in its civic growth, sharing its moral and social concerns, dreaming its dreams. Both officially and unofficially he was recognized as city chaplain. Perhaps the crowning accomplishment of his 30-year ministry at First Presbyterian was formation of the Johnson City Preaching Mission, of which he was the principal founder and to which he gave impetus and direction through the years.<sup>3</sup>

From influence in his church and in his community as well as with his television audience, which heard the broadcast of First Presbyterian's Sunday morning service, he moved to a wider circle of responsibility and influence in directing Presbyterian bodies and agencies in the East Tennessee and Western North Carolina region. He had served as moderator of Holston Presbytery and of the Synod of Appalachia. He had served as Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Lees-McRae College, Charles A. Cannon Hospital, Grandfather Home, and the Holston Presbytery Home Board. He was Vice-Chairman of the Board of Trustees of King College, and a member of the Trustee Board of Montreat-Anderson College.<sup>4</sup>

Skill in administration, teaching, preaching, and counseling as well as in fund-raising and promotional efforts all added to Dr. Wood's general reputation and impact upon others. However, it is reasonable to conclude

that preaching was the aspect of his ministry which enabled him to reach the greatest number of those influenced, most directly, the greatest amount of the time.

Dr. Wood regarded preaching as his most important function. Several months ago the national office of the Presbyterian Church in the United States (Southern Presbyterian) sent a questionnaire to each of its member pastors asking them to rank ten of their work functions as to level of importance in the total ministry. Dr. Wood rated preaching first.<sup>5</sup> It can be noted also in several of the sermons that even when he was speaking about a counseling or visitation function he referred to himself with the title of preacher.<sup>6</sup>

Rev. Wood seemed to carry on a preaching-type activity almost every time he spoke, whatever the occasion or context. So it is doubtful that he, himself, would have defined the terms preaching and sermon as referring only to the delivering of a formal religious message at the Sunday morning church service. However, for the purposes of limiting this study we will use the terms preaching and sermon in this restricted sense. We shall consider the content, strategy, techniques, and the style of presentation of fourteen of Dr. Wood's sermons in an effort to discover the sources of his successful preaching ministry. We are taking it as a given that he



was successful. This is not a critical study to arrive at a judgment of his rhetorical skill. Rather this is a detailed analysis, a rhetorical case-study of the methods of one highly successful preacher which might be instructive for other persuaders or critics of persuasion in the field of religion.

A clear outline of Rev. Wood's theological-philosophical viewpoint can be ascertained from reading or listening to several of his sermons. His theology was conservative and based squarely on the Bible. In fact, one could say that his position was conservative and traditional with a vengeance. This is because he stressed the historical continuity of basic human needs and the unchanging, always relevant Biblical advice in dealing with these needs. The following passage from "The Most Important Thoughts of All" (p. 3) illustrates these features:

We recognize that many are afraid of old-fashioned words such as saved from hell and saved for heaven. However, forgiveness, justification, and Sonship are the very things that this verse (Acts 4:12) is taking about. If there is any old-fashioned way of saying it, I'd like to say it that way. I would like to state it simply and clearly beyond the possibility of any misunderstanding. This same salvation which meant so much to our mothers and fathers and to their mothers and fathers before them, is the same salvation that God is holding out for us today, and saying, "This is what you need more than anything else."

Biblical quotations were the most frequent forms of supporting material in every sermon studied. The

next most frequently used supports were definitions or explanations of Biblical or theological terms such as justification, salvation, lost, grace, and love. Despite infrequent use of facts and statistics, Dr. Wood considered himself an empiricist and regarded Biblical passages relevant to his topic of inquiry as the appropriate factual data of his field. This is clearly documented in the following passage from "Our Lord is Virgin Born" (p. 3):

To this the orthodox Christologist replies that the facts of scripture are the data of all the doctrines and duties of the Christian religion. He holds that the virgin birth is an essential fact and yields essential doctrines.

Rev. Wood continually referred to Biblical statements as facts. Through these repetitions, stated in a most authoritative style and manner, he would have cultivated in his listeners the conviction that these are truly the empirical data within the fields of faith and moral decision-making.

