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FACULTY'S DISTINGUISHED DISSERTATION AWARD

for

EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH IN PASTORAL MINISTRY

May 24, 2013

At commencement each year, the Faculty of Asbury Theological Seminary grants a distinguished dissertation award to recognize and honor a Doctor of Ministry graduate who has submitted the outstanding dissertation-project for that year.

The recipient of the 2013 Distinguished Dissertation Award is John Hatton. John’s dissertation, entitled *The Work of the Spirit and the Ministry of the Word in Ambrose of Milan*, sought to discover and research the connections among Ambrose of Milan’s life of piety and faithfulness, his love of God, his theology of the priesthood, and his preaching life to bring renewal to contemporary preaching in the United Methodist Church’s Kentucky Annual Conference.

The criteria which governed the selection of this outstanding dissertation-project are:

- Contributes in a substantial way to the Church’s understanding of the nature and practice of ministry.
- Demonstrates potential for publication.
- Consistently follows standard research conventions.
- Conforms invariably to designated style guidelines in all respects.

The faculty of Asbury Theological Seminary commends John for his outstanding work and salutes Dr. Mike Pasquarello, his faculty advisor, for his excellent mentoring of John.

John, we pray for your continued success in leading others to Christ and building them up in the faith.

Dr. Timothy C. Tennent
President, Asbury Theological Seminary

Dr. Thomas F. Tumblin
Dean of the Beeson Center
ABSTRACT

THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT AND THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD
IN AMBROSE OF MILAN

by

John Wesley Hatton

The immediacy of culture has had significant effects upon the practice and art of homiletics and the spiritual life of ministers. Over time, the spiritual life of the pastor has received less emphasis as modern voices state that the energies of the pastor should be focused on strategic leadership and vision casting. While these foci are important parts of the role of a pastor, they should not overwhelm the spiritual life of the pastor. Instead, a pastor’s life in participation in the Triune life is central to his or her spiritual life. The shared life with God allows other areas of ministry to flow forth with wisdom, virtue, and the love of God. When a minister makes a life with God the central focus of the grammar of his or her life, God takes the lead in strategic leadership, vision casting, preaching, and other ministerial actions of the office (Pasquarello, *We Speak Because We Have First Been Spoken* 4). This study focused on understanding the life of a bishop and doctor of the early Church (Ambrose of Milan) and used his life as a model of faithful living in the present.

The purpose of the study was to understand the connections among Ambrose of Milan’s life of piety and faithfulness, his love of God, his theology of the priesthood, and his preaching life. This inductive historiography discovered if an appropriation of what was learned of Ambrose’s life might bring renewal to contemporary preaching in selected
pastors of the Prestonsburg District of the Kentucky Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church.

The study found a misunderstanding, by clergy, of the pastoral vocation. Pastors lacked comprehension of their primary role of being attentive to God, imitating Christ, and letting God be the primary teacher and speaker of the Word. Due to this misunderstanding, pastors experienced dissonance between their vocational work and their use of the means of grace. The study recommends a *complementary narrative* that brings renewal to clergy and the Church by capturing a patristic vision of the pastoral vocation.
DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled

THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT AND THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

IN AMBROSE OF MILAN

presented by

John Wesley Hatton

has been accepted towards fulfillment

of the requirements for the

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY degree at

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Mentor

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Dean of the Beeson Center

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In Partial Fulfillment

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John Wesley Hatton

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dissertations are not written in a vacuum. In my case, this dissertation is a tapestry of wisdom, time, and investment by a great many of people in my life who believe in the kingdom of God and the importance of faith and practice in the Church. I wish to thank my mentor, Dr. Michael Pasquarello, for his careful, diligent work over the years in homiletics and patristics. I have been formed by his passion and love for Christ that he exhibits every time he stands behind a pulpit. I also am thankful for his long lens into history that has grounded me in the tradition of the church. Mike has been and will continue to be a powerful mentor in my life. I also must thank Dr. Lester Ruth for his work in ancient Christian worship and the careful mentoring he has provided me over the years. Dr. Ruth’s deep love for doxology infiltrated my heart from the moment I met him and it still holds firmly in the locus of my heart.

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Finally, I wish to express gratitude to my wife, Julie, and my son, Emory, for their patient love and understanding in this last year. I appreciate your profound support and your willingness to listen to me prattle on about these saints of the church. My hope is that you see in me the same kind of love for God that I see in Ambrose.

Laeti bibamus sobriam profusionem Spiritus.

Ambrose, *Splendor Paternae Glorae*
CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM

Introduction

In the year 2000, I was a layperson in the United Methodist Church who was in the initial stages of candidacy for ordination in my denomination. I had recently enrolled in seminary and was enjoying the new challenges of schooling. God blessed me with a supportive pastor who took an interest in my candidacy and continuing growth as a future church leader. I helped lead worship and participated in the church’s contemporary praise band.

Like many other mainline denominations, this local church had seen prolonged decline in worship attendance for decades. In 1999, the declining trend ended and the church began to plan strategically for growth. The next five years were a time of explosive advancement for the church. Part of that strategic plan involved bringing the leadership team to a large, nationally known church for coaching during a one-week long seminar. I remember one session quite clearly: The lead pastor of the church began to talk about the stresses of being a pastor of a growing and vibrant congregation. He shared about his personal experiences of the demands of ministry. He noted that building relationships, casting a vision, and being a spiritual leader were extremely important functions of a pastor. The lead pastor then stated that pastors today do not have time to write sermons due to the demands of the pastorate. He noted that he had a writing team who researched and wrote his sermons for him so that he could attend to the more pressing matters of a pastor. I was stunned by this statement.
For years, I watched my father (who is a retired United Methodist Church elder) go through a weekly ritual of reading the Bible, studying, and praying throughout the week, and finally writing an outline for a sermon. My father’s actions connoted an ethos to his ritual. As a child, I understood it to be the normal work and behavior of a pastor. Unbelievably, the leader of the seminar (and a leader of the church catholic in the United States) confessed that sermon preparation was not a priority for him. More alarming for me was the pastor’s next words. He informed the attendees that they, too, did not have time to engage in sermon preparation. Instead, they could download sermons from his church’s Web site so that they might have the benefit of a writing staff. With these words, this lead pastor divorced the spiritual leadership he was advocating for pastors from the acts of preaching God’s Word. In effect, the pastor was stating that one’s spiritual life does not come to bear upon the sermon at all. The lead pastor relegated preaching to mere technical actions of regurgitating a sermon using good public speaking skills instead of the spiritual discipline that it truly is.

Over the last twelve years, I have conversed with laity and clergy on this issue. Laity seems to suspect that their pastors are purchasing sermons online or they are shocked and express feelings of betrayal when they find out that such sermon resources are available. Not all clergy participate in this practice, however. The wide availability of material online today suggests a large market for prepackaged sermon materials for pastors. While the act of borrowing a thought or story from another pastor has been a fairly common practice among clergy for hundreds of years, prepackaged sermons are a different ethical matter entirely.
The cottage industry of prepackaged sermons is alive and well in 2012. Sites such as Sermons ("Free Sample"), Saddleback Resources ("Sermons"), Preaching Today ("Finding Sermons"), Sermon Series ("Welcome to Single Sermons"), and Sermon Search ("New Sermons") are just a few examples of Web sites that have sermons available to download for free or for a charge. Popular pastors such as Bill Hybels and Rick Warren ("Sermons") offer their sermons for free or for cost on their respective Web sites.

Another ethical dilemma challenges contemporary pastors today. The Internet allows ministers and churches the ability to broadcast their sermons to the entire world. Preachers such as Adam Hamilton, Rob Bell, and Francis Chan openly share their intellectual property over the Internet. The intention of these pastors is to share, minister, and educate others. However, the temptation is ever present for other preachers to copy entire sermon series from some of the most popular preachers in America today and present it as their own. A colleague of mine recently reflected with me on her time in seminary. She was astonished that many of her classmates often copied sermons from others because they did not have time to write sermons for the churches they were serving and go to seminary at the same time. Seminary students did not experience an ethical dilemma from this practice either.

A friend of mine recently shared with me the occasion of his brother’s premature death and consequent funeral. He noted that the funeral sermon was moving and touching because the preacher knew his brother really well. The preacher was able to recollect stories and weave them into the gospel message. In effect, one of the reasons the preacher was able to give a wonderful sermon was because he knew the deceased extremely well
and was able to give beautiful testimony to their relationship and the deceased’s relationship with God.

Likewise, a pastor’s sermons should spring forth from a place of relationship and love of God. A preacher should speak with an authentic testimony that finds its center in the Triune life. Preachers witness to the congregation the authenticity of their faith that is rooted in a life of virtue, a life of piety, and the means of grace. This process is short-circuited when ministers download or copy sermons and present them as their own.

Multiple levels of ethical issues exist in this problem. The most obvious is the dishonesty of presenting something as one’s own when it originated from someone else. The deeper moral dilemma is the lack of an authentic spiritual life and relationship with the Triune God that feeds into the sermons that a pastor preaches. A depreciation of the pastoral office occurs when pastors ignore their calling and their relationship with God. Sermon plagiarism is only a symptom of a deeper problem.

Contemporary culture often feeds into this trend and typically does nothing to counter it. Parishioners often expect pastors to be active on social media so that they are relevant to the culture. Buzzwords such as analytics, e-mail marketing, social media, and usability are often the topics of church growth schemes made popular in popular culture (Mahaney). Other resources suggest that social media can create intimacy in a church or even spur revival (Reuter). Social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter often serve as one of the primary communication outlets for younger parishioners and pastors. One church blogger quoted a youth in church as saying, “If it isn’t on Facebook, it hasn’t really happened” (Moon). The pressure to be relevant in contemporary culture and invest in aspects of relevance and reality in social media puts enormous burden on
contemporary pastors and takes away from the deeper call and ethos of a life spent with Christ, in praise of Christ, and in witness of Christ. Not only do pastors and their sermons suffer; the church suffers as well.

In preparation for this dissertation, I wanted to discover a way to recover pastors’ spiritual and homiletic centers, the spiritual and moral issues of preaching, and a deeper wisdom or logic that orders pastors’ lives, their relationship with God, and their speech. For these reasons with regard to contemporary culture and social media, I discerned that the best course of action would be to utilize church tradition so that the church might move forward.

In order to be wise in the task of Christian proclamation and pastoral spirituality, the church today would benefit (especially evangelical Protestants in the United States, Canada, and Europe) from looking back to an earlier time in the church and to learn from the wisdom of those who have gone before. Looking backward at church tradition allows the church to go forth with a heart of love for God and a clearer theological purpose for Christian proclamation and pastoral piety.

In reading the work of the patristics, and in particular their sermons, one begins to see that holiness, personal piety, and love of God was an important part of their lives. The early Church fathers were interested in speaking in definitive, incarnational ways that were not only catechetical but also reflective of their relationship with God. Their sermons gave praise to God for his righteousness and taught the people about the stories (and the story) of the Bible. Early preachers utilized various interpretive methods to link together the Old and New Testaments in ways that often imitated Jesus’ biblical interpretive methods as they immersed their congregations in the sacramental life of the
church. In a postmodern time when philosophers argue that people must create their own culture and truths for enlightenment (e.g., Rorty), the Church catholic might consider imitating the early Church and establishing Christ’s distinct culture of good news in the midst of competing philosophies. The apostle Paul modeled this behavior when he encountered the philosophical elite of Athens at the Areopagus.

Most importantly, the spiritual life of the preacher must come to bear upon the sermon. A preacher’s love for God, a preacher’s prayer life, time studying the Bible, and participation in the divine life of the Trinity have an effect upon the act of Christian proclamation and its purpose. Attending to this participation in the divine life could bring renewal to preaching in the church today.

As a United Methodist and Wesleyan theologian, I understand the importance of tradition in helping the Church center itself through the meanderings of contemporary cultural issues. Church tradition reminds and rekindles orthodox beliefs. Tradition helps the Church interpret the Bible in a more full and authentic way. Tradition also helps Christians appropriate what they learn from the lives of the faithful who have gone before them and apply that knowledge to their contemporary context. Clergy should not always use tradition to imitate the Church fathers’ homiletical techniques. Instead, clergy should examine the content of their lives—the deeper wisdom and logic that ordered and defined their spiritual lives and their speech—to provide a moral roadmap that will allow preachers to imitate the Church fathers’ character, love of God, and ethos. Tradition works in this manner within the Church—passing wisdom from one generation of Christian to the next. John Wesley utilized tradition as a priest in the Anglican Church to
bring renewal for the Methodist societies. I hope to use tradition, as John Wesley did, to
bring renewal to the United Methodist Church.

Purpose

The purpose of the study was to discover and research the connections among
Ambrose of Milan’s life of piety and faithfulness, his love of God, his theology of the
priesthood, and his preaching life. I completed this study to ascertain if an appropriation
of what was learned of Ambrose’s life might bring renewal to contemporary preaching in
selected pastors of the Prestonsburg District of the Kentucky Annual Conference of the
United Methodist Church, who participated in a day-long continuing education event.

Research Questions

The nature of this study was twofold. The study’s first phase was to do an
inductive historiography of one of the original doctors of the church and develop a model
of a preaching life based upon that historical study. The second phase of the study was to
implement and evaluate the application of this model of the preaching life with United
Methodist pastors in a largely rural area of Kentucky. The research questions reflected
the need to understand who Ambrose was as a pastor and bishop in Milan, Italy, during
the fourth century AD as well as to apply that knowledge to a contemporary context. The
research attempted to investigate Ambrose’s love for God and how that love impacted his
preaching by examining the characteristics of Ambrose’s life, the characteristics of his
practice of ministry, and his personal piety. The research then applied that knowledge to
contemporary United Methodist pastors in the Prestonsburg District of the Kentucky
Annual Conference to observe any changes in their understanding, practice, and attitudes
of the purpose of preaching.
Research Question #1

What could I discover from Ambrose’s grammar of life through the examination of his life practices, ministry, love of God, and personal piety?

Research Question #2

What were the participants’ beliefs, knowledge, and behaviors about the connection among the practice, attitudes, and personal piety of one’s love of God in relation to the purpose and practice of preaching prior to the ministry intervention?

Research Question #3

What comparative changes occurred in the beliefs, knowledge, and behaviors about the connection among the practice, attitudes, and personal piety of one’s love of God in relation to the purpose and practice of preaching after the ministry intervention?

Research Question #4

What did the participants find most spiritually renewing from the ministry intervention project?

Definition of Terms

The research project used the following terms consistently throughout. The following definitions are provided to bring clarity to the dissertation.

Grammar of a Preaching Life

A grammar of the preaching life is the deep wisdom, logic, and theological rubric that order the life, speech, person, behaviors, and character of preachers—their spiritual lives, their virtue, their wisdom, and their love of God—so that the preachers’ life and speech are unified with Christ, the Word. As pastors are renewed and unified with Christ, the content and activity of preaching improves because Christ, the Word, takes more
leadership in the speech and life of the preacher. This grammar allows the preacher to speak with authenticity to the Word (Pasquarello, We Speak Because We Have First Been Spoken; John Wesley).

**Preaching**

Preaching refers to the agency and activity of God the Father speaking the Living Word to God's people in the power of the Holy Spirit. Preaching occurs through a human preacher in a congregational worship setting. Preaching enables God’s people encounter the Word of God in the Power of the Holy Spirit (Barth 88-95; Pannenberg, Systematics 332-36).

**Prestonsburg District of the Kentucky Annual Conference**

A district or diocese of fifty-one churches is under the authority of a superintendent, who is then under the authority of the area bishop for the United Methodist Church. In the Commonwealth of Kentucky, the area bishop has authority over twelve districts in the Kentucky Annual Conference. Prestonsburg District is the easternmost district of the Kentucky Annual Conference, and primarily its pastors do not have a seminary education. (“Prestonsburg”)

**Ministry Intervention/Project**

I wanted to understand what motivated Ambrose of Milan’s Christian proclamation through inductive historical research of Ambrose’s theology, his biblical hermeneutic, his preaching, his life as a bishop of Milan, and his spiritual life practices. The impetus in this historical research was to understand Ambrose's profound, devout belief and love for God and to find how they were reflected in Ambrose’s purpose and practice of preaching. This qualitative historical narrative inquiry was completed via the
guidelines of a qualitative protocol utilized in a number of his works, including but not limited to *De Officiis Ministrorum* and *Exposition on the Gospel of St. Luke*.

I completed the qualitative historical narrative research and developed a theological grammar of a preaching life based upon the characteristics of Ambrose's love of God as seen in the practice of his life, ministry, biblical hermeneutic, and personal piety. I offered a continuing education class in the Prestonsburg District of the Kentucky Annual Conference during the fall of 2012, whereby I taught the theological grammar of a preaching life as per Ambrose. Prior to the beginning of the class, the participants received a questionnaire that sought to discover the participants' understanding of the connection of one's love of God with to the purpose and practice of preaching. During the class, I encouraged participants to think critically and theologically about how they might create their own grammar of a preaching life after reflecting upon Ambrose's life and love of God. Participants also dialoged about how living week by week in a grammar of life informed their understanding of the purpose of preaching. At the end of the class, participants reflected on what they thought was most valuable from Ambrose's grammar of life and whether they understood the connection between their spiritual life and Christian proclamation better. I documented feedback through a questionnaire handed out to all participants after the class. I received and documented further long-term feedback and reflection with a focus group of the class participants two weeks after the course.

**Context**

The context of this project lies primarily within the clergy of the United Methodist Church. The ministry project occurred in the Appalachian region of Kentucky. Due to the cultural heritage of the area, the results of the project and study may be valid
to United Methodist clergy within the Southeastern Jurisdiction of the United Methodist Church.

The Kentucky Annual Conference is within the Southeastern Jurisdiction of the United Methodist Church. The conference contains approximately eight hundred churches within the bounds of the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Within the Kentucky Annual Conference, twelve districts represent an average of sixty-five churches per district.

The Prestonsburg District is the easternmost district of the Kentucky Annual Conference. It is located in the Highland area of Appalachia. Licensed local pastors primarily serve the churches within the district. Licensed local pastors typically do not have a seminary education and often work part-time in their parish, often bi-vocationally. When questioned about continuing education, they express great desire to learn more about theology, the Bible, and preaching to further their knowledge and skills as pastors. Currently only eleven seminary-trained and ordained clergy serve in the Prestonsburg District. A great need for educational development exists in the district because (1) the theological educational background of the preachers is often limited, (2) the isolation of the Appalachian area often limits educational offerings, and (3) the bi-vocational work schedule of many pastors prohibit them from attending continuing education seminars in the annual conference office in Louisville, Kentucky.

A wide cultural, theological, and temporal gulf exists between Ambrose and Methodist pastors in the Prestonsburg District. One of the challenges of this dissertation was bridging that gulf. In the continuing education event, I used Wesley as a bridge between the modern pastor and Ambrose. While most pastors in the Prestonsburg District
are not familiar with Ambrose, they certainly are familiar with Wesley and his theology. Wesley understood the wisdom of the tradition of the church and how it brings renewal. I have followed in the *virtue* tradition of Wesley and used him as a bridge to the core concepts taught in the continuing education event in an attempt to bring renewal (Campbell).

I have the honor of being the dean of our annual conference’s local pastors’ licensing school. Teaching at licensing school over the last four years has given me a deep understanding of the mind-set and theological competence of local pastors. As I have come to understand the educational needs of local pastors, I have adjusted the *pathos* of my teaching to meet those needs at an appropriate academic level. Additionally, in May 2012, I taught a 1½-hour class at licensing school that was concerned with the connection between clergy spirituality and preaching. As a result, the content of the continuing education event was field tested earlier in 2012.

**Methodology**

The study utilized a qualitative narrative inquiry methodology to examine the factors of Ambrose of Milan’s spiritual life that influenced his practice of preaching. These factors were identified and a grammar of life was created. This grammar of life was the basis of a continuing education class offered to pastors in the Prestonsburg District of the Kentucky Annual Conference. A pre-course qualitative questionnaire, post-course qualitative questionnaire, and a qualitative two-week, post-class essay measured the comprehension, effectiveness, and use of the course’s content.

Historical research has been completed on Ambrose’s mystagogical methods of preaching. Craig Alan Satterlee’s book is one example of such research. Satterlee
examines the mystagogical sermons Ambrose delivered to neophytes after the Easter Vigil and suggests a model for integrating mystagogical preaching into modern-day churches. My interest dovetails with Satterlee in that my research focused on Ambrose’s preaching and how it would affect the church today. However, I am also interested in a broader understanding of Ambrose’s theology, love of God, biblical hermeneutic, and the lived-out life of faith that influenced how Ambrose preached and why he preached.

The application of Ambrose’s theology and the critical reflection of his life of love and faith needed fuller exploration because for Ambrose, style poured forth out of the substance of his spiritual life. My research was less concerned with mystagogical technique than with what theologically drove Ambrose to preach the way he did. The primary focus of this study was to engage Ambrose’s theology, personal piety, and life of preaching and discover how they might bring renewal to a contemporary preacher’s sermons and spiritual life in an evaluative, qualitative way.

In short, I wanted to know how the wisdom of the past orients clergy to the future for the renewal of the church. I wanted to hear the witness of one from the past so that leaders of the church might be reoriented to a deeper and richer life in the Word that has implicit within it the Christian rhetoric of Evangelion and Heilsgeschichte.

Within the body of my research, I needed to place Ambrose within the larger context of his contemporaries to explain his historical importance, especially as a preacher and bishop. I also needed to define certain terms that are specific to the nature of this study. Once accomplished, I utilized a qualitative narrative inquiry research methodology with a qualitative protocol to discern what elements of Ambrose’s life were
important to the development of a grammar of a preaching life. I gathered data from the following primary sources: *De Officiis* and *Exposition on the Gospel of Saint Luke*.

I gathered and compiled data into a teachable grammar of a preaching life. Based on this compilation, I developed and offered a continuing education course to a self-selected set of pastors in the Prestonsburg District of the Kentucky Annual Conference. Prior to the course, a pre-course qualitative questionnaire instrument assessed the participants’ knowledge of the connection between the practice of one’s spiritual life and the purpose of preaching. Following the continuing education course, I distributed a qualitative post-intervention questionnaire to participants to assess any comparative changes to the participants’ knowledge of the connection between the practice of their spiritual life and the purpose of preaching.

Finally, I sent a post-course reflective essay two weeks after completion of the continuing education course. The essay examined how the participants’ knowledge of the connection between their spiritual life and the purpose of preaching had changed any of their short-term behaviors in preaching.

**Participants**

The participants of the study were self-selected pastors from the Prestonsburg District who desired to take a continuing education course entitled the Spirituality of Preaching. I offered the course through official district communications, and I limited enrollment to fifteen pastors in the district. Pastors who signed up for the course and attended the course became participants in the study. I notified the participants of the study, and they gave informed consent to me prior to the initiation of the seminar.
Instrumentation

This research project employed a qualitative narrative inquiry methodology in all aspects of the study. The initial stage of the study used a qualitative protocol for inductive historiography of Ambrose of Milan's sermons, writings, and letters. I designed the inductive study and qualitative protocol to assess Ambrose's love of God as seen in the characteristics of his lived-out theology, his biblical hermeneutic, his personal piety, characteristics of his Christian practice, and practice of ministry and how these factors relate to Ambrose's preaching.

I utilized a pre-intervention qualitative questionnaire instrument to assess the participants' knowledge of the connection between the practices of one's spiritual life and the purpose of preaching prior to the ministry intervention.

I developed a post-intervention qualitative questionnaire given to participants to assess any changes to the participants' knowledge of the connection between the practices of one's spiritual life and the purpose of preaching after the ministry intervention.

I issued a post-intervention qualitative reflective essay two weeks after the continuing education course. The essay examined how the participants' knowledge of the connection between one's spiritual life and the purpose of preaching had changed any of their short-term behaviors in preaching.

