

Preaching and the problem of evil: a case study in the published sermons of Helmut Thielicke

Michael P Calvert

BA, MDiv, PhD

Student number 22707522

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree *Philosophiae Doctum* in *Practical Theology*
at the
Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University
in cooperation with
Greenwich School of Theology

Supervisor: Revd Prof Dr D Ben Rees

Co-supervisor: Prof Dr FW de Wet

May 2014

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the preaching of Helmut Thielicke, the twentieth century German theologian and pastor (b. 1908, d. 1986). More specifically, this thesis will focus upon a selection of Thielicke's translated and published sermons that address the problem of evil and suffering (PES). Arguably, the PES represents the most formidable challenge to Christianity and presents an equally vexing difficulty for contemporary pulpit ministers. Thielicke's faithful preaching ministry, largely situated within the historical period encompassing the rise and fall of the Third Reich and its immediate aftermath, is remarkable for its straightforward treatment of the PES. Thielicke proclaimed the inscripturated Word of God to people in the midst of the horrendous evils and unspeakable atrocities brought about by the War. From his pulpit he boldly addressed the greatest questions raised by his generation concerning the existence of God and the presence of evil and suffering in the world. From the pages of the Word of God, Thielicke offered hope and comfort to the afflicted and pointed them to the Father whose love and mercy could be found in Jesus Christ His beloved Son.

With the translation of Thielicke's sermons into English, the benefits of his remarkable preaching ministry are available to a wider audience and his messages that specifically address the PES are readily accessible to contemporary preachers. Given this, the present thesis will attempt to set forth a selection of Thielicke's published sermons on the PES as paradigmatic for contemporary pulpit ministers who must also preach to those who are suffering. The researcher will offer this collection of Thielicke's sermons on the PES as evidence supporting the thesis that he is a worthy model for the construction and delivery of biblical messages that effectively confront the PES and its many intellectual and pastoral challenges that are likewise faced by ministers of the written Word today.

Key Words:

Preaching, homiletics, the problem of evil, theodicy, defense, suffering, gratuitous evils, free will, divine providence, sin, the image of God, eschatology.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis is offered in the loving memory of my grandfather, the late Rev. William E. Calvert. My grandfather was a bi-vocational Southern Baptist pastor for fifty years. He faithfully served a number of smaller churches in north Alabama while raising a large family and working full time to provide for their needs. While he never had formal theological training beyond the university, he deeply loved the works of Helmut Thielicke. In 1976 I entered the university as a freshman and my grandfather presented me with a copy of Thielicke's sermons on the Lord's Prayer, *Our Heavenly Father*. Upon reading this volume I was immediately drawn to Thielicke's profound insights into the Word of God, his simple style, and the obvious passion he had for people in need. Upon his death, my grandfather left me his collection of Thielicke's works, including his three-volume systematics and other theological monographs along with several of his sermon collections. Over the many years that I have read through Thielicke's works, I have come to understand my grandfather's love and appreciation for him. Literally every page of every volume that my grandfather left me displays the distinctive mark of his red pencil underlining. My grandfather treasured Thielicke both as a theologian and, especially, as minister of the Word of God. This project is simply an attempt to go a little further than my grandfather was able to go in studying this giant of a Protestant preacher named Thielicke. I pray that this thesis will honor appropriately my grandfather's memory and bring glory to the God whom he loved and served so faithfully and exaltation to the Savior whose Name he boldly proclaimed as humanity's only hope for redemption.

I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to Dr. Benjamin Rees of Greenwich School of Theology, UK, and Dr. F. W. De Wet of North-West University, Potchefstroom. This project could never have been completed without their kind and wise assistance. For four years they have patiently guided me through the production of this thesis and I am forever indebted to them. Peg Evans of GST has also been a source of continual encouragement and practical guidance. Her gracious assistance along the way has been most valuable and deeply appreciated. Thank you to each of you for all that you have done to make this study possible.

I also give God praise for my dear family. My wife Carol and our three grown children, Benjamin, Joseph, and Brooke, have provided me with endless encouragement and joy. My parents, Perry and Marilyn Calvert, have walked with me and prayed for me through every step in this process. I am eternally grateful for such a wonderful family.

Finally, special thanks are in order to Mrs. Emily Mettler. Emily, a retired English professor and member of Christ Presbyterian Church where I serve as pastor, has patiently assisted me with proofreading. Her corrections and suggestions for improvement have made this thesis much better than I could have ever achieved on my own.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 THE CENTRAL RESEARCH QUESTION	4
1.2 THE SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES	5
1.3 THE CENTRAL THEORETICAL ARGUMENT AND METHODOLOGY.....	6
1.4 CLASSIFICATION OF HEADINGS	6
1.5 SCHEMATIC REPRESENTATION OF THE CORRELATION BETWEEN POINTS 1.1, 1.2, & 1.3	8
2.0 A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO HELMUT THIELICKE AND HIS CAREER ...	10
2.1 LIFE AND EARLY EXPERIENCES	10
2.2 HISTORICAL CONTEXT FOR HIS LIFE AND MINISTRY	26
2.2.1 The political situation	27
2.2.2 The ecclesiological situation	30
2.2.2.1 The Protestant Church and Hitler's ascension to power	31
2.2.2.2 The rise of "German Christianity"	35
2.2.2.3 The birth of the "Confessing Church"	38
2.2.2.4 The Nazi persecution of Confessing Christians	41
2.2.3 The personal situation	44
2.2.3.1 Allied bombing	45
2.2.3.2 Germany in defeat	47
2.3 SIGNIFICANT THEOLOGICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL WRITINGS	49
2.4 SIGNIFICANT SERMONIC WRITINGS	55
2.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY	58
3.0 AN INTRODUCTION TO PREACHING AND THE PROBLEM OF EVIL AND SUFFERING	60
3.1 THE PROBLEM OF EVIL: THEOLOGICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	60
3.1.1 Theological considerations	62
3.1.1.1 Thomas Aquinas	71
3.1.1.2 Karl Barth	72
3.1.1.3 G. C. Berkouwer	74
3.1.1.4 Jürgen Moltmann	77
3.1.1.5 Stanley Hauerwas	79
3.1.2 Philosophical considerations.....	81
3.1.3 Christian responses to the PES	85

3.1.3.1 The free will defense	85
3.1.3.2 The open theology defense	86
3.1.3.3 The compatibilistic theology defense	89
3.1.3.4 The greater good defense	90
3.2 THE PROBLEM OF EVIL: PASTORAL AND HOMELITICAL CHALLENGES	95
3.2.1 Introduction: the context and necessity of preaching on the PES	95
3.2.2 The epistemological challenge: the perceived need to explain	99
3.2.3 The existential challenge: communicating the value of suffering	106
3.3 THE PROBLEM OF EVIL: THIELICKE'S UNIQUE MINISTRY CONTEXT.....	124
3.3.1 Contextual comments from <i>Between God and Satan</i>	124
3.3.2 Contextual comments from <i>Death and Life</i>	125
3.3.3 Contextual comments from <i>The Silence of God</i>	125
3.3.4 Contextual comments from <i>Our Heavenly Father</i>	126
3.3.5 Contextual comments from <i>Man in God's World</i>	127
3.3.6 Contextual comments from <i>Nihilism: Its Origin and Nature—With a Christian Answer</i>	128
3.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY	130
4.0 THIELICKE AS THEOLOGIAN: THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THIELICKE'S PREACHING ON THE PROBLEM OF EVIL AND SUFFERING	132
4.1 THIELICKE ON MAN AND CREATION	137
4.1.1 Man as a unique creature	139
4.1.2 Man as <i>imago Dei</i>	145
4.1.3 Summary	154
4.2 THIELICKE ON THE FALL OF MAN AND THE RUIN OF CREATION ...	154
4.2.1 The fall of man	155
4.2.1.1 Thielicke on divine providence and the fall	158
4.2.1.2 Thielicke on free will and the fall	162
4.2.1.3 Thielicke on the mystery associated with the fall	167
4.2.1.4 Thielicke on the definition of sin as it relates to the fall	170
4.2.2 The ruin of creation and the consequences of sin	175
4.2.2.1 Universal scope and cosmic effects	175
4.2.2.2 Estrangement from God, others, and self	177

4.2.2.3 Comprehensive suffering	178
4.2.2.4 Physical and spiritual death	181
4.2.3 Summary	186
4.3 THIELICKE ON THE REDEMPTION OF MAN AND THE RENEWAL OF CREATION	186
4.3.1 The redemption of sinners	187
4.3.1.1 The trustworthiness and power of God	187
4.3.1.2 Salvation in Christ as recovery of the <i>imago Dei</i> and eternal life	190
4.3.1.3 The possibility of postmortem redemption	194
4.3.2 The renewal of creation	196
4.3.2.1 Creation restored	196
4.3.2.2 The <i>parousia</i> and final judgment	198
4.3.3 Summary	201
4.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY	202
5.0 THIELICKE AS A MINISTER OF THE WRITTEN WORD: THE ROLE OF THE PREACHER AND THE SERMON WITH SPECIFIC APPLICATION TO THE PROBLEM OF EVIL AND SUFFERING	204
5.1 INTRODUCTION	204
5.1.1 An introductory orientation regarding the main characteristics of Thielicke's vision on the essence and praxis of preaching.....	205
5.1.1.1 Sermon type	205
5.1.1.2 Preaching as a confrontation and a call to decision	207
5.1.1.3 Sermon preparation and delivery	209
5.1.1.4 Pulpit style, physical description, and vocal qualities	211
5.1.1.5 Illustrations and rhetorical skills	211
5.1.2 Thielicke's particular appreciation of Spurgeon	212
5.1.3 Summary	213
5.2 THIELICKE'S STATED VIEWS ON PREACHING: DEFINITION, CRITICISMS AND CORRECTIVES AND THE LINK BETWEEN PREACHING AND THEOLOGY	214
5.2.1 Preaching as defined by Thielicke	221
5.2.1.1 The hearing of the Word	221
5.2.1.2 Preaching defined	222
5.2.1.3 The context of Christian preaching	223
5.2.1.4 The dangers of preaching	225

5.2.2 Thielicke's specific criticisms of preaching and his correctives	226
5.2.3 The vital link between preaching and theology	238
5.2.3.1 Theology follows proclamation	239
5.2.3.2 The necessity of humility and love	241
5.2.4 Summary	242
5.3 THIELICKE'S VIEW OF THE ROLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN PREACHING	243
5.3.1 The Spirit and the written Word	243
5.3.2 The Spirit, the preacher, and the audience	248
5.3.3 Summary	250
5.4 THIELICKE'S VIEW OF PREACHING IN LIGHT OF THE PES	251
5.4.1 Thielicke and the PES	251
5.4.1.1 The PES is a persistent theological problem for preachers	252
5.4.1.2 Many theological questions related to the PES are unanswerable	252
5.4.1.3 A Christocentric focus is essential to preaching on the PES	253
5.4.2 Thielicke and preaching on the PES: a selection of examples from his published sermons and some initial observations	253
5.4.2.1 A list of Thielicke's sermons on the PES	253
5.4.2.2 Some initial observations concerning Thielicke's sermons on the PES ...	258
5.4.3 Summary ...	260
5.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY	260
6.0 THIELICKE AS MODEL: AN ANALYSIS OF A SELECTION OF PUBLISHED SERMONS DEALING WITH THE PROBLEM OF EVIL AND SUFFERING	262
6.1 AN ANALYSIS OF FOURTEEN PUBLISHED SERMONS BY HELMUT THIELICKE THAT ILLUSTRATE HOW HE ADDRESSED THE PROBLEM OF EVIL AND SUFFERING	263
6.1.1 Sermons from the collection entitled <i>Our Heavenly Father: Sermons on the Lord's Prayer</i> (1960)	263
6.1.1.1 "Thy Kingdom Come"	263
6.1.1.2 "Thy Will Be Done, As It is in Heaven"	270
6.1.2 Sermons from the collection entitled <i>How the World Began</i> (1961a)	275
6.1.2.1 "Man, the Risk of God"	276
6.1.2.2 "How Evil Came Into the World"	280
6.1.3 Sermons from the collection entitled <i>Christ and the Meaning of Life</i> (1962a)	286

6.1.3.1 “Jesus Christ in the Front-line Trenches”	287
6.1.3.2 “Is Technology Diabolical?”	290
6.1.4 Sermons from the collection entitled <i>The Silence of God</i> (1962b)	294
6.1.4.1 “I Am Not Alone I With My Anxiety”	294
6.1.4.2 “The Silence of God”	299
6.1.5 Sermons from the collection entitled <i>I Believe: The Christian’s Creed</i> (1968)	304
6.1.5.1 “I Believe in God the Father”	304
6.1.5.2 “Descended Into Hell”	311
6.1.6 Sermons from the collection entitled <i>How To Believe Again</i> (1972)	316
6.1.6.1 “When Nothing Makes Sense”	316
6.1.6.2 “What is the ‘Death of God’ All About?”	322
6.1.7 Sermons from the collection entitled <i>Faith: The Great Adventure</i> (1985)	327
6.1.7.1 “How Does One Cope With Unresolved Questions?”	328
6.1.7.2 “Love Is Stronger Than Death”	332
6.2 INITIAL OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS	336
6.2.1 Initial observations and conclusions regarding the communicative dimension in Thielicke’s construction and delivery of the sermons	336
6.2.1.1 Text selection	336
6.2.1.2 Structure	337
6.2.1.3 Illustrations	338
6.2.1.4 Simplicity	339
6.2.1.5 Preparation	340
6.2.1.6 Audience connection	341
6.2.1.7 Convictions	343
6.2.1.8 Summary	344
6.2.2 Initial observations and conclusions regarding Thielicke’s approach to the PES in the sermons	344
6.2.2.1 Human sin	344
6.2.2.2 Christocentricism	346
6.2.2.3 God as Father	346
6.2.2.4 Theological mysteries	348
6.2.2.5 Faith	349
6.2.2.6 Eschatological focus	350
6.2.2.7 Summary	351

6.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR CONSTRUCTING SERMONS ON THE PROBLEM OF EVIL AND SUFFERING WITH AN EYE ON CONTEMPORARY PREACHERS	352
6.3.1 Significant implications for preaching on the PES	354
6.3.1.1 The preacher himself	355
6.3.1.2 Biblical authority and sufficiency	357
6.3.1.3 Confidence in the preached Word	359
6.3.1.4 Christian doctrine	361
6.3.1.5 The greatness and sovereignty of God the Father	362
6.3.1.6 Human guilt	364
6.3.1.7 Christological focus	366
6.3.1.8 Eschatology	367
6.3.1.9 Summary	368
6.3.2 A model for sermon construction on the PES	369
6.3.2.1 The minister and the sermon's preparation	370
6.3.2.2 The selection of the sermon's text	371
6.3.2.3 The sermon's structure and rhetorical elements	371
6.3.2.4 The sermon's exalted depiction of God	371
6.3.2.5 The sermon's emphasis upon human guilt	372
6.3.2.6 The sermon's Christological focus and appeal to personal faith	372
6.3.2.7 The sermon's doctrinal content	373
6.3.2.8 The sermon's eschatological trajectory	373
6.3.2.9 Summary	373
6.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY	374
7.0 CONCLUSION	375
7.1 REVIEW OF CONTENTS AND RESULTS	375
7.1.1 Review of Chapter One	375
7.1.2 Review of Chapter Two	376
7.1.3 Review of Chapter Three	376
7.1.4 Review of Chapter Four	376
7.1.5 Review of Chapter Five	377
7.1.6 Review of Chapter Six	377
7.1.7 Summary	377
7.2 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH	378
REFERENCE LIST	379

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Central to the task of proclaiming the Bible—the written Word of God—is the necessity of communicating the eternal message of the Scriptures in ways that will penetrate the hearts and stir the wills of the contemporary audience, confronting them where they are both spiritually and existentially. Any definition of the word “preaching” that does not take into account the need to apply the inscripturated Word in relevant ways to the life situation of the hearers is incomplete (Caemmerer, Sr., 1968:338; Johanson, 1951:356; Chapell, 1988:98). Simply and precisely defined, preaching is the explanation and application of God’s timeless words to people living in the present (Barth, 1963:15; Robinson, 1980:20).

One of the defining features of our earthly ‘moment’ is the haunting, globe-spanning presence of evil and the stark reality of human suffering. Since the fall of mankind in the Garden of Eden, the human race has endured the horrible consequences of its rebellion against God. It is into such a tragic environment, filled with death, disease, war, sickness, and endless tragedy that God has commanded the proclamation of His Word of grace, salvation, and victory in Jesus Christ. Without exception, every preacher of the Holy Scriptures, to one degree or another, must carry out this sacred task on the battlefield of human life, seeking to give appropriate care to those who live amidst the smoldering debris of humanity’s cosmic mutiny.

At once, the presence of tragedy and suffering affords the preacher of the Word with a divinely ordained responsibility not only to comfort and shepherd those under his charge but also to defend the Christian faith from what is perhaps its most formidable philosophical and theological challenge—the problem of evil and suffering (PES). Atheists and skeptics alike have doggedly assailed the Christian faith for its apparent inconsistency in its affirmation of the existence of God and its acknowledgement of the presence of evil in the world (Angeles, 1976:203-224; Martin, 1990; Draper, 1996; Ganssle: 1998; Rowe, 2006). Yet, the PES has also deeply troubled and perplexed those who believe the Scriptures and confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Sadly, the Christian church herself has frequently been divided over this very issue particularly as

witnessed in the recent debates between proponents of Classical Christian Theism and Open Theism (Köstenberger, 2002; Ware, 2002). In this way the PES is problematic both from an external and internal perspective in relation to the church and her witness and work in the world.

With all of this in view, it would appear that one ever-present need of the Christian church is for appropriate homiletical models of the kind of preaching that effectively sustains the church in times of tribulation and suffering and yet is of such theological and philosophical depth as to silence the mouths of the skeptics who assail her. It is the researcher's contention that just such a model may be found in the German theologian and preacher Helmut Thielicke, whose preaching, both in terms of its rich theological and biblical content as well as its rhetorical effectiveness, is exemplary and is perhaps on par with other more widely recognized Protestant preachers of the post-war period. While other pulpit ministers of that era such as Donald G. Barnhouse, Karl Barth, Andrew Blackwood, D. M. Lloyd-Jones, Peter Marshall, G. Campbell Morgan, and Harold J. Ockenga have indeed cast wide nets of homiletical influence, Helmut Thielicke also provides the Protestant Church with a powerful model of faithful and effective biblical preaching.

In terms of efficacy and impact in preaching there have been few men of the caliber and broad influence of Helmut Thielicke. From at least the late 1950s Thielicke has been consistently praised for his homiletical skill, theological depth, and philosophical insight. For example, Bromiley (Thielicke, 1984:xix), one of Thielicke's chief translators, has observed that Thielicke

has never been an ivory tower theologian. Indeed, he first became more widely known in the United States not for his academic work but for his sermons, in which, as an opponent of Hitlerism who was unavoidably implicated in the sufferings it caused, he spoke with such relevance and power to the generation of the Second World War and its aftermath.

Bromiley has also called him "One of the most powerful voices from the pulpit to reach us in the years after the Second War" (Thielicke, 1962b:v). Anderson (Thielicke, 1995: xv) noted that Thielicke appeared at a strategic time and "filled the void between revivalism and religious self-help. He aimed at the doubter, the marginal Christian. He then used a biblical text to explore some spiritual problem from a new perspective." Anderson (Thielicke, 1995:xx) also touched upon the secret to Thielicke's effectiveness in the pulpit that was evidenced by vast audiences both in Hamburg and Stuttgart:

From his pulpit in Stuttgart he addressed the whole spectrum of human fears and sorrows; his sermons quoted persons to whom he had ministered during the week, at gun emplacements, in hospitals, and in bombed-out homes. Audiences swelled into the thousands as people from all walks of life found that he understood their lives and their problems. This period of ministry set him apart from the academics of his time. It gave him the voice of authenticity that continued right through his preaching in the post-war years.

Others have offered the same kind of high praise for Thieliicke, particularly for his ability to proclaim the Word of God to people from all walks of life who had only their pain and sorrow in common. Doberstein (Thieliicke, 1979b:ix), another of Thieliicke's noted translators, has offered this analysis:

Helmut Thieliicke emerged from the air raid shelters of Germany as one of the most compelling voices of the resistance movement within the Christian church. He was able to address the judgment and mercy of God relevantly for both the perpetrators and the victims of Nazism and World War II. In an endless stream of sermons, speeches, essays, newspaper articles, and radio talks, this modern prophet deflated the proud, comforted the broken, inspired the hopeless, and challenged the bewildered and the skeptical in his own distinctive style.

Thieliicke's typical audience, sometimes as many as "three thousand persons gathered together," was composed of people from every age group, socio-economic strata, trade, and religious tradition (Thieliicke, 1963:8-9). The defining feature of Thieliicke's powerful pulpit ministry is to be found in his passionate concern to speak the language of his day and, as Bromiley concluded, his remarkable ability to proclaim and apply "the central message of the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection" to contemporary needs, especially to those who were suffering and struggling to keep their faith (Thieliicke, 1962b:vi).

There have been at least two comprehensive studies of Thieliicke's preaching and rhetorical abilities. Dirks (1968:18) analyzed Thieliicke's homiletical effectiveness from the perspective of what he termed "lay expectation factors," while Smith (1993) evaluated the distinctive Christological focus of his preaching. Additionally, Thieliicke's theology, ethics, and political philosophy, each ultimately providing the foundation for his preaching, have been critically evaluated in several noteworthy studies including those of Murphery (1964), Frear Jr. (1968), Lott (1968), Green (1969), Sohn (1973), Christian Jr. (1977), Turner III (1978), Davis (1987), Johnson (1987), and Rueger (2003). Less substantial studies of Thieliicke's preaching have been offered by Duke (1965), Lampton (1969), Cox (1975), Higginson (1976), and Klann (1980).

However, there appears to be a need for another kind of evaluation of Thieliicke and, more specifically, his widely recognized homiletical prowess. As far as can be determined there has yet to be a critical analysis of Thieliicke's sermonic treatment of the PES. As indicated above, studies of Thieliicke have typically focused upon his theology, ethics, and philosophy, and those addressing his preaching have centered upon his effectiveness and Christological focus. That no one has acknowledged Thieliicke's contribution to the PES is indeed surprising given that a large number of his more popular published sermons directly or indirectly address this subject and were originally delivered to audiences in the throes of the intense tribulations and incomprehensible atrocities of the Second World War. Providentially, most of these messages touching the PES have been translated into English and thereby made more widely available for reading and study (Thieliicke, 1958, 1959, 1960, 1961, 1962a, 1962b, 1963, 1969, 1972, 1979a).

The researcher would submit, therefore, that Thieliicke's sermonic treatment of the PES, now readily available to a broader readership, might offer significant help to Christian preachers in any place and situation. Furthermore, by analyzing the specific content, structure, rhetorical strategy, and dogmatic underpinnings of these sermons preachers may become better equipped to bring substantial comfort and assurance to their flocks and to answer the challenges to the veracity of the Christian faith in the face of evil and tragedy.

1.1 The central research question

The central question of this thesis, therefore, is: How did Helmut Thieliicke address the PES in his preaching, and what may be learned from his example that would be of benefit to all preachers?

In addition to the central research question, there are four additional questions that arise:

- i. What is the PES, and what are the unique homiletical challenges it presents to all preachers, and specifically in Thieliicke's historical ministry context?

- ii. What is the relationship between Thielicke's theology and his preaching on the PES in terms of presuppositions, theological themes, and the biblical meta-narrative, and how did this influence his preaching on the PES?
- iii. What was Thielicke's overall philosophy of preaching, particularly with reference to the PES?
- iv. How did Thielicke develop and preach his sermons on the PES in practical terms, and can an exemplary model for all preachers be constructed from the way in which he addressed the issue?

The aim of this thesis is to come to an understanding of how Helmut Thielicke treated the PES in his sermons and how, by means of his pulpit ministry, he so effectively brought comfort and assurance to his hearers and also defended the essential truth-claims of Christianity.

1.2 The specific objectives

The specific objectives of this investigation are as follows:

- i. To develop an understanding of the PES, especially the way it presents unique challenges to preachers in general, and how it uniquely challenged Thielicke in his historical ministry context.
- ii. To examine Thielicke's theological writings in order to interpret properly the significant theological themes and presuppositions that surface in his sermons on the PES.
- iii. To gain a general understanding of Thielicke's views on preaching, particularly in reference to the PES.
- iv. To understand how Thielicke formulated and delivered his sermons on the PES in practical terms and to suggest ways that he might serve as an exemplary model for all preachers.

1.3 The central theoretical argument and methodology

The central theoretical argument of this study is that the preaching of Helmut Thielicke provides an exemplary model of Christian homiletics, particularly in terms of his biblical sermons that addressed the PES.

In order to achieve the aim and objectives of this proposed inquiry the researcher shall

- Conduct a basic theological and philosophical investigation of the PES and examine significant Christian homiletical responses to the PES against the background of an initial investigation of Thielicke's unique historical ministry context.
- Perform an initial examination of Thielicke's published sermons on the PES in order to identify their key theological themes. These themes will then be interpreted in light of his theological writings.
- Examine Thielicke's writings on the subject of preaching in order to ascertain his views on the proclamation of the Scriptures.
- Conduct a thorough investigation of at least 35 of Thielicke's published sermons on the PES, giving attention to preparation, text, structure, theological themes, length, application, illustration, audience awareness, and other practical issues. This investigation is conducted with an eye on suggesting ways in which Thielicke's homiletical theories and praxis might serve as an exemplary model for contemporary preachers.

1.4 Classification of headings

1.0 Introduction

2.0 A Brief Introduction To Helmut Thielicke And His Career

- 2.1 Life and early experiences
- 2.2 Historical context for his life and ministry
- 2.3 Significant theological and philosophical writings
- 2.4 Significant sermonic writings
- 2.5 Summary

- 3.0 **Introduction To Preaching And The Problem Of Evil And Suffering**
 - 3.1 The problem of evil: theological and philosophical considerations
 - 3.2 The problem of evil: pastoral and homiletical challenges
 - 3.3 The problem of evil: Thieliicke's unique ministry context
 - 3.4 Summary

- 4.0 **Thieliicke As Theologian: Theological Foundations Of Thieliicke's Preaching On The Problem Of Evil And Suffering**
 - 4.1 Thieliicke on man and the creation
 - 4.2 Thieliicke on the fall of man and the ruin of creation
 - 4.3 Thieliicke on the redemption of man and the renewal of creation
 - 4.4 Summary

- 5.0 **Thieliicke As Minister Of The Written Word: The Role Of The Preacher And The Sermon With Specific Application To The Problem Of Evil And Suffering**
 - 5.1 Introduction
 - 5.2 Thieliicke's stated views on preaching: definition, criticisms and correctives, and the link between preaching and theology
 - 5.3 Thieliicke's view of the role of the Holy Spirit in preaching
 - 5.4 Thieliicke's view of preaching in light of the PES
 - 5.5 Summary

- 6.0 **Thieliicke As Model: An Analysis Of A Selection Of Published Sermons Dealing With The Problem Of Evil And Suffering**
 - 6.1 An analysis of fourteen published sermons by Helmut Thieliicke that illustrate how he addressed the problem of evil and suffering
 - 6.2 Initial observations and conclusions
 - 6.3 Implications for constructing sermons on the problem of evil and suffering with an eye on contemporary preachers
 - 6.4 Summary

- 7.0 **Conclusion**
- 8.0 **Reference List**

1. 5 Schematic representation of the correlation between points 1.1, 1.2, & 1.3

PROBLEM STATEMENT	AIM AND OBJECTIVES	METHODOLOGY
How did Helmut Thielicke address the PES in his sermons, and what may be learned from his example that would be of value and assistance to all preachers?	The aim of this thesis is to examine how Thielicke brought comfort and assurance to his audiences and also defended the essential truth-claims of Christianity in his sermons on the PES.	This homiletical investigation is being conducted from the perspective of a theologically conservative Reformed and Presbyterian tradition.
What is the PES, and what are the unique homiletical challenges it presents to all preachers, and specifically in Thielicke's historical ministry context?	To develop an understanding of the PES, especially the way it presents unique challenges to preachers in general, and how it uniquely challenged Thielicke in his historical ministry context.	This will be achieved by conducting a basic theological and philosophical investigation of the PES, by examining significant Christian responses to the PES, and by investigating Thielicke's unique historical ministry context.
What is the relationship between Thielicke's theology and his preaching on the PES in terms of presuppositions, theological themes, and the biblical meta-narrative, and how did this influence his preaching on the PES?	To examine Thielicke's theological writings in order to interpret properly the significant theological themes and presuppositions that surface in his sermons on the PES.	This will be achieved by conducting an examination of Thielicke's published theological works and by identifying the key doctrinal themes that would appear to be directly related to the PES.
What was Thielicke's overall philosophy of preaching, particularly with reference to the PES?	To gain a general understanding of Thielicke's views on preaching, particularly in reference to the PES.	This will be achieved by examining Thielicke's writings on the subject of preaching.

How did Thieliicke develop and preach his sermons on the PES in practical terms?

To understand how Thieliicke formulated and delivered his sermons on the PES in practical terms and to suggest ways that he might serve as an exemplary model for all preachers.

This will be achieved by conducting a thorough investigation of at least 35 of Thieliicke's published sermons on the PES, giving attention to text, structure, themes, length, application, illustration, audience awareness, and other practical issues in designing a model for contemporary preachers.

Note: For the sake of simplicity the researcher has sometimes employed masculine terms (e.g., man, his, him) in reference to humanity throughout this thesis. It should also be noted that this is consistent with Thieliicke's practice.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO HELMUT THIELICKE AND HIS CAREER

Before one can adequately grasp and appreciate the profound pulpit ministry of Dr. Helmut Thielicke, it is necessary to investigate briefly his early life, experiences, and colorful career as both a university professor and parish minister. Even a cursory examination of his upbringing and early years of life, marriage, and service to the university and the church will demonstrate that Thielicke's preaching was but a more eloquent reflection of his own persistent struggles with the reality of suffering and death. As a consequence, much of what he preached over five decades of sermons in one way or another addressed life's most daunting questions and perplexities. In this chapter and in Chapter Three, the researcher shall attempt to establish the critical connection between Thielicke's life experiences, his historical context, and his corpus of published sermons treating the PES.

2.1 Life and early experiences

Helmut Thielicke was born in Barmen, Germany, in December 1908. He was the son of a teacher who worked in a German pre-university school or *Gymnasium*. The city where he was born has been described as a "heavily industrial urban area" lying north of Bonn in a region known as the Wuppertal (Dirks, 1972:69). It was in this Reformed Parish of Barmen-Gemarke that Thielicke would grow up—the same city in which the Barmen Theological Declaration would be signed in 1934. Thielicke called his home parish "a light in the darkness during the Church's struggle with the Third Reich" (Thielicke, 1995:37). The theological atmosphere of the city of Barmen was a decided blend of both Calvinistic and Pietistic influences. Thielicke colorfully recalls that the local pulpit ministers in the city were judged by their "sputum" and the "crisp, throaty and fervent tone in which he confessed his faith. 'He spits out well' was the congregation's usual comment" (Thielicke, 1995:37). However, such enthusiasm for the merely external, stylistic components of the sermon and its delivery were not the least benign, particularly in light of the looming political threats on Germany's horizon. Thielicke would only realize much later that

style and form of language, atmospheric conditions, as well as the intimacy and communal spirit of the group were very often of greater influence than the contents of the Gospel itself. This may have been the reason why a considerable

number of religious people were taken in by National Socialism, for there were people among the Nazis who had spent their youth in this climate. They were thus able to imitate the style—with, of course, fraudulent intentions—with which these religious people were familiar (Thielicke, 1995:37).

Ultimately with the demise of the Weimar Republic and the birth of National Socialism, the Nazi leaders were able to promote successfully the agenda of the Führer by utilizing “the ecstatic style common among the Pietists and also to employ the phonetic device of speaking in that emotive tremolo so loved in Pietist circles” (Thielicke, 1995:37). The multitudes of German Christians who later became enthralled by such speeches and allowed themselves to be swallowed by the Nazi ideology “failed to notice the wolf lurking in the background” (Thielicke, 1995:37).

A love for both the art and science of teaching was deeply ingrained into Thielicke’s life early on. In addition to his father, his grandfather had served as the headmaster of the Leibusch School at Wuppertal-Langerfeld. Thielicke knew him as the “beloved patriarch” (Thielicke, 1995:1) and his grandfather’s eventual death from a liver ailment at the beginning of World War I would prove to be a very troubling and significant event in young Helmut’s life. Thielicke described the loss of this beloved man as his “very first experience with death” (Thielicke, 1995:1). When his grandfather died, Thielicke’s mother attempted to console him and soothe the pain of this first human loss by telling him “how happy he was now and that he was now among God’s angels and was quite certainly watching over me from heaven” (Thielicke, 1995:1). However, in an attempt to shield him from the stark reality of death, Thielicke’s mother had forbidden him from entering the room where his deceased grandfather lay because, as she put it, “his body was still sleeping there and he was not to be disturbed” (Thielicke, 1995:1). Undeterred, Thielicke entered the room accompanied by his three-year-old sister Elizabeth and saw the dead body of his grandfather and his yellowing skin. Thielicke admitted later that the “sight of my dead grandfather triggered a trauma for which I suffered for a long time” (Thielicke, 1995:2) and proved to be a very “dark encounter with death and finitude” (Thielicke, 1995:3). From that time on Thielicke was keenly sensitive to human suffering and the cold reality of the death he had personally witnessed at such an early age. His life would be marked by several life-altering traumas, each of which would ultimately prepare him for an extraordinary preaching ministry to the suffering people of Germany and beyond.

Another significant life-trauma experienced by Thielicke in his youth had to do with a small toy cart that his grandmother had once given to him. What would otherwise be a simple, incidental matter of contributing to a child's joy became an issue of life and death for Thielicke as he inexplicably developed an irrational fear that he might accidentally break the cart. He explains the underlying theological significance of this seemingly trivial event:

In the midst of my greatest happiness, the terror of life's transience had come over me. This was a child's first foreboding that the happy moment does not last and that the cold breath of its demise sends a shiver through us at the very instant when our happiness is concentrated into a *single* and immeasurable point. The sense of the immanent end of all things has always accompanied me (Thielicke, 1995:3).

Soon afterwards, at the age of six, Thielicke was persuaded by a taunting friend to throw a stone at a passing train full of German soldiers. Motivated by a desire to prove himself to be no coward, Thielicke reluctantly tossed the rock in the direction of the train. When it disappeared from view, his mischievous partner falsely claimed that the rock had struck and killed one of the soldiers on board. Thielicke was devastated at the thought that he had taken a human life and immediately "felt imprisoned in a dark hole of despair"—one that would often return to him with haunting power (Thielicke, 1995:4-5). What made such emotional traumas even more severe was the widely embraced maxim that "a German boy does not cry" (Thielicke, 1995:48). He was left to cope with his many questions and fears about life and death within the silent spaces of his own mind and feigned 'manhood.'

Later in 1917 a severe famine broke out in Germany, and Thielicke's familiar surroundings were forever altered. His boyhood school was converted into a kitchen where refugees were fed a watered-down soup that failed to satisfy the gnawing pains of their hunger. Food and other rations continued to be quite scarce for some time and this only further compounded the physical and emotional difficulty Thielicke faced when his father was eventually drafted into the army and served as "an artilleryman in the Carpathians" (Thielicke, 1995:11). He also witnessed the profound suffering of his mother who continually sacrificed her own well-being for the sake of the children. There was even one instance when she physically collapsed and lost consciousness from weakness because of the lack of food.

As the years passed, Thieliicke's family encountered an even greater challenge that exacerbated his childhood anxieties:

When the [First] war came to a catastrophic end, my parents' world collapsed. The Kaiser, whom they had idealized, had abdicated, and with the end of the monarchy the system of values that had been in force until then also disappeared. Military councils run by swaggering soldiers tore from the officers their epaulettes and medals, shots sounded in the town square, and a new type of person filled the streets with red flags. Although we children were not able to understand the changes that were taking place, our parents' anxiety spread to us and infected us with a feeling of dreadful foreboding (Thieliicke, 1995:12).

Later, after the rise of the Third Reich, Thieliicke would treasure the timely advice of his mother who "urged me to remain true to my convictions and to myself and not to give an inch to the Nazis" (Thieliicke, 1995:16). Throughout his life he did remain true to this commitment, though he sought to understand fully the intellectual and philosophical underpinnings of Nazism against the background of the rich Lutheran theology he had known since childhood. He described himself as

one of the few people who actually read Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. The style and content of this book had to a certain extent immunized me against the Nazism. A further reason for my antipathy was that, in the very first days of the Third Reich, I had to attend an 'ideology course' for budding lecturers, lasting several weeks. This gave me the opportunity of staring into the bottomless pit of Nazism, an experience which exorcized any susceptibility to this political gospel left in me ... At all events, I resolved—and remained true to this resolve—that I would under no circumstances swear an oath to the Fuehrer (Thieliicke, 1995:86).

It was certainly the wise counsel of his mother and his intellectual and spiritual integrity that prompted Thieliicke to vow never under any circumstances to join the Nazi party, regardless of what they might do to him. He also determined that he would never in spoken or written word say even one good thing about the Nazis, the regime, or the Nazi ideology that would soon race through the Protestant Church of Germany with both devastating force and horrible consequences (Thieliicke, 1995:90).

At twenty years of age Thieliicke began his university career at Griefswald and studied under Rudolf Hermann, a noted systematic theologian and one described by Thieliicke as "a penetrating thinker of almost masochistic intensity, the epitome of a seeker of the truth ... There was nobody in his day who had so plumbed the theological depths of the young Luther as he had" (Thieliicke, 1995:53). It was at Griefswald under Hermann's tutelage that his passion for theology was further enflamed. In addition to Hermann, Thieliicke was influenced by Julius Schniewind, the New Testament theologian at

Griefswald whom Thielicke greatly respected not only for his theological prowess but more so for his desire to be a friend and pastor to his students. Schniewind's comprehensive influence on Thielicke cannot be overstated. First, he was a gifted theologian and effective Bible interpreter who could bring the action and truths of the Gospel accounts of Christ's life into the present moment with particular clarity and force:

Schniewind knew how to interpret the Gospels and, in particular, to present the person and words of Jesus in a way that brought their truth alarmingly close to us—even when we engaged in complex philological work. In our eyes he seemed like an 'original Christian' in the literal sense of the word. It was as if he had been present at the events described in the New Testament and could speak as an eyewitness. In his lectures there were sometimes moments of such prophetic power that they took our breath away. Nevertheless, his lectures were always rational and factual, and never indulged in wild religious ecstasy (Thielicke, 1995:55-56).

But Schniewind was also an especially powerful orator and teacher. He possessed unique rhetorical skills and a certain pulpit-presence that would deeply impact Thielicke's own development as a preacher and teacher. Thielicke claimed that the words flowing from his mouth

flashed like lightning through the fog of false piety ... His mere presence was enough to convey to us how spurious much of our conventional Christian vocabulary was and how much was simply the regurgitation of secondhand platitudes. He trained us to distinguish the true from the false. He was for me *the* great religious teacher. He also remained true to himself in the Third Reich and was on several occasions transferred for disciplinary reasons (Thielicke, 1995:56).

There was an especially defining moment in Thielicke's life when in 1941 he spent the day with professor Schniewind in Halle. It was the events of that day that gave Helmut "great support in the difficult years that lay ahead" (Thielicke, 1995:58). The whole day that Thielicke spent with him witnessed the arrival of numerous people to Schniewind's house, each of whom gave heart-wrenching reports on the atrocities of the war. These testimonials, which continued throughout the whole day, came from ordinary students and many clergy wives as well. Upon learning of a particularly brutal case, Schniewind uttered a single sentence that would change Thielicke's outlook on the war and the struggle between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of evil: "The Lord will scatter them in a single moment" (Thielicke, 1995:58). Thielicke never forgot that statement or that unique "prophetic moment" which enabled him to "follow the story of Hitler's

terror with the calm certainty that his tyranny would one day come to an end. A higher power was holding the reins and would continue to guide us” (Thielicke, 1995:58).

Perhaps the greatest test of Thielicke’s faith came in the form of a physical disability that would plague him his entire life. In 1929, despite his doctor’s advice to the contrary, Thielicke had an operation to correct a problem with his thyroid gland. The massive swelling he constantly endured made breathing difficult and hindered his ability to concentrate on his university studies. However, the operation to remove the thyroid gland, which he had hoped would provide a simple solution to these problems, proved to be disastrous. During the surgery Thielicke suffered a pulmonary embolism and in order to save his life the surgeon was forced to remove one of his ribs. Following the surgery, infection quickly set in, and from that moment forward Thielicke would endure the ill effects of the postoperative tetany. He recalled that he would frequently “fall into terrible and painful tetanic paralysis, which spread to the respiratory center and each time brought me to the point of death. These attacks were preceded by a feeling of animal anxiety” (Thielicke, 1995:60). During his four years as an undergraduate student he went from hospital to hospital seeking relief from the ill effects of the infection, from Marburg, Erlangen, and then to Bonn. The various treatments for Thielicke’s illness all failed, including calcium injections, the replacement of the epithelial cells, the implantation of cadaver glands, and even sheep glands. Because of this Thielicke became somewhat of a scientific oddity and gained a “deplorable notoriety in the medical world” (Dirks, 1972:74). In a cruel twist he became known as “Mutton Thielicke” (Thielicke, 1995:60). Later, Thielicke’s doctors attempted to implant the cells of human fetuses, and for six weeks he suffered the embarrassment of being the lone male patient in a gynecological clinic where he “waited for the sad moment when a fetus could be obtained” (Thielicke, 1995:60).

Eventually Thielicke was seen by Dr. Hans Eppinger in the Cologne Hospital who offered hope of a successful treatment for his condition—one that would necessitate the use of a very expensive hormone. Soon, however, Eppinger became unsympathetic and uninterested in helping him, and the hormone therapy proved to be completely ineffective. At that point Thielicke traveled to Bonn and was given an experimental drug designated as “AT9” (Thielicke, 1995:65). In sheer desperation he drank the whole bottle at once and waited for the reaction:

I wanted to force a decision: either this maximum dose of the medicine would help me or the ‘poison’ would kill me. That evening I bid farewell to my life. I sat there gazing constantly at the crucifix opposite my bed ... When I awoke the next morning, I was at first astonished at the mere fact of being alive and felt happy in a way I cannot explain. I had the feeling I had been saved and could feel a sense of euphoria running like an electric current through my limbs. This resurrection took place on Good Friday, 1933. I have always regarded my recovery as a miracle (Thielicke, 1995:65).

Thielicke would have to take this experimental medicine for the rest of his life. After this trying ordeal and finally getting a measure of relief from his suffering he confessed, “I now knew what faith meant and everything that had previously fascinated me about theology was swept away by completely new impulses” (Thielicke, 1995:66). Dirks (1972:76) notes that through the years of torment and suffering Thielicke “came to a new understanding of the meaning of faith” and found, even in this time of great spiritual “darkness” and anxiety, the strength necessary to complete his university education at a number of noteworthy German universities, including Greifswald, Marburg, Erlangen, and Bonn.

During his recovery in Bonn, Thielicke spent two semesters occasionally attending the lectures of Karl Barth. It was Barth who had initially provided the young Helmut with the motivation to become a theologian in the first place. Following Thielicke’s graduation from the Gymnasium, he had expressed his boyhood interest in becoming a theologian. However, he in no way desired to be a simple parish pastor. About that same time, Thielicke attended a church conference at which Barth was one of the speakers. Dirks (1972:72) describes the event as “a sparking disputation with certain aggressive pietists.” He continues:

Thielicke was much impressed by the smoke-blowing theologian who in scintillating argument interspersed with good-natured humor and irony swept away the oppressive steam of the pious self-righteous flesh. As a result young Thielicke’s heart was completely won over to theology (Dirks: 1972:72).

From the very outset Thielicke had a somewhat strained, though mutually respectful, relationship with the great Karl Barth. This was due in large part to Barth’s theological presuppositions, which in the opinion of Thielicke, would render the task of biblical preaching thoroughly irrelevant and disconnected from real life. In his autobiography, Thielicke explains his concerns about Barth:

I opposed his thought because I believed him to be living in a theological ivory tower. Barth did not concern himself with the concrete—either inward or outward—situation of the human being, and yet it is precisely to such a situation

that the Christian message is addressed. Any consideration by a preacher of what degree of receptivity he might presuppose on the part of his congregation, what questions, hopes and fears they bring into church with them, which of their feelings and thoughts he should 'pick up on'—all reflections of this kind he regarded as highly suspect. He believed that it was the preacher's duty to refrain from all attempts at making the Christian message relevant to the modern age. This was because, in his opinion, it was *the Word* alone and nothing else that created an audience ... From such a standpoint, the mere attempt to search for 'common ground' with the audience could only mean that one no longer believes the Word of God possesses a power *of its own* (Thielicke, 1995:66).

Since Thielicke interpreted Barth to be rejecting the "common ground" necessary for preaching the Word, there could be no logical connection between theology and ethics or one's theology and one's politics for that matter. Thielicke saw Barth as theologically misguided and ethically unmoored since, in his scheme, there was no appropriate theological foundation for ethical norms. Thielicke realized that this flaw only "increased the vacuum that existed in respect to the question of Christianity's relation to the world" (Thielicke, 1995:67). Thielicke also anticipated that, at worst, the "demented philosophy of National Socialism" would quickly "fill this vacuum" with virtually no resistance from the church (Thielicke, 1995:67). Since Barth was viewed as "the intellectual leader of the Church's resistance and *de facto* the chief theologian of the Confessing Church shortly after Hitler came to power," he must share some of the blame for the weakening of the church's resolve against the Nazi ideology. As Thielicke put it, Barth's stance "was to become a severe handicap to the Confessing Church that in essence it spoke merely *pro domo*—that is, on behalf of the continued existence of the Church and its creed" (Thielicke, 1995:67). As Thielicke's development as a theologian and preacher would prove, this very point of dispute with Barth led to his dogged determination to maintain the essential connection between theology and life—between the pastor's work as a minister to his people, particularly to those who are suffering, and his service as a preacher of the Holy Scriptures.

In 1931 Thielicke completed his first doctoral dissertation for the Ph.D. as an assistant professor at Erlangen (Thielicke, 1959:8). His second dissertation for the Th.D. was completed at Erlangen under the supervision of Paul Althaus in 1934 (Thielicke, 1995:77-80). Thielicke's extensive doctoral studies reveal that he was desperate to understand how the Scriptures, and particularly the gospel, are connected to everyday, common life, including issues related to government, culture, and one's own personal existence. In contrast to Barth who, according to Thielicke, had a "magical

understanding of the Word” which evacuated the gospel of its “concreteness and brought back the old heresy of docetism in a new and extreme form,” Thielicke saw that unless the Word of God can be applied to the complex, often painful, and practical realities of human life it is of little value at all (Thielicke, 1995:69). In fact, he would confess that everything he attempted in terms of his theological endeavors was nothing but “a superstructure placed upon the experiences and sufferings of my life” (Thielicke, 1995:85), and that “the relationship between life and thought was to reveal itself more immediately and openly” in his preaching than in his “systematic thought” (Thielicke, 1995:85). In the course of his studies Thielicke came to the firm conclusion that “the human being does not find himself when he searches for himself. He only gains and actualizes himself when he loses himself in God” (Thielicke, 1995:78). As Thielicke would repeatedly emphasize later in his preaching and writing, this God in whom we are to lose ourselves is the one who has first revealed Himself to us in both Scripture and in actual human history as “our Father.”

By October of 1936 Thielicke had risen through the academic ranks and was installed as a professor of theology at the University of Heidelberg. He taught there until the Nazi Party summarily dismissed him from the faculty in 1940. The reason for his expulsion had to do with a forthright speech that Thielicke had given at Heidelberg in 1939 in response to what he saw as the disturbing influence of National Socialism on the university. In his lecture, Thielicke “fiercely attacked” the Nazi ideology and claimed that the real Germany had been “usurped by the contorted countenance of our present fatherland. Nazi Germany, I declared, was a mere caricature” (Thielicke, 1995:96). He also boldly attacked the Nazis for “idealizing the ‘orders of creation,’ including the idea of race (*Volk*),” which Thielicke felt had given an excuse to “‘German Christians’ for supporting Hitler” (Davis, 1987:7).

The Nazis would frequently harass and interrogate Thielicke throughout the twelve tragic years of the Third Reich. His every move seemed to be traced—a fact made more disturbing in light of his marriage to Marie-Luise Herrmann in October of 1937 and the eventual birth of their four children. Thielicke tells of how they returned from their honeymoon only to discover members of the Gestapo who had been searching through their apartment. Such intrusions into their lives brought great distress upon them, so much so that Thielicke followed the advice of a certain Major Klein to enter the army voluntarily simply to get away from the Gestapo’s constantly prying eyes. The Major

had read some of Thielicke's books and was very interested in further discussions with the young theologian. Out of a genuine fondness and respect for Thielicke, Klein made arrangements to surreptitiously alter his medical records so that he would no longer be considered physically unfit for military duty. Thielicke saw this as an instance when "God's gracious hand once again reached into my life" (Thielicke, 1995:121). He was soon assigned to "a special division of the aircraft recognition corps at Wiesbaden" and was eventually sent to the city of Evreux, "a town between Paris and Le Havre that had been almost completely destroyed by German aircraft" (Thielicke, 1995:121). The nine months that he spent in the Army gave him some measure of relief from the Gestapo and also allowed him to interact more frequently with "ordinary people" whose presence prompted him to "forget the desolateness of my life as a civilian" (Thielicke, 1995:121). Thielicke's ultimate dismissal from service in the army came about by a bit of deception on his part. By means of a series of clever twists, he was able to convince his military superiors that he had contracted a venereal disease along with several other unfortunate soldiers in his barracks. This allowed him to return immediately home to civilian life and to his much beloved wife.

By 1941 Thielicke had established a very special relationship with Bishop Theophilus Wurm, the Swabian Primate and leader of the Confessing Church. The Bishop appointed Thielicke to a parish church in Ravensburg. He served there for two years and during that time experienced life as a pastor and preacher for the first time. His ministerial duties included the preparation and delivery of weekly sermons, door-to-door visitation in church members' homes, and frequent teaching, a large measure of which was to children (Thielicke, 1995:126, 134). Thielicke felt especially passionate about the Christian education of the young, particularly because of the fact that the Nazis had outlawed all religious education in the schools. More and more he began to anticipate the disastrous implications of the Nazi ban on religious education for the future:

Very soon the up-and-coming generation was ignorant of the most simple knowledge of the Bible and of the tenets of the Christian faith in general. I thus became increasingly convinced that there was the need for the development of a sort of *dogmatics for adults*, lessons aimed at combining information and interpretation. Above all, however, these lessons had to bring faith into relation with people's experience of life and the problems life poses (Thielicke, 1995:149).

It was also during his tenure at Ravensburg that Thielicke experienced increasingly serious and frequent clashes with the Nazi party. He suffered repeated interrogations, some lasting up to three hours, unannounced house searches, and his personal mail was intercepted and read by the Gestapo. He was also forbidden by the Party to travel freely or to accept out of town invitations to speak and was essentially confined to the parish in Ravensburg.

Following his brief ministry in Ravensburg, Bishop Wurm transferred Thielicke to the city of Stuttgart in 1942 where his influence and notoriety as a theologian and preacher would only grow. Operating from the pulpit of St. Mark's cathedral, Thielicke would regularly lecture to overflowing crowds of three thousand or more during the Thursday night meetings. These lectures were given in a "devotional" setting and had the feel of a worship service beginning and ending with the singing of hymns and concluding with "Luther's evening blessing, from which—particularly during the time of the air raids—there proceeded an inexhaustible power" (Thielicke, 1995:152). The meetings were frequently interrupted by the sounding of the air raid sirens at which time Thielicke would simply utter the word "Peace" to the audience which had "a calming effect, enabling the church to be cleared quietly and calmly" (Thielicke, 1995:152). As the members of the audience filed out of the cathedral and went to the shelters, Thielicke remained standing in the pulpit as the organist played one of the hymns that had been used in the service.

The wide appeal of Thielicke's preaching and teaching is evidenced by the demographic make-up of his audience in Stuttgart. The large crowds consisted of people from virtually every segment of German society, including army personnel, businessmen, farmers, university professors, and even small children. Members of the Hitler Youth were also present for his lectures, dressed in civilian clothing, but nonetheless drawn to Thielicke's practical biblical messages that powerfully connected to the spiritual needs of the people and addressed their basic questions and fears about life, God, and eternity. Thielicke's weekly messages were influenced to some degree by the massive amount of mail he received from those who had heard him speak. As he read each letter he discovered the problems and questions the people of Stuttgart were facing and this brought down upon him a great burden of responsibility. He later wrote that by reading the personal letters of his audience, "I became aware of their great longing for security and how much this encounter with the Gospel, which for many was

their first, meant to them” (Thielicke, 1995:152). Following the services his lectures were recorded by as many as two hundred stenographers who met with him in the cathedral after the crowds had been dismissed. Thielicke would dictate an abridged form of his lecture and the many copies produced by hand would be sent through the mail to people all over Germany, including soldiers on the front lines. These copies were then “passed on to other people, who then duplicated them again” (Thielicke, 1995:153). Thielicke also received and accepted many invitations to speak in other settings while in Stuttgart. Clergy meetings were held all over the region and his popularity as a preacher and church leader grew even more. However, this burst of popularity attracted the attention of the Nazi officials who began to send representatives to his lectures, or “spies” as Thielicke called them, “who every evening took notes of the lectures for the Gestapo” (Thielicke, 1995:154). Over time the political pressure exerted against him by the Nazis dramatically increased, even as the air raids against Germany became more frequent. Thielicke describes the almost comical attempt by the Nazis to dissuade people from attending his sermons:

It was also no longer permitted to advertise my cathedral lectures in the newspaper. At first, the Gestapo forbade every mention of the lectures, even in church notices. Later the church assembly was at least able to gain the concession of being allowed to hint at the lectures. The permitted notice, which was printed in very small letters, ran as follows: ‘T. 8 P.M.’ and as the air raids increased, ‘5 or 6 P.M.’ Despite the inadequate advertising, people continued to come in the thousands, a sign of the highly sensitive response of readers in those days” (Thielicke, 1995:162-163).