On one level his theology was simple, basic, and much like the message of fundamentalist evangelists. He stressed that it is neither church membership nor religious activities, or is it adherence to creedal statements that make one a Christian. Nor is it adherence to any moral code, no matter how lofty and socially

useful, that makes one a Christian. Rather it is a relationship with Christ developed on the basis of admitting one's sinfulness and accepting Christ as one's savior and Lord. There also was a definite invitation to become a Christian, if one was not already in this state, at the end of almost every sermon. Occasionally this invitation occurred elsewhere in the sermon or at the end of the church service.

In addition to presenting a basic fundamentalist-type message. Dr. Wood also believed in all the "fundamentals of the faith" now under much dispute such as divine inspiration of the scriptures, the trinity, the virgin birth, the divinity of Christ, the atonement, the resurrection of Christ, and the second coming of Christ. Nevertheless, a close examination of his sermons shows that he was not a true fundamentalist. In the first place, he was not a Biblical literalist. He didn't emphasize this much, but he did refer to certain Biblical characters as types and certain stories as allegories which would have been interpreted literally by a fundamentalist. In the second place, his theology can be analyzed on a second level which shows much richness and complexity of thought and that is not characteristic of fundamentalists.<sup>7</sup>

This complexity of thought as well as his acceptance

of a classic Calvinistic theology was particularly well-illustrated in a sermon titled "God's Sovereign Grace." In this message he discussed and interrelated the doctrines of the sovereignty of God, predestination, free will, election, grace, and the eternal decrees of God, as well as defining the basic nature of heaven. He clearly believed in the classic formulation of double predestination developed by Calvin -- that some persons are predestined to salvation and others are predestined to damnation. He also acknowledged that the Bible teaches both predestination and free will although they seem contradictory, so a minister would be obligated to preach both. He further softened the impact of this harsh doctrine by stressing that believers must hope for as well as work for the salvation of all men. This practical conclusion which he gave is quite characteristic of the traditional Calvinistic position on evangelism. In addition to exploring all these key doctrines in the sermon, Rev. Wood developed an extended analogy between the two thieves crucified with Christ versus people today who decide to accept or reject Christ, calling for everyone to have the response and reap the benefits of the penitent thief.

Another interesting feature of Dr. Wood's preaching and another that might have caused him to be put mistakenly in the fundamentalist category is that of an almost-

studied anti-intellectualism which cropped up from time to time in his comments. For instance, in "What's All This Talk About Heaven" (p. 4) he remarked, "Jesus said -- 'I go to prepare a place for you.' You know I am just simple enough to take Jesus at His Word." In "The Joys of Sonship" (p. 3) he said, "We don't need deeper thinking but more faith." This style seemed to reflect his view that many people intellectualize about religion as a substitute for practicing faith, mistaking the two processes. Undoubtedly, he also felt that anti-intellectualism as a stance would elicit a favorable climate of acceptance from the primarily conservative, Southern audience he addressed.

While Biblical quotations or events were the empirical data of his sermons, most of the sermon topics were theological doctrines or religious practices. Grace, sonship, the nature of heaven, the practice of prayer, love or fear (seen from a theological perspective) were some of his most frequent subjects. He, of course, related these topics to problems of personal living and to broader social problems as well. He made these interrelations through a good variety of dramatic stories, vivid examples and cogent anecdotes. Psychologically his audience probably thought that solving a particular one of life's problems was the main topic when a more general theological exposition (to be sure,

in a popularized and nonobstrusive style) was really the main operation carried on in the sermon.

Dr. Wood tried to fulfill two equally important purposes in his preaching ministry. He tried to facilitate the conversion of the unsaved, and he tried to nurture the Christian believer in a deeper understanding and application of his faith to the various areas and problems of living.<sup>8</sup> We have noted the closing invitation and basic atonement theology that was geared to the first of these purposes. Regarding nurture, he stressed that specific problems, such as marital or family conflicts, or alcoholism, or any other problem, could be removed completely through a fuller yielding of all one's life and being to Christ. Neither in Dr. Wood's preaching nor in any classes or programs at First Presbyterian was there a stress on any of the psychological paradigms such as transactional analysis or parent effectiveness training which currently are popular and are the basis of special classes in some churches. Obviously, Dr. Wood felt that the Bible gives more complete and accurate guidelines for all the problems of life than do any secular formulations related to these areas.<sup>9</sup>