Variables

The independent variable of this study was the course, including the factors that created Ambrose's effectiveness as a pastor and his grammar of a preaching life as gleaned from my historical narrative inquiry and compiled, taught, and prescribed in the
course. The dependent variables of this study were the self-reported changes in belief, knowledge, and behavior of the participants concerning the purpose of preaching as a result of taking and applying the principles of the course. The intervening variables were the gender, age, work experience, education, and credential status of participants in the seminar.

Data Collection

I implemented data collection in the historical research instrument through the traditional historical research methods of the academy. The qualitative protocol provided boundaries for data collection that were specific and applicable to the confines and context of this research project. Participants completed a pre-intervention questionnaire prior to the course. Participants completed a post-intervention questionnaire after course completion. The participants completed the questionnaire on-site and returned the questionnaires to me before leaving the classroom. Participants completed a post-intervention reflective essay two weeks after the completion of the ministry intervention.

Data Analysis

I established boundaries within the qualitative protocol to identify various themes and patterns from the written works of Ambrose of Milan through documentary analysis. I carefully read the written, historical, primary sources, and categorized the various themes of Ambrose's life, theology, biblical hermeneutic, and ethos into a grammar of life.

I evaluated the pre-intervention questionnaire, post-intervention questionnaire, and post-intervention reflective essay through documentary analysis because much of the questionnaire included narrative responses, Likert scales, and continuum scales.
generated themes and patterns of understanding and application from an interpretive reading of the questionnaires.

**Generalizability**

This study has significance for pastors who serve in local churches who desire to improve their understanding of the purpose of preaching from the perspective of the early Church fathers. Because prior theological knowledge was not a requirement of the ministry intervention, the research has significance for both seminary-trained pastors and non-seminary-trained pastors. While the study was completed in the Prestonsburg District of the Kentucky Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, it holds broader significance for Protestant and Roman Catholic traditions within the United States, Canada, and Europe whose leaders continue a theological discussion about the life and practice of preaching.

**Theological Foundation**

The Church exists in a time that is still trying to understand the repercussions of the Enlightenment and modernity. In many ways, modernity laid the foundations for postmodernism and the philosophies that follow postmodern thought. Over and against this philosophy, the Church finds the grand narrative of God’s righteousness in the Bible. It is a great and grand meta-narrative (very much an anti-postmodern thought) that speaks about a God who gives light and life and chooses to pursue and redeem a people who turned away from him. This narrative of redemption carries the Church through the time of the Abrahamic covenant, the Law, the Prophets, the time and ministry of Christ, the Apostolic Age, and a promise of the future. Theologians often refer to this grand sweep of Scripture that gives glory to God as *Heilsgeschichte*, or salvation history.
Perhaps one of the best biblical examples of salvation history preaching is Stephen’s emphatic sermon prior to his execution in Acts 7. Stephen recalled the righteousness of God throughout history, inviting hearers to place themselves within that covenetal history. He then challenged the high priests and readers/hearers, in effect, saying, “You’ve heard the Word of God, yet you choose not to be changed by the Word and the Spirit. Instead, you reject the Holy Spirit and do not keep the Law. Look, you have murdered the Son of God!” These words continue to challenge the Church today.

Salvation history has a deep and profound message of gospel and grace to speak to the North American and European church today. Sadly, this message is one of many messages, and culture reflects the pluralistic society of the pre-Christian world. Alarmingly, Christian preaching often reflects and imitates the pluralistic society in which pastors live and fails to be explicit with regards to Christian rhetoric. Preachers are living in what many have called a post-Christian time. Biblical wisdom is available for approaching the pluralistic society in which Christians live through a way that is steeped in the theology and practices of the early Church. Through historical research, Christians can discern what faithful preaching would look like and how a preaching life could be lived out.

The postmodernist would say that humans are creative beings who have the ability to write the truth. They would also argue that others, likewise, do not have the right to judge personal truth (Rorty 5). The Christian response is that Holy Scripture is able to speak with relevance and truth today in ways that avoid the pitfalls of being only one of many stories out in the world. Because the Bible was dissected, studied, and exegeted in such a way during modernity (treated more as a piece of literature), modern
preachers must realize once again what Karl Barth communicated in response to the German idealists: The Bible is the Word of God. Indeed, where the Word of God is preached, it is relevant.

Barth's incarnational vision of preaching is quite powerful. Barth understands that when someone preaches the Word of God, God is speaking to his children in the power of the Holy Spirit through the person of the preacher. In effect, the written Word of God in the power of the Spirit acts as the Living Word and is loosed upon the congregation (120-21). The congregation encounters Christ in real, powerful ways and they are changed by that encounter. In a compatible manner, Wolfhart Pannenberg understands preaching as an event that is inspired by historical events that were themselves inspired by God. God reveals truth through history. These inspired events of Scripture are kerygma. The purpose of preaching is the in-breaking future of God onto the present to transform the past (332-36).

In all of these understandings about the Word and preaching, the astute reader will notice that an incarnational view of preaching is necessarily Trinitarian. The Father sends his only Son, the Word, to be revealed and speak in the church's midst in the power of the Holy Spirit. This theology must inform our theology of preaching. When reflected upon, this might cause pastors to preach in a different way and with a refined purpose. Whatever the response to this knowledge of kerygma and incarnational preaching might be, it surely must show up in the spiritual life of preachers as they go on to Christian perfection. The Bible is a means of grace and certainly must enter the hearts of preachers as they meditate on the Word. Pastors then speak out of that life-changing Word, Michael Pasquarello III argues in his book We Speak Because We Have First Been Spoken. This
type of pastoral leadership is reliant upon the Bible as a means of grace to form the community of faith into a distinct Christian culture with distinct Christian rhetoric and a distinct covenental worldview in a post-Christian time. Therefore, the Bible utilized as a means of grace was at the forefront of my mind as I approached Bishop Ambrose of Milan.

The way Ambrose weaves Scripture constantly into his sermons is very interesting. His sermons breathe Scripture continuously. Ambrose’s preaching method is surely is a reflection of Ambrose’s spiritual life. His method reveals a theological motivation for preaching in the imitation of Christ. It had a profound effect on his congregation, catechumens, and those priests under his authority. These theological understandings were at the center of my study and ministry intervention.

Overview

Chapter 2 presents an understanding of the relationship between the substance and character of Ambrose of Milan’s life and his preaching. Chapter 2 specifically deals with uncovering the meaning of Ambrose’s love for God and presents a theological model for a preaching life that allows the development of a connection between one’s love for God and preaching to be established. Chapter 3 discusses the design of the study and establishes the criteria for what themes and patterns were utilized in creating a grammar of life from Ambrose’s writings. This chapter also details the methods of data gathering from the questionnaires of the participants. Chapter 4 reports the findings of the participants’ questionnaires. Chapter 5 completes the dissertation with a summation and interpretation of the findings of the questionnaire.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE

Introduction

Modern preaching and modern instruction of preaching in the twenty-first century is rich with various approaches, styles, purposes, and theologies. A pastor or preaching scholar may scan the current literature on preaching and find various thoughts on what the purpose of preaching is and what methods may be utilized to achieve those purposes. Academic texts suggest what the content of a sermon should be. Current homiletical and theological books address the spiritual life and character of a preacher. Finally, some books speak on the activity and the art of preaching as a profession.

Unfortunately, the activity of preaching, the life and character of a preacher, the content of preaching, and the method and purpose of preaching are not discussed together in a holistic way. Modern scholarship, as a result of various academic, societal, and intellectual movements over the last century, have tended to deconstruct the activity and life of preaching into its elemental parts. This deconstructionism has led denominations influenced by Wesley as well as the Church catholic, particularly in Europe and North America, down a homiletical path that is distinctively different from what motivated the early Church fathers and Wesley.

This study attempted to reclaim and connect the content, character, life, and activity of preaching for a unified, theological purpose of preaching. It focused on the life and work of one preacher from the fourth century, Ambrose of Milan.

Therefore, the purpose of the study was to understand Ambrose of Milan's life and piety to discover how they might bring renewal to contemporary preaching in
selected pastors of the Prestonsburg District of the Kentucky Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church by studying aspects of his theology, love of God, and life of preaching so as to develop a grammar of life from that research.

**Qualitative Historical Narrative Research on Bishop Ambrose of Milan**

Ambrose of Milan’s *De Officiis* and sermons on the Gospel of Luke were examined to discover the connection between how Ambrose understood the content of preaching, the character of the preacher, and the activity of preaching. The primary thrust of the research was to discern theological meaning from these texts in a cohesive and unified way. In the course of historical research, I discovered major themes in Ambrose’s writings. Those themes are (1) a life of virtue, (2) *imitatio Christi*, and (3) preaching as born from the Word, in imitation of the Word, and loosed into the world. Each of these major themes are examined thoroughly in each section. These themes are preceded by a historical section that explores Ambrose’s locus in history.

**Historical Context**

Ambrose of Milan (Latin *Ambrosius*) was born in AD 339 in what is now Trier, Germany, near the borders of Luxembourg and France. He was born into a life of privilege, power, and education. Ambrose’s father was the Roman governor of Gaul, an established province at the time of Ambrose’s birth. Ambrose grew up in a family with one brother and one sister. Many scholars believe that Ambrose’s father died while Ambrose was still very young, so his mother moved the household to Rome so that the children might have a good education (Old 300).

Ambrose, and his brother Satyrus, were educated with the best that the Roman system could offer. The family was fluent in Greek (possibly due to Greek ancestry or
Ambrose’s family spending time in Greece in Roman government service), which was very helpful to Ambrose in his years of ministry. As Ambrose grew older, he followed in his father’s footsteps and began to study law, rhetoric, and civil service (Old 300).

Roman education at the time was rigorous. Ambrose attended the grammar school in Rome where he studied liberal arts. During this time his skills in oratory were developed and honed. He learned grammar, diction, pronunciation, and spelling in his early years, imitating the master historians and orators of the past. Upon completion of grammar school, Ambrose attended a school of rhetoric where he studied the works of Cicero and Quintilian who were masters of oratory and rhetoric. The students would craft and deliver their speeches in front of their instructor and class, receiving feedback after the speech was completed (Satterlee 36-37).

Following his studies in rhetoric, Ambrose’s training continued for approximately five more years in Roman law. He became a *juris prudens*, one who knew the law and procedures of the court and could make arguments and judgments with great clarity because of his vast knowledge of the law and their elevated sense of justice and order (Satterlee 37-38).

Ambrose’s education did not only include the finest that the Roman educational system could offer. It also included a strong Christian upbringing within the family. Ambrose’s sister, Marcelline, entered a convent in Rome while he was still in his teenage years. Ambrose’s strong Christian foundation also, no doubt, played an important part in his eventual acceptance of his call into the episcopacy, his desire to learn and grow as a
Christian priest and bishop, and understanding about the love of God, the virtuous life, and the mysteries of the sacraments (Old 300).

After completing his education, Ambrose and his brother, Satyrus, began their legal careers in Sirmium where they practiced law in the court of Praetorian Prefect Valcatius Rufinus. Attention drew around these two brothers because of their oratory and skill at the law. After Valcatius Rufinus’ death in 368, Sextus Anicius Petronius Probus was appointed to the prefect position. Probus was impressed with Ambrose and appointed Ambrose as his chief legal advisor. He held this station for a short while before Probus appointed Ambrose to an even higher station of Roman governance at a young age (Satterlee 38).

Ambrose was approximately thirty-one years old (AD 370) when he was appointed as governor of the provinces of Aemilia and Liguria, an area in the northern part of Italy. Milan was the capital city of these provinces and the emperor maintained his official residence in Milan, opening many avenues of advancement as well as affording Ambrose the ability to demonstrate his ethos, skill, and integrity as governor over the region (Old 300). Milan was a beautiful, aristocratic city at the time and was filled with diplomats, poets, and philosophers, rich with culture.

Tradition and history state that Ambrose’s life began to change dramatically during the election process for the new Bishop of Milan, after the exile of orthodox bishop Dionysius and the death of Arian-sympathizer Auxentius who was to be the next bishop of Milan. Great debate and disputes erupted over who would be the next bishop because the strict orthodox Catholics of the area did not feel a connection with

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1 I used priest, pastor, and preacher interchangeably throughout this work as ordained servants of God who fulfill all of these roles in the normal course of vocational ministry.
Orthodox Catholics believed that Auxentius utilized his political influence to gain the position of bishop.

Ambrose found himself in the middle of this dispute while acting as intermediary and arbitrator between the Catholics and the Arians. Both parties were determined to grasp control of the See of Milan and exert their theological preference in the province. Tensions grew and Ambrose appeared as governor in an attempt to calm the masses and avoid violence in the city streets. Even though Ambrose was still a catechumen and while he was speaking to the masses in an attempt to calm them down, the assembly elected Ambrose by acclamation to be the next bishop based upon the manner with which he carried himself during the deliberations and conflict. Tradition also tells a story about this election by acclamation that is interesting in light of the words that Prefect Probus spoke to Ambrose when he appointed Ambrose as governor: “Go and act, not as judge, but as bishop” (Schaff and Wace xv). A child, according to Paulinus, spoke out with a clear voice during the proceedings, saying, “Ambrose, Bishop!” The assembly of Catholics and Arians quickly agreed, and this catechumen found himself caught up in a call to serve God in a way that he never imagined (Schaff and Wace xv; Satterlee 44-45). Ambrose’s character and Probus’ admonition no doubt caused Ambrose to govern in an episcopal manner. The people were witness to his administration as governor, and the people of God saw in Ambrose gifts and graces for the office of bishop.

Ambrose attempted in many unscrupulous ways to escape this call to the episcopacy. He attempted to harm his reputation in society by having witnesses in his court tortured for evidence. He openly invited prostitutes into his home. He ran under the cloak of night, escaping the city only to be caught by the people and brought back into
custody. However, when Emperor Valentinian ratified Ambrose’s election to the position of See of Milan, Ambrose accepted his new call upon his life, if not under duress by Valentinian’s edict. Ambrose was baptized, fast-tracked through the various offices of the church, and was ordained a bishop eight days after his baptism on 7 December 374 at the age of thirty-five. He divested himself of his land and wealth, giving some to his sister, Marcelline, to care for her throughout her life as well as his brother, Satyrus, who later assisted Ambrose in his episcopal duties (Satterlee 46).

Confronted with the realization that he held a position for which he held little training and background, Ambrose quipped about the experience later in his life:

\begin{quote}
Ego enim raptus de tribunalibus atque administrationis infulis ad sacerdotium, docere vos coepli quod ipse non didici. Itaque factum est ut prius docere inciperem quam discere. Discendum igitur mihi simul et docendum est quoniam non vacavit ante discere. (De Officiis 1.1.4)
\end{quote}

This experience must have been difficult at best and frightening at worst for the new episcopal leader of Milan. Ambrose felt the weight of his office on his shoulders. He knew that he was the de facto spiritual leader of this province and that all eyes would be upon him as the church continued to grapple with Arianism. Indeed, even though Arius died three years prior to Ambrose’s birth, the church and Ambrose encountered this heretical teaching repeatedly throughout Ambrose’s episcopacy.

Ambrose’s ministry was not entirely focused upon the defense of orthodox, Catholic teaching against Arianism. The church also knows Ambrose for his

\footnote{2 For the purposes of this dissertation, I used the Latin for quotes of Ambrose in an effort to keep the original meaning and clarity of his writings intact. Ambrose here says, “I was snatched into the priesthood from a life spent at tribunals and amidst the paraphernalia of administrative office, and I began to teach you things I had not learned myself. The result was that I started to teach before I had started to learn. With me, then, it is a matter of learning and teaching all at the same time, since no opportunity was given me to learn in advance.” All translations from Latin to English in the dissertation are Ivor J. Davidson’s, from his editorial work on De Officiis. Davidson’s contemporary English translation exhibits a clarity that I did not find in older translations.}
mystagogical preaching to catechumens (i.e., sermons that explain the mysteries of the sacraments to Christian initiates who experienced baptism and Eucharist during the liturgy). Scholars know that Ambrose at heart was a preacher and a teacher. Schooled in rhetoric, he could rely upon his educational background for beautiful but simple erudition from the pulpit. Ambrose was polished but plain-spoken and encouraged his clergy to be polished and plain-spoken as well (Ambrose, De Officiis 1.23.104). Ambrose preached liturgically and, most likely, from memory addressing the contemporary issues and needs of his congregation (Satterlee 104-06). Ambrose sought to free the church from the powers of the empire. He confronted the emperor on more than one occasion. However, Ambrose also maintained a non-adversarial relationship with the emperors for whom he prayed in every Eucharistic prayer (60-61). Finally, Ambrose lived a life of virtue and ethical standards that spoke of his deep faith and love for God. Ambrose wanted to live that out, teach it to his pastors in mentor relationships, and preach it from the pulpit of his basilica to more than three thousand in attendance on any one Sunday.

Contemporaries

The apse at the end of the central nave of St. Peter’s Basilica in the Vatican has four statues depicting four doctors of the church: Athanasius, Ambrose, Augustine, and John Chrysostom. Each of these persons were general contemporaries of one another and encountered similar doctrinal and political struggles within the church as well as outside of the church. For example, Donatism, Palagianism, and Arianism all plagued the church from within during the fourth century while philosophical movements such as Manichacism affronted the church from without. For the purpose of this study, 1
examined two of these persons in an attempt to place Ambrose within the greater context of fourth-century Christendom.

**Augustine.** Augustine is perhaps one of the most widely recognized names and figures of the Catholic church today. Born in Thagaste in northern Africa, after Ambrose in 354, Augustine was raised in a divided household. His father, Patrick, was not particularly religious, and his mother, Monica, was a devout Christian who prayed for her son constantly. Augustine did not have the regal beginnings that Ambrose had as a child. Patrick struggled to send Augustine to school as they were not a family of great financial means. Augustine’s childhood and young adult life were full of struggles with regards to sin. He pursued sexual exploits as a way to fill the deep void within (Augustine 3.1.1). He took a concubine at a fairly young age and eventually had a son with her out of marriage. Augustine was also a roaming, frustrated, young man concerned with philosophy and the purpose of life. He explored Manichaeism, a Persian philosophical dialectic that separated good and evil, light and darkness, in material existence. Manichaeism is unusual in that it claims the notion that light is forever exiting this world, and humans cannot help their actions. Humans are wicked beings according to the Manichees and they cannot help but be evil (Litfin 218). After an early life of trying to find himself via various philosophical thoughts such as Manichaeism, Augustine found that his talents at oratory were opening powerful career opportunities for him. He moved to Milan, and at the insistence of his mother, Augustine divested himself of his concubine (whom he had been with for fifteen years since the age of seventeen) and became engaged to a ten-year-old from a wealthy family. As Augustine waited for his betrothed to grow up, he reflected
on the pain of his life and the pain he had caused his concubine and son through the breakup of their family (221).

In Milan Augustine eventually found himself with his mother in Ambrose’s basilica one Sunday morning in 386 (Litfin 221). Ambrose greeted Augustine with formality mixed with a cordial spirit, and Augustine fell in love with the bishop (Augustine 5.8.23). That love for Ambrose always came from a distance, as Ambrose was very difficult to get to know on a personal level. Ambrose was always busy meeting with important people of state. At the end of the day, when Augustine thought he might be able to approach this beloved bishop, he discovered him withdrawn into his studies (6.3.3). For Augustine, his encounters with Ambrose in the pulpit were the most stirring. He learned through these scholarly sermons that Christianity and the Old Testament were intellectually defensible against the Manichaean philosophy. Augustine marveled at how Ambrose took the Old Testament and defended it against Manichaean denunciations (6.4.6). He marveled at Ambrose’s scholarly abilities and his rhetoric: Ambrose preached some of the most up-to-date sermons in the Latin world at the time (Brown 74). Ambrose would take the rhetoric of the pagan and show how Christ the Word was superior in all ways.

Augustine wondered at Ambrose’s Platonic influences that seemed to bring Ambrose beyond the scope of the material world and into the spiritual. Ambrose was concerned about the soul, and Augustine was amazed with this perspective. Augustine notes with some incredulity that the educational quest upon which Ambrose inadvertently set him was difficult because Augustine had limited time to read, question, and talk to Ambrose, or find the right books for further study (Augustine 6.11.19). In this quest
Augustine found a fountain of God’s grace. He learned that the Bible grows in meaning as the Christian grows in wisdom (3.5.9). He learned that God had been working throughout his life, and he focused his internal energies to the work of the church.

Augustine was baptized in Ambrose’s basilica in Milan on 24 April 387 (Litfin 226). After his baptism, Augustine returned home to his native Africa with the intention of embracing a life of quiet monasticism. After the death of his mother, Monica, his son, Adeodatus, and a very close friend, Augustine visited Hippo where he went to meet a friend to discuss the monastic life. At Hippo Augustine inadvertently followed in the footsteps of his mentor, Ambrose. Augustine was elected by acclamation to a pastoral position that eventually led to his episcopacy (228).

During the years that followed, Augustine became one of the church’s most widely recognized names in history. He was a scholar, a bishop, a preacher, a theologian, and a defender of the faith against heretical factions of the church. He was a pastor who saw the deep need of God’s grace in the Christian’s life and vigorously defended that position against the Pelagians and the Donatists.

**John Chrysostom.** John of Antioch, later to be designated *Chrysostom or Golden Mouth* was also a defender of the faith, bishop, and contemporary of Ambrose of Milan. Chrysostom was born around 349 in the coastal town of Antioch. Antioch was a generally wealthy and large city that had a large Christian population due to the work of the Apostles Paul and Peter in that church some three centuries earlier. Antioch was a center for education and housed one of the schools of biblical interpretation (the other being Alexandria). John was born into what many scholars believe to be a fairly wealthy and socially important home. His father’s name was Sekoundos (Latin) and his mother’s
name was Anthousa (Greek); (Kelly 4). Sekoundos served with distinction in the officium as a top-class civil servant to Oriens.

John grew up in a Christian home, and his mother primarily raised him due to the early death of his father. At the young age of twenty, Anthousa raised her son alone and refused to take another husband. John attended an equivalent of a modern-day elementary school, learning to read, write, and do simple arithmetic. He then attended grammar school in his early adolescent years where he began to hone his natural abilities in rhetoric. Around the age of fifteen, John attended the school of rhetoric where he studied under the well-known pagan and traditionalist Libanios. Here he and his fellow students, Theodore, later bishop of Mopsuestia, and Maximos, future bishop of Seleukeia, honed their rhetorical skills (Kelly 6).

A mere twenty-five years before John’s birth, the Council of Nicaea met in an attempt to bring clarity to the church’s Christology. The Council’s decision did not end the controversy or the political maneuverings, however. The Arian debate continued throughout John’s life. In the midst of this great debate among Christians over the nature of Jesus, John grew up. The church was deeply divided on the issue and John experienced this divide in the Antiochene church. His household supported Diodore and Flavian who proclaimed the equality of the Son and Spirit with the Father (Kelly 10-11). Emperor Constantius II required the homoean compromise, which appealed to the Arian delegation. Constantius and his government’s via media was a wedge that brought further enmity between the orthodox Christians and the Arians. This divide worsened in AD 360 when the newly appointed bishop of Antioch, Meletios, was exiled after only a few weeks in the new position (12).
In the midst of this embattled church, John and his friend, Basil, graduated from their schooling. After graduation, John became very serious about his faith. Both John and Basil decided to attend to an ascetic lifestyle of prayer and study of Scripture. John became a student of Meletios for approximately three years. At the end of those three years, John was baptized and became a lector in the Antiochene church. Drawn to a deeper relationship with God, John eventually retreated into the mountains around Antioch. In these ascetic times on Mount Silpius, John, like Augustine, battled sexual temptation and other desires of the flesh (Litfin 193).

After six years of the ascetic lifestyle, John returned to Antioch because of poor health. A life of extreme asceticism had finally caught up with John’s body, and he needed to regain his strength. John returned to his post of lector in Antioch. Eight years later, he was ordained presbyter and began his preaching ministry. John’s preaching skills were unmistakable, and he soon became a very popular preacher in Antioch (Litfin 197).

