

**Reconsidering the Image of Preacher-as-Teacher:
Intersections between Henry Giroux’s Critical Pedagogy
and Homiletics**

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Abstract

Contemporary homiletic discourse posits a number of images that represent beliefs about preaching identity. Among those images, the relationship between preaching and teaching is one of varied use through the years, with little use or reflection in contemporary homiletics. With the help of the field of critical pedagogy, however, and the critical pedagogy found in the work of Henry Giroux, the preacher-as-teacher can be a vital image for understanding the theory and practice of preaching. Appropriating Giroux’s critical pedagogy, this paper seeks to understand how the preacher-as-teacher prioritizes ecclesiology implicitly and explicitly, answers questions about the authority of the preacher, frames relationships with listeners, negotiates its relationship with culture, and articulates a theological account of the tasks of preaching.

Images of Preaching Identity and Preaching-as-Teaching

It has become an almost commonplace exercise for preachers to examine and re-examine their fundamental assumptions about the practice of preaching through “identify[ing] the trope, the imaginative figure of thought which best captures what they believe they are ‘up to’ in preaching.”¹ Through this work, homileticians, preachers, and students of preaching are engaging

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in the kind of critical reflection by which an image comes to represent a system of beliefs about the preacher's role and identity, the work of God in preaching, the role of listeners, relationships with sacred texts, the human situation, and a host of other entailments.² These images often take the form of statements that begin "the preacher as..." Most notably, a number of these images are explored in Thomas Long's introductory preaching textbook *The Witness of Preaching*.³ Long sketches the images of the preacher as "herald," "pastor," "storyteller/poet," and "witness" as "organizing metaphors of ministry." More recently, in 2009, the Rhetoric Working Group of the Academy of Homiletics engaged in a panel discussion that considered contemporary images of preaching identity, which resulted in the book *Slow of Speech and Unclean Lips: Contemporary Images of Preaching Identity*, edited by Robert Reid.⁴ In it, a number of scholars in homiletics present robust images of preaching identity such as "messenger of hope," "lover," "God's mystery steward," "ridiculous person," "fisher," "host and guest," "one 'out of your mind,'" and "one entrusted." These images help describe theologies of preaching useful for framing one's own concept of preaching, rooted in understandings of theology, tradition, and context. All this is to say that conceiving of images for preaching identity is a helpful exercise for articulating a coherent theology of preaching and establishing the relationship between theory and practice in preaching.

Of course, there is historical precedent for this kind of discussion. C.H. Dodd's significant book *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Development* set the stage for consideration of what preaching is and does in the early 20th century.⁵ In it, Dodd famously makes the distinction between *kerygma* and *didache*, or preaching and teaching, based on close examination of the New Testament. For Dodd,

There is a clear distinction between preaching and teaching, and this can be found in the Gospels, Acts, Epistles, and Apocalypse. Teaching is ethical instruction in most instances, though in particular instances it might be called apologetic, 'the reasoned commendation of Christianity to persons interested but not yet convinced.' Preaching is the public proclamation of Christianity to the non-Christian world.⁶

Dodd was able to make this distinction, he believed, by distilling a specific formulaic content for Christian *kerygma* throughout the New Testament. While highly influential, this distinction has not withstood the test of time and the sharp separation between preaching and teaching, as outlined by Dodd, has blurred.⁷

In the early 1990s, the idea of the preacher-as-teacher surfaced again. In response to mainline denominational decline, Clark Williamson and Ronald Allen consider the question "What should be the image, model, or role of the clergy? How should Christian pastors understand what the church properly expects and needs from them? What is the central task of the ministry?"⁸ To this, Williamson and Allen respond,

Preaching itself, for example, is seldom an evangelistic proclamation to a crowd of people who have never before heard of the Christian faith. Usually it is a presentation to a congregation of Christian people who, whatever their understandings of things Christian, have at least taken the risk of exposing themselves to the gospel. While every sermon

should no doubt announce the good news to these people, it should also, and for the greater part, be at pains to teach it to them, to help them come to understanding it and their lives in relationship to each other.⁹

By this, Williamson and Allen believe that the preacher retrieves an ancient tradition and places it in conversation with the present, with two specific tasks. “The first is enabling the community to recall (or learn) the content of the gospel as well as the traditions of our faith from the time of the Bible to the present day. The other is the interpretation of the gospel (and the tradition) for the sake of the living community.”¹⁰ To this extent, every sermon is a sermon that teaches, as it not only passes on content of a historical faith, but also embodies/models a kind of theological method for everyday life.¹¹ Williamson and Allen are, of course, responding to the so-called New Homiletic (and not to Dodd), which raises the importance of preaching as an affective or experiential encounter, as opposed to the transmission of content.¹²