It is necessary to make a close study of the overall persuasive strategies used by Dr. Wood. Persuasive strategy can be classified according to three

main types: argumentation, transfer appeal, and tension-reduction. Argumentation is the use of facts, statistics, or other empirical data as the main supports of the final conclusion (proposition) of the persuasive message. Generally an effect-cause-solution pattern or a syllogistic form of reasoning conveys the lines of argument derived from the empirical data characteristic of this strategy. Transfer appeal is the association of an already understood or accepted idea, person, or object with the new idea being promoted in the proposition. There is an attempt to transfer attitudes toward the previously acted toward object to the new idea being promoted in the proposition of the message. Tension reduction involves the generation of or the capitalizing upon an emotional state already felt such as guilt or fear in order to show that the state can be overcome by following the persuader's proposition.

Argumentation was the primary strategy in all of the sermons studied except one on stewardship (pledging money to the church). This one address used tension-reduction to create feelings of guilt about not doing one's required duty in this area.<sup>10</sup> Tension-reduction also was used quite often in general announcements or in notes in the church bulletin that were concerned with soliciting financial contributions for various causes or were concerned with promoting attendance at various church-run or church-sponsored events. Usually one key stimulus statement such



as "Every loyal member will be sure to attend this event or give money to this cause" was a minor premise. It generated a syllogistic pattern of reasoning that included anxiety or guilt that one would not be living up to one's status as a loyal member unless one attended or contributed.

However, tension-reduction as a strategy or guilt as an emotional appeal seems never to have been a major emphasis when the sermon topic was a matter of faith or moral standards. Apparently Dr. Wood felt that behavior in these areas must be due to a freely-made, rational decision. Indeed the content of a number of his sermons indicated that he thought most persons already were in a state of feeling too much guilt, fear, and lack of self-worth. In his sermon "Is It Wrong To Love Yourself?" (p. 4) he said: "One of the biggest reasons people do not become Christians is that they do not love themselves well enough to choose the best." Further on in this sermon he added this related comment:

Why are so many young people willing to sell their souls for pleasure or popularity these days? They have grown up in a society and in homes where they have received the impression that their little lives do not matter. If we want our children to turn out well, we must not beat the self-respect out of them. (p. 4)

His primary appeal in sermons on faith and morals (and the primary stress was on faith with moral behavior as a logical, secondary by-product) was always a positive

stress on understanding and accepting the love of God and mirroring this in one's relationships with self and with others. However, unlike most theologians, but similar to contemporary psychologists of personality development, Dr. Wood began this cycle of causation with acceptance of self. This self-acceptance in turn would permit love of God and love of others: "Learn to love yourself, that you may properly love God and your fellow men." However, he added that acceptance of Christ into one's life would precede the ability to love and accept oneself. He elaborated further on this cycle of causation and on the specific nature of love. He also indicated that this kind of love relationship with God would not leave one unchanged:

But you say: "What has this acceptance of our own individuality got to do with love?" This is precisely what love is. Love is to accept warmly every other person as he is, even God. If we accept our neighbors, we will share with them. If we accept ourselves as we are, we will develop ourselves for the Kingdom of God.

What then do we mean by love? Love is the respect, recognition, consideration, and care for other persons. This is the kind of love which God has for us. He loves us just as we are, and you see what that means? We are sinners, imperfect, small, and selfish, but God in Christ has become our friend. He sees our limitations and our deformities, and yet He is not satisfied with us.

God then says: "I love you because you are you and as you are, will you permit me to help you?"<sup>11</sup>

Transfer appeal was sometimes used as a supplement to the overall strategy of argument. This usage generally involved a transfer between the attitude and corresponding fate of a Biblical figure or group compared with our possible responses today to an issue similar to the one faced in the Bible. For instance, in "God's Sovereign Grace" there was an analogy between the two thieves crucified with Christ and our two possible responses to Him. In "What Does it Mean to be Born Again?" there was an extended analogy between the responses of Nicodemus and our responses to the appeal to confess Christ as savior. In "Where Will You Spend Eternity?" there was in the introductory portion of the sermon an analogy between the Israelites wandering in the wilderness for forty years with our modern struggles and confusion over the right values to guide us.

The argumentation strategy that was the source of development in thirteen of the fourteen sermons studied did follow loosely an effect-cause-solution sequence. However, it generally was a topical pattern that was the more clearcut structural pattern of the message. A typical approximate sequence was Biblical text, the pastor's definition in his own words of some key terms in the text, stating of the general theme, further definition of what the key term in the theme is and is not, arguments for accepting the truth of the statement in the text or derived from it, and specific applications in everyday life of the theme or the text statement.

