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The narrative turn in homiletics by *pathos*

„PATHOS: PERSUASIVE APPEALS TO LISTENERS' EMOTIONS

The question guiding homiletic pathos is: “Why should my listener care?” The preacher searches for ways to engage the worldview and emotions of the congregation in order to persuade them that what is being said is true and should be taken seriously. Preachers use empathy and identification to enter the lives of the congregation in search of ways to connect the message with things that truly matter to listeners. (...) The goal of sermon pathos is an open, empathetic correlation of the sermon's message with important concerns in the lives of listeners, so that they will personally invest in what is being said.”¹

NEW HOMILETICS

The movement called *New Homiletic* developed in America and had its heyday during the last quarter of the 20th century. This meant that it coincided with the narrative perception of faith, borrowing many impulses from the latter. Generally it is difficult to understand this development, which resulted in New Homiletics being what it is. While in Europe homiletics of Barthian “theology of the Word”² dogmatically secluded itself from experimental practice, the same Barthiantheological movement in the US believed that dogmatic and definitive assessment

¹ McClure, John S.: *Preaching Words: 144 Key Terms in Homiletics*, Westminster John Knox Press. Louisville, 2007. 101-102.

² Karl Barth was a Swiss reformed theologian in the 20th century. He rejected the predominant liberal theology. Instead he embarked on a new theological path initially called *dialectical theology*. His theological work usually is known as „*a theology of the Word*.” Barth emphasized the sovereignty of God, particularly through his interpretation of the Calvinistic doctrine of election, the sinfulness of humanity, and the „*infinite qualitative distinction between God and mankind*” (Kierkegaard). See more: Url: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_Barth (Downloaded: 2013.12.20.)

does not provide suitable answers to problems encountered in practice. Thus, experimentation was natural in America. This is a very difference between American and European homiletics in the 70s.

The “*quo modo*” of preaching thus gained greater and greater emphasis overseas, but at the same time it did not separate itself from those directions of homiletics, which search the depth of preaching. An important breakthrough in forms of preaching was achieved, among others, by the analogy of Grady Davis, in which he compared the development of a sermon to living organisms, like a tree.³ The indistinguishable unity of form and contents began to show up in such analogies to living, natural beings, and became definitive in homiletic thinking of the age. In other words, only what is alive can develop within its own framework.

New Homiletic is new in the sense that in contrast to traditional and kerygmatic types of preaching, *New Homiletic* is based on speech event and methodically on inductive orientation. *New Homiletic* found its philosophical principles in new hermeneutics. New hermeneutics promulgated that with the aid of “hermeneutical circle” the person and the text develop together. This means that the commentator not only explains the text to his audience, but tells it in a new way, accommodating to the new situation, because the language of the text sometimes makes it unclear. It is not enough to outline the text for the present situation, but both the text and present case must be interpreted, if possible, unifying these two horizons.⁴ Fuchs called this “speech event”.⁵

Achievements of speech event (or speech act theory) therefore appear not only at theoretical, but also at practical levels in homiletics. Thus, most practising homiletics regarded this as a “litmus test” to see, “what happens in the sermon”. Here not simply the fact that the sermon has happened and transmitted the truth is important, but, from the practical point of view, what happens during the half hour, when the

³ Davis, Grady Henry: *Design for preaching*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1958. 15-16.

⁴ Thiselton, Anthony C.: *The New Hermeneutic*, in *A Guide to Contemporary Hermeneutics: Major Trends in Biblical Interpretation*, ed. McKim, Donald K., Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1986. See the same: Thiselton, Anthony C.: *The two horizons*, New Testament hermeneutics and philosophical description, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1980. 10-16.

⁵ Fuchs, Ernst: *Hermeneutik*. MohrSiebeck, Tübingen, 1970.

preacher talks to his audience. The aim was that the audience should become an active participant in the speech event – in other words that the listener should gain new knowledge and experience during this process. The sermon, in the presence and reality of God, becomes a real event. The most important criterion of this event is the unbreakable unity of contents and form.

Like in real life, every content can be understood within its own-form, even abstract concepts of faith and theology depend on the formal characteristics of their expressions.