The use of images to conceptualize preaching and the image of preacher-as-teacher, then, has some serious historical precedent, even if traced in broad strokes here. By and large, however, the image of teacher-as-preacher does not surface in the most recent images (referenced above) as a compelling image for contemporary preaching and homiletic reflection. It certainly has not presented itself as a robust image in contemporary homiletics. Indeed, Ronald Allen abandons the central image of preacher-as-teacher when he later goes on to use the image of preaching as “interpretation” and preacher as “interpreter” in his introductory preaching textbook.¹³

In the interest of using contemporary theory as an interdisciplinary partner for homiletics, I contend that the field widely known as “critical pedagogy,” and in particular critical pedagogy as articulated by Henry Giroux, can invigorate the image of preacher-as-teacher in such a way as to provide a vital image for the theory and practice of preaching today.

The Critical Pedagogy of Henry Giroux: A Brief Introduction

A brief introduction to critical pedagogy and specifically to the critical pedagogy of Henry Giroux is in order here. At its broadest definition, critical pedagogy is a school of thought that questions contemporary theories and practices of education, the reasons for its deficiencies, and the possibilities for education in specific contexts. Critical pedagogy traces its most immediate roots to Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. Famous for his 1970 work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire criticizes a “banking” method of education wherein the powerful transmit learning to the masses, the content and delivery of which serves the interest of oppressive regimes.¹⁴ Freire imagines and enacts methods of teaching that are intended to raise critical consciousness of students as they learn to read and write. Education becomes, then, not simply a set of skills acquired for uncritical reproduction of cultural values (as defined by the powerful/elite), but a practice of freedom and liberation for oppressed peoples.

Henry Giroux is a former high school teacher who teaches in the department of English and Cultural Studies of McMaster University in Ontario, Canada. Giroux assimilates the work of his now deceased friend Freire with a wide range of theoretical influences. Giroux leans heavily on Frankfurt School theorists Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Herbert Marcuse for their thoughts on the historical, cultural, economic, and political production of knowledge. According to Giroux, what the Frankfurt School “provides for educational theorists is a mode of critique and a language of opposition that extends the concept of the political not only into mundane social relations but into the very sensibilities and needs that form the personality and psyche.”¹⁵ In addition, Giroux makes use of a wide swath of partners: Antonio Gramsci’s concepts of culture and domination; the concepts of culture, power, and resistance in the British cultural studies of Stuart Hall and Raymond Williams; Michel Foucault’s work on “power/knowledge”; Pierre Bourdieu’s work on social capital; the educational theory of pragmatist James Dewey; and influences from Latin American liberation theology (via Freire) and feminist theology.¹⁶

The range of influences is immense and Giroux’s writing extends from education in his earliest work to cultural studies, politics, popular culture, and critical youth studies. For Giroux, all of these sites of inquiry are related one to another, as they are for those who influence him.¹⁷ There are a number of voices who work in the field of critical pedagogy, but none as widely-published and influential as Giroux. While I could take up the field of critical pedagogy as a whole, or pick and choose from a variety of authors within the field, limiting this study to Giroux’s articulation of critical pedagogy most helpfully informs a reconsideration of the preacher-as-teacher image.

For Giroux, like his mentor Freire, critical pedagogy is about both “critique” and “possibility” (or, as he often uses alternatively, “hope”). In the mode of critique, Giroux “examine[s] the various ways in which classrooms too often function as modes of social, political, and cultural reproduction. . . . In the context of reproduction, pedagogy is largely reduced to a transmission model of teaching and limited to the propagation of a culture of conformity and the passive absorption of knowledge.”¹⁸ He places under scrutiny “traditional pedagogy operating under the sway of technical mastery, instrumental logic, and various other fundamentalisms that acquire their authority by erasing any trace of subaltern histories, class struggles, and racial and gender inequalities and injustices.”¹⁹

In the mode of possibility and hope, Giroux describes critical pedagogy as a way of “address[ing] the democratic potential of engaging how experience, knowledge, and power are shaped in the classroom in different and often unequal contexts, and how teacher authority might be mobilized against dominant pedagogical practices as part of the practice of freedom.”²⁰ Teaching and learning, then, aims towards a specific end: a hopeful version of democracy where the outcome is a more just, equitable society that works toward the end of oppression and suffering of all.