Aside from a concern with reflective, rational decision-making, there seems to be a second reason that Dr. Wood expressed himself through the strategy of argument. He saw himself as a debater contending for the affirmative of Christian faith and practice in a cosmic controversy. Within his conservative theology, the devil is a real person who is striving for souls just as earnestly as Christ is striving for them. This controversy was most thoroughly elaborated in his sermon titled, "Conflict for the Mastery of a Human Life." The whole sermon was based on an extended metaphor of an auction compared with the battle for souls. Christ and the devil are the bidders, the auctioneer is the will of man, and the stakes are the possession of one's entire being and soul. The sense of conflict was heightened and emphasized through frequent alliterative phrasing that contrasted the two bidders and their qualities. For instance, the bidders were referred to as "the savior and satan," and "the lord and the liar." A related description was that one is heavenly, the other hellish.

Variations upon the theme of this cosmic struggle were presented in other sermons. A contrast between the voice of God calling for repentance and commitment to Biblical standards versus the secular-modernist view that develops its own morality and absolution was one of these frequent variations. An extended example of this

version of the cosmic debate from "The Most Important Thoughts of All" will be presented here in its entirety:

It is very plain, therefore that first of all, we must understand what we mean when we speak of salvation. Several years ago a sophisticated college student called for an appointment. She indicated she wanted to talk about joining the church. She entered the study with a superior air about her, and I realized at once that she was in dire need of counselling. I immediately pointed out that neither being baptized nor uniting with the church would save her soul. I reminded her that there were many persons who had been baptized and were members of churches whose names were not written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

I proceeded to ask her if she were a Christian. She stated rather bluntly and frankly that she didn't know just what a Christian was. When I asked her if she had been born again, she replied, "You must be kidding! I am far past all those old-fashioned ideas of needing to be saved from anything. I have reached the place where I am ready for fellowship with a company of people with high ideals and proper motives. I am not interested in any ancient creedal statements."

I said to her, "We have reached an impasse early in our interview. If you are not in need of being saved, then by implication you have already been saved, for there is no one anywhere in all the world who can say, I have no need whatsoever of salvation, apart from the shed blood of Jesus Christ."

I went on to say, "The person who has never been born again needs a power outside of himself and greater than himself to forgive sin." With a superior air she smiled and said, "Oh, I forgive my own sin." But I said, "I am talking about being redeemed from the power of sin." And again in her own smug way she replied, "I am

the power that redeems my own life." Disturbed, unsettled, and drifting on Life's Sea, it was easy to see that she had closed her eyes to anything but her own thinking. She had cast herself loose from all safe moorings, and was adrift upon the sea of her own imaginations and concepts of life. (pp. 1 - 3)

A further variation of this cosmic debate was a description of the conflict between the old (unregenerate) man versus the new (redeemed) man. Even the reference to Carl Jung, who stressed the positive value of a religious faith, versus Sigmund Freud, who denounced the religious sentiment, was a shorthand symbol for this conflict.<sup>12</sup>

Thus far, we have analyzed the theological viewpoint of Dr. Wood. We have also noted the two purposes and the types of topics that he developed in his preaching. We have seen that he used a clearcut topical structure in organizing his thoughts and generally presented them through a strategy of argumentation to encourage thoughtful, reflective decisions about the issue being discussed. Biblical quotations and related definitions or explanations of terms were his most frequent forms of supporting material, giving a strong logical tone to the overall message.

One or two stories or anecdotes, in length and impact, much like the one about the "superior co-ed" are to be found in most of the sermons studied. Several

short examples as well as dramatic quotations from literature or songs or hymns reinforced the ideas of the major examples. These examples were very attention-getting and added a strong emotional quality to the sermons. Perhaps the most striking attention factor of all was the use of constructed dialogue such as that in the "superior co-ed" example. There also was constructed dialogue expressing God's thoughts and recommended action regarding the issue under consideration in a given sermon. Liberal use of alliteration was another major attention-getter. Rhetorical questions were frequently posed to engage the mind of the listener and to encourage reflective thinking about issues that required a decision and action.