Because of this popularity, John was imperially ordered to appear at a church at the northern gate of Antioch in 397 at the age of forty-eight. The government official told Chrysostom that he was to be made bishop of Constantinople. John’s episcopacy in Constantinople was not an easy one. Bishop Theophilus of Alexandria did not care for this preacher of the Antiochian school of homiletics and immediately began to work against John in many ways. John’s temperament did not help in his new appointment. His proclivity of being a quick-tempered, aggressive personality played out on John’s cathedra every Sunday (Litfin 201).

Unlike Ambrose, who worked with governmental dignitaries with generally amicable relationships, John often attacked governmental and civic leaders during his
sennons. He was unwilling to compromise biblical truth with worldly standards and was rigid in his rhetoric. His sermons aimed at the bureaucrats, and their corruption was full of righteous anger. His austerity reforms and strict accountability measures for clergy did not win him any supporters, either. Chrysostom emptied the church’s vaults in order to fund hospitals and other justice ministries to the poor. In an ill-spoken word one Sunday, John referred to the Emperor’s wife as “Jezebel,” and this mistake was all the ammunition that John’s enemies required. Banished from his church and exiled to the mountains, John lived and died in lonely isolation (Litfin 205).

Overview

Modeled after Cicero’s De Officiis, Ambrose’s De Officiis is a book written to the clergy of Milan and its provincial territories. Consistent with Ambrose’s pastoral preaching style of taking what is worldly and/or pagan and showing how Christ is greater, Ambrose takes Cicero’s work and demonstrates throughout how Scripture and Jesus Christ is greater than the pagan Cicero’s great philosophical work. Ambrose was concerned throughout about how virtue should be an important part of a priest’s work and life. De Officiis was a document written to priests by their pastor and their bishop. Ambrose combines gentleness with firmness throughout as he spoke about the office of priest and pastor in this primer to the priesthood. Unlike modern-day primers, Ambrose’s mission was not to teach pastoral technique in this document. He did not instruct his priests on the minutiae of preparing or preaching a sermon. He did not tell his priests how to form their prayers technically during mass or what biblical hermeneutic to use while studying and interpreting the Bible. Instead, he focused on matters of the heart from which the office of priest flows. For Ambrose, a priest’s ministry, the content of a
sennon, a preacher’s character, the activity of preaching, and a priest’s life were inseparable from one another.

I have approached this text from a qualitative historical narrative context. In other words, I have attempted to discern and ascribe meaning to Ambrose of Milan’s *De Officiis* so that pastors might take the deep insights of this fourth-century priest and pastor and inscribe Ambrose’s wisdom upon their hearts as contemporary preachers. This chapter reports the data that was gathered using qualitative historical narrative research techniques on *De Officiis* and select sermons from Ambrose’s work on the Gospel of Luke. This data was analyzed for what themes Ambrose speaks on throughout his *De Officiis* in an attempt to (1) discern what mattered most to Ambrose about the spiritual life of a priest, and (2) understand practices that Ambrose found helpful in his own life and ministry that he desired to pass on to his clergy.

I reported this data in two sections. Section 1 examines Ambrose’s concern for virtue and how a pastor and preacher must live out a life of virtue. Elements of virtue for Ambrose include but are not limited to wisdom, character, humility, and a life of piety. Section 2 examines Ambrose’s *ethos* about a life that is *imitatio Christi*.

**A Life of Virtue**

Ambrose was deeply concerned about the character of his priests. Ambrose intimately knew the human condition and psyche. He knew that what was deep inside a person would ultimately reflect outwardly in interactions with other persons, in conversations, in language, in countenance and nonverbal communication, and in preaching and worship. He often spoke about how pastors must be cognizant of all of the human motivations that drive the human soul. Some of those passions, as Ambrose called
them, should be elevated and utilized. Others, Ambrose cautioned, should be repressed and checked by the mind (Ambrose, *De Officiis* 1.37.234-41). Ambrose spent a great deal of time discussing in *De Officiis* how a priest can address and bring the gospel to bear upon these areas of a priest’s life. The ultimate goal for Ambrose was virtue, wisdom, love of God, and holiness.

Occasionally, virtue for Ambrose came in the form of practice and discipline. While becoming virtuous in some areas of a priest’s life might require internal reflection and prayer, others require disciplining via practice. Thus, Ambrose saw spiritual growth as bidirectional. Growth can come from within and be expressed outwardly. Conversely, disciplining an outward action affects a priest’s inner life. Habits and discipline affect one’s spiritual life. A good example of Ambrose’s view of discipline occurred when he spoke about public address. Equating virtuous speech to preparation for war, Ambrose described how a soldier must go through training in the arts of his weapons in order to be prepared to defend himself against a foe. In the discipline of rehearsal, the soldier knows the weapon most intimately. In the rehearsal the soldier imagines that the enemy is drawing near and prepares mentally for potential battles ahead.

Ambrose continued on with his illustrations about practice and discipline in preparation for preaching. He noted that a person who wants to navigate the sea must begin with a small river to learn the fundamentals. Those who wish to sing beautifully must bring out their voice by training. Those who wish to win at a sport must struggle throughout the contest. Growth as a preacher and public speaker was gradual for Ambrose. Just as infants learn how to speak and form their words, so should preachers grow in the formation of their words. An infant’s pronunciation of such words often are
unintelligible and lack the beauty of a theatrical oratory. As children grow and mature, their words and their language grow more beautiful to listeners’ ears.

Ambrose suggested that priests take on the example of King David who for a while was silent in his learning as he matured. As David becomes older, his erudition and the beauty of his words in the Psalms became clear. This concept applies to the preacher as well. For a time, the preacher must be silent and learn. Then the preacher must venture out into the streams and rivers of the church and begin mastering the practice of speech and preaching. The preacher matures through the practice of this discipline and grows wise in the content of one’s speech (Ambrose, De Officiis 1.10.30-35).

Public speaking is a difficult activity. The church and the population in general are familiar with the misspoken moments from various leaders and preachers. These moments of spoken error come from the crucible that is the pulpit or lectern. In this crucible, all eyes and attention fall on the preacher. The preacher’s mind is active in the process, thinking ahead so that she or he knows where the sermon is going, while at the same time staying in the moment of what is being said. Occasionally, this divided attention leads to an unwise remark that harms the body of Christ. Ambrose suggests that the seasoned preacher will be like David. She or he will demonstrate their wisdom by considering what will be said, to whom it will be said, and the context in which it will be said. In preparation and in the moment of preaching, silence is paramount. The preacher places silence in the balance with speech. If an unsure moment arises, the wise preacher does not speak.

Attending to one’s speech points to a deeper concern that Ambrose has about preachers’ lives. Ambrose believes that priests and preachers must be modest. Pastors can
see Ambrose's intent throughout Book I of *De Officiis*, especially in chapter 18. As preachers bring discipline to personal speech, they learn modesty. Modesty is an inward and virtuous trait that expresses itself outwardly. Modesty is a companion to purity, and purity is a companion to chastity, all of which are important to priests or pastoral leaders. Ambrose states, "*Pulchra igitur virtus est verecundiae et suavis gratia*"¹ (Ambrose, *De Officiis* 1.18.67). Modesty was an important quality of the pastoral life for Ambrose.

Modesty was imperative and beautiful to Ambrose because this virtue was a mirror of the mind that reflected outwardly its image in the priests' words. Perhaps more subtly, modesty reflects its image in the tone of their voices, the way they sing, or even in their gait. Ambrose attended to the virtue of modesty by paying attention to these outward actions. Ambrose wanted his pastors to be self-aware of their countenance in the pulpit and in their ministry. Ambrose no doubt was well aware of the dangers of a haughty countenance. He required his clergy to think on the virtue of silence as a chief act of modesty. If areas of a priest's life needed the discipline of modesty, the priest should pursue silence of speech, silence of countenance, silence in gestures, silence in gait, silence in prayer, and silence of nonverbal communication. These are indicators of a steady, firm, pure, and dependable soul. Ambrose says, "*Itaque vox quaedam est animi corporis motus*"² (De Officiis 1.18.71). In effect, Ambrose is saying that style speaks out of substance.

Ambrose reflects briefly on what must have been two recent and well-known events to the clergy of Milan. In the first incident, he recalls a person who desired to be a priest in the church. This candidate attended with due care to all of the duties of the

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¹ What a beautiful, lovely virtue modesty is and how delightful and full of grace it always is.
clergy that were asked of him. However, Ambrose denied his admission into the 
priesthood on the sole basis that his gestures were too unseemly. Another incident, 
Ambrose recalls, involves a person who was already a member of the clergy. This priest 
was instructed never to walk in front of Ambrose because of the cocky way that he 
walked. Ambrose quips that this sight was “painful to behold” (*De Officiis* 1.18.72). The 
test of time found Ambrose’s judgment to be true. Eventually, both of these persons left 
the church. The former deserted his faith during the Arian onslaught and the latter fell in 
love with money and abandoned his ordination. Ambrose knew that the fickleness of their 
hearts was mirrored in the way that they walked. They had the appearance of a wandering 
clown (1.18.72).

Ambrose then reflected on the silence and modesty of Mary, the Mother of the 
Lord. After she saw the angel of the Lord who announced that she would be the mother 
of the Messiah, she was humble and quiet. She did not ask excessive questions. She did 
not speak for the sake of making conversation. She did not give an immediate reply. 
Instead, she listened in silence and in modesty to what the angel had to say about the 
Incarnation and virgin birth. In her modesty, she received the Christ into her womb. The 
Messiah was not born to a haughty woman. The Messiah was born to a humble, modest 
woman. Following Ambrose’s line of reasoning, the outcome of such modesty is that 
God extends grace all the more freely to those who live humble, modest lives. Ambrose 
expected the same from his priests. For Ambrose, a counterfeit life was not pleasing to 
behold (*De Officiis* 1.18.69 -75).

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4 The movement of the body acts as a voice for the soul.
Ambrose saw that modesty, purity, and chastity were important virtues for his priests because he saw these virtues in Jesus Christ. When Jesus said, “God blesses those who are gentle and lowly, for the whole earth will belong to them” (Matt. 5:5, NLT), Ambrose took that virtue of meekness to heart. He desired to imitate Jesus’ acting out of those words. He also saw these virtues in the apostles. Ambrose quotes the apostle Peter from 1 Peter 3:4, reminding his clergy that they should “pray for the incorruptibility of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God a great price.” Ambrose understood that the biblical virtues that he saw in Christ and in the apostolic fathers also enabled Ambrose’s contemporary church to have strong, holy leaders. These virtues protected the clergy in practical and useful ways.

For example, in Book 1, Chapter 20 of De Officiis, Ambrose discusses some of the more practical and useful ways that the virtue of modesty comes to bear in the ministry. He cautions his clergy about spending too much time with extravagant men who, by their very lifestyle, poison the virtuous life of simplicity and modesty. The excitement of grand dinners and buffets, the fineries of life, and the joviality of parties and games can plant seeds of discontent within the priests’ hearts. The priests could focus on these things, Ambrose argues, and lose their central focus of serving Christ and his Church. No doubt, Ambrose once again recalled in his mind the priest whom he dispatched because of the love of money. Ambrose wanted his clergy to remain on point and clear to their task.

Ambrose addresses practical matters of propriety and temptation in De Officiis as well. He notes that younger clergy need to be careful with their pastoral visits. If these younger clergy visited widow or young unmarried females (Ambrose uses the term
"virgin"), they should be accompanied by the bishop or other clergypersons. Obviously, this caution was a matter of great importance for Ambrose if he offered himself as proctor for such visits. He was concerned about such issues because (1) he was aware of human nature and the ease to which humans can fall to desire, (2) he was aware of human nature and the proclivity to gossip, and (3) he was aware of the power the office of clergy holds that might have an undue influence upon parishioners. Ambrose evidently saw such visits as rare occurrences if they required the presence of a bishop. Like Nathan in the Holy Scriptures, Ambrose desired to flee from any situation that might suggest impropriety or place parishioners and clergy in situations that might lead to moral failure (De Officiis 1.20.87).

Ambrose’s concern for virtue did not stay within the realm of philosophical debate. Virtues must be useful (to use Ambrose’s term), that is, applicable to the life of the church. Virtues were useful to Ambrose because he saw them as avenues of grace whereby Christians might fall more deeply in love with God and become a more holy people. Therefore, for Ambrose, the virtues were means of grace whereby the people of God were sanctified and made holy. This increase in holiness and godliness were again not an end to themselves. Holiness and godliness were the paths by which Christians walked so that they might serve Christ in the world. Ambrose saw this service to Christ as a response to the love of God who worked righteously to redeem people. Thus, virtues allow God’s grace to work within Christians to make them a holy people who respond to God’s love by working for the kingdom and the cause of Christ. This concept was more useful to Ambrose than the gain of money or possessions, and he quotes 1 Timothy 4:8 in support of his argument: “Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the
life that now is and that which is to come” (*De Officiis* 2.6.22-25). Ambrose essentially linked effectiveness in ministry with the promise of the eschaton.

Ambrose then reflected on Philippians 3:8. He wanted his godliness and his usefulness to be such that the cares and concerns of this world are left behind and instead the intent of Ambrose’s heart is the gain of Christ. Ambrose expects an outcome from his pursuit of holiness, virtue, and justice ministries—earthly loss and godly gain (*De Officiis* 2.6.26-27).

**The Chief Virtues**

One of the hallmarks of Ambrose’s erudition is his consistent, constant quoting of Scriptures. In his sermons and in other pastoral and theological writings, Ambrose weaved Scripture into his arguments. Ambrose argued for the connection between virtues and usefulness, and he used that occasion to examine Jewish ancestors and their lives. In book 1, chapter twenty-four of *De Officiis*, Ambrose discusses five of these Jewish ancestors: Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Job, and David. After a brief examination of each of these biblical characters, Ambrose proposes four “chief” virtues that clergy should examine as part of their virtuous discipline. These chief virtues are seen in each of these Jewish patriarchs’ lives in how they lived in relationship to God and in relationship to one another. Ambrose does not find these four virtues lacking in any of these patriarchs: (1) prudence, (2) justice, (3) courage, and (4) temperance. Ambrose is careful to define these virtues based upon his character study of the patriarchs. Prudence is the search for truth and a desire or yearning for deeper knowledge of God. Justice ensures that people have what is rightfully theirs. People who are just will not pursue others’ possessions as their own. Instead, just persons will pursue fairness for all persons. Courage enables the
loftiness and greatness of spirit that is required in times of war or in times of peace when leadership is required. Temperance calls an individual to balance in one’s life. Balance and order is where true godliness can be found (105-15).

Typical of Ambrose’s style in *De Officiis*, he speaks about how Christian virtue is better than pagan virtue. For example, in chapter twenty-six of Book I, Ambrose analyzes Moses and his search for the wisdom of God. He notes that Moses was exposed to the educational system of Egypt while he was growing up. Moses learned Egyptian philosophy, theology, and mathematics. Eventually, because of his search for God, Moses finds the wisdom of the Egyptians harmful and foolish. Moses turned away from Egyptian wisdom in preference to godly (Yahwistic) wisdom. Ambrose notes that no culture is wiser than God is. He further argues that God taught Moses. Moses, therefore, was incredibly wise compared to the pagan wisdom of the Egyptians. While Ambrose recognizes various forms of wisdom throughout the world, he also notes that godly wisdom is mightier. Godly wisdom was able to overcome the powers of Egyptian craft and work. Similarly, godly wisdom is preferred over worldly wisdom for the priest and preacher of God. The loftier the wisdom, the more priests should strive for that godly wisdom according to Ambrose. Wisdom is one example of many of Ambrose’s *proofs* throughout *De Officiis*. God’s righteous work and his wisdom are mightier than the work and the wisdom of humanity—even Cicero’s.

Ambrose established an ordinal system for these chief virtues while at the same time focusing on their interdependence. Courage was the loftiest of all the chief virtues (*De Officiis* 1.35.175). Times of war call for the virtue of courage, argues Ambrose. Times of peace also require courage in the home and church, even though courage is used
in more subtle ways during peacetime. The duty of the office of priest is fixed more on
the duty of the soul and on peace than on war and the body. The priest must have courage
to fight sin and carnal nature while also leading the church through spiritual battle.

Reminiscent of Paul's letter to the Romans, Ambrose states that through courage a
humans are able to conquer anger, learn patience during suffering, steel their eyes and
heart against enticing sin, learn humility, and be stable and foundational as a Christian.
The most noble duty of clergy is to train the mind, keep down the body of sin, and
subjugate it so that it will obey the mind and reason (36.181). A trained and courageous
mind was more valuable for Ambrose than money, pleasures, and honors.

Courage did not stand alone as the primary chief virtue. Ambrose notes in Book 1,
chapter thirty-five, paragraph 176 that while courage is the loftiest chief virtue, it will
never stand alone. He states that in some cases, courage can become wicked if not
combined with other virtues. Ambrose uses the example of war—courage without justice
could lead to various war crimes. Courage without prudence (wisdom) could lead to
unnecessary wars or prolonged and protracted wars. He uses the example of David who
never waged war unless he was driven to it and David's wisdom, given by God, which
allowed him to emerge victorious through various stratagems. When David was battling
Goliath, courage allowed him to face his adversary. Prudence enabled David to fight
Goliath without armor that would have weighed him down. Wisdom combined with
courage allowed David to kill Goliath, according to Ambrose. This early experience in
David's life caused him to be aware of the need to receive the counsel of God prior to
going to war. Ambrose applies this discursus on David to the life and work of the priest.

Priests must be courageous, wise, just, and balanced in the battle against sin in their lives
and in the life of the church. Courage enables priests to look inwardly and know themselves. Courage enables priests to give frank examination of their gifts, graces, and faults. Courage with wise prudence enables priests to make sense and reason of this inward examination and act upon it. This level of authenticity will then emerge out of their lives, into the pulpit, and through the words of the priests as they proclaim the Word of God. This deep authenticity also allows the clerical office to imitate Christ. Just as Jesus did his Father’s will, so do pastors imitate Christ in their love, virtue, and mission in the world and do the will of the Father. This deep authenticity also carries with it a notion of the future. Ambrose believed that the work of the clerical office was not for the present. Instead, pastors do battle for the future. This battle of the virtuous life is the greatest cause of humankind and pastors’ attention must be fully devoted to the cause of Christ (1.44.224-27).

Ambrose believes that the inner life of priests, if lived in such a manner that is pleasing to God, allows Christ’s power to show in the pastorate. Christ is glorified in the personal piety of preachers and their own battle with sin. The death of sin and flesh enables preachers to rise to new works and new life. This transition and testimony greatly excites Ambrose, for he sees them as the core of pastoral ministry. Virtue alone is only part of the formula. Action (or duty)—the living out of Christ’s power and grace in pastors’ lives within the community of faith—is coexistent with virtue (De Officiis 1.37.186).

Ambrose was a skilled rhetorician, and he realized that some might object at this point and ask why he waited until the twenty-fourth chapter of his argument in book one to define these four virtues as chief. Ambrose responds in a way that gives us an idea
about his modus operandi. He states that to offer these virtues at the very beginning would have been artificial because readers would have wanted to systematize all of the virtues under one of these four headings of chief values. Ambrose feels that early analysis of the chief virtues would be improper. His purpose is not to systematize these virtues but to bring them to cohesion as seen through the example of the Jewish patriarchs. Ambrose is after synthesis. He sees these virtues overlap with one another in a cohesive bond. He is not confined to the modernist proclivity to deconstruct his work. Instead, these virtues exist in a melting pot or as a soup in which one virtue seasons and influences another (De Officiis 1.24-25).

The lives of these patriarchs enable priests to see how these chief virtues begin to work with other virtues that Ambrose brings forth in his De Officiis. For example, Ambrose examines Abraham as a man who was prudent because he sought out wisdom and believed in God. Abraham was prudent because he knew the Lord. This knowledge of God is in opposition, says Ambrose, to the Manicheans who said that Satan is their creator or to the Arians who believed in an imperfect and debased creator, or to the Marcionites who preferred to have a Lord who is evil rather than good. Abraham was wise and prudent because he believed in the one true God, and he was counted as righteous because of that belief (1.25.116-18).

Ambrose finds a synthesis of these virtues in the Abraham and Isaac sacrificial narrative. Abraham was wise because he believed in God and was obedient to this most difficult and terrible of deeds of sacrificing his beloved son. Abraham was just because he gave back to God what he had been freely given. Abraham had courage because he used his wisdom and reason to restrain his impulses to save his son. He exhibited
temperance in that he showed through his actions a balance between his deep love for his son and his deep love for God (*De Officiis* 1.25.116-18).

This synthesis is difficult for the modern reader to understand because modernist deconstructionism continues to permeate analytical thought in the academy to some extent or another. Ambrose sees this synthesis as essential in his approach to life as a Christian and as pastor. These virtues are dependent upon one another, as noted in the examples of Abraham and David, and they are requisite for the pastorate in Ambrose's view. These virtues are the "duties" and "office" of the priest as they courageously lead congregations. Priests must not only "think" well; they must "act" well (*De Officiis* 1.30.143). In other words, Ambrose might ask pastors concerning preaching and doxology (1) what passions come forth from their mouths and their actions when they preach, (2) if those passions are rooted in sin or in the virtue of Christ, (3) if they know that those passions will come forth even if they do not want them to, (4) if they have chosen which passions they will let forth and which passions they will restrain, and (5) if they hope that over time, only the virtues of Christ will come forth because these virtues reign in their hearts.

Perhaps the most clear example of Ambrose's concern for giving good example and virtuous living are here:

*Talis itaque debet esse qui consilium alteri det, ut se ipsum formam alii praebat ad exemplum bonorum operum, in doctrina, in integritate, in gravitate, ut sit eius sermo salubris atque irreprehensibilis, consilium utile, vita honesta, sententia decora.*

5 (*De Officiis* 2.18.86)

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5 This is what a person's character ought to be like, therefore, if he is going to give advice to his neighbor: he must present himself as a model to others, as an example of good works, in doctrine, in purity, in seriousness of life; his language must be wholesome and blameless; his advice beneficial, his life honorable, and his opinions seemly.
Ambrose is saying that pastors should act according to their passions and that their actions must be a model of Christ. In effect, if pastors are to imitate Christ’s actions, they must also imitate Christ’s holiness and godliness in their inner, spiritual, lives.

The Inner Life

As previously noted, Ambrose was concerned about the spiritual lives of his pastors and, by proxy, his own spiritual life. He also understood that a deep spiritual life would bring freedom to pastors. They would be free from the bondage that sin can create and instead could walk into the pulpit with liberty of spirit to proclaim good news, unencumbered by the weight of sin (*De Officiis* 1.39.249-54). Sin can act like a spider web and entrap pastors with the fleeting pleasures of the world. These spider webs are nothing but an image of death, Ambrose argues. He calls his priests to live according to the image of life that Christ has given them. Ambrose recognizes that if one is to lead authentically, one must practice the prescription that one is teaching. As noted previously, Ambrose expresses his concern for the inner life by attending to and describing behaviors that are indicative of a healthy spiritual life. Conversely, he often speaks about disciplines that pastors must practice to bring holiness to their spiritual lives. For Ambrose, a spiritual life of holiness and behaviors are the same.

Ambrose expresses his concern for the *inner life* of a priest in a bilateral way. He was deeply concerned about the deep recesses of human nature and the effect that sin had upon humanity. Ambrose taught his clergy to attend to this inner life by protecting their hearts and minds, so that in moments of weakness or temptation, their behaviors would be Christlike. Ambrose was particularly concerned about speech and the effect that speech can have in a parish. He was fully aware of how pastors are leaders through their
speech, not only from the pulpit but also in their greetings, in their conversations, and in their leadership in the parish and in the community.