The other supporting pillar of new homiletics, besides the unity of contents and form, is that the sermon is an event which occurs continuously in time, in other words, it can be observed only as part of a historical process. It cannot be regarded on its own as an abstract concept; it must be examined as a process. Thus, observation and experience become dominant features of homiletic discussions.

The methodology of new homiletics is based on induction. It should not try to use general, but concrete truths of faith when speaking to the audience, who then can themselves draw the relevant conclusions. If the sermon is developed well and reached its target, then the conclusion of the listener and the general truth of the Bible become identical. This method is secured by the unity of the aesthetically examined reality and the language, thus the language becomes not simply the instrument of existing realities, but its product. Thus, a sermon while strictly adhering to truth, can only express it through the language and to make it an event.

The above mentioned phenomena resulted in the strengthening of pathos as a rhetorical argument in New Homiletics. The action, involvement, emotive participation, empathy and encounter all aimed to strengthen the link between the speaker with his theme and the audience to the maximum. The homiletic context of the sixties and seventies was the context of ineffectual preaching. Most homiletic textbooks tried to find a solution to newly establish the relevancy of preaching, asking the question, how can a Christian sermon become effective again? Naturally, there were theologians who wanted to base this on theological principles, but New Homiletics found these fundamentals in New Hermeneutics, its motto being: in dialogue with the receiver (listener). Therefore New Homiletics concentrated all its efforts on the listener of

the sermon, with whom it tried to pursue a dialogue. This approach was based on the reasoning of pathos, which they expressed as: “turn to the listener” or “hearer-driven homiletic”. “For homileticians, New Hermeneutics and movements in linguistic theory inspired a new appraisal of the role of listeners, their perceptions, and needs as integral to the preaching event. This move toward anthropological concerns resulted in listeners becoming central to the preacher’s consideration of not only what to say but how to say it. Sermons were understood as capable of making their appeal not only through rational arguments but evocation, imagination, and addressing listeners’ emotional needs as well.”⁶

New Homiletics found the answer to “*how*” in the narrative paradigm; therefore I will try to present the connections between narratology, rhetoric, theology and homiletics.

NARRATIVE TURN

Our everyday life, culture, history, care of ourselves and self-reflection are narrative in style. One expresses his own world, his life and identity in narrative terms. Reflections on our past, present and future are all embedded in the structure of time, resulting clearly in historical understanding of life.

However narrative thinking nowadays outgrew the simple explanation and classification of events. The innovations of the seventies, which influenced substantially the development of science, are nowadays often termed as narrative turn. This means that narrative is a much more general category than the study of fairy tales and short stories. Besides structural analysis of texts it is also applied in other disciplines. It is characteristic mainly of the social sciences (history, philosophy, sociology, politics, psychology and recently also in theology) that their object is of narrative nature. This means that in these various sciences similar phenomena occur in relation to the nature of the discipline and their discursive strategies. These common phenomena, with parallel rules, form the scientific structures of narrative, which can be applied also in theological investigations.

⁶ Ottoni-Wilhelm, Dawn: New Hermeneutic, New Homiletic, and New Directions: An U.S. – North American Perspective. *Homiletic* 35/1. 2010. 20.

In narrative discourse Walter Fischer introduced the concept of narrative paradigm.⁷ According to his interpretation all forms of communications, which affect our intellect, have to be understood as such an eventuality, which is shaped by history, culture and character. Fisher's aim was that besides didactical or descriptive communication narrative communication has a basic importance. The concept of narrative paradigm was an answer to the view of science in the seventies. In other words, according to Thomas Kuhn⁸ the solid structure of any science is indicated by generally accepted paradigms. Researchers of communication tried to define such a paradigm, which perfectly explains the behaviour of communication, and therefore provides a solid basis for the theories of communication. Thus, he suggests, among others, narrative paradigm should not be approached as special rhetoric, but as fundamental, on which the entire rhetoric can be built.⁹ His main work referenced above begins with a quotation from Scripture: "in the beginning was the word (Logos)". As he explains, the Greek word means an event, argument, discourse, principle, concept, thought, in other words, all forms of communication. According to him in those times imagination and thought were not separated. With philosophical writing one can observe that special usage, where the meaning of Logos moves towards thought and assertion. As a result, imagination, aesthetics and art are of secondary importance. Eventualities [tales, stories] do not fit pure logics, as they only affect sentiments; they become tools of delusion rather than those of noble persuasion.