To that end, Giroux recognizes that public and higher education can function as “democratic public spheres,” and that schools are historically situated and integrally connected to the wider regimes of power/knowledge in the political, cultural, and economic realms. Peter McLaren interprets democratic public spheres through Giroux as those sites that “encompass public networks such as schools, political organizations, *churches*, and social movements that help construct democratic principles and social practices through debate, dialogue, and exchange of opinion.”²¹

Charged with embodying critique and possibility, educators and schools have incredible responsibilities in front of them. As teacher authority diminishes in the current educational landscape, Giroux often calls teachers “public intellectuals” or “transformative intellectuals.” By employing these terms, Giroux advocates for teachers as pivotal contributors to the formation of public life. Understanding teaching as a public, transformative, and intellectual activity results in a form of cultural politics, helping students “develop a social imagination and civic courage capable of helping them to intervene in their own self-formation, in the formation of others, and in the socially reproductive cycle of life in general.”²² With this understanding, teachers contribute to a robust version of public life. The word “intervention” often occurs as a way of describing the role of teaching as schools become sites for emancipatory practices rather than formation of skills or instrumental logic and technical rationality. Such interventions occur in schools which, admittedly,

Are places that represent forms of knowledge, language practices, social relations and values that are particular selections and exclusions from the wider culture. As such, schools serve to introduce and legitimate particular forms of social life. Rather than being objective institutions removed from the dynamics of politics and power, schools actually are contested spheres that embody and express a struggle over what forms of authority, types of knowledge, forms of moral regulation and versions of the past and future should be legitimated and transmitted to students.²³

The work of a teacher is an intellectual behavior, by which Giroux means that teachers must be engaged in critical reflection on what political, economic, and social interests emerge through teaching methods and curricula handed down from bureaucratic and institutional sites. Teaching is transformative because critical reflection is never divorced from practices in the classroom, which aim to help students become active, critical citizens. Giroux sees teachers as “reflective practitioners,” not as those who enact “applied science.”²⁴

Teachers engage students, as previously stated, not as sites for depositing knowledge or as a potential skilled workforce. Rather they help to foster environments where students can be critical agents in their own formation, with active rather than passive voices. Students are encouraged to see their education as leading toward social responsibility, and in particular, the alleviation of suffering, inequalities, and injustice experienced by others. The goal is for students to become “individuals [who] can think critically, relate sympathetically to the problems of others, and intervene in the world in order to address major social problems.”²⁵

These are some suggestive but certainly not exhaustive dimensions of Giroux's version of critical pedagogy. What remains is to outline the import of critical pedagogy for homiletics and in particular, how critical pedagogy can inform a robust image of preacher-as-teacher. In what follows, I describe some categories that unfold this image in conversation with Giroux's critical pedagogy.

Preaching toward a Public Sphere

Since Giroux begins with the end or *telos* of pedagogy, this may be the most helpful place to begin outlining the impact of critical pedagogy on the image of preacher-as-teacher. Giroux's idea of the "democratic public sphere" calls for the education of engaged citizens whose concern for others promotes a kind of "concrete utopianism."²⁶ It is a call for alternative modes of experience, public spheres that affirm one's faith in the possibility of creative risk-taking, of engaging life so as to enrich it; it means appropriating the critical impulse so as to lay bare the distinction between reality and the conditions that conceal its possibilities."²⁷

As such, the preacher-as-teacher takes seriously the function of preaching to create a vision of the public sphere. While Giroux consistently frames this vision in the language of democracy, scholars of preaching would frame this through the language of ecclesiology. In other words, if the theories and practices of critical pedagogy enact a particular kind of public sphere, preachers portray distinct ecclesiological formations within their preaching as well. A preacher's practices contain an implicit ecclesiology within them, defining the gathered community's relationship to one another, to God, and to the world.²⁸

Critical pedagogy might suggest that the preacher-as-teacher enacts the kind of ecclesiology where preaching functions as (and encourages) the transformation of culture, social action and social change. This is what we find in Charles Campbell's *The Word Before the Powers*, where the preacher serves as one who unmasks the "Powers" and calls forth transformation (both theirs and ours).²⁹ We see this in the liberation theology and feminist theology traditions of preaching as well (which, no doubt, influenced Freire).³⁰ Preaching becomes both critique and resistance of the prevailing cultural pedagogies that enact oppression, marginalization, suffering, and/or suppression of particular histories, cultures, and identities. This kind of ecclesiology honors the multiplicity of experiences of the gathered community and encourages those participants to shape a vision of the world together that promotes justice and equality (or righteousness, *shalom*, etc.). Critical pedagogy would ask Christian preachers to be very specific about what they mean when they interpret the *basileia tou Theou* (variously defined as the kingdom, reign and rule, or realm of God) of Jesus in current contexts.