Ambrose notes that times for silence and times for speaking exist for pastors. Wisdom (prudence) is requisite to know when silence is required. Ambrose is aware of the balance: (1) Humans can sin when they do not speak when they should, and (2) humans can sin when they then speak when silence would have been more prudent. God will judge a pastors' moments of silence as well as every word they speak. Therefore, pastors must rely on godly wisdom and guard their hearts and their mouths:

\[ \text{Saepi possessionem tuam spinis... et argentum et aurum tuum adliga, et or\text{\i} two fac ostium et vectem, et verbis tuis iugum et stateram? Possessio tua mens tua est, aurum tuum cor tuum est, argentum tuum eloquium tuum est: Eloquia Domini, eloquia casta, argentum igne examinatum. Bona etiam possession mens bona.}^6 \] (De Officiis 1.3.11)

Ambrose goes on to say in his analysis that a pure, inner life is a valuable possession for priests. Preachers must guard their hearts with thorns and pious care or else the passions of the flesh could take ahold of the pastors and lead to sinful behavior. Ambrose presses on to the reader:

Guard your inner self... Don't neglect it. [B]ind up your words so they do not run riot and gather up sins by too much talking. Let there be a door on your mouth that can be shut and barred when the need arises. (11-13)

Ambrose expected his pastors to examine, ponder, and weigh their words before they speak.

Ambrose proposes that the outcome of such guarding is gentleness, patience, and modesty in speech. Speech begins to proceed from good motives and not from sin. He...

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^6 Hedge your property with thorns:... bind fast your silver and your gold; make door and bar for your mouth, and yoke and balance for your words. It was for each one of us, was it not? Your property is your mind, your gold your heart, your silver is your word: "The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver tested by fire." A good mind is good property.
reminds priests that the Word is holy and their words should be holy, too. Pastors should not blurt out something in a fit of indignation or in anger. Instead, their words should imitate Christ, the Word, who is holy. Preachers should "ne sermo postremo, qui commendare interiora debet, vitium aliquod esse in moribus aperiat et prodai" (De Officiis 1.4.15). Ambrose understood the snare of the enemy to be speech.

Ambrose was not solely teaching his pastors about the techniques of public speaking or of networking, to use a modern term. He combined piety with practice, technique with holiness, speech with wise motives. This combination is very different from the work seen in modern homiletics. While the tendency of modern homiletics is to dissociate piety and practice, Ambrose sees them in a bilateral and cohesive way. Piety and practice hold hands as they walk the streets of pastoral ministry.

If "the snare of the enemy is our speech" (Ambrose, De Officiis 1.4.15), Ambrose is accordingly concerned with the act of public proclamation of the gospel. As is typical for Ambrose, he returns to the patriarchs of the Old Testament to prove his point. Ambrose recalls how King David instructed the people of God to roam through the rooms of their hearts, imagining the human heart as a large mansion that must be explored thoroughly. Ambrose urged his priests to hold conversation with themselves as they meandered through the mansions of their hearts, imitating David. As persons of God meander and hold conversation with their hearts, they are to listen to the outcome of that conversation and apply it to their daily lives. Self-analysis was an important part of Christian proclamation, holiness, and godliness according to Ambrose. He also thought

\[\text{In short, make sure that his language as it is intended, to commend his inner nature and not reveal the existence of some fault in his character for all to see.}\]
that it was requisite for preaching. However, self-analysis was not as important as communing with God (3.1.1).

Ambrose continues his analysis by referring to Moses who spent much time in prayer with Yahweh in the Tent of Meeting. Moses prayed and communed with God for much longer periods than he spent in public discourse. Ambrose suggests during these times of extended quiet, prayer, and listening (i.e., forty days on the mountain with God) that he received the gift of the Law. In solitude Moses was able to be close to God and hear God speak. Ambrose has an expectation that God will speak to the human heart in these times of prayer and solitude. The alternative for Ambrose is that Christians only hold conversation with themselves and that God will not have an influencing partnership in that conversation. Holy, private conversation with God (Augustine, a contemporary of Ambrose, would also equate prayer with listening to God) is a great and a glorious thing because it gives pastors a vision of God’s heart. Ambrose is also very clear about what the pastoral and ministerial outcomes of such times of holy conversation and listening brings (De Officiis 3.1.2).

The result of prayer is powerful speech and powerful ministry. Ambrose reflects upon the work of the apostles who spent time in prayer and close, face-to-face relationships with Jesus. The apostles had powerful ministries. Ambrose notes how people would bring the sick to the apostles in the hope that the shadow of Peter would fall upon them so that they could be healed. He sees that in a like manner with Christ, people would come and touch the apostles’ garments and health was given. Elijah “spoke the word” (De Officiis 3.1.4) and drought occurred in the land for 3 1/2 years. Elijah’s prayer and presence allowed the oil and grain of his caretaker always to provide
sustenance for the day. In prayer and meditation Elijah called forth the power of heaven to consume the altar of stone and its sacrifice doused with water on Mount Carmel. Elisha was able to promise a barren woman a child and raise the dead to life. Elisha prayed and caused blindness in the soldiers of Syria. Ambrose is replete with examples, but his point is clear: A life of prayer centered on hearing God speak enables powerful, God-driven ministry (3.1.1-7).

In summary, the words that preachers use in the context of ministry and proclamation reflect the inner life. God "knows the minds of men and nothing can be hidden from Him" (Ambrose, De Officiis 1.14.54). The Father in heaven will mold the preachers' minds so that every word spoken is pure and uplifting, worthy of praise. If preachers' live spiritual lives of prayer and reflection, preaching and ministry will be powerful, Ambrose argues.

Ambrose's concern for the inner life of preachers also focuses upon the practicalities of Christian proclamation. In one of the rarer moments in Ambrose's writings in De Officiis, he speaks about the practice and the art of rhetoric and speech. He notes two different kinds of speech that humans (and priests) utilize in life and work. The first kind of speech is that of affable discourse between acquaintances and friends. This is friendly conversation. It is full of laughter and tends to be relaxed in its style of dialogue. The second kind is the speech and rhetoric of proclamation and matters of faith. This second form must be virtuous, without any intent of anger or wrath, and should be full of wisdom and reason (Ambrose, De Officiis 1.22.99). Ambrose goes on to note that all of the preacher's language should be mild, quiet, full of kindness and generosity. His concerns return to preaching very quickly, however. He sees this kind of speech as very
important and influential. Because the words of proclamation carry with them great weight, Ambrose notes that when preachers speak of the holy Scriptures, their language must be without wrath, bitterness, or sharpness. Proclamation should not contain flowery, ornate, and sophisticated language. Proclamation should be simple and clear yet also contain dignity and weight. It must not be too studied or too refined yet should also not be careless and rough in style, either. Preachers' imagination must be held in check in the moment of preaching. Ambrose is well aware of preachers' proclivity to return to often-repeated phrases, stories, and soapboxes. He urges his priests to let reason rule their minds as they prepare for the act of preaching as well as in the practice of preaching. Ambrose also suggests that pastors keep counsel with others with regard to the content of their preaching. Wise counsel will keep sermons within the realm of godly reason and virtue.

Ambrose notes that preachers should care for and analyze the quality of their sermons. He also suggests that mentors give periodic counsel on sermons as well. Ambrose tells the reader that sermons should be outlined with a reasonable argument. Sermons should have a good, reasonable beginning and that the sermon should not be too long. A long sermon irritates the parishioners, Ambrose notes, and incurs anger. Likewise, short sermons communicate that preachers neglected their office as priests and demonstrate carelessness in the lives of said priests. While some modern preachers might advocate starting a sermon with a joke or a humorous story, Ambrose suggests against such things. He suggests that times for jokes occur occasionally; however, the pulpit (and more largely, the clerical life) is not a place for jests. Ambrose takes a sober stance on
humorous talk, noting that Christians do not find jesting and humorous language in Scripture.

Ambrose addresses other practicalities. He states that priests must pay attention to their voices. The preaching voice must be plain and clear. Ambrose notes that it is a great benefit if it is a beautiful, musical voice. He also states that the preacher’s voice must be distinct with good pronunciation and full of masculine vigor. Preachers should avoid a theatrical lilt in their voice, and Ambrose also recommends that preachers work on eliminating “rustic twang” (De Officiis 1.23.104) from their speech. Preachers must do this careful work because for Ambrose, the act of proclamation is a God act and is bigger and greater than priests are. Ambrose wants to keep the true, inner meaning of the words that preachers utter authentic and reflective of Scripture (1.22-23).

Ambrose knew that attending to these practical matters required deep thought and internal reflection. The inner life of pastors fuels the outward and public act of Christian proclamation. The inner, spiritual life of wisdom, virtue, and Christlikeness fuels the outward, practical matters of preaching. If preachers desire imitatio Christi, they should attend to their preaching skills with careful and wise practice and attention. Likewise, a godly, virtuous life empowers preachers and allows God’s power to be shown.

The Life of Piety—Silence, Prayer, and Study

I have thus noted Ambrose’s connection between a spiritual life and the ministerial practice of Christian proclamation. Ambrose states, “[P]ietas enim in Deum initium intellectus. Pietas fundamentum est virtutum omnium” (De Officiis 1.27.126). This summary statement demonstrates how Ambrose gets to the core of his argument in

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* Piety towards God is the beginning of understanding. Piety is the foundation for all the virtues.
De Officiis. Ambrose exposes a deep truth—wise men and women seek God and God’s wisdom through acts of piety that lead to deeper virtue. Ambrose knows that a strong, godly mind is able to resist sinful temptations and the yearnings of the flesh (1.36-37). A life of piety deepens preachers’ shared experience in the divine life and enables them to grow more fully into the imago Dei. Prerequisites for a life of piety exist, however. Ambrose notes that a life of piety that eventually leads to virtue and wisdom must first start in silence—a silence of the mouth, a silence of the mind, and a silence of the soul. Indeed, Ambrose states that silence must be the first discipline learned on the path to virtue and wisdom. Ambrose understands that learning how to manage rhetoric is a matter of spiritual maturity. Priests exhibit wise speech when they know how to keep still and quiet in various matters of the church and life. Wise speech comes from training the mind to be non-reactionary, yet wise speech also comes from prayer (1.2.5).

Ambrose wants to ground his thoughts on prayer and silence with Holy Scripture. He reflects on the Shema in Deut. 4. Ambrose notes that God told Israel to hear and listen to God. God did not instruct Israel to speak. Ambrose also reflects upon Adam and Eve’s sin and how they refused to listen to God. They acted upon their own wisdom and failed. Refusal to listen is perhaps the Achilles heel of many Christians, in particular pastors, who have a tendency to make poor choices without counsel. Ambrose does not look fondly on such actions. He sees action and speech of this kind as very evil. Ambrose would rather priests not speak to an important issue and remain silent rather than to speak unwise words that will cause an uproar in the church. He uses the expression, “being idle with our words” (De Officiis 1.2.8). Silence is perhaps Ambrose’s most valued virtue. He speaks of it often in De Officiis and believes that silence not only is the fount from which
all other virtues come. He also sees silence as the most important act of living a modest life.

For Ambrose, a modest life involves piety, virtue, and wisdom. He saw the life of modesty in an ascetic way as well. I have already noted that Ambrose sold or gave away much, if not all, of his worldly wealth when he entered into the episcopacy. Ambrose saw divestment of wealth as an effective and appropriate way to imitate Christ. Asceticism carries over into his understanding of a pietistic life as well, as can be seen from his strict instruction on silence and discipline of the mind and body. Ambrose wants to get into the trenches of the spiritual battle and grind away at the flesh, so that Christlike truth can be self-evident in all that a preacher does or says. In this ascetic mind-set, Ambrose calls his pastors to forget about the high value of riches and wealth that this world places its trust. Instead of building up their bank accounts with greater wealth, Ambrose recommends that priests train up the mind upon God so that they can have true riches. He notes that physical exercise is a good, worthy, and effective thing. How much better, Ambrose quips, is mental exercise, which enables the mind to grow in wisdom, truth, and godliness (De Officiis 1.36).

Ambrose retreats to Scripture again to support his assertions. He recalls Moses and his interactions with Pharaoh and Pharaoh's magicians. He notes how Moses' staff and serpent devoured the magicians' serpents. As is very typical of Ambrose, he interprets this scene allegorically, following Jesus' allegorical lead of being lifted up on a pole. The Word of God, Jesus Christ, devoured the serpent's poisonous bite of death through the forgiveness and pardon of sins. Ambrose suggests that Christ, through his
actions, enables pastors to live a pietistic life that empowers and frees pastors to grow in wisdom, truth, and holiness (*De Officiis* 3.15.93-95).

**A Spirit of Wisdom**

The quote, “*Sapiens est ergo qui novit tacere*”⁹ (Ambrose, *De Officiis* 1.2.5), speaks of a deep *ethos* about wisdom. He also understands how to attain wisdom. Wisdom ultimately does not find its source in humanity but through the revelation and providence of God for Ambrose. God spoke through the Word, and the people of God have access to the wisdom of God through the Bible, God’s revelation. Ambrose suggests that priests can imitate Jesus and many of the Old Testament patriarchs in gaining godly wisdom. Jesus went away to pray and be with his Father in heaven. Moses spent time with Yahweh in the tent of meeting. Moses became wise because of his prayer life. The Father directed Jesus in his ministry because of an intimate prayer life. Ambrose tells priests to pay attention and listen to God. He encourages his priests to renounce the impulse to take control of their lives and their ministry and run ahead of God. Ambrose is interested in *sitting in the stew* of God’s wisdom. As all of the ingredients in a stew mingle in flavor, preachers absorb the wisdom of God when they choose to be in close proximity to God and listen to him. God directs them in what to pray, what to preach, and where to lead the church. The Father is leading the church in the power of the Holy Spirit through the Son, the high priest. The high priest leads the priests of the church and provides true wisdom. Ambrose calls his priests to silence so that they can hear from their high priest. In their silence they become wise in the Father, through the Word, and directed by the Spirit (1.2-6).

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⁹ *It is a wise person indeed who knows how to keep silent.*
Ambrose is interested in character formation. He acknowledges the large corpus of human wisdom in the world, having studied Plato and many of the great rhetoricians of his time. God’s wisdom is greater and more profound than human wisdom for Ambrose. God’s wisdom forms the character and life of the preacher, and because God forms preachers’ characters, their preaching comes from a place of godly wisdom as well. For Ambrose, preachers should not ask themselves, “What techniques or skills must they learn to be preachers?” Instead, preachers should ask, “What type of person do they need to become to be preachers?” (De Officiis 2.2). These are essential questions that many pastors do not ask of themselves.

No one is more aware of the importance of character formation and the need for wisdom than Ambrose. Ambrose’s education and career aspirations demonstrate his concern for spiritual growth and virtue. The theological arts were not part of his education and training. He was a catechumen at the time of his acclamation. While he was a skilled orator and government official, he knew little about being a leader of the church. It was because of his lack of wisdom at the beginning of his ministry that Ambrose begins De Officiis on a note of humility:

*Sed tantummodo intentionem et diligentiam circa scripturas divinas opto adsequi quam ultimam posuit apostolus inter officia sanctorum; et hanc ipsam ut docendi studio possim discere. Unus enim verus magister est qui solus non didicit quod omnes doceret: homines autem discunt prius quod doceant et ab illo accipiant quod aliis tradant.*

(De Officiis 1.1.3)

Ambrose realized that the wisdom required to lead the church had to come from something and someone far greater than himself. He looked back with great fondness and...
longing to the Apostles whose knowledge and passion of the Scripture was profound.

Ambrose examined his own life and his questionable behavior in running from the call, and he found his life to be wanting. He was in the difficult position of being a spiritual leader and teacher without having the benefit of any theological education. He understood that he must learn while he taught, again a humbling and frightful experience, and Ambrose decided to learn from the source of all truth—Christ. Ambrose understood that Christ Jesus, the Word, was the fount of all knowledge, as he never had to learn what he taught. Ambrose saw himself as quite ordinary and had to learn from the Word, Jesus, so that he might pass that wisdom on to others.

Ambrose saw this transmission of wisdom from God to priest through the discipline of silence to be a high treasure. He encourages priests not to worry themselves with the pursuit and concerns of wealth and honor. These were fruitless pursuits to Ambrose. Instead, he encourages his pastors to focus on the wisdom of God and train the mind to ignore the concerns of earthly pleasures (De Officiis 1.36). The priests’ duty and love must be the pursuit of God. This deep faithfulness molds the character of preachers, and they become wise. This wisdom is not accessible through human teaching but through Christ who speaks when pastors are silent and ready to listen (1.1.1). When priests have a spirit of wisdom that comes from Jesus Christ, they imitate Christ who received wisdom from the Father and the Spirit in his silence and prayer. Imitation of Christ’s *modus operandi* and *ethos* concerning wisdom enables preachers to share God’s wisdom with others in the normal course of ministry (1.1.2). This wisdom enables priests to resist evil in the daily course of life. Wisdom permitted the priests to know their taught everyone else: in this he is unique. Ordinary men must learn before-hand what they are to teach, and receive from him what they are to pass on to others.
strengths and their weaknesses. Wisdom alerts priests to the times when they need to train their minds and bring them under subjugation. Wisdom empowers the priests’ preaching and teaching (1.44, 37).

Ambrose understands the innate hunger for knowledge and truth deep within each human being (De Officiis 1.26.125). Ambrose wants to focus that desire into godly wisdom for pastors. He also understands explicitly the connection between the pursuit of godly wisdom and the virtuous life. This godly wisdom, more beautiful and brilliant than the sun, can be focused into the deeper wisdom and logic that orders life and speech. Deep wisdom and logic that ordered life and speech in the imitation of Christ was the virtuous life (2.8.64-65). Ambrose’s virtuous life in the imitation of Christ was the grammar that ordered his preaching.

*Imitatio Christi*

Fourth-century Milan, as noted, was a very metropolitan, rich, and political city. It was the summer home of the Roman Emperor and his court. It was also a city of extremes—the poor struggled in the midst of the luxury and greed of the wealthy. Wealth was so abundant that the Milanese spent vast amounts of money on clothing, jewelry, horse races, and theatrical productions. The homes of the rich were palaces outfitted with servants both for work and for entertainment. The lords drenched their bodies in perfumes and their wives covered their bodies in jewelry and fine clothing. Clothing, jewelry, and wealth became an irrational obsession for many of the Milanese, and this obsession troubled Ambrose greatly (Satterlee 72-73).

The lavishness poured over onto their dinner tables and social entertainment. An overabundance of food filled the tables of the rich and powerful. Extravagant wines from
distant, exotic places and vintages filled the glasses of the elite. With all of this wealth, the Milanese were never content. The search for and acquisition of wealth became an idol for many of the rich inhabitants of Milan (Satterlee 74).

Usury and abusive money lending was rampant throughout Milan. While the legal interest rate was 1 percent per month, many rich lenders evaded this law and acquired as much as 50 percent interest per annum. The poor became burdened with debt, and the wealthy became wealthier (Satterlee 75).

Finally, Milan struggled with uncontrolled drunkenness. In De Helia et ieiunio, 42 and 43, Ambrose comments how the poor who could barely afford clothing would sit at a tavern and drink an entire week’s pay in one sitting. Satterlee notes in his historical examination of Milanese culture that drunkenness was not limited to the poor and lower class. It was evident in the wealthy as well. The drunkenness was not limited to alcohol consumption. Drunkenness of immorality plagued Milan as well. Ambrose notes how women would dance through the streets of Milan in an immodest fashion to entice the young men who sat and watched the spectacle (Satterlee 76).

In the midst of this immoral environment, Ambrose faithfully went about the office of bishop. Consistent with the ideals of an ascetic monk, Ambrose thought that the bishop and his priests must imitate Christ in all things, including modesty, sobriety, care for the poor, and godliness. Ambrose saw the imitation of Christ for himself and his clergy as a way for parishioners to see the clear, clean waters of Jesus Christ. Priests were to satiate their appetites and thirst by drinking from the waters of Jesus. Priests were to model this life of imitatio Christi by living a life of virtue as outlined throughout this chapter. Ambrose asked of his priests, “Who is going to drink from muddy waters to
quench their thirst?” (De Officiis 2.12.60). Instead, Ambrose wanted the parishioners of Milan to see a minister behind the table of the Lord celebrating Eucharist who was adorned with virtue that gives praise to the Lord (1.50.256).

Ambrose demonstrates a desire for virtue that manifests itself as the imitation of Christ in Ambrose’s sermon on Luke 5. In this sermon, Ambrose alludes to Colossians 3:9-10 and begins to speak about the nature of the Christian. He notes that priests must toss aside the old ways of sin. The Christian should not mix the ways of sin with the new way in Christ. The Christian’s garments, who are friends of the groom, are to be the same color as the garments of the groom, Jesus. These festal garments should not be spoiled or spotted with the leprosy of sin but should be clean, full of peace and joy of the soul, purity of heart, clarity of mind, and in the imitation of Christ (Ambrose, Exposition 5.23: Old 314). Ambrose continues his argument on imitatio Christi:

\[Iam non publicanum gero, iam non porto Leuin. Exui Leuin, postquam Christum indui. Odi genus meum; fugio uitam meam; solum te sequor, domine Iesu, qui sanas ulnhera mea. Quis enim me sperat a caritate dei, quae in te est? Tribulatio an angustia, an famis? Ligatus sum fide clavis quibusdam et bonis conpeditibus caritatis innexus sum.\]

Ambrose makes a powerful statement in this quotation. He is noting the power of Christ to heal, save, and gather his people. He is also noting his deep conviction to place upon himself Christ and to flee from his old life. Ambrose wants to wear the garments of Jesus. He wants to be deeply joined with Christ. His passion and love for Jesus are so deep that he sees “nails of faith” (5.27) binding him to his Lord. This binding of faith purified his

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11 No more will I hear about the old Levi, off with the old Levi! On with Christ! I flee from my old life. You only, O Lord Jesus Christ, would I follow! You have healed my wounds! Who shall separate me from the love of God which I have found in you, O Christ! Shall tribulation, or distress, or famine take me from you? With nails of faith I am joined to you. I am held fast to you by the gentle claim of your love.
heart and his life and insulated him from the cares and worries of this world that would separate him from Christ and Jesus’ love.

Ambrose understood that the pleasures of the world would hinder priests and their parishioners from developing into the image of Christ. He urged the clergy to “eice magis de civitate animae tuae imaginem diabolic et adtolle imaginem Christi”¹² (De Officiis 1.49.245). Ambrose wanted to restore the divine image of Christ in his life, in his priests’ lives, and in his parishioners’ lives. *Imitatio Christi* was central to his doctrine of salvation. Ambrose saw Jesus as the source, the means, and the goal of salvation. Salvation comes from and through the crucified and raised Christ. Through the grace of Jesus Christ, the church’s bridegroom, Jesus, in the midst of a life of virtue, transforms them. The life of virtue has as its goal the restoration of the divine image of God (imago Dei) through Christ. Ambrose understood that Christians must follow and hear the Word. When Christians hear the preached Word, they are shaped by the encounter with the living Word as also documented in the written Word. They go forth and follow the lead of the Word, imitating Christ in the world in the hope that God’s grace will restore them to the image of Christ. Said in a Wesleyan way, Ambrose is advocating sanctification through the sanctifying grace given through Jesus Christ. Pastors must pursue a holy life of virtue that imitates Christ by encountering Jesus the Word through the means of grace: prayer, Scripture, fasting, works of justice, and the Eucharist.

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¹² Instead, cast out the image of the devil from the kingdom of your soul and raise the image of Christ.
Preaching—Born from the Word, in Imitation of the Word, and Loosed into the World

This holy, transforming encounter with Christ changes pastors and their preaching. Ambrose believed in a living God who speaks a living Word in the present. He believed that God was active in the preaching moment and that he is the initiator of preaching, not the pastor. In order for God to speak clearly and powerfully through the pastor, the minister must pursue a holy life of virtue.