This struggle between pure logics, sentimental effect, rationality and emotions not only characterised the classical age, but has continued to do so ever since in our cultural life and in homiletics, too.

NARRATIVE IN CLASSICAL RHETORIC

In Aristotle's Rhetoric one can read that "narration" is that part of speech, which is positioned in the first part of "tractation", in the invention. In-

⁷ Fisher, Walter R.: *Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value, and Action*, University of South Carolina Press, Columbia, 1987.

⁸ Kuhn, Thomas S.: *The structure of scientific revolutions*, University of Chicago Press, 1970.

⁹ Fisher, 194.

roduction (“*exordium*”) is followed by the “*narration*” just before the “*propositio*” and “*argumentatio*”. „In political oratory there is very little opening for narration; nobody can „narrate” what has not yet happened. If there is narration at all, it will be of past events, the recollection of which is to help the hearers to make better plans for the future.”¹⁰ The fact, that according to Aristotle narration can not only be used after the introduction, but at other parts of the speech, or that it can be applied in all kinds of talk, can also be suggested through the paradigm mentioned before – not only for pragmatic reasons (information, understanding) but also by anthropological reasoning. Thus, events, happenings, persons and characters linked to these, and the whole environment is secured and interpreted as a great personal history.

One can distinguish several types of narration:

- *Prodiegesis* – a short, condensed, purposeful narration about essentials
- *Hypodiegesis* – an enlarged narration (suitable to strengthen probability, which first looks unimportant but which gains relevance later in the verification)
- *Antidiegesis* – narration which formulates opposition, disapproval
- Sidetracking the object with a parable – describing it with analogy or a parable

An indispensable part of any narration is an internal order. This can be either natural or artificial. The former is structured around chronology, space, reason and its consequence etc, while the latter is arranged by the speaker according to the subject or theme.

Among the antique criteria of narration brevity, clarity and probability were most important (see Cornificius). These ensured acceptance, understanding and empathy by the listener. Classical orators unambiguously used persuasion to convey real or possible events; in the law courts they tried to use it for conviction. This renders a sort of vehicle for special purposes in oratorical skills. In this sense Greco-Roman rhetoric regarded persuasion/verification as the primary aim, placing other parts of speech under this.

¹⁰ Aristotle: Rhetoric 1417b.

It is easy to see therefore that the so-called illustrative theory of preaching tradition drew on the system of classical rhetoric. The thought, the content, is often illuminated by an analogy, an image, an example or a story. As C. H. Spurgeon, a leading preacher of the 19th century wrote, an illustration is like a window, it illuminates the subject, brings air into an airless room.¹¹ Compared to the understanding of narrative of the 20th century, antique rhetoric regarded the function of narration quite differently.

The Biblical (eastern-semitic) approach of narration was also quite different from the concepts of antique rhetoric, and in some ways it is closer to today's theories. For example the prophet Nathan did not prove the guilt of David by legal means (with a speech in the courts), but by telling a parable. The king declares sentence over himself. Persuasion reached its target; David shows remorse and accepts the verdict (see 2 Samuel 12 in the Bible).

I regard the research of George Kennedy, published in 1998 on comparative rhetoric interesting.¹² The aim of his research was to examine how people, outside the Greco-Roman societies (where there is no exact equivalent of what we call rhetoric) discuss their problems with each other. He points to several cultures, where the judge uses proverbs or a short story when pronouncing verdict to the disputing parties, who have to draw appropriate consequences from these.