In the usual rhetorical study, the categories we have summarized comprise the total sources of the speaker's persuasive impact. However, preachers stand in a unique position in the persuasive spectrum. First of all, they have the advantage of speaking to the same audience once a week or more over a period of years depending, of course, on their tenure. They are also in the business of influencing basic beliefs, values, and standards of conduct; a much more awesome responsibility than that of the usual politician or advertiser. Ministers usually attach an almost mystical significance to the "proclamation of the Word." This sense of divine mission



is a part of the total pulpit ethos. The minister is traditionally expected to be "a living sermon," an embodiment of precept by example. Thus, he is attempting to lead his congregation to an acceptance of Christian concepts by his preaching and by his life. The local minister lives in the community; he is no remote TV personality who is featured once a week or even a visiting evangelist who appears for a season and then vanishes. The community pastor has all the advantages and disadvantages of an intimate and continuous relationship with his parishioners and with the citizens of his locality. Ethos in such a setting becomes paramount.<sup>13</sup>

The eminent social psychologist, Gordon Allport, has formulated a statement differentiating the "mature" from the "immature religious sentiment." Through combining several closely-related items from this statement, we can reduce his criteria to three basic ones. First, the person with a mature religious outlook has a well-differentiated system of belief with great complexity and richness. This complex system also allows for recognition of some inconsistencies in one's belief system -- some doubts or some not totally reconciled areas, of which one is aware. Honest self-criticism is also included within this factor. The second major criterion is that ultimately the religious motive is self-sustaining,

not derived from other needs. Generally this would mean that religious sentiment expresses itself as the highest of all of one's values. The third major criterion is that one's religious faith supplies a comprehensive philosophy of life and consistent moral guidelines for the various areas of living.<sup>14</sup>

There is much evidence showing that Dr. Wood possessed these three main qualities of the mature religious sentiment, and that he was also trying to instill the development of these in the members of his audience. Regarding the first standard of complexity, we have seen that he had developed a multi-level personal theology, and that he presented strongly theological formulations to his audience. He also was quite original in some of his theological formulations regarding love and fear. He admitted to seeming contradictions between doctrines such as free will and predestination. He also recognized typical imperfections of believers and included himself in these statements. A good example of this occurs in "Grace Is Not a Blue-Eyed Blonde" (p. 3):

Let us consider then these other words, "Thou Shalt be." We look into our hearts and we see what we are and if we are willing to stand before God and admit that we are sinners and that we are lost in sin and are in need of His grace, we can hear these wonderful words, "Thou shalt be." Look at them in relation to ourselves. Don't sit there and say, "Oh I wish so and so had been here this morning to hear that sermon." Let's say to ourselves, "I am glad that I was there. Because the preacher was talking about himself and he was talking about me."

In this passage Dr. Wood had also stressed the particularly mature and particularly Christian view that one should be concerned mainly with self-criticism for constructive self-improvement instead of criticizing others.

That the religious drive was the strongest of all for him, providing its own motive, is shown clearly when he speaks of the most important reason for wanting to get to heaven in "What's All This Talk About Heaven?" (p. 6):

Heaven is a place where Jesus is.

If the golden streets -- the crown -- and the robe were all of heaven, it would not be worth the struggle. But heaven is a place where we are going to be forever with Jesus. Just one glimpse of His face is worth giving up everything. In order that we might reach heaven and see Him. There are many we are anxious to see in heaven but first of all we want to see Jesus. Because He is the One who made heaven possible for us.

A remark in "The Most Important Thoughts of All" (p. 13) is particularly succinct in illustrating that religious sentiment provided a unifying philosophy and overall moral guidance for Rev. Wood that that he was trying to lead his congregation toward this level of understanding and application of their faith:

If in your "search for the Ultimate," you will recognize that "There is salvation in none other." And if you will open your heart to Jesus Christ, believing

that "There is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." Simply turn away from everything you have been counting on, and dealing with, and working for, and receive Him as your personal saviour. If you will do this right now, He will speak words that shall satisfy your heart forever, and in Him you will find the answer to life's ultimate needs, as well as that peace which passeth all understanding.

Another helpful framework can be utilized here which helps us to see that Dr. Wood acted in a particularly mature communications manner with his audience. In so doing he attempted to develop mature communications, thought, and behavior in his parishioners.