Lives of holiness, love of God, and virtue allow priests to act as mirrors and lenses. In the imitating of Christ through a life of love and virtue, they model (or mirror) Christ to their congregations. Through lives of holiness and the imitation of Christ, priests also act as clear, focusing conduits or lenses whereby God’s agency in the preached Word comes to bear in a powerful way. Ambrose’s sermon from Luke 5, where Scripture describes how the leper asks Jesus to be cleansed, demonstrates how Ambrose understands the existence of power in the spoken word from the Word. An intimate, deep connection with the word of God and the actions of God are evident (Ambrose, *Exposition* 5.4). God’s desire was to heal the leper and cleanse him. God spoke and the cleansing occurred.

If I applied this understanding to the contemporary context of the Church today, God has agency in the preached sermon. Christ is loosed into the congregation, in the power of the Spirit, to heal the lepers of sin and bring peace and life to the Church. God’s will is to seek, save, heal, and love. His will, through the Word and expressed through the mirror and lens of the preacher’s virtuous life and sermon, acts upon the people of God gathered to come and worship him in the power of the Spirit.
Preaching for Ambrose was born from the Word, Jesus Christ. The fullness and the richness of Scripture poured forth from Ambrose fluently because he lived in the depths of a life in the Word. Ambrose and his sermons found their center in the Bible, and he drank deeply from the fount of Scripture. Ambrose understood that the Word, Christ, not only had agency in the Scripture and in the sermon but also in the life of the Christian and the preacher. The Word worked upon the heart and life of the preacher to cleanse them of their sin and give them the clothes of an heir to the kingdom of God who will sit at the table of the Lord on the day of the Lord. Ambrose had a deep desire to join with the Word, Jesus, to be cleansed, and to put on Christ in all areas of his life. He loved God deeply, and love showed externally in his piety. His piety of putting on Christ, being formed and cleansed by Christ, and finding his center in the Word enabled Ambrose to preach with passion and authenticity because he understood that God is the initiator of preaching, just as God initiated and lived in his life of piety and virtue. God empowers preaching his Word, and it is loosed into the world to act according to God’s love and will. A piety of imitating (putting on) Christ and his virtue enables the preacher to cooperate more fully with God’s work and be a living sermon that speaks truth, wisdom, love, and Gospel. This ethos is the preaching life.

Ambrose is not alone in his approach to the Christian life and preaching. Ambrose’s contemporaries discussed earlier in this chapter lived an ascetic, reflective life of piety and imitatio Christi as well. While each of these bishops had different styles of preaching, hermeneutics, ministerial contexts, and political and theological battles to be fought in their See, they all lived lives born from the Word, in imitation of the Word, and lived out/preached into the world. Ambrose, John Chrysostom, and Augustine are
examples of how the early Church fathers understood the righteous path and life of the pastor and preacher. Their ultimate concern was discerning what kind of person they needed to become to be effective pastors and preachers. Their lives of saturation in the Bible and joining with Christ in love evidenced through words and actions was the response to their ultimate concern. The preaching life can be a helpful guide to the spiritual and moral issues of preaching with which the church is struggling today.

Ambrose has demonstrated for priests a grammar, a deeper wisdom and logic that orders a pastor’s life and speech. This grammar of the preaching life is not a step-by-step fix to the issues that surround preaching today. It is not a program that can be purchased on the Internet so that we might imitate the techniques of Ambrose’s preaching style. Programmatic thinking would not only be ineffective but confuse modern Christians as well. Instead, the church’s task is to be faithful to God in the same ways thatAmbrose, Augustine, Chrysostom, and other church fathers were. Modeling the fathers is a matter of ethos, not imitation of style. Contemporary pastors must become the kind of persons that Ambrose (and ultimately Christ) was. Pastors must imitate Ambrose’s character, his love of God, and his ethos—his grammar of the preaching life. Preachers must not merely imitate Ambrose’s preaching style or method. If preachers only imitate or copy methods, they miss the richness of the underlying life of the preacher that Ambrose experienced daily. If preachers only imitate method and style, they contribute to the deep moral dilemma in preaching today.

Ambrose provides contemporary pastors a theological grammar of the preaching life. In the examination of his grammar, I have gone backward so that the church might
go forward. Tradition in the Church works in this manner. The Church learns from its ancestors in the faith and they push forward with faithfulness.

**Research Design**

I utilized a qualitative, inductive, historical narrative inquiry design for this research. Qualitative narrative inquiry research is well established in academia to be a valid method of gathering and analyzing qualitative data (Creswell 247-53). John W. Creswell’s text outlines effective and valid protocols with which to analyze data gathered in a narrative format. Data from narrative sources is coded via a protocol that allows the researcher to understand the qualitative aspects of the data. My research design was not purely qualitative narrative inquiry, however, because of the nature of the study. My research centered on an early Church father from the fourth century and is ultimately historical in nature. In order to understand the qualitative components of Ambrose of Milan’s spiritual life, I had to code historical documents (narratives) written by Ambrose inductively with a qualitative protocol instrument.

Other scholars, to understand the context and value of historical narrative data, have utilized qualitative historical narrative inquiry. Art historian Charles B. Blair, III utilized qualitative historical narrative inquiry in his dissertation to discover the history, story, tradition, and methodology of Greek ceramic artists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that had largely been forgotten due to modern methods of manufacture (vi–viii). Richard Douglas Runyon utilized a historical qualitative case study on the founding leadership of the Republic of Singapore in 1965 to understand the qualities, story, and methodology of early leaders in their society (55). Runyon identifies the leadership qualities and methodology of the founding leaders of Singapore so that these qualities
and methods could be utilized in the field of business. James Paton utilized a similar qualitative inductive historical inquiry in his dissertation on preaching doctrine in a post-Christian society. He examined the sermons of five Christian preachers of the past to see how their methodology might be applied to a contemporary context (29).

Inductive research such as that contained in this dissertation cannot begin with a hypothesis due to the nature of exploratory research (Pugh, Philips, and Derek 50). The research design was formulated to discover and learn about the spiritual life of Ambrose of Milan through inductive historiography. The data was then applied to the contemporary context of United Methodist preachers in Eastern Kentucky.

**Summary**

The qualitative historical narrative inquiry on Ambrose of Milan gave me a deeper understanding about the quality of Ambrose of Milan’s spiritual life. Because the study was inductive, I was able to approach Ambrose through the primary sources of *De Officiis* and *Exposition of the Holy Gospel according to Saint Luke* without an agenda so that I might appropriate the qualities of Ambrose’s life in ways that will help deepen the spiritual lives of preachers today. Due to the fact that a large body of literature written by Ambrose exists, I had to constrain my research to two primary source texts. I chose the texts for this research based on their content, application to the spiritual life, and their example of how Ambrose’s life of virtue affected his sermons. Thus, I chose *De Officiis* because it is a treatise on the spiritual life of a pastor. *Exposition* was chosen because it is an example of Ambrose’s preaching.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Problem and Purpose

The immediacy of culture has had significant effects upon the practice and art of homiletics and the spiritual life of ministers. Over time, the spiritual life of pastors has received less emphasis as modern voices state that the focus and energies of pastors should be directed to strategic leadership and vision casting. While these foci are important parts of the role of pastors, they should not overwhelm the spiritual life of pastors. Instead, pastors’ lives in participation with the Triune life is central to the virtue of ministers. The shared life with God allows other areas of ministry to flow forth with wisdom, virtue, and the love of God. When ministers establish God as the central focus of the grammar of their lives, God takes the lead in strategic leadership, vision casting, preaching, and other ministerial actions of the office. This study focused on understanding the ethos of a bishop and doctor of the early Church and used his example as a model of faithful living in the present. I taught this model of piety to ministers in the Prestonsburg District of the Kentucky Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. I gathered data from participants via questionnaires during a continuing education seminar to understand the change in their opinions and understandings of the connection between their lives with God and their preaching.

Wesleyan theologians understand the importance of church tradition and how tradition speaks wisdom to the contemporary church. I desired to hear from the tradition of the church and apply the wisdom of the past to the church of the present in order to go forward into the future as a faithful people of God. The purpose of the study was to
understand the connections among Ambrose of Milan's life of piety and faithfulness, his love of God, his theology of the priesthood, and his preaching life. I completed this study to discover if an appropriation of what was learned of Ambrose's life might bring renewal to contemporary preaching in selected pastors of the Prestonsburg District of the Kentucky Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church.

Research Questions

This study focused the importance of the spiritual life of the minister by performing an inductive historiography of one of the original doctors of the church so as to describe events, occurrences, and settings of the past to understand them and developed a grammar of a preaching life based upon that historical study. Due to the nature of inductive study, no research hypothesis was formulated at the outset of the study. The second phase of the study was to implement and evaluate the application of this grammar of the preaching life with United Methodist pastors in a largely rural area of Kentucky. The research questions reflected the need to understand who Ambrose was as a pastor and bishop in Milan, Italy, during the AD fourth century as well as apply that knowledge to a contemporary context. The research attempted to investigate Ambrose's love for God and how his godly love impacted his preaching by examining the characteristics of Ambrose's life, the characteristics of his practice of ministry, and his personal piety. The research then applied that knowledge to contemporary United Methodist pastors in the Prestonsburg District of the Kentucky Annual Conference to determine any changes of their understanding, practice, and attitudes of the purpose of preaching.
Research Question #1

What could I discover from Ambrose’s grammar of life through the examination of his life practices, ministry, love of God, and personal piety?

This research question attempted to understand the connections among Ambrose of Milan’s life of piety and faithfulness, his love of God, his theology of the priesthood, and his preaching life. I utilized qualitative, inductive, historical narrative inquiry methodology in order to understand more deeply who Ambrose was and how this methodology impacted his preaching and ministry. I utilized a qualitative protocol to frame the aspects of the study to the specific attributes of the study—specifically Ambrose’s concerns on the spiritual life of the preacher as well as examples of Ambrose’s preaching that demonstrate how Ambrose’s life and love of God impacted his sermons. The protocol enabled me to avoid reading the corpus of Ambrose’s work and instead focus on texts that specifically address the concerns of preaching and spirituality.

Research Question #2

What were the participants’ beliefs, knowledge, and behaviors about the connection among the practice, attitudes, and personal piety of one’s love of God in relation to the purpose and practice of preaching prior to the ministry intervention?

This research question attempted to provide a baseline for data gathering to discern if an increase in knowledge and renewal of pietistic behavior occurred in the participants after the ministry intervention was complete. I gathered data for this research question through a pre-course survey instrument that explored beliefs, behaviors, and connections between one’s spiritual life and the act of preaching. Every question of the pre-intervention questionnaire addressed this research question.
Research Question #3

What comparative changes occurred in the beliefs, knowledge, and behaviors about the connection among the practice, attitudes, and personal piety of one’s love of God in relation to the purpose and practice of preaching after the ministry intervention?

I wanted to assess the results and outcomes of the ministry intervention to determine if an increase in knowledge and renewal of spiritual disciplines (increase in behaviors) occurred in the participants after the ministry intervention was complete. I gathered data for this research question through a post-course survey instrument that explored beliefs, behaviors, and connections between one’s spiritual life and the act of preaching. Every question of the post-intervention questionnaire addressed this research question.

Research Question #4

What did the participants find most spiritually renewing from the ministry intervention project?

This question functioned as a post-intervention evaluation to provide other researchers a beginning point to track long-term trends in the connection between the spiritual life of pastors and the quality of their preaching. Two weeks after the ministry intervention, I issued an online post-intervention reflective essay to participants:

What was the most spiritually renewing thing(s) that you learned about in the class? Please thoughtfully reflect on how this renewal has changed your sermons. What concrete things would you do differently to live more virtuously, develop your character, and have this reflected in your preaching?

These questions allowed me to understand the effects a grammar of life had on participants during a brief period.
Participants

I offered a continuing education seminar in the Prestonsburg District of the Kentucky Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. The district advertised the seminar via a monthly newsletter, e-mail communication, and other district communiqués. The Office of Ministerial Services in the Kentucky Annual Conference approved the seminar as a continuing education event for clergy for the purpose of earning continuing education units (CEUs). Participants signed up for the class through the district. Because of the nature of seminar enrollment, participants in the study were necessarily self-selected. Participants included ordained elders and deacons in the United Methodist Church, as well as licensed local pastors (often without seminary training). Both male and female clergy participated. Ages of the participants ranged from mid-30s to early 70s. The average length of experience in pastoral ministry (either full-time or part-time) for participants was fifteen years. Table 3.1 provides the demographic information for participants’ age, gender, experience, and credentialing status.
Table 3.1. Participant Demographics

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<td>Licensed pastor</td>
<td>16-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Ordained elder</td>
<td>30+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Ordained elder</td>
<td>6-10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Participants 5, 7, and 12 registered for the seminar but did not attend.

**Design of the Study**

The research project centered around performing a qualitative, inductive, historical narrative inquiry design on selected works of Bishop Ambrose of Milan through a qualitative protocol. The data gathered through this narrative inquiry design was formulated into a seminar that was offered to participants in the Prestonsburg District of the Kentucky Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. Participants completed a pre-seminar questionnaire, a post-seminar questionnaire, and an online post-intervention reflective essay.

**Project Phases**

Phase one of the project involved the development of a qualitative protocol to define the primary source material that would be studied. After the protocol was designed and validated by expert review, I utilized the protocol to narrow the focus of the historical research to primary sources that most clearly addressed the concerns of the purpose of the study and the research questions. I selected the primary sources and performed a qualitative, inductive, narrative inquiry on these sources. I documented data from the
narrative inquiry in an Excel spreadsheet and analyzed the data for major concepts of thought in Ambrose of Milan's *De Officiis* and *Exposition of the Holy Gospel According to Saint Luke* as documented in the literature review. I assembled this information into an appropriate structure for a continuing education seminar for clergy of various educational and experiential backgrounds. I completed a lesson plan for the course that covered the major themes and topics identified in Chapter 2. I presented the lesson plan to the Office of Ministerial Services in the Kentucky Annual Conference and the seminar was approved for .6 CEU (six contact hours) on 14 April 2012. I formulated pre- and post-seminar questionnaires, and they were examined by four expert reviewers for validity. I gave the expert reviewers the problem statement, the purpose statement, the research questions, and the questionnaires of the study to review. I also supplied the expert reviewers with a protocol to evaluate the questionnaires for validity. The expert reviewers validated the pre- and post-questionnaires (identical documents to measure the same data), and I created a professional copy for the participants in the study.

Phase two of the project involved advertising the seminar through the Prestonsburg District channels of communication. A disclosure statement was made in the advertisements and registration paperwork that noted participants would be involved in a study as part of the course. Participants signed up for the course through the district office, and the district informed me of the participants' names and biographical information. Participants met on 20 October 2012 for the seminar. I reminded the students that they were participating in a study. Each participant was assigned a number. Every pre- and post-study questionnaire, as well as the post-class reflective essay, had numbers to match with the number of each participant. I utilized this number system to
ensure that the data gathered on the surveys and essay followed the specific changes in each individual participant. I handed out the pre-course questionnaire and demographic instrument to the participants. After the pre-course questionnaire was completed by all students, the research assistant gathered the questionnaires and inserted them into a sealed manila envelope labeled “pre-course questionnaire.” I taught the seminar as per the lesson plan. Following the seminar, I issued a post-course questionnaire to all participants. After the post-course questionnaire was completed by all students, the research assistant gathered the questionnaires and inserted them into a sealed manila envelope labeled “post-course questionnaire.” Two weeks after the completion of the seminar, all participants were e-mailed via Survey Monkey a reflective essay assignment that asked the following questions: (1) What was the most spiritually renewing thing(s) that you learned about in the class; (2) please thoughtfully reflect on how this renewal has changed your sermons in the last two weeks; and, (3) what concrete things would you do differently to live more virtuously, develop your character, and have these changes reflected in your preaching. I issued continuing education credit to all participants after successful completion of the reflective essay assignment.

Phase three involved data analysis. The pre-study and post-study questionnaires required the use of both quantitative measures and qualitative analysis. The reflective essay assignments called for narrative analysis.

Research Design

This project utilized a qualitative, inductive, historical narrative inquiry design. I chose this design to allow for discernment of the particularities of Ambrose’s love of God and how his piety impacted Ambrose’s preaching. This design also allowed me to
approach Ambrose, describe his story, and analyze the narrative of his life for themes. In narrative research, the researcher first identifies a problem or phenomenon that requires study. The researcher purposefully selects an individual whose story or life can speak to that problem. The researcher then gathers the story or narrative from the person being studied. The raw data of the narrative is examined and elements of the story are organized into themes. These themes are re-storied so that the listeners or participants will better understand the life and story of the person studied. The next step in narrative research places a burden of application upon the listeners/participants. Participants are asked to arrange the elements of the story of the person researched and apply those elements into the stories of the participants’ lives. Data is gathered then on the participants’ experiences and their stories and documented in the research process. The final step in narrative research is validating the accuracy of the report (Creswell 514-16).

The research in this dissertation centered around identifying the problem and phenomenon of pastors experiencing a displacement of practice and character, praxis and spiritual life, teknikos and ethos. This displacement was evidenced through the proliferation of sermon-purchasing Web sites available today. Ambrose of Milan was selected because he stands in the virtue tradition of the church, which marries the spiritual life and character of the pastor with the behaviors of the pastor. I developed a qualitative protocol to study the work and story of Ambrose of Milan. I identified specific themes after the inductive historical research was completed and Ambrose’s "story" was re-storied in Chapter 2 of the dissertation. I also re-storied Ambrose’s life in the continuing education seminar that was taught in the Prestonsburg District. I challenged participants in the seminar to apply the elements of Ambrose’s life of piety and character
to their own stories and lives as preachers. I gathered data on the participants’ experiences and their stories, and documented those stories via questionnaires and reflective essays. My doctoral mentor and dissertation defense committee provided validation and accountability for the content of the historical research.

Instrumentation

The research utilized four instruments to gather and organize data. The instruments utilized in this study are (1) the demographic instrument, (2) the pre-course survey questionnaire, (3) the post-course survey questionnaire, and (4) the post-course reflective essay.

**Demographic instrument.** I assigned an identification number to each participant in the ministry intervention project. Participants filled out the demographic instrument that included gender, age, ethnicity, credential status, and years of experience in ministry. The questionnaire connected with the participants’ identification numbers.

**Pre-course survey instrument.** The pre-course survey instrument was researcher designed. I administered the instrument as a paper document to the participants prior to teaching the continuing education content on the day of the class. I utilized this instrument to determine the character, narrative, beliefs, and behaviors of participants prior to the ministry intervention project. Each instrument was numbered to identify it to a specific ministry intervention participant to allow for tracking of changes in beliefs and behaviors. This numbering system also allowed for tracking changes while ensuring anonymity for participants.

**Post-course survey instrument.** The post-course survey instrument was researcher designed. I administered the instrument to the participants as a paper
document after teaching the continuing education course content on the day of the class. I utilized this instrument to determine the changes in the character, narrative, beliefs, and behaviors of participants after the ministry intervention project. I numerically connected each instrument to a specific ministry intervention participant to allow for individual tracking of changes in beliefs and behaviors. This numbering system also allowed for tracking changes while ensuring anonymity for participants.

**Post-course reflective essay.** The post-course reflective essay was researcher designed. I administered this instrument as a free-response essay over the Web through Survey Monkey to participants two weeks after teaching the continuing education course. I utilized this instrument to determine what an extended horizon of reflection and behavior modification would reveal in the data. I numerically connected each instrument to a specific ministry intervention participant to allow for individual tracking of changes in beliefs and behaviors. This numbering system also allowed for tracking changes while ensuring anonymity for participants.

**Expert review.** I utilized expert review of the demographic instrument, pre-course questionnaire, post-course questionnaire, and post-course reflective essay in order to validate these instruments. I sent these instruments to each of the expert reviewers with a copy of the purpose statement, research questions, an abstract of the study, and a feedback form that allowed the expert reviewers to state if the question was needed or not needed, clear or needing clarification, and, if unclear, how could the question be made more clear. After receiving feedback from the expert reviewers on the form, changes were made to the instruments to ensure their validity.
I utilized three expert reviewers for validation of these instruments. The first expert reviewer holds a Doctor of Education degree and has experience in educational research. The second expert reviewer holds a Doctor of Philosophy degree in philosophy and has expertise in Platonic virtue philosophy. The third expert reviewer is an ordained clergyperson in the Prestonsburg District in active ministry. I received feedback by the expert reviewers and the following changes were made to the instruments.

**Demographic instrument.** I made general formatting changes to the demographic instrument to aid in the readability of the document. These changes included tabulation and spacing that provided for a more readable document by participants. The content of the demographic instrument remained unchanged.

**Pre-course survey instrument and post-course survey instrument.** I added to the instructions at the top of the form to include the following: “Do not give answers you think the researcher will want to hear. Instead, let your answers most accurately reflect your current beliefs or practices in ministry.” I changed question 1 on the pre-intervention instrument to address a participant’s average day, rather than a full week as initially written. I changed question 1 on the post-intervention instrument which allows the participant to set a goal for time spent in acts of piety. I changed the tense of the question from present tense to past tense so that participants report past behaviors.

I added the phrase, “Please indicate your agreement with the following statement,” prior to the opinion statement in questions two and three. Instead of a Likert scale of three possible answers, a Likert scale of five possible answers were utilized.

For questions four and five, I added the phrase, “Please indicate your agreement with the following statement,” prior to the opinion statement. Instead of a Likert scale of
four possible answers, I utilized a Likert scale of five possible answers. Questions six and seven were changed to include a Likert scale of five possible answers instead of four. The phrase, “and being set apart,” was added to the opinion statement in question seven.

I added the phrase, “Please indicate your agreement with the following statement,” prior to the opinion statement in questions eight and nine. Instead of a Likert scale of three possible answers, I utilized a Likert scale of five possible answers for these items.

Questions ten and eleven were deleted due to a lack of clarity and replaced with the following questions: (1) What percentage of a sermon do you believe is developed or initiated by the pastor, and (2) what percentage of a sermon do you believe is developed or initiated by the Holy Spirit. A Likert scale of five possible percentile answers followed these questions.

I changed question twelve from a time frame of one week to a time frame of one day in the language of the question. I changed the phrase “living a holy life” to “holiness of heart and life” to bring clarity to the question.

Post-course reflective essay. In question one, the word about was deleted from the question. In question two, the word spiritual was added prior to the word renewal in the question. Question three was rewritten to ask, “What spiritual practices will you adopt to live more virtuously and develop (deepen) your character?” I added a fourth question, “If you were to develop and hold to a grammar of a preaching life, how will this impact and be reflected in your sermons?”
Variables

I noted numerous variables for this study that must be reported and taken into consideration. The independent variable of this study was the course, including the factors that created Ambrose’s effectiveness as a pastor and his grammar of a preaching life as gleaned from my historical narrative inquiry and compiled, taught, and prescribed in the course. The dependent variables of this study were the self-reported changes in belief, knowledge, and behavior of the participants concerning the purpose of preaching as a result of taking and applying the principles of the course. The intervening variables were the gender, age, work experience, education, and credential status of participants in the seminar.

Reliability and Validity

Protocols for consistency were put into place to ensure reliability and validity. All instruments were edited and vetted for formatting errors by a research reflection team of post-secondary teachers, doctoral-level educators, and practicing clergy in the district where the study was implemented. I utilized this team of experts to ensure that all instruments utilized clear, unambiguous language to reduce error in the data-gathering process. The methods and procedures of data gathering were consistent and with clear instructions for participants on all instruments. I ensured that the data-gathering instruments for the ministry intervention were implemented during times when the participants were alert, non-anxious, and their physical needs were met. I designed the instruments with consistency in mind. I also designed the instruments so that they would have multiple sources of data gathering for beliefs versus behavior in participants and/or the historical research. I achieved a 100 percent response rate for pre- and post-study
questionnaires, and a 67 percent response rate for the post-class reflective essay, by
offering the ministry intervention as a continuing education course with .6 CEU credits in
the Kentucky Annual Conference awarded to participants after the completion of the
course, the pre- and post-class questionnaire, and the post-class reflective essay.