This type of gaining knowledge is of course not alien to the European way of thinking. Rhetorical tradition using analogical reasoning accompanies the history of communications (e.g. when the orator strengthens his subject with an anecdote or a story). We call these stories *exemplums*. An example of this rhetorical induction is the work of Aristotle. The use of this example was especially favoured during the Middle Ages. There is a curious early literary work, which is generally regarded as the first modern novel, and is entirely based on such *exemplums*. I think of the Catalan philosopher and author, Ramon Llull who in 1288-89 wrote a novel entitled "Felix or the book of wonders". In this novel, Felix is sent by his father to the world in order to find out why the Christianity of the age distanced

¹¹ Spurgeon, Charles Haddon: The Art of Illustration, Pilgrim Press, 1986.

¹² Kennedy, George: Comparative rhetoric: an historical and cross-cultural introduction, Oxford University Press, 1998.

itself from the faith and thinking of the apostles and martyrs. Felix tries to tackle his task systematically. In a hierarchical way we read about God, angels, heaven, plants, even hell. Felix enquires, converses, researches, but there are no definite conclusions. For questions (like “Who is God?”, “Who are the angels?”) they tell him one or more stories. The end of the novel is telling. Felix now knows everything. He lives in a monastery and is revered by his brethren. When he dies, at his funeral the priest tells the story of Felix’s life to the congregation. This has a great effect on one of the friars. He memorizes everything and, with the permission of his authorities, he also goes wandering as a “second Felix” to observe the world. And so on. Newer and newer Felixs emerge, who seek truth, knowledge, laws in the world, and they find these in the large labyrinth of stories.

Regarding the narrative possibilities of rhetoric within ecclesiastic life, one can see even at the level of common phenomena, that personal and genuine histories of faith are more convincing compared to direct communications. Communication theories says that in the influencing of cognitive and affective spheres the nature of the relationship between the speaker and the listeners (like a respected speaker, a friend, member of congregation) has at least a proportion of 70 per cent. We call this the argument of pathos.

NARRATIVE THEOLOGY

In this part I do not wish to discuss the deep relationships between theology and its adhering disciplines like history and philology, but would like to describe briefly the initiative which theologians have drafted in the last quarter of the 20th century. Among the most prominent representatives are the researchers of Yale University: George Lindbeck, Hans Frei, Ronald Thiemann or the authors of the most important articles like Johan B. Metz, Harald Wienrich, Paul Ricoeur from Europe.

The origin of the theological trend cannot be related to one person or school, but it is generally accepted that the beginnings are connected to Erich Auerbach’s epoch-making work.¹³ It was he who opened the

¹³ Auerbach, Erich. *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. Trans. Willard Trask. Princeton University Press, 2003.

path for the theological application of biblical narrative research.¹⁴ Most people trace the origin of narrative theology back as far as Karl Barth, who added new authority to Scripture, as the history of God. According to Richard Niebuhr God has revealed himself in the course of history (liberation from Egypt and Babylon, liberation of Jesus), and therefore the best way of expressing the nature of revelation is narration.¹⁵ The spirit of enlightenment did not favour the expression of truth in history. The first important work was published by Hans Frei in 1974,¹⁶ which strongly criticised the thinking of enlightenment about contents and form. His view was that this era restricted theology into a general rational theory, and this necessarily lead to the downgrading of the historical books. It also meant that history had no role in theology, its only aim being the verification and refinement of rationally structured principles. Bultmann's trend of suppressing myths was also part of this approach, which held that the timeless person of Jesus can be separated from the descriptions left to us in the scriptures. If we define the importance of Jesus as timeless, these descriptions lose their meaning, in other words contents have priority over the form of revelation, which attains at best secondary importance.

I also refer to another publication, which interestingly does not apply the form of biblical narratives as a basis of its reasoning. Johan B Metz provides theological arguments for the necessity of narrative tradition, i.e. the importance of narrative memory.¹⁷ His emphasis is based on experiences of faith, for which neither rites nor dogma were able to provide adequate form. Only historical narration is the revelation, in which creation, resurrection, the history of Jesus' suffering, healing and redemption can be adequately expressed.

¹⁴ He compared Homer's *Odyssey* and the Genesis 22. He continuously emphasizes that the aspects of the Bible (historical, temporal, conscious) are deeper than in Homer's work. According to him the quality of the biblical narrative is very specific and realistic.

¹⁵ Niebuhr, Richard: *The meaning of revelation*, Westminster JKP, 2006.