Regardless of the specifics of the type of ecclesiology embodied within a community's preaching, a homiletic appropriation of critical pedagogy would ask preachers, at the very least, to become more aware of the implications of ecclesiology as it functions within their preaching,

and to supply a more robust, explicit version of homiletic ecclesiology. The preacher-as-teacher is responsible for helping create the context for envisioning the future and the community's role within that future.

Preacher-as-Teacher and Authority

To suggest that the preacher function as teacher does not mean that the preacher participates in an arcane definition of teaching as it relates to authority. The preacher-as-teacher is not the all-knowing figure who transfers intellectual content or skills. Instead, this version of preacher-as-teacher necessitates revising the notion of pastoral authority in preaching. When talking about important public roles such as preacher and teacher, we recognize that authority and power have significant dimensions. As critical pedagogy brings public school teachers into view, there are two sides to the question of authority.

First, teaching as a profession is undergoing a diminishing sense of authority. Now more than ever, public school teachers are subject to less directive authority over the shape and content of their classrooms. The rise of standardized testing and uniform educational standards through programs like "No Child Left Behind," "Race to the Top," and "Common Core" means that teaching is rapidly becoming divorced from the contextual realities of everyday life for many students. Teachers now feel the pressure to "teach to the test" and to cover the required curricular materials handed down from above. The rise of charter schools suggests that corporate interests have now begun to shape educational endeavors. Teachers' authority, such as the ability to shape teaching and learning according to the needs and experiences in each individual classroom, has diminished.

Returning to preaching, it may be helpful to recast the category of the teacher as "public or transformative intellectual." While the preacher's authority may not be diminishing in terms of autonomy to establish the shape and content of preaching as described above for teachers in parallel fashion, preachers have relinquished or failed to grasp their authority in the mode of *public* intellectual. Preaching bases its authority, in part, on the way that the gathered community gives permission to the preacher, inviting regular interventions in its life together for the purposes of articulating a shared ecclesial imagination, and sharing the resources for self-formation and formation of others for the good of life together. Martin Luther King, Jr., William Sloane Coffin, or Barbara Brown Taylor come to mind as examples of notable preachers as public intellectuals.

Second, critical pedagogues, conscious of the remaining authority they do have, are mindful of how their authority relates to power. According to Giroux,

Authority in this perspective is not simply on the side of oppression, but is used to intervene and shape the space of teaching and learning to provide students with a range of possibilities for challenging a society's commonsense assumptions, and for analyzing the interface between their own everyday lives and those broader social formations that bear

down on them. *Authority, at best, becomes both a referent for legitimating a commitment to a particular vision of pedagogy and a critical referent for a kind of autocritique.*³¹

Those conversant in the literature of homiletics will recognize this view of power and authority. American clergy have seen a steady erosion of the general public's confidence in their authority. The greater concern recently, however, has been for how preaching still holds within it the power for oppression/marginalization or liberation/justice.

Concerning the authority of the preacher, John McClure's *Other-wise Preaching* gives the most thorough articulation of an ethic of preaching that might extend the "commitment to a particular version of pedagogy and a critical referent for a kind of autocritique."³² For McClure, a type of preaching authority comes through an appropriation of the philosophical ethics of Emmanuel Levinas. To risk a gross oversimplification, in this view, the preacher lives out a commitment to avoid an authoritarian stance in preaching. In doing so,

Each other-wise preacher brings into the pulpit his or her ongoing, changing narrative testimony (verbal proclamation) to the rupturing of totality by the glory of the Infinite revealed in the vulnerable face of the other. At the same time, other-wise preachers rehearse in the pulpit the testimonies (verbal proclamations) of many others within the congregations, communities, traditions, and testimonials that constitute much of the sacred text: 'Thus says the Lord'; 'He spoke as one with authority'; 'I deliver to you what was also delivered to me.'³³

The "autocritique" can be found in what McClure describes (in the language of Levinas) as bringing the preacher's "ongoing, changing narrative testimony" into the pulpit, confident that that the possibility for "totality" will be ruptured "by the glory of the Infinite revealed in the vulnerable face of the other."³⁴ In other words, the preacher's authority in proclamation is risked in such a way that it cannot possibly stand as a totality. Similarly, the particular version of pedagogy Giroux advocates can be found in the latter half of the above quote. Preachers positively use their authority by bringing to bear the various proclamations of others in order to foster the ongoing work of proclamation. This kind of preaching-as-teaching means that, as Giroux says, "at stake here is the need to insist on modes of authority that are directive but not imperious, linking knowledge to power in the service of self-production, and encouraging students to go beyond the world they already know to expand their range of human possibilities."³⁵

Recent homiletic literature has engaged in this kind of "autocritique" of authority and stated a commitment to preaching that claims authority but is not authoritarian. McClure's *Other-wise Preaching*, Lucy Rose's *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church*, McClure's earlier *Roundtable Pulpit: Where Leadership and Preaching Meet*, Anna Carter Florence's *Preaching as Testimony*, and Ronald Allen's *Preaching and the Other* are the most notable works.³⁶ Still, none of these suggest that the image of the preacher-as-teacher might be an appropriate image for preaching perhaps because of traditional associations of imperial authority with teaching. This revised understanding of preaching-as-teaching, however, would integrate rather seamlessly into each of these accounts.