I implemented the demographic instrument, pre-course questionnaire, the post-
course questionnaire, and the post-course reflective essay with protocols that placed
consistency as a priority. I wrote these four instruments with a concern for timing. I
limited the amount of questions in these instruments to ensure that the information-
gathering process did not fatigue the participants. I carefully crafted questions that sought
to address the specific goals of the project and the research questions.

I addressed issues concerning validity by ensuring that the participants were all
clergy of the Kentucky Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. In order for
a participant's results to be included in the study, the participant was required to complete
the entire course, including the completion of all instruments and all class time. I ensured
validity of the study by consulting with a leading educational research professor at
Asbury University in Wilmore, Kentucky, concerning the design of the study. She
approved the research design. The data-gathering instruments were issued to participants
with the intent that they were not fatigued or had other physical needs present while they
were filling out the data-gathering instruments. Each data-gathering instrument was
proctored by a research assistant to ensure that every question on the instruments was
completed. If a question was left out, the research assistant encouraged the participant to
answer the question. Each instrument was validated by expert review. The expert
reviewers were asked to evaluate and agree that the content of the historical research, the
continuing education seminar teaching plan, and the data-gathering instruments were all in alignment with the purpose of the study and its research questions. Multi-treatment interference was limited by not allowing any teacher other than myself as researcher to lead the continuing education seminar because I had completed the historical narrative research. Threats to validity include the intervening variable of the qualitative protocol instrument. This instrument by its design was implemented to narrow the research focus of this study to issues of virtue, character, and preaching. Because of its limiting design, the historical research may not include a nuanced and complete understanding of Ambrose’s ethos and behaviors that a full study of the corpus of Ambrose’s works would accomplish.

**Data Collection**

A qualitative protocol was developed and utilized to limit the historical narrative study (see Appendix F). I chose the texts for the historical narrative study. I inductively studied these texts and documented my findings in an Excel spreadsheet format with citations and quotes to support my findings. As major themes began to develop in the historical narrative research, I documented those themes as major headings and categorized the citations and quotes under the appropriate headings that supported the major themes. I shared these findings with my doctoral mentor who gave comment and ensured validity of the historical narrative research. After the historical narrative research was complete and documented, I wrote a teaching plan for a continuing education seminar to be taught to pastors in the Prestonsburg District of the Kentucky Annual Conference. I submitted the teaching plan and course outline to the director of ministerial services for the Kentucky Annual Conference on 21 March 2012. The office of
ministerial services approved the teaching plan and continuing education credit on 14 April 2012. The office of ministerial services stated that the seminar was worth .6 CEU credits to any participant who completed the entire course.

I scheduled the continuing education course for 20 October 2012 with the Prestonsburg District office. The Prestonsburg District announced and advertised the seminar on 1 August 2012 through official communication channels. The announcements and advertisements disclosed that registrants would be participating in a study. Participants were instructed to contact me for registration. I documented registrants in a log book along with their contact information. I reminded registrants of the time, place, and date of the seminar one week and two days prior to the event.

On the day of the event, I assigned each participant a number at registration. Each participant signed an informed consent document to be a part of in the study. I confirmed each participant’s e-mail address with the participant for accuracy. I asked each participant to sit down at his or her respective table and I gave them a demographic instrument. Each demographic instrument was labeled with the participant’s number. I read the instructions on the demographic instrument and responded to all participant questions. The participants filled out the demographic instrument. After all participants had completed the demographic instrument, the research assistant gathered all of the demographic instruments. The research assistant reviewed each instrument to ensure that every question was complete. If a question was not answered, the research assistant approached the participant and asked him or her to complete the missing information. All of the demographic instruments were then placed in a manila envelope.
I handed out the pre-course questionnaire to all participants. Each pre-course questionnaire was labeled with the participant’s number. I read the instructions on the pre-course questionnaire and responded to all participant questions. The participants filled out the pre-course questionnaire. After all participants had completed the pre-course questionnaire, the research assistant gathered all of the pre-course questionnaire. The research assistant reviewed each pre-course questionnaire to ensure that every question was complete. If a question was not answered, the research assistant approached the participant and asked him or her to complete the missing information. All of the pre-course questionnaires were then placed in a manila envelope marked “pre-course questionnaire.”

I taught the class per the teaching outline (see Appendix A). I provided lunch for participants at noon. I gave regular breaks to help participants remain alert and on task. After the content of the class was taught, I gave participants a ten-minute break.

When participants returned from the last ten-minute break of the course, I handed out the post-course questionnaire to all participants. Each post-course questionnaire was labeled with the participant’s number. I read the instructions on the post-course questionnaire and responded to all participant questions. The participants filled out the post-course questionnaire. After all participants had completed the post-course questionnaire, the research assistant gathered all of the post-course questionnaires. The research assistant reviewed each post-course questionnaire to ensure that every question was complete. If a question was not answered, the research assistant approached the participant and asked him or her to complete the missing information. All of the post-course questionnaires were then placed in a manila envelope.
I reminded participants that the post-course reflective essay would be sent to them in two weeks. Participants were also reminded that the essay was part of the course material because it allowed them to reflect on how their spiritual lives had changed after implementing a grammar of the preaching life. After two weeks, an e-mail was sent to each participant giving him or her an Internet link to fill out the essay on Survey Monkey. I also reminded participants of their participant number that was required to complete the post-course reflective essay. I gave instructions to participants in this e-mail on how to complete the essay. After the participants completed the essays, all coursework for the seminar was complete and I awarded CEU credit to the participants. I then downloaded the data from the post-course reflective essay for analysis.

Data Analysis

I completed data analysis on all of the data-gathering instruments of the course. I utilized Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel’s data analysis abilities to quantify the data reported in Chapter 4 of the dissertation. Data analysis protocols were completed as documented below.

Demographic Instrument

I statistically analyzed every possible response for each demographic instrument question. I calculated a mean score for each possible answer as a percentage of the whole class’s answer for each question. I determined the percentage of age ranges of participants, percentage of gender for participants, percent of different ethnicity, percent of credentialing status, and percent of ranges for years of service.
Pre-Course Questionnaire

I statistically analyzed every possible response for each pre-course questionnaire item. I calculated a mean score for each possible answer as a percentage of the entire class’s answer for each question. For questions that had an option of a free response, I performed qualitative content analysis and coded those answers using Microsoft Word’s coding abilities. I chose one questionnaire to begin the coding process. I read the responses to get a sense of the whole answer asking, myself, “What is this person saying?” I selected text segments that accurately described the whole answer. I recorded these text segments in a list for lean coding of the other pre-course questionnaires. After utilizing Microsoft Word to code the other participants’ responses, I determined themes. This identified the participants’ understanding about the connection among the practice, attitudes, and personal piety of one’s love of God in relation to the purpose and practice of preaching prior to the ministry intervention.

Post-Course Questionnaire

I statistically analyzed every possible response for each post-course questionnaire item. I calculated a mean score for each possible answer as a percentage of the entire class’s answer for each question. I then recorded the change in mean score responses for each question to determine any changes in participants’ responses from the pre-course questionnaire to the post-course questionnaire. For items that had an option of a free response, I performed qualitative content analysis and coded those answers using Microsoft Word’s coding abilities. I utilized the same codes developed from the pre-course questionnaire to code the post-course questionnaire. After utilizing Microsoft Word to code the other participants’ responses, I identified and documented themes.
Changes in attitude and planned behavior were recorded as well. This analysis documented the participants’ understanding about the connection among the practice, attitudes, and personal piety of one’s love of God in relation to the purpose and practice of preaching after the ministry intervention.

Post-Course Reflective Essay

I performed qualitative content analysis on the free responses of the essay. I coded the answers from the post-course reflective essay using Microsoft Word’s coding abilities, for terms applicable to the concerns of the study. I chose one reflective essay to begin the coding process. I read the responses to get a sense of the whole answer, asking myself, “What is this person saying?” I selected text segments that accurately described the whole answer. I recorded these text segments in a list for lean coding of the other pre-course questionnaires. After utilizing Microsoft Word to code the other participants’ responses, I identified and documented themes. After I coded the data, I recorded in a qualitative format the things for question one that were most renewing for the pastors in their spiritual lives and preaching lives after having taken the course. I also documented in a qualitative format how the participants’ spiritual renewal impacted their sermons. Finally, I recorded in a qualitative format what concrete things participants are doing differently post-course to live more virtuously and to develop their character, and how these activities reflected in their preaching. This analysis documented what the participants found most spiritually renewing from the ministry intervention project.

Ethical Procedures

I upheld academic ethical standards in the course of this study. Individual participants were assigned participant numbers from the beginning of the study to protect
their anonymity. No participants were named in the dissertation. The research assistant and I were the only persons who had access to the raw data of the essays, questionnaires, and demographic instruments. The research assistant, in order to protect the anonymity of the participants, sealed all of the data in manila envelopes. All data gathered from participants were shredded after the completion of the study to protect participants’ identities and answers. Each participant gave verbal informed consent on the day of the continuing education event and agreed to participate in the study prior to the beginning of the seminar. I informed participants of the study’s topic and that the data was utilized in a Doctor of Ministry dissertation. Participants were informed that participation in the study was voluntary. All advertisement literature in the Prestonsburg District for the continuing education seminar clearly indicated that participants would be participating in a Doctor of Ministry study. Signing up for the course indicated written consent to participate in the study.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Problem and Purpose

The immediacy of today's culture has had significant effects upon the practice and art of homiletics and the spiritual life of ministers. Over time, the spiritual life of the pastor has received less emphasis as modern voices would state that the focus and energies of the pastor should be focused on strategic leadership and vision casting. While these foci are important parts of the role of a pastor, they should not overwhelm the spiritual life of the pastor. Instead, a pastor's life in participation in the Triune life is central to the life of a minister. The shared life with God allows other areas of ministry to flow forth with wisdom, virtue, and the love of God. When ministers make a life with God the central focus of the grammar of their life, God takes the lead in strategic leadership, vision casting, preaching, and other ministerial actions of the office. This study focused on understanding the life of a bishop and doctor of the early Church and used his life as a model of faithful living in the present. I taught this model of a spiritual life to ministers in the Prestonsburg District of the Kentucky Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. I gathered pre- and post-intervention data from participants via questionnaires to understand the change in their opinions and understandings of the connection between their lives with God and their preaching.

Wesleyan theologians understand the importance of church tradition and how tradition speaks wisdom to the contemporary church. I desired to hear from the tradition of the church and apply the wisdom of the past to the church of the present so that the church might go forward into the future as a faithful people of God. The purpose of the
study was to understand the connections between Ambrose of Milan’s life of piety and faithfulness, his love of God, his theology of the priesthood, and his preaching life. This study was done to discover if an appropriation of what was learned of Ambrose’s life might bring renewal to contemporary preaching in selected pastors of the Prestonsburg District of the Kentucky Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church.

The purpose of the study was to discover and research the connections among Ambrose of Milan’s life of piety and faithfulness, his love of God, his theology of the priesthood, and his preaching life. This study was done to discover if an appropriation of what was learned of Ambrose’s life might bring renewal to contemporary preaching in selected pastors of the Prestonsburg District of the Kentucky Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, who participated in a day-long continuing education event.

Participants

Participants in the continuing education seminar were a self-selected group of pastors from the Prestonsburg district of the Kentucky Annual Conference. Participants ranged in age from 35 to 44 years to 65+ years. The demographic instrument collected only age ranges, not actual ages. Eight males and four females participated. All participants were from a white/European ethnicity. Credential status included supply pastor, licensed local pastor, ordained deacon, and ordained elder. Participants’ years of experience in ministry ranged from 0 to 5 years to 30+ years. Table 3.1 presents a detailed presentation of participant demographics (see p. 73).

Research Question #1

I desired to learn how church tradition speaks to the character of a preacher and their preaching. Church tradition has many voices that speak to this question. I chose an
exemplar of the preaching life from early Christendom to understand how one bishop lived out his life and theology. I chose Ambrose of Milan for that exemplar. As I read select works of Ambrose, I asked, “What could I discover from Ambrose’s grammar of life through the examination of his life practices, ministry, love of God, and personal piety?” My findings for research question #1 are documented in Chapter 2 of the dissertation.

**Research Question #2**

After discovering the theology and practice of Ambrose, I wanted to share this knowledge with pastors in the Prestonsburg District of the Kentucky Annual Conference via a seminar. I wanted to see if the information taught in the seminar changed the knowledge, behaviors, and beliefs of pastors. In order to document any changes, I needed to establish a baseline of their knowledge, behaviors, and beliefs prior to the seminar. Research question #2 asked, “What were the participants’ beliefs, knowledge, and behaviors about the connection among the practice, attitudes, and personal piety of one’s love of God in relation to the purpose and practice of preaching prior to the ministry intervention?” I gathered data for this research question via a pre-intervention questionnaire (see Appendix C). Appendix G documents the questionnaire responses, where *Question* refers to the question numbered on the questionnaire located in Appendix C. *Possible answers* lists the possible answers available to participants on the questionnaire. The letter *n* represents the number of participants who responded on the questionnaire with that particular answer.

On questions 2, 3, 8, and 9 of the pre-intervention questionnaire, participants were encouraged to describe their opinion via a short narrative if they agreed or strongly
agreed with the statement presented to them. These narratives allowed the participant a forum to \textit{flesh out} their responses and identify their knowledge and beliefs more clearly. I documented these beliefs in Appendix F.

Participants generally had moderate beliefs about the connection between one’s piety and preaching prior to the seminar. Beliefs appeared to be congruent in intensity with the moderately practiced pietistic behaviors reported in the pre-intervention questionnaire. Over half of the participants reported spending sixty minutes or less in acts of piety per day. A large majority (91 percent) of the participants also reported that they agree (33 percent) or strongly agree (58 percent) in a direct connection between one’s piety and sermon preparation. The free responses in Appendix H document how participants understood that connection. Many of the free responses noted that piety allowed them to be close to God and allowed the Holy Spirit to direct their thoughts as they prepared sermons. Participants also understood a correlation between piety and sermon delivery. A majority (91 percent) of the participants reported agreement or strong agreement in a connection between piety and sermon delivery.

Participants generally did not feel that their sermons were profound or relevant. They did feel that their sermons were delivered with enthusiasm, conviction, and expression of their love for God. Understanding the reasons why participants feel that their sermons lack profundity or relevance is difficult to quantify. Societal expectations of a “humble pastor” might indicate a reason for these responses. A lack of accurate evaluative skills might be another reason why pastors have a low score. Another possibility is that the pastors’ sermons are lacking in profundity and relevance and they are aware of this deficit in their preaching.
While preachers may lack profundity, they reported that they preach with enthusiasm and conviction (91 percent agree or strongly agree). Societal and religious expectation might cloud this response somewhat. Congregations and pastors expect that their sermons should be delivered with enthusiasm because of the content of *euangelion*.

Question 6 was a question to gauge the validity of the answers in questions 2 and 3 by asking about similar theological concepts in different ways. The question asked if participants believed in a connection between one’s spiritual life and the quality of sermons. Similar belief patterns were asked in question 2 and 3. Responses in question 6 corresponded with the beliefs expressed in question 2 and 3.

Question 7 addressed the participants’ beliefs that their life’s primary task as pastor is *imitatio Christi*. One-third (33 percent) had a neutral response while 66 percent agreed or strongly agreed. The four neutral responses are puzzling coming from pastors, however. While the questionnaire utilized the English “Imitation of Christ,” I wonder if all the participants fully understood what this theological term meant prior to the seminar. This lack of knowledge might explain the four neutral responses. Another possibility for interpretation is that these pastors truly felt neutral about this theological premise.

I used questions 8 and 9 to gauge validity of the responses to questions 2 and 3 by asking about similar theological concepts in different ways. Participants generally responded in a like manner to these four questions. One participant stated that he disagreed with the statement, “There is a correlation between living virtuously and good sermon delivery.” This participant, participant number 2, agreed that acts of piety affect sermon delivery. This participant might define acts of piety and virtuous living in
different ways and/or see them as dissimilar concepts. Comparing pre-intervention and post-intervention responses provided deeper understanding to this participant's answers.

Questions 10 and 11 asked participants about their theology of the activity of God in sermon preparation. Participants evenly split their beliefs about the level of activity they as pastors have in the development of sermons. However, 58 percent of the participants believed that they initiated 40-60 percent of the development of a sermon. The majority of participants (83 percent) did believe that the Holy Spirit initiated the development of a sermon 60 percent of the time or greater. While these questions are crude ways of assessing beliefs about the activity of the Holy Spirit and human participation in the development and initiation of sermons, they do provide general opinion data that can be tracked from pre-seminar to post-seminar.

Question 12 assessed participant virtue behavior. The question asked for what percentage of their day they consciously attended to holiness of heart and life. A majority (67 percent) of respondents stated that they consciously attended to holiness of heart and life 0-60 percent of their day. A minority, thirty-three percent, stated that they attended to holiness of heart and life greater than 60 percent of their day. This data is an important behavioral figure for ministers in the Wesleyan tradition. Two-thirds of the ministers in the class only attend to holiness of heart and life a little more than half of their day.

This data suggests that while ministers in the Wesleyan tradition believe in the importance of living a virtuous life, their behavior does not track with the level of their beliefs. This data is not surprising, however, considering the anecdotal stories pastors often share about their work life.
Research Question #3

After I taught the seminar on the spirituality of preaching, I needed to discern the impact the class had on the knowledge, beliefs, and behaviors of those who participated in the seminar. In order to accomplish this task, I needed to evaluate any changes in knowledge, beliefs, and behaviors of the participants. Research question #3 asked, “What comparative changes occurred in the beliefs, knowledge, and behaviors about the connection among the practice, attitudes, and personal piety of one’s love of God in relation to the purpose and practice of preaching after the ministry intervention?” I gathered data for this research question via a post-intervention questionnaire (see Appendix D). Appendix F documents the questionnaire responses where Question refers to the question numbered on the questionnaire located in Appendix D. Possible answers lists the possible answers available to participants on the questionnaire. The letter \( n \) represents the number of participants who responded on the questionnaire with that particular answer.

On questions 2, 3, 8, and 9 of the post-intervention questionnaire, participants were encouraged to describe their opinion via a short narrative if they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement presented to them. This narrative allowed participants a forum to flesh out their responses and identify their knowledge and beliefs after the seminar more clearly. I documented these beliefs in Appendix J.

Question 1 demonstrated a slight increase in planned pietistic behavior from current behaviors due to class discussion. Participants expressed a strong increase in the belief that acts of piety affected sermon preparation and sermon delivery after the seminar was complete. I observed an increase in the belief that acts of piety enable
sermons to be profound and relevant (question 4). The pre-class versus post-class change for this question is an important marker for this research project and demonstrates that while some pastors believe their current sermons lack profundity and relevance, they expressed a belief after class that acts of piety can improve sermon quality. The change demonstrates that the content of the seminar enabled participants to see an avenue of improvement through the virtue tradition. The change is most clearly seen in participant 2, who disagreed with the statement on the pre-intervention questionnaire and strongly agreed with the statement in the post-intervention questionnaire. Participant 2 is an ordained elder with thirty-plus years of experience. Participant 14, also an ordained elder with thirty-plus years of experience, disagreed with the statement in the pre-intervention questionnaire and strongly agreed with the statement on the post-intervention questionnaire. Participant 11 also disagreed that her sermons were profound and relevant but agreed that acts of piety would enable her sermons to be more profound and relevant.

Participants reported a belief that acts of piety affect sermon delivery. While pastors generally reported that they believed they delivered their sermons with enthusiasm and conviction, they also reported that acts of piety would enable them to preach with more enthusiasm, conviction, and expression of their love for God.

No change was noted in belief among participants regarding a connection between their spiritual lives and the quality of their sermons. All participants agreed (33 percent) or strongly agreed (67 percent) with this statement prior to and after the seminar. Note this response in comparison to question #4 that asks a similar thematic question. While participants understood the relationship between the quality of their sermons and their spiritual lives, participants noted that their sermons lacked profundity and relevance.
The lack of change in participants answers in question 6 compared to their reported lack of sermon quality might suggest a number of things: (1) Pastors do value and hold a high belief in the connection between their spiritual lives and the content of their sermons yet do not allocate time to their spiritual lives so as to improve sermon content; (2) they do not see profundity and relevance as markers of quality and define quality in a different way than asked in questions 4 and 5; (3) pastors believe that quality is not as important as other issues (i.e., delivery); (4) pastors do not know how to address quality issues in their sermons; (5) the disparity is a marker of the current state of the participants' spiritual lives (i.e., while they hold the belief, they are unable or unwilling to attend to their spiritual lives to improve sermon content); or, (6) they may believe that their current pietistic behavior is adequate despite their reported sermon quality and do not fully understand the connection among piety, sermon content, and activity.

Participants reported an increase in their belief that the imitation of Christ and being set apart are primary tasks in the life of the pastor. One-third (33 percent) of participants strongly agreed with this belief prior to the seminar. After the seminar, 75 percent of participants strongly agreed with the belief that the imitation of Christ and being set apart are primary tasks in the life of a preacher.

Participants demonstrated a slight increase in their belief that virtuous living and sermon preparation are connected. This response correlates closely to question #6. Participant #6, a local pastor with twenty-one to twenty-five years of experience, answered with a neutral response to this question in the pre-intervention questionnaire. He indicated agreement after the seminar with this belief statement. Participant 11, a
supply pastor, also indicated a neutral response prior to the seminar and reported an agreement response after the seminar.

Participants reported a dramatic increase in their belief of a connection between virtuous living and good sermon delivery. While three participants either disagreed or had neutral beliefs regarding the connection between virtuous living and sermon delivery prior to the seminar, all participants agreed (42 percent) or strongly agreed (58 percent) with the belief after the seminar. Participant 2, an ordained elder, demonstrates one of the dramatic shifts in participants. He disagreed with this belief prior to the seminar and agreed with the belief after the seminar was held.

Participants generally shifted their belief about who initiates a sermon. Over the course of the seminar, participants reported that they believed the Holy Spirit took a larger role in the initiation of a sermon than they had once thought.

Finally, participants reported that they would attend to holiness of heart and life only slightly more so after the seminar than prior to the seminar. This data is an interesting report of planned behavior compared to beliefs expressed elsewhere in the questionnaire. Pastors stated that they have concerns about their sermon’s lack of quality, profoundness, and relevance. They also demonstrate a belief in the connection between acts of piety and virtuous living and sermon quality, yet their post-seminar plan does not include a significant increase in their attentiveness to their spiritual lives.

**Research Question #4**

Ultimately, I provided the seminar for the purpose of renewal in homiletics and renewal in the spiritual lives of pastors in the Prestonsburg District. I wanted to understand if and how the seminar was renewing. I wanted to understand, in a short-term
context, what effect the seminar had on the spiritual practices and beliefs of participants. Research question #4 asked, "What did the participants find most spiritually renewing from the ministry intervention project?"

I sent a brief reflection essay to participants after the seminar via Survey Monkey (see Appendix E). Eight of the twelve participants responded to the post-intervention reflective essay. Three of the eight participants responded to the essay immediately two weeks after the seminar. The remaining five participants responded approximately four weeks after the seminar was completed. Participant responses are documented in Appendix K.

Question 1 of the essay asked, "What was the most spiritually renewing thing(s) you learned in the class?" Participants' answers mirrored the responses they gave on the post-intervention questionnaire, albeit with more depth and thought of the theological implications of the topic covered. The pastors noted that they now saw a deeper connection between their vocational calling and their true calling of being attentive to God at all times. They also expressed a deeper understanding that authenticity in sermons required a harmony between what they do, who they are, and what they say. Dissonance in these areas of their lives would have an effect upon the credibility of their sermons. The pastors also noted that preaching was much more than just a message given on a Sunday morning. They now understood preaching as a lifestyle to be lived, not just spoken four times a month during corporate worship.