This atmosphere of constant oppression and danger had a powerful effect not only upon Thielicke’s audience but also upon Thielicke himself. He admitted that the increasingly difficult situation he faced while in Stuttgart soon became much too severe and emotionally painful to cope with. He spoke of this time in his life as one that brought upon him “an enormous increase in intensity of life,” one filled with profound shock, and the season of life in which all the Christian clichés seemed to evaporate into thin air (Thielicke, 1995:162, 170). This sense of foreboding and emotional weight only increased as tragic news soon came to Thielicke that his parent’s home in Barmen had been completely destroyed by Allied bombs. Following the loss of their home, his parents eventually made their way to Stuttgart where they found Thielicke and his wife. Carrying nothing but a very small suitcase that contained all of their remaining earthly possessions, they arrived in a state of shock, visibly devastated by the death and destruction they had witnessed. And yet, when they were able to attend the Thursday evening lectures in the cathedral with thousands of other suffering people their

“happiness began to return” and “the powerful singing there moved and comforted them” (Thielicke, 1995:161).

Eventually the city of Stuttgart, reeling and mortally wounded from frequent air raids, would be completely destroyed by Allied bombs. This happened on July 26, 1944 and was an especially horrific experience for Thielicke and his wife. The couple just happened to be away from the city on a holiday at Lake Constance when news of the city’s destruction came to them. They immediately returned to Stuttgart only to find it fully engulfed in flames that seemed to reach up to the clouds. The air was so filled with smoke that it was necessary to place handkerchiefs over their faces in order to breathe. When they arrived at the street where their small home was located, only a tiny section of one corner wall remained intact. Thielicke describes the days immediately after this tragic loss:

One of the following days was Sunday. There were no longer any church bells which could ring out and no church in which a congregation could gather. Only the little church at Doggenburg hill was ... still useable to some extent. There a frightened congregation still numbering some thirty people met. On that Sunday I heard the most powerful sermon I have ever experienced. It was given by Prelate Issler, a prince among Christian preachers. Some of the sentences still resound in my ears as if I had only just heard them (Thielicke, 1995:180.)

In the years following the destruction of Stuttgart, Thielicke saw his academic career blossom. From 1945 to 1954 he held the chair of Systematic Theology at the University of Tübingen, and from 1951 to 1952 he served as the rector of the University. During that period Thielicke engaged in various writing projects, personal correspondence, and he produced major works in dogmatics, philosophy, and ethics. In 1954, he accepted an invitation to come to the University of Hamburg as a member of the newly created Faculty of Theology. In 1960 he was promoted to the position of University rector. While in Hamburg, Thielicke regularly preached at St. Michaelis Church (St. Michael’s), typically twice per month on Saturday evenings and Sunday mornings. It was while serving at St. Michael’s that he gained wide popularity as a preacher not only because of his exceptional rhetorical skills but also because of his remarkable ability to connect with the personal struggles of his audience. Smith (1993: 45) has observed that Thielicke owed this unique ability to the fact that “he experienced the same crises that his people experienced and addressed those in his sermons. When the people heard his sermons, they undoubtedly felt that Thielicke was thinking through their problems with them.” At these services, attended by crowds numbering in the

thousands, offerings were taken in support of “various projects initiated by Thielicke, such as for the sending of books to the East Zone of Germany” (Dirks, 1972:84). Dirks (1972:84) estimates that by the end of 1966 Thielicke had preached at St. Michael’s at least one hundred times.

In the post-war years Thielicke was able to travel extensively around the world. In 1956 he made his first visit to America at the invitation of Chicago Theological Seminary, along with Harvard, Princeton, and Drew universities. He returned to the United States in 1962 and taught as a guest lecturer for five months at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago (Smith, 1993:67). There he presented a series of thirty lectures on anthropology and sexuality. Later he produced a book based upon his journeys to the United States in which he detailed his many conversations with American Christians from diverse denominational backgrounds.

By far, one of the most painful events in the life of Helmut Thielicke transpired during his tenure at the University of Hamburg. In November of 1967 there was a significant student revolt that erupted on the campus that initiated what Thielicke himself called, “one of the saddest phases in my life” and a “depressing phenomenon” that “not only darkened the following years but also shook the structures of the German university to the foundation” (Thielicke, 1995:377). The revolt began at a ceremonial change of rectors held by the University on November 9. Thielicke (1995:378) recalls that the incoming rector’s address to the students and faculty was “constantly interrupted by yelling and shouting” and that the students engaged in disrespectful and disruptive behavior including smoking, public displays of affection and releasing balloons into the air. This protest by leftist students against the University only escalated as the days went by. The students overran faculty offices, and the walls of the University were marked with red paint and political slogans such as “Smash the state, power to the Soviets.” Many of the University’s professors were “terrorized by mass disruptions and organized protest yelling” (Thielicke, 1995:378). Thielicke responded to this crisis by circulating a leaflet among the students in defense of one particular professor who had come under an especially harsh attack. In this lengthy response to the revolt, Thielicke roundly criticized the student protestors and communicated his utter amazement at such vulgar and antiauthoritarian behavior. He concluded the leaflet with the statement that following the events of November 9 he had “lost my faith in human beings” (Thielicke, 1995:382). By then, the students realized that he was the one professor who would

challenge both their ideology and their behavior. Not content to simply protest against Thieliicke on the University campus, the protestors determined to disrupt the preaching services at the St. Michael's Church where he spoke to large, adoring crowds. By January 1968 the plan to make the church a target for their protests was fully engaged and well publicized. January 13 was chosen by the student protestors as the date they would infiltrate the audience at St. Michael's and force Thieliicke to take up discussions with them. Thieliicke writes:

I slept very badly during the nights leading up to January 13 because I was constantly going through every conceivable situation in my mind and considering how I should react. I was confident that I was serving as a witness to the Gospel, but I could not rid myself of the worry that my overtiredness might cause me to react the wrong way (Thieliicke, 1995:386).

When the Sunday evening service started on January 13, 1968, Thieliicke could barely make his way into the church because of the gauntlet of protestors that stood in his way. The church was completely full and people were even standing in the aisles. Thieliicke notes that there was constant movement in the audience and a distinct atmosphere of hostility and agitation present. Yet, all was relatively calm until Thieliicke entered the pulpit:

A particularly active student ring leader, Peter Schütt, got up and vociferously demanded an immediate discussion. This was accompanied by rapturous applause and chaotic shouts from his clique, while multiple "boos" and "nos" burst forth from the rows of the congregation. At the same time the air was pierced by shrill heckling (Thieliicke, 1995:386).

As the hostility in the church increased, Thieliicke feared that physical violence might soon erupt and result in nothing short of a catastrophe, much like the great Charles Spurgeon had experienced in England with the deaths of seven worshippers in a stampede (Thieliicke, 1995:384-385). Thieliicke had planned ahead for such a situation and had chosen a large selection of hymns to be sung in the event of trouble. At one especially frightening moment, Thieliicke had the congregation stand to sing, "Great God, we praise you." Upon his order, the worshippers stood "and the powerful singing of thousands of people present, combined with the sounds of the organ, whose organist pulled out all the stops, completely drowned the shouting" (Thieliicke, 1995:387).

Though seemingly triumphant at the moment, the aftermath of the student revolt was most serious in personal terms for Thieliicke. He endured endless nights of sleeplessness and total exhaustion. His "old tetany illness" was also reactivated and hospitalization

was again necessary in order to treat it (Thielicke, 1995:389). Along with the physical distress, Thielicke was also temporarily taken out of the St. Michael's pulpit by the Hamburg synod. He was replaced by the Bishop of Hamburg whose presence, it was assumed, would not evoke such protests. Thielicke saw this move as a complete capitulation to the protestors and a "rather spineless" attempt at appeasement (Thielicke, 1995:389). At that moment he felt most abandoned and utterly betrayed by the very church he had served so faithfully. As a result he writes that he was "suddenly struck down by an attack of physical weakness" (Thielicke, 1995:389). Soon, however, Thielicke's deep personal agony over the terrible events that had transpired at the University gave way to a great sense of peace. First, he remembered the words of a friend who offered great encouragement at the very height of the controversy: "You will be attacked where you are your strongest, namely in the proclamation of the Gospel, and not at some peripheral point. For this reason you'll be able to stand firm" (Thielicke, 1995:390). Then he reflected upon one of the lines of Bonhoeffer's soothing hymn: "*Wonderfully safeguarded by good powers, we await with confidence whatever may come*" (Thielicke, 1995:390-391). These timely words infused him with courage and convinced him that his cause was just and that his stance was the only righteous option available. He writes that later there were many people who had great respect and admiration for him for not giving in, whereas his colleagues had "courted the favor of the 'leftists'" (Thielicke, 1995:391).

In the years following the student revolt, Thielicke sought further personal solace through writing. In 1969 he produced a book entitled *The Student Rebellion's Cultural Criticism* and then completed the first and second volumes of his systematic theology, *The Evangelical Faith*. Thielicke eventually retired from the University of Hamburg in 1974 and spent his remaining years traveling throughout the world and writing of his adventures in other places and cultures. He also worked diligently to establish a Christian education program that later became known as *Project Group Faith Information* which published and distributed Christian educational literature.

Helmut Thielicke died in a hospital in Hamburg, West Germany, on March 5, 1986, at the age of 77. In an obituary R. Lundin described him as a courageous preacher who "spoke of the urgent issues of the day by drawing upon faith in the risen Christ and the riches of the Christian past" (1986:42). He further observed that the sermons Thielicke faithfully preached always demonstrated "a clear commitment to the historic doctrines

of the faith and a concern to communicate the truth of those doctrines in terms that have relevance and power for a contemporary audience” (1986:42). K. Vaux, a doctoral student at Hamburg in 1968, spoke of him as “the preacher’s theologian of our generation” and recognized that the real “genius of his work” derived from “his immersion in the hopes and fears, doubts, and beliefs—the daily lives—of people” (1995:1189). Perhaps the simplest and most fitting tribute to Thielicke’s life and ministry was issued by G. MacDonald: “If Bonhoeffer’s calling was to warn the German people of the consequences of Hitler’s political philosophy, Helmut Thielicke’s calling was to sustain people through the war and then to help them rebuild their lives spiritually and morally” (2002:63). While there could be a host of other appropriate descriptions and tributes offered in Thielicke’s memory, it seems sufficient to say that he was first and foremost a compassionate pastor and one exemplary man whose prime calling was to proclaim fearlessly the written Word of God in ways that touched real needs and addressed the many complicated issues of life in a sin-scarred world.

2.2 Historical context for his life and ministry

If one is to analyze properly the sermons of Helmut Thielicke, the historical context in which they were prepared and delivered must be carefully examined. This is most certainly true for the large number of sermons that directly addressed the PES. In this section the researcher shall attempt to provide a brief historical overview of Thielicke’s ministry context which, as will be demonstrated later, directly and profoundly shaped not only the distinctly pastoral trajectory of his ministry but, more importantly, the very content, design, and passionate delivery of his sermons.

The twelve years of the Third Reich, from 1933 to 1945, serve as the unique historical setting for Thielicke’s preaching, teaching, and writing ministry. It was during this tragic period in world history, and the painful years of recovery immediately afterward, that he produced an amazing body of sermons in addition to numerous books, letters, tracts, and theological texts. This exceptional setting may be examined from three perspectives: *politically* in terms of the brutal politics and policies of the Third Reich, *ecclesiologically* in terms of the complex relationship between the Nazi Party and the Protestant Church, and *personally* in terms of the human toll extracted by the war, particularly the bombing of German cities by the Allies.

2.2.1 The political situation

In terms of the political situation of the first half of the twentieth century, especially the years from 1933 to 1945, the consistent refrain uttered by historians of that era is well-expressed by Forstman (1992:12):

Those were dark times in what will surely be remembered as a dark century in which there has been more human oppression, more violation of basic human rights, more killing of people by leaders or hackneys or would-be regimes, more terror, more deprivation, than in any other set of similarly linked years.

The twelve horrid years of the Third Reich, a period succinctly described as “Germany under the shadow of Hitler,” may be justly classified as “a particularly dark and demonic time in a century that will surely be remembered as one of the darkest and most demonic” (Forstman, 1992:15). If such a description seems to be overstated and unnecessarily beset with religious or even apocalyptic language, one only has to consider the world-encompassing magnitude and utter depravity of the events that ultimately transpired. In an essay entitled “The Nazi Capture of Power,” Bessel (2004:169) speaks with similar force in summarizing the period:

The capture of state power by Adolf Hitler and the [N]azi movement in 1933 marks one of the great, and dreadful, turning-points in modern history. The installation of the [N]azi leader in the Reich Chancellery on 30 January 1933 opened the door to a brutal racist dictatorship, to a world war which claimed the lives of perhaps 50 million people, to campaigns of mass murder which were unprecedented even in the terrible twentieth century ... The [N]azi capture of power was the step which made the most appalling trail of destruction possible—destruction of bricks and mortar, destruction of human life, destruction of morality and of civilized behavior. It opened the door to barbarism.

The philosophical and political landscape, which would eventually provide the fertile soil for the appearance and growth of the Third Reich, was cultivated in the declining years of the Weimar Republic. As the First World War came to its conclusion, a great cloud of defeat and disaffection hovered over the Republic like a massive blanket of thick fog. The years between 1914 and 1919 had profoundly changed not only the geopolitical makeup of Germany but also the spiritual and emotional life of the once proud German people. Common workers struggled to “navigate a path through the war economy” and women were “compelled to provide an income for households deprived of a male breadwinner” while even the children “whose early years were scarred by the privations of wartime” suffered immensely (Bessel, 2004:173). The Weimar Republic was never able to escape the terrible reality of war or the deep scars indelibly etched

upon both the soil and the soul of the nation. The Republic “remained a society in which the social, cultural and political points of reference were the war, a war which had acted as a midwife for the Republic and haunted its entire existence” (Bessel, 2004:172). With two million dead and over four million wounded, the human toll upon the Republic was beyond all comprehension. In this climate of horror, pain, and loss there arose a certain political militancy among the German population. National politics took on a “shrill and strident character” which set the course for the rise of another power within the shattered Republic that would seek to extract vengeance upon those responsible for the “dire strait of affairs in Weimar Germany” (Bessel, 2004:172, 174). O. Bartov (1991:51) agrees when he likewise concludes that Germany’s previous “authoritarian traditions provided the background not only for military discipline but also for widespread antidemocratic and dictatorial tendencies.”

Into this vacuum of pride, power, and national identity there would arise an ideology known as *National Socialism*—a worldview cloaked in religious, even Messianic, language, that would experience nothing short of phenomenal growth in a “neurotic post-war society in which millions of people bore war wounds” and deeply entrenched resentments (Bessel, 2004:174). As a university student Thielicke himself experienced the danger of the moral and political numbness that characterized the German people at that delicate time:

That we were not motivated by any ideologies—unless one saw ideological motives at work in our disownment of the Weimar Republic—was founded not on our immunity, but our indifference. This was one of the reasons why half a decade later Nazism was able to sweep everything before it like a torrential river, encountering almost no resistance. This political indifference on the part of the middle class and its offspring had created a vacuum which the Nazis were able to fill with their ideology (1995:52).

It was such indifferent political sentiments that Adolf Hitler effectively utilized and manipulated in order to gain mastery over the people despite the fact that his politics have been characterized as both crude and barbaric. E. Kunzer, writing in 1939 just six years after Hitler came to power, suggests that he appeared “under the guise of a benevolent liberator of his people” and as one who would make his prime goal not only the military and economic security of the nation but the purity of her ethnic identity as well (1939:145, 147). Kunzer lamented that the “new German spirit,” which accompanied the rise of Hitler’s regime and was widely embraced by the German people, proved beyond all doubt that “the cult of hatred and revenge and conquest

exercises far greater influence than the cult of positive ideals” (1939:147). Kunzer’s evaluation of the educational system installed by the Nazi regime, which he personally witnessed in action, is illustrative, if not frightening:

Today education in Nazi Germany exists only to further the Nazi ideology of the creation of a subservient mass completely amenable to the dictates of the state, for German education today is founded on the Hegelian philosophy of state which is the direct antithesis of a democratic ideal. The State, according to the Hegelian theory, represents the realization of reason and justice in social life; in a word, the state alone, as an idealized entity *superior to the individuals* who make it up, has a mission and a destiny to fulfill and has, therefore, the right to organize that system of education that will realize its *Kultur*. The state is an *Uebermensch*, a superbeing, which exists not for the welfare of the citizens who make it up but rather they exist for the welfare of the state. Complete subservience, unquestioning obedience to constituted authority is the highest “good.”

As history so tragically demonstrates, Hitler would ultimately lead the German people into “a despotic subjection” and create “a nation of anti-intellectual automatons whose main purpose seems to be the will to destroy” (Kunzer, 1939:147). This spirit of destruction was perhaps demonstrated most clearly in the *Wehrmacht*—Germany’s armed forces. By means of the united military forces of the Third Reich, domestic discipline and strict obedience among the citizenry was all but guaranteed. With the display of its sheer force and the threat of terror, the Nazi regime was able to exploit fully its own initial political popularity and “the public’s conformism while simultaneously stamping out any opposition with the utmost brutality” (Bartov, 1991:51). While this kind of discipline had characterized the “old Prussian tradition,” its use was perfected under Nazi rule and eventually “introduced into martial law under the Third Reich” (Bartov, 1991:51). Initially, however, the Nazi revolution was less violent than it would prove to be in the mid and later thirties—an era that saw “extreme bloodshed” and one that witnessed “violence and intimidation” as central methodological components (Bessel, 2004:180). Through their control of the police there resulted the creation of a “climate of fear, the undermining of the Nazis’ opponents and potential opponents, and the formation of a powerful incentive for those sitting on the fence to side with the Nazis” (Bessel, 2004:180).

Yet even within the ranks of the *Wehrmacht* itself there existed a similar climate of intimidation and death. Bartov (1991:51) calculates that some fifteen thousand German soldiers were executed over the course of the Second World War in remarkable contrast to only forty-eight that met a similar fate in the First World War. These thousands of

military executions were carried out for various unforgivable offenses including “desertion, cowardice, and self-inflicted wounds”—offenses viewed by the regime as acts of treason, subversion, and espionage (Bartov, 1991:51). Bartov also notes that there were literally millions of other crimes carried out by members of the German military establishment against both combatants and civilians that were essentially “legalized” by the regime. He concludes that “the obedient and uncritical participation” of these soldiers in such war-time crimes was also “significant in that it probably both reflected the moral values these young men had internalized before their recruitment and affected their state of mind and conduct upon returning to civilian society following the collapse of the Third Reich” (Bartov, 1991:53).

While much more could be written about the years leading up to the rise of the Third Reich and the twelve years of horror and depravity that ensued, the point to be made here is that this unspeakably evil and violent period of German and world history would serve as both the atmosphere and impetus for the timely and profound preaching ministry of Helmut Thielicke. As will be documented below in much greater detail, the dark veil of evil and gratuitous human suffering brought down upon humanity under Hitler’s empire would be the background against which Thielicke’s bold preaching of the gospel would shine with triumphant luminosity. Thielicke would not only prove to be a courageous preacher of the gospel but also an effective apologist for the Christian faith and worldview—a faith and worldview founded squarely upon the life, death, and bodily resurrection of the Son of God from the dead. It was this central, non-negotiable tenet of the Christian faith that for Thielicke proved that God was well acquainted with human suffering and the horrible presence of evil in the world. Thielicke’s preaching ministry would consistently demonstrate his understanding of the resurrection as “absolutely essential as a basis for faith. It demonstrated the power of God to overcome an earthly system of oppression. It also showed that the crucified Jesus is an active power in history and not just an ancient example to follow” (Anderson in Thielicke, 1995:xvi).

2.2.2 The ecclesiological situation

A second critical area of consideration in reference to the unique historical setting for Thielicke’s life and ministry is the relationship between the Third Reich and the Protestant Church. As indicated above, this is a very complex sociological and religious

issue but one that is essential for properly grasping the contribution Thielicke made to his times and continues to make even today. The researcher shall consider this subject under four main headings: the Protestant Church and Hitler's ascension to power; the rise of "German Christianity"; the birth of the "Confessing Church" and its resistance to both "German Christianity" and National Socialism; and the Nazi persecution of Confessing Christians.

2.2.2.1 *The Protestant Church and Hitler's ascension to power*

To understand the ecclesiological context in which Helmut Thielicke preached and ministered, one first must consider the spiritual and religious climate of Germany at the time of the rise of National Socialism. Historians of this era have demonstrated that Protestant Christians in Germany largely welcomed Hitler's accession to power, and many clergymen actually interpreted this momentous event as a sign of divine favor and gracious providence (see Baranowski, 1987; Bergen, 1996; Conway, 1992, 1997; Dahm, 1968; Eldridge, 2006; Jantzen, 2008; Peirard, 1991). As shocking as this fact may sound to contemporary ears, such an interpretation of Hitler's appearance and the birth of the Third Reich is more easily understood when one evaluates the spiritual and religious atmosphere present earlier in Germany, particularly between 1870 and 1935. J. Conway (1992) has detailed the historical process whereby the religious life and political expectations of the German people, most notably among the Protestant Christians, unwittingly set the ideological stage for Hitler's influence and eventual reign of terror. Conway argues that following 1870 there existed the ever-intensifying belief among the Germans that God had specifically chosen them to "inaugurate a new chapter in salvation history" (1992:820). While admitting that this national vision was not unique to Germany, as witnessed by similar beliefs about Providence among Britons, Americans, and Canadians, Conway argues that "the religious element in the notion of German 'exceptionalism' was to play a significant role in the fateful rise of German nationalism" (1992:820). As the decades passed, the deepening concept of German "exceptionalism" was embraced and developed by a number of leading and influential German Protestant theologians. Among them one of the most noteworthy was Adolf von Harnack. Harnack propelled forward the vision of Germany's divine destiny with his stress on

the corporate responsibility of church and nation to enhance the God-given task of forwarding the advance of Germany's *Kultur*. This idea of their *mission civilatrice* was based on the supposed greatness of Germany's *Bildung* (in

contrast to the decadence of the Latin's or the materialism of the English). But at its heart lay the anti-universalist conviction that man's true identity was to be found in the *Volk*, one of God's primal communities, just as original as the family or the state (Conway, 1992:821-822).

Conway also observes that following 1914 there were many significant "distortions of the Gospel" in Protestant Germany, further setting the stage for the very tight ideological alignment of Protestantism and National Socialism (1992:822). Among these distortions of the Gospel was the notion of spiritual and moral regeneration by martyrdom, the demonizing of Germany's political and military enemies, the justification of war in spiritual terms, and the belief that a national crisis such as a war would, in fact, direct the German people back into the churches and thereby serve the religious interests of the nation (Conway, 1992:822). Thus, German Protestants learned from their theologians that war could be a divinely granted opportunity "to raise up *Kultur* in the world" and "a *Weltgericht* which God had now imposed on Germany's mean-spirited and jealous enemies" (Conway, 1992:823).

Following World War I a number of right-wing nationalist clergymen formed what became known as the *Federation for a German Church* whose main mission was the "theological justification of their country's aspirations and its desire for national glory" (Conway, 1997:10). Believing that Germany's recent defeat and humiliation in the War were due to the presence of internal enemies, particularly the Jews, "the Federation sought to give a purely German character to the Christian Gospel" (Conway, 1997:10). Hockenos explains that it was largely the conservative Lutherans involved in the *Federation* who staunchly maintained that Germany and, particularly, the divinely mandated mission of the German *Volk* had been severely "weakened and disrupted by the communists, socialists and Jews who stabbed Germany in the back in World War I and were continuing to divide the German *Volk* politically and economically after the War" (1998:74). These dangerous internal threats could only be defeated by the development of much greater unity between the *Volk* and the Church and "by placing the resources of the church behind the *Volk*" (Hockenos, 1998:74). Protestant leaders, many of whom were influential Lutherans, went so far as to connect the changing religious and political climate of post-World War I Germany to the Reformation of the sixteenth century sparked by Martin Luther, who himself was deeply suspicious of the Jews. Protestant nationalists believed that "twelve centuries of Christianity had left an ineradicable imprint on the German community, giving it its own particular identity and

mission and sealing it as the creation of Almighty Providence,” and that Luther’s work of reformation would be “finally completed by a national and spiritual re-assertion of Germany’s power and strength” (Conway, 1997:11).

It was into this rapidly evolving spiritual and moral climate characterized by the threatening presence of Germany’s perceived internal enemies that Adolf Hitler came to power. His timely arrival was met with the general expectation among Protestant and Catholic clergymen alike that political stability and national respect would finally be achieved (Baranowski, 1987:61). Conway states that this moral and spiritual atmosphere was defined by a deep

longing for some faith to replace the disillusionments of the post-war world ... and when Adolf Hitler appeared in Germany with his programme and a promise calculated to appeal to the defeated and discouraged, and offering what appeared to be a vital secular faith in place of the discredited creeds of Christianity, the time was ripe for its acceptance (1997:2).

The personal disillusionment and hopelessness, widely experienced among the German people, was readily filled by the Nazi ideology whose agenda was set forth in distinctly religious terms that resonated with the spiritual sensitivities of the nation. For example, Linder (1982:272-274) details how Nazi Propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels skillfully employed biblical and theological phrases such as “deliverance,” “savior,” and “miracles,” along with other familiar and distinctly Christian terms and concepts and “transposed” them onto “a different ideological base which made for better rapport with the people at large.” He concludes that

it was difficult for most people to look beyond the godly vocabulary and pious affectations the early Hitler used. The Nazi leader knew how to dissemble, and even theologically learned Germans had to look very closely and read his *Mein Kampf* very carefully to see the cloven hoof beneath the angel’s luminous robes (Linder, 1982:274).

Eventually Hitler would take advantage of this fragile national situation and by means of his “demagogic propaganda” would exploit the people’s massive “discontent with the republic”,

the despair at the acute social misery brought on by the world economic crisis, the fervent longing for a national rebirth, and ... convert them into a belief that he alone, the Führer sent by Providence, could bring about a turn for the better. Millions of disillusioned people saw no other way out, derived new hope from irresponsible promises, followed him blindly, and enthusiastically celebrated his ‘seizure of power’ when Hitler was appointed Chancellor on 30 January 1933 (Dahm, 1968:44).

According to Conway (1997:2), Nazism also offered the German people “both a dynamic political creed and a plausible explanation of Germany’s post-war predicament.” This “National Socialism was to become far more than an alternative political party offering a programme suited to the times: it was, in Hitler’s own words, ‘a form of conversion, a new faith’” (Conway, 1997:2). This ‘new faith’ offered by Hitler made the most headway among the Protestant clergy. Catholic clergy, with very few exceptions, did not lend their support to the Nazi movement and the theology of the Catholic Church remained intact. Among the Protestants, however, there was immediate and rapidly growing acquiescence to the Party and its ideology. Conway suggests that this ready acceptance by Protestant clergymen was due, first of all, to the “perceived political power and ambitions of the Nazi movement, which many Protestants were deeply attracted to” (1997:9). Yet Nazism also manifested certain “theoretical” foundations that proved philosophically attractive as well (Conway, 1997:9). The result was that the Nazi ideology made its way into the very core of German Protestantism like a “slithering snake,” fastening its grip upon the majority of the ninety-five percent of all German citizens who considered themselves to be Christians at the time (Eldridge, 2006:151-152). When this happened, the Church’s

traditional bonds of unity were torn asunder and the rich brotherhood established by Martin Luther was strained as never before ... At stake during Hitler’s tyranny was nothing less than the very fabric of German Reformation Christianity. Like a quickly moving virus, National Socialism began to weave itself into the soul of Protestant theology, ultimately blurring the lines between worship of nation and worship of God (Eldridge, 2006:151).

On the day that Hitler was appointed as the German Chancellor, January 30, 1933, there was nothing less than an explosion of thanksgiving and jubilant praise among the Protestant Church leaders who welcomed with open arms the new leader and the promise of national renewal and comprehensive prosperity. According to R. Pierard, one German pastor named Seigfried Leffler declared that the coming of Hitler to power was “the wonderful transparency for our time, the window of our age, through which light fell on the history of Christianity. Through him we were able to see the Savior in the history of the Germans” (Pierard, 1991). Another pastor, Julius Leutheuser, even proclaimed that “Christ has come to us through Adolf Hitler” (Pierard, 1991). Indeed, there were scores of Protestant pastors and leaders who were staunchly “anti-Marxist and feared communism” and had a deep-seated hatred for the Weimar republic that had “causally accepted the humiliating peace terms following World War I” as well as the presence of political liberals and Jews “who were leading the country to destruction”

(Pierard, 1991). They saw in Hitler a “great man sent by God—a man who would introduce the birth of a new Protestant Germany” (Yonan, 1999:311). While welcoming Hitler with open arms, these same Protestants were convinced that his policies and views were “more moderate and responsible than his followers” and that like Bismarck he was “essentially a ‘pious’ man, piety being a characteristic of all Germany’s historic leaders” (Conway, 1997:14). It was this very mistaken but powerful illusion that Germany’s new leader was careful to sustain, and it helps critics of Germany’s history to understand the “pathetic confidence which innumerable churchmen could maintain, even as late as 1945, that Hitler had never meant the Church any harm” (Conway, 1997:14).

2.2.2.2 *The rise of “German Christianity”*

With the appearance of Hitler and the birth and growth of the Nazi party, there also developed a particular brand of Christianity that became popularly labeled “German Christianity.” This new species of Christianity, which would transcend socio-economic and vocational lines, found its birth among pro-Nazi Protestants who saw themselves as “storm troopers for Christ”, pressed for the “synthesis of Nazi ideology and Protestant tradition” and sought to “agitate for a people’s church based on blood” (Bergen 1996:7). These “German Christians,” as they were called, lobbied for the reconstruction of the Protestant Church according to the fundamental ideological and organizational principles guiding the Nazi movement (Baranowski, 1987:58). The German Christians enthusiastically embraced Hitler’s new government and fully cooperated with his calculated efforts to “align the organization, theology, and practice of the twenty-eight German Protestant *Land* Churches with the racial and authoritarian values of the National Socialist regime” (Jantzen, 2001:295). While the group was initially known as the “Protestant National Socialists,” the name “German Christians” soon replaced it as a deliberate strategy, carefully designed to

produce confusion, to force anyone else who claimed both Germanness and Christianity to qualify that identity or risk association with their cause. Members of the group thus used their name to enforce the contention that they represented the only authentic fusion of German ethnicity and Christian faith (Bergen, 1996:4).

The result they hoped to achieve was the creation of a single and unified German Church characterized by a pure amalgamation of carefully filtered Christian truths and Nazi ideology, with particular stress placed upon the centrality of blood, race, and the

fatherland (Bergen 1997:522). This Church would not be “a fellowship of the Holy Spirit described in the New Testament” but a religious “vehicle for the expression of race and ethnicity” (Bergen, 1996:10). In all there were as many as 600,000 participants in this movement that penetrated all layers of German society with its attractive brand of anti-dogmatic Christianity, including the military chaplaincy. The members of this German Church stood united upon two key assumptions as the movement gained traction. First was the belief that New Testament Christianity and Judaism were diametrically opposed and secondly, that National Socialism and Christianity were complementary and, in fact, “reinforced each other” (Bergen, 1997:531-532). Drawing upon the seminal work of Bergen (1996, 1997) a list of the significant characteristics of this “German Christian” movement may be summarized as follows. First, the movement was expressly anti-doctrinal and had little interest in the Scriptures of either Testament. It was believed that any emphasis upon Scripture, confessions of faith, or matters touching Christian orthodoxy would be problematic for the unifying of the nation into one Reich Church. In fact, the German Christians relished the notion of their anti-biblical stance and soon “proclaimed themselves the champions of antidoctrinal Christianity” (Bergen, 1996:44). Second, the German Christian movement rejected the notion that the church was distinct from the state, and thus, the historic Protestant doctrine of the “two kingdoms,” articulated by Luther and other reformers, was jettisoned along with other key beliefs about the church and salvation. This rejection of the “two kingdoms” doctrine served to weld the Party to the church in such a way that they became virtually indistinguishable. As Bergen says, this expressed their core belief that Germany’s religious tradition undergirded National Socialism and served their intent to “transform the church into the spiritual expression of a racially pure, militantly anti-Jewish German nation” (1997:524). Third, the German Christians attempted to purge Christianity from any so-called non-Aryan presence or influence, particularly that of the hated Jewish variety. Their goal was to erect a church that would be free from all peoples judged to be “impure” while enfolded those who were “true Germans” into a “spiritual homeland for the Third Reich” (Bergen, 1996:4). This would, therefore, become a church of the *Volk* and “not an assembly of the baptized but an association of ‘blood’ and ‘race’” (Bergen, 1996:4). Consequently, there was nothing less than an all-out assault upon any traces of Jewish influence upon Christianity. Even Christianity’s historical and biblical roots in Judaism were expunged as the Old Testament itself was discarded, and Jesus was excised from the Gospel context and transformed into an “Aryan warrior” whose life, death, and resurrection

served the greater interests and aims of the state (Bergen, 1997:523). Non-Aryan ministers were expelled from their pulpits. The traditional terminology of the church was purged from words like “hallelujah” and “hosanna.” Certain biblical characters and names including “Abraham,” “David,” “Jerusalem,” and “Zion” were outlawed in worship (Bergen, 1997:530). The worship of the traditional church and its liturgy were also radically altered to suit the pro-Aryan mentality. Anything deemed to be contrary or offensive to Party ideology was forbidden and the language and subject matter of the hymns was redacted to reflect Nazi aims. The church services of the German Christians involved

responsive readings, and choral speaking, mixing biblical texts with hymns and passages from German heroes. The goal was to create a sense of community by appealing to the emotional ties many Germans felt to the familiar words, actions, and melodies of church ritual (Bergen, 1996:47).

The sacraments of the church were also re-interpreted to suit the movement’s agenda. Holy Baptism, for example, was transformed from a celebration of Christ’s atoning blood, spilled on behalf of sinners, to a celebration of German blood-ties designed to “remind parents that their children did not belong to them but to the German *Volk*” (Bergen, 1996:48). Finally, in terms of piety and emotionality, the kind of “Christianity” resulting from such a radical alteration was “manly” and powerfully attractive to those who had become “estranged from church life; young people and men, especially men in uniform” (Bergen, 1997:524). German Christianity took on a pronounced, masculine aggressiveness as it sought to win a following among the many Protestants who were already immersed in ethnic chauvinism and anti-Semitism (Bergen, 1996:22). Christianity, and more precisely the Gospel, was no longer about God’s mercy, repentance from sin, and atonement through the self-sacrifice of Christ on the cross but a pathway to personal and national empowerment by means of the Nazi ideology that viewed “war as the core of their spiritual community” (Bergen, 1996:48, 60). For example, Reich Bishop Ludwig Müller, the leader of the German Christians, once boasted that while the traditional Calvinist and Lutheran Christians pray, “Our Father,” the German Christians pray, “Father of ours!” (Bergen, 1996:45-46).

By 1944 it became apparent that the German Christian movement had totally “identified their anti-Jewish people’s church with the genocidal German nation” (Bergen, 1996:26). Bergen reports that an official newsletter of the German Christian church, issued that same year, “echoed the threat Hitler had voiced in January 1939” when he

claimed to be a “prophet” and predicted the complete annihilation of the Jewish race, and “phrased their affirmation of that goal and their recognition of its impending realization in the language of the apocalypse” (Bergen, 1996:26).

2.2.2.3 *The birth of the “Confessing Church”*

However, not all Protestants welcomed the new Regime and its charismatic leader or embraced all of the ideological goals of National Socialism. As Dahm (1968:46) notes, there were, in fact, quite a “large number of parsons” who were not “prepared to accept without protest the Germanizing tendencies of the German Christians and incursion by the state into the internal affairs of the church.” Within the ranks of Protestant clergymen there arose an initially mild resistance movement against the perversion of Christianity’s core doctrines and the hijacking and reinterpretation of the Gospel message. In simplest terms, what became known as the “Confessing Church” was a “fellowship of Christians who believed that the primitive confession ‘Jesus is Lord’ must be maintained against the cult of Hitler as Leader” (Stackhouse Jr., 2007:25). In Baranowski’s extensive treatment of the Confessing Church phenomenon (1987:57) he characterizes the movement as a coalition of leading Protestant pastors and laymen who

exemplified both the agreement and ambivalence with which conservative elites encouraged the rise and triumph of Nazism. The social composition of its membership resembled that of leading political elites who first approved of the regime and then later grew reserved toward its increasing racial, economic, and military radicalism. The Confessing Church repelled a determined Nazi party-supported effort in the ‘German Christians’ to ‘synchronize’ the Protestant Church at large in much the same way that the army and civil service initially prevented Nazi ‘old fighters’ from infiltrating those traditionally powerful institutions with new faces and integrating them with Nazi organizations.

The movement was initially started with the formation of a “Pastor’s Emergency League” in September 1933. Martin Niemöller, a theologian and Lutheran pastor from the Dahlem parish of Berlin, brought together a number of Protestant ministers who were committed to the Reformation confessions of faith and, more importantly, to the centrality of the Bible for preaching and teaching. The growth of the League was nothing short of explosive given the swelling hostilities against traditional Christian doctrines and those espousing them. Jantzen (2008:4) reports that within a week of its formation there were at least two thousand members of the League. Within a year’s time, there were about seven thousand Protestant pastors who had joined, or roughly half of all Protestant clergy in Germany. Niemöller was very successful in convincing

his fellow ministers of the Gospel that it was “impossible to continue as before,” and that the Protestant Church itself “must undergo a complete cleansing and spiritual conversion. Only then could it call the nation to repentance and thereby help to restore the good name of Germany in the eyes of the world” (Conway, 1992:830). The success of the Pastor’s League eventually gave way to a more formalized form of protest against the Nazi takeover of the church. In May of 1934 the *Barmen Declaration* was drafted by Karl Barth and signed by Confessing Church leaders including men of such caliber as Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Baranowski (1987:58) argues that this declaration of faith was formulated and signed primarily in reaction to attempts by German Christians to restructure thoroughly the Protestant Church, largely by removing those ministers who were suspicious of the Party and substituting pro-Nazi pastors who would “assume control of the central organs of the institution.” This restructuring of the church was carried out with “active Nazi party encouragement” and utilized the methods of intimidation and repression

similar to those appropriated in the political realm, notably against the left, declaring ‘emergencies’ to justify the harassment of dissident pastors, suppressing internal church debate, eliminating regional and local synods, and even amalgamating Protestant youth groups with the Hitler Youth (Baranowski, 1987:58).

The *Barmen Declaration* was crafted to reinforce the belief that only the Scriptures, as interpreted and embedded in the Reformation creeds and confessions, were foundational to the life and work of the church. Indeed, Barth’s intention in drafting the *Declaration* was that it should function as “a broad attack against a ‘totalitarian’ regime whose ideological and political claims penetrated every area of human existence” and that it should trigger the recapture of the “Protestant obligation to interpret the word of God to German culture” (Baranowski, 1987:64). Confessing Church leaders stood largely united in the belief that the calling of the church and the “prime necessity” related to their pastoral office was to “recall the nation to God, and to reassert the moral authority of the church in national life,” particularly in light of the Nazi manipulation of Christianity for its political and military objectives (Conway, 1992:832).

However, as stated above, the degree and scope of resistance to Nazism offered up by the Confessing Church was considered weak and tepid by some within the movement itself. Most notable among them were Helmut Thielicke and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Thielicke was under the impression that the members of the Confessing Church were somewhat misguided in their approach to the Nazi problem. As he saw it, they “spent

too much time and energy combating Nazi ideology *within* the Church, while disregarding the greater dangers raging *outside* of it” (Eldridge, 2006:161). Bonhoeffer was also critical of the movement because he soon realized that Confessing clergymen were hesitant to take their convictions further to the more faithful, if not logical, conclusion of *public* resistance. In his view, to terminate the movement before “moving from the ecclesiastical to the political level meant merely to betray the Barmen Declaration” (Mengus, 1992:S141). Bonhoeffer believed that faithfulness to Christ, the Christian Gospel, and to the Word of God meant more than the gentle resistance of statements of faith and official declarations. It demanded nothing less than the willingness to confront boldly the Regime in the public square and not only in the pulpit. Pierard (1991) also has observed that the Confessing Church was a rather reluctant resistance:

Its goal was to preserve the church, not to topple the Hitler regime. The great majority of Christians supported the Führer, even when he led them into war. With its idealistic view of the state as being always God’s agent, the Confessing Church had indeed ventured on the totally new and risky path of political resistance.

Yonan (1999:314) also notes that while many Confessing Church pastors preached bold sermons against the Nazi ideology and tactics, “the faithful” in the church pews “were mainly admonished to obedience toward the secular authority.”

By 1939 and the outbreak of the Second World War, the Confessing Church was confronted with a new challenge. Believing that as Christians they owed the state a degree of loyalty and obedience, they dutifully embraced the national call to war and the defense of the fatherland. Yet, as committed followers of Jesus Christ “they could hardly endorse the aims of an immoral regime” (Wall, 1981:18). Because so many Confessing pastors and seminary students were convinced of the “theological mandate” for service in Germany’s military, there was a very large number who voluntarily and enthusiastically entered the service in order to display their loyalty to the German people (Wall, 1981:22). There were many Confessing pastors who fought on the front lines, and those who were not killed or wounded eventually suffered brutal treatment at the hands of the Nazis when the regime turned against them (Wall, 1981:23, 27). This suffering, heaped upon them by an evil regime, was seen by Confessing clergy as the “consequence of loyalty to the gospel and defense of the church and its teaching” (Wall, 1981:27). In contrast, it was likely Bonhoeffer alone who courageously prayed for the defeat of his own country and attempted to lead his Confessing brethren to defy the

Nazis, even at risk of imprisonment or death. In the end, the Confessing Church movement had only partly succeeded. Its glaring failure was that it did not act upon the one conviction that Barth had so clearly articulated at the beginning: “that there are no areas of life in which Christians do not belong to Jesus Christ and that Christians need not obey authorities who reject their divinely appointed commission to promote justice and peace” (Wall, 1981:33).

2.2.2.4 *The Nazi persecution of Confessing Christians*

Eventually, Confessing Christians in Germany would find themselves in a precarious and dangerous situation that resulted from their conflicts with the “German Christians” on the one hand—the *Kirchenkampf*, or “Church struggle”—and with the Nazi authorities on the other. What became known as the “Church struggle” was a theological conflict that had developed between the Reich Church and the Confessing Church. The Reich Church, as detailed above, represented “a confederation of Lutheran, Reformed, and United Churches that wholeheartedly embraced the Positive Christianity so compatible with Nazi ideology” while the Confessing Church was “a splinter group led by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Karl Barth, and Helmut Thielicke” that fully rejected and condemned the “mongrelized fusion of Nazism and Protestantism” (Eldridge, 2006:158). However, the Confessing Christians also had a much greater and more perilous struggle with the Nazi Party. By 1935, Nazi officials were already seeking to intimidate and harass Confessing clergymen. Jantzen (2008:6) notes that their methods of harassment included the dissemination of racist and anticlerical propaganda, restriction of church meetings and worship services, suppression of the official church press, and other actions designed to “marginalize the German churches, with the ultimate goal of excluding them from German society altogether.” In that same year, and those immediately following, there were frequent police actions against Confessing pastors resulting in the eventual arrest and brief imprisonment of several thousand ministers (Dahm, 1968:46). In the summer and fall of 1937 alone there were about seven hundred pastors who were taken into police custody for their refusal to turn over their local church collections to their governing church bodies (Jantzen, 2008:8). Following this, ministers were forbidden to “teach religious instruction in German public schools, and measures were taken to terminate the employment of pastors trained and examined for ordination by the illegal Confessing Church seminaries and counsels” (Jantzen, 2008:8).

Conway (1997:328) has observed that the Nazi antagonism toward Christianity in general and the Confessing Church in particular grew out of their “intolerance of any compromise with a system of belief that spanned the centuries and embraced all men under a doctrine of equality before God.” Hitler himself had made it clear that, as far as he was concerned, Christianity was a gangrenous hoax “which must be cut out before it infected the new growth of Nazi racialism” and that Germany had “too long been held in bondage by the alien beliefs of a Jewish-derived faith and by the political conspiracy of Roman Catholic prelates” (Conway, 1997:329). Hitler’s strong antipathy towards Christianity was nothing new, however. Though he had been raised in a Catholic home and educated in the church schools, he summarily rejected the teachings of Christianity and pursued the more progressive ideologies and philosophies that were popular “in the early years of the century, which derived, albeit in perverted form, from Darwin, Nietzsche and Gobineau” (Conway, 1997:1). It was during Hitler’s “bitter experiences” and personal “disillusionments” brought about by the First World War that he began to develop his own “personal creed” and finally “rejected both Christianity and the Christian Church” (Conway, 1997:1). Hitler was certainly not alone in his disillusionment with the church and his abandonment of Christianity. Conway explains (1997:1-2):

Millions of men and women throughout Europe had likewise come to realize that for them the doctrines of the Christian faith no longer held meaning or truth. The confident optimism of the nineteenth-century liberal theology withered and died before the stark reality of the Flanders trenches. Christian values no longer seemed tenable in the bloody circumstances of total war. The Churches all-too-willing support of nationalist war-time aims, on both the warring sides, appeared uncommonly like hypocrisy. And the inability of the Christian Churches to explain why the religion of the Prince of Peace was powerless to prevent the catastrophic disasters of 1914-18 finally destroyed all Christian belief in the hearts of a generation that had watched its comrades die so tragically in the belief that they were defending their country’s Christian heritage.

As the tensions increased between the Nazis and those faithful Confessing pastors who were determined to resist, even as far as martyrdom, persecution and harassment by the Gestapo become more physical and violent. While there were repeated attempts by the Nazis to pressure and intimidate pastors to the point of abandoning their pulpits and withdrawing from their churches, Nazi sympathizers began to disrupt services of worship and other church meetings and threatened church leaders with violence (Helmreich, 1979:310). There were other types of persecution as well, including the seizure of church property “under the guise of wartime necessity” (Helmreich, 1979:323). According to Helmreich (1979:320), leaders of the “Reich youth” also

attempted to dissuade Christian teenagers from participating in their churches. In November of 1939, they

instituted a compulsory youth service for fourteen to eighteen-year-old boys, a sort of premilitary training which was to be held four half-Sundays a month. Like the activities of the Hitler Youth, these sessions were regularly held on Sunday mornings, in spite of objections from the churches. In May 1940, Himmler forbade all church-sponsored youth retreats, summer camps, and similar meetings because time was needed for premilitary training, for gathering the harvest, and for other war activity. This order finally eliminated most of the newly organized programs which the churches had instituted to keep contact with their youth and further their religious education.

One of the more noteworthy instances of persecution occurred in 1939 with the arrest, trial, and acquittal of Martin Niemöller, the outspoken leader of the Confessing Church. Upon his release Niemöller was immediately re-arrested by Gestapo agents and held in concentration camps until 1945 (Jantzen, 2008:9). Men like Niemöller, Bonhoeffer, and Thieliicke were three of only a handful of Confessing Church Christians who

saw through the real nature of Hitlerism from the beginning, who were able to avoid transferring nationalist Protestant wishful thinking to the [N]azi movement, and who were prepared to accept the consequences of a political resistance to the [N]azi regime that transcended the limits of ecclesiastical struggle (Dahm, 1968:47).

The magnitude and reach of Hitler's hatred for the church and Christianity is also evidenced by the persecution of the Jehovah's Witnesses, a non-Christian sect that, while denying the core doctrines of orthodox Christianity, shares similar terminology. Yonan (1999:310-311) reports that the Witnesses were almost unanimous in their rejection of Nazism and that of the twenty thousand members of the sect living in Germany in 1933, one half were arrested by the Nazis. Six thousand of these detainees were eventually imprisoned and 253 sentenced to death including both women and children. By the end of the War, over one thousand Witnesses had been executed, and another one thousand died in prisons and concentration camps.

There was also much persecution of Christians within the German military. Hitler had made no secret of his contempt for Christianity within his inner circle of military advisors, and he believed that any form of Christian belief, "even the national religion of the chaplaincy, threatened Nazi claims to spiritual monopoly" (Bergen, 2001:240). Increasingly restrictive orders were foisted upon Christian chaplains, virtually robbing them of any ministry to military personnel. For example, they were forbidden from approaching any soldier who had not explicitly sought them out for pastoral care; they

could only perform funerals for those soldiers whose military documents clearly demonstrated they were church members; chaplains could not provide the soldiers with the necessary forms requesting last rites and a Christian burial; and they could no longer provide ministry to the families of servicemen killed in combat (Bergen, 2001:241). In 1942 there was an especially cruel act of persecution brought upon Christian chaplains. An order was executed that sent chaplains to the front lines of battle where the heaviest action was. This order was given under the guise of an effort to boost the morale of the troops by placing chaplains next to them in the line of fire. This plan became known among the chaplains as the “Uriah Law” named after “the general in the Bible whom King David sent on a suicide mission so that David could have his wife Bathsheba” (Bergen, 2001:242).

All of this proves the point that Christianity, the kind of biblically faithful Christianity courageously embraced and proclaimed by the Confessing Church—and most importantly for this discussion by Dr. Helmut Thielicke—was fundamentally at odds with Nazism and National Socialism. To borrow terms from Conway (1997:328), the “political nihilism” and “ideological fanaticism” that characterized the Nazi system, along with all of its dehumanizing brutality and barbarism, could never be embraced by those who would not compromise the foundation of the Christian faith—the Bible as understood to be composed of both Old and New Testaments—and the Gospel—defined as the salvation of sinners by means of the grace of God by faith in the crucified and resurrected Savior who is Lord over all and the enfolding of these sinners from all nations into one people of God.

2.2.3 The personal situation

Finally, in order to understand properly the historical context in which Helmut Thielicke lived, studied, and preached, we must consider in more stark terms the human toll extracted from the German citizenry during the Second World War. Aside from Nazi harassment and persecution, Thielicke’s ministry context was most notable for the incalculable human suffering which accompanied what were arguably the most productive years of his preaching ministry. While a detailed analysis of the personal, human toll cannot be presented here, the researcher shall attempt to summarize briefly 1) the most significant facts related to the bombing of German cities by the Allied

forces and its tragic aftermath, both in terms of physical and emotional suffering and 2) the emotional and spiritual state of the German people following the nation's defeat.

2.2.3.1 *Allied bombing*

One of the most devastating of the wartime strategies employed by the Allied forces against Nazi Germany was the mass bombing of major industrial and urban centers. Raids of hundreds, and sometimes up to one thousand heavy bombers were carried out against Germany during the late thirties to the mid forties. This strategy was known as "area bombing" and was specifically designed to "lay down as dense a carpet of bombs as possible" (Hewitt, 1983:260). Aside from the obvious damage that was created by the massive explosions, the resulting fires were the cause of most of the carnage and human casualties. In fact, it is the spread of such fires and the subsequent devastation that resulted that "defines the essential character of area bombing" (Hewitt, 1983:260). These mass aerial raids were carried out by American and British bombers on an almost daily basis, particularly between May 1940 and May 1945 (Hewitt, 1983:262). As the attacks continued, the targets included both industrial sectors and civilian population centers. Barker (2005) comments that the mentality of all-out war soon

blurred the distinction between the soldiers on the battlefield and civilians working in armaments factories on the home front. Therefore, a Krupp factory worker was just as much an enemy as a Luftwaffe bomber pilot or an Afrika Korps tank driver—and therefore his home was, regretfully, a worthwhile target.

For example, as a result of the very first air raids against the city of Berlin by RAF bombers, over five thousand civilians were killed and one of every five homes in the city was destroyed (Barker, 2005). Several of the air raids carried out between 1939 and 1945 are notable and put the true human cost in graphic perspective. In May of 1939 planes from the British Bomber Command attacked the region of Wuppertal, home of Helmut Thielicke. Seventy-five percent of this area with its population of 398,099 people was completely destroyed and over seven thousand civilians died (Hewitt, 1983:266). Then in May of 1942 Barker (2005) reports that the RAF carried out the very first one thousand-bomber raid in history against the city of Cologne and its population of one million people. In the span of the ninety-minute attack 1,455 tons of high explosive bombs and 915 tons of incendiaries were dropped on the city. Five hundred were killed and over five thousand were injured. The raid destroyed thirty-six factories and over three thousand homes, leaving 45,000 homeless. In March of 1943

Allied bombers carried out an attack against Lübeck on the Saturday night before Palm Sunday, destroying the central part of the city with its many cathedrals and historic churches. Helmreich (1979:307-308) notes that a prominent pastor in the city, Karl Friedrich, preached the following day about the fact that God's "judgment had come to Lübeck, and expressed his opinion that its citizens would learn again to pray." He was soon arrested for these remarks that were considered treasonous by the Nazis. In that same year RAF bombers attacked Hamburg, literally turning the city "into ashes" and instantly leaving forty thousand dead, "victims of a firestorm of unprecedented ferocity" (Barker, 2005). This particularly horrific raid occurred on July 24 and 25, 1943 and was code-named "Operation Gomorrah" by the British. Hewitt (1983:272) describes the horrible scene that unfolded:

On 24/25 July 1943 Britain opened 'Operation Gomorrah,' sending 791 heavy bombers against Hamburg. The British sent another 787 on 27/28, 777 on 29/30, and 740 on 2/3 August. Nine thousand tons of bombs were dropped in the so-called 'battle of Hamburg'; about half were high explosive bombs with 1,900 tons of liquid incendiaries and 1.5 million thermite stick bombs. More than 250 daylight strikes by American bombers were made at the same time. The first firestorm in the history of war occurred.

There were also twenty-seven hospitals, fifty-eight churches, 277 schools, seventy-six public buildings, eighty-three banks, 2,632 stores, 4,113 small factories, 580 other industrial plants, 180,000 tons of shipping in the ports, and 12 bridges destroyed. Nineteen percent of the dead in Hamburg were children (about 7000) and over 10,000 children were orphaned. The civilian casualties from that single attack were only slightly less than those of soldiers from Hamburg on all fronts in the war, and ultimately the death toll of non-combatants in Hamburg would rise to over 55,000 (Hewitt, 1983:263, 272). Hewitt's research has revealed that the center areas of the older German cities such as Hamburg were specifically targeted by the bombers because of their

greater amount of combustible materials to stoke a fire ... the old city centers were generally the 'aiming points' in the raids. Thus was abandoned any pretense of avoiding damage to noncombatant or nonmilitary structures, to residents old or young, to hospitals, or to works of art. Antipersonnel techniques, such as delayed-action bombs, and second strikes with fragmentation bombs to harass fire fighting and rescue work, were well developed (Hewitt, 1983:265).

In 1945 there was another notable attack by the British on the city of Dresden. Barker (2005) describes the raid:

At 10.15 pm on Tuesday February 13th 1945, 244 RAF Lancasters started dropping 881 tons of incendiaries and high explosives onto Dresden. Within thirty minutes, the city centre was ablaze. Three hours later, a second wave of 524 Lancasters with another 1,700 tons in the bomb bays appeared over Dresden. In the inferno that resulted, an estimated 25,000 human beings were crushed, suffocated and burnt to death. At noon the next day, it was the turn of 311 bombers of the 8th US Air Force to complete the job.