Preacher-as-Teacher and Listeners

To this point, I have engaged the ends of education/preaching and the preacher-as-teacher, but I have yet to fully address the student/listener in the mode of critical pedagogy. Giroux believes that “a substantive democracy cannot exist without educated citizens.”³⁷ Being careful not to conflate democracy (even Giroux’s version of democracy filled with social justice and equality) and the church, this thought helps draw out the image of preacher-as-teacher. We might change this statement to “a substantive church cannot exist without educated disciples.” The definition of education is at stake here. In the eyes of critical pedagogy, educated citizens are those who are not only informed, but whose civic imaginations have been nurtured in such a way that they are self-reflective about public issues, the world, and their places within it. For Giroux,

Giving students the opportunity to be problem-posers and engage in a culture of questioning in the classroom foregrounds the crucial issues of who has control over the conditions of learning and how specific modes of knowledge, identities, and authority are constructed within particular sets of classroom relations. Under such circumstances, knowledge is not simply received by students, but actively transformed, open to be challenged, and related to the self as an essential step towards agency, self-representation, and learning how to govern rather than simply be governed. At the same time, students also learn how to engage others in critical dialogue and be held accountable for their views.³⁸

If the comparison between student and sermon listener holds, then sermon listeners, ideally, are actively engaged in the sermon, questioning what is said and why. They attempt to make sense of the power, identities, and authority that undergird a particular sermon in addition to the relationships between listeners, preacher, and world within the sermon. Sermon listeners use the sermon to transform the sense of self in relation to *basileia tou Theou* and engage others in conversation and accountability as a result of those listening practices.

Much of the last generation of homiletic conversation has tried to articulate a vision of the listener’s role in preaching. Fred Craddock’s inductive preaching method in *As One without Authority* was among the first to emphasize the listener’s role in preaching, suggesting that the listener is an active partner who, through a particular sermon shape, can come to her own conclusions about a sermon’s meaning.³⁹ The so-called New Homiletic operated on much of the same assumptions about listeners, trying to acquire listener involvement through sermon forms. Thus the proliferation of homiletic work from the late 1970s through the early 1990s that champions narrative styles of preaching and preaching as a kind of conversation.

Direct involvement of the listener in the production of sermons, however, arrives only later in John McClure’s *Roundtable Pulpit*, which gathers listeners and preacher around the biblical text for a given week as partners in the sermon creation process, using the conversation’s shape and content as the basis for the sermon.⁴⁰ Still a further step came through a group of scholars in homiletics who conducted a qualitative study in the early 2000’s, called the Listening to Listeners study. This study, funded by the Lilly Endowment, produced four books, engaging listeners about

the nature of preaching (rather than a particular sermon to be preached) in order to help preachers become active listeners themselves.⁴¹ This study infused preaching with some much needed reflexivity and holds the potential, at least, to make preaching less about a kind of instrumental logic or technical rationality (e.g. an investigation about sermon form or preaching skill with uncritical assumptions about listeners) and more about a partnership with listeners in creating meaningful preaching.

This is an important point for critical pedagogy because it means that the preacher-as-teacher is a truly “reflective practitioner,” partnering with listeners rather than one who engages in “applied science” of preaching prescriptions to engage listeners. The past generation of homiletic literature focused a great deal on sermon form, on the strategies and skills used for delivering the content of preaching. According to Giroux,

Teaching . . . is often treated simply as a set of strategies and skills to use in order to teach prespecified subject matter. In this context, teaching becomes synonymous with a method, technique, or the practice of a craft – like skill training. On the other hand, critical pedagogy must be seen as a political and moral project and not a technique.⁴²

Giroux’s point stands for both the weekly task of preaching and for teaching preaching in theological education. How the preacher sees and engages listener can never be separated from the weekly preaching task of writing and assembling a sermon to be preached. The involvement of the listener is an ethical project, not merely a question of preaching technique.