¹⁶ Frei, Hans W.: *The eclipse of Biblical narrative: a study in eighteenth and nineteenth century hermeneutics*, Yale University Press, 1980.

¹⁷ Metz, Johan Baptist: *Kleine Apologie des Erzählens*, *Concilium* 9, (1973), 329-334.

According to Ricouer the understanding of existence through events and self-interpretation ensures the solid foundation for narrative theology and biblical research. That is, as far as Scriptures are concerned, one has to see that a substantial part of biblical stories appear as “narrative creed”. Various aspects of faith, like creation, the Flood, liberation, declaration of law, captivity, gospel, redemption etc. appear as human experience through narration of events and history. The language of redemption is therefore not argumentative, but narrative. Furthermore, the story of suffering cannot be explained simply through argumentative means, it basically is memorative-narrative theology. Remembrance and narration relativises the argumentative theology, making it necessary to rethink the relation of history and interpretation. One cannot accept the view that the gospel narrates stories, while theology has to take up its interpretation.

Although, as I pointed out earlier, Logos was in initial form already Logos, i.e. all ways of expression were free to use, among others for the historical and event-like narrations. The tension between the approach provided by the enlightenment and by the narrative method has however emerged much earlier in the development of theology. This happened in connection with the Hellenization of eastern-semitic history. Namely the character of Christianity has been fundamentally altered as a result of Hellenization. It was not the Logos which became of narrative character, but in reverse narration disappeared in the dense system of logics. In the biblical stories however, interestingly the process was reversed, i.e. not that the concept took up an abstract meaning, but the Logos became historical.

Going back to the article of Metz, by his advice we are bound to observe three objects, if we do not wish to be trapped by anachronism or by superficial modernization. These objects are borrowed from the area of systematic (dogmatic) theology: remembrance, narration, solidarity. We should remember our freedom, our own history with God, as a deed of God. This remembrance is first of all *memoriapassionis*, the remembrance of Jesus’ passion, to remember those who were made sacred during the course of history. This remembrance also saves us from the notion we require the sufferings of others to facilitate our own progress. Narration thus is about those who suffer or suffered in the past. The

narrator accepts solidarity with them.¹⁸ He accepts this solidarity, because he is talking to the oppressed and forgotten people in the hope of release and freedom. In this sense theology becomes politicised. Its basis is the faith of first Christians, who narrated to one another the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus, and they understood their own situation through remembrance, history and solidarity. According to Metz a narrated story is always a story with understanding, thus narration and argumentation are intertwined.

The effect of narrative theology on narrative homiletics

This source of tension which occurs in narrative theology has its effect on the discussions in narrative homiletics. The first question which appears is whether contents and form are separable or inseparable. According to the narrative approach contents cannot be distilled from the form.

The biblical stories are not simply illustrations attached to a thought, but they are forms of expression. Also in preaching the stories have greater relevance than secondary illuminations. A narration cannot become ideological if it is more than the illustration of the topic. If a narration is merely an illustration, it is difficult to liberate it from allegorical approaches. However, instead of allegory a metaphor is capable of securing that activity, which points beyond itself and which at the same time secures the relevance of the form.

The effect of narrative theology on narrative homiletics is often misunderstood. When we speak about something or someone (descriptive style), we may think that we are preaching narratively. The fact is just the opposite. Description does not necessarily mean narration. Argument often uses the tool of description (as in classical rhetoric). Narrative homiletics (just like narrative theology) thinks in terms of events. If in a sermon God is not merely the object of description or its person, but begins to “happen”, i.e. becomes part of the story, this is when we can talk of narrative preaching, and about the maximum effect of the pathos. Narrative preaching discloses what happens in the presence of God. For this reason the form of narrative preaching is multicoloured. It cannot be compared

¹⁸ Liberation theology and narrative theology are very close to each other.

to the two and a half millennia-old propositional speech of Aristotle. The emphasis of narrative preaching is not based on didactics, but on history itself, or on its relation to history, in other words what the story induces in us. We may open up or seclude ourselves, we may become more daring or timid, or we may get consolation or distress. Our faith is not articulated for ourselves in concepts, but in events, especially in self experience.