Hewitt (1983:263) has calculated that in some months, such as March 1945, the total weight of bombs dropped by both British and American bombers on German cities “was nearly twice that which fell on Britain in the entire war.”

In the end, after some 550,000 tons of bombs had been dropped, there were about 593,000 civilian deaths from the Allied raids and, according to German authorities, over seventy percent of these casualties were the direct result of carbon monoxide poisoning rather than from explosions (fifteen percent) and fire (fifteen percent) (Hewitt, 1983:263, 274). Mortality studies also revealed the shocking fact that most of the fatalities occurred among women, small children, and the elderly (Hewitt, 1983:263). In addition to the incalculable human toll almost 2.5 million homes were destroyed representing thirty nine percent of the nation’s housing units (Hewitt, 1983:264).

2.2.3.2 Germany in defeat

The bombing program against Germany swept the people of the nation into a tidal wave of horror much too catastrophic to be captured by eyewitness descriptions and mortality statistics. The evil and barbaric policies of Hitler’s regime, both against the world and his own people, were only exacerbated by the Allied military response. It was this wounded nation, reeling from one atrocity to the next and finally conquered, that served as the larger parish for the preaching ministry of Helmut Thielicke. Following the formal end of the Second World War, Germany was plunged into an even deeper period of darkness and hopelessness. Conway (1992:829) observes that the summer months of 1945 were especially bitter in the face of the numerous “lurid and shattering reports” of the many atrocities committed in the name of the German people circulating on the world stage. The firm loyalties of the German people to their land, the Führer, and their cause in the war “was now seen to have served the inhuman goals of a criminal regime. Disillusionment about the past and dismay for the future were paramount” (Conway, 1992:829). At the same time Germany’s cities lay in smoldering ruins, the smell of

death still in the air, and the victorious Allied forces that had removed all national authority and identity occupied the entire country. Thus, “the moral discredit of all previous stances now left only a bleak prospect” (Conway, 1992:830). The total defeat of Germany was much too obvious to deny, unlike that of the First World War with its humiliating ending in 1918. The devastating years of constant aerial bombardment, and “the bitter fighting on German soil, which culminated in the destruction of Germany’s armed forces before the eyes of its civilian population confirmed it” (Diehl, 1989:398). In addition to the moral and ethical quagmire in which the German people now found themselves trapped, Diehl notes that there was at the same time a growing political apathy and sense of economic desperation. The immediate and frantic need to “produce the basic necessities of survival, food, shelter, clothing, occupied the full attention and consumed the energies of most Germans” (Diehl, 1989:401-402). Yet, the hunger pains and the need to survive could not eclipse the feelings of guilt that the German people experienced *en masse* following the war. According to Diehl, after 1945 the complicity of the German people in the war crimes of Hitler and the Third Reich, including its “aggression, barbaric occupation policies, and above all, the Holocaust,” became the center of world-wide debate (1989:399). Most Germans, however, sought to shift the blame for these atrocities to Hitler, his henchmen, and the Nazi regime. Germans largely saw themselves as victims as well and pointed to “their ruined cities and the millions of German expellees driven from German lands” as ample proof that they had “suffered as much as their enemies” (Diehl, 1989:400). This rejection of collective German guilt and the posture of victimhood would continue for many years following the war. Buse (1961:190) explains:

During the 1950s, aside from honoring some of those who resisted Nazism, the German states and the elites did little to cultivate knowledge of the Third Reich’s misdeeds, and they cast those misdeeds into a rejection of fascism and totalitarianism without much historical context. Many people saw themselves as victims due to the lack of food, housing and endless streams of refugees at the war’s end.

This feeling of guilt, though outwardly denied in principle, also made its presence known among the Protestant Christians and churches which did little or nothing to stop the rise and spread of Nazism and the horror it perpetrated on the world. As a whole the Protestants were

unable to prevent either the crimes against humanity or the war crimes which were committed in the name of Germany and therefore in its own name; as a whole it did not even manage a unanimous and unequivocally clear cry of protest against this development (Dahm, 1968:48).

In the end it seemed that above all the people in Germany, the Protestants, who initially welcomed the news of the Führer's arrival, were left with massive intellectual and spiritual questions that could not be quickly answered or soothed by clichés and talk of victimhood. The nation had witnessed a degree of evil and suffering that defied human imagination. Truths that were once deeply held about God, death, and the Gospel and once considered indisputable were now sprinkled with doubt. How could God allow such a thing to happen in the first place, and how could the church and her leaders have participated in such horror? Along with contemporary scholars such as Jantzen (2008:vi), millions then and now are left to ask the questions:

Why did so few dedicated, influential Christians speak out against the hatred, violence, and national idolatry of Adolf Hitler's movement? How did so few pastors and parishioners appear to feel any discomfort with the rejection and even public mockery of traditional Christian virtues like love, hospitality, mercy, humility, and kindness? Even more troubling, how could Christians in the Third Reich hold on to such mutually exclusive sets of values ... as those of Jesus Christ and Adolf Hitler?

It was into this climate of doubt, anger, and national guilt that the sermons of Helmut Thielicke appeared as lights in a profoundly dark place. By means of his brilliant expositions and practical applications of key biblical texts, each of which stood squarely upon the shoulders of his theological skill and pastoral love, he would courageously rise to the challenge of seeking to provide comfort and whatever answers may be available to the questions of evil and human suffering, even as they were being experienced. His ministry would serve the saint and skeptic, driving both to the Scriptures and, particularly, to their compelling portrait of the Father's invincible love and the Son's infinite sacrifice.

2.3 Significant theological and philosophical writings

In 1959 Helmut Thielicke was described as "one of the supreme Protestant theologians on the continent today" whose published works are "prodigious in scope and erudition" (Doberstein in Thielicke, 1959:9). With that in mind the researcher shall simply list and briefly discuss in this section some of the most significant of Thielicke's many theological and philosophical works that appear to have had a direct bearing upon his sermons, particularly those that have as their subject matter the PES. The books are listed in no certain order according to their English titles along with a brief comment

(publication dates are for the English versions and direct quotations are also taken from these).

Death and Life (1970): Thieliicke began work on this book in 1939 after he was expelled from his teaching post at the University of Heidelberg. He started writing it while serving as a pastor in the city of Ravensburg when he had been forbidden by the Nazis to travel or speak elsewhere. He notes that in that cold atmosphere of “enforced solitude” with no access to a library he penned the book for himself in order that he might discover “some measure of clarity on fundamental questions of life and faith” (ix). One of these central questions for Thieliicke was the “mystery of human death” which he saw as “a central element of the church’s proclamation” (xiv). The book was completed in 1945 and was first produced and distributed in a Swiss edition by the World Council of Churches in Geneva.

Nihilism: Its Origin and Nature—With a Christian Answer (1961): This book is based upon a series of lectures Thieliicke delivered to his students at the University of Tübingen. The lecture hall where Thieliicke spoke was filled to capacity. Two additional overflow rooms held other students who listened by way of a loudspeaker. The lectures and the monograph that resulted were intended to address “a generation of youth which had been shrewdly and cruelly misled by the holders of power” and now “faced a world of rubble and ruins; not only their homes, but also their idealism, their faith, their concepts of value” which were now completely shattered (Thieliicke, 1961b:11). Into this moral and spiritual vacuum, Thieliicke attempted to inject the eternal message of the Gospel with its announcement that “this world is loved by an everlasting Heart” that summons us to “say Yes to life” (Thieliicke, 1961b:13).

Theological Ethics (1974, 1977, 1979): This three-volume series has been widely hailed as one of Thieliicke’s “greatest literary efforts” and a “standard work on theological ethics” (Dirks, 1972:95, 96). By Thieliicke’s own admission, these volumes serve as the theological basis for his preaching. Thieliicke states: “My sermon collections, as I now realize, all draw their life from this attempt at a comprehensive interpretation of reality” (Thieliicke, 1979:xv). Later he confessed that he wrote *Ethics* “in order to do the theological background work for preaching” (Thieliicke, 1965b:78). In this exhaustive treatment of Christian ethics, Thieliicke also sought to “give a Christian interpretation of human and historical reality in general, and to do this in a comprehensive and

systematic way” (Thielicke, 1979b:xiii). In this work there are two chapters in *Volume One: Foundations* (1979) that have a direct bearing upon considerations of the PES. In Chapter 13 Thielicke addresses the implications of the *imago* doctrine for Christian ethics, and in Chapter 14 he treats the subject of the law of God as it functions in a fallen world characterized by human guilt, personal responsibility, divine judgment, and grace.

Between God and Satan (1958): This book is a detailed exposition of the temptation experience of Jesus as recorded by Matthew’s Gospel. Originally written in 1938 and reissued in 1946, it was initially intended to “strengthen the followers of Jesus Christ in their resistance to ideological tyranny” (Thielicke, 1958:v). Following the collapse of the Third Reich, Thielicke hoped the book would remain as relevant as it had before, knowing that while the temptations had indeed changed with the shifting landscape of Germany and the world, the tempter and his tactical methods were the same.

The Freedom of the Christian Man: A Christian Confrontation With the Secular Gods (1963): This book is a compilation of numerous lectures, occasional papers, and addresses given by Thielicke on the subject of human freedom and the threats to its enjoyment. In this volume Thielicke boldly attacks secularism, Marxism, communism, and utopianism and defines true freedom as bondage to the love of God: “For the one who loves is free precisely to the degree that he surrenders to the necessity of love” which, in turn, “permits the human heart to will what the heart of God wills” (Thielicke, 1963c:13).

The Trouble With the Church: A Call for Renewal (1965): This book, originally written in 1965, represents Thielicke’s philosophy and defense of preaching. Thielicke challenges preachers to recover the dying art of persuasive, passionate preaching, which is God’s chief means for the life and renewal of the church. His central thesis is that preaching should connect with real life and courageously address the problems and concerns that people are facing. The faithful preacher, he says, must “deliver the message of his text to the people living today” and, therefore, he must “know these people” and “know at what point they raise questions” (Thielicke, 1965b:21). While pointedly critical of the church and preachers, Thielicke “unequivocally takes his stand within the church” and seeks to guide her out of the dark valley of irrelevance (Doberstein in Thielicke, 1965b:vii).

Encounter With Spurgeon (1963): This book reveals Thieliicke's great love for the nineteenth century English Baptist preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon. He finds in Spurgeon a worthy model for all faithful preachers and challenges them to make the bold preaching of the Scripture the "theme number one" of the church (Thieliicke, 1963b:2).

A Little Exercise for Young Theologians (1962): In this work Thieliicke seeks to guide students of theology to a proper understanding of the vital connection between doctrine, preaching, and life. In no uncertain terms he sets forth the "theological necessity" which has been "laid upon the church" to love God with all the mind as well as the heart (Marty in Thieliicke, 1962d:xiv). In this short treatise Thieliicke also summons preachers to "reclaim the task of seeking theological excellence and community [responsibility]" (Smith, 1993:38) and to "maintain a lively—even theological—dialog with the ordinary children of God" (Thieliicke in Dirks, 1972:110-112).

Between Heaven and Earth: Conversations With American Christians (1965): Thieliicke traveled to America for a second time in 1963 and met with a large number of Christians from various faith traditions and denominations spanning from "Los Angeles to New York, from Texas to Chicago" (Thieliicke, 1965a:xi). He came to America at the invitation of several seminaries and churches and conducted lectures, seminars, and informal conversations over a six-month period. Throughout the duration of his visit, Thieliicke took extensive notes on the many conversations he had with American Christians—conversations that traversed the full spectrum of the day's relevant issues, including biblical criticism and inerrancy, the virgin birth of Christ, speaking in tongues, racism, and the Nazi regime.

The Evangelical Faith (1974, 1977, 1982): This three-volume series represents Thieliicke's official foray into the field of Systematic Theology where his contribution to the discipline has been widely applauded since the completion of the English version of the series in 1982. Bromiley (in Thieliicke, 1974:5) comments that while Thieliicke's theology is distinctly Lutheran in flavor, the series does not represent "Lutheran dogmatics in the narrower sense" but, rather, achieves Thieliicke's aim of setting forth a "more broadly ecumenical" theology that would appeal to a wider audience, assisting the church to "find its way theologically in a new and perplexing age." Particularly helpful in reference to the PES is *Volume Three: Theology of the Spirit* (1982). In Part

Five of this volume there are two chapters dealing with eschatology from an individual and corporate perspective. In these chapters Thieliicke sets forth his understanding of the doctrines of death, judgment, resurrection, the intermediate state, and eternal life.

The Hidden Question of God (1977): This book is another compilation of Thieliicke's addresses, lectures, and occasional writings, each responding to the wide variety of significant questions facing mankind. The book is organized around five key subjects and the numerous questions being posed in relation to each: questions of religion, the church, humanity, truth, and God.

The Doctor as Judge of Who Shall Live and Who Shall Die (1970): This book is a collection of lectures originally presented by Thieliicke to the Congress of Surgeons at the University of Hamburg. Later, these same addresses were given to a diverse American audience composed of physicians, lawyers, businessmen, ministers, educators, and students at the first meeting of the Houston Conference on Ethics in Medicine and Technology. In this volume Thieliicke attempts to answer questions concerning the dignity and worth of a human being and whether or not there is something about a person that "dare not be changed—something in his very nature that dare not be violated—if he is to remain human" (Thieliicke, 1970a:1). The book is thus concerned primarily with the relationship of medical technology to humanity as the image of God. Specifically, Thieliicke seeks to defend the notion that questions of human existence, the beginning and ending of life, and the very nature of humanity itself are fundamental issues that "exceed the competence of medical people to decide alone" (Thieliicke, 1970a:2). He argues that such questions are much too serious to be handled by physicians in a vacuum apart from the additional insights and contributions of the disciplines of philosophy and theology. Thieliicke also raises a concern regarding the point at which physicians and medical technologies cease to provide aid and begin to cancel themselves out. That is, he asks at what point do medical technologies and advancements in patient care actually serve the antithesis of the Hippocratic oath? As he wisely cautions, the "constructive powers are always accompanied by a destructive tendency" and the "act of compassion to one generation can be an act of oppression in the next" (Thieliicke, 1970a:6-7). The relevance of this book for an investigation into Thieliicke's sermonic treatment of the PES is to be found in his robust view of the biblical meta-narrative of creation, fall, and redemption. The fact of human sin against God, estrangement from the Creator, and the subsequent corruption of the creation has

plunged mankind into the tragic state of “standing in sinful contradiction to his intended destiny” in a world that is now “disjointed” (Thielicke, 1970a:9, 11). Suffering and death will be humanity’s lot until the eventual renewal of creation in the eschaton. Until then, we will grapple with the profoundly complex questions related to the end of life, the alleviation of human suffering, and the ethical legitimacy of ever-advancing medical procedures.

Modern Faith and Thought (1990): Thielicke calls this volume a “historical supplement” to his three-volume work, *Evangelical Faith*. In this book, which is based upon a series of classroom lectures given at the Universities of Tübingen and Hamburg, Thielicke traces the significant epochs of Protestant theology and the unique issues and questions that defined each, “especially the question of the interrelationship of faith and thought” (Thielicke, 1990:xvi). He states that a further aim of the book is to “present the great systematic sketches of the past century in the light of our modern problems” (Thielicke, 1990:xvii). To accomplish this purpose Thielicke interacts with prominent theological and philosophical figures such as Descartes, Reimarus, Lessing, Semler, Schleiermacher, Kant, Hegel, and Kierkegaard and reveals his vast knowledge of the central theological and philosophical issues of his day.

Being Human, Becoming Human: An Essay in Christian Anthropology (1984): This extensive work represents Thielicke’s attempt to answer the question of human identity. In this wide-ranging book of essays, he probes the depths and contours of humanity in sin, in history, and in time as well as the relationship between theology and anthropology. In the third major section of this work entitled “*Humanity and Finitude: The Beginning, End, and Center of Existence*” Thielicke deals with issues directly related to the PES, including the fact of the afterlife, the distinction between human and animal death, the resurrection of the body, and the promise of eternal life.

Man in God’s World (1963): This book contains a number of theological lectures that Thielicke originally delivered during his years in Stuttgart before the Allied bombing had started. Thielicke knew that there were “dreadful visitations ahead” for the German people and felt compelled to prepare his audience for their eventual encounter with suffering and death (Thielicke, 1963a:7). Thielicke likewise understood that it was his duty as a minister to prepare his audience for the awful horrors that lay ahead and sought to do this by helping them to see “their life and the course of history from the

standpoint of Christ,” proving that faith in Him not only has to do with eternity but with life here and now (Thielicke, 1963a:8).

2.4 Significant sermonic writings

In this section the researcher’s aim is to present a listing of the more important of Thielicke’s published sermons, each of which have been translated into English, edited for clarity, and compiled in book form. As will be demonstrated below (in 6.0), there are a substantial number of these sermons that find their impetus in the need for a Christian and biblical response to human suffering and evil and will therefore be the subject of further analysis in this thesis. Once again, the researcher shall include some brief comments concerning their content, background, and the circumstances under which they were produced and preached. It should be noted that some of these sermons were first presented in the form of lectures, addresses, meditations, and personal correspondence.

The Waiting Father: Sermons on the Parables of Jesus (1959): J. Doberstein, Thielicke’s chief translator, calls this collection of sermons on the parables an example of the “greatest preaching being carried on anywhere in the world today” (Thielicke, 1959:7). Dirks (1972:108) states that this is Thielicke’s “best known book” and Smith (1992:46) likewise describes it as his “most popular and widely read sermonic work.” The book contains sixteen sermons on Thielicke’s favorite parables.

The Prayer That Spans the World (1960, also released as *Our Heavenly Father*): This is a moving and powerful series of messages preached by Thielicke in Stuttgart during the final days of World War II. They were begun at the Church of the Hospitallers and, following its destruction, concluded at St. Matthew’s parish house. Thielicke comments that these sermons were delivered “to people who continued to assemble throughout the horrors of the air raids” and the period of the “total military and political collapse and the beginning of the occupation”—a people who “had now come face to face with Eternity” (Thielicke, 1960, 13). Thielicke’s firm conviction about this prayer is that it

spans the world: the world of everyday trifles and universal history, the world with its hours of joy and bottomless anguish, the world of citizens and soldiers, the world of monotonous routine and sudden terrible catastrophe, the world of

carefree children and at the same time of problems that can shatter grown men (Thielicke, 1960:14).

How the World Began (1961): Delivered over a two year period in the very secular climate of Hamburg, these sermons are based upon the first eleven chapters of the book of Genesis. The messages represent Thielicke's attempt to communicate to his audience—a very diverse gathering of “all professions and ages in the very large Church of St. Michaels” —what God “meant us to be when he created us, what he had in mind when he planned the image of man” by “looking at the original design” (Thielicke, 1961a:6).

Faith, the Great Adventure (1985): This is a collection of eighteen sermons and meditations designed to acquaint the reader with some of the texts of Scripture which are seldom preached and generally assumed to have nothing to do with life or nothing to say to the contemporary reader. In this volume Thielicke deliberately avoids those commonly addressed subjects such as love, faith, hope, “with which we are all too familiar,” and instead brings his audience face to face with unappreciated texts that will lead to growth as Christians (Thielicke, 1985:v-vi).

How to Believe Again (1972): This is a collection of messages Thielicke first delivered to his congregation at St. Michael's Church in Hamburg. These particular sermons were specifically designed to address the basic questions that unbelievers have about God. The book contains fifteen sermons on such questions as “What does ‘faith’ mean?”, “How can I keep from being torn up inside?”, “How can God and politics mix?” and “What does God have to do with the meaning of life?” Thielicke states that his primary concern in these sermons was to “answer the question ‘And if there be a God ...?’ by speaking about people to whom God became a certainty” and to “indicate the level on which one's life moves when one brings God into the picture” (Thielicke, 1972:20).

I Believe: The Christian's Creed (1968): This volume is a series of sermons Thielicke preached on the *Apostle's Creed*. He was convinced that theology must be taught primarily through proclamation, for when theology “is given the nod over proclamation, everything goes wrong, for then man speaks more of himself than of the word of God which makes him a new creation” (Thielicke, 1968:viii). Thielicke was convinced that all believers must understand the substance of faith “on which we draw each time we

speak of the concrete issues of life” and that this is best accomplished not by systematic treatments but “in preaching” (Thielicke, 1968:vii).

How Modern Should Theology Be? (1969): This is a short collection of sermons Thielicke preached at Saturday afternoon worship services in Hamburg to audiences described as those who have “been reading in newspapers and magazines about the controversy now going on among theologians” (Thielicke, 1969:v). Here he attempts to deal forthrightly with the major theological questions being debated in the late 1960s such as the reliability of the Gospels, the possibility of actual miracles, and the reality of divine judgment. The sermons deliberately avoid technical theological language and are intended for both Christians and non-Christians who have questions about issues fundamental to faith in Christ.

Christ and the Meaning of Life (1962): This book is a series of sermons and meditations delivered by Thielicke on the radio and television. These messages, which were designed to be read concomitantly with the church year, treat a variety of biblical texts and themes as well as some of the parables of Jesus.

The Silence of God (1962): The sermons contained in this book were originally preached by Thielicke in the years between 1942 and 1951, years he describes as “extraordinary” and full of “supreme danger” and “excitement” (Thielicke, 1962b:viii). During this period, particularly the years 1942-1945, the people of Germany were experiencing “catastrophes, bombings, mass burials and evacuations,” and Thielicke realized that “mere reflection” could never offer real comfort to those so afflicted by the apparent silence of God (Thielicke, 1962b:viii). Into this situation of extreme human pain, profound questions, and the constant presence of death, these sermons were delivered in order to demonstrate how “the eternal Word comes into our human times and sustains and guides us as a reality” (Thielicke, 1962b:ix). The second part of this collection contains four sermons Thielicke preached on Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, and Pentecost. As the translator G. Bromiley notes, each of these final sermons “applies the central message of the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection to our contemporary needs” (Thielicke, 1962b:vi).

Facing Life's Questions (1979, also published as Being A Christian When the Chips Are Down): This volume contains sixteen sermons on practical questions raised by

Christians and non-believers alike. The subject matter ranges from “Who am I?” to “Does our life have any meaning?” and “What does it mean to take God seriously?” The second section includes sermons on questions related to the church year festivals of Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, and Pentecost.

2.5 Chapter summary

In this chapter the researcher has sought to demonstrate that the foundation for the unique and timely pulpit ministry of Helmut Thielicke, particularly as he proclaimed the Word of God in response to the carnage and suffering of the Second World War, was his own early experiences of personal suffering and tragedy and the obvious questions about God and evil that seemed to confront him continually. Thielicke’s early life and experiences shaped and prepared him for the task of preaching the Gospel in the tragic climate and immediate aftermath of the Third Reich—a task to which he would be providentially called and especially equipped with all of the requisite theological, philosophical, and pastoral skill that such an important calling would involve. I have also sought to demonstrate that Thielicke was blessed not only with a massive intellect but also with the rare ability to teach in the University, to serve as an effective and compassionate parish minister, and to produce a prodigious body of academic and pastoral writings that have been widely recognized for their excellence and impact upon the Christian world. It is often the case that highly gifted academicians, particularly those philosophically minded, do not communicate effectively and sometimes seem to function at a certain intellectual, if not emotional, distance from their audience or students. On the other hand, it is certainly true that not all popular communicators think well or speak in substantive ways as to reach beyond the level of cliché or populist rhetoric. Yet, in Thielicke we find the balanced blend of theological and philosophical acumen, the rhetorical dexterity of an effective communicator, and the tender heart of one who is in touch with the deepest needs, questions, and feelings of his audience no matter what their station in life. This makes Thielicke not only rare among ministers but also worthy of consideration as a model for pulpit ministry to those who are in the throes of suffering and death and are beset with the haunting questions posed by the presence of evil in God’s world.

In the next chapter the researcher shall offer a basic theological and philosophical introduction to the PES, consider four of the more significant Christian responses to the

PES, and then examine two of the homiletical and pastoral challenges that the PES presents to ministers. The chapter will conclude with a brief reflection on the PES as faced by Thielicke in his unique ministry context.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 AN INTRODUCTION TO PREACHING AND THE PROBLEM OF EVIL AND SUFFERING

Having outlined the early life and career of Helmut Thielicke and set forth briefly the historical context for his Christian ministry, it is now appropriate to shift the focus to the PES itself. In this chapter the researcher shall attempt to delineate the particular difficulties that evil and suffering pose for Christian ministers, particularly in terms of preaching. To accomplish this the researcher will 1) seek to define and introduce the PES from both a theological and philosophical perspective and briefly survey and illustrate some of the significant Christian responses from these two vantage points, 2) suggest two of the unique challenges the PES presents for pulpit ministers, and 3) examine the specific context in which Thielicke preached with reference to the PES.

3.1 The problem of evil: theological and philosophical considerations

Few deny the fact that human life and world history are encumbered by the presence of evil and suffering and often in quantities and magnitudes that defy our imaginations and stretch our emotions beyond their reasonable limits. Even those religions (such as Hinduism and Christian Science, for example) that claim that the material world with all of its troubles and painful events and experiences is a mere illusion, or *maya*, must at least recognize the evil and suffering in the world in order to deny their reality. Despite one's theological or philosophical presuppositions about the world of matter, virtually everyone senses "that our world is not a perfect place. Suffering, both in mind and body, is pervasive" and, furthermore, there is no one who "wholly escapes suffering and the evils that beget it" regardless of their theological or philosophical commitments (Dauenhauer, 2007:207).

The PES is indeed a 'problem' for religious and non-religious people alike who not only experience the intellectual strain of having to account for the evil and suffering in the world and in their own lives but must also bear the emotional and physical consequences of evil and suffering in very personal terms while seeking some degree of meaning and purpose for such tribulations. Theists are compelled to search for an intellectually satisfying way to release the pronounced tension between their belief in an

omnibenevolent, all-powerful deity and the pervasive suffering and evil that is present in the very world this 'good' deity has created. Atheists, who regularly deploy the PES as their main argument for the non-existence of God, must account for how 'evil' can exist in a world without transcendent, universally binding moral absolutes, as well as the question of how the suffering of humans (and animals) can be considered 'tragic' or 'bad' in light of the supposed random nature of life itself (Nash, 1992:112-113). In a rather ironic twist, atheists themselves would also appear to have a problem of evil since it would "seem to follow that one cannot appeal to gratuitous evils while arguing against the existence of God—unless, that is, one is unconcerned about begging the question" (Nash, 1992:113). Feinberg (2000:385) has correctly observed that the PES is, therefore, "a problem of both theological and philosophical interest as well as a matter of religious import, and it arises not only in Western religion and philosophy but also in various other world religions." Dauenhauer (2007:208) agrees: "The problem of evil, especially of moral evil, has long agitated both philosophical and theological speculation."

It must also be noted that the PES is certainly not a new phenomenon that has suddenly made an appearance on the world stage following the unspeakable atrocities of the Second World War that were experienced by Thielicke and his generation. Johnson (2001:119) boldly states that "it is intellectually dishonest to act as though this problem was not just as intractable millennia before the Holocaust occurred, and that it would not be just as vexing had the Holocaust never happened." According to Thiselton (2002:344), formal expressions of the PES predate the birth of Christianity and Islam, and even David Hume's popular and widely referenced formulation of the problem in the eighteenth century seems to draw upon the work of Epicurus in the third century BCE. And as for Judaism, the ancient biblical book of Job, arguably one of the oldest stories in all of Scripture and, perhaps in all of human history, has the PES as its main storyline. However, Davis (1985:536) observes that, while the PES was indeed recognized by philosophers and theologians long before the present time,

the period from 1914 to the present, with its tragedies, outrages, and heinous crimes, has forced recent philosophers (as well as theologians and other thinkers) to face the problem in a poignant way. Coming on the heels of a great period of optimism, the twentieth century can be called the Age of Theodicy. The blood and in retrospect pointless battles of World War I, the Great Depression with its millions of jobless and even starving people, World War II with its forty million civilian and military deaths, the atomic age and the threat of nuclear destruction—all these events forced theists to do theodicy in an urgent way. But doubtless *the* great symbol of evil in our age, that event against

which all theodicies must measure themselves, is the Holocaust of World War II.

3.1.1 Theological considerations

In its more popular formulation the PES may be defined as the apparently irresolvable conundrum faced by those who believe that “there is a God who is both omnipotent and wholly good” despite the obvious evils of the world and the human suffering that results (Mackie, 1964:47). As Mackie (1964:47) further explains it, the most straightforward form of the PES is seen in the following:

God is omnipotent; God is wholly good; and yet evil exists. There seems to be some contradiction between these three propositions, so that if any two of them were true the third would be false. But at the same time all three are essential parts of most theological positions: the theologian, it seems, at once *must* adhere and *cannot consistently* adhere to all three.

Davis (1985:535-536) sets forth the three essential components of the formal PES as it relates specifically to monotheism and the classical view of the divine attributes:

1. If God is omnipotent, God is able to prevent human suffering; and if God is perfectly morally good, God must want to prevent human suffering.
2. Human suffering exists.
3. Therefore, no omnipotent and perfectly morally good God exists.

This, Davis claims (1985:535), is “doubtless the foremost intellectual difficulty theists face,” and it presents intellectual, practical and pastoral challenges to all those holding to what might be termed the ‘traditional orthodox’ view of God and his properties. Christian philosopher John Frame (2002:160) agrees and admits that the PES is “probably the most difficult problem in all of theology, and for many atheists it is the Achilles’ heel of the theistic worldview.” Quinn (1995:610) has also observed that the PES is “generally regarded as the strongest objection to theism” and that both natural evils (sickness, disease, natural disasters, etc.) and moral evils (murder, war, and the evils perpetrated by human agents) “raise the question of what reasons an omniscient, omnipotent, and perfectly good being could have for permitting or allowing their existence.”

Thus, for theists, and particularly Christian theists, the heart of this dilemma is the apparent contradiction between the perfect goodness and benevolence of an omnipotent God—theological affirmations with substantial scriptural support—and the obvious fact that so much evil and suffering exists in the world. Leikind (2010:41), responding from

an atheistic perspective, states the theist's dilemma this way: "Those who think as I do would say that the existence of evil and suffering show that the supposed properties of God—omnipotence, omniscience, and perfect goodness—cannot exist without contradiction." Ronald Nash (1988:178), a Christian philosopher, sounds a similar note with his observation that the PES has its focus on the fact that there are a number of "related and essential Christian beliefs about God" that seem to be thoroughly "incompatible with the evil we find in the world" and that it is uniquely the Christian theist's task to "explain how the conceptual scheme that is the Christian worldview is consistent with the amount and kinds of evil we find in creation." Thus, it is the theist's insistence upon both the omnibenevolence and omnipotence of God that provides the PES with its intellectual and existential traction.

According to Feinberg (2004:19) it is also critical to recognize that there is actually not 'a' problem of evil or 'the' problem of evil in a singular sense, but rather the PES is actually

a host of distinct problems that confront theologies holding that (a) God is omnipotent (in some sense of 'omnipotent'), (b) God is good in that he wills that there be no evil, in some sense of 'evil,' and (c) evil, in the sense alluded to in (b), exists.

Furthermore, he explains that there are two main internal distinctions that are important for theists in terms of fully grasping and addressing the PES. There is a "religious" problem of evil that arises from "a particular instance of suffering and evil that someone is actually experiencing. Faced with such affliction, the sufferer finds it hard to reconcile what is happening with his beliefs about God's love and power. This precipitates a crisis of faith" (Feinberg, 2004:21). In the midst of this crisis the sufferer raises a number of questions as to why this is happening to 'me' and how a loving God could permit such things to occur and how one is supposed to trust and worship God when He will not end the supplicant's pain despite fervent prayers for deliverance. According to Feinberg (2004:21) it is "the religious problem of evil that Job encountered"; his story is the biblical prototype. But there is also the "theological/philosophical problem of evil" which concerns the "existence of *evil in general*, not some specific evil that someone encounters which disrupts her personal relation with God" (Feinberg, 2004:21). One dealing with this form of the problem "could ask how the existence of an omnipotent, all-benevolent God, if he existed, would square with the existence of evil, if there were any" (Feinberg, 2004:21). So it would

seem, therefore, that theists have a particularly knotty problem with evil and suffering when they affirm both God's goodness and power. Michael Peterson (1982:16) expresses this difficulty by noting that the PES is particularly troublesome for Orthodox Christian theology

because two of its important beliefs seem to be incompatible. On the one hand, Christian theology affirms the unrivaled power, unlimited knowledge, and unrelenting love of God. On the other hand, Christian theology recognizes the obvious fact that horrendous evils occur in God's created order.

But then, as William Rowe argues, this difficulty is especially exacerbated when added to it are strong views of God's sovereignty over all things—a view that is prominent in various denominational expressions of Augustinian, Calvinist, and Reformed Theology. Rowe (1999:98), a noted atheist philosopher, comments on the robust declaration of divine sovereignty found in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (Chapter III, "Of God's Eternal Decree") which announces God's exhaustive and comprehensive sovereignty over all of life and history, including mankind's fall into sin:

This remarkable expression of God's total sovereignty over all that comes to pass might seem to make God the creator of the moral evil in the world. Moreover, it might also seem to preclude any free will on the part of his creatures. For if God has from all eternity unchangeably ordained whatsoever comes to pass, it is hard to see how it can ever be genuinely up to us what we shall do or even decide to do.

Mackie (1964:47-48) grants that the PES can be easily solved, at least in some sense, if theists will surrender their view of strong divine sovereignty or one of the other classical affirmations about the nature of God, the world, and evil:

If you are prepared to say that God is not wholly good, or not quite omnipotent, or that evil does not exist, or that good is not opposed to the kind of evil that exists, or that there are limits to what an omnipotent thing can do, then the problem of evil will not arise for you.

Dilley (2000:29) has also made such a case by arguing that the problems posed by evil and suffering for the theist could be "reduced or perhaps even solved" if theists would simply admit that there are apparently many kinds of evil that "God cannot eliminate because they are caused by something over which God does not have complete control."

To summarize, it seems clear that the theological side of the problem of evil is made more acute by at least two broad considerations. The first is the rather large number of biblical passages that speak of God's total control (sovereignty or Lordship) over all

events, including the commission of sin by moral agents (and the resulting ‘moral’ evil), and disasters, famines, earthquakes, etc. that occur in the world (or ‘natural’ evil). This results in the theological question: how can God hold people accountable for their sinful actions if He has ordained all that comes to pass? (For example, note how this is expressed in the *Belgic Confession*, Article 13: The Doctrine of God’s Providence). The second consideration is the more practical or existential problem Christian believers face when seeking to relate to God (in terms of prayer, service, trust, and love) in the face of pervasive evil, personal tragedy, and loss. As Spiegel notes, this results in a series of significant questions:

How can I trust a God who allows such rampant injustice and suffering to continue from day to day? From an emotional standpoint, how can I relate to such a God? And if God somehow intends some or all of the evil in the world, then what am I to make of Biblical directives for human beings to oppose evil? (2005:185.)

With regard to the biblical data setting forth these two larger considerations and the serious questions they prompt, the Scriptures are unambiguous in establishing at least four key theological affirmations in regard to God and evil. First, there are Scriptures that affirm that evil is real and not an illusion or simply a subjective state of mind. Secondly, there are other passages that firmly establish God’s sovereign control over the evil actions of men and angels as well as their often-horrible consequences. Thirdly, there are Scriptures that set forth the authentic moral agency of human beings and angels and their accountability before God. Finally, evil is presented in Scripture as both the antithesis to God’s revealed will and as the servant of His ultimate purposes for the world. The following list of some of the representative passages in each of these categories will illustrate this point (unless otherwise noted all Scripture quotations are taken from the *New American Standard Bible*, 1958):

Certain biblical passages demonstrate that evil and its accompanying suffering is real:

Genesis 2:17—“but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die.”

Psalms 23:4—“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for Thou art with me....”

Isaiah 25:8—“He will swallow up death for all time, and the Lord God will wipe tears away from all faces....”

Ezekiel 33:11—“I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked....”

Matthew 4:23—“And Jesus was going about in all Galilee ... healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness.”

Matthew 6:12-13—“And forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

Mark 8:31—“And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.”

Luke 24:26—“Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?”

John 5:5—“And a certain man was there, who had been thirty-eight years in his sickness.”

Romans 1:18—“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.”

Romans 5:12—“Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned.”

Romans 6:23—“For the wages of sin is death....”

Romans 7:19—“For the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish.”

Galatians 4:13—“but you know it was because of bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time.”

2 Corinthians 4:4—“in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving....”

1 Thessalonians 5:22—“Abstain from every form of evil.”

Hebrews 2:14-15—“Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.”

Certain biblical passages demonstrate God’s control over all things including evil and its consequences:

Job 42:2—“I know that Thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of Thine can be thwarted.”

Psalms 135:6—“Whatever the Lord pleases, He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps.”

Proverbs 16:33—“The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.”

Isaiah 14:24, 27—“The Lord of hosts has sworn saying, ‘Surely, just as I have intended so it has happened, and just as I have planned so it will stand.... For the Lord of hosts has planned, and who can frustrate it? And as for His stretched-out hand, who can turn it back?’”

Isaiah 43:13—“Even from eternity I am He; and there is none who can deliver out of My hand; I act and who can reverse it?”

Romans 8:28—“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”

Certain biblical passages demonstrate authentic human moral agency:

Genesis 2:16—“And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘From any tree of the garden you may eat freely.’”

1 Samuel 12:14-15—“If you will fear the Lord and serve Him, and listen to His voice and not rebel against the command of the Lord, then both you and also the king who reigns over you will follow the Lord your God. And if you will not listen to the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the command of the Lord, then the hand of the Lord will be against you, as it was against your fathers.”

1 Samuel 15:10—“I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not carried out My commands....”

John 3:16—“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”

John 6:38—“And you do not have His Word abiding in you, for you do not believe Him whom He has sent.”

Romans 10:9-10—“that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.”

Certain biblical passages demonstrate God’s hatred of evil and His sovereign employment of evil and suffering for the accomplishment of His will and eternal purposes:

Genesis 50:20—“And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good....”

Exodus 10:27—“But the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he was not willing to let them go.”

Job 1:12—“Then the Lord said to Satan, ‘Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him.’”

Romans 11:32—"For God has shut up all in disobedience that He might show mercy to all."

Proverbs 16:4—"The Lord has made everything for its own purpose, even the wicked for the day of evil."

Proverbs 6:16-19—"There are six things which the Lord hates, yes seven which are an abomination to Him: Haughty eyes and a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood. A heart that devises wicked plans, feet that run rapidly to evil, a false witness who utters lies, and one who spreads strife among brothers."

John 9:2-3—"And His disciples asked Him, saying, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind?' Jesus answered, 'it was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was in order that the works of God might be displayed in him.'"

Romans 1:18—"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness."

Romans 9:17—"For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, 'For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth.'"

Colossians 3:6—"For it is on account of these things that the wrath of God is coming."

It seems clear enough that these Scriptures declare the reality of sin, evil, and suffering, and also simultaneously affirm both divine sovereignty and human responsibility while guaranteeing the accomplishment of God's eternal purposes and glory. And it is remarkable that the Scripture's unambiguous affirmation of divine sovereignty and human moral agency is accomplished without any apparent need to explain their relationship or to provide a logical rationale for such *a priori* incongruous claims. Most amazingly, this is sometimes accomplished within the span of a single verse of Scripture. One of the most significant of these passages is found in the midst of Peter's

Pentecostal sermon as recorded by Luke in the book of Acts. In reference to the arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus, Peter states the following: “[T]his Man, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of Godless men” (Acts 2:23). And later Peter also declared that

truly in this city there were gathered together against Thy holy servant Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the people of Israel to do whatever Thy hand and Thy purpose predestined to occur (Acts 4:27-28).

In these texts we find the twin declarations of God’s predetermination (or pretemporal divine ordination) of both the event of Christ’s crucifixion and the actions of the perpetrators that precipitated the crime, in addition to the moral accountability of those who freely acted in concert with God’s eternal plan.

One might reasonably argue that these passages are paradigmatic and beneficial to interpreters in seeking to understand other biblical references that likewise establish the two seemingly illogical truths that form the heart of the PES: that God is good and is in total control of all things, exercising comprehensive sovereignty and Lordship over the created order, including evil, and that humans are responsible moral agents, fully and justifiably accountable to God for their actions. Such passages are also critical since they deal with what is the most diabolical and horrific event ever to occur in the universe—an event ordained by God from eternity past, yet carried out by human agents who, according to the biblical testimony, acted freely and of their own volition in slaughtering the Son of God.

Despite the clarity with which the Scriptures address the essential components of the PES, there yet remains a significant degree of difficulty for biblical interpreters, theologians, pastors, and Christians of every level of spiritual maturity. We struggle to reconcile in our minds how both of these biblically affirmed truths could be simultaneously maintained without falling victim to logical absurdity. It is also self-evident that this is precisely the point at which Christian theologians have offered nuanced definitions of evil as well as various explanations as to the origin and nature of sin and the relationship between divine sovereignty and human agency. To appreciate the wide spectrum of Christian theological reflection upon these critical issues five examples may be set forth: T. Aquinas, K. Barth, G. C. Berkouwer, J. Moltmann, and S. Hauerwas. And as will be demonstrated later in this thesis (see 4.0), each of these

representative theologies of the PES has at least some bearing upon Thielicke's sermonic treatment of the PES.

3.1.1.1 *Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)*

In Aquinas' treatment of the PES we find a number of significant theological premises that govern his thinking. First, he is initially prompted to defend the fundamental goodness of God and the fact that the origin of evil cannot be traced to the divine being. To the contrary, he claims that "God cannot will evil" and that "every operation of God is an operation of virtue since His virtue is His essence" (1975a:290-291). Aquinas defines God as the *summum bonum*, "the highest good," and from this simple definition moves to the logical assertion that, as the ultimate good in the universe, God "cannot bear any mingling with evil as neither can the highest hot thing bear any mingling with the cold. The divine will, therefore cannot be turned to evil" (1975a:291).

Secondly, as to the origin of sin and the culpability for evil actions that falls upon men and angels, Aquinas turns to the idea of *causae secundae*, or secondary causation, for his answer. The evil that has arisen in the world, "without prejudice to Divine Providence," has done so

because of defects in secondary causes. Thus in causes that follow one another in order, we see that evil finds its way into an effect owing to some fault in a secondary cause, although this fault is by no means the product of the first cause (1993:158).

While God is the "first cause" of all that has come into being, He cannot be the author of evil since evil finds its source only in "secondary causes." To be sure, evil, like everything else in the universe, exists by divine permission, and in this restricted sense God may be thought of as the "universal cause of all things" (1993:159). Yet, He is "not the cause of evil as evil," and He bears no blame for the evil and suffering that occurs (1993:159). To the charge that such a view is illogical, Aquinas replies that

God's permission of evil in the things governed by Him is not inconsistent with the divine goodness.... The perfection of the universe requires the existence of some beings that are not subject to evil and of other beings that can suffer the defect of evil in keeping with their nature. If evil were completely eliminated from things, they would not be governed by Divine Providence in accord with their nature; and this would be a greater defect than the particular defects eradicated (1993:159).

Finally, Aquinas also argues that the existence of evil is necessary to the degree that it affords God the platform from which to display His nature as that which is truly good. If God had not providentially permitted evil to arise in the creatures He made, then “much good would be rendered impossible” (1993:159). Thus, it is not the aim or ultimate goal of His providence to “safeguard all beings from evil” but only to “see to it that the evil which arises is ordained to some good” (1993:159). And the good that God desires to display is only appreciated in terms of antipathy or comparison. Aquinas argues, therefore, that it is against the dark backdrop of evil that God’s radiant goodness is made apparent:

Good is rendered more estimable when compared with particular evils. For example, the brilliance of white is brought out more clearly when set off by the dinginess of black. And so by permitting the existence of evil in the world, the divine goodness is more emphatically asserted in the good, just as the divine wisdom when it forces evil to promote good (1993:160).

3.1.1.2 *Karl Barth (1886-1968)*

Barth’s treatment of the PES finds its foundation in several theological concepts that surface in his writings. Not unlike Aquinas he speaks primarily of “possibility” and of “God’s permissive will” but defines evil as essentially “non-being.” He first argues that the “possibility of defection or evil” is necessarily intrinsic to the creature if he is to maintain both his ontological distinction from the Creator and his integrity as a created thing living under the sovereign lordship of God:

The fact that the creature can fall away from God and perish does not imply any imperfection on the part of creation or the Creator. What it does mean positively is that it is something created and is therefore dependent on preserving grace, just as it owes its very existence simply to the grace of its Creator. A creature freed from the possibility of falling away would not really be living as a creature. It could only be a second God—and as no second God exists, it could only be God Himself (1957a:503).

With this approach to the origin of evil, Barth is careful not to locate its source in the creation itself as if evil is inherent in the created order. If this were the case creation would not then be truly “good” as was declared by God in the Genesis record (1957a: 504). Rather, evil results from the creature’s rejection of the “preserving grace of God”—a tragic choice that plunged the human race into ruin. Therefore, no “shadow” or blame may be cast upon the Creator since the responsibility for sin and suffering lies totally with the creature (1957a:504). When men choose to sin, taking advantage of the possibility necessitated by their creaturely status, they “enter into the sphere of the

divine prohibition and curse, disavowal and rejection; the realm of death” (1957a:557), and they suffer the horrible consequences.

Secondly, Barth speaks of the permissive will of God in his treatment of the PES. While arguing that it is “really impossible” to “leave the sphere of the divine will or escape from the lordship of the divine will” (1957a:557), he seems to differentiate between the divine decree, which encompasses all things that occur in time and space, and that which, nevertheless, stands opposed to all that God is in His holiness and moral perfection. For example, Barth speaks of “sin, death, and the devil and hell” as “works of God’s permissive will which are negative in their effects” (1957b:92) and then argues that even in these acts of permission “God’s willing and knowing are gracious, even though they take effect as negation (and in that sense are permissive). For even the enemies of God are the servants of God and the servants of His grace” (1957b:92). Therefore, all things without exception, even the wicked acts of men and the inestimable suffering brought about by them, are “instruments of the eternal, free and immutable grace of God” (1957b:92). In this way the comprehensive nature of the decree is maintained and the power of divine grace is unblemished: “Without evil as ‘permitted’ in this sense there can be no universe or man, and without the inclusion of this ‘permission’ God’s decree would be something other than it actually is” (1957b:170). Barth maintains that God wills all that is, including sin and evil “in so far as He gives it this space, position and function” (1957a:556). God does not accomplish this as the author of evil in the sense of

recognising it as His creature, approving and confirming and vindicating it. On the contrary, He wills it as He denies it His authorship, as He refuses it any standing before Him or right or blessing or promise (1957a:556).

Furthermore, God could not eternally and immutably ordain the “overflowing of His glory” and “man as witness” to His glory without also

choosing its shadow, without conceding to and creating for that shadow—not in Himself, but in the sphere of the outward overflowing of His glory—an existence as something yielding and defeated, without including the existence of that shadow in His decree (1957b:170).

Thus, God may be said to “will” the presence of evil “only because He wills not to keep to Himself the light of His glory but to let it shine outside Himself” (1957b:170).

A third strategy discovered in Barth's theology of the PES is his definition of evil as "nothingness" or as the "unreal" and "autonomous power" of "impotence" (1957b: 170). For Barth, evil is the "spirit of constant negation" that "necessarily confronts and opposes being in the realm of creation" (1957b:170). And it is only in this dialectic of perpetual "confrontation and opposition" to being that evil finds its "basis and meaning" (1957b:170). Bromiley (1979:149) explains that by applying the term "nothingness" to evil Barth means that

creation in both its light and darkness is God's good creation. Hiding behind this negative side, nothingness makes itself seem harmless and innocuous, contradicts God's self-manifestation in the incarnate Christ, brings itself into an apparently positive relation to God, and cannot be recognized as the true enemy it is.

Despite the fact that "man did not have by nature a capacity for sin," evil gained entry into the world because man "opened the door to nothingness by thinking, willing, and acting contrary to grace" (Bromiley, 1979:150). That is to say, nothingness, or evil,

belongs to [God's] perfection not to be creature, and to the creature's perfection not to be God. The creatures' 'not' forms a frontier, for beyond what it is by God's will lies what God does not will it to be. It is at this frontier that nothingness gains entry into the creaturely world (Bromiley, 1979:150).

Since this is the case, neither God nor the creature may be properly conceived of as the author of evil itself (Bromiley, 1979:148). Rather, evil must be understood in terms of the "negation of being" or the vicious "No" that stands diametrically opposed to the divine "Yes" declared "at the moment of creation" (Blocher, 1994:76-77). Sin and evil occur, therefore, when and where moral agents "give in to nothingness" and find themselves in league with Satan and the demonic forces that "give concrete expression to the power of nothingness" (Blocher, 1994:77).

3.1.1.3 *G. C. Berkouwer (1903-1996)*

Berkouwer's approach to the PES finds its focus upon his strong cautions against the perceived need of theologians and preachers to employ theodicy, which he notes, arises in the light of "our confession of God's Providence over all things" (1952:251). Especially for the Christian there is a "crisis of Providence" which gives a "new task to the Church in her preaching of the Gospel" for she must now proclaim that same Gospel "to men for whom experience has made it obvious that God does not rule" (1952:265).

For Berkouwer, those who construct some theodicy in response to the PES are attempting to

bring certainty out of doubt, confidence out of suspicion; its deepest motive can thus be pastoral affection. It assumes its apologetic stance in the midst of the distresses of human reason which whelms up in the tensions that exist between the unavoidable facts of experience and the preaching of the Church regarding God (1952:251-252).

Yet, at the very least theodicy, as typically practiced, ultimately dissolves into an attempt to deploy human reason in an unwarranted way, as if through its exercise one might somehow discover “a proper place for sin in creation” and provide intellectually satisfying answers for life’s many dilemmas (1952:257). That is, the starting place for such defenses of God and His ways is not Scripture but reason and the assumption that the answers men are seeking are accessible to them. Berkouwer explains that the main problem with theodicy is that

man proceeds from the facts of experience along the way of reasoned arguments to demonstrate that God’s rule of the world is just, to prove that experiential reality is not inconsistent with the righteousness of God. This is the way of the philosophy of religion or natural theology (1952:266).

To do this, Berkouwer argues, is to reason in an autonomous fashion, irrespective of the fact that the Word of God does not permit any “independent analyses of the world which leave God, even though temporarily, in the shadows” (1952:267). Those who seek to initiate a Christian theodicy from the starting point of autonomous reason, while motivated by praiseworthy pastoral or apologetic concerns, are making the serious mistake of abstracting thoughts and drawing conclusions about the world and sin from God’s revelation in Scripture (1952:266). They are assuming that

the world and its events, apart from revelation, speak their own language and that their speech can be understood and translated by our natural reason. God and His righteousness take their place, not at the *beginning*, but at the *end* of this process of thought (1952:266-267).

This, however, is exactly backwards, for the more biblically faithful approach is to begin with God’s self-revelation in the Word and then evaluate all human experiences in its light. In this way, the Word of God functions as the only authoritative and infallible interpreter of reality. It is unfaithful to the Word and wrongheaded, therefore, to assume that the world may be understood apart from God’s revelation. At the “most crucial moment”—such as the occurrence of personal suffering or gratuitous evil—human reason will fail, and our experiences of evil and tragedy will be “misunderstood

when God's revelation is not the determinative point of departure for analysis" (1952:267). Biblically speaking, it is not legitimate to "approach God on the basis of empirical reality" or to "make His righteousness a *deduction* of human reason" (1952:269). Since reality, inclusive of all human evil, suffering, tragedy, and death, "can never be considered as having existence in itself," it follows that reality "cannot be known, phenomenologically, in its deepest sense, apart from the light of Divine revelation" (1952:273). Additionally, the Scriptures teach us that human sin "is not an isolated territory in which man held exclusive domain and in which God cannot work except in reaction" (1952:276). And simultaneously, Scripture makes it clear that there is no possibility of "darkness or guilt in God" and that men are never allowed to call God to account for His actions (1952:276). Yet the Scriptures never directly address the intellectual incongruity created by these claims. The logical tension remains undiminished as the Scriptures unflinchingly declare the reality of human accountability within "the limits of the activity of God in all things and within the invincibility of His purpose" (1952:280). This juxtaposition of human responsibility for sin and divine moral perfection is, frankly, never presented as in any sense problematic in the biblical witness (1952:280).

In this regard, Berkouwer appeals to Paul's argument in Romans 11:36 as one that is most critical. Here the apostle emphatically states that

the living God is not to be subjected to the judgment of man and not to be grasped by the compass of experiential reality. Rather, all reality is to be seen as existing of, through, and unto him ... and to be understood in *His light*, the light of revelation (1952:267).

Berkouwer believes that the illuminating light of the Holy Scriptures is a light that "is found only in faith" and that to view the world apart from this light is to remain "enshrouded in darkness" (1952:268). This, he claims, is why all attempts at theodicy are fundamentally "worthless and unacceptable" (1952:268). Such efforts are divorced from faith in the incomprehensible God "who defines the limits and the nature of our knowledge" and reveals as much of Himself and His ways as He sovereignly chooses (1952:273). Berkouwer speaks in very alarming terms about the inherent danger and insufficiency of "natural theodicy" (1952:269):

Instead of preparing the way for fruitful conversation, instead of erecting a dam against the secularization of thought, theodicy only suggests that we try again to reach God by way of natural understanding. It is the ironic drama of theodicy that it actually abets the progressive secularizing of thought by insisting that man can understand his world without revelation. And the fact that one in

theodicy usually concludes with an empty, abstract God concept is already a judgment against this method.

For Berkouwer the haunting doubts that believers face in view of the PES represent the desperate “struggle against the protest of the autonomous man, who sees the limits which God draws to human knowledge as an outrage against his freedom and happiness” (1952:275). The antidote to this kind of doubt is not theodical reasoning but faith in God and in the “sovereignty of His grace” which we find in abundant measures in Christ. By means of this all-sufficient grace our doubt-filled protests against Him are withdrawn and in their place “worship is born” (1952:275). This, then, is the “profoundest point in all reflection on the problem of theodicy” and it raises the ultimate challenge for believers: “[I]s it possible to stand in this evil world and sing a doxology in the face of the incomprehensibility of God’s world rule?” (1952:285). The greatest lesson to be learned in times of suffering is that doxology and worship and songs of joy

do not arise from those who live without fear or misgivings, who escape all the shocks of life’s experiences. On the contrary, doxology is sung when peril is near and fear possesses. It sounds above questions and cries. The remarkable fact is that all the questions that arise in Scripture around what we call the problem of theodicy have their profoundest and most definitive answer in a *Hallelujah* (1952:286).