Some pastors saw renewal in their lives by attending to increased time in sermon preparation. Other pastors became more reflective of their own spirituality and noted that the course has brought them closer to God. The outcome of their renewed intimacy with
God was congregational renewal. One participant noted that he had a deeper sensitivity to the spiritual suffering of his parishioners. Another participant noted that she believed she was holding onto a living gospel that enabled her to see and encounter with more depth the spiritual life of a pastor than she had previously. Overall and most importantly, the participants demonstrated a deeper understanding of the connection between Christ the Word and their preaching, their leadership, their lives, their visitation, and other pastoral duties.

Question 2 asked participants to reflect on how spiritual renewal has changed their sermons. Participants noted that they now had an increased desire to speak as one who knows God more intimately, passionately, and more profoundly in their sermons. They believed that their spiritual renewal enabled them to preach with more integrity, authenticity, and power. The pastors also noted that time with God prepared them as a pastor. This preparation time was an important precursor to sermon development and formulation. In examination of their responses, I noted an increased awareness and integration of the connection between the act and technique of preaching and the theological undergirding of proclamation. One pastor assumed a new role as preacher—ambassador of God. This new role was surprising to the participant, yet it helped her understand that virtuous living and time with God prepared her for deeper sermon development and formulation. The participants also noted an increased awareness of God speaking His Word throughout all areas of their lives. This awareness enabled them to address the needs of the congregation better in the sermon. I noted participants had an increased awareness of more direction by God in the pulpit after engaging in the means of grace. In effect, the pastors were stating that they found a closer connection with God
enabled them to be transformed by the preached Word even as they preached it. Renewal allowed them to increase their attentiveness to the congregation and increased their understanding of the Holy Spirit's authoring role in the sermon.

Question 3 asked participants what spiritual practices they would adopt to live more virtuously and develop their character. Respondents overwhelmingly noted a need for consistency with any of the means of grace. While some noted that they did intend on increasing their time spent attending to the means of grace (e.g., Scripture reading, prayer, Eucharist weekly, monthly retreat, Sabbath keeping), most noted that their need fell more along the line of participating in the means of grace consistently in their daily lives. They noted that fuller participation in the means of grace would enable them to grow as a Christian, be more accountable to other pastors, and enable them to be more attentive to their relationship with Christ. Participants did expect a daily encounter with Christ and they also understood that the encounter with Jesus would have a profound, changing effect upon them. They saw this joyful encounter as being a place where they could confront their brokenness and perfectionist tendencies. Instead of perfectionism, one pastor saw a daily encounter with Christ as a means of being perfected in love so that he could “practice grace everywhere.” Finally, one participant noted that he would try to meditate more consciously on Christ’s presence “24/7” so that his life would bring glory to God. Participants saw meditatio as a means of grace that ultimately gave glory to God as a lived-out sermon.

Question 4 of the essay asked the pastors if they held to a grammar of life and in what ways it would impact and be reflected in their sermons. Many of the responses centered on the newfound connection they discovered among their spiritual life, the
sermon of their life, and the spoken sermon during corporate worship. The pastors demonstrated a patristic cohesion of these concepts in ways that were not evident prior to the seminar. They noted a closer alignment of their inner and outer lives, especially in relation to Scripture. They also noted the transformational abilities of Scripture upon their lives, noting that as Scripture transformed them during the week, that transformation was communicated on Sunday during corporate worship. Their minds were renewed via an exposure to the Holy Spirit that enabled them to teach with new insights and not rehash old insights from previous years of preaching. They believed that their transformational connection with God was reflected throughout all areas of their lives, and this transformation enabled and required integrity. Pastoral integrity would then provide for a better congregational response. One pastor noted, “More people will be saved.” They would also be more inclined to present the entirety of salvation history and Scripture to their congregations.

Pastors understood their relationship with God via a grammar of life in an experiential kind of way—experienced via means of grace and in meeting with God. They knew that attending to the grammar and meeting God would result in a preacher that is obedient to the Word and more willing to be shaped and stretched by the sermon text in powerful ways. They did not understand the grammar to be a static document, either. Instead, the grammar would grow and change with the pastor as they grew in Christ and purposefully lived a holy life. Holy living was seen as an avenue for better pastoral caregiving as well.

Most profoundly, one pastor noted that she did not fully understand what a grammar of life was. Examining this participant’s response also yielded a deep
theological thought about the connection she made between her inner being and her outward actions. In effect, she understood (and perhaps many of the pastors understood) a grammar of life as an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. While not to be elevated to a sacramental level, this data is important to note as it reflects Wesleyan thought of outward signs of inward grace in the virtuous life. The outward actions (the living sermon and a life of virtuous, holy living) reflect the inner grace that is received through more intimate participation in the triune life. Much like a wedding ring is an outward symbol of the inner grace of Christian marriage, holy living is an expression of life in the Trinity.

Summary of Major Findings

After analyzing the data from the pre-intervention questionnaires, the post-intervention questionnaires, and the post-intervention reflective essays, the study produced two major findings.

1. Pastors do expect a daily encounter with Christ, and they understood that an encounter with the Triune God does have a profound, changing effect upon them and their sermons. They struggled with consistency, engaging in means of grace and participating in that encounter with God during their weekly schedules. Pastors are either unable or unwilling to adjust their time spent being attentive to God, even though they realize that this behavior can have a negative effect on the quality, content, and activity of their proclamation.

2. Prior to the seminar, pastors were not fully aware of the connection between their love of God, their virtue, their speech, their spiritual life/participation in the means of grace, their wisdom, their character, their speech, and their proclamation (i.e., they
believed that acts of piety would improve delivery of a sermon more than the content of sermons). They did not have a clear understanding that Christ the Word is the initiator of proclamation. They did not clearly understand that one of their primary roles as pastors is to be attentive to God. After the seminar, pastors grasped a fuller patristic vision (*imitatio Christi*) of the cohesive connection between their love of God, attending to the means of grace, their virtue, their speech, and their character so that their life and speech are unified with Christ’s life and speech. While participants held a strong belief that *imitatio Christi* improved sermon content and activity prior to the seminar, participants reported a fuller understanding how *imitatio Christi* improves the content and activity of their sermons. Despite this deepened knowledge, pastors did not indicate plans for a major change to their current pietistic behavior.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

Major Findings

The immediacy of today’s culture has had significant effects upon the practice and art of homiletics and the spiritual life of ministers. Over time, the spiritual life of the pastor has received less emphasis as modern voices state that the thoughts and energies of the pastor should be directed towards strategic leadership and vision casting. While these foci are important parts of the role of a pastor, they should not overwhelm the spiritual life of the pastor. Instead, a pastor’s participation in the Triune life is central to the vocation of a minister. The shared life with God allows other areas of ministry to flow forth with wisdom, virtue, and the love of God. When ministers center their thoughts and energies upon God, the central focus of the grammar of their life, God takes the lead in strategic leadership, vision casting, preaching, and other ministerial actions of the office.

This study concentrated on understanding the life of a bishop and doctor of the early Church and used his writings and lived-out ministry as a model of faithful living in the present. I taught this model of a spiritual life to ministers in the Prestonsburg District of the Kentucky Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. I gathered pre- and post-intervention data from participants via questionnaires to understand the changes in their opinions and understandings of the connection between their piety and their preaching.

Purpose

Wesleyan theologians understand the importance of church tradition and how tradition speaks wisdom to the contemporary church. I desired to hear from the tradition
of the church and apply the wisdom of the past to the church of the present in order to go forward into the future as a faithful people of God. The purpose of the study was to understand the connections between Ambrose of Milan's life of piety and faithfulness, his love of God, his theology of the priesthood, and his preaching life. This study was done to discover if an appropriation of what was learned of Ambrose's life might bring renewal to contemporary preaching in selected pastors of the Prestonsburg District of the Kentucky Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church.

**Understanding versus Consistent Practice**

Pastors do expect a daily encounter with Christ, and they understand that an encounter with the Triune God does have a profound, changing effect upon them and their sermons. They struggled with consistency engaging in means of grace and participating in that encounter with God during their weekly schedules. Pastors are either unable or unwilling to adjust their time spent being attentive to God significantly, even though they realize that this can have a negative effect on the quality, content, and activity of their proclamation.

While I was teaching the seminar, I quickly noted that the participants deeply cared about their relationships with God and their practice in ministry. Participants engaged in lively discussion throughout the day, sharing their personal beliefs about preaching while also sharing their personal struggles in living into the beliefs that they held. While I did not document the class discussion via video or audio recording, much data came from the interactions each pastor had with one another and with me. They also shared many reflections from their experience in ministry that added to the body of knowledge and discussion in the seminar.
Because different levels of pastoral education were represented in the learning environment, seminary-trained clergy were able to share their academic expertise with the licensed local pastors. Licensed local pastors often shared from their experience, reason, and biblical sources. The environment was cooperative and a tone of collegiality was set by me at the very beginning of the seminar to ensure good theological discussion. While the participants were not surprised that a connection exists between their spiritual lives and their preaching lives, they were surprised at the extent to which the connection exists as presented in Chapter 2 of the dissertation. This deeper understanding created a visible excitement among the participants that encouraged more dialog. Pastors generally want to grow in the grace of the Lord, and they want to improve the content and activity of their sermons.

One of the struggles that participants discussed during class was their available time and ability to attend to the new lessons learned in the seminar. Not only was this struggle documented in the research study instruments, but it was also expressed verbally throughout the seminar. Pastors expressed frustration in their inability to be attentive to God due to the other roles of ministry to which they must attend. Ultimately, the reasons for a lack of consistent practice of spiritual disciplines should be examined through further research. Possible reasons for a lack of attentiveness to a pastor’s spiritual life might include a lack of understanding of the pastor’s role. In a culture where mainline denominations are responding to a decline in membership by focusing on the leadership roles of clergy, such as in the United States, perhaps elevating the primary clerical role of being attentive to God and imitating Christ should be explored. Local church expectations of clergy roles may also contribute to a pastor’s lack of attentiveness to his
or her spiritual life. If local churches expect that the primary role of the pastor to be *chaplain* or *community organizer/volunteer*, the various role expectations placed on a pastor might create dissonance for the pastor in defining their roles as a clergyperson while also causing him or her to doubt the primary role due to external, secular expectations.

Fallen human nature may also contribute to this finding. From those first terrible moments of disobedience in the garden of Eden to the living out of the consequences of sin, sin continues to affect human motivation in various ways, one of which is procrastination and diverted motivations. For example, doctors often tell their diabetic or cardiac patients that they must lose weight so that they can have better health. However, diverted motivations or procrastination often prevent patients from attending to dietary concerns. In a like manner, even when the physician of Christians' souls calls pastors to be attentive to God so that they will be fruitful in ministry, pastors often are diverted from those things that matter most to less important but pressing needs. A good example of this diversion is technology. Technology, while helpful in many ways, competes and confounds a pastor's time. E-mail, cellular phones, Facebook, and other technologies often act as a sponge of pastors' time and create a false sense of immediacy. One anthropologist has described this technology diversion as the "tyranny of the moment" (Erikson viii).

The biblical model presented by Jesus is one of frequent, timely, and disciplined withdrawal from ministry to be with the Father. Purposeful withdrawal from technology and ministry to be with God is a discipline to be learned if pastors are to imitate Christ
fully. Easily said and not easily mastered, withdrawal for prayer and meditatio on the Word is requisite for development as a preacher and is only achieved through grace.

**A Deeper Understanding of Christ the Word as the Speaker in Proclamation**

Prior to the seminar, pastors were not fully aware of the connection between their love of God, their virtue, their speech, their spiritual life/participation in the means of grace, their wisdom, their character, their speech, and their proclamation (i.e., they believed that acts of piety would improve delivery of a sermon more than the content of sermons). They did not have a clear understanding that Christ the Word is the initiator of proclamation. They did not clearly understand that one of their primary roles as pastors is to be attentive to God. After the seminar, pastors grasped a fuller patristic vision (imitatio Christi) of the cohesive connection between their love of God, attending to the means of grace, their virtue, their speech, and their character so that their lives and speech are unified with Christ’s life and speech. While participants demonstrated a strong belief that imitatio Christi improved sermon content and activity prior to the seminar, participants reported a fuller understanding of how imitatio Christi improves the content and activity of their sermons. Despite this deepened knowledge, pastors did not indicate plans for a major change to their current pietistic behavior.

My work on the Kentucky Annual Conference Board of Ordained Ministry has led me to an almost universal conclusion about clergy, in general, and in ministry candidates desiring ordination, in particular. They usually represent themselves with an excessively positive presentation during interviews, psychological examinations, and in interviews. While this positive presentation is most likely normal behavior in most professions, the pressures for clergy to be exemplars of the faith continue throughout
their career. Perhaps this same behavior skewed data in this study. If this observation is true, the participant-reported behaviors might be slanted to the positive and not completely reflective of actual practice in the pastors’ lives. This observation might explain the lack of planned behavioral change with regard to their spiritual lives. Upon further reflection at the end of the seminar, participants might have thought that their typical daily goal for pietistic behaviors as reported at the beginning of class, although usually unobtainable due to a variety of reasons, might still be a worthy goal after the seminar and would actually account for an increase in their pietistic behaviors.

Whatever the explanation, like Ambrose, these pastors desire to live lives of holiness and virtue, pleasing to God and full of godly wisdom. The seminar did help bring renewal to the participants’ spiritual lives and their preaching. Thus, the purpose of this study was accomplished. Ambrose’s lived-out grammar of life from the fourth century, as researched in this dissertation and taught to pastors in the twenty-first century, was shown to bring at least short-term renewal to the pastors who participated in the seminar. The spiritual truths given by church tradition and enlivened by the Holy Spirit are as applicable and helpful today as they were in the early centuries of the church. These spiritual truths demonstrate that patristic insight, when approached and applied with wisdom, can still bring renewal and revival in the church’s priests, pastors, and preachers. Technology and modern conveniences, such as prewritten sermons, may assist a busy pastor, but they ultimately do not bring renewal. Instead, the early Church fathers have taught us that, ultimately, renewal is initiated by the Father, through the Son, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. A vibrant relationship with the Father, Son, and Holy
Spirit will bring better and longer-lasting renewal, wisdom, virtue, authenticity, relevance, and growth in God’s kingdom.

Jesus often spent time with his Father in heaven. Jesus, in his Jewish framework, attended to prayer and the Jewish feasts. He lived out a life of wisdom and virtue well documented in the Scriptures. He preached with authenticity and authority not only because he is God and the Word but also because he nurtured his relationship with the Father. Clergy, too, are to imitate Jesus’ piety. The apostles learned this lesson while they were still disciples of Jesus. When finally loosed into the world with the authority of the Word and the power of the Spirit at Pentecost, they had an intrinsic knowledge that their work must be done in the imitation of the one who sent them.

Practice of ministry in the imitation of Jesus, the Christ, who sends out the Church with good news and mission (and particularly clergy) is the model of practice for the Church upon which all other models must base themselves. Clergy must not only lead by example; they must also experience the renewal brought by imitation of Christ’s piety as well.

Implications of the Findings

The study has shown that pastors are spiritually hungry. They desire to grow in grace and love of God not only for personal reasons but also for professional reasons. Participants in this study expressed deep needs, not only to deepen their knowledge of how to live a virtuous life in the imitation of Christ but also how to enact that piety faithfully in the midst of a busy pastoral schedule.

One frequently asked question Methodist churches pose to district
superintendents is, “Can the new pastor preach?” Churches obviously hold preaching ability, content, and activity as high values in their evaluation of a pastor. Other demands placed upon a pastor, sometimes by laity, sometimes by other external forces, obfuscates the central role a pastor is called to live into—imitatio Christi. The Church can use this study to aid in renewal of local churches by helping them understand that renewal will most likely come quickly when they help their pastors identify and live into the primary roles of ministry to which they were called. The study can also be used as a template for other continuing education seminars to teach the spirituality of preaching to pastors in order to bring homiletic renewal to clergy and general renewal to the Church.

My research of Ambrose revealed a powerful quote that often runs through my mind when thinking on Church and homiletic renewal:

> No more will I hear about the old Levi, off with the old Levi! On with Christ! I flee from my old life. You only, O Lord Jesus Christ, would I follow! You have healed my wounds! Who shall separate me from the love of God which I have found in you, O Christ! Shall tribulation, or distress, or famine take me from you? With nails of faith I am joined to you. I am held fast to you by the gentle claim of your love. (De Officiis 5.27)

Ambrose’s passionate testimony of the transforming power of Jesus for the Christian is evident. He identifies himself with Christ—taking Christ onto himself and casting aside his old self. Ambrose’s point is clear. Christ alone will be the one he will follow in in thanksgiving because it is in Jesus he has found cleansing, healing, salvation, and love. Ambrose’s faith is steadfast because Jesus’ love is steadfast. For Ambrose, the imitation of Christ is dramatic—he nails himself to a cross with Jesus. Imitation of Christ with nails of faith is a response to Jesus’ gentle claim of love. Ambrose is able and willing to imitate Christ in the most painful and intimate of ways because of the love of Jesus.
Joining Jesus in this journey transformed him, his love of God, his wisdom, his speech, and his sermons.

Contemporary Christian preachers join in this sanctifying journey as well as they faithfully nail themselves to the cross of Christ, and Jesus holds them there by his love. My research has led me to the conclusion that this nailing is one of the central roles of the pastorate. Effectively communicating this role in the Church will assist in the task of faithful preaching and discipleship. Spiritual disciplines, assisted by God’s grace, will aid preachers in going on to Christian perfection in the Wesleyan tradition. Preachers will speak, act, and live more like Christ. Consequently, the Church will hear more clearly Jesus’ words because Jesus is taking the lead as the chief proclaimer and theologian of the church.

Limitations of the Study

The study has focused on clergy spirituality and how that relates to sermon content and activity. While this study was conducted on a self-selected group of United Methodist pastors in eastern Kentucky, it may be generalized to pastors of various denominations that function within the same cultural context of the United States. Possible geographic and cultural areas to which this study could be generalized are Canada and Europe. Generalization of this scope is possible because clergy in these geographic and cultural areas tend to share similar struggles, ecclesiastical concerns, and outlook as do the participants in this study. These concerns would include declining church membership, church ministry in a post-Christian culture, and a similar theological outlook and training. I urge caution when generalizing this data, however, because not all clergy in these areas may place such a high value on their spiritual lives as did this self-
selected group of participants who attended a seminar on the Spirituality of Preaching. Their self-selection predisposes them to an interest in the connections between spirituality and preaching. The cultural contexts of Africa, Central and South America, and Asia may limit generalizability of this study to those areas. Clergy in these areas might not struggle with the concerns raised in this study.

**Unexpected Observations**

Participants did not only see a grammar of the preaching life as a rubric through which their speech, actions, and wisdom were more closely aligned with Christ. Participants also saw the process of living according to a grammar of the preaching life as a means of grace. The alignment of their hearts to God’s heart, their speech to God’s speech, was an inward and spiritual grace that manifested itself as outward and visible symbols (actions) for others to see and experience. My hope was that participants would experience and use the Bible as a means of grace in their sermons. Participants came away from the experience understanding the grammar of life assignment as a means of grace as well.

**Recommendations**

The Church catholic, but in particular churches in like cultural contexts as those in this study, needs to discuss further and define the primary roles of a pastor. This discussion might include bishops, district superintendents, pastoral supervisors, and laity, to include the patristic vision described in Chapter 2. While pastors understand or have a growing understanding of their primary roles as imitators of Christ, the demands of the pastorate, supervisors, parishioners, as well as external forces such as technology and human behavior might affect their ability to live into these newly discovered roles.
Continued education of pastors about the intimate connection between their spiritual life, the mystery of the Word, the work of the Spirit, meditation on the Scriptures, and the content and activity of their sermons is appropriate to bring renewal to homiletics and, more broadly, the Church.

Further study into pastoral spiritual roles would also enable the Church to enact the patristic vision of this study more broadly. Implementation might begin on the seminary campus. Seminaries could explore the theological role of the preacher as *one who imitates Christ* in their homiletics courses. One of the principal activities of any seminary is to teach its students how to think as theologians. Pastors should not forget the skills and training they received at seminary once their diplomas are hung upon their office walls. The life of a person called into God’s service is one in which the pastor consistently interprets the world through the lens of Scripture. Thinking theologically and communicating in theological ways is one of the chief roles of a pastor. Seminaries might explore the connections between theological thinking, spirituality, and homiletics in future coursework. I also recommend that seminaries utilize patristic sources for their curriculum because the church fathers thought in a much more holistic way than contemporary culture does today.

Preaching is often taught at seminaries with an emphasis on technique and skill. Contemporary texts in homiletics would indicate this as the current trend. I recommend that seminaries explore combining *pathos* with *ethos* and *logos*, that is the technique of creating persuading speech with integrity, virtue, and Scripture. In this way, they can enable seminarians to grasp the patristic vision and move the church forward in grace and truth.
Continuing education courses could follow this same model. Utilizing a church father, the course could foster a discussion about the theological role of the pastor, their spiritual life, and the connection between the imitation of Christ and the activity of preaching. Since this model was field-tested and found to be an effective tool with clergy, I would recommend that homiletic professors, instructors, and clergy-management administrators on an annual conference level consider it an effective tool for pastoral renewal and continuing education.

Postscript

Christians, like the Israelites following Yahweh through the Sinai wilderness, are called to growth, holiness, belief, trust, and obedience to God. Speaking from the pulpit with the words of Christ on their lips requires pastors to be attentive to the one who gives them speech in the first place. The pastorate is often a Sinai wilderness journey as well. Moments of grumbling, moments of despair, and moments of intimate joy abound in pastoral ministry. Grace is offered in various means and locations despite clergy's thirst for water or their hunger for the meat pots of Egypt. Those moments of intimate relationship with the Lord, sometimes in wilderness hardship, help clergy understand that they do not live by bread alone but by the Word of God. God, in his grace, gives pastors the Bread of Heaven, manna sent from above, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, to feed them spiritually and give them the waters of life so that they no longer hunger or thirst.

This study, and the grammar of a preaching life as presented by Ambrose of Milan, is a means of grace. My hope is that preachers find renewal for their souls and their sermons in this research if they are in the wilderness of sin. Moreover, as another
offering of grace, I pray that clergy who are in a homiletical and spiritual wilderness understand that they are already imitating Christ’s first steps into ministry.
APPENDIX A

SPIRITUALITY OF PREACHING COURSE OUTLINE

Continuing Education Course for September 2012

Taught in the Prestonsburg District of the Kentucky Annual Conference

By Rev. John W. Hatton

9:00 a.m.—Welcome and introductions by all participants. Sticker nametags given to all participants.

9:05—Explanation of research and students will complete the pre-class questionnaire

9:20—Beginning with a Baseline—"What is your purpose of preaching?"
   -Class will examine what are the current trends are for preaching.
   -What are your theological motivators?
   -What is your hermeneutic—what is your framework for interpreting the Bible?
   -What is your style of preaching (narrative, expository, verse-by-verse)?
   -Where and how did you learn how to preach?
   -Did approach and opinions about preaching change over time?

9:50—Breakout Groups (groups of 4 or 5): Students will be given a purchased sermon. They will analyze the sermon for: (1) quality, (2) the sermon’s purpose, (3) theology. Groups will then return for reporting of the sermon discussion. Class will then process together:
   (1) Would they feel comfortable preaching that sermon?
   (2) What are the ethical issues involved in preaching another person’s sermon?
   (3) What are the local kingdom issues involved in preaching another’s sermon?

Instructor will then recollect the experience at a conference where the main presenter said to “buy my sermons.” Instructor will also recollect a recent seminary student’s current practice of “borrowing sermons” for lack of time during the week.

(4) As Wesleyans who are called to examine the state of one’s soul (How is it with your soul?), how do our sermons provide an indicator (sign or symptom) of the state of our souls? Discuss.