Martin Buber speaks of persons being divided into two types regarding their patterns of communication with others -- "image people" versus "essence people." Image people are artificial in their manner and concerned mainly with the impression they are making on others. Some pastors today are very gushy, exuding a phony ministerial manner. They are "image persons." Dr. Wood was definitely the other type, the "essence person," one who is honest and expressive regarding his views and moods and who listens closely to the moods and views of others.<sup>15</sup> Passages quoted previously have indicated his blunt manner of presenting views he knew might not be popular with a number of people. Some of these passages also have shown much empathy with people

having problems in their lives or feeling inadequacies in their Christian faith. Such empathy indicates that he listened intently not only to what others told him directly but also to the messages conveyed by their general behavior.

It is likely that the "essence type" such as Dr. Wood would not make as favorable a first impression on people as might the "image type" who devotes his whole effort to this matter. But over a period of time the "essence person" wears well and his good qualities become well-recognized. Perhaps this is why Dr. Wood and his congregation in Johnson City mutually encouraged each other in a joint partnership of almost thirty years length, ended only by death.

A friend of one of the authors, who is a member of another church in Johnson City, confessed on one occasion that every so often she would stay home on Sunday morning so that she could listen to Dr. Wood preach on television because she benefitted so much from his preaching. She added that the first few times she had heard him speak she really didn't appreciate him, and that over the years her admiration and affection for him had grown considerably. She concluded by saying, "He is the type that grows on you after awhile." This may seem like a rather odd compliment, but it is one that, doubtless, would have pleased and amused Dr. Wood

had he heard it.

An "essence person" who communicates in this depth-level manner over a period of time with "image people" will gradually help them move closer to the essence level of thought and expression just through his mode of communication. This is due to the principle of reciprocity -- we tend to imitate or reflect back to another communicator the tone of communication that he has conveyed to us.<sup>16</sup>

In an amplification of Buber's idea, Muriel James deals with the problem emotional states and the faulty attitudes which cause people to be "image types." They live in an encapsulated state rather than in a state of freedom:

"Image people" are incapable of genuine dialogue with others which "essence people" readily engage in. The "image person" is encapsulated -- shut off from others because of fear, guilt, resentment, or disinterest. Such a person may be high in achievement but low in loving ability.<sup>17</sup>

Much of the guidance that Dr. Wood preached was an attempt to help encapsulated people escape from fear, guilt, or resentment, and to regain an interest in life. A typical illustration of this guidance as related to an outlook of guilt, fear, or discouragement is found in "Grace is Not a Blue-Eyed Blonde" (p. 2):

The good news that I bring you this morning is simply this: Whatever others think about you, or whatever you may believe about yourself, the Lord Jesus Christ believes in the

glorious possibility that you, defeated, degraded, soiled, enslaved, proud, self-centered, that you can be saved and cleansed by His transforming grace, and by this declaration our Lord indicates that He believes in the omnipotence and the all-sufficiency of God's grace and power.

Guidance related to restoring a joyous interest in life as well as a feeling of self-worth and competence is powerfully-made in "Is it Wrong to Love Yourself" (p. 5):

See yourself for what you are, with great potentialities and possibilities. Why bury 90 percent of yourself in the earth? Unused and unrecognized? Of all the people in all the world, of all those who lived, and of all those who are now alive, and even of those who will live, there never has been and never will be another person just like yourself. God has made you for a particular place in the world. He wants you to be yourself. Yet how many people are miserable because they try to be other people? Born an original, they die a copy.

In this article we have studied representative sermons of Dr. Ferguson Wood regarding their content, strategy, techniques, and style of presentation to determine if these features would yield clues to the great success of his preaching ministry. He showed consummate skill in the usual rhetorical categories such as organization, stylistic techniques, development, and implementation of persuasive strategy, and authoritative manner of delivery. We also considered the type of personal character he projected and the type of character he tried to cultivate in his listeners. Undoubtedly,



the maturity of his own religious sentiment and the maturity of his own communications behavior as well as the maturity of outlook and behavior he tried to help his audience members develop were the greatest sources of his preaching success. Beyond this, it can be said that in a time of shifting values and much confusion about religious beliefs, he stood for something definite. And he had a well-articulated position. Although his position was "conservative," a term much in disfavor today, his theology was most positive. He stressed the love of God and the great potentiality of man, when properly related to God. Many of the members of his congregation would state their view on the reason for his preaching success a little differently. They would say that he was an unusually dedicated pastor whose preaching gave them hope and direction and spoke to their real needs. Consequently, "the spirit within them" bore witness that this was the truth being preached.