Preacher-as-Teacher and Culture

Giroux sees the complex relationships between schooling, economics, politics, and culture such that “pedagogy becomes an act of cultural production, a process through which power regulates bodies and behaviors as they ‘move through space and time.’”⁴³ With that understanding, education joins a host of other “public pedagogies” that engage in similar processes of regulation.⁴⁴ It is important to note that in thinking about culture, Giroux does not abandon a historical consciousness concerning the development of public pedagogies. In fact, Giroux carries forward an understanding of history wherein,

Critical theory points educators toward a mode of analysis that stresses the breaks, discontinuities, and tensions in history [rather than a focus on historical continuities and development], all of which become valuable in that they highlight the centrality of human agency and struggle while simultaneously revealing the gap between society as it presently exists and society as it might be.⁴⁵

Such a concept of culture and history helps the preacher-as-teacher in at least two ways.

First, an understanding of preaching as a cultural practice encourages preachers to account for how this activity is enmeshed in a complex relationship with economics, politics, history, and culture. Ted Smith, for example, helpfully traces the development of democratic practices in the United States in relation to Charles Finney's "new measures" preaching.⁴⁶ Like the critical educator Giroux desires, the preacher-as-teacher should attend to the ways in which her own practices are embedded within particular economic, political, and cultural formations through time. This recognition is not necessarily deterministic. Rather, the preacher-as-teacher remains critically aware of how preaching practices embody uncritical continuities and devises contextually appropriate discontinuities.

Second, the preacher-as-teacher should attend to the ways that culture is understood and articulated within sermons. Preaching is a pedagogical site whereby people are oriented to particular values, biases, cultural formations, and power relationships. From the way a preacher uses biblical texts to the way a preacher tells stories, preaching is a cultural production. Does the preacher-as-teacher uncritically reproduce the "social imaginary significations" of a society, "which provide the structures of representations that offer individuals selected modes of identification and set the standards for both the ends of action and the criteria for what is considered acceptable or unacceptable behavior, while establishing the affective measures for mobilizing desire and human action"?⁴⁷ By and large, contemporary homiletics as a discipline has been increasingly conscious of how constructions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability, class, etc. emerge in the language, stories, and symbols used within sermons.

Radical Imagination and Prophetic Imagination

Finally, we have already seen how critical pedagogy articulates both critique and possibility/hope. To questions about global inequalities, Giroux responds that critical pedagogy demands "a language that is both critical and hopeful, a language of critique and possibility."⁴⁸ This dialectical framework provides educators a way forward, not simply a negative critique of the way things are. Here, through the lens of critical pedagogy, the work of preacher-as-teacher finds some clarity in her week-to-week task. The preacher engages the gathered community to critique the way things are and to critically reflect on a different future for our shared world.

Practical theologians will see this kind of language dripping with potential; the preacher-as-teacher finds common ground and an ally in Giroux. This is not to say that I have a fully, or even partially developed theological project in Giroux's critical pedagogy. Indeed, Giroux's project does not center on any notion of the Divine or the role of faith communities, nor do his writings have what might be called soteriological or eschatological arcs. His interests might be called functionally agnostic, imagining how an informed, engaged citizenship can work together toward the common good, and the key roles teaching and learning play in enacting this vision. Still, Giroux does present himself as a bricoleur, appropriating an array of critical social theory while using the

kinds of language and ideas that people of faith easily recognize. In this I see the truth that “theology is indissociable from ethics and politics,” not just for the theologian, but in the language and ideas appropriated by Giroux’s work as well.⁴⁹ For this reason, I feel comfortable exploring the possibilities of intersection between Giroux’s critical pedagogy and theology and in particular, how those intersections might be useful in constructing a theology of preaching.

In developing the language of critique and possibility, Giroux’s recent work has come to settle on the term “radical imagination” as one of the desired outcomes for education. By this he means that “public and higher education, however deficient, were once viewed as the bedrock for educating young people to be critical and engaged citizens. . . This meant learning how to engage in a culture of questioning, restaging power in productive ways, and connecting knowledge to the exercise of self-determination and self-development.”⁵⁰ Radical imagination, then, engages students in such a way as to enable them to see the world as it is, question it, and respond in positive ways for themselves and one another. Giroux notes, “spaces that promote a radical imaginary are crucial in a democracy because they are foundational for developing those formative cultures necessary for youth and old alike to develop the knowledge, skills, and values central to democratic forms of education, engagement, and agency.”⁵¹ Elsewhere, Giroux says that he believes teachers “must work to create the conditions that give students the opportunity to become citizens who have the knowledge and courage to struggle in order to make despair unconvincing and hope practical.”⁵² In making the parallel between critical pedagogy and the preacher-as-teacher, I position preaching as one of those spaces where a new kind of imagination is developed.