10:30—Break

10:45—Class will explore some of the current trends of postmodernism (via Richard Rorty) and explore some of the challenges of the postmodern church (purchased sermons).

Discussion topics to include:
   -Richard Rorty and the creativeness of humans via language that allow us to write truth. (Read from Rorty’s book and discuss this topic)
   -Quote youth who stated, “If it isn’t on Facebook, it hasn’t really happened” (Moon).
   -What pressures does this place upon you as a pastor and on the church? What is at risk? How does relevance and reality apply to the gospel today?
11:10—Class will process as a group John Wesley’s hermeneutic and purpose of Preaching
- Class discussion: Instructor will document class participants’ understanding of Wesley’s purpose of preaching on a whiteboard.
- Discuss the opinion and work of Dr. Jones’ *John Wesley’s Conception and Use of Scripture*.
- Break this out into the Wesleyan quadrilateral. Talk about John Wesley’s use of tradition.
- Instructor will then facilitate a conversation with students about how John Wesley stands in a “virtue” tradition of preaching. Instructor will examine and teach what this means to students.
- Instructor and class will examine Wesley’s historical motivators in ministry. Church fathers and church tradition will be explored.

Noon—Break/Lunch

12:45—Class instruction will now focus on early Church fathers’ emphasis on a life of virtue, based on church tradition. Topics will include:
- Use of tradition in the United Methodist Church (Quadrilateral)
  - Technika versus ethos
    - Spiritual Wisdom
    - Character and speech
    - Humility & holiness
    - Prayer & study
    - A virtuous life
    - Life of faith as reception, not in production
    - *Imitatio Christi* and Christian perfection
    - Spiritual competence—*Speaking as one who knows God*
  - The inner life—protecting one’s heart, mind, and speech
  * Special emphasis will be placed on how a life of virtue speaks connects to preaching on a week-to-week basis. We will discuss how experiencing and living into the divine life will bring forth a deeper, richer, more powerful proclamation moment during the sermon on Sunday. The class will focus on marrying piety and practice—a hallmark of the early Church fathers.

2:15—Each student will develop a *Grammar of Life* based upon the Church fathers’ concern with virtue and piety. This grammar will assist them in further defining their life of preaching. They will then utilize this grammar for the next two weeks. Students will be given an opportunity to share their grammar with other students to explore best practices.

2:30—Students will complete post-class questionnaire

2:40—Class Ends

In two weeks—Students will participate in a second post-class questionnaire to discern if any changes have occurred in their preaching life as a result of their grammar
of life. This survey will be completed on Survey Monkey and it will be reflective and qualitative in nature. Fifteen minutes of participation time should be considered for this survey when calculating CEUs. (see below)

(The class will not be considered complete until the final (3rd) survey is completed by participants. Therefore, CEUs will not be awarded until after the final survey is completed 2 weeks later).
APPENDIX B

DEMOGRAPHIC INSTRUMENT

Assigned Participant Number: ________

Please answer every question. Checkmark, circle, or write in your answers to every question.

1. Age Range: □ 65 and above □ 55-64 □ 45-54 □ 35-44 □ 25-34

2. Gender: □ Female □ Male

3. Ethnicity □ Asian □ Black or African-American □ Hispanic □ White □ Other ________________

4. What is your current credentialing status with the United Methodist Church?
   □ Supply Pastor □ Licensed Local Pastor □ Ordained Deacon □ Ordained Elder

5. How many years of experience do you have in pastoral ministry?
   □ 0-5 years □ 6-10 years □ 11-15 years □ 16-20 years □ 21-25 years □ 26-30 years □ +30 years
APPENDIX C

PRE-COURSE QUESTIONNAIRE

Assigned Participant Number: _______

Please complete the survey by circling your answer or writing legibly, filling in the blank for your answer to each question. Do not give answers you think the researcher will want to hear. Instead, let your answers most accurately reflect your current beliefs or practices in ministry. Please complete every question.

1) In the course of a typical day, how many minutes have you spent in acts of piety? (prayer, Scripture reading, study, sermon preparation, personal devotional time)

0–30 minutes 31–60 minutes 61–90 minutes 91–120 minutes Greater than 120 min.

2) Please indicate your agreement with the following statement:
   “Acts of piety affect my sermon preparation.”
   Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

   If Strongly Agree or Agree, in what ways do you think acts of piety affect your sermon preparation?

3) Please indicate your agreement with the following statement:
   “Acts of piety affect my sermon delivery.”
   Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

   If Strongly Agree or Agree, in what ways do you think acts of piety affect your sermon delivery?

4) Please indicate your agreement with the following statement:
   “My sermons are profound and relevant every week.”
   Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree
5) Please indicate your agreement with the following statement:
"My sermons are delivered with enthusiasm, conviction, and expression of my love for God."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

6) Please indicate your agreement with the following statement:
"There is a connection between my spiritual life and the quality of my sermons."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

7) Please indicate your agreement with the following statement:
"Imitating Christ and being set apart is the primary task in my life as a pastor."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

8) Please indicate your agreement with the following statement:
"There is a correlation between living virtuously (humility; modesty; protecting your heart, mind, & speech; living a holy life) and good sermon preparation."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

If Agree or Strongly Agree, in what ways do you think living humility affects your sermon preparation?

_________________________________________________________

9) Please indicate your agreement with the following statement:
"There is a correlation between living virtuously and good sermon delivery."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
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<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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</table>

If Agree or Strongly Agree, in what ways do you think living virtuously affects your sermon delivery?

_________________________________________________________

10) What percentage of a sermon do you believe is developed or initiated by the pastor?

$20\%$, $40\%$, $60\%$, $80\%$, $100\%$
11) What percentage of a sermon do you believe is developed or initiated by the Holy Spirit?

- 20%
- 40%
- 60%
- 80%
- 100%

12) In the course of a typical day, what percentage of your time do you consciously attend to holiness of heart and life?

- 0%-20%
- 21%-40%
- 41%-60%
- 61%-80%
- 81%-100%
APPENDIX D

POST-COURSE QUESTIONNAIRE

Assigned Participant Number: _________

Please complete the survey by circling your answer or writing legibly, filling in the blank for your answer to each question. Do not give answers you think the researcher will want to hear. Instead, let your answers most accurately reflect your current beliefs or practices in ministry. Please complete every question.

1) In the next two weeks, how many minutes do you plan to spend daily in acts of piety? (prayer, Scripture reading, study, sermon preparation, personal devotional time)

   0-30 minutes  31-60 minutes  61-90 minutes  91-120 minutes  Greater than 120 min

2) Please indicate your agreement with the following statement:
   "Acts of piety affect my sermon preparation."

   Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Neutral  Agree  Strongly Agree

   If Strongly Agree or Agree, in what ways do you think acts of piety affect your sermon preparation?

   ________________________________________________________________

3) Please indicate your agreement with the following statement:
   "Acts of piety affect my sermon delivery."

   Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Neutral  Agree  Strongly Agree

   If Strongly Agree or Agree, in what ways do you think acts of piety affect your sermon delivery?

   ________________________________________________________________

4) Please indicate your agreement with the following statement:
   "Acts of piety enable my sermons to be profound and relevant every week."

   Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Neutral  Agree  Strongly Agree
5) Please indicate your agreement with the following statement: “Acts of piety enable my sermons to be delivered with enthusiasm, conviction, and expression of my love for God.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
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<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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</table>

6) Please indicate your agreement with the following statement: “There is a connection between my spiritual life and the quality of my sermons.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
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<th>Agree</th>
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</table>

7) Please indicate your agreement with the following statement: “Imitating Christ and being set apart is the primary task in my life as a pastor.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</table>

If Agree or Strongly Agree, in what ways do you think living humility affects your sermon preparation?

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</table>

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10) What percentage of a sermon do you believe is developed or initiated by the pastor?

20%, 40%, 60%, 80%, 100%

11) What percentage of a sermon do you believe is developed or initiated by the Holy Spirit?

20%, 40%, 60%, 80%, 100%
12) In the course of a typical day, what percentage of your time will you consciously attend to holiness of heart and life in the next two weeks?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage Range</th>
<th>0%-20%</th>
<th>21%-40%</th>
<th>41%-60%</th>
<th>61%-80%</th>
<th>81%-100%</th>
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APPENDIX E

POST-COURSE REFLECTIVE ESSAY

This essay was distributed over the internet to participants via SurveyMonkey.com.

Assigned Participant Number: ______

Please answer each of the following questions in an essay or narrative format. Please be reflective of the last two weeks of ministry in your life as you answer these questions.

1. What was the most spiritually renewing thing(s) that you learned in the class?

2. Please thoughtfully reflect on how this spiritual renewal has changed your sermons.

3. What spiritual practices will you adopt to live more virtuously and develop your character?

4. If you were to develop and hold to a grammar of a preaching life, how will this impact and be reflected in your sermons?
APPENDIX F

QUALITATIVE PROTOCOL

1) List the known works of Bishop Ambrose of Milan

2) Of the works listed in #1, which specifically deal with Ambrose’s concerns for the spiritual life, the character and/or the preaching and speech of a priest? List these specific works below:

3) Of the works listed in #1, which specifically deal with characteristics of the practice, ministry, character, and personal piety of Ambrose’s life as a bishop? List these specific works below:

4) Of these works that address the above concerns in question #2 and #3, which works most clearly speak to the concerns of research question #1? List these specific works below:
# APPENDIX G

## PRE-COURSE QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES

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SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, N = Neutral, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree
### APPENDIX H

**PRE-COURSE QUESTIONNAIRE NARRATIVES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Narrative Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| #2       | "Keeps you closer to the Lord"  
|          | "It works on me before I think about what it will do for listeners"  
|          | "Preparation, leadership of Spirit"  
|          | "Holy Spirit directs my thought process and sensitivity to leading of the Holy Spirit"  
|          | "Focuses our thoughts and emotions"  
|          | "As I walk as a disciple daily, the application of Christ’s principles of divine behavior (loving your neighbor as yourself, etc.) fuel the sermons that come from the pulpit of my charge"  
|          | "Make me open to Holy Spirit’s leading"  
|          | "Have that closeness with God"  
|          | "Increase sensitivity to leading of the Holy Spirit"  
|          | "When I have prepared a sermon, I have spent much greater amounts of time, reading Scripture, meditating upon it, praying over the sermon I am to give, asking for the words of direction, trying to discern God’s message that I am an instrument for"  
|          | "Without them, the teaching would be is more a product of my own thoughts: an execution of my own strength"  |
| #3       | "Helps to keep me more connected"  
|          | "Prayer with others before the service enhances the message"  
|          | "Time to prepare sermon in our mind and heart"  
|          | "Closer to God, partnering with the Holy Spirit in the act of proclamation"  
|          | "I interpret acts of piety as growing in grace and knowledge. Both of these attributes make me more confident that the message I have to deliver is right, good, necessary, and of God"  
|          | "Helps me preach in the Spirit"  
|          | "Have that assurance that Jesus is with me in the pulpit"  
|          | "More passionate, more connected with God and parishioners"  
|          | "Calm my nerves, focus my energy on Spirit"  
|          | "If I did not engage in acts of piety, it would just be my word—a speech, if you will"  
|          | "I feel more connected with the Holy Spirit; His power, His desires, if I have studied, prayed, chewed on the Scriptures, dwelled upon what I feel have been God’s responses to me"  |
| #8       | "A Christian lifestyle strengthens one’s life"  
|          | "It acknowledges my sole dependence upon God"  
|          | "It will determine mostly if it is received by others"  
|          | "One can speak through truth in love"  
|          | "If I have little knowledge of how to walk with Jesus, how will I be able to tell others?"  
|          | "I must live a Holy Spirit led life or I grieve the Holy Spirit and grieve Him"  
|          | "Keeps you down to earth"  
|          | "Correlation between talk and walk"  
|          | "There is a unity wholeness that comes through"  
<p>|          | &quot;I feel like a fraud if I am not practicing humility&quot;  |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#9</td>
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**Narrative Answer**

- “One becomes more spiritually connected”
- “It will have an effect on our confidence. If we don’t live it and believe it, we can’t sell it”
- “The messenger becomes the message”
- “If I have little knowledge of how to walk with Jesus, how will I be able to convince anyone of my message?”
- “The pastor must be the first partaker of God’s Word before he can give (deliver) to others”
- “It seems like the more you try to please God in living a good life, the more the Holy Spirit blesses you in your preaching”
- “Unity of heart and affect”
- “I can stand before the folks in truth honesty”
- “I think it matters as to how it is perceived by the hearers. If they believe the pastor is not virtuous to some degree, then their leadership or credulity is greatly reduced”
# APPENDIX I

## POST-COURSE QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES

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SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, N = Neutral, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree
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| #2       | "Brings one stronger toward God"  
|          | "Sermon prep is affected by all aspects of my life"  
|          | "We need to become our sermon. (As a part of us)"  
|          | "Being more attentive to God in the preparation process"  
|          | "Acts of piety open my mind to God who in turn helps me prepare"  
|          | "Living honestly before God who is watching all I do, means that I have to be in communion with God, even in sermon preparation"  
|          | "Living right, praying, reading Bible, living close to Christ is daily preparation"  
|          | "Draws me closer to God"  
|          | "Unity of heart and life with Christ"  
|          | "Bring me in line with journey of Christ"  
|          | "It's part of having my life become a living sermon"  
|          | "Helps us to be, and to be to others, someone who knows God"  
| #3       | "One feels the very presence of God through the Word"  
|          | "I am empowered to preach to the extent I have spent time in the presence of God beforehand"  
|          | "Our delivery speaks of our life, sanctification"  
|          | "Being authentic/conveying authenticity during the preaching event"  
|          | "Acts of piety open my mind to God who in turn helps me deliver"  
|          | "The authenticity of my delivery depends on my confidence towards God because we have walked together during the week, or repentence on my part fixes any rips in the fabric of our relationship"  
|          | "Living the Word is preaching the Word"  
|          | "I feel God's power when preaching"  
|          | "Passionate and understanding"  
|          | "Allows me to stand in humility and confidence"  
|          | "It's part of marrying technique with belief and ideals"  
|          | "Would make it possible to marry techniques with beliefs theology/ideals"  
| #8       | "You feel closer to God when one is obedient"  
|          | "To submit to the influence of the Holy Spirit with humbleness allows Him to speak through my preparation"  
|          | "People should see our sermon, not only hear it"  
|          | "Keeping myself out of God's way; following His lead via Holy Spirit"  
|          | "Living virtually allows me to concentrate on preparation"  
|          | "How can I prepare the Word if I haven't lived the Word?"  
|          | "People recognize and respect humble people"  
|          | "Keeps me down to earth"  
|          | "Living the message/Word"  
|          | "Time management"  
|          | "It's going to show in the conviction as I prepare"  
|          | "Sermon prep would stand to improve as our lives become a sermon in themselves"  

APPENDIX J

POST-COURSE QUESTIONNAIRE NARRATIVES
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| #9       | "Learning to depend upon God"  
|          | "You cannot fake the impact of being in the presence of God as you proclaim God's Word"  
|          | "When we live what we say, we become authentic, not only in word but in action"  
|          | "Genuine, gentle, non-confrontational proclamation of God's truth"  
|          | "With a clear conscience, I preach better"  
|          | "No one will believe the Gospel from my lips if the confidence of the Holy Spirit is not sitting in my heart"  
|          | "May fail at times, just keep living for Christ"  
|          | "The more virtuous, the more the Holy Spirit will work through me"  
|          | "Living the message/Word"  
|          | "Joy shows through"  
|          | "The integrity is going to show through in the acceptance of the sermon"  
|          | "Doing so would maintain connection with the pulpit" |
## APPENDIX K

### POST-COURSE REFLECTIVE ESSAY RESPONSES

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| **#1** | "In the myriad ways in which we believe we are called to live out our vocation as pastors and especially as preachers, the true calling we are given is often overlooked—attentiveness to God."  
"The supreme value of authenticity—being doing/saying, all in harmony, with a minimum of dissonance."  
"The preaching is more than an occasional message. It is a lifestyle.  
"I became aware that I wasn’t taking enough time preparing my sermons"  
"First of all, I enjoyed the quietly evangelistic demeanor of our teacher facilitator. His reflective presentation of his thesis and supporting thoughts helped me to become more reflective of my own spirituality. The outcome of such reflections have brought me closer to God on a minute by minute basis. I would never have predicted that a day spent in a CEU class would actually effect as much renewing in my life as this one did. I feel like I haven’t adequately expressed what has taken place in my mind and heart since that Saturday, probably because I don’t fully understand it. Since I like to think of myself as a pragmatist who shrinks back from stuff that can’t be explained realistically, I suppose the best explanation I can give is that the Holy Spirit used this experience, coupled with extenuating experiences that occurred in my work, to lift my soul to a new level of devotion. I felt this past Sunday like I was actually holding the living gospel in my hands. Having said all that, I think the most spiritually renewing thing I got from the class was to be able to open myself to different ways of seeing the spiritual life."  
"That we never know who is suffering spiritually in our midst. That God uses such a great variety of personalities and differing ways of getting His word out of all who are called by Him to take the gospel to the world."  
"Spending time in theological discussion was helpful to renew my mind and spirit; realizing anybody can give a sermon, but if it’s disconnected from the heart and holiness of the preacher, it rings hollow to the hearer."  
"The class reaffirmed for me the concept of a pastor’s personal connection to Christ and all aspects of the pastor’s ministry: preaching, visiting, leading, etc." |  |
| **#2** | "Being reminded of how Christ was both the message and the messenger of the good news of God’s salvation during his earthly ministry has reminded me of the desire to speak as one who knows God" more intimately, more passionately, more profoundly than before. This renewed and heightened attentiveness to God has enabled my sermons to be delivered with greater integrity, authenticity, and power."  
"With more value/respect given to the ordinary, my sermons have become more "down to earth." I hope this means they are more accessible to more people."  
"Although it has not happened to the degree I feel is necessary, I recognize my need to rely more on undivided time with the Lord to prepare ME [original emphasis] before I spend time preparing a message for God’s people. I rely far too much on my past experience, training, and understandings to formulate the messages I believe God gives me to preach. I do desire that the words I speak in preaching are not just ‘the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart’ (Ps. 19:14). I want to know that God is speaking through the accumulation of His Word throughout my life to a specific need of the hearers."  
"Besides taking more time in preparing, I try to deliver it with a grateful heart, that He would use me in spreading the gospel." |
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| #2, cont.     | "I had the most extraordinary feeling as I drove to church on Sunday, that I was literally in God’s hands, not just someone who would stand in the pulpit going through a ritual, but God’s ambassador here on earth offering God’s loving truth to the people. I really felt connected to the worship that I led. I truly believed that Jesus took His disciples to be completing. As a result, the words that came from my mouth surprised and admonished even me. Even though my sermon went 10 minutes past noon nobody reached for hymnals, and we yet had to celebrate Holy Communion. I truly believe that the spiritual renewal I have experienced since the class has helped take me out and put the Holy Spirit into my sermons.”

"I don’t think my sermons will change. I have been preaching for 32 years. God has shown me that if I seek the leading of the Holy Spirit, study, and pray, then the message will be there for each service.”

"It hasn’t as I haven’t written any sermons in the last couple of weeks.”

"My devotional time with Christ and the Scriptures was increased but sporadic in the past 2 weeks. My sermons benefitted from this spiritual renewal and I felt more attune to the Spirit’s guidance with conviction and power in my preparation and delivery of the sermons.”

| #3             | "Be more consistent in my practice of Sabbath. Be more consistent in my practice of taking a day off. Be more consistent in my practice of silence and solitude. Seek a one-on-one clergy accountability partner or a spiritual director mentor to complement the clergy covenant group I am currently leading and participating in."

"Increase my reading and studying of Scripture for my own spiritual growth and enrichment, separate from sermon prep. Deep listening to stories from the lives of my parishioners. Use of “Prayer of the Ordinary” to more firmly ground myself.”

"Renew my covenant to daily, “uninterruptible” time with the Lord. Receive Holy Communion weekly - Retreat monthly for personal and private time apart with the Lord.”

"Set aside time for extended prayer; spend time in bible daily, enjoy God’s presence.”

"I will focus more on my areas of brokenness, my need to give up my personality trait of perfectionism that causes me to be judgmental and graceless toward others. I want the love of Jesus Christ to obliterate that part of me that craves closure and balance."

"That needs to fix everything and smooth out the wrinkles. I want to accept people where they are and who they are because that’s how Jesus always did and does it. I want to practice grace everywhere and at all times.”

"Start every day with reflective prayer, asking and looking for Christ to develop and direct us in every daily encounter. Seek the virtues and character of Christ.”

"I plan to become more intentional about my personal Bible study and prayer life. I need to spend more time surrounded by ones who are striving to be joyous in life and less mired in life’s dramas.”

"I will practice a more consistent devotional time in the mornings, I will read a portion of Scripture for personal reflection instead of just for sermon preparation. I will "pray on the hoof” as ministry opportunities present themselves during day. I will more consciously meditate on Christ’s presence with me 24/7 allowing my choices decisions to bring glory to God.”
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| "My deepening experiential knowledge of God, received through various means of grace as I seek to live out my calling to be ever more attentive to God, will impact and be reflected in my sermons in the following ways: (1) the Holy Spirit will find a more yielded preacher willing to be shaped and stretched by the sermon text during the preparation time resulting in a more relevant message targeting the Body of Christ, individually and collectively, right where they are in their faith journey; (2) I will preach with more authenticity and authority as my inner and outer life more closely align with Scripture resulting in the gospel message being proclaimed with not just words but with the power of the Holy Spirit; (3) I will be able to “live” with the sermon more fully in the week prior to preaching it resulting in a greater awareness of and receptivity to the leading of the Holy Spirit during the preaching event."
| "Though I don’t fully understand what you mean by “a grammar of a preaching life,” I suspect it may have to do with making my inner being (thoughts, emotions, dreams) be authentically reflected in all I outwardly say and do—INCLUDING preparing and delivering sermons.”
| “It would develop in me a more consistent presentation of the whole gospel reflected across the pages of scripture instead of relying on my own familiar and favorite passages. It would also impact every sermon as a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit gleaned from the regular and continual exposure to his presence instead of a ‘rehashing’ of previous insights.”
| “Hopefully more people will be saved.”
| “Were I to develop and hold to a grammar of a preaching life I might be more focused. However, my developed grammar would need to be flexible or changeable to accommodate growth in grace and knowledge in new areas of my life that I discover need work. In any endeavor, having a plan means a greater likelihood of success, whether it’s educational, economical, or spiritual enterprises. Knowing this principle, I must conclude that purposefully living a holy life, confessing my faults when they are revealed to me, and reaching out to engage anyone regardless of their differences to me, will broaden my preaching capacities with the wealth of my experiences. By concentrating on the real needs of those around me, not just on what I think their needs are, by really listening to others instead of just waiting for an opening to inject my story and by opening mind to really see how Jesus interacted with the people in His day, I can become a much more effective proclaimer of the Gospel.”
| “As we live and give ourselves to God, then God molds and forms us ever more into the image of His son. The study of God’s word directs our lives, thus our preaching should ever more reflect our lives with Christ in ever showing more of Christ while we evermore diminish self.”
| “I believe living a grammar of a preaching life will impact my future sermons because I will be more fully connected to God and as such it will be reflected in the way others see me. If others see me more fully connected, then the integrity of any sermon I preach would be held in higher esteem and perhaps cause others to think more deeply about their own walk and reexamine their own lives as they strive to live a better God-driven life.”
| “I believe my sermons will be energized by the Holy Spirit as I continue to be conformed to the mind of Christ and directed by Christ’s Holy Spirit. I will feel more at ONE [original emphasis] with Christ and my congregation in my sermon preparation and delivery times. My character will enhance genuine compatibility between my personal spiritual life and the Word of God.”

#4
WORKS CITED


---. We Speak Because We Have First Been Spoken. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009. Print.


WORKS CONSULTED