In the absence of theodicy, therefore, we need not “flee to the irrationality of a hidden God” but direct our thoughts to a sovereign God of revelation who is both living and true and is merciful to all who believe upon Christ. “This God is precisely not the God of dangerous caprice, but the holy and merciful Father” whom we may never accuse of “arbitrariness, nor protest with rebellious ‘Why?’” (1952: 273).

3.1.1.4 Jürgen Moltmann (b. 1926)

Moltmann’s reflection upon the PES seeks to demonstrate the metaphysical connection between suffering and the very being and nature of the Triune God. To be more precise, Moltmann argues that no predication regarding the being and nature of God may be legitimately set forth apart from a consideration of the suffering of the incarnate Christ. He argues that “all statements about God, about creation, about sin and death have their focal point in the crucified Christ” (1993:204). In this way, the passion of Christ, particularly the last hours of his suffering on the cross, serves as the “centre of all Christian theology” and is the basis and initiation point from which all theological

problems, such as the PES, are confronted and understood (1993:204). By means of this “theology of the cross” the challenges presented by atheists against belief in God and the troubling questions raised by suffering believers may be properly answered. He explains:

The only way past protest atheism is through a theology of the cross which understands God as the suffering God in the suffering of Christ and which cries out with the godforsaken God, ‘My God, why have you forsaken me?’ For this theology, God and suffering are no longer contradictions, as in theism and atheism, but God’s being is in suffering and the suffering is in God’s being itself, because God is love (1993:227).

In this model, God’s nature is paradoxical, or dialectical, embracing both human and divine natures with physical suffering serving as an ontologically necessary component of His Trinitarian being. Not unlike the model of God’s nature that is offered in panentheism (see Elwell, 1984:818–820), Moltmann’s God is also bipolar. He is *necessarily* and *eternally* infinite and finite, human and divine, immutable and subject to real change, eternally existent and yet suffering the torments of eternal death. Sin and suffering, then, are necessary to God’s existence rather than understood as contingent properties as in traditional Christian theism. Thus, as he claims, there are no contradictions to be resolved between God’s omnipotence and human sin and suffering. Mankind’s sin, what Moltmann describes as a “metaphysical rebellion,” is actually

a rebellion in God himself; God himself loves and suffers the death of Christ in his love. He is no ‘cold heavenly power’, nor does he ‘tread his way over corpses’, but is known as the human God in the crucified Son of Man (1993:227).

Moltmann’s “theology of the cross” is also to be distinguished from traditional Christian theology in terms of its Christology. While affirming with the traditional model that God does indeed become a true man in Jesus Christ, and thereby “enters into the finitude of man” to make it possible for “all the godless and the godforsaken” to “experience communion with him,” he argues that “the incarnate God is present, and can be experienced, in the humanity of every man, and in full human corporeality” (1993:276). Apart from its apparent denial of the uniqueness of Christ’s incarnation, this view seems to indicate that for Moltmann, the sin and suffering that is universally known in humanity is logically and ontologically necessary to the progress of Trinitarian history and for the expression of divine inter-Trinitarian love. For example, Moltmann claims that

like the cross of Christ, even Auschwitz is in God himself. Even Auschwitz is taken up into the grief of the Father, the surrender of the Son and the power of

the Spirit for it is the cross that is the beginning of the Trinitarian history of God (1993:278).

Ultimately, the history of the Godhead will be duly consummated “with the annihilation of death” (1993:278) when the victorious Son hands over the kingdom to His Father:

Then God will turn sorrow into eternal joy. This will be the sign of the completion of the Trinitarian history of God and the end of world history, the overcoming of the history of man’s sorrows and the fulfillment of his history of hope (1993:278).

Mankind’s hope in the midst of suffering, therefore, is singularly found in the “crucified God” who is supremely on display in the event of the crucifixion. This is the only “basis for a real hope which both embraces and overcomes the world” (1993:278).

3.1.1.5 *Stanley Hauerwas (b. 1940)*

Hauerwas approaches the PES from the perspective of two principal concepts, each of which casts serious doubt upon the propriety of theodical responses. First, Hauerwas is very concerned with the notion of human autonomy and, specifically, autonomous theological reasoning that appears to betray an inappropriate dependence upon the “Enlightenment assumption that we are most fully ourselves when we are free of all traditions and communities other than those we have chosen from the position of complete autonomy” (1990:53-54). It is in the atmosphere of such independent reasoning, divorced from a worshipping community, that the alleged PES appears. In such a context as this, “suffering cannot help but appear absurd, since it always stands as a threat to autonomy” (1990:54). For Hauerwas, it is a serious mistake to assume that the Christian faith is a mere system of beliefs, or theological affirmations, that can be “universally known without the conversion of being incorporated within a specific community of people” (1990:53). Likewise, it is a mistake to embrace the popular assumption that “there is a so-called problem of evil which is intelligible from anyone’s perspective” (1990:53). Hauerwas argues that the PES is simply the result of the flawed assumption that God can be known apart from a community of worshippers and the equally unjustified belief that questions related to God’s existence and actions can be separated from God’s character (1990:41-42). If these basic errors are avoided, there is, properly speaking, no problem of evil at all.

Secondly, Hauerwas explores the fact that the early believers in Christ did not require 'answers' in the face of their experiences with unjust suffering and evil. To the contrary, what they needed was "the means to go on even if the evil could not be 'explained'" (1990:49). He notes that

[a]pparently it never occurred to the early Christians to question their belief in God or even God's goodness because they were unjustly suffering for their beliefs. Rather, their faith gave them direction in the face of persecution and general misfortune. Suffering was not a metaphysical problem needing a solution but a practical challenge requiring a response (1990:51).

The early Christians were not interested in explaining the relationship between the divine attributes and human sin or suffering, but were, rather, resolutely focused upon how they might faithfully carry out the responsibilities of discipleship. Suffering, then, served as "an opportunity for living in a way more faithful to the new age which they believed had begun in Jesus Christ" (1990:51). Unlike their modern counterparts who sense the necessity of providing answers to the PES, the first Christians did not question God's love, power, or goodness, and viewed their suffering as the confirmatory sign "that they were part of Christ's church through baptism into his death" (1990:84).

In light of these considerations, Hauerwas concludes that while pain and suffering are indeed very real, there is really no PES since this alleged 'problem' is the mere creation of independent reasoning. Furthermore, he argues that "theodicy is basically a parasitic endeavor that draws its life from more positive modes of life" (1990:39) and is, therefore, unnecessary.

In summary, it is clear that there are a number of significant theological issues that challenge every biblical interpreter and theologian with regard to the PES and its subsidiary complications. It is also apparent that there are a number of varying approaches to dealing with these theological challenges, and Christian interpreters often find themselves in opposition to one another at certain points along the theological spectrum. However, it is very helpful for pulpit ministers to investigate the broad scope of theological reflection on the PES, even interacting with those whose views may be considered heterodox. If nothing else, such an exercise will promote an appropriate degree of humility and sharpen the interpretive skills of the one who has been called by God to apply the inscripturated Word to the most profound and perplexing problem of all.

3.1.2 Philosophical considerations

As to the philosophical side of the PES it is virtually a given, according to Ganssle (1998), that if the PES is “not the greatest philosophical problem with theism” and particularly Christian theism, “it is at least the problem with the greatest emotional impact. Everywhere and in every age sensitive thinkers have been confronted with the magnitude of evil in the world, both moral and natural, and have asked the question, ‘Why?’” This has been the basic philosophical problem with the theist’s belief in an omnipotent, perfectly good God. Evans (1982:130-131) goes so far as to claim that “[o]bjections to belief in God posed by the occurrence of evil and suffering present a far more serious challenge than do objections from science.” To be more specific, it is the presence of *gratuitous* evil and suffering that initiates the philosophical attack upon the claim that God, if He exists at all, possesses the attributes ascribed to Him in traditional Christian theism. Philosophers often refer to this version of the PES as the *inductive* or *evidential* argument *from* evil, which is to be distinguished from the *deductive* or *logical* form of the PES. As Ganssle defines it (1998), the evidential or deductive argument for the non-existence of God is *probabilistic* in nature. It readily admits that

the existence of God and the reality of evil are not logically incompatible but the amount and the kinds of evil we find in the world is strong evidence against the existence of an all-loving all-powerful God. Therefore the existence of God is improbable (Ganssle, 1998).

Nash (1988:196) expresses the evidential dilemma this way:

Given the amount of evil we find in the world—to say nothing of the apparent senselessness of much of this evil—it seems improbable or unlikely that the world was created by or is supported in its existence by a good, omnipotent, and omniscient God. The existence of evil, including large amounts of apparently senseless evil, tends to disconfirm belief in the existence of God.

Those employing this argument against Christian theism have surveyed the landscape of human history and in so doing have discovered sufficient evidence (in the quantity and types of evil and suffering that are present) for raising the question concerning the likelihood of God’s existence given the evil that is seen and experienced. The basic structure of the evidential form of the PES follows (Ganssle, 1998):

1. If there is unjustified evil (evil which God has no good reason to allow), God does not exist.
2. Probably there is unjustified evil.
3. Therefore, probably God does not exist.

In contrast to this approach, the deductive or logical argument, according to Ganssle (1998), represents the bolder claim that

there is a logical contradiction in asserting that God is all powerful, God is all loving and that evil exists. Wouldn't this kind of God eliminate all evil? The existence of God, on this view, is on par with a square circle. Given the existence of evil it is impossible for God to exist.

Among philosophers of both theistic and atheistic stripes, there appears to be a measure of general agreement regarding the fact that the *deductive* form of the argument has been sufficiently answered. The seminal work of Alvin Plantinga (1989, 1990) is typically regarded as the best response to the deductive challenge. In short, Plantinga has argued that an omnipotent, wholly good God may have morally sufficient reasons for the existence of evil and suffering, even that which is *a priori* gratuitous, that are not available to finite creatures given the infinite epistemic distance between Creator and creature. Stone (2003:253), therefore, concludes that no version of the logical or deductive PES "is persuasive, however, for the claim that suffering logically precludes God's existence cannot be justified. God is compossible with any evil you choose if he must permit it in order to realize an outweighing good." Dauenhauer (2007:208) also admits that it is "apparently not logically absurd to hold that every evil is somehow in the service of a greater good" though he doubts this is the case. In addition, as Plantinga has suggested (1989:31), it may be the case that even a God who is all-powerful and wholly good *could not* ensure the moral freedom of human creatures unless there was the possibility of evil and suffering.

Yet, in terms of the *inductive* challenge to theism, William Rowe has articulated one of the more cogent presentations of the evidential side of the PES with reference to gratuitous evils. In its simplest formulation Rowe's argument is set forth in the following three statements (2006:80):

1. Probably, there are pointless (or gratuitous) evils in the world.
2. However, if God exists there are no pointless evils since it follows that a wholly good and omnipotent God would have good reasons for permitting all evils.
3. Therefore, it is more likely that God does not exist.

In his defense of the probable non-existence of God, Rowe supplies a compelling example of a thoroughly pointless evil in the hypothetical case of a helpless fawn being horrifically burned in a forest fire ignited by a lightning storm. In Rowe's example the

helpless fawn suffers from its burns for a number of days before finally succumbing to death. He argues (2006:79-80) that

[u]nlike humans, fawns are not credited with free will, and so the fawn's suffering cannot be attributed to a misuse of free will. Why then would God permit it when, if he exists, he could have so easily prevented it? It is generally admitted that we are simply unable to imagine any greater good whose realization can reasonably be thought to require God to permit the fawn's terrible suffering. And it hardly seems reasonable to suppose there is some greater evil that God would have been unable to prevent had he not permitted the fawn's terrible suffering.

In this case, Rowe (2006:79-80) defines a pointless or gratuitous evil as an

evil that God (if he exists) could have prevented without thereby losing an outweighing good or having to permit an evil equally bad or worse. For given God's omniscience and absolute power it would be child's play for him to have prevented the fire or the fawn's being caught in the fire.

He concludes (2006:79-80) that given the facts of this specific case, it is "extraordinarily difficult to think of, or even imagine, a greater good whose realization can sensibly be thought to require God to permit that fawn's terrible suffering." Thus, the suffering serves no discernable purpose and is therefore morally pointless. Following this same track, Draper (1996:12) applies the inductive form of the argument specifically to issues of *human* pain and pleasure:

[O]ur knowledge about pain and pleasure creates an epistemic problem for theists. The problem is not that some proposition about pain and pleasure can be shown to be both true and logically inconsistent with theism. Rather, the problem is evidential. A statement reporting the observations and testimony upon which our knowledge about pain and pleasure is based bears a certain significant negative evidential relation to theism. And because of this, we have a *prima facie* good epistemic reason to reject theism—that is, a reason that is sufficient for rejecting theism unless overridden by other reasons for not rejecting theism.

A second example of this kind of philosophical argument against theism based upon gratuitous evils is discovered in the work of atheist philosopher Quentin Smith. Smith (1996) goes so far as to claim that "the existence of gratuitous evil proves atheism." This argument, he asserts (1996), "decisively refutes theism, based on the ordinary logic of induction that we use in our everyday lives." Smith cites the outbreak of Spanish influenza in 1918-1919 (with its human death toll estimated at between 50 and 100 million people) as an example of such gratuitous evils. Smith asks: "So how could this possibly have occurred if God exists? Is God not powerful enough to kill the virus or

prevent it from growing? If so, then He's not all powerful and is not really the god of the Judeo-Christian tradition." He then reasons that

[i]f God exists, a being who is all-powerful and perfectly good, then this being must somehow ensure our world is perfectly good. The only way He can do this is to make all of the apparent evils we see in the world into means to a greater good.... Thus, if God exists, we must have evidence that all of the evils we see are means to a greater good.

Another model of the inductive argument is found in Michael Martin, who offers what he calls the "indirect inductive argument from evil" (1990:341). He alleges that there is apparently no known theodicy that successfully answers the atheist's challenge to theism on the basis of the abundant evil and suffering in our world. Furthermore, he predicts that it is also very unlikely that any future theodical response will be successful and that ultimately there will never be a satisfactory answer or explanation for the kind of evil and suffering we experience. However, this inability to supply an adequate theodicy becomes problematic for the theists since it necessarily follows that if God does exist "there must be such an explanation" (1990:341). Therefore, one is justified with the conclusion that "it is likely that God does not exist" (1990:341).

As a final example of the argument from gratuitous evils, Leikind focuses his objections to theism's claims on the biblical story of Job that is, ironically, one of the key scriptural passages that theists, particularly those who advocate a strong or meticulous view of divine sovereignty, often appeal to in responding to the PES. In reference to the story of Job and the dialog between God and Satan over the strength of Job's commitment to his faith (Job 1:6-12), Leikind (2010:41) rather sarcastically asserts: "Any modern hospital or university ethics committee reviewing a proposal for an experiment involving humans would never approve of such a test, but no one thought to criticize God in biblical times." For skeptics like Leikind (2010:42) this biblical story seems to supply evidence for the fact that God has done nothing except to permit "the devastation of Job's life to settle what is little more than a bar room bet." He concludes (2010:42) that even if by some remarkable chance there is a God, "his inscrutable purposes may be far beyond us, or he may be playing with us, or he may be tormenting us" and therefore it remains highly "unlikely that we can ever truly know why bad things happen or evils exist" (2010:41).

In summary, it would seem that the philosophical side of the PES is essentially an issue of *presuppositions*. One might argue rather simplistically that the PES can only exist as

a philosophical dilemma if there *is* an all-powerful, omniscient God. If no such God exists, then the ‘problem’ is no longer about perceived evil states of affairs or events but about the existence of any ‘good’ in the first place. Those denying the existence of God must then demonstrate how something may be called ‘evil’ given the philosophical components of the atheistic worldview. Only if one presupposes a transcendent good can one speak of evil in any meaningful sense of the word.

3.1.3 Christian responses to the PES

In light of the serious challenges posed by the evidential form of the PES, Christian theologians and philosophers have utilized a number of arguments to defend the claim that the God of Christian theism does exist and that the attributes ascribed to Him in classical Christian orthodoxy are not in any way logically compromised by the fact of evil and suffering. However, before briefly surveying four of these responses, it is necessary to clarify the distinction between a *theodicy* and a *defense*. Feinberg (2000:1083) defines the term *theodicy* as referring to “attempts to justify the ways of God to man” and further observes that a “successful theodicy resolves the problem of evil for a theological system and demonstrates that God is all-powerful, all-loving, and just, despite evil’s existence.” In contrast, a defense according to Feinberg (2004:29) is “much less pretentious, for it claims to offer only a *possible* reason God might have for not removing evil.” Thus, while the *theodicy* is the more ambitious of the two approaches to the PES, the defense is perhaps more effective and pastorally useful (this point will be explored more fully in Chapter 6).

In the researcher’s view, four such defenses will provide a sufficient look at how Christian theologians and philosophers have responded to the PES, particularly in its evidential or inductive form. Each will be briefly introduced and illustrated below.

3.1.3.1 *The free will defense*

One Christian response to the PES is known as the *free will defense*, and while this strategy is found extensively in the history of Christian thought, C. S. Lewis popularized it in the mid twentieth century (1962:26-36; 69-88). One of the clearest modern examples of this defense is discovered in the writings of Alvin Plantinga. In fact Feinberg (2004:79) claims that no “contemporary philosopher has done more to

develop the free will defense than Alvin Plantinga.” As indicated above, Plantinga’s defense has enjoyed great success in effectively silencing the deductive challenge to Christian theism. Yet it would also appear to be the most often employed argument for addressing the evidential side of the PES in addition to being the easiest to understand and utilize (Feinberg, 2004:67).

As stated above, Plantinga has argued that God’s gift of moral freedom and responsibility to human beings necessarily entails the possibility of evil decisions and actions and, thus, the likelihood of suffering caused by such choices. The core of his defense is the claim that “[a] world containing creatures who are significantly free (and freely perform more good than evil actions) is more valuable [to God], all else being equal, than a world containing no free creatures at all” (Plantinga, 1989:30). This popular approach assumes that in order for human creatures to enjoy significant freedom and moral responsibility—essential components of authentic personhood—they must be truly free to do otherwise than God might desire or command. That is, while it is certainly within the scope of God’s omnipotence to create human beings who only do what is right and good, God cannot create *free* moral agents who are responsible for their actions unless they are capable of moral evil. If God should always intervene to prevent transgressions of His will or otherwise guarantee that human behavior is always consistent with His will, humans would not be truly free and, in fact, would be nothing more than mere automatons incapable of relating to God in any meaningful way. As Plantinga states (1989:30), God cannot “give these creatures the freedom to perform evil and at the same time prevent them from doing so.” Therefore, this defense stands upon the notion that “it is possible that God could not have created a universe containing moral good (or as much moral good as this world contains) without creating one that also contains moral evil” (Plantinga, 1989:31). As Lewis also concluded (1962:69), the very fact that God determined to create a world of free, rational, and relational agents necessarily “included the possibility of evil; and that creatures, availing themselves of this possibility, have become evil.”

3.1.3.2 *The open theology defense*

A more recent response to the PES is known as *open theology*, *neotheism*, or the *theology of divine risk*. This defense has enjoyed a high degree of popularity in the last three decades (see Basinger, 1996; Boyd, 2000; Pinnock *et al.*, 1994; Rice, 1980). This

model appears to take the free will defense a step further by defining authentic creaturely freedom as *contra-causal* or *libertarian* in an absolute sense. That is, it is freedom without any external cause outside of the agent whatsoever. As a consequence, open theology rests squarely upon the assertion that the future actions of free, rational creatures are logically unknowable, even to an omniscient God. And this bold assertion about the future is only logical, since if God did have infallible foreknowledge of the future actions of moral agents, the agents would be bound to perform only those actions foreseen by God in eternity past. In this case, creaturely freedom would be compromised.

Thus, for humans to be completely free in a libertarian sense the future must remain 'open' and undetermined. Pinnock (1986:150) explains the far-reaching implications of this view:

It means that genuine novelty can appear in history which cannot be predicted even by God. If the creature has been given the ability to decide how some things will turn out, then it cannot be known infallibly ahead of time how they will turn out.... It is plain that the biblical doctrine of creaturely freedom requires us to reconsider the conventional view of the omniscience of God.

That God would create such a world in which future free actions are unknowable is a consequence of His infinite love and the necessity of preserving libertarian freedom that makes the creature's reciprocal love for the Creator possible. A necessary by-product of this *contra-causal* freedom and the 'openness' of the future is the possibility that the very freedom granted to the creature will be misused, creating a situation in which evil and suffering will likely occur. William Hasker (1994:152) explains:

God knows that evils will occur, but he has not for the most part decreed or incorporated into his plan the individual instances of evil. Rather, God governs the world according to *general strategies* which are, as a whole, ordered for the good of creation but whose detailed consequences are not foreseen or intended by God prior to the decision to adopt them. As a result, we are able to abandon the difficult doctrine of "meticulous providence" [found in Reformed Theology and some other versions of Evangelical Theology] and to admit the presence in the world of particular evils God's permission of which is not the means of bringing about any greater good or preventing any greater evils.

Following on the heels of the tragic events of September 11, 2001 in New York City and Washington D. C., Gregory Boyd, an open theologian and pastor, commented on the relationship of these horrific events and the larger purposes of God:

God does not have a divine purpose for allowing, or ordaining, atrocities ... any more than God has a purpose for allowing Pilate to murder Galileans or

allowing people to be killed in falling towers. In a cosmos populated by free agents, human and angelic, many of which have turned against God, things are going to happen that God does not will. When they do, the 'why' is located in them, not God (Boyd, 2005).

He would argue that far from leaving the Christian with nothing to say about the meaning of such events that were unforeseen by God, "God does have a purpose for what he can do with atrocities, once they occur" (Boyd, 2005). In this way, God cannot be charged with the authorship of evil and the PES is thereby solved.

This theology of openness, therefore, entails a certain *risk* in the creation itself—a risk that God was willing to take for the sake of creating morally free creatures that would reciprocate His love and serve Him with willing hearts. The risk element in this defense has been presented most notably by John Sanders (1998:257) who claims that this defense "provides a way of understanding the structures in which suffering and evil could come about in God's creational project even though he never intended them to." Thus, God's love for humanity necessitates the insertion of genuine risk into the cosmos, for divine love and the risk of creaturely rejection are mutually dependent. In this scheme, a love without real risk, even the likelihood of gratuitous evil and pointless suffering like that witnessed in the Third Reich, is not the kind of authentic love worthy of the divine imprimatur. And not unlike the claim of those employing *the free will defense*, neotheists also argue that one's basic humanity is compromised if there is no allowance for the very real possibility of freely turning against God. As Sanders states (1998: 259), "God cannot prevent all the evil in the world and still maintain the conditions of fellowship intended by his overarching purpose in creation." Sanders candidly admits that these evils would include the horrendous violence and suffering perpetrated by Hitler, Stalin and other "monsters" that God is powerless to prevent from "arising without abandoning the type of project he established" (1998:260). In contrast to the comprehensive foreknowledge and soft determinism that is typically advanced in traditional Christian theism, open theists present their defense as a more logical and pastorally appropriate option in facing the PES and one that in their view has the greatest possibility of removing the PES as an objection to Christianity.

3.1.3.3 *The compatibilistic theology defense*

A third approach to the PES that is typical of Christian theism is known as *compatibilism*. This approach to reconciling the reality of evil and suffering with the existence of the God of Christian theism is held by those espousing a more traditional view of the divine attributes while at the same time offering a nuanced view of creaturely freedom. Rejecting libertarian or contra-causal freedom, theological compatibilists affirm that God is sovereign over all things in an absolute and meticulous way and that human beings remain morally responsible for their actions that they freely choose. Thus, authentic moral agency is compatible with divine sovereignty. The one theological claim—that of absolute divine sovereignty—does not in any way militate against the other—that of moral agency, and *vice versa*. One notable defender of this position is D. A. Carson:

Christians are not fatalists. The central line of Christian tradition neither sacrifices the utter sovereignty of God nor reduces the responsibility of His image-bearers. In philosophical theology this position is sometimes called compatibilism. It simply means that God's unconditional sovereignty and the responsibility of human beings are mutually compatible (Carson, 1999:264).

Another way of simply stating the core of this defense is to say that “absolute divine sovereignty is compatible with human significance and real human choices” (Grudem, 1996:316) or that “freedom and responsibility” are “consistent with determinism” (Kapitan, 1995:281). Feinberg (2001:651), one of the most expressive defenders of this position, argues that, contrary to what one might assume at first glance, this view is “not self-contradictory, and it offers a way to harmonize freedom with a strong sense of divine sovereignty” both of which are clearly affirmed in Scripture. Those holding to compatibilism typically assert that “even though [human] actions are causally determined, they are still free as long as the agents act according to their wishes, i.e., without constraint” (Feinberg, 2001:651). Feinberg states (2001:651) that the evil that people perpetrate and the suffering that results “stems from what they desired at the time” and thus is accomplished in a compatibilistically free way.

When we sin, God neither does the act nor enables it. He doesn't need to do any of this, for we are thoroughly able and willing to do it on our own. So God is neither the proximate cause nor the remote cause of such acts in the sense of being the ultimate mover of the act.... God can control all actions, including evil, without participating in them or being morally responsible for them, and without removing compatibilistic human freedom (Feinberg, 2001:651).

As stated above, this view sets forth a very specific definition of moral agency and creaturely freedom that is to be distinguished from that envisioned in the free will and the open defenses. In this model, the “essence of free agency is that we act without compulsion from without, according to our nature or character. Free agency thus construed applies to all conditions of men and angels” (Murray, 1977:65). Since after the fall humans are in bondage to sin, their natures, including the volitional aspect of their being, have been adversely affected to the point where they are no longer free to refrain from evil. Prior to the fall Adam was able *not* to sin (*posse non peccare*) and was in possession of “the power of contrary choice” (Murray, 1977:63). Subsequent to the fall, man is “under the unholy necessity of sinning” and is powerless (*non posse non peccare*) to “choose what is good and well-pleasing to God” (Murray, 1977:64). In his current state, therefore, a sinner’s choices are limited to his nature. He is totally free to perform any action that his sinful nature will permit. Yet, the inability to perform the good and holy in no way deprives humans of free agency, the essence of which is to freely and without coercion “follow our most immediate desires” and to “always act according to our strongest desires” (Frame, 2002:137). Therefore, in the compatibilist scheme, divine providence and foreordination, though comprehensive to the point of spanning all things that happen without exception, do not “operate so as to deprive man of his agency, nor of the voluntary decisions by reason of which he is responsible for his actions” (Murray, 1977:64). The PES, then, is to this degree answered by the appeal to Adam’s terrible choice to rebel against God and thus to plunge humanity into ruin. While this fall occurred within the confines of God’s sovereignty and may be further classified as the result of eternal divine ordination, humans remain free moral agents who are responsible to God for their choices and the often-horrible consequences that result.

3.1.3.4 *The greater good defense*

A fourth and final Christian approach to the PES under consideration in this thesis is known as the *greater good defense*. Simply stated, this response to the PES asserts that either by the permission or sovereign decree of evil, God is able to produce significant goods that would otherwise be impossible to effect in a world containing no evil. Philosopher John Hick has supplied one of the most famous models of this defense. In fact, Blocher (1994:51) calls Hick’s *Evil and the God of Love* (2010) “one of the most

influential attempts at theodicy in the English-speaking world.” The central premise of his approach is the claim that

personal life is essentially free and self-directing. It cannot be perfected by divine fiat, but only through the uncompelled responses and willing cooperation of human individuals in their actions and reactions in the world in which God has placed them. Men may eventually become the perfected persons whom the New Testament calls ‘children of God’, but they cannot be created ready-made as this (Hick, 1990:168).

That is, according to Hick, there are virtues, character traits, strengths, and human abilities that can only be produced and developed in the crucible of pain, suffering, and the manifold difficulties of life in this present world. And this crucible of pain is only possible in a world where sin has been permitted to exist. Hick refers to this process of maturation and development as “soul-making” since the divine purpose for such trials is the development of inner Christian character. In other words, if “God’s aim is that of ‘bringing many sons to glory,’ that aim will naturally determine the kind of world that He has created” (1990:169).

To understand Hick’s theodicy one must remember that the Bible reveals God as a loving Father. And as all fathers do, God desires the maximum good for His children, especially their development into mature and responsible adults. This goal requires a certain kind of world, one where “the presence of pleasure and the absence of pain cannot be the supreme and overriding end for which the world exists. Rather, the world must be a place of soul-making” (1990:171). The growth and perfection of a soul happens only by means of a long and painful process whereby “human goodness” is “slowly built up through personal histories of moral effort” (1990:169). This admittedly arduous journey “has a value in the eyes of the Creator which justifies even the long traversal of the soul-making process” (1990:169). The result will be character traits that are far superior to those possible in other environments. Hick argues that

one who has attained to goodness by meeting and eventually mastering temptations, and thus by rightly making responsible choices in concrete situations, is good in a richer and more valuable sense than would be one created *ab initio* in a state of either innocence or virtue (1990:168-169).

Thus, Hick concludes that the wrong kind of question to raise in the face of evil and suffering is “Is the architecture of the world the most pleasant and convenient possible?” (1990:170.) The more appropriate question, given God’s fatherly intentions, is “Is this the kind of world that God might make as an environment in which moral

beings may be fashioned, through their own free insights and responses, into ‘children of God?’” (1990:170.) Despite what we might otherwise assume, a “world custom-made for the avoidance of all suffering” would not be a truly good world at all. In such a world the emergence of critical “moral qualities” would not only be impossible but would “no longer have any point or value. There would be nothing wrong with stealing, because no one could ever lose anything by it; there would be no such crime as murder, because no one could ever be killed” (1990:179). Hick stresses that the world in which we live must be seen for what it actually is, “an environment for beings who are in process of becoming perfected” (1990:170). It is not in any sense a paradise or earthly shadow of heaven but “the scene of a history in which human personality may be formed towards the pattern of Christ”—a place where “a hazardous adventure in individual freedom” may take place (1990:169-170).

More recently, J. Spiegel (2005) has offered a nuanced version of the *greater good defense* that avoids some of the difficulties with Hick’s proposal, most notably his dependence upon absolute libertarian freedom and the notion that “evil is necessary to understand or appreciate what is good” (2005:186). Contra Hick, Spiegel argues that to postulate “goodness demands evil as a counterpart” is to make the flawed assumption that God Himself “cannot be good without evil” (2005:186). This is a serious theological mistake and infringes upon the nature of God, particularly His aseity and infinite holiness. Also contra Hick, Spiegel argues from the presupposition of compatibilistic human freedom and strong divine sovereignty while anchoring his model upon two paradigmatic biblical texts, James 1:2-4 and 1 Peter 1:6-7. These passages demonstrate that human trials are essential means employed by God for the attainment of the kind of Christian maturity that results in the glory and praise of Jesus Christ. With Hick, he agrees that there are, in fact,

numerous moral virtues that cannot be achieved except by struggling against or in the midst of evil. These include patience, courage, sympathy, forgiveness, mercy, perseverance, overcoming temptation, and much greater versions of faith, hope, love, and friendship. What sense could be made of the trait of courage in a world in which there was no danger and nothing to fear? How could one show sympathy to others were there no sorrow or affliction with which to sympathize? How might one forgive where there has been no offense? And how can one be said to persevere through perfectly pleasant circumstances? (2005:195).

Therefore, it is the hardships and difficulties in life, even those directly caused by human sin, that God employs for the maximal benefit of believers. By means of such

trials God draws us closer to Himself in fellowship and trust, provides us with triumphant hope in this life, and leads us to a greater awareness of the needs of our fellow humans (Spiegel, 2005:196). Suffering is also used by God to purify our lives, particularly in terms of the sin of self-dependence. Spiegel explains:

Our trials force us to acknowledge that we are not ultimately in control of our own lives, even at a very basic level. Thus, suffering turns out to be a form of divine grace, enhancing our understanding of our own contingency and our basic reliance upon God. (2005:197.)

This is another way of saying that through the various tribulations of life God destroys the idolatrous “lust for control over one’s circumstances” (2005:197). He does this by

existentially proving how impractical it is. As our lust for control is curbed, our inclination to trust God’s control is strengthened, if only by default. Foolish as we humans are, it often takes a great deal of pain to prompt us to look upward rather than within to find someone worthy of our trust (2005:197).

Given Spiegel’s commitment to the exhaustive sovereignty of God over all things, he denies that there are any evils that may be classified as ‘gratuitous.’ Because God so controls the world and governs all of life according to His eternal purposes, we can be completely assured that “there is no pointless and unproductive evil in the world” (2005:207). Yet he admits that some instances of evil and human suffering are so massive and horrific that “sufficient goods to justify their occurrence defy the imagination” (2005:210). However, Spiegel cautions that it is at such a point that we must demonstrate a certain epistemological humility by admitting that there are definite limits to what may be known about the purposes and plans of God:

Just as there are mysteries in the physical world about which we should take care to avoid bold pronouncements, there are moral and theological mysteries about which we should take similar care. Just because *we cannot imagine God’s purposes*, it does not follow that *there are no divine purposes* when it comes to particular instances of moral evil.... Furthermore, to declare boldly that an action or event is unredeemable is to assert that one knows the limits of God’s power to redeem. Such an attitude subjects the power of God to the limits of our own finite imaginations (2005:210).

Spiegel then turns to the crucifixion of Christ in order to support his thesis that all instances of suffering, despite their intensity or scope, are instruments of good in the hands of God. First, he notes that, according to Scripture, it was “the evil that he successfully endured” that distinguished Jesus as “maximally virtuous” (2005:196). While He was indeed “morally impeccable” before His passion and death or any instance of suffering that He endured, His moral blamelessness “through a lifetime of

temptation and vexation warrants his exaltation to the greatest heights of glory” (2005: 196). Then Spiegel specifically appeals to the cross and claims that in this most horrible of all instances of human suffering God brought about the redemption of sinners. In this way God proves on the stage of human history that He is capable of “redeeming the worst of all evils” (2005:210). Thus, in the passion of Christ we have the “archetypal” example of how the very highest of all possible goods—the eternal salvation of sinners—may be achieved by the greatest of all moral evils—the crucifixion of the innocent Son of God (2005:211). Spiegel refers to his strategy as an “*a fortiori* argument” that demonstrates conclusively that if “the worst of all moral evils can be justified, then even more so may lesser evils be justified” (2005:210). Yet, if we “fail to recognize the highest goods achieved through the greatest evil, then even more so we may fail to recognize lesser goods achieved through lesser evils.” Therefore, it is imperative that all suffering, both personal and corporate, be understood through the redemptive framework of God’s merciful actions in Christ to bring about the eternal salvation of sinners. For it is only at the cross of Jesus that we discover “the convergence of the worst evils, performed by human beings, and the greatest good that God has done in our world” (2005:211).

Again it is apparent that each of these approaches to the PES has at least some degree of merit and theologians and pastors should in my view freely utilize the strengths of each. For example, the *free will defense* helps us realize that sin is deeply intertwined with the misuse of creaturely freedom and that humans are not automatons, preprogrammed in such a way as to forfeit their authentic humanity. The *open theology defense* (or *theology of divine risk*), while fraught with fatal theological assumptions, nevertheless helps us to realize that from one perspective, divine love is ‘risky.’ Humanly speaking in the strictest of terms, there is always a certain degree of vulnerability involved with God’s love for sinners. Love may be rejected, scorned, and eventually crucified. And certainly the *compatibilistic theology defense* is most worthy of consideration in that it gives proper respect to both sides of the theological antinomy present in the PES—God’s comprehensive sovereignty over all things, and mankind’s moral responsibility before the Creator. Finally, the *greater good defense* is very helpful in setting forth the truth that many goods do result from suffering. Human souls are improved and the believer is sanctified in a way and to a degree that would otherwise seem to be impossible.

3.2 The problem of evil: pastoral and homiletical challenges

Having examined the essential theological and philosophical issues related to the PES and some of the more significant Christian responses, it is now appropriate to consider the specific challenges the PES presents to preachers. Following an introduction the researcher shall consider two of the main challenges that the PES raises for Christian preachers and their hearers: 1) the *epistemological* challenge or the perceived need to solve or explain the PES, particularly to those who are suffering, and 2) the *existential* challenge or the task of demonstrating from the Scriptures both the value of suffering and God's presence and redemptive activity in our pain.

3.2.1 Introduction: the context and necessity of preaching on the PES

In the apostle Paul's second epistle to young Timothy, his ministerial protégé, the imprisoned and soon to die missionary commands his faithful student to "preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with great patience and instruction" (2 Timothy 4:2). Of course, these impassioned words immediately follow Paul's declaration that the whole of the inscripturated revelation, "all Scripture," is the very breath of God and is, therefore, "profitable" for all things needed by those who follow Christ as Lord: "for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16). The command to proclaim this authoritative and inspired Word to the people of God in *all* circumstances and seasons of life forms the very core of the minister's task and the weightiest responsibility placed upon that minister by God. It also establishes the utter necessity of preaching as the God-ordained means of building, nourishing, protecting, and sustaining the church of Jesus Christ and her individual members. This truth is nowhere clearer than in Paul's declaration that "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17). The preached Word of God, therefore, creates faith in the hearts of those who hear, and this truth alone provides the "paramount reason to preach" (Lose, 2007:7).

One of the 'seasons' into which this inspired Word must be declared is that of suffering in all of its many forms and magnitudes. As argued above, the PES presents the most formidable theological and philosophical challenge confronting the Christian truth-claims. A logical consequence of this fact is that the PES is also the most difficult context in which the Christian pulpit minister is divinely commissioned to proclaim the

Word that is sufficient and profitable for all things. This season's difficulty is exacerbated by the fact that the PES is not only a profound theological, philosophical, and existential stumbling block to those outside of God's saving grace in Christ but is the haunting "shadow that falls across the biblical teaching about God's character" (Philips, 1991:7) and, therefore, calls into question the very Word the minister is to preach to God's own people. Inevitably, all pulpit ministers will at some point face questions from their congregants having to do with the reasons "an all-good and powerful God" permits or has decreed "evil in His creation," and how the immeasurable "pain in the world," and that experienced by countless individual Christians, may be reconciled with "the character of the God we see in the Bible" (Philips, 1991:7). As witnessed throughout history, and illustrated most tragically in the unspeakable horrors associated with the rise and fall of the Third Reich, the world into which the preacher and the church has been deployed is "a culture of division, violence, hatred, death. Such a context gives rise to perplexity and hopelessness and the imperative to find meaning" (Melancthon, 2004:279). This context also troubles and perplexes the minister himself as the PES "strikes at the root of his confession" and "calls into question the validity of his discipline" (Conyers, 1989:129). For both pastor and parishioner, the PES produces a "shocked insecurity" and an atmosphere ripe with apparent contradictions, unfathomable mysteries, inconsolable hurts, and the "tragic fact of death," the last enemy (Bowie, 1954:138, 153). Every minister of the Christian Gospel, to one degree or another, serves an audience that is intimately "aware of the force of evil in its world" and the accompanying sense of bewilderment as to what or whom they can believe (Bowie, 1954:153, 155).

It is also essential that we distinguish Christian preaching from other forms of communication and speech that one may engage in within the context of the PES; this distinction will be more fully treated below in 5.1 and 6.0. Melancthon (2004:284) defines Christian preaching as

a form of human verbal communication that involves the organized explanation and application of biblical truth, presented in a manner that is reasonable, imaginative, and intrinsic to the text. It should be biblical, life-centered and hope-giving.

Another way to define preaching simply is to say it is the "applied word" or the proclamation and application of the contents of the Scriptures to the lives of human beings (Melancthon, 2004:283). Specifically within the context of suffering and the

broad complexities of the PES, Piper (2002) has offered a more nuanced and comprehensive definition of Christian preaching. He concludes that preaching, which he sees as “the normative event in the gathered church,” is “expository exultation” designed to maximize “the glory of God through Jesus Christ” by means of fostering a deep satisfaction in God within the context of the “universal human experience” of suffering (2002:241). He adds that if this definition of preaching is indeed correct, it follows that preaching “must aim, week in and week out, to help our people be satisfied in God while suffering” (2002:241). The critical distinction between Christian preaching and other forms of pulpit speech that are typically labeled ‘sermons’ or ‘preaching’ is that Christian proclamation is thoroughly biblical. That is, what the Christian preacher declares to his congregation finds its origin and authority in the Scriptures alone, rather than in other sources or disciplines such as sociology, psychology, anthropology, or in therapeutic theories and methodologies. With Melancthon (2004: 283), we can legitimately ask: “Can there be any preaching that is not biblical? Can preaching ever be ultimately independent of the historic revelation?” I would strongly suggest that the answer to these question is a resounding ‘No’ along with the positive affirmation that the “non-negotiable necessity” for all Christian pulpit ministers is “to give utterance, as the Bible gives utterance, to the real human condition, trauma and all, anger and all, doubts and all” (Duke, 1985:42). Duke (1985:41) also maintains that the “discipline of regular preaching from the scriptures” is by far the “most effective” form of “proclamation to the traumatized” and this includes

expounding upon all the themes of the Gospel, and doing so with vigilant pastoral attention to the woundedness of the people addressed by the Word. Such preaching will have more power to heal because instead of being an immediate need scrambling for a relevant word, it will be a prior Word constantly touching immediate needs—and perhaps redefining what the immediate needs really are.

This kind of biblically based proclamation is the polar opposite of what Duke refers to as “optimistic preaching” or the kind of shallow proclamation that finds its source in pop-theology or pop-psychology and is, therefore, not “honest” in the sense that it fails to address the real “terrors of human grief and loss” (1985:43). Thus, sermon words of consolation, encouragement, and sympathy that are divorced from the Word of God are ultimately of little value to the hearers and may even result in greater suffering through the promulgation of “false solutions to the problem of evil” or trite ‘answers’ to complex questions that demand greater theological reflection as guided by Scripture (Clendenin, 1988:323). As Bowie counsels, the Christian preacher must preach the

theology of the Bible—a solemn task which is “as practical as laying the foundation for a house” (1954:137).

Another way to think of the distinction between Christian preaching and other popular, non-biblically based forms of sermonizing is to say that biblical preaching is anchored to the historic and apostolic gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Such gospel preaching is uniquely able to “sustain the congregation as its members are buffeted by the blows of shock, fear, and loss” while ultimately affirming “the bedrock Christian belief” that nothing can separate the believer from God’s redeeming love in Christ Jesus (Ramsey, 2002:180). Bowie (1954:17) explains that the faithful biblical preacher is actually

a channel from the living God to the living souls who are there before him.... [God] reveals himself to the preacher as that preacher feels himself part of the needs, the hopes, the longing, of all humanity, and as he reaches out in God’s name to the men and women whose faces look up to his in order that he may draw them, with their poignant and personal needs, together with himself into the light of a redeeming gospel. And what is that gospel? It is the proclamation that something incomparable has happened and is happening now: that in Jesus Christ—his life, his death, his resurrection—there stand revealed the tragic power of human sin both in history and in our own hearts, and at the same time the love of God which reaches out to save.

Biblically based gospel preaching, then, is nothing less than

the proclamation of a decisive event. The power and love of God in Christ have broken the control over men of the evil to which they were in bondage.... The glory of preaching is to tell men that they do have a Friend and to make their hearts as well as their minds believe it—a Friend who is stronger than wickedness and stronger than worldliness, and who by his immortal power can set them free from every degrading force that holds them down (Bowie, 1954:18).

Effectively preaching the Word of God in the context of the PES also requires a fundamental integrity on the part of the minister himself. He must be one who has personally dealt with the questions, burdens, sorrows, and pains of life being experienced by his congregation if his message is to connect with them in any significant way. To this degree it is imperative that the minister function as more than a disconnected ‘life-coach’ or as ordained ‘cheerleader’ who has no personal history with pain but one who has also wrestled with the intense perplexities presented by the PES and found his solace and comfort in the Word of God and, particularly, the gospel. As Bowie wisely cautions, “There will be no power in the man who shows that he has never himself confronted and wrestled with the stark realities by which all thoughtful persons must sometime be dismayed” (1954:155). Piper agrees that the “suffering part

of our ministry” is, to a greater degree than realized, “the power of our message” for it allows the minister to “see from the Scripture what he must say to his suffering people” (2002:249, 262). As will be demonstrated later from Thielicke’s ministry (see 5.0), having a personal history with the PES is the only way that the minister may honestly and adequately respond to the “certain vaguely conceived but real difficulties lying in people’s minds today against which that Gospel that we preach strikes” (Brooks, 1969: 221).

Having defined Christian preaching and established its necessity and function with regard to the PES, we may now identify at least two of the more formidable challenges the PES presents for pulpit ministers. Both of these will surface again in later sections of this thesis as Thielicke’s preaching ministry is considered more fully (see 4.0 and 5.0).

3.2.2 The epistemological challenge: the perceived need to explain

It is virtually self-evident that of the many theological and philosophical questions the PES raises in the minds of those who experience suffering in its diverse forms, the question of ‘Why?’ in all of its varied expressions (e.g., ‘Where were you God?’ ‘Why did you not answer my prayers for deliverance?’ ‘Why now?’ ‘What does this mean?’ ‘What have I done to deserve this?’ ‘What are you teaching me?’) is the most frequent and daunting. The researcher would submit for consideration that this persistent question of ‘Why?’ is at its core an *epistemological* one. That is, it essentially has to do with knowledge and how one comes to know and believe certain things to be true. In the specific case of the PES, this question appears to express the deep frustration of the sufferer’s lack of knowledge regarding the purpose and goal of suffering and how the experience of various tribulations in life serves the greater interests of the individual and the glory of God.

The universality of the ‘Why?’ question is demonstrated not only by the fact that all pastors have faced it, and will repeatedly confront it numerous times throughout the course of their ministry, but also by its prominent presence in the history of redemption as recorded in Scripture itself. We hear this question voiced by such luminary biblical figures as Moses (Exodus 5:22; 32:11; Numbers 11:11) and King David (Psalm 10:1; 22:1). It frequently appears in the history of the Israelites (Numbers 14:3; 1 Samuel

4:3; Judges 21:3) while the sons of Korah give poetic, if not tragic, expression to it in Israel's hymnbook (Psalm 42:9; 44:24). And in the New Testament it is painfully evident in the grief-laden words of Martha directed toward Jesus Himself in John 11:21—"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." (In other words, 'Jesus, why did you delay?') Even more significantly, we hear it implied in the voice of Jesus' own disciples in John 9:2—"Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents that he should be born blind?" (In other words, 'Jesus, why is this man blind? What sin caused it?' or 'Why did God allow this?') Finally, even the Son of God extracted King David's own question from Psalm 22 and raised it before His Father as He hung on the cross: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46). Yet despite the fact that even the incarnate Son of God sought an answer for His own suffering, it would seem that the questions that Job directed toward God in pursuit of an answer to his catastrophic and apparently meaningless suffering are most compelling (Job 3:11-12; 7:20-21; 10:18; 13:14, 24; 21:7). To one degree or another, all believers in Christ (and many outside the Christian faith) have at times compared their experiences of evil and suffering with Job's horrible travails and have raised the very question that was frequently in his mind if not on his lips: "Why hast Thou set me as Thy target?" (Job 7:20). This fact adds further weight to the notion that there exists within each of us a need for the justification of our suffering and our many painful experiences with evil. Consequently, the Christian pulpit minister will frequently face the need to explain what God is doing in the course of an individual or group's suffering and how such instances of suffering serve the greater purposes of His kingdom and the ultimate good of His children (Romans 8:28-29).

Beck and Taylor (2008:151) have correctly observed that offering an explanation for life's many evils, pains, and experiences of suffering is "the unique theological burden" of monotheistic religions such as Christianity. Tavard (2003:707) agrees:

[F]or a long time, a conflict has existed between the spontaneous belief of religious persons in the sovereignty of God over all things, that is affirmed or implied in all monotheistic religions, and the experience of evil engineered by the human will. Whether there is such a conflict in God is of course another question. But the primary human question deals with what the human mind can grasp in its temporality.

In dualistic or polytheistic religious systems evil and its accompanying pain can easily be "attributed to malevolent deities," thus maintaining the ontological and causal distance between the evil condition or event and the benevolent deity (Beck & Taylor,

2008:151). It should at least be noted here that there is a heterodox version of Christian theism that also functions rather dualistically as it seeks to maintain the causal as well as ontological distance between God and Satan with regard to the PES. More recently this theology has enjoyed popular expression in G. Boyd's *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy* (2001). Boyd's claim is that God is at war with Satan who is the ultimate cause of the world's sin and suffering. While God the Creator (a necessary Being) is indeed greater than Satan the creature (a contingent being), the devil maintains a level of control over the creation and the affairs of men and nations that closely approaches philosophical dualism. For example, Boyd claims that

[t]he ongoing warfare between God and agents who oppose him makes sense, I contend, only on the assumption that these agents were created with the capacity to *choose* to war against God. Within limits, the capacity of these agents to choose to war against God must genuinely rival God's own will (2001: 83-84).

In Boyd's scheme, which depends entirely upon the presuppositions of openness theology (absolute libertarian freedom, the logical impossibility of God's foreknowledge of future free-agent decisions), the 'Why?' question is irrelevant since God does not 'will' the suffering of any creature and cannot be 'blamed' in any way for the pain that results. Boyd concludes that the anguish and difficulties we suffer in life are due to the war between God and Satan and, therefore, the 'Why?' question finds its solution in this cosmic duel. Personal pain, loss, grief, and tragedy are the collateral damage produced by this conflict, and though God is unable to prevent such things (since He does not violate libertarian freedom) His comforting presence attends the sufferer nevertheless.

However, in biblical Christianity, with its robust vision of an all-sovereign and omnipotent God, "the positive and the negative experiences of life get laid at the One God's feet," and the theological atmosphere is powerfully conducive to the formulation of the 'Why?' question (Beck & Taylor, 2008:156). It would appear axiomatic, therefore, that the Christian pulpit minister who affirms the truthfulness of the Scriptures and the orthodox understanding of the divine attributes will face the ever-present challenge of answering this most basic question.

While this 'Why?' question and the need to explain the reason and purpose for painful experiences has always been characteristic of those who believe in the God of Holy

Scripture, Van de Beek (1990:9-11) has made a strong case for the palpable intensification of this question in more recent history. He argues that there are a number of factors that have made the question of 'Why?' in regard to the PES a much greater difficulty in our time:

- 1) "The experiences of the Second World War" including the unthinkable horrors of Auschwitz, and later, the battlefield horrors of Korea and Vietnam;
- 2) The worldwide scope of human suffering and our immediate awareness of it through modern methods of communication and media;
- 3) The denunciation of the Enlightenment view that understood the world as orderly, systematic, coordinated, and explainable;
- 4) The *a priori* philosophical rejection of the supernatural and the conclusion that there is "no room for a power or an influence outside of the power of direct causality or what is empirically verifiable";
- 5) The rapid and sweeping developments in science and technology tempting mankind to embrace the notion that he can "manage life himself" without the aid of God;
- 6) The ever-increasing value that is being placed on the temporal and, thus, the belief that "suffering has become much more acute" than in earlier times;
- 7) And, finally, what Van de Beek has labeled the "increased maturity of man," defined as the rejection of any authority outside of man himself.

Hauser (1995:17-18) offers another interesting perspective on the prevalence of the 'Why?' question by observing that there are basically just two ways believers face their suffering. The first he labels the "meaning-context approach" in which the "age old question, 'Why is this happening, O God?'" is asked at the outset of the event. Hauser explains that this question implies two major assumptions about God and suffering. First, it assumes that "God is the direct cause of suffering," and secondly it assumes that "God causes suffering for specific reasons" (1995:18). Growing from these two basic assumptions is the conclusion that "if we knew God's reasons for sending the suffering, acceptance of it would be easier" (1995:18). A second way that believers face times of adversity, trial, and pain, according to Hauser, is the "support-context approach" (1995:18). Rather than being defined by the question of 'Why?' this approach is characterized by the simple cry, "Help me O God" (1995:18). The "support-context approach" also implies two assumptions about God and suffering as well. The first is that "God gives strength for life," and the second is that "God gives strength in suffering" (1995:18). In contrast to the "meaning-context approach" believers taking

this path “see God primarily as the source of strength rather than as the direct cause of our suffering” (1995:18). However, Hauser concludes that most believers initially attempt to cope with their pain by taking the first approach to God, seeking definitive answers to the ‘Why?’ question based upon the assumption that knowledge of the reason(s) for the suffering would eliminate some of the difficulties sufferers face. This is likely the case because many, if not most, Christian believers do generally affirm God as the ultimate cause of all things and also assume that He has a definite purpose in either permitting or decreeing the suffering that comes into our lives. With this in view, Hauser’s conclusion seems to support the notion that, more often than not, the Christian pulpit minister will be confronted with the pressure to explain God’s purposes for suffering both in the lives of individuals and on the broader scale as well.

Along with the universal need for explanation, which every preacher will face, comes a certain danger associated with giving satisfactory ‘answers’ to sufferers where none are available. Fischer (1983:313-314) notes this danger:

By attempting to justify the God of the universe, we might be guilty of putting Him on the same level as the world, in making Him merely an object of human understanding. This could well be totally inappropriate at best. Biblical man realized that not everything could be explained and was able to accept this.

This is especially the case when addressing the PES, for all suffering, particularly that which is *a priori* gratuitous, “is no mere surface appearance, but a ground floor phenomenon, not to be explained away” (Wettstein, 2001:341). In other words, there are some truths related to God and His activities in the world, particularly those associated with the PES, that are well beyond the epistemic powers of humans. And more to the point, there are many instances of suffering and pain that appear to make no sense at all, which defy rational explanations and serve no apparent good. Deuteronomy 29:29 is an oft-cited biblical text that suggests that certain things are hidden from human understanding—“the secret things belong to the Lord.” These “hidden things” stand in contrast to “the things revealed” that “belong to us and our sons.” And if this verse may be more specifically applied to the PES the case is made even more strongly for the avoidance of theological explanations where none are supplied (see Carson, 1990:245, and Jüngel, 1988:4). Tavad is certainly correct in asserting the persistent human frustration with the “hidden things”:

Whether at the time of Augustine, or Aquinas, or Calvin, or the Counter Reformation, whether in Hitler’s concentration camps, in the gulags of Stalin, in the killing fields of Pol Pot, or in the destroyed monasteries of Tibet, divine

Providence remains the same profound mystery. It is ultimately the mystery of God, before whom we confess our incapacity to understand (2003:716-717).

We must simply admit and accept the fact that throughout the lifetime of every believer there will be occasions when personal or corporate suffering “calls a people or a person to trust God for a brighter tomorrow in the midst of such a despairing present that there seems to be no possible future at all” (Wall, 1983:444). Justifications for the occurrence of suffering and evil are often unavailable, and the danger is that preachers will be tempted to provide what Scripture neither supplies nor permits. Matthews (2000:378) observes that our real intellectual difficulties with evil

lie in our failure to recognize evil’s problematic ontological status, a status to which we were blinded by the seamlessness of our earlier conceptions of evil. To rectify this situation, we should reconceive of evil in a way that admits its incomprehensibility; it should remain difficult, even problematic for us, more like a tear, a black hole in our moral fabric, than just another thread seamlessly running through the cloth.