Still, I do not want to simply conflate democracy as Giroux sees it with the world preaching imagines. Fortunately, I find a theological partner in one of Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann’s most celebrated works: *The Prophetic Imagination*.⁵³ More than simply sharing the word “imagination,” Brueggemann’s *Prophetic Imagination* provides a theological parallel to what Giroux describes. According to Brueggemann, “the task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us.”⁵⁴ As Giroux sees political, economic, and cultural forces at work that diminish democracy, freedom, justice, and equality, Brueggemann sees forces at work that diminish God’s vision for humanity. Brueggemann continues,

The alternative consciousness to be nurtured, on the one hand, serves to *criticize* in dismantling the dominant consciousness. To that extent, it attempts to do what the liberal tendency has done, engage in a rejection and delegitimizing of the present ordering of things. On the other hand, the alternative consciousness to be nurtured serves to *energize* persons and communities by its promise of another time and situation toward which the community of faith may move. To that extent it attempts to do what the conservative tendency has done, to live in fervent anticipation of the newness that God has promised and will surely give.⁵⁵

Brueggemann, like Giroux, advocates nurturing a kind of imagination through the avenues of critique and possibility/hope.⁵⁶ This is the task of the preacher-as-teacher: to engage listeners in the kind of preaching that helps them to articulate critique of the way things are and enact a hopeful imagination through a vision of God's future.

Conclusion

The preacher-as-teacher is not an image of a bygone era. Instead, with the help of Henry Giroux's critical pedagogy, the preacher-as-teacher sponsors a system of beliefs about the preacher's role and identity that foreground ecclesiology, responds to contemporary questions about authority, frames relationships with sermon listeners and culture, and gives a theological account of the tasks of preaching. Rather than replacing other images, this revised image of preacher-as-teacher joins other contemporary images of preaching identity for use in appropriate contexts.

Notes

1 Robert Stephen Reid, ed. *Slow of Speech and Unclean Lips: Contemporary Images of Preaching Identity* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), 2.

2 For more on entailments, see George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

3 Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005). 18-51.

4 Reid, *Slow of Speech and Unclean Lips: Contemporary Images of Preaching Identity*.

5 C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments, Three Lectures* (Chicago, New York: Willett, Clark & company, 1937).

6 Robert C. Worley, *Preaching and Teaching in the Earliest Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967). 21.

7 For more thorough discussion of why this distinction does not hold, see *ibid.*, 30-86.

8 Clark M. Williamson and Ronald J. Allen, *The Teaching Minister*, 1st ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991). 7.

9 *Ibid.*

10 *Ibid.*, 85-86. In this I see what Allen later calls (following theologian David Tracy) a theological method of "revised critical correlation" or "mutual critical correlation." This has an affinity with what comes in Thomas H. Groome, *Christian Religious Education : Sharing Our Story and Vision*, 1st Jossey-Bass ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999).

11 Even as Williamson and Allen are addressing mainline denominational communities, it is interesting to note that over the past ten years or so, many so-called Evangelical communities (especially large, multi-staff congregations) have begun replacing the clergy title “preacher” and description “preaching” with correlating titles of “teaching pastor” and “teaching.”

12 See Lucy Atkinson Rose, *Sharing the Word : Preaching in the Roundtable Church*, 1st ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997).

13 See Ronald J. Allen, *Interpreting the Gospel : An Introduction to Preaching* (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press, 1998).

14 Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th anniversary ed. (New York: Continuum, 2000).

15 For Giroux’s interpretation and appropriation of Frankfurt School theorists, see in particular Chapter One of Henry A. Giroux, *Theory and Resistance in Education : Towards a Pedagogy for the Opposition*, Rev. and expanded ed., Critical Studies in Education and Culture Series, (Westport, Conn.: Bergin & Garvey, 2001).

16 I should note Giroux’s indebtedness to liberation and feminist theologies. Giroux receives his appreciation for Latin American liberation through Paulo Freire while he comes to feminist theology through Sharon Welch. See Henry A. Giroux, *Teachers as Intellectuals : Toward a Critical Pedagogy of Learning*, *Critical Studies in Education Series* (Granby, Mass.: Bergin & Garvey, 1988). 110; 214-21.

17 Indeed, my first exposure to Giroux came by research on critical youth studies through his work on what he calls “disposable youth” for my dissertation on the relationship of preaching and adolescent youth. See Richard William Voelz, *A Youthful Homiletic a Practical Theological Examination of the Relationship between Preaching and Adolescents*, ([Nashville, Tenn.]: Vanderbilt University, 2011), <http://etd.library.vanderbilt.edu/available/etd-03272011-195232/>.