The encouraging and consoling character of a sermon draws its message from the knowledge, that if God was able to do his great deeds in the distant past, he can achieve these even nowadays, also in the life of the listener. Faith becomes active (in its fullness, in emotional, rational or voluntary spheres),ⁱ e. it becomes stronger rather than weaker as the effect of listening to the sermon.

To achieve this, it is not sufficient to use simply topics illustrated by analogies, short narratives or examples. New Homiletics regarded the whole sermon as a full plot based on events, where the totality of time, characters and happenings brings a ready message to the audience. New Homiletic analogues became the vehicle of the message. They are no longer illustrations, but they are the message themselves. A chain of stories or a longer story has a plot with succeeding moments or moves, a whole movement. It includes the message in itself. Such complete narratives can visualize the whole Christian narrative, the story of Jesus even on a small scale for the listener, by means of which the listener can takepart in the narrative. This is the maximum effect of the argued system of pathos, when the effect on the listener means that he/she is fully included in the rhetorically presented text, and can identify with the values presented in the sermon.

Appendix

As example let me present the following narrative,¹⁹ the plot structure of which attempts to draft the salvation narrative in a new way.

A wealthy man and his son loved to collect rare works of art. They had everything in their collection, from Picasso to Raphael. They would often sit together and admire the great works of art.

¹⁹ Url:http://www.reformationtheology.com/2006/06/the_parable_of_the_painting_1.php#more (Downloaded 2013.12.20.)

When the Vietnam conflict broke out, the son went to war. He was very courageous and died in battle while rescuing another soldier. The father was notified and grieved deeply for his only son.

About a month later, just before Christmas, there was a knock at the door. A young man stood at the door with a large package in his hands. He said, "Sir, you don't know me, but I am the soldier for whom your son gave his life. He saved many lives that day, and he was carrying me to safety when a bullet struck him in the heart and he died instantly. He often talked about you, and your love for art."

The young man held out this package. "I know this isn't much. I'm not really a great artist, but I think your son would have wanted you to have this."

The father opened the package. It was a portrait of his son, painted by the young man. He stared in awe at the way the soldier had captured the personality of his son in the painting. The father was so drawn to the eyes that his own eyes welled up with tears.

He thanked the young man and offered to pay him for the picture.

"Oh, no sir, I could never repay what your son did for me. It's a gift."

The father hung the portrait over his mantle. Every time visitors came to his home he took them to see the portrait of his son before he showed them any of the other great works he had collected.

The man died a few months later. There was to be a great auction of his paintings. Many influential people gathered, excited over seeing the great paintings and having an opportunity to purchase one for their collection.

On the platform sat the painting of the son. The auctioneer pounded his gavel. "We will start the bidding with this picture of the son. Who will bid for this picture?"

There was silence.

Then a voice in the back of the room shouted, "We want to see the famous paintings. Skip this one."

But the auctioneer persisted. "Will someone bid for this painting? Who will start the bidding? \$100, \$200?"

Another voice shouted angrily. "We didn't come to see this painting. We came to see the Van Goghs, the Rembrandts. Get on with the real bids!"

But still the auctioneer continued. "The son! The son! Who'll take the son?"

Finally, a voice came from the very back of the room. It was the long-time gardener of the man and his son. "I'll give \$10 for the painting." Being a poor man, it was all he could afford.

"We have \$10, who will bid \$20?"

"Give it to him for \$10. Let's see the masters."

"\$10 is the bid, won't someone bid \$20?"

The crowd was becoming angry. They didn't want the picture of the son. They wanted the more worthy investments for their collections. The auctioneer pounded the gavel. "Going once, twice, SOLD for \$10!"

A man sitting on the second row shouted, "Now let's get on with the collection!"

The auctioneer laid down his gavel. "I'm sorry, the auction is over."

"What about the paintings?"

"I am sorry. When I was called to conduct this auction, I was told of a secret stipulation in the will. I was not allowed to reveal that stipulation until this time. Only the painting of the son would be auctioned. Whoever bought that painting would inherit the entire estate, including the paintings. The man who took the son gets everything!"