Timothy George (Schreiner, 2000:110-111) reinforces this critical point specifically from the pastoral perspective by comparing the ‘theology of glory’ with the ‘theology of the cross’:

The theologian of glory has no place for suffering or surrender but seeks instead to ‘explain’ God and the world in terms of human assertiveness, natural theology, and evidentialist apologetics. By contrast, the theologian of the cross understands that all efforts to understand God and achieve a standing before him by such efforts are doomed to fail. The cross puts a question mark around all of our theodicies and requires us to confess [the words of Romans 9:16].

And while theodical reasoning and apologetics do have a legitimate place in the Christian pulpit (as the researcher will attempt to demonstrate in 6.0 from Thielicke’s own ministry) Peters cautions that we should be aware that inherent in every theodicy is “the dynamic of self-justification” and “human self-promotion” (2002:281). Recognizing this tendency at work in the human mind

uncovers a subtle assumption at work in both atheistic and theistic theodicies, namely, that our human perspective on evil and suffering is placed in the judgment seat. The theodacist has claimed the role of judge and placed God on trial (2002:281).

Another way of stating this is to say that the preacher must understand that the demand for comprehensive answers from God where none are given may ultimately devolve into an attempt to place God “before the tribunal of men” which is nothing less than a manifestation of “the total godlessness of the sinner” (Hille, 2004:31) and a capitulation

“to our desire to be gods ourselves” (Carson, 1990:245). The demand for a final solution to the PES, either on the microcosmic level of individual suffering or the macrocosmic level of corporate suffering, contains within it the hidden conviction that people are “willing to accept the rule of God” provided that He may be “proven to be good and omnipotent in allowing life to go well” (Hille, 2004:31; see also Fischer, 1983:313-314). Much like the original human sin, it is a manifestation of “false autonomy” (Matthews, 2000:381).

It would seem, therefore, that the Christian minister must be careful to preach and minister to sufferers within the boundaries of what the Scripture actually reveals, particularly with reference to the PES. To travel beyond the revealed Word, even for the sake of providing substantive comfort and assurance to those who suffer, violates the epistemic boundary between the “secret things” of God and those “revealed” for which we are responsible. It also trivializes the mysterious nature of God’s “ways” and “thoughts” that are “higher” than those of men (Isaiah 55:8-9). And while orthodox Christian theology is certainly correct in its assertion of God’s comprehensive control over all of history, we must remember that human beings

cannot have access to the particular free acts of God, unless God chooses to disclose reasons for God’s acts. These free acts of God are contingent and thus could be otherwise. God could act in a number of different ways and thus we cannot know why God permits suffering in a particular instance. Neither can the theologian know the particular character of God’s loving responses to other people in the throes of suffering (Miller, 2009: 848).

Wall also strongly cautions against such homiletical explanations as well as the theological systematization of divine mysteries that are outside the purview of the creature:

[D]iscussions about the problem of pain seem always to be carried on within the dispassionate confines of dogmatic categories. Whether intentioned or unintentioned they seem to remove the mysterious, the unknowable, the ambiguity from the very center of human experience. Indeed human suffering cannot be organized and articulated to make it seem reasonable. For the one experiencing pain, everything seems to be in disarray. Suffering, although a part of human existence, is not very humane (1983:444).

With all of this in view it is clear that the Christian pulpit minister should meet the formidable challenge of providing ‘explanations’ for suffering and evil with a bold yet sensitive proclamation of God’s loving concern for His children and providential control of their lives. At the same time, such biblically founded and theologically

focused preaching will summon hearers to appreciate humbly the existence of impenetrable theological mysteries on one hand and the very real presence and power of God in the midst of human suffering on the other. Rather than attempting to offer exhaustive solutions or answers to the ‘Why?’ question related to the PES, preachers should present a sweeping vision of God’s majesty, power, sovereignty, and mercy through the faithful ministry of the written Word. This, in my view, will have the effect of promoting a healthy spirit of repentance and building personal faith while comforting the sufferer as only God’s Word can.

3.2.3 The existential challenge: communicating the value of suffering

A second significant and related challenge confronting the pulpit minister in reference to the PES is that of demonstrating from Scripture the *transcendent value* of human suffering. That is, it would appear necessary to link the present miseries of the sufferer, in whatever form they are being experienced—the *existential* component—with a higher, overarching purpose and meaning—the *transcendent* component. In other words, it would seem to be most beneficial to the sufferer to realize that there are eternal or transcendent benefits gained by the experience of suffering that will contribute to the overall good of the person *in this life* as well as in the life to come. Additionally, these benefits will demonstrate that there is meaning in one’s afflictions, and meaning that extends beyond the personal experience of the sufferer in the present. In strictly Christian terms, we might say that the suffering that comes into the life of the believer is ultimately designed by God to produce eternal spiritual benefits that would otherwise be unavailable and that these benefits touch this life here and now and the life that is to come. This is quite likely the apostle Paul’s very point in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, for example, where he recalls Christ’s reassuring words that in the midst of his experience with the “thorn in the flesh” (v. 7) the “grace” of God is “sufficient” and the “power” of God is “perfected in weakness” (v. 9). I would suggest that the point for application here is that if, in fact, there is a divinely ordained *transcendent* purpose (or purposes) for one’s suffering, the experience of that suffering—its *existential* dimension—is to that degree controlled and informed by the eternal—the *transcendent* dimension. This permits one to join Paul in expressing thanksgiving to God even in the midst of pain (2 Corinthians 12:9-10), this thanksgiving being based squarely upon the fact that God is both graciously and powerfully at work to produce benefits that will exceed one’s present experience.

To probe deeper into this point we might say that along with the ‘Why?’ question comes the logical problem of understanding how a given occurrence of evil or pain may serve the greater interests of the individual believer and the Kingdom of God as Scripture asserts that it does. This would appear to be especially true in cases of so-called *gratuitous* evils and the apparently meaningless suffering of those considered to be ‘innocent’ such as children or other vulnerable or disadvantaged persons. For example, grieving parents might well ask how God could be glorified and their personal faith strengthened by the loss of their infant child to cancer or a tragic accident. What good could possibly come from such a loss, and why would God permit or decree such a thing in the first place? What present benefit and eternal value is there in such cases of suffering and death? What good is accomplished, for instance, in a believer’s painful fight with terminal illness? Or, as in Thielicke’s case, one might ask how experiencing the destruction of an entire nation, the loss of literally millions of civilians to relentless bombing raids, and the horrible shame of unspeakable wartime atrocities benefit those who follow Jesus Christ? Long (2006:141) expresses the acute existential dilemma of such apparently senseless evils:

In some cases, however, suffering seems to be other than can be accommodated within the context of soul-making. Such suffering is often referred to as gratuitous or unjustified, suffering which by most reasonable accounts appears to be useless. Perhaps one might argue that all suffering is useless or senseless, but at least this appears to be the case with gratuitous suffering.... Such suffering is non-integratable or non-justifiable ... [including such] natural events as the Lisbon earthquake ... as well as the kind of intolerable suffering found uniquely in Auschwitz.... In such cases it seems to make little sense to speak of persons choosing to bear their suffering or justifying their suffering in relation to some future human or eternal good.... Such suffering seems to have no purpose in terms that can be meaningfully appropriated in human terms. It is what might be called an experience of emptiness, or nullity, perhaps one might say of the absence of the gods, whether secular or religious.

As minister of the Word of God, the preacher must seek to set forth not only the biblical and theological underpinnings of death, illness, disease, war, and other such evils that characterize human life after the Fall but must also demonstrate biblically how such evils are ultimately used as tools in the hands of a good and loving God for the present and eternal benefit of the believer, the growth of Christ’s church, and the glory of His name. In short, he must demonstrate from the Scriptures and communicate to his hearers that, contrary to what human experience might otherwise suggest, there *are no gratuitous evils*, or instances of “senseless suffering” which truly “contradict any

human value or purpose and elude integration with any rational or coherent order” (Long, 2006:142).

The *locus classicus* for such a bold and sweeping assertion is found in the comforting words of Romans 8:28—“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those called according to His purpose.” With this strategic passage in view, it would appear that the minister’s core mission in treating the PES sermonically is to assure those who are suffering that God does in fact work “all things” for “good” and that instances of pain and affliction, even those assumed to be senseless, are the very means by which He brings about His good, wise, and oftentimes mysterious purposes.

Considering this, it seems that an appropriate first course of action would be to further establish the fact that the Bible repeatedly and unequivocally claims that numerous goods come directly from the experience of evil and affliction. By means of a comparative examination of the scriptural data, the researcher will attempt to confirm that there is abundant theological and biblical warrant for the claim that significant spiritual goods can result from adversity, suffering, pain, loss, death, tragedy, and the experience of evil in its various forms (natural and moral evil, as well as *a priori* gratuitous evil). What follows is a simple listing of some of the more significant Scripture passages that may be examined with this question in view.

Genesis 50:20—“And as for you, you meant it for evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.”

Job 5:17—“Behold, how happy is the man whom God reproves, so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty.”

Psalms 94:12—“Blessed is the man whom Thou dost chasten, O Lord.”

Psalms 119:67—“Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Thy word.”

Isaiah 48:10—“Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.”

Hosea 5:14-15—“For I will be like a lion to Ephraim, and like a young lion to the house of Judah. I, even I, will tear to pieces and go away, I will carry away, and there will be none to deliver. I will go away and return to My place until they acknowledge their guilt and seek My face; in their affliction they will earnestly seek Me.”

Romans 5:3-4—“And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character, and proven character hope.”

Romans 8:17-18—“and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him. For I consider that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

2 Corinthians 1:3-7—“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ. But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer; and our hope for you is firmly grounded, knowing that as you are sharers of our sufferings, so also you are sharers of our comfort.”

Hebrews 12:11—“All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.”

James 1:2-4—“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”

1 Peter 1:6-7—“In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

What these biblical texts appear to demonstrate is that the believer’s experience of the PES, while fraught with pain, intractable questions, and significant existential challenges to personal faith, is actually a mechanism for the production of benefits that ultimately, at the *eschaton*, will outweigh all suffering. Furthermore, as demonstrated above, Christians have hope-filled warrant for the belief that

evil is here by [God’s] permission, not by compulsion of some second ultimate power. If by God’s permission, then as he is wholly good, wise, and loving, evil must be serving some necessary though temporary purpose, and when it is accomplished evil will disappear (Merrins, 1912:276).

However, this very fact—that evil with all of its multi-varied ramifications serves the greater purposes of God and the good of all Christians—is something that is given precious little consideration by many believers until they themselves have encountered the PES in a more personal way. As long as the PES remains a philosophical or theological abstraction far removed from one’s immediate experience, it seems less likely that it will be given appropriate contemplation and the kind of deep reflection that is both prompted and governed by the Scriptures. On this point Carson (1990:9) sounds a much-needed warning:

We do not give the subject of evil and suffering the thought it deserves until we ourselves are confronted with tragedy. If by that point our beliefs—not well thought out but deeply ingrained—are largely out of step with the God who has disclosed himself in the Bible and supremely in Jesus, then the pain from the personal tragedy may be multiplied many times over as we begin to question the very foundations of our faith.

Carson’s point is well taken and serves to establish the necessity of regularly treating the PES from the pulpit for the benefit of the church as a whole, not only in terms of doctrinal clarity but also for the sake of effective shepherding. If parishioners struggle to find meaning and purpose in their pain, it is the minister’s responsibility to prompt such biblically grounded reflection by means of preaching. Again, Carson’s counsel is most helpful:

Christians undergoing pain and suffering will be well served by contemplating the Bible’s story line and meditating on the price of sin. We live in an age

where everyone is concerned about their 'rights.' But there is a profound sense in which our 'rights' before God have been sacrificed by our sin. If in fact we believe that our sin properly deserves the wrath of God, then when we experience the sufferings of this world, all of them consequences of human rebellion, we will be less quick to blame God and a lot quicker to recognize that we have no fundamental right to expect a life of unbroken ease and comfort. From the biblical perspective, it is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed (1990:47).

As Carson suggests, the scriptural story line faithfully expounded by the minister will provide suffering believers with a proper perspective from which to view and assess their situations. This effect is illustrated rather dramatically in the experience of the apostle Paul as recorded in 2 Corinthians 12 where he describes his well-known "thorn in the flesh" (v. 7). As Paul makes clear, this painful experience in his life, whatever its exact nature may have been, was something from which he sought immediate and complete relief: "Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me" (v. 8). However, it was only when Paul received the direct Word of the Lord—"And He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness'" (v. 9)—that he was able to accept the painful experience as a divinely designed means to facilitate his spiritual maturation: "Therefore, I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong" (v. 10). The Word of the Lord gave the apostle a new perspective from which to interpret his experience and as a consequence supplied Paul with hope and assurance in the midst of his pain. Merrins (1907:690) provides a thorough explanation of the overall benefits of Paul's 'thorn' by noting that after he was prompted by the Word of revelation and finally understood its meaning and value,

There burst upon him the conviction that the divine power of Christianity itself was simply the strength to sustain weakness; that the earthly glory of the Master had mainly consisted in his ability to support with un murmuring love the weight of a bitter thorn, at the last a crown of thorns. In his affliction the apostle therefore discerned that he was but following the footsteps of Christ along the dolorous way, and must exhibit the patience, gentleness, and resignation with which the Son of Man bore his trials. So the thorn becomes for him the unmistakable sign of his apostleship. It united him to Christ in suffering, and enabled him to sympathize deeply not only with the trials of his fellow men, but also with the groaning and travailing together in pain of the whole creation. He accepted his affliction, therefore, with cheerful resignation, confident that whatever happened, nothing could separate him from the love of God, and that the strength of Christ would be manifested in his weakness for the salvation of men.

The notion of perspective also surfaces in the apostle Peter's treatment of suffering in his first epistle. In 1 Peter 4:1-2 he initially suggests that suffering has a purging or purifying effect upon believers—"he who has suffered has ceased from sin" and no longer lives "for the lusts of men but for the will of God." And then in 1 Peter 4:12-19 he provides the eternal or eschatological perspective from which all suffering must be understood and received from the hand of God, namely that "at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation" (v. 13). Kirk (1981:53) argues that in this passage Peter intentionally "focuses his readers on a higher plane, namely their heavenly inheritance and eschatological hope" and his treatment of trials and tribulations is "spoken of against the backdrop of the believer's position in Christ." With this in view, the numerous tribulations that believers face in life,

however unpleasant, begin to be placed in perspective, and only in this context can affliction and suffering be seen in true proportion. Compared with the promised inheritance (the eschatological hope) suffering is actually short-lived. With this kind of inner stability, there is the capacity for rejoicing, entrusting, and humbling oneself under the mighty hand of God (Kirk, 1981:54).

In his most significant and widely respected treatment of the PES entitled *The Problem of Pain*, C. S. Lewis also implies that having the proper perspective on life in terms of the biblical meta-narrative assists sufferers in their times of distress and troubling questions prompted by pain. This is particularly true when considering God's love:

The problem of reconciling human suffering with the existence of a God who loves, is only insoluble as long as we attach a trivial meaning to the word 'love,' and look on things as if man were the centre of them. [Scripture declares that] Man is not the centre. God does not exist for the sake of man. Man does not exist for his own sake.... We were made not primarily that we may love God ... but that God may love us, that we may become objects in which the Divine love may rest 'well pleased' (Lewis, 1962:47-48).

All of this indicates that the faithful exposition of the Word of God by the pulpit minister will provide parishioners with the eternal vantage point needed to frame properly and interpret their experiences of pain. The Word announces in terms that are both clear and authoritative that God's love for us in Christ is indomitable and unassailable (Romans 8:38-39; Ephesians 3:17-18) and that He is at work in our lives for the accomplishment of His sovereign and good purposes (Philippians 2:13). In this regard, Bridges (1988:178) has observed that it is essential to "*bring the word of God to bear upon the situation*" if we want to "profit most from adversity," and that believers must rest in the fact that every instance of suffering "that comes across our path, whether large or small, is intended to help us grow in some way. If it were not

beneficial, God would not allow it or send it" (1988:177). When this is done, not only will the Word help to place the pain being experienced within its proper redemptive frame of reference but those same adversities will also

in turn help us to understand the Scriptures.... [A]dversity enhances the teaching of God's Word and makes it more profitable to us. In some instances it clarifies our understanding or causes us to see truths we had passed over before. At other times it will transform 'head knowledge' into 'heart knowledge' as theological theory becomes a reality to us (1988:178).

In this way there is somewhat of a reciprocal relationship between the Word of God and the experience of the sufferer. The Word speaks meaning into one's pain, provides direction, perspective, encouragement, and hope in one's many afflictions, and serves as the guarantee that in the end all will be "good" indeed. Likewise, pain may enhance the sufferer's understanding of the Bible as scriptural truths are connected to real life events and the effectual power of the Word is experienced in most practical and definite terms. The result will be an increase in spiritual goods and the sanctification of the believer.

From the scriptural texts that have been analyzed we may establish a listing of some of the main benefits, or transcendent values, that derive from affliction and suffering. These benefits, discovered in the Word, should be regularly announced and applied by pastors seeking to address the PES in their preaching. The promise of eternal goods, when discovered and embraced by sufferers, will not only provide the proper biblical perspective for life in a fallen world but will also supply the foundation for advancement in faith even within the depths of personal and corporate affliction.

The numerous benefits gained through adversity may be grouped together under several broad headings for initial consideration: 1) Those dealing more generally with Christian maturity, 2) Those having to do with the purity of the believer's life, 3) Those related to the promotion of joy in this life, 4) Those addressing an increase of faith and trust in the presence and power of God, 5) Those having to do with hope, perseverance, and the believer's preparation for eternity, and 6) Those indicating that suffering provides significant opportunities for ministry to others. What follows is a brief delineation of these transcendent benefits.

First, it is clear from the biblical vantage point that the experience of suffering and the painful spiritual and intellectual realities of the PES in general are employed by God for the promotion of overall Christian maturity. In passages such as Romans 5:3-4 and

James 1:2-4 it is clear that pain in the believer's life, or that experienced within the body-life of the church, is beneficial in terms of the spiritual growth and development of those who are followers of Christ. These texts indicate that God "will not remove an adversity until we have profited from it and developed in whatever way He intended in bringing or allowing it into our lives" (Bridges, 1988:174). Melchert (1989:41) also concludes that the kind of suffering addressed in these texts serves the general purpose of the believer's spiritual maturation. He argues that

the most profound learning, that is, learning which most deeply and widely affects how I think, feel, and act, is learning gathered and constructed *in living*. Such learning often comes when I am enabled or even forced to be open or vulnerable to something, perhaps even something I do not want to know, yet I know is true [emphasis added].

Experiences of suffering, and the vast intellectual and existential challenges presented by personal encounters with the PES, provide opportunities for believers to be shaken from their 'comfort zones' and deposited into an arena where learning is fostered and faith is stressed and stretched in beneficial ways.

The general benefits of adversity are also indicated by the words of Hebrews 12:5-12 where suffering believers are assured that in the end "those who have been trained by it" shall see a great harvest of "the peaceful fruit of righteousness" (v. 11). Commenting on this passage, Carson (1990:71) notes that such suffering is one of the primary ways that God disciplines His people. While the exact nature of this Fatherly discipline is not spelled out in this specific passage, the balance of the biblical revelation would seem to indicate that "God's discipline may include war, plague, illness, rebuke, ill-defined and rather personal 'thorns,' bereavement, loss of status, personal opposition, and much else beside" (Carson, 1990:71). When Hebrews 5:7-9 is considered, it is also evident that even within the earthly experience of Jesus Himself "the perfection of his identity with the human race and of his human temporal obedience to his heavenly Father could be attained only through the fires of suffering" (Carson, 1990:80). This establishes the notion that there is a kind of Christian maturity and growth that can be attained "only through the discipline of suffering" (Carson, 1990:79). Given this reality in the life of Jesus Himself makes it certain that a similar pattern is constantly at work in the lives of His followers, and to assume that one might be exempt from such testing is a "ghastly misapprehension" or evidence of sheer "arrogance" (Carson, 1990:80). Lewis has also sounded this note by asserting that

growth or progress in Christian virtue is, by its very definition, painful and unpleasant (1962:92):

Hence the necessity to die daily; however often we think we have broken the rebellious self we shall find it alive. That this process cannot be without pain is sufficiently witnessed by the very history of the word ‘mortification.’

Perhaps one of the most famous lines from the Lewis corpus comes at this same point in his extensive treatment of the PES in *The Problem of Pain*:

We can rest contentedly in our sins and in our stupidities; and anyone who has watched gluttons shoveling down the most exquisite foods as if they did not know what they were eating, will admit that we can ignore even pleasure. But pain insists upon being attended to. *God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world* [emphasis added] (1962:93).

This divine “megaphone” of pain teaches the saint that, indeed, God’s great power is, quite paradoxically, perfected in human frailty and weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9) and that there is “truly an omnipotent power, a spiritual dimension, in which there is nothing so evil that cannot be made to work for my good, provided I trust [God’s promises]” (Luther, 2008:67). Interestingly, even those researching within the disciplines of psychology, medicine, and bioethics have recently noted this same fact. For example, Hall *et al.* (2010) have concluded that

[i]f alleviating suffering can sometimes lead to bad results, it is also true that enduring suffering can lead to good results. In some [religious] traditions, suffering is something to be sought, rather than something to be avoided (2010:111).

Though they admit that “suffering may not produce happiness directly, it might promote a long-term character change, life re-orientation, or worldview change that would be contributive or constitutive of human flourishing” (2010:113) and that the strong connection between suffering and the maturation of the believer is well established by experience (2010:115). Likewise Delkeskamp-Hayes argues that any Christian approach to the practice of medicine

must recognize that disease and the threat of death are relevant to the individual patient’s spiritual situation. It must ... give space for patients to ponder the reason for their affliction not only in view of the spiritual plight of fallen humanity in general, but also in view of its diagnostic value for personal responsibility in aggravating that plight for themselves (2006:218).

Thus “the personal encounter with disease” can “serve as an occasion for reflection and repentance so as to redirect one’s priorities in life” (Delkeskamp-Hayes, 2006:218). In

addition, it is also self-evident that much of the suffering in human experience “may seem to be totally negative and without purpose. But within the wider context of God’s activity evil events may contain divine good that can be discovered” (Russell, 1996:569). Therefore, it “is valid to encourage the search for what affirms life and is redemptive within suffering” (Russell, 1996:569). Thus we may agree with Lewis that though the PES produces undeniable pain and prompts many serious and deeply complex questions, the Bible would indicate that “the old Christian doctrine of being made ‘perfect through suffering’ is not incredible” (1962:105) and that “the world is indeed a ‘vale of soul-making,’ [that] seems on the whole to be doing its work” (1962:108).

A second spiritual benefit derived from the PES is growth in Christian purity or the production of holiness in the life of the believer. This point is based upon the claims of the apostle Peter as recorded in 1 Peter 4:1 where he states that “he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.” The kinds of transgressions which suffering purges from the individual believer are enumerated in 1 Peter 4:3 and include “sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousals, drinking parties and abominable idolatries.” Critical to understanding this vital link between suffering and the purging of character flaws and moral impurity is the fact that, based upon “the biblical worldview,” suffering is “the direct result of the entrance of sin into the world,” and the curse pronounced upon humanity in Genesis 3:16-19 accounts for the increase of “difficulties faced by human persons” (Hall *et al.*, 2010:116). Additionally, the presence of pain and suffering “confirms the idea of a Moral Governor” to whom we are accountable, “and in the moral sphere points to Him as the resource of His defective and dependent creatures” (Hayman, 1888:587). Hayman observes that such an extensive scriptural conviction

comes naturally to all minds not tainted by pessimistic views, that there must be, inexplicable as the paradox seems, a *reason why* such suffering should be. And having exhausted the reasons for pain in the physical and mental spheres, we must seek our ‘reason why’ for this apparent surplus in the moral sphere (1888:587).

This cause-and-effect relationship between the commission of a sin and the resultant pain, whether physical or spiritual, is the gracious mechanism provided by God for the sanctification of the sinner and the production of godliness and the very moral character of Christ Himself (see Galatians 4:19). To this end, therefore, God employs the various pains associated with the PES to expose the “corruption of our sinful nature” and to serve as an effectual way to “reign in our affections that have been drawn out to unholy

desires” (Bridges, 1988:181-182). The passions of the body are, in effect, purged and purified in the fires of affliction, and as a consequence, these same affections find their satisfaction in objects that are more worthy and pure in the eyes of God. Carson (1990:72) provides an example of how this happens:

For instance, prolonged suffering from chronic illness is certainly not a ‘good’ thing, yet rightly accepted it can breed patience, teach the discipline of prayer, generate compassion for others who suffer, [and] engender some reflection and self-knowledge that knocks out cockiness and the arrogance of condescending impatience.

In other words, suffering functions as the moral and spiritual filter that purges impurities from the lives of believers, ultimately liberating them to experience both joy and peace in their afflictions while preparing them for the Day of Judgment:

In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of your faith ... even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:6-7).

A third benefit derived from the PES is the production and experience of joy in this life even during episodes or extended periods of intense pain and affliction. There are at least two significant passages of Scripture that directly connect the experience of pain and suffering to the development of joy in the life of the believer. In Romans 5:3-4 the apostle Paul lists the many positive qualities that result from a believer’s tribulations, namely, “perseverance,” “proven character,” and “hope.” He then appeals to the development of these very traits as the ground for the sufferer’s present exultation in the midst of adversity—“but we exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about” many spiritual goods that may not be developed in other contexts (v. 3). James 1:2-4 sounds a similar note as it summons believers to “consider it all joy” when they “encounter various trials” since these very afflictions and experiences of pain and suffering yield “endurance” and in the end a “perfect result” (vv. 2, 4). In both passages it is the certain *knowledge* that by God’s providential working pain produces spiritual growth and maturity in very specific areas that prompts the call to joy and rejoicing. It should also be noted that both of these passages, one from an apostle of Jesus and the other from the Lord’s own half-brother, seem to parallel closely the words of Christ’s *Sermon on the Mount* (Matthew 5:11-12):

Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely on account of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

To be sure, as Bridges states (1988:175), it is “not *the adversity considered in itself* that is to be the ground of our joy. Rather, it is the expectation *of the results*, the development of our character, that should cause us to rejoice in adversity” [emphasis added].

This is a critical distinction to draw and it reinforces the fact that the Christian worldview denies neither the reality of pain nor the intrinsically evil source and nature of human suffering. Rather, believers are summoned to rejoice in the providential governance of God and in His sovereign determination to employ the PES for their benefit and His glory while denying neither the reality nor the evil nature of their afflictions. For it is

in extremity that many Christians drink most deeply of the grace of God, revel in his presence, and glory in whatever it is—suffering included—that has brought them this heightened awareness of the majesty of God (Carson, 1990:244).

The exact connection between suffering and joy then would appear to be that affliction moves the believer into a unique position to see God powerfully at work in ways otherwise unobserved and unappreciated. To this degree, the PES becomes the means by which God produces conditions favorable to the development of gratitude and joy in the heart of the sufferer, particularly as the afflicted person begins to realize that there is a divine purpose in it. This is achieved as the reality of the Spirit’s sanctifying work in the heart of the sufferer becomes apparent (through the manifestation of repentance, confession, humility, patience, and other Christ-like virtues) and is further confirmed by the witness of Scripture, which sets forth the facts of God’s sovereign and good designs for all of His children. This also explains why the apostles would rejoice “that they had been counted worthy to suffer shame for His glory” (Acts 5:41) and that Paul would state, “I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake” (Colossians 1:24) and would commend the Thessalonian Christians for their reception of the gospel “in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit” (1 Thessalonians 1:6). Simply put, the Scriptures seem to indicate that without pain and affliction, authentic, deep, and lasting joy might not be possible in full measure if possible at all.

A fourth benefit derived from the PES is an increase of faith and trust in God. The words of the apostle Peter in 1 Peter 2:6-9 make it clear that one of the prime purposes served by pain and affliction has to do with the development of the believer’s faith in

God. That tribulation results in the refining of personal faith finds repeated emphasis in the epistle (see 4:12-16; 5:6-10). According to Peter “the proof of one’s faith,” which is effectuated through pain, “far exceeds any extrinsic value” (Kirk, 1981:54). At this juncture it is very important to offer a definition of what the Bible means in these contexts that speak of ‘faith.’ Negatively defined, it would appear that ‘faith’ is not the *complete* absence of doubt or freedom from difficult and perplexing questions about God and human life under His providential care. Experience would seem to suggest that doubt and faith often occupy the same space within the redeemed heart and the one does not necessarily negate the other. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1965) has articulated this point most clearly. Commenting on the colorful episode from the earthly life of Jesus recorded in Luke 8:22-25, Lloyd-Jones states that ‘faith’ may not be reduced to mere feelings but “takes up the whole man including his mind, his intellect and his understanding” (1965:142). In simple terms, the kind of ‘faith’ that God desires to create in the hearts of suffering believers is “a refusal to panic, come what may,” and may be understood simply as “unbelief kept quiet, kept down” (1965:143). It is in times of extreme doubt and fear that one is summoned to trust in God and to refuse to be “controlled by the circumstances” while standing upon the promises of God’s Word (Lloyd-Jones, 1965:144-145). Along with the temptation to panic, it is also self-evident that the PES inevitably raises a host of troubling and persistent questions in the minds of believing sufferers, and many of these have to do with

our understanding of God as the all-powerful sovereign of history who is at the same time loving and good. Can we hold on to a God who is loving, powerful, present in history and committed to his people ... in the face of the overwhelming events of our generation? (Fischer, 1983:309).

It would be more accurate to suggest that whatever ‘faith’ is, it surfaces in the heart *despite* the doubts and questions precipitated by painful events, particularly those that involve apparently gratuitous or senseless evils. It is also true that ‘faith’ in the biblical context of the PES may not be reduced to mere ‘fortitude’ or ‘courage.’ Webster and Beach (2007:393) explain:

For many, ‘having faith’ means mustering up the intestinal fortitude to put up with their circumstances, bolstered by the belief that God is with them and is working out a plan or trying to teach them something. Often that is simply a strategy for avoiding conflict. It may pressure people to be ‘tougher’, but it may not necessarily lead them to know God better.

With this, Webster and Beach seem to be getting at the heart of the biblical notion of ‘faith’ within the definitive context of the PES. The concept of increasing in the

personal, experiential knowledge of God gets much closer to the idea of ‘faith’ in situations of suffering and pain. Bridges (1988:190) makes this same connection:

Perhaps the most valuable way we profit from adversity is in the *deepening of our relationship with God*. Through adversity we learn to bow before His sovereignty, to trust His wisdom, and to experience the consolations of His love ... we begin to *pass from knowing about God to knowing God Himself in a personal and intimate way* [emphasis added].

Times of suffering, whatever the precipitating cause or reason, “brings us to an awareness of our finitude and our sense of dependence,” and this would seem to be the initial move necessary for developing a deeper and more personal knowledge of God (Long, 2006:143). Suffering exposes the helplessness of the sufferer while simultaneously providing the conditions under which one may see and embrace the all-sufficient power and wisdom of God. With all of this in view, it would be more accurate to define ‘faith’ simply as the inner “assurance” (Hebrews 11:1), prompted by the Spirit of God and resting upon the Word of God, that “all things” that come into one’s life from the hand of the Heavenly Father will indeed “work together for good” (Romans 8:28). In the context of suffering, true faith, or this inner Word-prompted assurance, rests upon and hopes in the fact that “God’s will [for the lives of His people] is determined by His wisdom which always perceives, and His goodness which always embraces, the intrinsically good” (Lewis, 1962:100). It is by means of suffering then that we “learn to trust our heavenly Father and rely on his wisdom to take us through paths we never would have chosen for ourselves” (Carson, 1990:73), all the while growing in the Spirit-prompted confidence that His purposes will stand. Thus, the trials and tribulations of life, which every believer and every generation of believers will inevitably face, are the means by which we learn to have faith in God, even in those profoundly difficult times “when he can at best be only dimly discerned behind events and circumstances that the Bible itself is quick to label evil” (Carson, 1990:72).

In the fifth place, Scripture indicates that the experience of suffering fosters hope and perseverance and prepares the believer for eternity in the presence of the Lord. Once again we may appeal to Romans 5:3-4 to establish the link between suffering and the production of perseverance and hope. Paul states that there is due cause for exultation in times of adversity since “tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope.” Based upon this bold declaration there is ample justification for the claim that endurance in Christian living is made possible “only as one is able to look forward to eternal reward” (Kirk, 1981:55). Or, as Bridges

(1988:184-186) explains, adversity and pain “produces perseverance, and perseverance enables us to meet adversity.... Though perseverance is developed in the crucible of adversity, it is energized by faith,” and such faith looks forward in hope to the promises of God that touch the future blessedness prepared for those who believe. Once this connection is realized and the suffering saint rests in God’s good and loving purposes,

[m]aximal comfort in the fallen world is now low on the agenda. The real question is how our current circumstances are tied to our faith in Jesus Christ, our peace with God, and our prospect of seeing him (Carson, 1990:78).

Carson explains that the entire life of the believer in Christ is lived in view of “the End,” including physical death and the vindication of personal faith by means of the promised resurrection of the body (1990:133). Apart from this forward-looking perspective of final salvation, “Christianity does not make much sense, and neither do major planks in any Christian perspective on evil and suffering” (Carson, 1990:133). It is suffering and pain, therefore, that effectively convince Christians that their “ultimate hope” is nothing less than “the new heaven and the new earth, the Holy City, the new Jerusalem” (Carson, 1990:135-136). Jay Adams makes special note of the preacher’s responsibility in light of this unique benefit of tribulation. He concludes that the faithful pastor will assist those who are suffering and even dying by continually “rehearsing the gospel message in simplicity with clarity” (1974:209). Furthermore, a responsible pulpit minister will

remind them of the need for a Savior that was brought about by sin. He rehearses the wonderful message of the good news that God, out of pure grace, sent his own Son to die in the place of guilty sinners, taking the punishment they deserved for their sins. He speaks of the resurrection as God’s stamp of approval upon the work of his Son on the cross, and the certain assurance that our frail bodies shall be raised together with our souls and shall live forever. He clearly outlines the means by which the elect enter into the promises of eternal life: through simple faith in Christ (Adams, 1974:209).

Carson (1990:147) affirms the same pastoral necessity and argues that all believers “ought to be developing a kind of homesickness for heaven,” and that such is achieved only by the consistent proclamation of the Word from the pulpit:

Preaching and teaching that do not constantly make heaven the Christian’s hope and goal are not only unfaithful to the Scriptures, but rob the believers of one of the most important perspectives in helping them to cope with the pressures here and now (1990:148).

Visions of heaven and eternity in God’s presence, the termination of all earthly tribulation and pain, the final victory of Christ over sin and its horrible consequences,

the judgment of the wicked and all those who have perpetrated humanity's darkest moments, and the resurrection of the body are essential to any Christian response to the PES. Scripture teaches that world history is inexorably moving toward a predetermined consummation and along the way there is much pain to be experienced by the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45, 25:31-46; 2 Peter 3:3-14). Yet, these very truths, when preached to those in the throes of affliction, foster the kind of perseverance and hope that God intends to be characteristic of His redeemed people until the end (Matthew 10:22).

A sixth benefit derived from the Christian perspective on the PES is the opportunity for loving service and Christian ministry to others, especially others who themselves are suffering. This transcendent value is set forth most explicitly in 2 Corinthians 1:4-5 where Paul provides assurance for suffering believers with the promise that "God comforts us in all our affliction" with an "abundant" measure of consolation "through Jesus Christ." Yet, God does this not simply for the immediate benefit of the one enduring affliction but in order that "we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God." Through Christ, and especially by means of the Spirit-applied Word, God supplies consolation to those who are afflicted so that there will be relief for the sufferer and abundant comfort available for other afflicted persons within the church. Thus, God's greater purpose and aim in bringing adversity into the lives of His people is "to equip us for more effective service" to one another (Bridges, 1988:188).

As we experience God's comfort and encouragement in *our* adversities, we are equipped to be His instruments of comfort and encouragement to others.... To the extent that we are able to lay hold of the great truths of the sovereignty, wisdom, and love of God and find our comfort and encouragement from them in our adversities, we will be able to help minister to others in their times of distress (Bridges, 1988:188).

While instances of adversity and pain may tend to drive people deeper into themselves and their own concerns, one of God's chief purposes in human suffering and affliction is to produce the exact opposite effect: to move believers to become involved in the cares and concerns of others within the church and to create a greater awareness of the needs of sufferers in the world. Suffering sets the stage for the establishment of a loving, unselfish, and compassionate bond between Christians so that to the degree one believer suffers, all suffer, and each shares in the consolation and joy of all (Romans 12:5; 1 Corinthians 12:26). Suffering, therefore, provides an opportunity to demonstrate

love and compassion in concrete ways, and fosters sacrificial love among the saints in such a way that it becomes a defining characteristic of the church (John 13:35). In this regard, Jüngel (1988:6) has duly noted the critical relationship between suffering and the ability to love. He observes that a person who never suffered

would also be apathetic and would furthermore be incapable of loving. Apathetic love is a contradiction in itself, just as it is a characteristic of love that there is nothing in the world which is more capable of suffering than love! The fact that love can suffer does not make it weak, but rather strong. Love's capacity to suffer is the core of its passion.

In addition to a deepening experience of love, Long (2006:147) explains the power of suffering to create a strong sense of community and mutual concern:

The suffering of other beings seems to call us to put our own being at risk, so to speak, to suffer with others, to become actively involved in relieving the suffering of others where we can, and to change those conditions that bring about senseless suffering.

Bridges (1988:188-189) also speaks of how the presence of adversity and pain creates a special fellowship, or sharing, within the community of Christ, and effectively erases many of the barriers to mutual concern and compassion: "Trials and afflictions have a *leveling effect* among believers.... we are all alike subject to adversity. It strikes the rich and the poor, the powerful and the weak, the superior and the subordinate, all without distinction" [emphasis added]. As counterintuitive as it may first appear, afflictions would seem to be essential to the life and overall health of the church. Experiences of suffering "have a mutual drawing effect among believers" and may serve as the effective means of tearing down walls that unnecessarily divide Christians while dissolving "any appearance of self-sufficiency we may have" (Bridges, 1988:189). All of this creates a loving climate in which believers may serve and care for one another and tangibly manifest the mercy and redemptive, self-giving love of Christ to the world.

To summarize, there seems to be a substantial biblical warrant for the belief that even the worst instances of human suffering may result in significant spiritual benefits and that suffering is one of the chief means by which God sanctifies believers and strengthens Christ's church. Consequently, it is essential that pulpit ministers preach and teach these passages in the full confidence that the inspired Scriptures will be both sufficient and profitable for the comfort and spiritual maturation of God's people as they are illuminated and applied by the Holy Spirit.

3. 3. The problem of evil: Thieliicke's unique ministry context

At this point it would be appropriate to reflect briefly once more upon the uniqueness of Thieliicke's preaching and teaching context, particularly during the terrible years of the rise and fall of the Nazi regime and the immediate post-war period that provided its own distinctive horrors. While not wanting to repeat the historical and spiritual sketch presented in the previous chapter (see 2.0), the researcher would simply like to recall those unique and tragic scenes that characterized the climate into which Thieliicke's preaching blossomed so powerfully, particularly as it relates to the PES. The purpose for this reflection is to set the stage for a further investigation of Thieliicke's sermons and specifically how he so effectively addressed the homiletical challenges presented by the PES. To do this the researcher shall allow Thieliicke to speak for himself by recounting the contextual comments he made about his preaching and lecturing ministry as recorded in six of his translated works.

3.3.1 Contextual comments from *Between God and Satan* (1958)

This book first appeared on the scene in 1938 and represents Thieliicke's deep theological and pastoral reflections upon the meaning and application of Christ's temptations as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew (4:1-11). In the preface to the third German edition Thieliicke commented that this collection of theological lectures "makes no reference to the religious and political conflict of the day" (v). Yet it was nevertheless specifically designed "to strengthen the followers of Jesus Christ in their resistance to ideological tyranny" (v). Following the collapse of the Third Reich and the formal ending of the war the book was reissued in 1946. By that time Thieliicke observed that the landscape of the world and particularly that of Germany had changed in radical ways along with the specific temptations Christians faced. However, the tempter himself was the same, just as dangerous and crafty as ever. Thieliicke believed very strongly that Satan, the "bringer into confusion," was executing his old diabolical schemes, although he now "employed new threats and new allures. His strategic goal remained the same; only his tactical methods had altered" (v).

3.3.2 Contextual comments from *Death and Life* (1970)

This book was begun in 1939 and was written during the time Thieliicke was serving the small parish in Ravensburg after he had been forcibly removed from his teaching post at the University of Heidelberg. As detailed above (2.1), it was Bishop Theophil Wurm who had provided him with the somewhat obscure pastorate in Ravensburg. The oppressive climate and inner pain of that particular time and place in Thieliicke's life is exemplified by the following personal comment in the book's preface:

There [in Ravensburg] the secret police imposed an injunction which proscribed my traveling or speaking anywhere else in the country. Only in the town itself was I permitted to preach. I had long since been forbidden to publish (ix).

Clearly this was a most trying period of "enforced solitude" for Thieliicke (ix), but it gave him the opportunity for focused study and theological reflection. He writes, "I was seriously handicapped, however, by the fact that I did not have access to a library" and, because of the wartime conditions, "even my own books were not at hand" (xi). Yet these difficult conditions provided "a certain stimulus" for further study that would yield great fruit in the later years of his life and preaching ministry (xi). Thieliicke confessed that this book was written largely for his own personal benefit in order that he might "come to some measure of clarity on fundamental questions of life and faith" which had been forced upon him during the initial years of the Nazi tyranny (xi).

Also reflected in this work is Thieliicke's strong conviction that one of the chief and central elements of the "church's proclamation" is "the mystery of human death" with which the German people would become all too familiar (xvi). He explains this in the most compelling of terms:

Church and world alike gaze spellbound on this third party, this common ground where willy-nilly their glances meet. And the greater the harvest of death in our blood soaked world—the closer death strikes as each of us is compelled to traverse the harvest field and the louder the hoofbeats of the apocalyptic riders thunder over the earth—so much the more unflinchingly and intensively do church and world alike gaze upon this third party (xiv-xv).

3.3.3 Contextual comments from *The Silence of God* (1962)

This book is a compilation of sermons composed and delivered by Thieliicke between 1942 and 1951. Thieliicke hauntingly explains that these messages were addressed to those "in supreme danger" and to those who were threatened with "fire and water,

dagger and poison”—to those at “the very frontier of death, when we lose our dearest friends and when we are anxious and guilty” (viii). The atmosphere into which these lectures sounded was a most trying one of “catastrophes, bombing, mass burials and excavations” and a period that allowed “no place for comfortable thoughts or the luxury of speculation” (viii). It was “a day of extreme trial” and the “darkest hours in our lives” (ix). Thieliicke states that this collection was intended to be read by a very specific audience: “those of men who stand at graves or smoking ruins, who see houses fall and can sense there is within them a soul in need” (viii), and those desperate ones “whose eyes still reflect the glare of the last air-raid,” along with “the exhausted or dying at the front” (xi).

3.3.4 Contextual comments from *Our Heavenly Father* (1960)

One of Thieliicke’s most popular collections of sermons is this series of messages based upon the Lord’s Prayer as recorded in Matthew 6. According to Thieliicke, the eleven sermons contained in this work were preached in Stuttgart

to people who continued to assemble throughout the horrors of the air raids, the declining days of a reign of terror, and finally through a period of total military and political collapse and the beginning of the occupation (13).

Thieliicke began preaching these messages on the Lord’s Prayer at the Church of the Hospitallers. Then, following its destruction by Allied bombers, he concluded the series in the auditorium of St. Matthew’s parish house. In the introduction to the collection he painfully describes what confronted him each week as he spoke to the assembled crowds:

The preacher saw written upon the faces of his hearers the destinies from which they had come or which they were approaching. He sensed the tension they were feeling, not knowing whether the next moment the scream of sirens would scatter them in all directions—which happened not infrequently. He saw on those faces the torment of doubt and despair, the hunger and thirst for a valid comfort and encouragement that would stand the test in hours of work, in hours spent in underground shelters, suffering agonies of body and mind (13-14).

The reader is then informed that the world into which these compelling sermons echoed was one of

joy and bottomless anguish, the world of citizens and soldiers, the world of monotonous routine and sudden terrible catastrophe, the world of carefree children and at the same time of problems that can shatter grown men (14).

Thielicke notes that the sermon on 'Thy Kingdom Come' was "delivered in the choir of the Church of the Hospitallers" since the church building itself "had been reduced to pitiful ruins in the air raids" along with the center of the city of Stuttgart, which "was also totally destroyed" (55). He then explains that when the sermon on 'Thy Will Be Done' was being delivered the service was "interrupted by sirens and an ensuing attack" (68). Not long afterwards a second attack that same day "completely destroyed the part of the Church of the Hospitallers that was still standing so that this was the last sermon to be delivered there" (68).

3.3.5 Contextual comments from *Man in God's World* (1963)

This book is a series of lectures given over a period of three years beginning in 1941 after Thielicke was permitted to "deliver one evening lecture a week in the Stuttgart Cathedral Church" (7). As he prepared the biblically based addresses, he was deeply aware of "the dreadful visitations" that were in store for the people of Germany and the fact that the people of the nation "should be prepared for eternity" (7). He saw these messages as a way to "prepare people for the terrible things that lay before them by giving them instruction—quite simply, just instruction—in the mysteries of our faith" so that "in terror and death we shall nevermore be left desolate and alone" (8). At times there were as many as three thousand people crammed into the church to hear Thielicke speak. The lectures in the Cathedral Church continued well into the time of the air raids, after which

[o]ne church after another collapsed and burned, thousands of homes sank into rubble and ashes, and the original congregation of hearers was scattered; but new ones kept coming. And when the streetcars stopped running they came on foot, often from many miles away through fields of ruins and rubble which were dark, spectral, and frightening on those winter evenings (9).

Eventually, the Cathedral Church itself was hit by a bomb and completely consumed in flames. During the same air raid, Thielicke's own home burned down. He describes how, as he approached it to inspect the damage, he "stood there holding in my hand a key to a door that no longer existed" (9). Two other auditoriums were used for the lectures, but they too were so completely destroyed that "not even the streets on which they were located were there any more" (9). The lectures were then moved to Bad Cannstadt where later another air raid occurred that killed two members of the audience, one being the organist (10). Several weeks before the air raid in Cannstadt, Thielicke was assisting with cleanup operations in the city and was working near a

massive bomb crater where one military officer and fifty women auxiliary air force aids were killed (10). It was there Thieliicke met the wife of the deceased officer. As she held up her husband's cap she said, "This is all that was left of him. Only last Thursday I was with him, attending your lecture. And now I want to thank you for preparing him for his death" (10).

Thieliicke describes that particular period of his ministry in the most striking of terms:

[T]he Nazi tyranny has not only pitched us into a ghastly war which everyday is destroying our men, our brothers and sons, on the battlefields; it is not only exercising the most monstrous reign of terror within the country, but it has attacked and desecrated everything that is holy to us. It has introduced pagan gods and is bent upon using them to drive out Jesus Christ (7).

Ultimately, the tyrannical reign of the Nazis "brought bewilderment and confusion to many people" and "shut off all from contact with Jesus Christ" (8). This prompted Thieliicke to respond with a commitment to proclaim the essential truths of the Christian faith from the pages of Scripture. He explains:

What we were doing there was teaching theology in the face of death. There the only thing that was of any help at all was the gospel itself. Everything else simply dissolved into thin air. We were living only upon the substance of our faith. And those desperate hours also helped us to find that substance (10).

In the introduction to this book Thieliicke explains to the reader that those dreadful days of constant bombing and the resulting firestorms "illuminated many questions about faith, human nature, history, and life with an intensity and a depth that is hardly ever seen in more peaceful times" (11). In such times of indescribable horror "one could not attract people with the topics and clichés of the day. Only pure, hard metal was accepted. God had sent us into a hard school in order to make us find this metal" (11). Sometime later, when Thieliicke reflected back across that painful scene, he confessed that

never since have we perceived as clearly as we did then that God is stronger than fire and destruction and that even the valleys of deepest darkness, rod and staff are put into our hands and bridges are thrown across the abyss (12).

3.3.6 Contextual comments from *Nihilism: Its Origin and Nature—With A Christian Answer* (1961)

This book was written just after 1945 when according to Thieliicke, "the universities were reopened after the German capitulation" (11). At that time Thieliicke was teaching

at the University of Tübingen where, as he notes, the classrooms were filled to overflowing with “ragged figures,” even to the point where loudspeakers were used to carry the lectures into two additional large rooms (11). He describes the typical scene:

Sitting in the lecture rooms were former officers, dressed in the remnants of their uniforms from which they had torn the badges of their rank, refugees from the Eastern territories who had lost everything and often did not know where their immediate families were or even whether they were still alive, and also many who came from prison camps.... we delivered our lectures in unheated rooms [and] we stood at our lecterns in our overcoats as the students took notes with fingers stiffened by the cold (11).

The traumatic post-war years of Germany’s occupation were a time of pronounced “intellectual and spiritual hunger” that Thieliicke felt compelled to satisfy by means of his teaching, lecturing, and writing (12). The effect of the war years upon the youth of Germany was most disturbing to Thieliicke:

Before us sat a generation of youth which had been shrewdly and cruelly misled by the holders of power. And now they faced a world of rubble and ruins; not only their homes, but also their idealism, their faith, their concepts of value were shattered. But the vacuum in their hearts cried out to be filled. At the same time these young people were profoundly skeptical. Whatever we professors said they turned it about in their minds ten times before they would accept it: these burnt children dreaded the fire, because it might contain the coals of fresh seductions (11).

Thieliicke saw that there were deep “wounds that needed to be bound up,” both intellectually and spiritually, and the grave post-war situation called for the kind of “consolation and firm, forthright direction” that one could only find in the Christian faith (12).

In conclusion, these brief glimpses into Thieliicke’s world at the time of his most intense efforts to address the needs of his generation reveal the horrible conditions in which he sought to proclaim the Word of God. There were both the practical, physical challenges created by the war-time environment but also the enormous intellectual and spiritual obstacles to belief in God and in the gospel that were born in the crucible of a time of unparalleled evil and human suffering. What is remarkable is how Thieliicke met these challenges with such a vibrant commitment to preach the Word of God, and this despite the seduction and capitulation of the Protestant Church on the one hand and the sheer horrors associated with the rise and fall of the Third Reich on the other. Far from deflating him, the horrific manifestations of the PES that Thieliicke and his generation faced enflamed him with holy zeal to stand upon the riches of God’s effectual love and

grace, and the radical yet eternally powerful message of the Bible that this God had come to the world in the person of Jesus Christ to find those who, because of mankind's sin, were lost and Fatherless.

3. 4. Chapter summary

In this chapter the researcher has attempted 1) to introduce the PES by defining it from both a philosophical and theological perspective, 2) to illustrate some of the more substantial Christian responses to the PES, and 3) to suggest two of the more formidable homiletical challenges the PES presents to Christian pulpit ministers. Finally, in order to prepare for an investigation of Thieliicke's sermons on the PES, the researcher has considered Thieliicke's own words as he described, often in chilling terms, the specific context in which he preached and ministered to his generation.

What is made clear so far by this investigation is the fact that the PES is a deeply complex theological and philosophical conundrum. It is particularly problematic for those who maintain an orthodox view of the divine attributes and, consequently, believe in and worship the Triune God of the Christian Scriptures who has declared Himself to be both sovereign and merciful. It is also quite clear that comprehensive solutions, explanations, and responses to the PES that are intellectually and emotionally satisfying are not readily available to finite, sinful creatures. The "secret things" do indeed "belong to the Lord" (Deuteronomy 29:29), and the vast epistemic distance between the Creator and the creature must be acknowledged and respected. Yet, the Bible is very emphatic that although the Creator is the sovereign Lord of history, time, space, and matter He has graciously endowed human beings with authentic moral agency and personal responsibility before Him. The abuse of this moral (compatibilistic) freedom and the resultant fall of mankind in the Garden of Eden—events decreed by God from eternity past yet without doing violence to the choices and will of the creature (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, 3:1)—plunged Adam's race into ruin and destruction. Therefore, the PES shall remain problematic on multiple fronts until the triumphant consummation of all things when faith gives way to sight. In the meantime, between the fall and the consummation, the Christian pulpit minister, knowing that the preached Word is fully sufficient for the building of Christ's church and the equipping of the saints for worship and service (2 Timothy 3:15-17), must faithfully nourish God's flock in the Scriptures (1 Timothy 4:6).

As God's own people continue to suffer along with the rest of humanity, they will find their greatest source of comfort and assurance from the proclaimed Word, focused on Christ, delivered in the power of the Spirit, and promising eternal life and heavenly treasures for all who believe. It is only by looking forward in hope to these certainties, as both prompted and sustained by Scripture, that Christians find consolation in their pain and suffering. The great doctrines of the faith extracted from the biblical story line need particular explication for the benefit of the suffering church and those over whom she has redemptive influence. As Thieliicke himself has reminded us, it is only the "hard metal" of the Christian faith that shall survive the fiery furnace of trial and affliction and provide true satisfaction and assurance for those who suffer (1963a:11). This fire-tested "metal" is the preacher's only weapon against the forces of evil and is the one and only antidote with which the church must be regularly inoculated against despair, doubt, and the troubling intellectual perplexities associated with the PES.

In the next chapter the researcher shall offer an examination of Thieliicke's theological writings on key subjects that would appear to be directly related to his preaching on the PES. This investigation will lay the necessary groundwork for what will follow later in Chapters Five and Six where the researcher will be examining Thieliicke as a minister of the written Word and interpreting the various biblical and theological themes that surface in his published sermons on the PES.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 THIELICKE AS THEOLOGIAN: THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THIELICKE'S PREACHING ON THE PROBLEM OF EVIL AND SUFFERING

In this chapter the researcher shall conduct a limited bibliographical investigation of the theology of Helmut Thielicke with a view to understanding his perspective on some of the critical doctrinal themes related to the PES that surface in his published sermons on the subject. Broadly speaking, these themes include 1) the doctrine of man, 2) the doctrine of sin, and 3) the doctrine of redemption. Furthermore, the researcher would suggest that by developing an understanding of these specific theological emphases one might be in a better position to appreciate and to evaluate more accurately Thielicke's unique contribution to preaching on the PES.