18 Henry A. Giroux, *On Critical Pedagogy, Critical Pedagogy Today* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011). 5.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Peter McLaren, “Foreward: Critical Theory and the Meaning of Hope” in Giroux, *Teachers as Intellectuals: Toward a Critical Pedagogy of Learning*: xvii. Emphasis mine.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid., 126.

24 Ibid., 123-25.

25 Giroux, *On Critical Pedagogy*: 13.

26 Here it is helpful to point to the fact that Giroux follows Marcuse, rather than Habermas in describing the “public sphere”: “In opposition to Habermas, Marcuse argues that radical change means more than simply the creation of conditions that foster critical thinking and communicative competence. Such change also entails the transformation of the labor process itself and the fusion of science and technology under the guise of a rationality stressing cooperation and self-management in the interest of democratic community and social freedom.” Giroux, *Theory and Resistance in Education : Towards a Pedagogy for the Opposition*: 26-27.

27 Ibid., 242.

28 Burton Z. Cooper and John S. McClure, *Claiming Theology in the Pulpit*, 1st ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003). 137.

29 Charles L. Campbell, *The Word before the Powers : An Ethic of Preaching*, 1st ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002).

30 I will say more about the relationship between Giroux, liberation theology, and feminist theology below.

31 Giroux, *On Critical Pedagogy*: 81. Italics mine.

32 John S. McClure, *Other-Wise Preaching : A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2001).

33 Ibid., 125.

34 Ibid.

35 Giroux, *On Critical Pedagogy*: 80.

36 Rose, *Sharing the Word : Preaching in the Roundtable Church*; John S. McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit : Where Leadership and Preaching Meet* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995); Anna Carter Florence, *Preaching as Testimony*, 1st ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007); Ronald J. Allen, “Preaching and the Other,” *Worship* 76, no. 3 (2002); Ronald J. Allen, *Preaching and the Other : The Other, Deconstruction, Social Location, Transgression, and Pluralism : Themes for the Pulpit in a Postmodern Setting* (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press, 2009).

37 Giroux, *On Critical Pedagogy*: 136.

38 Ibid., 156.

39 Fred B. Craddock, *As One without Authority*, Rev. ed. (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2001).

40 McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit : Where Leadership and Preaching Meet*.

41 John S. McClure, *Listening to Listeners: Homiletical Case Studies* (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press, 2004); Mary Alice Mulligan, *Believing in Preaching : What Listeners Hear in Sermons* (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press, 2005); Mary Alice Mulligan and Ronald J. Allen, *Make the Word Come Alive : Lessons from Laity, Channels of Listening* (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press, 2005); Ronald J. Allen, *Hearing the Sermon : Relationship, Content, Feeling, Channels of Listening* (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press, 2004). See also Ronald J. Allen and Mary Alice Mulligan, “Listening to Listeners: Five Years Later,” *Homiletic* (Online) 34, no. 2 (2009).

- 42 Jose Maria Barroso Tristan, “Henry Giroux: The Necessity of Critical Pedagogy in Dark Times,” Truthout, <http://truth-out.org/news/item/14331-a-critical-interview-with-henry-giroux>.
- 43 Henry A. Giroux and Christopher G. Robbins, *The Giroux Reader, Cultural Politics & the Promise of Democracy* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2006). 95.
- 44 Giroux’s more recent work takes an interest in popular culture as a site of public pedagogy, drawing connections between popular culture, youth, politics, and economics, in addition to education.
- 45 Giroux, *Theory and Resistance in Education : Towards a Pedagogy for the Opposition*: 36.
- 46 Ted A. Smith, *The New Measures : A Theological History of Democratic Practice* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
- 47 Giroux, *On Critical Pedagogy*: 142.
- 48 Tristan, “Henry Giroux: The Necessity of Critical Pedagogy in Dark Times”.
- 49 Graham Ward, *Theology and Contemporary Critical Theory* (New York, N.Y.: St. Martin’s Press, 1996). xx.
- 50 Henry A. Giroux, “Reclaiming the Radical Imagination: Challenging Casino Capitalism’s Punishing Factories,” *Truth-Out*, <http://truth-out.org/opinion/item/21113-disimagination-machines-and-punishing-factories-in-the-age-of-casino-capitalism>.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 Giroux, *Teachers as Intellectuals : Toward a Critical Pedagogy of Learning*: 128.
- 53 Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978).
- 54 Ibid., 13.
- 55 Ibid.
- 56 See Brueggemann’s definition of hope in *ibid.*, 67.