Dr. Wood, himself, would have explained the reason for the success of his preaching ministry in a still different manner. He likely would have explained it in terms of the following Biblical passage:

Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos but ministers by whom ye believed, even as they Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth, any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.

(I Corinthians 3:5-7)

## NOTES

Valerie Schneider (Ph. D. 1969, University of Florida) is an associate professor of speech at East Tennessee State University. She has been a member of First Presbyterian Church in Johnson City since 1974. Richard Dean (Ph. D. 1955, Purdue University) is an associate professor of speech at East Tennessee State University.

<sup>1</sup>William Norwood Brigance and Marie Kathryn Hochmuth, eds. A History and Criticism of American Public Address, 3 vols. (New York, 1955).

<sup>2</sup>This biographical information is taken from the church bulletin printed for the occasion of Rev. Wood's funeral service on April 11, 1976.

<sup>3</sup>"A Mighty Legacy," editorial in Johnson City Press Chronicle, Section 2, p. 2, April 9, 1976.

<sup>4</sup>"Ferguson Wood, Prominent Minister, Dies," Johnson City Press Chronicle, pp. 1, 12., April 9, 1976.

<sup>5</sup>Dr. Wood's personal secretary, Mrs. Dolores Hart, supplied this information regarding the survey and his response to it in an interview with one of the authors on April 28, 1976.

<sup>6</sup>See, for example, "Where Will You Spend Eternity?", p. 5.

<sup>7</sup>For a thorough discussion of fundamentalism versus a more classic theological position, see: "Fundamentalism" in Encyclopedia Britanica (1970), Vol. 9, p. 1009; and Edward John Carnell, "Fundamentalism," in Handbook of Christian Theology (New York, 1964), p. 143.

<sup>8</sup>The content of the sermons studied (ten manuscripts and four cassette versions) show quite clearly that these are the two purposes. In addition, Mrs. Hart who typed manuscripts of the sermons from dictophone renderings of them said that Dr. Wood told her these were his two purposes. He felt that if the nurture purpose was effectively carried out in sermons that less counseling

about personal problems would be necessary.

<sup>9</sup>A qualification should be made here that this viewpoint did not imply or include lack of support for other agencies working on these problems as a supplement to what the church was doing. For instance, one of the authors has received the monthly report of the Johnson City Alcohol and Drug Treatment Rehabilitation Center which is sent to all heads of civic and religious groups in Johnson City. Each month First Presbyterian Church was one of the biggest contributors to the work of this center.

<sup>10</sup>"It's You God Wants!" October 26, 1976. This strategy worked quite well. In recent years particularly, Dr. Wood consistently raised the largest church budgets in the community.

<sup>11</sup>"Is It Wrong to Love Yourself," p. 5.

<sup>12</sup>For an example of the "old" versus "new man" see "The Joys of Sonship," p. 1. The contrast between Freud and Jung occurs in "The Most Important Thoughts of All," p. 9. Rather interesting, however, in "Get Rid of Your Fear" (cassette) he took Freud's idea that all fears relate to anxiety about loss of love and used this to support his thesis that all fears relate back to a fear of God when one knows one is not properly related to Him. He said this was surprising that he could use Freud as support of his view and mentioned it with obvious glee. The whole interpretation in this sermon about fear is rather creative.

<sup>13</sup>However, it should be added that Dr. Wood stressed that every Christian should be a living sermon, a witness by being a good example of the beneficial effects of one's faith. This idea was the whole point of development in "The Case of the Christian."

<sup>14</sup>Gordon W. Allport, The Individual and His Religion: A Psychological Interpretation (New York, 1973), pp. 59 - 83.

<sup>15</sup>Muriel James, Born to Love: Transactional Analysis in the Church (Reading, Massachusetts, 1973), p. 184. (Muriel James is both a Protestant minister and a psychologist who specializes in the transactional analysis method of therapy.) She has taken Buber's key ideas and related them to TA, extending the use and meaning of them.

<sup>16</sup>Michael Argyle, The Psychology of Interpersonal Behavior (Middlesex, England., 1967), pp. 63 - 67.

<sup>17</sup>Born to Love, p. 185.