Students of Thielicke's life and work will surely be impressed by the sheer depth and scope of his theological writings. While he is widely revered for his preaching (Anderson in Thielicke, 1968:v; Dominy, 1971:102; Cox, 1975:199; Pless 2009:444-445), some have argued that Thielicke should also be recognized as a first-rate theologian in his own right. Eneigenburg (1982:766) commenting on Thielicke's three-volume dogmatics (*Evangelical Faith*) claims that it is "without equal in our generation as a comprehensive statement of the best conservative Protestant theology." Muller notes that Thielicke's theology and theological writings are

the product of a deeply personal faith and of an individual intellectual and spiritual wrestling with root problems in theological formulation ... [and] represents an affirmation of *sola scriptura* and *sola gratia* of the Reformation against a variety of pitfalls both ancient and modern ... [and] transcends the denominational forms and [addresses] the larger theological world of the present both critically and appreciatively, without, however losing its own integrity (1982:28).

Scaer has commended Thielicke for producing a systematic treatment of doctrine that is "a welcome addition to the libraries of those who want to do serious theology" (1982:252) and argues that Thielicke "belongs to one of the vanishing breed of theologians who organize their theology into comprehensive systems" (1982:251). Vaux (1995:1190) praises Thielicke as "the preacher's theologian of our generation"

and notes that the “genius of his work comes from his immersion in the hopes and fears, doubts and beliefs—the daily lives of people.”

Even a cursory reading of his three-volume *Evangelical Faith* (1974, 1977, 1982) or his three volumes of *Theological Ethics* (1964, 1969, 1979) will reveal his massive intellect and the broad scope of his interaction with theologians and philosophers of virtually every persuasion, both those of the past and those of his own day. Quite appropriately, on the cover of his *Modern Faith and Thought* (1990) Thieliicke is praised as “one of the most prominent Protestant theologians of this century.” He is also highly regarded for his work in the field of Christian ethics. For example, Bloesch (1968:309) has stated that, “[i]t cannot be doubted that [Thieliicke’s three-volume *Theological Ethics*] is a major contribution to the theological and ethical discussion in this century.” Likewise, Vaux (1995:1190) calls Thieliicke’s *Theological Ethics* “the most extensive and comprehensive work in the field.”

However, Thieliicke is not without his theological critics. Montgomery (1978:57) chides him for deliberately avoiding “rigorous epistemological questions” and for his obvious reluctance to define his doctrinal terms

so precisely that one is forced to make clear distinctions between truth and error, between orthodoxy and heterodoxy. Yet he identifies himself with evangelicalism—and with Anglo-American evangelicalism at that!

Furthermore, Montgomery claims that there are “yawning chasms between Thieliicke’s theology and the historic evangelical faith that insists with Luther and the Reformers that ‘the Scriptures have never erred’” (1978:57). Klann (1980) offers a blistering critique of Thieliicke’s theology at several notable points (epistemology, Christology, and pneumatology) and charges him with deviating from “the classical orthodox formulations of the Christian church” (1980:155). He believes that Thieliicke is an heir to “the German tradition of philosophical idealism which had become a philosophy of cosmic evolution already at the time of Schelling” (1980:162). Walvoord (1966:79) summarily dismisses Thieliicke as a “typical neo-orthodox” theologian who “seldom gives a yes and no answer” to pointed theological questions. He concludes that

Thieliicke, by any fair evaluation, is an entertaining and stimulating theologian, but far from the view-point of historical evangelicalism. He is definitely neo-orthodox and thoroughly committed to experiential epistemology (1966:80).

Rosenberger (1964) is especially troubled by Thielicke's doctrine of Scripture and particularly his critique of the notion of verbal inspiration. He believes that Thielicke has completely misunderstood this doctrine as it is expressed in orthodox Christian theology and unwittingly confuses it with a mechanistic approach that is not embraced by theological conservatives. He wonders how it is possible for "anyone who claims to be a scholar, and particularly for a scholar of Professor Thielicke's character" to be guilty of misrepresenting "so grossly an historical doctrinal position as he does" (1964:241).

As one navigates through his impressive theological corpus, it is apparent that Thielicke saw his doctrinal works as foundational for his preaching. The twin tasks of theological reflection and the proclamation of the Word should never be separated (Thielicke, 1962d:4; 1965b:4-11). Thielicke believed that preaching must be theological but that theology must first be proclaimed and specifically applied if it is to be of any benefit at all (see 5.2.3 where this is more fully explained). For example, in his sermonic treatment of the Apostle's Creed (*I Believe: The Christian's Creed*, 1968:vii), Thielicke asserted that the task of preaching must be united to dogmatics in the sense of prompting theological inquiry and that it is only "after the proclaimed word strikes home do we reflect upon what happened and relate it [theology] to the problems of life." He also suggested that

[w]here theology forgets its secondary position, the result is spiritual sickness, of the kind of which traces are already at hand. We become almost completely preoccupied with ourselves, inquiring less about what the word of God says and more about who we are and the degree to which we can in our situation understand and appropriate that word (Thielicke, 1968:vii).

This vital connection between preaching and theology is also expressed in the preface to the English edition of the first volume of his *Theological Ethics* where Thielicke claimed that his singular aim in producing the series was "to lay a new foundation for Christian preaching" (Thielicke, 1979b:xv). He confessed that at the time he produced this massive and widely acclaimed treatment of Christian ethics he was primarily motivated by "the present sickness of preaching" (Thielicke, 1979b:xv) which, as he sadly judged it, was divorced from life, reeling from a lack of any "missionary point of contact with our contemporaries outside the church" (Thielicke, 1979b:xvii). In order to make this vital connection to the world, Thielicke challenged preachers to involve themselves in patient theological reflection upon the Scriptures with a view to

proclaiming a faith that connects to men where they are, dealing courageously and forthrightly with the actual questions they are asking. He writes:

For me, preaching was never intended to proceed independently of theological endeavor. On the contrary, in intention at least theology and preaching are one in substance. As it seems to me, however, the fundamental error in modern preaching is that we hurry directly from biblical exegesis to preaching and skip right over the whole field of ethical study (Thielicke, 1979b:xvii).

In Thielicke's estimation, one cannot preach effectively without doing the hard yet delicate work of the theologian (Thielicke, 1962d). Therefore, to appreciate properly Thielicke's contribution to preaching and particularly his preaching on the perplexing subject of the PES, it would seem necessary to examine his theology at key points that directly intersect with the PES.

With this in view, the specific aim of this chapter is to probe the relationship between Thielicke's theology and his sermonic treatment of the PES in terms of presuppositions, theological themes, and the biblical meta-narrative and how his theology influenced his preaching on the PES. This will provide the necessary foundation for properly evaluating his sermons on the PES and assessing his preaching as it directly pertains to this most important subject. While a comprehensive evaluation of Thielicke's extensive dogmatic corpus would certainly exceed the limits of this present study, it is necessary to identify and perform a basic examination of the critical doctrinal themes that would appear to be intrinsically related to the PES in general and prominent in Thielicke's published sermons on the subject in particular.

Following an initial reading of over thirty of Thielicke's published sermons, selected because they directly address the subject of the PES, the researcher has identified three broad theological themes that consistently surface in them and are most logically linked to the PES: 1) man, 2) sin, and 3) redemption. Later in this thesis (6.0) the researcher will fully investigate each of these sermons and will identify and interpret the specific instances where these three themes appear with a view toward seeing them as paradigmatic for the sermonic treatment of the PES and for appreciating Thielicke's unique contribution to this specific homiletical challenge. Yet in order to accomplish this it will first be necessary to come to some degree of understanding as to how Thielicke defined and deployed these themes, theologically speaking. That is, in order to evaluate Thielicke's sermons on the PES, particularly as they address the related

themes of man, sin, and redemption, one must first attempt to understand his theological views on them.

Therefore, it would seem to this researcher that an investigation of Thielicke's theology within the scope of these three broad doctrinal parameters would yield sufficient data to assess intelligently and fairly his sermons on the PES. In light of an initial reading of Thielicke's sermons on the PES the specific and narrower theological foci that the researcher has deemed to be significant for this study are his perspectives on 1) the doctrine of man and creation, 2) the doctrine of the fall of man and the ruin of creation, and 3) the doctrine of the redemption of man and the restoration of creation. The rationale for the selection of these three specific areas is as follows.

First, the PES is primarily (yet not exclusively) about *human* suffering. This fact would seem to necessitate an investigation into the nature of man as creature. If the main philosophical/theological difficulty with suffering is that rational creatures experience it, and often in apparently gratuitous measures, then one must define what a human being is in distinction from other creatures. Human suffering is significant and deeply problematic precisely because of the presupposition of human dignity, the assumption of the qualitative distinction between human suffering and that of other creatures, and the intrinsic worth ascribed to human life.

Secondly, according to the testimony of Scripture (and the Christian worldview that stands squarely upon it), human suffering is the direct result of mankind's sin against the Creator (Genesis 3:17-24). The effects of this fall, which orthodox Christianity has always deemed to be an historic event, are dramatically set forth in the Bible not only as *personal* in nature (Romans 5:12-19; 6:23) but *cosmic* as well (Romans 8:21). From the Christian perspective suffering, whether human or non-human, cannot be understood and should not be contemplated apart from the biblical doctrine of the fall.

Thirdly, the Scripture provides the assurance that in the future there will be an end to all suffering and the multi-varied and universal consequences of human sin (Revelation 21:1-6, 27; 22:1-3). What was forfeited in the fall will be restored in Christ on the Last Day, and this assurance provides sufferers with hope and peace in the midst of their pain (2 Timothy 4:6-8; 1 Peter 4:12-13; 2 Peter 3:7-13).

In this chapter, therefore, the researcher shall endeavor to discover what Thieliicke believed about each of these three specific doctrinal themes by investigating a selection of his published theological works where they are addressed: 1) his three-volume *Theological Ethics* (1964, 1969, 1979), 2) his three-volume *The Evangelical Faith* (1974, 1977, 1982), 3) *Being Human, Becoming Human* (1984), 4) *Man in God's World* (1963), 5) *Between God and Satan* (1958), 6) *Between Heaven and Earth: Conversations With American Christians* (1965), 7) *The Freedom of the Christian Man* (1963), 8) *The Doctor as Judge of Who Shall Live and Who Shall Die* (1970), 9) *Death and Life* (1970), 10) *Nihilism: Its Origin and Nature—With a Christian Answer* (1961), 11) *The Hidden Question of God* (1977), and 12) *I Believe: The Christian's Creed* (1968). Additionally, the researcher shall examine a series of Thieliicke's published sermons that are contained in *How the World Began* (1961) based upon the opening chapters of the book of Genesis. These messages could be classified as more dogmatic in nature and each has significant relevance to the PES.

4.1 Thieliicke on man and creation

In order to measure and appreciate Thieliicke's homiletical contribution to the complex difficulties presented by the PES, it would appear necessary to investigate first what it is that he believed about the nature of man along a more theological route. Obviously, the PES is so hauntingly perplexing precisely because it involves the suffering of rational creatures who are capable of contemplating the meaning of their existence and judging the relative value and significance of their many life-experiences, particularly those that are deemed painful or categorized as 'evil.' Yet, with the Psalmist, one is first compelled to ask, "What is man...?" (Psalm 8:4). This timeless and fundamental question, according to Thieliicke, is "not just a philosophical question" to be approached casually or "at our leisure" but is, to the contrary, "a basic life-and-death question" (Thieliicke, 1970a:39). As Thieliicke observes, it is intuitive and universally affirmed that "there is something about man that dare not be changed" and something concerning "his very nature that dare not be violated" if he is to be regarded as "human" at all (Thieliicke, 1970a:1).

Set within the parameters of the PES this question as to man's identity becomes most critical, for if humans are not in some way distinct from other creatures and endowed with a special dignity and worth, then their suffering is no more consequential than that

experienced by animals, insects, and other living organisms. The PES would certainly appear to be problematic, at least in a logical sense, if and only if human beings have been *granted* or *endowed with* such distinction and intrinsic value. Thielicke applies this point specifically to the rise of Nazism and the resultant atrocities:

What triggered [the rise of the Nazis] and set rolling the apocalyptic drama of mass murder was not the subjective disposition of the murderer but their table of anthropological values. For if humanity is defined by its utilizability, the diagnosis of unfitness to live follows as night follows day (Thielicke, 1984:8).

The Nazi regime and the evil perpetrated by it are considered the pinnacle of human depravity precisely because of the universal *presupposition* of the worth and dignity, if not the *sacredness*, of human life. This controlling presupposition, according to Thielicke, is something that we “cannot break free from” for “we ourselves are the presupposition” (Thielicke, 1984:21). He observes that in “both East and West everybody speaks about positive humanism, about the humanizing of the penal codes, abortion, bureaucracy, the care of the elderly,” yet the crucial question begs to be answered: “[W]hat is meant by people? What view of humanity is normative?” (Thielicke 1984:7). Thielicke notes that following the fall of the Third Reich the Nuremberg trials were conducted, and the Nazi war criminals were finally brought to account for their actions or their ‘crimes against humanity.’ He asserts that these court proceedings could only be initiated and carried out upon the assumption of some kind of transcendent ‘law’ that made such things as genocide and euthanasia illegal and *inhuman*. However, there was no clear *universal* legal code forbidding such activities, yet this did not permit the Nazis to escape punishment:

Was there no positive law to which their judges could appeal with the claim that they had broken it? This legal problem raised the question whether there were not eternal unwritten laws ... that would make a competent verdict possible. In fact, the prosecution in this case did argue that certain basic laws that protect humanity were in force when the crimes were committed—because they are always valid. At issue were the axioms of humanity, transgressions which are ‘crimes against humanity.’ This was the very slogan on which the Nuremberg court based its competence to impose punishment” (Thielicke, 1984:27).

Thielicke’s point is that the question ‘What is man?’ is properly basic, and only upon the basis of “a prior realization of our human nature” or certain presuppositions or assertions about human life can there ever be the possibility of arriving at a legal code that protects the rights of individuals and punishes evildoers (Thielicke, 1984:28). As he summarizes,

[h]ere again we have confirmation of our prior observation that human rights as to what is “due” us can be formulated only on the basis of what we “are.” Only a prior realization of our human nature opens the possibility of defining our rights (Thielicke, 1984:28).

This would also apply directly to the PES as well, for it would appear unfounded to categorize any action or experience as ‘evil’ or ‘tragic’ apart from certain basic assumptions about the nature of the human sufferers. In truth, it would be logically incoherent to express outrage over such things as systematic genocide or rape or to bemoan the loss of hundreds of thousands in a tsunami or famine apart from the *a priori* judgment that human life has a certain value. The human question is, therefore, *the* question that must be faced and answered if there is to be any meaningful dialogue about suffering and evil at all.

By considering the doctrine of man along two lines of thought we may gain an understanding of Thielicke’s views on the subject. First, Thielicke held that man is a *creature* deliberately made to be distinct from other living organisms and the rest of nature by the direct action of the Creator Himself. Secondly, Thielicke believed that the Creator endowed humans with a special dignity and worth expressed by the *imago Dei*.

4.1.1 Man as a unique creature

It is quite clear from Thielicke’s doctrinal and ethical writings that he maintained a robust belief in the uniqueness of man as opposed to other creatures made by God. That is, he held that man is the mysterious and special creation of God and as such derives a superior and distinctive significance from his personal relationship to the Creator. Thielicke referred to this biblically founded Creator-creature connection as the “I—Thou” relationship between man and God, which should be understood in opposition to the “I—It” relationship between the Creator and the other creatures described in the Garden of Eden (Thielicke, 1964:4). He explains:

In the biblical narrative of creation, the creatures—stars, plants, and animals—are only objects of the creative ‘Let there be!’ Man, on the contrary, is addressed in the second person as ‘you.’ He is entrusted with a commission to be fulfilled, a destiny to be realized, and with reference to these it is possible for him to fail. Thus man is called into partnership with the creator, and to this he must respond (Thielicke, 1970a:16).

What makes man distinct then is that he and only he is “addressed as a person, a ‘you’” (Thielicke, 1961a:75). Additionally, it is man’s capacity for relationships with other men that he is a “being in fellow-humanity” experiencing the “Thou of the neighbor” that sets forth his distinctiveness (Thielicke, 1964:4-5). The various other creatures also made by God received no divine commandments or prohibitions “concerning what they should do and become.... But to man a ‘Thou shalt’ is spoken” (Thielicke, 1961a:75). It is precisely this critical fact, the divine Word spoken to man as a rational and responsible creature in relationship to the Creator, that “constitutes the uniqueness of man over against the animal world” and “lifts him above his fellow creatures” (Thielicke, 1961a:75-76).

With this said, however, it is important to recognize that Thielicke was perfectly comfortable with the notion of biological evolution and saw no essential disharmony between the biblical account of creation and the complex biological processes postulated by the scientific theory of evolution. Thielicke was very concerned to avoid an either-or mentality concerning evolution and biblical creationism or between science and faith. He deemed such diametrical thinking as “childish” on the part of the believer and the “neo-pagan” alike and argued that by adopting such a position Christians particularly “seal themselves off from life and lead an insular existence in the stream of time” (Thielicke, 1963:75). Thielicke viewed the creation narrative in Genesis as a kind of accommodative symbolism, a cosmology cast in the terms of ancient, pre-scientific men, designed not to show the ‘how’ of creation but rather the ‘Who’ of creation (Thielicke, 1963:74-93). This position would likely place him among those labeled ‘theistic evolutionists’ and could raise legitimate questions concerning the orthodoxy of his doctrine of Scripture and his hermeneutical presuppositions. However, his writings on the subject of origins do not evidence a militant commitment to the evolutionary model. Rather, one is left with the suspicion that he categorized such a discussion as *adiaphora*, an area of little moral or spiritual significance where believers in Christ may freely hold various views without doing damage to any essential Christian doctrine. He observes:

Christian faith in the Creator is therefore independent of any cosmology that happens to be current; or to put it another way, it is given to us within the cosmology that we have worked out in good conscience with the knowledge we have. But the Christian faith itself never dictates what this cosmology should be (Thielicke, 1963:34).

Despite the fact that he personally believed that the creation narrative in Genesis was both “geographically and historically part of a cosmology which is no longer ours,” he held that its essential message “remains the indispensable gospel of our faith” (Thielicke, 1963:90). Thielicke argued that the fundamental and non-negotiable point of the creation narrative was not whether or not it was directly accomplished by the divine hand over the course of seven solar days or more indirectly by means of natural processes occurring over billions of years. Rather, the main focus should be upon the personal, and as he would term it, miraculous involvement of the Creator and especially the divine endowment of the human creatures with an “alien dignity,” thus setting them apart from other living creatures (Thielicke, 1970a:39, 41). He argued that the interpreter must lay aside needless arguments about the exact literary genre of the Genesis account and “go back behind the lost paradise” where man’s nature may be discovered by listening to “the first words God spoke” to Adam and thereby glean from the narrative the uniqueness of man (Thielicke, 1961a:7). Thielicke quite colorfully asserted his personal convictions on this subject:

I have nothing against the idea—even as a Christian I have nothing against the idea—that man has risen up out of the state of a tadpole. Why shouldn’t he have? What I reject is the attempt to *define man in terms of his origin*, and hence to view human nature as a variation of tadpoleness [emphasis added] (Thielicke, 1970a:40).

Thielicke theorized that at a specific point in time along the “millions of years of development” as required by the theory of evolution God personally called man “by name,” condescended to make Himself known to him by His spoken Word, and bestowed upon man “that unique dignity and personhood” which was not granted to any animal (Thielicke, 1961a:82-83). Despite initial appearances, Thielicke maintained that this view of the evolution of the human species in no way compromises the miraculous and mysterious nature of creation nor suggests that purely scientific theories of man’s origin have explanatory comprehensiveness:

[E]ven when we take this process of evolution seriously, the evolution of man still remains a *miracle*, a real *creation*. This is evident in the simple fact—which we must continue to hold up to biology in the name of the Holy Scriptures—that man simply cannot be explained on the basis of these prehuman, animal-like forms, even if exact proof of the existence of certain missing links were to be found.... The transition from the prehuman to the human stage is a mystery. It is nothing less than the mystery of creation.... we cannot explain ... by scientific means how it is that man, who on the biological level is a mammal and even in minute details exhibits a development parallel with this zoological realm, is at the same time something else, that as a person he is responsible to God, that unlike oxen and asses he is called by name and

must give answer, and that Jesus Christ died for him. Thus here in the midst of the biological vessel there is a totally different reality which cannot be explained in biological terms (Thielicke, 1963:87).

As suggested in the quote above, Thielicke passionately maintained that science in general and biology in particular are of virtually no value at all in defining who or what man actually is. Scientific disciplines, normally understood as involving purely impersonal mechanisms, cannot account for man's *uniqueness* and are, therefore, powerless to probe adequately the deep mysteries of human existence.

For it is clear that humans cannot be investigated just like inanimate objects, plants, and animals. If we treat them thus and establish certain objectifiable characteristics, our statements may well be true. But they do not hit the real truth of humanity. They put the essence of humanity in the twilight of changeability (Thielicke, 1984:10).

Anyone attempting to answer the question as to the definition of 'man' must, therefore, appeal to "a confession of faith" and have "already made the decision on this question" before initiating any "scientific research" (1970a:39). That is, the determination of man's nature requires the disciplines of the theologian working in concert with rather than against the scientist.

As noted previously, Thielicke admitted that from one narrow perspective man is, in fact, an animal or more specifically a *mammal* since he "developed biologically" (Thielicke, 1963:89). In his series of sermons on Genesis 1-11, he states: "I do not deny that from the biological point of view man is only a mammal, but—only from the *biological* point of view! In his essential being he is something else" (Thielicke, 1961a:80). Yet, observed from another perspective, that which is discovered in Scripture, man is profoundly unique in that he alone is the divine image-bearer. Thus, every human being may confidently believe that

God 'created' me, who was formed in a natural way in my mother's womb, and that he knew me before the world's foundation was laid. I, who on the biological level am a mammal, can at the same time be assured that I am a child of God, created in his image (Thielicke, 1963:89-90).

The miraculous nature of man's creation is highlighted specifically by the fact that God determined to extract man from the animal kingdom, calling Adam to Himself and thereby making him His child and representative (Thielicke, 1963:90). Or more exactly, in the midst of the long process of "biological development" God performed the miracle

of breathing His very breath into man, giving man “a part of himself” and making man “the bearer of his Spirit and image” (Thielicke, 1963:90).

[O]ne day God created a man, that one day he made him aware that he was a child of God and that he had received life from his hands, and ... this does not contradict the fact that this creation was preceded by an embryonic stage of development (Thielicke, 1963:90).

The breath of God into Adam’s nostrils, which Thielicke apparently viewed as an historic event occurring at a specific moment in man’s evolutionary development, is what turned the mammal into a human and was nothing less than

the miracle of the spark of the Spirit leaping from the outstretched finger of the Creator to the man. Without that spark he would remain a creature of the soil, an earthbound clod ... he would still be something other than a ‘man,’ who can be God’s child and partner (Thielicke, 1961a:83).

This miraculous act of God, breathing life into Adam (Genesis 2:7), forms the heart of the “mystery of man” and serves as the scriptural and historical basis for understanding his nature (Thielicke, 1963:91). Thielicke saw this as a most basic Christian affirmation, the acceptance or denial of which have far-reaching implications, not the least of which relate to the life of Christ and the veracity of gospel itself:

This affirmation that God breathed his breath into man in order to make him a man is the crux of the gospel of creation; it is ‘history’ in the highest sense of the word, for it is actually the basis of all human history. For only by virtue of this word concerning the divine inbreathing could Jesus Christ, who bore within him intact the breath of God and is able to make men new by the breath of his Spirit, become our brother (Thielicke, 1963:91).

Accordingly, if one seeks to know *what* man is then one must not inquire as to his origin in strictly biological or scientific terms, that is, “*where* he came from,” but “must rather ask *what* it was that God intended him to be” (Thielicke, 1963:91). The question of the nature of man then is inseparably connected to the “end” or “destiny” for which man was both created and designed by “a higher hand” (Thielicke, 1970a:40).

As indicated above, the notion of *relationship* is key to grasping Thielicke’s contributions to the doctrine of man as creature. He argues that

[t]here is no theological statement about man which does not take account of his relation to God. If one were to venture a statement about man apart from God, one would only come up with something about physical or psychical functions or about the agents of such functioning, or at best with metaphysical assumptions and explanations. *If man is seen apart from his relation to God, the point of his existence will certainly be missed* [emphasis added] (Thielicke, 1969b:197).

This is another way of stating that, unlike the animals or other creatures in the world, man is the “bearer of a history” and, more specifically, uniquely enjoys a “history with God” (Thielicke, 1970b:116). In the biblical sequence of creation, man appears last and this symbolically announces that he is at once the goal and “apex of the whole creation” (Thielicke, 1979b:155). Man alone “receives the divine likeness” and, therefore, has “an orientation which is ‘above.’ The effect of this special position in the cosmos is that man is to rule over all the rest of creation” (Thielicke, 1979b:155). This personal “history” can only be experienced when “I encounter another who confronts me as a person” and there is the presence of both “freedom and responsibility” in this encounter (Thielicke, 1970b:116). Thielicke explains:

This history begins with the word addressed to me, “I have called you by name, you are mine” (Isa 43:1). That means that God lays claim to me for himself. I am not simply a functioning biological organism living on the resources of my own immanence, but I am an organism that belongs to someone else, in such a fashion that I can be committed to this belonging or deny it and break away from it. If this freedom of decision were eliminated ... man would once more become a phenomenon of nature despite any apparent religious foundation to his life. He would become an effect of the divine primary cause. If God were such a primary cause, then there would be no such thing as an encounter with him in freedom, no appropriation or rejection, but only blind dependence (Thielicke, 1970b: 116-117).

As suggested above, another noteworthy and related component in Thielicke’s understanding of man as creature is that of *self-consciousness*. It is this feature of man’s essential being, his awareness of the world around him and of himself as an individual, which sets man apart in a most definitive way. Thielicke presupposed that “consciousness of the self” is *the* “characteristic sign of human existence” and that a man “devoid of any trace of self-consciousness would be, as it were, merely a biological creature” (Thielicke, 1970a:17). For Thielicke this assumption has a vital connection to the PES and more directly to the possibility that man will experience the horrible effects of evil to a degree unlike that of other creatures:

Consciousness of the self is thus the critical sign of human existence. Only because of self-consciousness does suffering, for example, have any meaning. For connected with the gift of self-consciousness is the duty—also the possibility—of ‘reacting’ to suffering.... Thus, for man suffering can be an ethical act; it can even become a positive duty (1970a:16-17).

To summarize, according to Thielicke man is the special and miraculous creation of God. He has been granted a unique position by virtue of his special relationship to the Creator as recipient of the divine breath and Word. Man is a responsible agent and

alone possesses self-awareness, or self-consciousness, and the capacity to interpret his surroundings and life-experiences. Most importantly, man has been loved by God and summoned to become His child by virtue of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

4.1.2 Man as *imago Dei*

Discussions as to the nature of man and especially his assumed uniqueness and dignity most naturally lead to the subject of the *imago Dei*, or the biblical doctrine of the image of God. This doctrine finds its scriptural foundation in the opening chapter of Genesis, particularly in the exacting language of 1:26, “Let Us make man in Our image; according to Our likeness.” The centrality of this doctrine lies in the fact that the “Christian confession concerning the image of God captures the very heartbeat of the biblical view of man” and this despite the reality that interpretations of the *imago Dei* are “as diverse as the wide-ranging schools of theology which produced them” (Spykman, 1992:223).

While some modern Protestant theologians have suggested that there is much mystery associated with the *imago*, given the fact that there is no explicit definition of it provided in Scripture (Richardson, 1969:202; Thielicke, 1979b:159; Hoekema, 1986:33), there have been a number of significant proposals as to its nature. For example, there has been the suggestion by J. Macquarrie (Gentz, 1986:480) that the doctrine of the *imago Dei* implies that “in the human creature there is some reflection of the divine nature” albeit imprecisely defined. He notes that in the Hebrew Scriptures one discovers the repeated insistence that there is a “difference between God and the Creation” and also “between the human creature and all other creatures,” and it is this differentiation, or Creator-creature distinction, that “finds expression in the doctrine of the image of God” (Gentz, 1986:480). Man is more like God than the other creatures though still distinct from Him.

D. Bonhoeffer, one of Thielicke’s most significant theological contemporaries and fellow Lutheran minister, located the meaning of the *imago* in the fact that God created man with *freedom*, particularly a freedom that he believed was intrinsic to personal relations:

In man God creates his image on earth. This means that man is like the Creator in that he is free. Actually he is free only by God’s creation, by means of the Word of God; he is free for the worship of the Creator. In the language of the

Bible, freedom is not something man has for himself but something he has for others.... Freedom is not a quality of man, nor is it an ability, a capacity, a kind of being that somehow flares up in him ... freedom is a relationship between two persons. Being free means 'being free for the other,' because the other has bound me to him. Only in a relationship with the other am I free (Bonhoeffer, 1959:36).

Others have spoken more specifically of man's unique *relationship* with God as the defining center of the *imago*. K. Rahner and H. Vorgrimler (1981:228-229), for example, have concluded that the biblical terms "image" and "likeness" (Genesis 1:26-27) refer to "the unique relationship between God and man," and this is the very thing that "differentiates him from all the rest of creation, especially living creatures." Hoekema (1986:67) offers a slightly nuanced emphasis upon this idea of relationship by speaking of the *imago* principally in terms of man as the special *representative* of God who at the same time is responsible to love and obey Him:

When the Bible says that God created man in his own image, it certainly intends to say that man at the time of his creation was obedient to God and loved God with all his heart.... [This] sets man apart from the rest of God's creation, by indicating he was formed in a unique way. [This concept of image] does not merely tell us in what direction man was living his life at the beginning (namely, in obedience to God); it describes him in the totality of his existence. Man, these words tell us, is a being whose entire constitution images and reflects God (Hoekema, 1986:66).

Understood this way, the *imago* is not "accidental to man, which he can lose without ceasing to be man, but is essential to his existence" (Hoekema, 1986:67). Hoekema also asserts that God created man specifically to reflect the divine likeness and to represent Him in the world. Man mirrors, represents, or reflects God in that through the creation of man God actually makes Himself "visible on earth" (Hoekema, 1986:67). To this Hoekema adds the notion of *authority* and argues that man in his relationship to God represents the divine authority, somewhat "like an ambassador from a foreign country" (Hoekema, 1986:67).

As an ambassador represents his country's authority, so man (both male and female) must represent the authority of God. As an ambassador is concerned to advance the best interests of his country, so man must seek to advance God's program for this world ... [and] promote what God promotes ... [and do] what God desires (Hoekema, 1986:67-68).

This position as the divinely commissioned viceroy is then the highest honor God could ever bestow on any creature and expresses the unique privilege enjoyed only by human beings (Hoekema, 1986:67).

Another noteworthy and more recent contribution to the effort to define the *imago Dei* has been offered by G. Spykman (1926–1993), late professor of religion and theology at Calvin College in Michigan. Spykman sought to extend the work of previous Reformed theologians on this subject of the *imago* including Calvin, Bavinck, Berkouwer, and Hoekema. He emphasized that the “image and likeness” of Genesis 1:27 are not to be seen as abstract qualities or characteristics added to man, but are, in fact, the terms that describe the man himself:

Man is not first a unique creature to which these imaging, mirroring, echoing qualities are then added for good measure. The image of God is not a *donum superadditum*—a supernatural gift which supplements or complements our otherwise purely natural state. It is not an afterthought appended to an already existing human nature. Rather, to be human is to be the image of God. *Imago Dei* therefore describes our natural state. It points not to something in us or about us, but to our very humanity.... it may be said that God imaged man into existence. It is therefore misleading to say that we *have* the divine image. Nor are we merely image-bearers.... Imaging is not a choice but a given. We *are* images of God. Imaging God represents our very makeup, our constitution, our glory, and at the same time our high and holy calling in God’s world (Spykman, 1992:224).

Seen in this light, the *imago Dei* represents all that man is as creature and “covers human nature in its total extent and in all its parts. It embraces everything we are and have and do” and is, indeed, “the very mystery which constitutes our being human” (Spykman, 1992:223-224).

In assessing Thielicke’s theology of the *imago Dei* as to how the notion of image may be more precisely defined or identified, it may be helpful to classify his contributions to this subject along several lines of thought or perhaps by means of four key words: 1) relationship, 2) dignity, 3) responsibility, and 4) dominion. To begin with, Thielicke frequently links the *imago Dei* to the concept of *relationship* or *fellowship* in much the same way as other Christian theologians. That is, it is the human creature’s unique privilege to be personally related to God that marks him off as the divine image and likeness. He speaks of the *imago* as expressing “our unmediated relationship to God” and argues that the essential nature or “real being” of man

does not consist in a sum of attributes, but rather in a *relationship*. That is to say that this man [Adam] was created in order to live in *fellowship* with his Father and not merely to develop himself as a mere entelechy [emphasis added] (Thielicke, 1964:31).

Because man has this unique honor of fellowship with God in a way that is distinct and superior to that of other creatures, there is also an accompanying dignity, an “alien dignity,” with which man is endowed (Thielicke, 1969b:305). As Spykman later suggested (1992:224), Thielicke also asserts that man is, in his very being, essentially “an *imago Dei*, possessing an unexchangeable human dignity” (Thielicke, 1964:87). In the first volume of his *Theological Ethics*, Thielicke expands upon this theme:

[T]he doctrine of the *imago Dei* does not describe a given attribute or property (*habitus*) of man which may be demonstrated in detail. It has reference rather to the alien dignity which man possesses by way of his divine prototype (*Urbild*), that original which is present in Christ alone (Thielicke, 1979b:151).

For Thielicke this special relationship and “alien dignity” that have been divinely bestowed upon man also includes the concept of his *responsibility* to God as a creature. We might speak of this as a personal relationship characterized by authentic accountability or moral agency. He can describe the *imago* then as “both a gift and a task” that are realized within the parameters of divine fellowship (Thielicke, 1979b:159). Because man has such a distinctive dignity and is personally related to the Creator, he is singularly responsible to carry out the divine will. Stated more strongly, “the fact that he is responsible to God” is the very thing that “makes man the image of God in his character as a person” (Thielicke, 1963:85).

Finally, Thielicke links the *imago Dei* to Adam’s commission to rule over the creation as God’s representative. He is to have a measure of *dominion*, and this lofty place in the created order also flows directly from his distinctive relationship to the Creator. The Scriptures do not teach that man is to rule the earth “because we stand *above* the other creatures” but “only because we stand *under* God” and are, therefore, “privileged to be his viceroys” (Thielicke, 1961a:67). For Thielicke then the image of God is not “a constituent capacity inherent in man but a relational entity” which he more specifically defines as “man’s ruling function” (Thielicke, 1979b:157). Man’s unique likeness to God, in stark contrast to the other creatures, is made explicit in man’s “ruling position” and by the divine authorization related to his “exercise of dominion and lordship” over the created order (Thielicke, 1979b:157).

There are at least four additional theological considerations strategically connected to Thielicke’s view of the doctrine of the *imago Dei* that are worthy of note. As will be demonstrated below in 6.4, each is prominent in his published sermons on the PES: 1)

The *imago Dei* is seen most clearly in Christ, the incarnate Son of God, 2) Sin remains a possibility for man as *imago Dei*, and this possibility is intrinsic to comprehending its nature, 3) The *imago Dei* cannot be totally lost, and 4) The *imago Dei* is restored in and by Christ in view of the sinner's repentance.

Thielicke first argues that the *imago* is perfectly mirrored in Christ Himself. In Him we see what man was meant to be until the image and likeness were spoiled by the Fall. In other words, discussions as to the precise nature of the *imago* are incomplete apart from a serious consideration of Jesus Christ as divine image-bearer. For Thielicke, there is only one "real and essential man" and He is the One who "came from the Creator's hand as the image of God" and lovingly "gazes upon us undistorted from the face of Jesus Christ" (Thielicke, 1963c:36). Thielicke suggests that the New Testament's frequent presentation of Christ as the picture or the "norm" for the divine image (Colossians 1:15 for example) necessarily implies that the *imago Dei* is "emphatically integrated into the order of *redemption* as well as that of creation" [emphasis added] (Thielicke, 1979b:152). Hoekema expresses the same notion in view of Colossians 1:15:

[I]f we wish to know what the image of God in man is really like, we must first look to Christ. This means, among other things, that what is central in the image of God is not such matters as reason or intelligence but rather love, since what stands out more than anything else in the life of Christ is his amazing love. In Christ, in other words, we see clearly ... what man as the perfect image of God should be like (Hoekema, 1986:73).

Thielicke then observes that as a "true ontic possession," in contrast to the way Adam functions as an image-bearer, the *imago Dei* in its ultimate expression can be ascribed "solely and exclusively to Jesus Christ" (1979b:170-171). This ascription comes in the form of

a *proprium*, not merely in the sense that in him alone it has remained intact, but above all in the sense that it is present only in him. In the absolute sense Jesus Christ is the *only man*. More precisely, he is the *only man who fulfills humanity*; he does not possess humanity merely in the negative mode, as an unrealized possibility [emphasis added] (Thielicke, 1979b:171).

As Thielicke suggests, the *imago*, therefore, should also be viewed *post lapsum* and not simply from the perspective of the creation *pre lapsum* as is typical. It may only be comprehended fully by our perception of Christ in His redeeming work, reclaiming and renewing sinners and establishing a new humanity under His authority. By first viewing Christ as divine image-bearer in this way, in His office as the Redeemer of

sinners, we learn what man was truly meant to be and “wherein the divine likeness of man consists” (Thielicke, 1979b:171). Christ as the preeminent *imago* receives the Father’s divine command, offers perfect obedience, sacrifices Himself as an atonement for sin, and exercises His dominion, or lordship, over all creation to the glory of the Father. Thielicke’s point is that it is only *after* contemplating Christ as the Savior of sinners and as the One who establishes a new humanity filled with His Spirit that we can begin to comprehend the horrendous nature of man’s fall and the blessings and eternal joys that were spoiled by humanity’s rebellion, particularly the gift of the *imago Dei*.

Secondly, while man was created in the divine image and likeness the possibility of sin against God remained acute, and it is this very possibility—of a catastrophic rebellion against the divine will—that is critical to the *imago* itself. Thielicke articulates this possibility in terms of a unique risk or hazard that was inherent in the creation of man. He explains that

man’s special situation in creation is characterized also by special *danger*, a danger which is peculiar to man alone. Man can transgress the command and thereby fall victim to death, and he can alter his quality as divine likeness in the most dangerous manner—but only alter it, not destroy it. *For it is the very nature of the image itself to expose man to this peril*, to allow him but also to *burden* him with the making of decisions.... Failure is something specifically human; it belongs specifically to the divine likeness [emphasis added] (Thielicke, 1979b:158-159).

By recognizing the component of risk inherent in the *imago* the ministry of Christ as sinless Mediator is brought into fuller relief. Where the first Adam failed as *imago*, the second Adam succeeded, though tempted in every way experienced by men. Apart from the possibility of temptation and sin in reference to the Creator’s stated will, man’s designation as divine image-bearer would be a vacuous appellation. Man would be reduced to the level of beast or robot, and in either case he would be less than human. Thus, the freedom of *decision* is inherent in the *imago Dei*:

[B]ut man does have to decide whether he wills to realize his determination as a man, as a child of God. And because he is faced with this decision, he can decide otherwise. And therefore he can fall away from his determination, and even in his fall, in his sin—for the animal cannot fall!—one sees his greatness.... Only a king, only an image of God can fall so low. This is our doctrine of the image of God in man (Thielicke, 1963:85).

As Thielicke has suggested, this means that there must be a peculiar moral burden or ‘ought’ associated with the *imago*—a burden revealed by the Law/Gospel dichotomy

and the related indicative/imperative structure that Thielicke finds apparent throughout the biblical revelation. Because men are made in God's image (the indicative), they alone receive the divine command (the imperative), which Adam freely transgressed, and all sinners thereafter have been both unwilling and powerless to obey. In this way

the divine likeness constitutes a disturbing goad. For because of it the Law of God is able to address me with its claim. I do not learn the divine likeness through a historical account that 'once it was so.' That would only lead to sentimentality along the lines of the 'good old days.' On the contrary, I learn of the divine likeness by being addressed with a claim which I cannot meet. The content of the message concerning the *imago*—the fact that as gift it is also task and Law—determines also the form in which that message may be perceived. For it is by the fact of having it granted to me once again that I come to see what it was that I lost; in the *imago* I perceive also the 'Law.' Hence I learn of the divine likeness both in the promise and in the acute judgment, both in Gospel and in Law (Thielicke, 1979b:153).

Thielicke finds the inherent moral burden associated with the *imago Dei* expressed in Christ's teaching, particularly in the *Sermon on the Mount*:

The divine likeness is not just something of which we are told. It is something on the basis of which a claim is laid upon us. It is something which—in the strange ambivalence of imperative and future which marks this saying of Jesus [Matthew 5:48]—encounters me as Law and promise, as judgment and grace (Thielicke, 1979b: 153-154).

This divinely ordained claim upon all mankind and the threats of judgment and Gospel promises that accompany it are essential to the *imago Dei* and provide man with the assurance of his dignity and worth even in the light of his cosmic failure in the Garden of Eden.

All of this naturally leads to a third theological consideration. Thielicke believed that the image of God in man is an incorrigible gift of the divine love that may never be fully forfeited or destroyed by sin. Though man has indeed fallen from his *justitia originalis* he remains *imago Dei*. As he argues, the *imago Dei* "constitutes a *character indelebis*"—it simply "cannot be lost" (Thielicke, 1979b:167). This is similar to what Hoekema expresses about the incorrigibility of the divine image in man:

After man had fallen into sin, however, he retained the image of God in the structural or broader sense but lost it in the functional or narrower sense. That is to say, fallen human beings still possess the gifts and capacities with which God has endowed them, but now they use these gifts in sinful and disobedient ways. In the process of redemption God by His Spirit renews the image in fallen human beings—that is, enables them once again to use their God-reflecting gifts in such a way as to image God properly—at least in principle. After the

resurrection of the body, on the new earth, redeemed humanity will once again be able to image God perfectly (Hoekema, 1986:72-73).

Thus, even in the throes of his rebellion against the divine will and the painful experience of the devastating consequences of his fall, man is still human and remains the divine image-bearer. Thieliicke believes this is one of the main emphases in Jesus' parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15). Like the loving father in the parable, God remembers man as his son "even though the sonship is corrupted to the point of extreme depravity" (Thieliicke, 1979b:165). The image and likeness of God, therefore, "rests on the fact that God remembers man, in spite of the corruption which prevents our identifying certain relics of the *imago* and from reconstructing the *imago* itself" (Thieliicke, 1979b:165). Thieliicke finds additional biblical support for this assertion in Romans 1:18 where man, even in his state of spiritual depravity, is still "addressed on the basis of his humanity" (Thieliicke, 1979b:169). *Post lapsum* man then is still human and this is a most critical theological consideration with regard to the *imago*. Even though he is radically and pervasively fallen and hopelessly resistant to the good will and purposes of God, he

cannot get rid of his humanity. He cannot dehumanize himself. If he could this would imply his ability actually to reach the bestial sphere beyond good and evil which he seeks to attain. But this is exactly what he cannot do. Even if he be untrue to himself, man remains in his misery as the deposed king (Thieliicke, 1979b:169).

Following Thieliicke's course we may rightly speak of the *imago* as a lost state, "that which man *in re* no longer is, but on the basis of which he is nonetheless addressed" (Thieliicke, 1979b:169). Or, as Thieliicke proposes, we may say that the *imago* now has a negative connotation rather than positive in that it is a state or mode of being that man cannot escape and which still in a most persistent way haunts and disturbs him even in his condition of spiritual death (Thieliicke, 1979b:170). This fact has serious implications in at least two directions. First, with reference to the PES, the suffering of human beings is that of creatures made in the image of God. Even though the ultimate cause of all human afflictions is sin, either in terms of natural or moral evils, the sufferers of evil as well as the perpetrators remain in the divine likeness. As Thieliicke has argued, despite the unspeakable horrors that humans are capable of unleashing upon each other and the profound depths of evil that men may plumb, they remain human beings. This fact makes all human suffering, whatever its cause or magnitude, both unique and significant. Secondly, with regard to the love of God and the hope of

salvation, Thielicke argues that God's love for sinners, supremely demonstrated in the sending of the Savior, is God's love for His *own* image. The divine love, he argues, is

above all the love which loves that which is like it. It loves in man the *imago Dei*. And this tendency of the love of God evidences its real character precisely in the fact that it addresses itself to fallen man, who, so to speak, no longer has any worth ... and thus is no longer worth loving. God loves in him the buried image of himself. He loves him *nevertheless*. God does not love the dust in which the pearl lies, but he loves the pearl lying in the dust. The parable of the Prodigal Son shows us how the Father's gaze penetrates beneath the grubby surface and sees the real person. This real, authentic man, this *imago Dei*, is not the image we show to others; it is the image the Father has of us (Thielicke, 1964:31).

The pursuit of lost men by the giving of the Son rests upon the infinite, Fatherly love of God for the very thing that makes him authentically human and capable of a relationship with God in the first place. Because man *is* the *imago Dei*, he can be loved redemptively by God and reclaimed from the wreckage created by his sin.

Finally, Thielicke believed that the *imago Dei*, distorted and damaged as it was in the fall and now unseen by men, can be restored by faith in Christ. There is a concrete hope associated with the *imago* and this has an eschatological or teleological dimension that is most significant. The New Testament's frequent emphasis upon the believer's position "in Christ" (Romans 6:11; 8:1, 39; 1 Corinthians 15:22; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 1:7) demonstrates the newness of life that is experienced in the Gospel and foreshadows the full participation in the divine likeness that awaits all those who believe (2 Corinthians 3:18; Philippians 3:21). In Adam "they belong to the old fallen creation," but in Christ "they are therefore the image of the new Adam" (Thielicke, 1979b:172). In this way the *imago* has a "pronounced eschatological character" in that it anticipates something greater than that which was forfeited and damaged in the fall. The *imago* then is "not just that *from* which I come. It is also that to which—through the gift and claim of God—I go" (Thielicke, 1979b:152). The biblical doctrine of the image of God is filled with hope since it

addresses me on the basis of my real but forfeited existence in order that precisely on account of this message I may turn from my 'past' (that from 'whence' I come). It addresses me in order to give me my future, which is promised to me anew in this very message. If we can call the original state of the *imago Dei* 'original righteousness' (*justitia originalis*) then we can designate the image of the 'new man' given to me in Christ as 'final righteousness' (*justitia finalis*). This concept of what is 'final' expresses not only the character of the *imago* message as a claim, but also the fact that in Christ what is involved is not simply a restoring, but a transcending of the original (Thielicke, 1979b:154).

The hope of final salvation and the restoration of all that sin has destroyed, including the *imago Dei*, serve the purpose of aiding and assuring believers, especially in times of suffering and distress.

4.1.3 Summary

In this section the researcher has sought to understand Thielicke's view of man as a creature made in the divine image and likeness. It is clear from his theological writings on this subject that he fully affirmed the Creator-creature distinction as set forth in the biblical record and embraced the concept that man has a distinct dignity and worth unshared by other living creatures made by God. As the divine image-bearer, man has a unique responsibility to both hear and obey the voice of the Creator, with the corresponding threat of judgment further defining his unique position as viceroy who exercises a God-ordained dominion. With specific reference to the PES, Thielicke's views on man as creature lay down the appropriate dogmatic foundation for understanding the tragic nature of human suffering. Because those who commit acts of sin and those suffering the consequence of such acts are human beings who retain the divine image despite their transgressions, all instances of suffering are significant. That is, the PES is only problematic if it is assumed that human suffering is distinct from that of other creatures. Logically speaking, the PES as both a doctrinal and existential difficulty can exist only in such a worldview that embraces the intrinsic dignity and worth of a human being as witnessed in Scripture.

4.2 Thielicke on the fall of man and the ruin of creation

Having established Thielicke's high view of the dignity and uniqueness of human beings that are, according to Scripture, made in the divine "image and likeness," it is now appropriate to consider his theological views concerning the fall of mankind in the Garden of Eden. This will be accomplished by exploring his doctrinal beliefs regarding the meaning and significance of the fall as is set forth in the biblical record and by seeking to understand how he defines the nature of sin itself and the consequences that result for humanity and nature from the transgression of the divine will.

4.2.1 The fall of man

Any discussion of the descent of man into sin against God and the PES that results will necessarily entail treatment of the doctrine of *divine providence*, because Protestant orthodoxy has generally affirmed (with varying degrees of emphasis and strength, e.g., the distinction between ‘soft determinists,’ ‘hard determinists,’ and those affirming mere ‘prescience,’ see Geisler, 1999:196-197) that, while God is not the author of evil, He is nonetheless the Sovereign Lord, Provider, and Ruler over all the universe, including the affairs of men and of angels (for example, compare the following Protestant confessions of faith: *The Belgic Confession* [1, 12-16], *The Thirty-Nine Articles* [I, X, XVII], *The Westminster Confession of Faith* [3:1-8, 5:1-7], *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000* [II, V], *The Methodist Articles of Religion* [1, 8], and *The Augsburg Confession* [XVIII]). As will be evidenced below, Thielicke stands squarely in this general tradition. He vigorously argued that God exercises His wise providence and sovereign control over all things and that even the fall of man into ruin ultimately serves His greater purposes. That is, God sovereignly provides for and sustains the world and all of world history, ever guiding it to His predetermined ends despite humanity’s rebellion.

Simply stated, at the heart of the Protestant doctrine of divine providence is the belief that all events taking place in the world of time and space occur either because God has foreseen and *permits* them or He has *ordained* them from eternity. There is, therefore, a direct connection between the doctrine of divine providence and “any notion of God as the supreme being” given that a satisfactory “definition of the idea of God requires his overlordship of the history of all that is” (Ferguson *et al.*, 1988:541). Following this line of reasoning, providence in its more broadly evangelical Protestant expression may be defined as the

beneficent outworking of God’s sovereignty whereby all events are directed and disposed to bring about those purposes of glory and good for which the universe was made (Ferguson *et al.*, 1988:541).

This doctrine “tells us that the world and our lives are not ruled by chance or by fate but by God, who lays bare his purposes of providence in the incarnation of his Son” (Elwell, 1984:891).

The obvious difficulty with such an affirmation, however, is that this broad perspective on divine providence seems to suggest that in some way God is complicit in the rise of sin in the heart of Adam and Eve. If providence means that nothing simply happens according to chance, then the cosmic disaster that transpired at “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Genesis 2:17) was in no way an accidental occurrence. Since this tragic event actually happened as a fact of history, as evangelical Protestants insist, then it must have some intrinsic relationship to God’s sovereign designs and providential governance of the world and the universe. This would also strongly suggest that there is a direct connection between the doctrine of divine providence and the PES. Since all suffering is ultimately the result of man’s treason against the Creator, then one must reckon with the theological and pastoral problems posed by the juxtaposition of divine providence and human moral agency. It is simply not clear how, in view of God’s providential ordering of the world and the associated notion of divine sovereignty, “the actions of free agents” and the agents themselves “remain free, personal and responsible” (Ferguson *et al.*, 1988:541). Berkouwer articulates this difficulty with compelling force when he notes that the Church’s confession of the providence of God is always under intellectual attack:

Raw reality assaults this comforting and optimistic confession. Could the catastrophic terrors of our century, with the impropportionate sufferings they inflict on individuals, families, and peoples—could these be a reflection of the guidance of God? Does not honesty force us to stop seeking escape in a hidden, harmonious super-sensible world? (Berkouwer, 1952:25)

Carson (1994:1) likewise candidly speaks of the seemingly insurmountable difficulties raised by the Christian doctrine of divine providence:

The sovereignty-responsibility tension is almost impossibly broad. It lies at the heart of questions about the nature of God, and it poses difficult conundra about the meaning of human ‘freedom.’ The most common questions it raises are well known. If God is absolutely sovereign, in what sense can we meaningfully speak of human choice, or human will?

According to Carson, the intellectual tension that is apparent here does not properly represent a theological or philosophical problem that can be readily solved but is a “framework to be explored” that resists all simple solutions that might otherwise “impose alien philosophical constructions upon the biblical data” (Carson, 1994:2). Christian responses to this intense theological tension have been quite varied (as exemplified above in 3.0), but the researcher would suggest that there are at least two

specific and related treatments that warrant brief consideration here before addressing Thielicke's own position on the matter.

First, Berkouwer (1952) has argued that it is illegitimate to initiate any discussions of divine providence apart from Christology, which supplies its legitimate theological parameters. Using the rise of Nazism as an example, he suggests that the history of humanity, particularly that of the deplorable years of the Nazi regime, sufficiently illustrates the inadequacy "of a confession of Providence without Christ, whether in the form of a religiously clothed national socialism or in the conclusions of a consistent natural theology" (Berkouwer, 1952:49-50). He states that reverberating from Hitler's Germany

we heard an unctuous invocation of 'providence.' He, of course, used the word providence as a propaganda device to justify and recommend himself as a gift of 'special providence,' as a Divinely appointed leader ... [and this was a] grotesque perversion of Providence called in to bolster the Third Reich (1952:49).

Providence divorced from a Christocentric mooring paves the road for belief in chance, fate, destiny, and natural theology, which amount to nothing more than "religious fancy" and "illusionary escape[s] from reality" (Berkouwer, 1952:25). None of these distortions may be incorporated into any distinctly Christian view of God. Thus, apart from "the true Christian faith," which finds its heart in the crucified and resurrected Son of God, there is simply "no real nor true knowledge of God, nor of His Providence" (Berkouwer, 1952:48). Providence then in the strictest of terms is a "specific Christian confession exclusively possible through a true faith in Jesus Christ" (Berkouwer, 1952:49). It is precisely this fact that distinguishes the Christian confession of God's sovereignty from all imposters, which are

acceptable in prosperity; but, in times of terror, when she withdraws her friendly arms of protection, she fails to inspire either confidence or faith. For this reason, the soteriological orientation of the Providence doctrine in the confession [of the Church] is decisive (Berkouwer, 1952:50).

Secondly, Spiegel (2005) has likewise and more recently appealed to Christology to define the biblical and Christian doctrine of divine providence. Based on the Old Testament story of the life of Joseph (and particularly Genesis 50:19-20), Spiegel extracts what he labels as the "Joseph Paradigm" (2005:211). As dramatically illustrated in the intriguing account of the life of Joseph and his brothers, that which sinful men may intend for evil, God utilizes and even designs for good purposes. This

is, philosophically speaking, an *a fortiori* argument for divine sovereignty that demonstrates that “there are no acts ‘too evil’ for God to redeem” (Spiegel, 2005:211). Spiegel then argues that the “archetypal instance” of this Old Testament paradigm is the passion and death of the Lord Jesus Christ. The event of Christ’s death presents the incredible

convergence of the worst evils performed by human beings and the greatest good that God has done in our world ... it boggles the mind to juxtapose such evil human intentions and good divine purposes. But the biblical point on this matter remains clear. Both human and divine intentions are real; and both are responsible, whether culpable or praiseworthy (Spiegel, 2005:211).

As Christ has already “redeemed the worst evil our world has seen” we are, *a fortiori*, supplied with the confidence that “surely he can redeem lesser evils” that befall us (Spiegel, 2005:211). All of this would suggest, as articulated by Berkouwer and duly noted in Elwell (1984:890), that one must resist the seductive temptation to consider providence apart from and independent of Christ and the gospel. Rather, one must recognize that in Christ alone “God has set up the relationship between himself and his creatures, promising to carry through his purpose in creation to its final triumphal conclusion” (Elwell, 1984:890).

4.2.1.1 *Thielicke on divine providence and the fall*

Having briefly introduced the Protestant concept of divine providence and suggested a helpful perspective from which it may be viewed, we are now in a position to consider Helmut Thielicke’s theological views on the fall of man that will necessarily involve the issues of providence, free agency, and their obvious relationship to divine sovereignty. This will be accomplished by an investigation of Thielicke’s extensive treatment of these matters in *How the World Began* (1961) and *Man in God’s World* (1963).

As a task of first importance, it would seem necessary to set forth Thielicke’s definition of divine providence. He notes that the Bible speaks with clarity regarding the fact that the writers firmly believed that “all historical events” are related to God, who is “the Subject of history” and “the unconditional Actor” on the stage of world events (Thielicke, 1963:132). The Bible, therefore, declares the fact that “nature” as we know and experience it is not a

self contained, autonomously functioning mechanism, but rather [is] a drama in which God is acting at every single moment; and without his sustaining

preservation and intervention the world would immediately collapse and, to speak in modern terms, the laws of nature would disappear (Thielicke, 1963:132).

Thus, the control and care, which according to Scripture, God continually exercises over the creation is *personal* in nature and is not to be identified with any impersonal, mechanistic, or fatalistic vision of the unfolding of cosmic and world history. Rather, when providence is appealed to, at least from the perspective from which Thielicke approaches it, it is intrinsically linked to God's *personal* "decision and decree" which governs the comprehensive history and individual lives of the persons He has made in His own image (Thielicke, 1963:137). A Christian, accordingly, can never legitimately view providence simply as

a 'system' of world order any more than there is a battle plan which is set down on paper and intended to be followed in *purely* mechanical fashion. Providence is rather contained within the 'higher thoughts' of God that determine his personal decisions. The world and our destiny lie in a 'hand': they are laid upon a 'heart' that is concerned about us. So there is profound significance in the fact that here [in discussions of providence] the Bible and the church always have to resort to very 'personal' words (Thielicke, 1963:138).

Thielicke suggests that there are two consequences that result from seeing providence in more personal terms. The first is that divine providence

cannot be reduced to an objective formula which would simply solve the mystery of what happens in the world. It rests upon the *personal* decisions of him who 'provides' (in the literal sense of that word, which means 'to foresee') (Thielicke, 1963:138).

The second consequence is that

the only way I can get at the mystery of providence is to enter a personal relationship with him who 'provides.' And because I learn to know his heart in Christ and because I trust him, I am no longer irritated by the dark and impenetrable parts of his providence (Thielicke, 1963:138).

When people speak of providence in formulaic or mechanistic terms, such as placing 'faith' in the movement of the stars or in undefined "higher cosmic laws" that are believed to govern one's life and guide one's decisions, they are essentially locating their faith "in one's self" (Thielicke, 1963:142-143). In the strictest of terms, according to Thielicke, this is nothing less than "a piece of self-worship which employs belief in one's star in order to surround oneself with a cosmic aureole" (Thielicke, 1963:142-143). Such defective and deceptive beliefs, constructed with reference only to the self,

will soon collapse in the face of the harsh and disturbing realities of life and human history. The final result will inevitably be “resignation and a plunge into meaninglessness” (Thielicke, 1963:144). Such a “secular” and self-oriented belief system or worldview inexorably “leads from self-security to resignation” (Thielicke, 1963:144).

In dramatic contrast to such thoroughly secular beliefs in chance or fate, the Christian faith is firmly grounded in the non-negotiable conviction that God is our *Father*, and by means of “personal trust” in “the Father of Jesus Christ” one may be rescued from “doubt and despair” and led into “praise” (Thielicke, 1963:144). Such praise and thanksgiving are prompted by the realization that it is “the Father who sees and provides” and that His heart is “unfathomably, incomprehensibly gracious” towards sinners (Thielicke, 1963:206, 204). Furthermore, the Christian faith affirms that God the Father wisely rules our lives “with his gracious and inscrutable predestination” which, while presently veiled in profound mystery, is nevertheless the substance of our comfort and peace (Thielicke, 1963:206-207). Yet, this critical lesson concerning His absolute trustworthiness, His infinite Fatherly affection, and all-encompassing sovereignty can be learned

only in *practical* experience, only in total personal engagement and the venture of discipleship. In *no* case can all this be learned through a process of intellectual cogitation in which one remains a pure spectator (Thielicke, 1963:207).

The Christian affirmation of providence then must necessarily exist “in spite of appearances to the contrary” along the biblically guided trajectory of Christian discipleship (Thielicke, 1963:139). It must be sufficiently “armed with that defiant ‘Nevertheless’” which believes that even when there is no obvious plan for the world or any “perceptible hand that governs the events of history” or one’s personal life-story, God is ever holding the world in His hands (Thielicke, 1963:139). It is God’s will that our faith, particularly in His providential governance, be consistently groomed and strengthened by means of the many “fiery furnaces of satanic challenge” that life under our Father’s purview presents to us (Thielicke, 1963:140).

However, as suggested above, the simple affirmation of God’s personal nature and His Fatherly love for humanity that accompanies His sovereign lordship do not answer every question that may be raised concerning providence. The reality of suffering and

evil brings us to the realization that much mystery is associated with the *way* and *extent* to which God provides and exercises His control over world affairs. Thieliicke articulates this notion of mystery extensively in his treatment of providence (see Thieliicke, 1963). He observes that

[w]hen we contemplate the suffering and the depravation in this world of ours and ask what God's will is and what his goals are, cherishing the hope that we shall receive an answer to our question, we find that in the last analysis *his purposes are hidden from us*. As natural men we never escape the vicious circle of thought in which we ask whether God could not achieve his ends in some other way and how in war, for example, he can allow both the sanctuaries and the gin-mills to be reduced to the same hideous ruins.... Could not God have achieved his great goal of reconciliation some other, less bloody way? Why do we always have to go through blood and tears to reach the divine shore? [emphasis added] (Thieliicke, 1963:131).

There are certainly many occasions when even the strongest of believers in Christ witnesses the all-too-frequently horrible events of world and personal history and sees them only as “an inextricable tangle of sense and nonsense,” finding it to be almost impossible for their “natural observation to break through to an assured, demonstrable concept of providence” (Thieliicke, 1963:133, 135). On one hand, we conclude that there is “too much sense,” order, and apparent harmony in the events of life to affirm the operation of purely mechanistic forces—seeing life “as a gigantic playground for the forces of blind chance” (Thieliicke, 1963:136). On the other hand, however, we must also admit that world history at least as it appears “has in it *too much nonsense* for us to be able to deduce from it a purposeful providence that guides it” (Thieliicke, 1963:136). In Thieliicke's day, believers to whom he ministered frequently witnessed the seemingly indiscriminate destruction of their churches by the same bombs that somehow managed to miss the bars and houses of ill repute (see, for example, *Our Heavenly Father*, 1960). There were many such unbearably painful “contradictions of history” that were never resolved and that repeatedly confronted the Christians of Germany with “the hidden God whose ways we cannot fathom” (Thieliicke, 1963:137). It is at such a point as this that the “deep mystery of the problem of providence” appears (Thieliicke, 1963:137). We want to know *what* God is doing and *why* He is doing things the way He is and *when* or *if* He will alleviate the suffering of the world and bring the full measure of His justice against the forces of evil. In this way, the providence of God and the “act of predestination” remain “staggering” mysteries and irresolvable paradoxes (Thieliicke, 1963:206). To be sure, there is also a certain degree of danger associated with the universal human temptation to *solve* such intellectual mysteries:

So if my speculative and inquisitive reason insists that first it must plumb the mysteries of predestination, it will surely be shipwrecked; it will only lead me into a dark labyrinth of unanswerable questions. Reason gazing at the majesty of God is blinded, consumed, and staggered (Thielicke, 1963:205).

Yet, one must always remember that as mysterious and deeply hidden as God's ways are, "the Subject of predestination, however, is so comforting and familiar to us that suddenly one can feel secure even with this staggering mystery" (Thielicke, 1963:206). As Thielicke's sermons will illustrate (see particularly the collection in *Our Heavenly Father* and 6.0 below), the mystery associated with providence and evil loses some of its irritating edge upon the contemplation and faith-filled embrace of His gracious and loving Fatherhood.

4.2.1.2 *Thielicke on free will and the fall*

Perhaps the most perplexing part of the mystery associated with God's governance of the world in its fallen condition is the relationship between God's sovereignty and human moral agency. This theological dilemma confronts us in the opening chapters of the Bible as we gaze at the record of Adam's fall into sin. We know, rather intuitively, that this act of cosmic treason cannot be simply attributed to divine providence as if the mere affirmation that God is sovereign over all things answers the troubling and perplexing questions that always arise. The narrative of the fall itself seems to make this apparent as Adam, in an almost insane way, "attempts to fix upon God the blame for being the cause of his fall" (Thielicke, 1963:145). For Thielicke, it is all too clear from Scripture itself that the doctrine of divine providence cannot possibly mean that God is the cause or Author of all things that happen in the world, especially man's first act of treason:

We know only too well that here it is not God but rather man who is at work. It is not God who rains down phosphorus and dynamite; it is man who has drunk from the intoxicating cup of mad destruction and vengeance and is thus destroying himself. With the aid of technology, one of the peak achievements of humanity, the gigantic work of self-destruction goes on. God allows all this to happen, manifestly in order to let mankind find out for itself where it gets to when it ceases to be a family of children bound to God, and when nations and individuals insist upon living their own autonomous lives in separation from God and in distrust in each other (Thielicke, 1963:145).

Thielicke strongly defends the obvious point that it is both "impossible" and "impermissible" to attribute such evil actions to divine providence: "For such a

monstrous attempt would make us guilty of assigning to God the responsibility for all the evil that has ever happened” (Thielicke, 1963:146). Simultaneously, we must still affirm the robust view of providence that is discovered in Scripture, yet in a way that does not result in God becoming sin’s author nor removes from human beings the moral agency required for authentic personhood nor leaves world events at the mercy of chance. Thielicke asserts that one reading the Bible must come to the text-driven conviction that the sovereign rule of God “includes even those who oppose him in history” (Thielicke, 1963:199). Such a position, indeed, raises many questions for interpreters, not the least of which has to do with “how there can be any room for our will to act” and the fact that we seem to be left “constantly wavering between views of man that make him either an unrestrained Prometheus or a will-less puppet” (Thielicke, 1963:199). This problem, Thielicke argues, cannot be approached by reason or the “cool calculating tone of logical inquiry” alone (Thielicke, 1963:204). To do so would lead to a certain “inner catastrophe” as one will become hopelessly entangled within an inescapable “labyrinth” (Thielicke, 1963:203). Rather, one should approach these questions from the posture of worship and from a humble, believing heart that is enflamed with “praise and thanksgiving” and is readily willing to confess that it “deserves only God’s wrath” (Thielicke, 1963:204).

In response to this daunting theological challenge of reconciling divine sovereignty with human freedom, Thielicke introduces the notion of *divine risk*. By appealing to the reality of a certain measure of risk inherent in the creation of man, Thielicke seeks to affirm human agency while still respecting the biblical declarations of God’s providential governance of world events. In the creation narrative of Genesis, Thielicke finds support for his belief in divine risk. He explains that with the phrase “Let us make man” (Genesis 1:26) there is a significant pause in the action of creation. It is here that “God halts and soliloquizes,” and with this critical pause in action

we sense that there is a risk connected with it [the creation of man]: will the creation of man mean the coronation of creation or its crucifixion? Will creation reach its pinnacle.... Or is the creation of this being called ‘man’ the first stage in a tremendous descent that starts in the Garden of Eden and leads to the disturbed and desolated earth, that transforms the child and image of God into a robber and a rebel, and through him carries war and rumors of war to the furthest planets? (Thielicke, 1961a:59-60).

It is within the framework of this “breathtaking” and “almost blasphemous” thought concerning divine risk that man discovers his authentic creaturely freedom (1961a:60).

God took the risk of endowing man with “freedom and power,” and He “risked the possibilities that the child would become a competitor, that the child would become a megalomaniacal rival of the Creator” (Thielicke, 1961a:60). By creating man with freedom and power, He “exposed himself to the possibility of being reviled, despised, denied, and ignored by man—this venture was the first flash of his love” (Thielicke, 1961a:60-61). Thus, in Thielicke’s model of divine sovereignty and human freedom, God’s love is made evident by this creaturely freedom, which necessarily entails the possibility or risk of the creature’s rebellion. While man has his destiny sovereignly given to him by God, he must obey the Creator and discover for himself how to fulfill it. Consequently, “there is always the possibility he may fail” and that the human embryo may “become inhuman” and, thereby, someone totally different than God intended, “someone who is constantly sabotaging these plans of God for his life, wasting his talent, and throwing away his destiny, until finally he ends in the pigpen with the prodigal son” (Thielicke, 1961a:76).

This freedom, and the divine risk it entails by definition, is granted only to human creatures. Only those made in the divine image and likeness have such liberty, which Thielicke concludes is the power and privilege of “the chance” to “decide for himself whether he wants to become human or inhuman, whether he wishes to realize or sabotage his destiny” (Thielicke, 1961a:253). As he states, “An animal cannot fail to fulfill its destiny; but man, you and I, can” (Thielicke, 1961a:76). Apart from this specific kind of freedom, the freedom of contrary choice, humans would be less than the creatures God intended:

God does not want man to be a marionette that responds precisely and mechanically to the slightest movement of his finger. He wants living men, who have it in them to give their hearts to him, but who can also stand up to him as rebels (Thielicke, 1961a:253).

Far from such risk diminishing the majesty, power, and glory of the Creator, it actually displays “the other side of the fact that God is great and good” (Thielicke, 1961a:253). That God actually grants this freedom means that He “must accept the possibility that this man [Adam] may also use this freedom *against* him and thus decide against him” (Thielicke, 1961a:253).

Given this concept of divine risk, Thielicke can then speak of God *allowing* evil and sin to be present in the universe along with the suffering that results. Yet, even this still

involves and depends upon God's providential control and the sovereign execution of His eternal plans. This allowance, he maintains, is

the hidden structure of providence and God's governance of the world, and it is there even when God has abandoned men to their own self-destruction and seems to be doing nothing but 'letting things happen' (Thielicke, 1963:149).

Despite appearances to the contrary, the execution of the divine sovereignty is not compromised by the presence of risk, nor is any such compromise implied by suggesting that God allows sin, evil, and suffering. While the affirmation that the exercise of divine sovereignty never mitigates human moral agency is essential to biblical theology, it is, nevertheless,

this unconditioned sovereignty of God, to which I am subject in every impulse of thought and will, that now constrains me to bring my whole life into accord with this divine sovereignty and not to spurn the beckoning hand that would draw me to the Father's house. The absolute sovereignty of God therefore does not condemn me to the slavish passivity of a mere instrument, but rather liberates me for activity and responsibility (Thielicke, 1963:208-209).

Following Luther, Thielicke also maintained that Satan is "'God's devil' and must be subservient to His higher goals because God is *his* Lord too" (Thielicke, 1963:149).

And this fact remains true even in the worst of times for humanity and human history:

When the apocalyptic horsemen storm across the earth and the world shakes beneath their hoofbeats, when war, pestilence, famine, and terror lay waste mankind, then we must remember that it is *God* who allows even these powers of destruction to ride, that it is he who waves them on and he who can check them with a flick of his sovereign hand (Thielicke, 1963:149).

However, we must never make the mistake of conceiving of divine sovereignty or predestination as that which is externally coercive, tramples man's will, or in any way forcibly moves upon helpless men in the same manner that "a policeman forcibly shoves a helpless, will-less drunkard ahead of him" (Thielicke, 1963:209).

When Thielicke speaks of the divine *allowance* of evil, he first means that

we are admitting that there is a sector of life in which we simply cannot apply the concept of providence as a cause, not only in the sense that we do not recognize it as the cause, but also in the sense that it would be blasphemy to designate it as such. We are admitting that there is a sector in which we must speak of our opposition to the Father, or at least of a certain autonomy of human life (Thielicke, 1963:146).

Secondly, the belief that God *allows* evil means that He has in some way

withdrawn into a state of silent and almost passive permissiveness, of just letting things happen. From the Bible we know that when God leaves man to himself and the destructive instincts with which he has broken away from his child-relationship, this can be the most dreadful judgment of all and therefore the most hidden kind of activity of God (Thielicke, 1963:145).

Therefore, God allows sin and the awful consequences that follow whenever humans “throw off the bonds that link them to God,” and by doing so they inevitably “fall into the bondage of idols and demons” (Thielicke, 1963:148). No other choice exists for men, no third option or state of neutrality that frees them from God’s will on the one hand or the dreadful slavery that exists on the other. There is only “the sought-for freedom from God” or the “hideous servitude to demonic powers that goes to the depths of horrible excess” (Thielicke, 1963:148). For when God is forcibly “driven out of the door” of one’s life, “specters” enter through the open window (Thielicke, 1963:148).

For Thielicke, the whole of human history is the “realm of man” and the arena where the divine, the human, and the demonic “are at work in a mysterious intermixture” (Thielicke, 1963:146-147). In this “history” where God has “taken a risk in creating man,” man was granted a degree of independence and freedom which are “an inseparable part of the concept of man” (Thielicke, 1963:147). However, he has employed his freedom in a way that, paradoxically, has resulted in the slavery of his will, and with this the history of humanity is a “*history of rebellion*” (Thielicke, 1963:147). God still rules this history by means of His providence, albeit mysteriously so. Yet, due to man’s rebellion, human history has sadly become the realm of tragedy and pain, for “history exists only where there is guilt” (Thielicke, 1963:147).

To illustrate his theology of risk, human freedom, and the providential rule of God, Thielicke appeals to the tragic life-story of Judas Iscariot as the archetypal example. The Bible makes it plain (Acts 2:23) that Judas played an essential role in the eternal plan of redemption. His life at every point served a specific purpose and “definite function” and “his actions were set within a framework of a supernatural predestination” (Thielicke, 1963:209). Yet, Judas was in no way coerced by God, and to affirm his actions as part of a divinely predestined plan does not imply that Judas had no choice or was forced to do what he did. All we are left to say is that “he fell victim to consequences of his own nature” and thereby bears all of the responsibility and guilt (Thielicke, 1963:210). When the apostle Peter declares in Acts 2:23 that the diabolical actions of Judas were part of a divinely ordained plan and that other human agents

crucified the Savior and are thereby guilty of murder, we are confronted by two “paradoxical” claims:

God ‘gave up’ Judas Iscariot to his own nature ... [and] God took what Judas ‘meant for evil’ and made it *good* and thus caused his individual act, which was aimed at his own selfish ends, to enter into his higher divine plans (Thielicke, 1963:210).

Thus, 1) God *allowed* Judas to exercise his sinful schemes as a responsible agent, acting in agreement with his nature and desires, and 2) God sovereignly *used* his evil actions in a way that resulted in maximum good for humanity.

To summarize this point we should realize that for Thielicke this risk, necessitated by the very nature of human moral agency, must be contemplated in view of the incarnate Christ, who is the *terminus ad quem* of all biblical revelation. The divine risk of the Genesis story of creation comes to an ultimate climax in the sending of Jesus Christ to earth and specifically in the event of the cross. There, in the self-sacrifice of the Son, “God exposed himself to his rebellious children, put himself at their mercy, and let his most beloved die by their hand but for them” (Thielicke, 1961a:61).

4.2.1.3 *Thielicke on the mystery associated with the fall*

Inherent in Thielicke’s doctrine of sin is the note of *mystery* or *incomprehensibility*. The fall of man in the Garden of Eden is an event that remains shrouded in deep mystery and contains within it many elements that are *a priori* illogical. Elwell (1984:1013) states the case quite clearly by noting that

[t]he origin of sin is a mystery and is tied in with the problem of evil. The story of Adam and Eve does not really give us a rationally satisfactory explanation of either sin or evil ... but it does throw light on the universal human predicament.

Reformed and evangelical theologians have robustly articulated this same fact. For example, Bavinck has recognized that any questions as to the nature of sin itself or the reason(s) for man’s fall from his state of innocence are related to that which is, at its core, an “incomprehensible mystery” (2006:28-29). The most basic question of all, that of the origin of sin, is only “second to that of existence itself” and remains as “the greatest enigma of life and the heaviest cross for the intellect to bear” (Bavinck, 2006:53). Bavinck explains further:

Almost at the same moment creatures came, pure and splendid, from the hand of their Maker, they were deprived of all their luster, and stood, corrupted and

impure, before his holy face. Sin ruined the entire creation, converting its righteousness into guilt, its holiness into impurity, its glory into shame, its blessedness into misery, its harmony into disorder, and its light into darkness (Bavinck, 2006:28-29).

For Bavinck, the heart of this intellectual conundrum is the fact that the Scriptures proclaim that God rules over the totality of the creation with perfect wisdom and power. For this reason, sin is “never isolated from God’s government nor excluded from his counsel” (Bavinck, 2006:29). Rather, it is “God himself who, according to his special revelation, created the possibility of sin” (Bavinck, 2006:29).

Berkhof also has argued this point regarding the mysterious origin of sin and evil. He explains that the intellectual difficulties with the question of sin’s origin, which he labels “one of the profoundest problems of philosophy and theology,” also plays itself out existentially as “an ever present blight on life in all its manifestations, and is a matter of daily experience in the life of every man” (1996:219). Likewise Murray has traced the mystery of sin’s origin even further back to the pre-creation fall of Satan and the non-elect angels “who kept not their first estate” (1977:67). In Murray’s view the PES, we might say, existed as a potential antinomy even before there were humans to reflect upon it or experience it personally. More recently Grudem (1994:493) has simply concluded that “all sin is irrational,” and this being the case, there is bound to be a certain degree of intellectual frustration that inevitably accompanies any investigations of this profound subject.

Perhaps more crucial to this present study of Thielicke’s treatment of sin is the expression of this point by Bonhoeffer, Thielicke’s contemporary, who initially posits that human sin and the guilt that resulted from it are thoroughly “inconceivable, inexplicable, and inexcusable” (Bonhoeffer, 1959:65). In the first place, Bonhoeffer argues that the question of the origin of evil is not properly a “theological question” at all since it “assumes that it is possible to go behind the existence forced upon us sinners” (1959:78). Or to state his point another way, this is a question that the discipline of theology, a thoroughly human enterprise, is neither permitted nor equipped to approach since it exceeds the proper boundaries of human reflection. For if sinners could answer such a question—beset as they are with the noetic limitations appropriate to fallen human creatures—then they would no longer be sinners. Therefore, “the ‘question of why’ can always only be answered with the ‘that,’ which burdens man

completely” (Bonhoeffer, 1959:78). Again, when it comes to providing a rational explanation for the fall of man, the answer

cannot be uncovered either in the nature of man, or in that of the creation, or in the nature of the serpent. No theory of *posse peccare* or of *non posse peccare* can apprehend the fact that the deed was actually done. Every attempt to make it understandable is merely the accusation which the creature hurls against the Creator (Bonhoeffer, 1959:77).

The mystery-laden account of the fall, therefore, is “both inconceivable and unalterably inexcusable,” and the paradoxical nature of it only exacerbates the guilt of the first sinners (Bonhoeffer, 1959:77). Words such as *sin*, *transgression*, and especially *disobedience* do not in any way “exhaust the facts of the case” nor give it satisfactory explication (Bonhoeffer, 1959:77).

Thielicke’s similar appeal to the inherent mystery of the fall is established by three simple assertions. First, there is mystery associated with the *origin* of sin itself. Why creation, particularly as it was declared “good” by God (Genesis 1:4, 10, 18, 21, 25), should be polluted with that which is contrary to God’s will is inexplicable. In this way there is a mystery associated with the fact that the world “hangs thus between God and the Adversary and is always on the point of going over to the Adversary.... God and the world stand ‘crosswise’ to each other” (1958:11). Secondly, there is a mystery associated with the *nature* of sin itself, especially with its power to seduce successfully human creatures created in the divine image and likeness. This is demonstrated in the creation narrative by the presence of the forbidden “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Genesis 2:17). This tree, according to Thielicke (1958:14),

is beset with the dangerous lure of mystery. And its mystery is a continual alluring call to the eternal and untamable urge in man to uncover every mystery. It is a call to that curiosity which inspires science and technology, which conquers the earth, and in its deepest depths strives to disturb and ‘clear up’ the mystery of the Most High.

Thirdly, and related to the second, there is a mystery associated with *motive* for Adam’s rebellion. That is, it is a mystery as to why Adam and Eve would desire to transgress the command of God to begin with. Why was it that Adam manifested such an “avid desire to be like God,” and why did he demonstrate a “measureless hunger for equality with God, which was not content with mere likeness” (1958:14)? The discipline of theology is unable to offer a satisfactory answer to such fundamental and universal questions.

It is clear, then, that Thielicke agrees with other Protestant theologians that there are certain elements of the story of man's fall into sin that cannot be fully probed by the human mind. Any theological or philosophical analysis of the fall must make appropriate intellectual room for the presence of mystery, paradox, and unanswerable questions that exceed the epistemic powers of finite creatures. This fact, as seems obvious, also has a direct bearing upon the whole subject of human suffering. If it is the case that at the core or root of evil there is a pronounced "incomprehensibility" and "inexplicability," then in principle at least evil "cannot be explained either from the causal standpoint of possible derivation (e.g., from the devil!) or from the teleological standpoint of having a meaningful part in the historic process" (Thielicke, 1982:450). In other words, there is necessarily an inescapable mystery connected to human suffering, which, as Thielicke has argued (1963:147-148), is part and parcel of the "historic process" or the history of mankind post-fall.

4.2.1.4 *Thielicke on the definition of sin as it relates to the fall*

While the origin of sin shall remain wrapped safely in the cords of mystery, the definition of sin finds explicit treatment and explication in Protestant theological reflection. Bavinck, for example, explains the act of eating the forbidden fruit of the Garden of Eden in terms of the willful violation of the explicit command of God, as well as the attempt of the first couple to "position themselves outside and above the law" of God (2006:33). Their sin consisted in the fact that they desired to determine for themselves, in a most autonomous fashion, the definition of good and evil (Bavinck, 2006:33). When the fall occurred, humanity represented by Adam received precisely what it wanted; "it made itself like God" and this "by its own insight and judgment" (Bavinck, 2006:33).

Likewise, Berkhof defines the essence of sin as a basic opposition to God Himself made evident when Adam

refused to subject his will to the will of God, to have God determine the course of his life; and that he actively attempted to take the matter out of God's hand, and to determine the future for himself (1996:222).

Bloesch argues that, at least from the biblical perspective, sin is the positive act of rebellion and not simply "a privation of goodness or being" as suggested by Augustine in the fourth Christian century (1998:92). Sin may be more fully defined by the terms

“idolatry,” “hardness of heart,” and “unbelief,” and may be expressed as a “positive force of destruction” and “as a power outside as well as inside man” that chiefly manifests itself by “pride and sensuality” (Bloesch, 1998:92-93, 97). Bloesch also explains that sin may be properly defined as both an act and a state of being since it

entails separation from God as well as a deliberate violation of his will. It signifies both a state of alienation or estrangement from God and a transgression of his law. It is a wrong direction as well as wrong acts. It is missing the mark, but even more profoundly it is a fatal sickness (1998:93).

Erickson (2003:580) articulates the essence of sin as the failure of human creatures to conform to the “divine standard” or to otherwise fail to “reflect the nature of God.” Sin is defined by the fact that “the sinner has failed to fulfill God’s law,” and this failure of conformity may be either “active or passive” in nature and may evidence itself by way of “thought” or “inner disposition” or “state” (Erickson, 2003:595-596).

C. Plantinga Jr. (1995) speaks of the nature of sin in a variety of terms and concepts. He first observes that the Bible presents a definition of sin principally as

lawlessness and faithlessness, expressed in an array of images: sin is the missing of a target, a wandering from the path, a straying from the fold. Sin is a hard heart and a stiff neck. Sin is blindness and deafness. It is both the overstepping of a line and the failure to reach it—both transgression and shortcoming (1995:5).

Yet sin is more than the breaking or violation of the divine law; it represents “the breaking of a covenant with one’s savior” (Plantinga Jr., 1995:12). It is “the smearing of a relationship, the grieving of one’s divine parent and benefactor, a betrayal of the partner to whom one is joined by holy bond” (Plantinga Jr., 1995:12). First and foremost, human sin has a vertical orientation or “Godward force” that by means of deeds, attitudes, emotions, and words brings displeasure to a personal God who is offended by such transgressions (Plantinga Jr., 1995:13). Sin is an affront and offense to God precisely because it not only attacks God Himself but also because it directly “bereaves and assaults what God has made” (Plantinga Jr., 1995:16).

Thielicke stands firmly within the tradition of those theological representatives cited above. He too maintains that the essence of sin has to do with the insatiable desire of the creature to become the master, even “God’s masters” (1958:4). Sin results, as he says (1958:4), when men “set up the conditions which God must satisfy in order that we may proclaim him God.” For example,

He 'must', for instance, be wise (in a way I can understand). He 'must' act in a way that makes sense and is best for me. He 'must' enrich my life with happiness and perhaps also with suffering (we clever human beings know something about the uses of suffering!). He 'must' preserve our nation, for our nation knows it is called to a mission in the world, and that God's providence can only exist when this mission reaches fulfillment. God 'must' do all kinds of things if he is to be acclaimed as the true God (1958:4).

For Thieliicke, this attitude toward God betrays a certain "stupidity" on the part of man and a unique culpability as well. As he explains, "Animals do not fall (that would be real mythology)" (1982:437). Only man who is the "goal of creation and in some sense its representative" is able to fall from the Creator, and his subsequent "breach with God has a universal dimension" (1982:437). As for this "stupidity" of which he speaks, Thieliicke argues that the consequence of human wickedness is moral blindness:

[Human sin] cannot see itself. The spell under which it comes leads in the first place to blindness itself. In this it resembles stupidity. Stupidity cannot see itself because some unattainable intelligence is needed to see it, to confess knowledge of one's ignorance.... In its own eyes it is not wickedness.... People never see the devil even when he has them by the throat (1982:449).

Thieliicke also expresses the *universality* of sin in the strongest of terms. For example, he argues that the stain of sin is indelibly etched into the fabric of humanity such that wherever man goes he takes with him the "phosphorescent putrefaction of his anxiety and his greed for power" (1961a:70). He continues this thought:

No matter where he goes, whether it be Mars or Venus, immediately the same old story will begin all over again, the same old story that took place when the forbidden fruit was plucked in some mythical garden. Then Cain's fratricide will occur on Venus too, and the tower of Babel will rise on Mars (1961a:70).

The story of Cain and Abel, therefore, becomes tragically paradigmatic for all human relationships and "the pattern for everything that we can see in ourselves and all around us" (Thieliicke, 1961a:188). Bavinck has also argued this same point, noting that the fall is

a fact that occurred at one time at the beginning of the human race and constitutes an indestructible component of the world and of history.... Furthermore, according to Scripture, the fall of humankind was such a serious and appalling fact that the consequences of it continue to have their effect in the history of the human race to the present (Bavinck, 2006:37).

As for this human history, Grudem (1994:490) also understands it as "primarily a history of man in a state of sin and rebellion against God and of God's plan of redemption to bring man back to himself." Likewise, Thieliicke (1961a:191) also

explains that Eve herself is still, to this very hour, quite active “outside of paradise.” She is

the mother of world history—and, after all, this is the way of the world. Even the greatest deeds have a hidden dark side, and the seeds of horror spring up with others in the dreams of every budding life (Thielicke, 1961a:191).

Closely aligned with the doctrine is sin and the fall of mankind is the subject of *temptation*. Thielicke appears to understand the heart of temptation in terms of an expression of doubt (1958:25). This is most apparent in the story of the fall of mankind in the Garden of Eden. There, having received the divine prohibition regarding the tree, Adam and Eve were seduced into the intellectual and moral posture of doubt. Man is, for Thielicke, “a doubting and tempted being from the start,” and this propensity toward doubt is “bound up with his nature as a man” (1958:8). The Genesis reckoning of the fall demonstrates conclusively that man is “a doubter from the very beginning of his journey, as indeed, from his cradle onwards, every single human being must be” (Thielicke, 1958:10). Man manifests a strong, almost limitless belief in himself as opposed to locating his faith and confidence in God the Creator, and the “hour of temptation is the hour in which we believe in ourselves, in which we cease to doubt ourselves, and therefore doubt God” (Thielicke, 1958:10). In the moment of temptation

our whole life is secretly loosed from God; we do not want his grace and dominion, and all this becomes completely and bodily obvious in our life, in its rush and dissatisfaction ... in our desire to deceive ourselves and others (1958:26).

Bonhoeffer also suggests this theme of doubt as the essence of man’s temptation. He notes that the question of the serpent, “Did God say...?” (Genesis 3:1) is nothing less than the diabolical suggestion that man is able to “get behind the word of God and establish what it is by himself, out of his understanding of the being of God” (1959:66). This question posed by the serpent then proved ultimately to be

the satanic question par excellence, the question that robs God of his honour and aims to divert man from the Word of God. While appearing to be religious this question attacks God as the ultimate presupposition of all existence (Bonhoeffer, 1959:69).

Like Bonhoeffer, Thielicke also frequently speaks of the devil in connection with the temptation of Adam and Eve (see 1958; 1982:450-452). He observes that the serpent is the apparent embodiment of the devil himself who once fell from his lofty and exalted place before God’s throne (1982:451-452). That he fell so far in his own act of rebellion is clearly indicative of his once exalted station: “The fall of the demonic angel

[Satan] seems to reflect a basic principle of God's kingdom, namely, that everything demonic and ungodly points to original greatness" (Thielicke, 1982:452). This same principle also applies to the fall of mankind into sin and ruin:

The higher the rank, the greater the fall; the greater the loan, the worse the possible loss.... Nothing is so corrosive as ruined greatness. The worst of human rascals always had it in them to be the best examples. Man's misery is that of a great lord, a dethroned king (Pascal). It is that of perverted divine likeness and not of a return to a brutish state, as simple people imagine (Thielicke, 1982:452).

Regarding the serpent's appearance and activities in the Garden, Thielicke colorfully notes that there in that primitive scene he "acts more pious than a nun and knows his Bible better than a professor of Old Testament or a Jehovah's Witness" (1961a:124). His strategy was and is to operate "in disguise," ever hiding "behind a mask of harmless, indeed, pious benevolence" (Thielicke, 1961a:124). In the Garden, as the story of man's descent into death and sin progresses, the serpent and the apple

have only a little piece of work to do; the apple has nothing to do but smile a little at this over-full, thrusting heart, and let its own bright charms sway to and fro in the morning breeze, in order to be a last and ultimate cause of stumbling for this heart, already ripe for its wanton theft (Thielicke, 1958:15).

As suggested in the quote above, Thielicke believed that there was something already at work in the heart of man, something that was mysteriously susceptible to Satan's "little drop" of poison in the form of doubt—a deadly drop that initiated a "chemical process" that would ultimately lead to all of the suffering, death, and disease we see so tragically at work in the world (1958:15). In this initial incursion of doubt into the human story we find the secret of all temptation:

[T]he tempter is already enthroned in our hearts and rouses us to murder and theft (Mark 7:21-3). And the opportunity, which makes thieves, and every other external element, are mere auxiliaries and reinforcing manoeuvres for his power (Thielicke, 1958:15).

However, Thielicke reminds us that we must not, therefore, conclude that Satan is the final cause of evil or that his deceptive, doubt-infusing dealings with men render them "mere victims" in an otherwise horrible story of creation gone wild (1982:450). There is not "some external Satan who stands between God and us; we ourselves stand between God and us, since the evil one possessed us" (Thielicke 1958:18). Human agents, therefore, are not permitted to "hide behind demons" or to even make reference to the devil and the world of the demonic apart from the realization of sin's "personal character" (Thielicke, 1982:450). Despite the obvious power given to the devil and his

hosts, human beings are not “innocent victims of usurpation who have been robbed of their own personality” (Thielicke, 1982:450). To frame properly sin and temptation, Thielicke appeals to us to look inside our own hearts:

This secret [to the nature of temptation and sin] lies in man himself, not outside him.... In him yawns the abyss, even if he leaps over it a thousand times. He is tempted by theft because he is a thief, even though in fact, he does not steal. He is tempted to kill because he is a murderer, even though in fact he does not slay his brother.... So the possibility of our being tempted to lie, to thief, to be adulterous, proves us to be lying creatures. We cannot change this fundamental constitution of our life, even if we fight for truth and against lies with every nerve of our soul and body.... the abyss yawns within us; sin lies in wait in implacable desire (1958:75).

Both *then* in the ancient story of the Garden disaster and *now* in the course of human history, mankind remains personally accountable to God and must bear the devastating consequences that sin has wrought.

4.2.2 The ruin of creation and the consequences of sin

Thielicke’s published theological works manifest his comprehensive reflection on the disastrous consequences of the fall of humanity into sin and rebellion. At least four major emphases may be readily identified in his writings. First, he speaks of the universality of sin and of its cosmic effects. Second, he explains that sin has resulted in relational estrangement on both the vertical (man toward God) and horizontal (man toward man) planes. Third, Thielicke demonstrates that suffering, in its various manifestations (physical, mental, emotional), is directly linked to humanity’s fall. Finally, he identifies and defines the experience of both physical and spiritual death as sin’s ultimate consequence.

4.2.2.1 *Universal scope and cosmic effects*

The ubiquity or universality of sin, what Reformed and Lutheran theologians have historically linked to the notion of ‘total depravity’ (see Berkhof, 1996:225 and Bloesch, 1998:90, for example), means for Thielicke that within every human being there is the same “callousness, contempt, and cynicism toward our neighbor” that Cain, the son of Adam and Eve, had in his heart (1961a:192). As Thielicke declares, we all share the “Cainitic urge” to make ourselves “the center” of life, and we “appraise all others only by whether they are useful or harmful” to us (1961a:192). Because of the

sin of the first human couple, “we are all the children of Cain” and his murderous “will to power” and “egotistical self-assertion” belong to every human without exception (Thielicke, 1961a:191). This fact at once explains the tragic nature of human history and provides the ultimate reason behind every murder and act of war. The monstrous hatred that often gives rise to murder dwells within the human heart because all men in some mysterious way are hopelessly linked to Adam and will inevitably follow in his rebellious footsteps. While human history does contain the record of countless acts of valor, heroism, and altruism, these apparently noble deeds with all of their “dazzling goodness” simply act as a “camouflage for [one’s] heart” (Thielicke, 1958:16). Deep inside every human being lies an evil power that we desperately attempt to hide from one another and from God Himself “by means of good works” (Thielicke, 1958:16). Inwardly, however, the human heart is “full of all defilement, full of hypocrisy and evil-doing” (Thielicke 1958:16). Every human soul is but a “Babylonian heart,” and the temptations to which we succumb are not out there in the world but are “within us” (Thielicke 1958:17). This means that

there is a definite level in men where they are all alike, Jews and Greeks, Arians and Semites, Zulus and Japanese, Europeans and Americans. Of every one of them it is true that they are called by God and are responsible to him, that they are all ‘persons.’ Of every one of them it is true that they have sabotaged the plan which God had for their life and therefore must confess: ‘We are all sinners’” (Thielicke, 1963:54).

For Thielicke, sin’s universality also implies that there are cosmic effects as well. That is, sin has not only damaged and defiled the *imago Dei* spoiling what man is and affecting what he does, but it has also ruined creation itself in some way.

Man’s history casts its shadow into the cosmos, evidently not only in the sense of a direct relationship of man to the animal world ... but in the sense of a certain common fate that encompasses the entire world.... The animal realm too lives in terms of guilt (Thielicke, 1970b:208).

Thielicke finds explicit evidence for this in Romans 8:20 where Paul announces that the creation itself has been “drawn by man into the bondage to decay” and because of man “is subjected to futility by God” (Thielicke, 1970b:209). Adam was established by God as “head of the cosmos” and its “vicarious representative” (Thielicke, 1970b:208). When he committed the sinful act, “which simply is no private matter but the act of a steward to whom creation was entrusted,” he “drags the cosmos which he represents along with him into the abyss” (Thielicke, 1970b:208). The suffering witnessed in nature, which would include natural disasters and animal suffering and death, is nothing

less than the tragic outworking of “man’s history with God in rebellion and grace” (Thielicke, 1982:437). If there is one lesson to be learned from the Genesis account of creation and the fall it is that God cursed the earth and all that is upon it “for the sake of man” (Thielicke, 1970b:209).

How all of this has transpired, though, is not clear since the Bible offers “no demonstration” of the precise way that human sin has resulted in such comprehensive cosmic after-effects (Thielicke, 1970b:209). All that can be said is that the haunting “cry for redemption goes through the cosmos,” and the Scriptures make it apparent that the “destructive and deadly violence of the cosmos are related to the spell cast upon it” (Thielicke, 1970b:209). Thielicke then would surely agree with Bonhoeffer that the fall of man is not simply a “moral lapse” on the part of one solitary pair of humans but the wholesale “destruction of creation” itself by the very creature that was made in the divine image (1959:77).

4.2.2.2 *Estrangement from God, others, and self*

For Thielicke human sin has also resulted in relational estrangement for all men. Evidence for this is first discovered in Genesis 3 where the divine punishments for sin are spelled out. Specifically, the man is to rule over the woman (3:16) while she desires to master him. To Thielicke this suggests the fundamental dissolution of their relationship with each other which is reflective of their estrangement from God:

The story of the Fall does indeed say that the man has the superior rank.... In this context the fact that one shall ‘rule’ over the other is not an imperative order of creation, but rather the element of disorder that disturbs the original peace of creation: for the dominion of the man spoken of here is the result of the desire (the libido) of the woman. This indicates that sexuality has lost its original form (Thielicke, 1964:8).

Thielicke argues that this dissolution violates the original intent and purpose of creation which was to create an “original unity” and make them “one flesh” as is stated in Genesis 1:24 (1964:8). Following the fall, however, the sexes are now opposed to each other,

and the question is who shall triumph and who shall be subjugated. Now libidothralldom on the one hand and despotism on the other constitute a terrible correspondency ... now one partner proceeds to denounce the other (3:12). But all of this is, of course, not in accord with the order of creation, but rather a destruction of the order of creation (Thielicke, 1964:8).

The relational distance resulting from their sin against God is nothing but the concrete outworking of the marring or perverting of the divine image. This, for Thieliicke, consists primarily in “the destruction of the original immediacy of child to Father, of creature to creator” (1979b:174). In the story of the fall, we see that man has deployed his God-given freedom in a most destructive way. Rather than using it in the service of God and his fellow-creatures, he now employs it “to sabotage his original determination as the image of God” and relentlessly seeks to “grasp after a hybrid equality with God” (Thieliicke, 1977:185). Furthermore, the tragic account of Cain’s murder of Abel is replayed countless times in the course of human history precisely because Cain’s hatred toward his brother and the guilt that followed “is exactly the same as that which stands between me and my neighbor” (Thieliicke, 1961a:9).

In the fall the creature and the Creator become adversaries. The man is always seeking to hide in the bushes, as it were, deathly afraid of the divine presence. Yet, because the image still remains in him he is “constantly confronted with the presence of God” which only brings to light his internal guilt and spiritual dissonance (Thieliicke, 1961a:89):

There is no corner or curve on our journey through life, no stage in our life story, in which God is not there, confronting us with the question whether we belong to him here and now, whether we are willing to obey him and grant him our trust here and now (Thieliicke, 1961a:89).

But man is not only alienated from God and his fellow men; Thieliicke demonstrates that the sinner is also estranged from *himself*. The fall has rendered mankind incapable of recognizing what he was designed by God to be, particularly with reference to functioning as the divine image-bearer (1961a:6). As a consequence,

we are no longer what we were when we left the hands of God ... something happened in between—that man seized the forbidden fruit, that he desired to be more than a child and creature ... in short we have become something different from the image we were intended to be (1961a:7).

4.2.2.3 *Comprehensive suffering*

A third immediate consequence of man’s sin against God is that of suffering in all of its varied manifestations. In general, Thieliicke asserts that human suffering, whether resulting from moral evil or that which derives from natural evil, is the direct consequence of the human creature’s misuse and abuse of the Creator’s good gifts and

manifold blessings. This is particularly true in reference to man's moral freedom and the vast potentialities with which he has been graciously endowed (Thielicke, 1961a:6). When men abuse these gifts and potentialities (such as their ability to reason, to calculate, to invent) in the service of selfish and destructive ends, suffering is the resultant experience. As he states, we use these otherwise good gifts to "destroy, to kill, to poison, and to hate" rather than in the service of God and the greater benefit of our neighbor (Thielicke, 1961a:6). The initial abuses of these divine blessings in the Garden of Eden find repetition throughout the course of human history, which for Thielicke is always the arena of creaturely sin and death:

The deadly ax swished down upon Abel. But this is not the end of it. Cain's solo hatred soon becomes a whole chorus of hate and Cain's murder is followed by war and rumors of war and every brutal and subtle form of murder that history has developed. That *one* perilous spark that flared up in Cain's heart soon outshone the sacrificial fires on a thousand altars (Thielicke, 1961a:198).

The fact that mankind is destined to repeat the saga of the Garden guarantees that despite the creature's misplaced confidence in his own moral and intellectual abilities, there will never be a time or place when heaven will be experienced on earth, at least on this side of the eschaton. That is, suffering and death will constitute and characterize the human experience until the very end. Thus, what utopians have persistently dreamed of and advocated for is morally and spiritually impossible. No "superhuman" state will ever emerge, and the best and noblest efforts of men to rectify their situation *postlapsum* will only produce "a hell on earth" (Thielicke, 1961a:66):

No sooner does he worship his own power—no sooner does he regard flesh or atomic power as his 'arm' and surrender to the illusion that he can hold the world in order and balance by military potential and political intelligence—than he has already renounced God's grace and breached the dam that holds the heavenly ocean. When he imagines that he can free men from need and fear by means of the welfare state he is already declaring himself independent of his sustaining grace and pressing the buttons which set off the secret signals of catastrophe (Thielicke, 1961a:240).

Man is unable to save himself from this awful destiny or from the guilt residing deep in his heart. Even in his worship of the Triune God, man's innermost being remains full of wickedness and is "quite capable of devising mischief even in holy places" (Thielicke, 1961a:192). The singing of the hymns of the faith in the gathered community of corporate worship is always marred by "the wolves" that are "howling in the cellars of our souls" (Thielicke, 1961a:192). We, who are now estranged from God and our fellow human beings by virtue of our own horrific choice, remain pitifully "bracketed

by the day of creation on the one hand and by the day of Last Judgment on the other” (Thielicke, 1961a:69). In this specific way, then, history will most assuredly repeat itself as men persistently do that which is evil in the sight of God, thereby ever provoking the terrifying “floods of dammed-up mischief” while simultaneously rejecting the very grace by which “the dams are held up” (Thielicke, 1961a:239). Sadly, in the fabric of creation itself, destruction and death are still present. The atoms, which God originally created as good and beautiful, “need only to be split, the bacteria let loose, hereditary factors monkeyed with, genes tampered with, and poisons need only to be distilled from the gifts of creation” (Thielicke, 1961a:239).

All human suffering, then, can ultimately be explained by appeal to man’s initial act of rebellion. However, in the course of each individual’s life, the suffering that remains inherent in the human experience is further exacerbated by pain and the passage of time. In Thielicke’s penetrating exposition of the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness (*Between God and Satan*, 1958) he observes that time and pain are the twin enemies of every sufferer. These tools are most powerful and effective and are diabolically deployed by Satan himself to alienate further the sinner from God. Thielicke finds definitive evidence for this strategy in the biblical story of Job. He explains that the ancient record details how the tempter simply laughs at the “pious reaction” to suffering that understands it as a necessary mechanism for the production of maturity (or what might be known today as the ‘greater good defense’) (1958:6). In such a case, the victim of the suffering is “prepared to let his sufferings be ‘a lesson’ to him” in hope of the production of some otherwise unanticipated good that will outweigh whatever pain is endured (1958:6). Yet, the passage of time, like that which Job experienced, ultimately decimates this hope. Satan, like a “good psychologist,” calculates that the more one suffers and the longer the suffering lasts, the less meaningful it will become (1958:6). Clearly in Job’s case, the suffering surely exceeded the limits of what any man could possibly regard as reasonable and progressed into that which may only be described as gratuitous. The story reveals that the “moment at which [Job] thinks it must stop because he has learnt enough is precisely the moment at which it does not cease; it goes on senselessly” (1958:6). This, as Thielicke reckons it, is the “strongest argument against God” and the experiential foundation for the PES (1958:7):

By our very nature, we and our intelligence (the proclaimer of sense) appoint ourselves the lords and judges of God. In time we cease to see any sense in his actions, let alone any higher purpose behind them. Therefore: Curse God and die! (Thielicke, 1958:7)

This pride-filled demand that God give account to us for His actions or non-actions evidences our radical fallenness. From a heart of rebellion, we expect that

God's higher thoughts must always correspond—even adapt themselves—to the thoughts of man, which man regards as having meaning. In this the tempter does nothing else but what we saw in Job: he leads man with the aid of time—i.e., with the aid of long-continued suffering—to a point at which man can no longer see any sense in his sufferings, and certainly cannot understand how they can give him maturity and help him on his way. This is the point at which, with diabolical inevitability, his belief in God appears absurd, and he adjures God (Thielicke, 1958:7).

Time, then, is “the most uncanny minister of this prince of darkness,” and his central “thesis” is that there is a certain point in the duration of one's suffering “at which one ceases to be mature” (1958:6, 8). Then, pain teams with time to function as “the other arrow in the enemy's quiver,” tempting the one suffering to conclude that there is no sense of meaning associated with it at all (1958:8).

4.2.2.4 *Physical and spiritual death*

A fourth consequence of man's sin, which finds lucid expression in Thielicke, is that of human death. First, it is necessary to consider specifically how he defined death as he understood it from Scripture. Thielicke concluded that the Bible presents the subject of death in two distinct yet connected ways. In the first place, there is physical or *biological* death as man “breathes his last” and returns to the dust from which he was first created (1963:88). In this respect death means that “he goes through the natural process of decay,” and his body ultimately “withers like a flower” (1963:88). The Scripture sets this forward as the “judgment of God” that results in man being

flung back into his own temporality and excluded from God's eternity. This confinement behind the barriers of his temporality and transience, this condemnation ‘to death’ is God's answer to man's Promethean attempts to seize the forbidden fruit, involving him in repeated and constant falls into sin; his illicit strivings to break into the sovereign realm of God, to become a superman, to deny his limitations, and in all this to rise beyond his likeness to God and gain a forbidden equality with God. In the fact that he must die, this man who is constantly pressing toward boundlessness is shown his bounds. This is God's judgment of death (Thielicke, 1963:88).

This biological or physical death according to the Scriptures (Romans 3:23) directly results from the sin of Adam and Eve, and in this way the Bible makes the clear connection between the human transgression of the divine word and the termination of

physiological life. Commenting on Romans 6:23, Thielicke explains that physical death is

an event which I myself have caused, over against which I am subject, and which I have freely brought about as a responsible person.... The wrath of God which comes to expression in death is in this sense God's reaction to our personal action (1982:391).

Biological death, therefore, results from man's fall, and for Thielicke this fact seems to imply that "man's mortality is not rooted in creation but in his fall from creation," and therefore physical death is "not of the created *order*; it is disorder" (Thielicke, 1970b:1).

Thielicke argues strongly that human death is

simply unnatural. At no time and in no place is it the expression of any sort of normality of nature, as if it signified the necessary ebb in the rhythm of life. Death is rather an expression of a catastrophe which runs on a collision course with man's original destination or, in other words, directly opposite to his intrinsic nature. This catastrophe intruding into God's creation simultaneously becomes the boundary line between God and man, between him 'who alone has immortality' (1 Tim. 6:16) and him who has forfeited life (1970b:105).

In view of human sin, physical death may also be understood as the erection of an impenetrable barrier or boundary that distinguishes the infinite Creator from the finite creature whose sin finds its expression in the choice to seek life outside the appropriate limits established by God. As Thielicke sees it, this aspect of death is both a boundary line and a contradiction. He finds that sin, which inevitably leads to biological death, is described in the Bible as "the violation of a limit" and as a "contradiction" in that man has illogically broken away from the God who is the Source of his life and very existence (1982:392). "Man wants to be superman," and his sin is nothing short of a self-destructive "usurpation of God's throne and a titan-like invasion of heaven" (Thielicke, 1982:392). He further explains this limit and its breach:

The first limit, i.e., the boundary between God and man, which it was left to man's freedom of obedience to respect, was wickedly violated by man in his freedom. Hence a second limit was set which he could not overcome and which entailed a radical division between corruptible man and the eternal God. This limit is [physiological] death. It is an uncontrollable event which happens *to* him and to which he is subject (1982:392).

Given this understanding of biological death and its intrinsic relationship to human sin one may sharply distinguish human death from that of other creatures (Thielicke, 1970b:1). The death of a man in his sinfulness is "not the death of man as a mammal but the death of man as one who wants to be God and hence has to learn that he is only a man" (Thielicke, 1982:393). He observes that

[t]he gravity of human dying ... does not stand out until I come to understand, on the basis of this uniqueness, that I am endowed with personhood and that it is absolutely impossible for other persons or suprapersonal entities to take my place. I am simply unique (1970b:115).

If man is only a mammal or is viewed without reference to the *imago Dei* as one species of creatures among the many God made, then like the animals he is incapable of personal sin and his death is no more significant than the falling of a leaf or the death of a tree (1970b:115). Thieliicke cautions all readers of Scripture, especially when reading the creation narrative of Genesis 1, that they must never forget that

through his creative act God has not simply set me on my feet like the young lions or calves, but has created me to be his possession so that I owe myself to him and am obligated to give him an accounting of what I have made out of his work. Therefore Luther's words in his interpretation of the creation ('I believe that God made me') constitute the keenest safeguard against such depersonalizing of creation into a mere cosmogony (1970b:126).

The autonomy that man seeks from God in his prideful desecration of the divine command stands in horrible contrast to the relationship of love and trust that God intended for him, and this leads inexorably to his death. When God pronounces the curse upon Adam and Eve as recorded in Genesis 3:19, "To dust you shall return," He is declaring to them that

you will be reminded that you have been thrust back behind the frontier you crossed. Your death is thus a warning that you belong to earth and that the eternity which you assume to yourself is not yours. Sin as the background of that assumption gives death a claim over you. It is the basis of death (Thieliicke, 1982:394).

While the fear of the termination of life is most real in the hearts of all men, Thieliicke believes that the greater fear associated with death has reference to the limit or boundary line that is reached with the end of biological life. Death's real terror, as he argues, is that those who seek to be without any restrictions whatsoever reach a non-traversable limit imposed by God, "who alone is eternal," and this barrier "contradicts finite man in his attempt to be without limits" (1982:393). The greater fear, then, is the loss of man's presupposed or assumed autonomy and self-sufficiency or what Bonhoeffer described as the frustration of man's idolatrous desire to live "out of himself" while defiantly acting as "his own creator" (1959:73).

However, there is another sense in which man can be said to experience death. This death is a dark, *spiritual* reality, which is "embedded in this natural process of dying"

(1963:88). This *spiritual* component or aspect of death is understood as a “divorce from God” and is, as a consequence, the complete disordering of life itself (Thielicke, 1970b:108):

Viewed biblically, death is the symptom of an inscrutable distortion of life. Life created by God is indestructible of itself—or more precisely of God’s self—so long as it remains under the influence of the divine breath and in fellowship with God (1970b:108).

The language of *separation*, therefore, is most appropriate to depict the far-reaching disorder and distortion caused by human sin. Thielicke explains that human death as the cessation of physical life and the spiritual separation from the Creator “go together” (1970b:108). Both represent that which is “un-nature” and “not a component part of life but life’s diametrical opposite” (1970b:108). This non-physical dimension of death is a “personal transaction between God and man” which results in the spiritual estrangement of the creature from the Creator (1963:88). To be divorced from God in this way is a living death that is now the experience of every sinner. Life itself, like walking, is “a kind of falling,” and every moment of life is “a matter of dying” both physically and spiritually after the fall (1970b:7). This dreadful reality persistently confronts the sinner to the point where it is impossible to discover meaning in human existence while thus alienated from God (Thielicke, 1970b:7). Additionally, the sinner’s life, seen from the human perspective, is hopelessly characterized and dominated by guilt:

As a creature who has received himself intact from the hands of God, man senses that he owes God his entire self and above all that he owes it in the same form as he originally received it from God’s hands. At the same moment he is forced to discover that he can never balance out his obligations, that it rests upon him as ‘guilt.’ For he must admit that he is thrust into an existence which surrounds him on every side with evidence that he is already emburdened (Thielicke, 1970b:90).

This guilt manifests itself in man’s persistent desire to escape completely from the God who gave him life. As one who has fallen from fellowship with God and is both dead and in the process of dying, he is “still in flight” and “cannot flee fast enough” (Bonhoeffer, 1959:82).

Before concluding this discussion of death from Thielicke’s theological perspective, it is important to note that he was quite dissatisfied with what he termed the “orthodox doctrine of original sin” (1970b:122). As he understood the orthodox position, it interprets human death *simply* as “a consequence of the fall into sin” and, therefore,

views the fall as “the cause and death the effect” (1970b:122). He feared that by viewing original sin in this way, “the death of man and the death of animals are hence once more relegated to the same level. The specific character of man’s dying in contrast to that of the animals is denied, as in the biological materialism of our own day” (1970b:122). If death is only a *natural* consequence of sin, then it “becomes an occurrence of natural law” and befalls the sinner “in the same way as the natural occurrence of a thunderstorm or hurricane,” both of which come upon the sinner apart from any personal effort (1970b:125). When one transforms death from “a fact of history into a fact of nature” (1970b:126) and sees death as an event that does not “strike man in his personal relationship with God” (1970b:125), the very personhood of man is forfeited:

When the character of death as ‘mine and mine alone’ is lost, it becomes clear that a fact of history—always striking me as an individual, irreplaceable and responsible—is transmuted into a fact of nature to which I am subject as to any coercively deterministic law. Man under the shadow of death as viewed by orthodoxy becomes just as personless as he does under the fate of an original sin that is viewed hereditarily and deterministically (1970b:125).

Thielicke wanted to maintain the profound distinction and dignity of man in the image and likeness of God, even in his sin and death. He believed that in the orthodox position, man is viewed

in a fatalistic subjugation (reminiscent of natural law) to some given that has occurred outside of him, and as a result, despite all the theological and metaphysical decoration, he is not treated in terms of his history with God, but as a phenomenon of nature. However, there is no aspect of living or dying in which man can legitimately consider himself only as an effect in a causal naturalistic cause-effect relationship to divine activity. On the contrary, his life is always—even in the midst of its subjugation to God and Satan—historically responsible (1970b:123).

Clearly, Thielicke opposed any view of sin and death that diminishes man’s moral agency or mitigates his direct accountability to the Creator for how he conducts his life. He noted that the doctrine of original sin as typically expressed in Protestant orthodoxy unintentionally fosters an “attitude of indifference toward actual sins” and promotes a sense of moral irresponsibility (1970b:124):

The concrete negative actions that occur, my offenses against God, lose thereby their specific weight and are only the symptoms of a fateful destiny, a pressuring coercion, that overarches my entire existence. Sin, so to speak, is no longer ‘mine and mine alone.’ It becomes the ‘all too human’ in which I share. And in the face of this weightlessness of sin itself, the redemptive work of Christ,

ostensibly for the sake of removing that sin, appears as an excessive and unnecessary expenditure.

In other words, Thielicke's ultimate concern was that such a view of sin and death would result in "reductionist Christologies" that would threaten to undo the gospel itself (1970b:124). For Thielicke, a better way to speak of original sin is to admit that

I know that what I am has its origin within myself, that I really am as I find myself to be in my thinking, willing, and acting. I see no place in my own history in which I had myself in hand as a blank page and where I still possessed an open possibility within my control. I always see myself facing the reality of my own self. This reality is labeled alienation from God, and I must confess that this reality is my reality (1970b:124).

4.2.3 Summary

It is most apparent from this brief evaluation of Thielicke's theology that he embraced what may be described as a healthy and biblically based view of sin and the cosmic and personal effects that resulted, including human suffering and death. He appreciated the deep mystery associated with the appearance of evil and the fall of mankind into sin, as well as the comprehensive providential governance of God over all events in human history, even those that are otherwise considered evil and tragic. Yet he vigorously maintained the necessity of creaturely freedom and the kind of moral agency that is commensurate with personhood and the possibility of a meaningful and responsible relationship with God characterized by love and trust. Most importantly, however, Thielicke's theological writings demonstrate that all human suffering, whether related to natural or moral evil, is brought upon mankind by himself and results from his own illogical actions in contradiction to God's revealed will. While God is indeed the sovereign Lord of all, sinners are responsible for what they have done in violation of His word and are thereby the sole cause of their own miseries.

4.3. Thielicke on the redemption of man and the renewal of creation

The principal aim of this section is to explore what Thielicke believed about salvation and the ultimate restoration of all that human sin has damaged and ruined. In keeping with the scope of the previous sections that have explored his theology at strategic points relative to the PES, this section will also offer only a more general appraisal of the substantial themes that develop along the major headings of *redemption* and

renewal. The limited evidence presented here should be sufficient to substantiate the fact that Thieliicke reflected very deeply on the subject of personal and cosmic eschatology, and he did so with both pastoral and theological concerns. Recently this very fact has been recognized by Pless (2009) who notes that Thieliicke's early life experiences with suffering and death seemed to "focus and sharpen" both his writings and preaching ministry "which often engaged eschatological themes" (2009:439). Specifically, Pless has also observed that his sermons frequently reflected a strong "eschatological edge, setting the hearers' own lives in the context of eternity" (2009:442).

Thieliicke's theological writings on the themes of redemption and restoration manifest a decided Christological focus, with significant emphasis upon the subject of the sinner's union to Christ by faith, and the attendant benefits that result—benefits that are both *present* and *eternal*. As will be demonstrated below, Thieliicke views personal salvation largely in terms of the recovery of the *imago Dei* and sees cosmic renewal more fundamentally as the coming of the Kingdom of God.

4.3.1 The redemption of sinners

Thieliicke is quite clear about the necessity for *personal* salvation. Sinners are humans made in the divine image and are, therefore, responsible to God for their individual transgressions. Adam's first sin plunged the entire human race into ruin and guaranteed that all men without exception would be born in a state of alienation from God resulting in spiritual death (Romans 5:12-14). Yet all men are responsible to God for their *own* rebellion against Him, thus the need for personal salvation from sin's consequences. Thieliicke's doctrine of salvation may be traced along three routes: 1) the trustworthiness and power of God, 2) salvation in Christ as recovery of the *imago Dei*, and 3) the possibility of some form of *postmortem* redemption.

4.3.1.1 *The trustworthiness and power of God*

First, to appreciate adequately Thieliicke's doctrine of redemption it is necessary to consider his expressed confidence in the power of God and in His determination to bring all things triumphantly to a glorious consummation in Jesus Christ. More specifically, Thieliicke articulates a strong view of God's providential control of the

world and its history, even over the world as it stands in rebellion and hostility toward Him and His purposes. In his series of theological addresses on the opening chapters of Genesis (*How the World Began*, 1961a), ironically presented during an intense period of the Allied bombing of Germany, Thielićke appeals to the story of Noah and the great flood for an illustration of God's power to reclaim what was once destroyed by sin. The practical and personal lesson learned from this Old Testament story is that God has an indefatigable purpose for every sinner and for every situation in which sinners find themselves. History, then, whether viewed cosmically or individually, can be properly evaluated only in the light of biblical eschatology. Thielićke asserts that

we can understand all human history only from the vantage point of its end, when Jesus Christ will come to judge the quick and the dead, when he will deliver the kingdom to the Father, who then will be all in all. *The victory of God is the meaning and end of history* [emphasis his] (1963:92).

That is, God can redeem all situations along the time-line of human history, even those that appear hopeless or are characterized by unprecedented evil and gratuitous suffering. The salvation of Noah and his family through the floodwaters that covered the earth—the result of God's judgment on the horrible wickedness of his generation—demonstrates that God has a purpose that human rebellion is powerless to frustrate. Thielićke argues that since God was at work in Noah's life, executing His divine plan of redemption even in the face of universal rebellion, then He surely has such a purpose "for you, and for me, no matter what may be the envelope in which this plan of life is enclosed, whether floods and reverses or success and happiness" (1961a:243). God is able to redeem all situations and circumstances resulting from human sin. Since this is true and has been illustrated so powerfully in the story of Noah and the flood, the sinner can trust in the power and grace of God, knowing that even in such a sin-ravaged world His mercy and saving grace will finally triumph. Practically and more individually applied, this means that we must have faith and confidence in

the mystery of divine guidance in our life and in the history of the world. The very time when we can no longer understand a catastrophe like the Flood or even the rushing streams and deluges of our personal life ... is the time when this very anxiety, this temptation, even dread, can become raw material for our faith (1961a:246).

In other words, the sinner can always and in every possible circumstance of life have perfect trust in the gracious God who providentially controls all things and has determined to save sinners out of their misery and death. God's grace and power are "always stronger than the powers of destruction" and thus there is no need to

put our trust in arks, in political prescriptions and armament potentials by which we hope to survive the floods.... No, we must hold fast to him who says in majesty: "Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here your proud waves be stayed" (1961a:251).

The rainbow that God placed in the sky (Genesis 9:12-15) as testimony to His commitment never to destroy the world again with water becomes a *personal* sign of salvation and mercy for every sinner who stands under the threat of divine judgment:

[T]he rainbow that shone like an arc of divine promise above the receding Flood is also a sign for me from another world when I walk though the valley of the shadow and cry out from the depths (1961a:9).

The only thing that is required of us, as demonstrated in the life of Noah, is faith in the God who is able to redeem all things. He has a plan that will not fail, despite what we in our cleverness and scheming may devise against Him. Because He is infinitely powerful and is merciful with equally inexhaustible love, there can be no sin "that redemption is too weak to deal with, that therefore cannot be forgiven," and death itself can never be "mightier than the life that God would give" (1961a:250). Faith declares that God does indeed know what He is doing, and as the salvation of Noah and his family demonstrates, He is constantly moving history along in such a way as to guarantee its arrival at His predetermined destination resulting in His glory and the sinner's good:

Its restlessness and torment, its glory and its shame, its tumults of war and its periods of peace will one day enter into the great Sabbath, into the silence of eternity which will replace and encompass the shouting, the clashing of weapons, and the sirens of disaster (1961a:114).

Stated in non-technical terms, faith in God's power to save is simply the sinner's confident rest in the God who is merciful toward sinners and always knows both *what* He is doing and *why* He is doing it, particularly in the midst of the darkness and depravity of man's sin (1961a:247). Contrary to what many might assume, saving faith is *not*

some daring decision to believe, by which man might achieve God's righteousness and to that extent control his destiny with God. It is really just the opposite, for by believing man subordinates himself to God's control.... Faith does not mean that by my decision to believe I could make myself the subject of my relationship with God, but the other way around: I decide to be the object of God's gracious actions (Thielicke, 1970b:107).

Faith for Thielicke is the sinner's hope in the power and triumphant grace of God—the One who will see to it that in the course of world history man's sin and the justified consequence of death will not have the final word.

4.3.1.2 *Salvation in Christ as recovery of the imago Dei and eternal life*

To arrive at the core of what Thielicke believed about salvation it is important to recognize that he viewed the immediate consequences of sin as essentially the loss or ruin of the *imago Dei*. Following the fall in the Garden of Eden, man remained *imago Dei* only in the “negative mode,” which has to do with the detrimental effects unleashed against his relationship with the Creator (Thielicke, 1979b:193). Though the *imago* has been radically deformed by man's transgression, he still “bears on his forehead the mark of his original nobility,” and his present miseries and tribulations are always those of a “deposed king” (1979b:193). It is at this point that the intense Christological focus of Thielicke's doctrine of salvation appears. For Thielicke, the *imago* can be restored only in the person of the Son. This key point is well expressed in the second volume of Thielicke's *Theological Ethics: Politics* (1969b):

The image which God has of us men has taken form in the humanity of Jesus Christ. Any doctrine of the divine image is thus Christologically determined. What man is, I know only in face of the humanity of Jesus Christ. To become man is to share in this humanity of Jesus Christ. It is to grow into the union with the Father which Jesus Christ ‘is’ in virtue of his being the God-man. To grow in humanity is to grow into Jesus Christ (1969b:613-614).

Christ then is “the *telos*” to which our restored humanity is aimed (Thielicke, 1969b:614), and salvation is ultimately the restoration of that essential humanity. When the sinner is linked to Christ by faith, the recovery of the *imago* begins, and with regard to God,

the immediacy of the parent-child relationship is restored, [and] we are then enabled to ‘reflect’ the glory of God—but only in the sense that it is God who is actually reflecting himself in us.... Man can never boast that his character as an ‘emitter of light’ is his own, a kind of residual property inherent in himself (*habitus*) (Thielicke, 1979b:176).

This then is fundamentally what the Scriptures mean when believers are said to be “in Christ” (see Ephesians 1:1, Philippians 1:1). Among the other rich biblical truths relative to salvation, this phrase indicates that all those who are united to the Savior by faith “participate in the divine likeness of Christ” who is the image of God *Himself*

(Thielicke, 1979b:184). It is Christ alone who “stands in the breach that has opened up between us and God” (1979b:189). In addition, as our perfect divine representative who is always at peace with God the Father, those who are “in Christ” are granted the same supernatural peace since they stand in the identical place “where Jesus Christ stands in relation to the Father” (1979b:188). Thielicke interprets Paul’s words in Galatians 2:20 (“the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God”) as *not* teaching that

I have the new life through faith *in* Jesus Christ ... but rather that I have the new life through and in the fact that Jesus Christ believes, so that here he is thus taken to be the prototype of my faith. He, Jesus Christ, lives as he gives himself in unreserved trust to his Father. If I am ‘in Christ,’ I participate in his life, and the point where I stand is thus the very point where he so believes (1979b:189).

Thus, the *imago Dei* can only be recovered to its positive mode by Christ who is “the prototype of our unfallen position” and the “original prototype both of God’s saving activity and of the reality of our own salvation” (Thielicke, 1979b:193). By faith, all the glorious and magnificent things that Christ accomplished in His sinless life of perfect righteousness, by His atoning death on the cross and through His bodily resurrection, become the sinner’s:

I can claim his qualities as my own: his faith is my faith, his righteousness my righteousness, his peace my peace. And for this very reason all my qualities now apply conversely to him: he is my guilt, my death, my unrighteousness.... All the attributes one can ascribe to the Christian are predicable not of qualities inherent in the person himself but of the ‘communication’ with Christ (Thielicke, 1979b:191-192).

The incorporation of the humble sinner into the life of Christ, resulting in a vital connection to Him as the head and Lord of the Church, implies that the believer may ascribe all of His qualities to himself, and may embrace Christ’s “*alienum*” (alien righteousness) and “*proprium*” (attributes) and may relate himself “inclusively rather than exclusively” to Christ’s “vicarious representation” (Thielicke, 1979b:191). Christ then is the sinner’s *exemplar* (original or prototype) before he becomes the sinner’s example. That is, the *indicative* of salvation, what God has accomplished for the sinner through Christ alone, precedes the *imperative*, what the sinner does in response to the gift of salvation in Christ (see Thielicke’s extensive discussion of this point in 1979b:51-93):

I must first be in a right relation to Christ in his quality as exemplar before I can follow him as example. I must first be set in the sun before I can become warm. I must first know that I am loved before I can love in return (1979b:193).

As *exemplar*, Christ provides an alien righteousness for those who believe, and the gift of this righteous standing before God is evidence of His infinite love for those made in His image and likeness:

Because God's love rests on us, because Jesus died for us, we have that golden chain about our neck and that crown upon our head.... It is this crown that gives us royalty, not vice versa; we do not receive the crown because we cut such a royal figure. The reformers spoke of the alien righteousness which we receive through Jesus. In the same way we can speak of the alien dignity that is bestowed upon us. This and nothing else is what is meant by the infinite value of the human soul (Thielicke, 1970b:xxv).

As implied above, Thielicke believed that salvation is due in total to the initiative of God. It is God who seeks out the sinner: "We could not seek God at all, if he had not already found us; we could not love him, if he had not first loved us" (1958:11). The only "hero" in the story of the redemption of fallen men is God: "No, we are not the heroes in this fight. We are the battlefield rather than the heroes or the army. The fight is for us, for we are fleeing" (1958:11). God alone can grant eternal life to the sinner, and this life is a divine gift from a *personal* God, not one who "winds up the clock and lets it run its own course" as in "deistic ideology" (Thielicke, 1970b:106). God, who alone possesses life, is the only Source of this gift, and this appropriately suits His unique identity as the "Lord and giver of life" (1970b:106).

For Thielicke salvation entails not only the restoration of the *imago Dei* but also the guarantee of eternal life, and this is principally defined as the restoration of *fellowship* with God. He observes:

the only person who has life is one who lives in contact with, or, more precisely, in fellowship with God. Whoever does not have this contact with the breath of God, whoever lives in protest against him or in internal detachment from him, is already dead regardless of how much vitality he might have externally. His life is disconnected from its actual source of power, though still rolling along "in neutral" according to the law of inertia (1970b:106).

This renewed fellowship with God, which stands in stark contrast to man's alienation from the Creator and relational isolation, is "the authentic antithesis to personal death" and to the "boundary line between God and man," expressed in Genesis as the "flashing sword" that stood guard over "the gates of paradise" (1970b:190). Thus, the opposite of physical death is not biological life but rather eternal life or life with "the barrier removed" and the sinner's reception of "a new access to the life of God" (Thielicke, 1970b:190). The "barrier" of which Thielicke speaks is not taken away or conquered

by anything that men might do to regain their access to God. That is, the barrier is not breached “by an upward movement from below, but by a downward movement from above” (Thielicke, 1970b:191). God saves sinners through the condescension and self-emptying of the Son (Philippians 2:7-8). This incomprehensible truth, which finds its preeminent expression in the incarnation of the Word of God, is the Father’s ultimate act of love and should be celebrated as His voluntary “comradeship with us in death on the cross” (Thielicke, 1970b:191). For Thielicke, Christ Himself is not only the image of God but also the “actual content” of the gift of eternal life (1970b:192). Thus, salvation takes on a deeply personal character as the sinner is linked by faith to the “*zoe* of Jesus Christ” which cannot be defeated even by death or diminished by the passage of time:

Instead it overcame death since death as the boundary, as the reminder of the fall, is meaningless in the face of God’s own life. Death can find no flank, as it were, on which to attack him, just as death can no longer have any power over those who are “in Christ Jesus” in living fellowship with the Resurrected One, the one who has shattered death (1970b:192).

In this way also the eternal life that the sinner receives through union with Christ “is never something timelessly existing” but is a “living fellowship” that has a definite “present-tense character,” resulting in freedom from the fear of death which now has no power over those in Christ (1970b:191-192):

It cannot separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.... What still remains is merely the biological side of death, *psuche* expiring, which does indeed remain a reminder and a significant indicator, but an indicator which has already lost its sting, its poisoned fang.... This killing power of death has been taken from death. Those who stand in living fellowship with Jesus can no longer be enslaved to their anxiety about death. They can no longer be slaves of false gods and thus separate themselves from God even more by raising their primeval hubris to an even higher power. Death is not removed, but it is rendered impotent (Thielicke, 1970b:193-194).

When a believer in Christ does die, there will be no experience of the wrath of God, and to this degree, death itself takes on a profoundly different meaning. Thielicke calls it merely “a biological mask” which has no significance for the Christian (1970b:194). All who are in Christ Jesus will die in peace, fully confident that they are the “friend of Jesus,” and because of this not even physical death can destroy their eternal union with Him (1970b:202). Christ has sacrificed Himself on their behalf, thereby fully “consummating the total gravity of man’s existential destiny” while sharing in full “solidarity” with them (1970b:192). Though even the children of God—those whose sins and guilt have been atoned for in the death of the Son—will experience agonizing

suffering and the certainty of death in the present, they are incapable of “being dominated by death, or by the gods and goods of this life” (1970b:202). When suffering and death do approach, every believer in Christ can triumphantly declare,

In dying I come before God, who holds not only judgment but also life in his hands, and I come with the confidence that I have no need to trust in my good works nor in my immortal soul ... and yet I am confident that I am righteous and share in the resurrection by grace alone.... I remain in fellowship with him who is Alpha and Omega, and with this knowledge I walk into the night of death, truly the darkest night; yet I know who awaits me in the morning (Thielicke, 1970b:199).

Christ’s own bodily resurrection is the guarantee of the believer’s future resurrection, and this blessed certainty provides a present hope and fundamentally transforms the totality of life itself, particularly the experience of suffering and pain. Suffering, Thielicke argues, also “takes on another sense. It shares the relativity of the world of death. It becomes a new means of salvation which purifies us” (1982:411). Furthermore, suffering in this present life leads to the “transvaluation of all values. Much that was important apart from eternal life loses its dominant rank and dissipates. Other things that were previously overlooked take higher rank” (1982:411). That is, pain, suffering, and other negative and unpleasant experiences associated with the PES, become means appointed by God for the sanctification of the sinner. In all of this there is cause for great rejoicing and hope, and those who are in Christ may be confident of the “protective custody” they presently enjoy in their Savior’s arms (Thielicke, 1970b:192).

4. 3.1.3 *The possibility of postmortem redemption*

Before moving to a consideration of Thielicke’s theological position on the renewal of creation and the eschatological appearance of the kingdom of God, we must briefly consider his suggestion that the gift of salvation may ultimately be granted to men following death. There is a clear, though not dogmatic, universalistic tendency in Thielicke that would distinguish him from orthodox theologians on this point. Universalism, or *apokatastasis*, is the doctrine that “affirms that in the fullness of time all souls will be released from the penalties of sin and restored to God” (Elwell, 1984:1128). That Thielicke embraced a form of this doctrine, although apparently quite tentatively, is evident from his comments in *Between Heaven and Earth: Conversations with American Christians* (1965). The obvious motivation behind his somewhat

universalistic suggestions is Thielicke's twofold concern for 1) those that lived before the incarnation of the Savior, as well as the multiplied millions in the world who have never had an opportunity to hear the gospel and 2) for the preservation of a more robust view of the divine mercy. For example, Thielicke gently raises the possibility of post-death salvation by noting that God may have

other ways, beyond death and our limited space and time, to come to those who did not hear his call, to those who lived before Christ ... and to the millions who to this day live beyond the sound of his Word. We simply cannot comprehend that that which for *us* is the Word of life should be withdrawn from and become a judgment of condemnation upon those who do not hear it during their earthly life. Is the Savior who said of himself, "No one comes to the Father but by me," to become a barricaded door, a judgment, a barrier for the millions ... who do not know him? (1965a:110).

Thielicke evidently believed that in the case of certain deceased non-believers, who for some reason were prevented from hearing the gospel, God would provide a way of salvation for them through Christ yet one that has not been explicitly revealed in Scripture. Even after death there remains at least the possibility of repentance and faith in Christ. He suggests that since Jesus is the Lord "of the living and the dead," He is fully capable of seeking and finding

even the dead who call upon [Him]—all those who worshipped false gods because they did not know [Jesus] and are now forsaken by their fetishes and idols, all those who were snatched away in their youth and died unfinished lives; but also the atheists who lost sight of [His] Word or heard only a distorted caricature of it (1965a:110).

Such a possibility, the exact details of which are beyond human knowledge, rests upon the wideness and triumphant power of God's mercy in Christ Jesus. Since God's grace is never defeated by sin or human rebellion, His power to save the sinner is not threatened nor limited by physical death, and neither is the ability of the deceased sinner to call out for God's mercy in Christ. Thielicke asserts that God's love for sinners will never allow Him to give up the souls that are lost and that Christ's sufferings were more than sufficient to save even those who have been taken in death. As he expressed it, the passion and atoning death of the Savior was "great and dreadful enough to make amends even for them" (1965a:110).

In regard to a biblical foundation for such a heterodox soteriology (at least at the point of the application of Christ's saving benefits to men *postmortem*), Thielicke appeals to

1 Peter 4:6 (“For the gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead”) for evidence supporting his views. He explains:

This, to be sure, is only a word that speaks by way of intimation and parable and points through the message of the New Testament to a mystery that lies at the extreme boundary of what we can dare say. It tells us that the gospel is spoken even to the inhabitants of the realm of the dead, that Jesus penetrated even here with his redeeming, liberating Word. That can be set down as the limit of all that we can say (1965a:111).

This interpretation would seem to lay a peculiar theological foundation for Thieliicke’s sermons on the PES, particularly in terms of the anticipated redemption of certain deceased sinners. It would appear that such a doctrine would serve as a kind of eternal vindication for whatever earthly disadvantage or suffering had been experienced in this life. God will, in profound mystery-shrouded mercy, redeem even the penitent dead who will be given yet another opportunity to place their faith in the Son. This expression of *postmortem* mercy will overshadow all of the ill effects of man’s sin including personal suffering and the multi-varied consequences of the fall that might well have prevented the sinner’s exercise of faith and repentance before death.

4.3.2 The renewal of creation

Thieliicke’s theological writings also reveal an interest in the renewal of all creation as a consequence of the victory of Christ over His enemies. The third volume of *The Evangelical Faith: Theology of the Spirit* (1982) contains his most direct treatment of this doctrinal theme. First, he sets out the general expectation of cosmic renewal. Secondly, he envisions the coming of the kingdom of God, which will be preceded by ever-increasing worldwide conflict and opposition to the Church and the gospel, culminating in the appearance of Christ Himself and the last judgment.

4.3.2.1 *Creation restored*

As discussed above, Thieliicke places great stress on the fact that human sin has spoiled and deformed that which God originally created as good. This is particularly true with regard to the *imago Dei* but also applies to the creation itself, which has likewise experienced the radical and pervasive consequences of human depravity. Sin has a universal dimension, which Thieliicke recognizes in conformity with views typically articulated in Reformed and Lutheran theologies of the fall and its effects. This

recognition of the cosmic effects of the fall naturally suggests that for all the damage sin has caused, the salvation that is provided in Jesus Christ will bring restoration not only to the sinner in terms of the *imago* but also to all of creation in terms of its full renewal. While Thielicke does not develop this point very fully in his systematic theology, he does declare his belief that God's *original purpose* for the creation will be restored in the end (1982:438). There will be a day, yet future, when the "whole episode of man's history of revolt" will have reached its point of termination (1982:438). While the kingdom of God may be understood as *present* in the preaching of the gospel, in the work of the church and especially in the experience of the believer with Christ by means of the Word and the Spirit, it will appear in its fullness in the *future* (1982:458). When this happens once again the perfect rule of God will be the norm on earth and in the universe, yet this time it will endure for all eternity (1982:428).

The comprehensive eschatological renewal of creation envisioned by Thielicke is buttressed exegetically and theologically by the words of Jesus in John 3:7-8 where He speaks to Nicodemus of being "born again" and "born of the Spirit" (1982:399). Concerning the individual sinner, there is required a "totally new beginning" effected by the "transforming Spirit of God" before one may see or enter the kingdom of God (1982:399). However, the regeneration and transformation of the individual also anticipates and illustrates the eschatological renovation of all that sin has corrupted. In this way the powerful and transformative work of the Spirit is set in even greater and more expansive terms. Likewise, if the gift of eternal life, which the individual sinner receives from God at the moment of belief, is fully consummated in an eternal future with Christ in heaven, then the reversal of the fall's effects upon the creation is also initiated in time and history with the preaching of the gospel and the salvation of sinners. Ultimately the transformation of creation, though it is now groaning under the weight of human sin (Romans 8:20-23), will be consummated in the new heavens and earth.

For Thielicke God's gracious bestowal of eternal life in human history is not "present as a mere invasion of our temporality. It transcends this temporality by going beyond it and finding eschatological actualization at the last day as resurrection from the dead" (1982:405). Thus, Thielicke declares that his belief in a future state of personal and cosmic renewal is not based upon "some dream of the hereafter" but because of the fact

that “I am already the companion of him who has begun a history with me and will never let me fall away from his faithfulness” (1982:410).

4.3.2.2 *The Parousia and final judgment*

The believer’s hope in the Second Advent, the resurrection of the body, the final judgment of all men, and the complete renewal of creation stands squarely upon the fact of Christ’s own bodily resurrection from the grave. In the resurrection event, Christ has already secured His “breakthrough” and thus we have the “certainty of eternal life beyond death” (1982:404). The arrival of the eschatological kingdom of God (which is already present in the preaching of the Gospel and in the work of the Spirit) should be seen as an event that transcends time and history, and will be unveiled in its fullest expression when Jesus returns to earth. The *Parousia* of Christ, for Thieliicke, is firmly grounded in what has already taken place historically “in the event of the resurrection” (1982:428). “The decisive thing,” the victory of Christ Jesus over all that ruined men and the creation, has “already happened and it presses us on toward what has still to happen. The great concluding chord is already quivering in the air” (1982:428).

In terms of the final judgment, God’s saving actions in history—as well as the acceptance and rejection of the gospel as it is continually proclaimed—also anticipate and mirror what will happen in the future. “The last judgment simply makes manifest what has already taken place here and now” as men variously respond to the message of salvation (1982:442). In one real sense, the final judgment has *already* commenced as an “eschatological event in the here and now” (1982:441). Thieliicke explains that the eschatological judgment

takes place already when, faced with a choice between faith and unbelief, people opt for unbelief and thus miss the saving power of Christ (John 3:18; 9:39; 12:47). On the other hand, when they hear his word and believe in him who sent him, they already have everlasting life and have passed from death into life (5:24) (1982:441).

This leads to his conclusion that, in the end, it is not so much that at His Second Advent Christ judges and condemns those who do not believe, but rather, that the impenitent have already judged themselves by their rejection of the Savior. Thieliicke finds biblical support for this in the Gospel of John where the Lord Himself states that He

does not actually judge anyone. He brings salvation. But the Word that he speaks will judge on the last day (12:48). He makes no judicial decision but a

decision does take place. Those who despise him and do not accept his Word (12:48a) have rejected the proffered salvation and therefore judge themselves ... those who scorn this way build a blockade which keeps them in *this* life. Precisely because Christ is the only Savior those who despise his saving Word will find that this Word condemns them at the last judgment (1982:442).

Christ's *Parousia*, Thielicke argues, expresses something beyond the resurrection of the dead and eternal life. While the resurrection of the dead is certainly included in the *Parousia*, it cannot be regarded as "the completion of eternal life" (1982:458). Christ's coming and all that attends this momentous event will show forth the long-awaited "victory of God in which he goes beyond every mere beginning, pledge, hiddenness, mirror, or obscure word to reach his definitive goal and to destroy death as the last enemy" (1982:458).

However, before Christ returns and the eternal state begins, the Church should expect that certain signs will appear. Chief among these eschatological precursors is the persecution of the Church, the rise of the antichrist, and an exponential increase in evil. These signs find their antecedent in certain events that occurred during the earthly life and ministry of Jesus. The certainty of a future day of judgment and the inauguration of a new eternal order is demonstrated, according to Thielicke, especially in the Gospel accounts where Jesus exorcised demons. The Gospels reveal that the demonic spirits would become much more active when Jesus appeared on the scene. Thus,

the gospel message provokes contradiction, the Spirit awakens the virulence of the demonic spirit, and Christ stirs up opposition of what is anti-Christian or even of antichrist in person ... their revolt is the very thing which paradoxically points to the Yes of God and raises expectation of his final victory as this is intimated already in his eschatological acts of history (1982:438).

Since this is true, then the Church must expect that tribulations will increase, both personally and corporately, as the gospel message is proclaimed and God's redemptive work in His Son continues. From one perspective, conditions on earth will not improve despite the best intentions and ingenuity of men. Thielicke notes that the Scriptures, and more exactly those that touch the subject of eschatology, contain an implicit

criticism of every kind of belief in progress which views the kingdom of God as a utopia.... the New Testament never portrays the process of history as a straight-line development to the kingdom. With the approach of the kingdom ... the forces of the abyss and antichrist achieve supreme escalation (cf. Revelation 12 and 13) (1982:421).

This fact leads believers to embrace “modest” expectations for the improvements they can make in the world by means of their good words and other manifestations of the fruits of their faith in the Savior. Knowledge concerning the certain increase of opposition and tribulation inoculates them against hopelessness and despair on one hand and apathy and disengagement on the other (1982:422). Thielicke believes that the signs of the times will be both “personal” in nature, such as instances of individual suffering and death, but also “cosmic” in nature, such as various perturbations in the natural world (1982:436). Together these signs will function as “symbols” that anticipate a future “world-catastrophe” (1982:436). Based upon his reading of 2 Thessalonians and Matthew 24 Thielicke concludes that

[t]he time between the resurrection and the return does not just run on but is exposed to incidents which arise through human traffic with what is wicked and ungodly. Thus salvation does not simply unfold in this aeon. It also provokes its opposite and the conflict between Christ and antichrist undergoes extreme escalation. Thus a longer process of struggle is needed before God’s ‘victory day’ can be declared (1982:429-430).

As for the precise timing of the *Parousia*, Thielicke cautions that we must respect the fact that there are certain “epistemological limits” as to what can be known concerning the details of the end (1982:438). At best, our knowledge of the final judgment and appearance of the Lord is only partial, and we can affirm little more than simply “the fact of this second advent” (1982:438). However, the limitations of human finitude do not diminish the Church’s confession of the *imminence* of His return. The Church has always affirmed the “suddenness of the Lord’s Parousia” and its “unannounced and incalculable nature in spite of all the signs” (1982:430). Practically, this means that while the Church waits for the return of the Lord, she must be faithfully engaged in the daily duties of responsible discipleship, which for Thielicke is the arena where the believer’s death and resurrection with Christ is “worked out” (1982:429):

Life in the kingdom of heaven is being and living with Christ. It consists of the relation which is granted to me even here on earth by the Word and Spirit. As my righteousness in both cases is not my own righteousness but an alien righteousness that is mine by clinging to Christ, so my resurrection life is not my own as a quality of immortality but an alien life *in which I participate by being a member of Christ’s body* [emphasis added] (Thielicke, 1982:461).

Thielicke appeals to the parable of the virgins (Matthew 25:1-13) to make his point that belief in the imminence of Christ’s return does not lead to inactivity, disengagement with the world, or an obsession with the details of the *Parousia* that remain hidden

within the divine counsel. Rather, belief in the immanent return of Christ has to do with preparedness. We must realize that every new day granted to us by God is

qualified by the nearness of the Lord and the unforeseeability of his coming. We no longer ask: *When* is his future? We ask: What does it *mean* for us?" It means: Watch. But watching is a form of soberness which demands extreme realism. To be realistic here is not to confuse the transitory with the eternal, the little with the big.... It is not to treat the relative absolutely. Watching means being ready to effect a transvaluation of all values (Thielicke, 1982:431).

While there is both suffering and waiting in store for the Church until the end, all who have believed upon Christ can rejoice that "the serpent's head has been broken" and all that remains is "the writhing of its body" (1982:431).

4.3.3 Summary

Thielicke's theological writings demonstrate his stalwart belief in the personal salvation of sinners and in the rich soteriological blessings that accompany the twin graces of regeneration and justification through Christ. The salvation of sinners, promised in the Gospel and made effectual through the power of God's Spirit and Word, is essentially the recovery of the *imago Dei*, which is perfectly embodied and exemplified in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Salvation is both secured and guaranteed by Christ's life of perfect righteousness, His atoning death, and His bodily resurrection, which for Thielicke was an historic event with far-reaching consequences. The result is eternal life, which Thielicke understood as beginning in the *present* experience of the believer and continuing on through the eternal *future*. Defined in the simplest of terms, the gift of eternal life is the reestablishment of *fellowship* with God into which the sinner enters in this life by union with Christ. Yet, full enjoyment will be possible only subsequent to the resurrection and Second Advent. The hope of the resurrection of the body, the definitive triumph of Christ over His enemies, and the promise of eternal fellowship with God serve as the believer's immovable basis for peace and confidence here and now. The practical benefit of this present hope and certainty is the Spirit-empowered ability to face up to life's various temptations and trials that are directly associated with the PES.

Following the eschatological trajectory of the Scriptures and of the New Testament in particular, Thielicke also envisions the restoration and renewal of creation itself. The promise of cosmic salvation is foreshadowed in the reality of individual regeneration.

Ultimately God's original purpose for the created order will be recovered; the vestiges of man's rebellion will be fully removed, and the eternal kingdom of God will be inaugurated. In the meantime, since the timing of the *Parousia* remains unknown to men, believers are to be busily engaged in those duties that are commensurate with responsible discipleship. Primarily, this means hopeful watching and expectant waiting even in the face of earthly trials and tribulations.

Finally, Thieliicke has offered the suggestion that there may be a certain wideness in God's saving mercy that extends even to those who have already died. He holds out hope that in the end there will be the possibility that deceased unbelievers may yet repent and believe upon the Savior. While this view may not be formally classified as a fully developed universalism, it does represent a more modest and limited form of universalism, offering hope only for those who have never heard the Gospel or were otherwise prevented from exposure to it. For Thieliicke there remains the possibility of *postmortem* repentance, and in this way God's greater saving purposes will transcend and overshadow the self-inflicted horrors brought down upon the human race on account of its rebellion against the Creator.

4.4 Chapter summary

In this chapter, the researcher has attempted to evaluate Thieliicke's theology at three specific points, each of which are logically connected to the PES and are prominent in his sermons that specifically touch the subject of the PES: 1) his views on the doctrine of man, 2) his views on the doctrine of sin, and 3) his views on the doctrine of redemption. The purpose for this is to lay the proper theological groundwork that will be necessary for the evaluation of his sermons on the PES.

Regarding the doctrine of man, Thieliicke has articulated a robust, theologically orthodox position on the creation of man as *imago Dei* and has argued that this fact is the basis for man's uniqueness and dignity in comparison to other creatures. Since only man is the *imago Dei*, human life takes on a distinct sacredness and inestimable value. This fact then lies at the philosophical and emotional core of the PES. The suffering and death of humans is logically problematic only upon the presupposition of life's intrinsic value and significance. In other words the PES is only possible, in a logically coherent sense, within a worldview that assumes such an exalted status for human beings. The

Scriptures provide just such a foundation and, therefore, the PES is a natural byproduct given the biblical meta-narrative of the creation, fall, and redemption of men created in the divine likeness.

Secondly, Thieliicke has set forth his doctrine of the fall in equally clear and decisive terms. He understands the spiritual failure of humanity in the Garden of Eden as the cause of all subsequent human suffering, including both moral and natural evils. While this momentous event happened within the sovereign purview of God, man remains morally accountable for the misuse of the creaturely freedom with which the Creator lovingly endowed him. While the source and precise nature of evil is enshrouded in impenetrable mystery, human history is the arena where the universal and often-horrific consequences of man's rebellion against God are repeatedly experienced. Specifically, sin has resulted in physical suffering and death, alienation from God (or spiritual death), the ruin of creation itself, the destruction of human relationships (both vertical and horizontal), and suffering in all of its varied manifestations.

Finally, the researcher has investigated what Thieliicke believed concerning the redemption of man and the ultimate restoration of all creation by virtue of the atoning work of Christ and His bodily resurrection. Thieliicke suggests that the present suffering of humans and that of the creation itself will ultimately give way to the appearance of the eschatological kingdom of God and entrance into the eternal state. All suffering, whatever its form or specific circumstances, will be overshadowed by the coming *Parousia* and the full experience of eternal fellowship with God that is presently guaranteed as a future blessing by Christ's own resurrection and ascension to the right hand of God. The point at which Thieliicke diverts from a more orthodox doctrine of salvation is his modest suggestion relative to the possibility of the postmortem salvation of certain repentant sinners.

In the next chapter the researcher shall move to an investigation of Helmut Thieliicke as a preacher of the written Word. This will include an assessment of his perspectives on preaching in general and of preaching on the PES specifically. The researcher shall also examine Thieliicke's view of the role of the Holy Spirit both in the preaching and in the hearing of the sermon. The chapter will end with an identification of a selection of Thieliicke's published sermons that explicitly address the PES. These sermons will be examined in Chapter Six.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 THIELICKE AS A MINISTER OF THE WRITTEN WORD: THE ROLE OF THE PREACHER AND THE SERMON WITH SPECIFIC APPLICATION TO THE PROBLEM OF EVIL AND SUFFERING

5.1 Introduction

At this juncture it is now appropriate to initiate a specific consideration of Helmut Thielicke's actual preaching on the PES with reference to his published sermons treating this subject. To set the stage for this evaluation the researcher will first give attention to how Thielicke's preaching has been described and classified by others, most notably by Dirks, who spent six months with Thielicke in Hamburg in 1967 (Dirks, 1972:5). This will provide the necessary frame of reference from which to consider Thielicke's preaching on the narrower subject of the PES.

Following this initial orientation to Thielicke's vision for the essence and praxis of preaching, the researcher will move to the more specific consideration of Thielicke's preaching on the PES. This will involve three steps, the first two being essential for the third, which is the primary focus of this thesis. First, the researcher shall give attention to Thielicke's stated theology of preaching in general, including his particular criticisms of contemporary preaching and suggested correctives and to his understanding of the vital link between preaching and theology. Secondly, the researcher will investigate Thielicke's view of the role of the Holy Spirit in the preaching and hearing of the written Scriptures. This will include an evaluation of the connection between the Spirit and the inscripturated Word and the activity of the Spirit in relation to the preacher and the audience. Then, having gleaned a sufficient understanding of Thielicke's general theology of preaching, the researcher will probe his view of preaching on the specific subject of the PES. This will include a brief analysis of Thielicke's own view of the PES followed by a demonstration of his sermonic treatment of the PES in his published sermon manuscripts.

5.1.1 An introductory orientation regarding the main characteristics of Thielicke's vision on the essence and praxis of preaching

Before commencing with the investigation of Thielicke's theology and practice of preaching with particular reference to his published sermons on the PES, it would be helpful to consider briefly how his preaching has been described by others. Thielicke's preaching has been thoroughly investigated in two notable works by Dirks (1968, 1972), a former professor of speech and communication at Eastern Nazarene College of Wollaston, Massachusetts, in the early 1960s. Dirks spent considerable time with Thielicke in Germany and had the opportunity to hear a number of his sermons delivered in person in his native German language. In his 1972 homiletics book *Laymen Look at Preaching: Lay Expectation Factors in Relation to the Preaching of Helmut Thielicke*, which resulted from his intensive study of Thielicke, Dirks highlights several interesting features of his preaching that provide helpful insights into his strengths and wide appeal as a pulpit minister.

5.1.1.1 *Sermon type*

As to the type of sermons that Thielicke normally delivered, Dirks classified them as "textual-thematic," meaning that the preacher extracts the theme of the message from the biblical text itself and, with the text securely in view, he then "formulates the main point of the sermon" (Dirks, 1972:154). In his autobiography Thielicke himself stated that one of the main reasons he adopted this methodological approach to sermon development—a method that led him regularly to preach a series of messages "oriented towards a sequence of biblical texts or a single subject"—was to guard himself from the temptation of "arbitrarily choosing texts" or subject matter on his own "authority" (1995:292-293). In addition, he believed that this textual-thematic approach was also

fruitful for the audience because their interest was sustained by the continuity and development of a particular subject or train of thought, as a result of which they always looked forward eagerly to the next sermon (1995:293).

In *The Trouble with the Church* (1965b) Thielicke provided his working definition of a textual-thematic sermon. He described it as

a meditative presentation in which one goes through the text, following its train of thought, considering and taking seriously every word in it, and thus as far as possible exploring and exhausting the whole of it (1965b:62).

In such a textually driven sermon the main point of the message is commensurate with the main point of the biblical text under study, and Thielicke articulated three reasons for the superiority of this methodology over and against a purely thematic approach. First, this method of sermon development and preaching allows the biblical text to “be an end in itself” (1965b:63). In other words, the sermon’s authority rests upon and terminates in the Scriptures and not upon some other external source. Within the scriptural text the preacher discovers “a center and a periphery” and he then “illuminates it on the basis of its main idea” (1965b:63). Secondly, this method not only helps to keep the sermon true to the Scriptures, but it also allows the preacher to achieve a greater degree of “order and clarity” in both preparation and delivery (1965b:63). When the theme of the sermon comes directly from the biblical text, it is much easier, practically speaking, for the preacher to “arrive at an outline” for the sermon, and this “makes the whole message transparent” to both preacher and audience (1965b:63). Third, the textual-thematic method of sermon construction is of greater benefit to the hearers since the structure of the message is typically more memorable. A biblical sermon with a well-defined outline flowing from the biblical text is more easily retained and passed on to others (1965b:64). Such a sermon is more ‘lay-friendly’ in this regard.

Thielicke also maintained that the superiority of this method of preaching should be appreciated in light of the theological liberalism of the nineteenth century, particularly its dramatic impact upon preaching. He claimed that as a result of the rampant theological declensions of Protestant Liberalism the thematic sermon was made

the *magna carta* of homiletics. The more the preachers became estranged from the Bible and the more they courted the favor of the spirit of the times, the more the sermon became a lecture on some theme, such as “Man and Culture,” “The Ethical Problem of the Sermon on the Mount,” “The Nature of Love” (1965b:62).

By the utilization of a purely thematic method of preaching, the methodology championed by the theological liberals, Thielicke warned that disastrous consequences would result as the very nature of preaching itself changed, and the text of the Bible was functionally

degraded to the level of a mere motto or even a mere refrain. The text was repeatedly quoted as an illustration or to underscore and corroborate what was said; but it was understood that its meaning, that is, its message, could not be taken very literally. It was something like the sound-track music in modern

films; it constitutes a background noise which has an independent purpose of its own (1965b:62-63).

However, as strongly as Thielicke felt about the necessity of preaching textually controlled sermons, he did see the benefit that a more thematically oriented sermon could possibly provide for some audiences. He believed that in rare cases this type of sermon could address and answer certain questions of the day deemed relevant by those who otherwise had “no desire to listen to any biblical exposition whatsoever” (1965b:65). The thematic sermon, then, had only a limited usefulness for Thielicke, perhaps in terms of what might be labeled ‘pre-evangelism’ or introducing the gospel in public settings outside of the formal worship of God.

5.1.1.2 Preaching as a confrontation and a call to decision

A second way that Dirks described Thielicke’s preaching was that it involved a life-changing encounter with the audience that would inevitably lead to a point of decision. According to Dirks, Thielicke believed that a minister could not properly preach the gospel without placing before the audience “a never ending series of challenges” and that in such preaching “confrontation with decision” should occur “continually in the course of the proclamation” (1972:170). And while Thielicke gave no formal altar call at the end of his sermons, Dirks noted that there were “explicit invitation[s], challenges, and appeals” presented throughout Thielicke’s sermons, and that a discernable call for decision in some form or another was present in every sermon he preached (1972:171).

In addition, Dirks reported that Thielicke was able to preach for a decision in such a way that the listeners were not aware of it. Those hearing him would respond “affirmatively” without being aware that they were “being confronted with the necessity for making decisions” (1972:287). Though confrontational to some degree, his messages were not unnecessarily offensive. As he preached, his listeners were very much aware of a dialog taking place between the preacher and the audience, between the pulpit and the pew. Thielicke effectively established this dialogical atmosphere by the frequent use of the personal pronouns “we” and “you” in his sermons (1972:288). This fact corresponds with the way Thielicke later expressed his stated goal for each sermon he delivered. He wanted to ensure that every listener had been “personally touched in the center of his being” by the message and could, therefore, say that “I was the subject of this sermon, he meant me” (Thielicke, 1995:292). These comments

confirm Dirks' observation of the deep sense of concern and pastoral care that Thieliicke had for his listeners, particularly that each would be personally touched and moved to decision by the message of the Word of God.

During his ministry years Thieliicke was also keenly aware of the great gulf that existed between the professor's lectern and the minister's pulpit—a gulf that he believed was “wider and worse than the rift between denominations and the confessions” (Dirks, 1972:157). Thieliicke was disturbed by the tendency of the ministers of his day to preach in ways that were beyond the understanding of everyday people. He believed that the use of the kind of technical theological vocabulary one would expect to be dispensed from a professor's lectern had unnecessarily infiltrated the pulpit (Dirks, 1972:187; Thieliicke, 1995:131-132). This resulted in what Thieliicke described as a gap between pulpit and lectern. To alleviate this problem, Thieliicke maintained that this intellectual and linguistic chasm must be bridged by a “continuing conversation with the laymen” (Dirks, 1972:157). The pulpit minister must embrace the task of translating the message into the language of the layperson and deliver the sermon in a way that meaningfully connects with those untrained in the language and concepts of the theological academy. To accomplish this, Thieliicke thoroughly investigated his audience, took careful note of their religious, educational, and socio-economic backgrounds, and sought to find that “aspect of human nature that is common to all human beings” (1995:292). He looked for the very “center of their being,” that which “moved” them “by fear and hope, by their finitude, by ambition, desires, the search for meaning, by the burden of guilt and torment of conscience” (Thieliicke, 1995:292). In 1955 the German newsmagazine *Der Spiegel* reported on Thieliicke's preaching during his ministry in Hamburg at St. Michael's Church. The article confirmed that Thieliicke manifested a unique knowledge of those issues that would be of interest to the average working person, that he knew the “newsreel and the everyday life of the Germans,” and that this unique skill made him “a rarity in the Evangelical Church” (Anon., 1955:34).

That Thieliicke accomplished his goal of preaching for decisions by effectively bridging the gap between the theologian and the layman is further confirmed by Lund in his review of Thieliicke's collection of sermons on the parables of Jesus contained in *The Waiting Father* (1959). Lund describes the mere reading of these sermons as “both a religious experience and a theological exercise” (1960:273). He noted that these

“simple, biblical, relevant” messages were obviously produced by a preacher who desires his “message heard and accepted by many” and

by a man who knows the Gospel, who knows human nature, and who knows how to relate the one to the other.... They are scholarly without seeming to be so. They are theological without being dull or trite.... They are almost consistently masterpieces in the art of homiletics.... Thielicke knows theology and has a theological position.... Hereafter let no one say that systematic theologians cannot preach or that European theologians do not know how to preach. There is Thielicke to give the lie to both claims (Lund, 1960:273).

5.1.1.3 *Sermon preparation and delivery*

A third characteristic of Thielicke’s preaching noted in Dirks’s study relates to his disciplined sermon preparation, which, joined with his “boundless energy” and “devotion” to the task, resulted in his homiletical success (Dirks, 1972:286). To understand why Thielicke was committed to thorough sermon preparation, one must first understand how he defined effective, thought-provoking preaching. Dirks’s research reveals Thielicke’s conviction that good sermons and effectual preaching resulted from six factors:

(1) meeting the intellectual demands of preaching, (2) making the Word contemporary, (3) speaking to men as individuals, (4) engaging in “dialog,” (5) helping men to ask the right questions, and (6) using the textual-thematic method (Dirks, 1972:172).

To accomplish these objectives would require great effort and focus on the part of the preacher and the accompanying conviction that he is “a chosen instrument in the hand of God” and thus occupies a position of profound “responsibility toward the message he is to preach” (Dirks, 1972:182). Thielicke further explained the weight of personal accountability he carried with regard to the task of sermon preparation and delivery:

Although preaching was a task that I undertook with joy and gratitude, it also carried a heavy burden of responsibility. When I saw the people gathered below me, above me, and around me in the great dome of the church, when I saw the little band of loyal churchgoing Christians and the much larger crowd of people who had only a peripheral relationship to the Church and who often had no spiritual home at all, I was, despite my happiness at the task, also impressed by its immensity (Thielicke, 1995:288-289).

As a result of these deeply held convictions, Thielicke’s sermons were carefully prepared and revealed a concerted attention to detail. The “prime evidence” of his meticulous preparation was “the message itself” (Dirks, 1972:193). Dirks has also noted that additional evidence of such disciplined preparation was the fact that he took a

“multi-page manuscript” into the pulpit with him for each sermon he delivered (1972:193). Dirks describes the way he skillfully utilized his manuscript in the pulpit:

[A]lthough he turns the pages regularly as he progresses in the delivery of the sermon, he presents it in such a way that he appears not to be reading, but speaks in highly personal conversational tones, fluently, and with a wide variation of tonal inflections (Dirks, 1972:193).

Interestingly, Dirks discovered that while there was a “considerable difference in terminology and sentence structure” between Thielicke’s manuscript and the actual sermon he delivered, there was “very little difference in the continuity and the basic content of the sermon” (Dirks, 1972:193). This would seem to indicate that Thielicke relied upon his memory in order “to reproduce what he has on the typed page without the necessity of following it word for word” (Dirks, 1972:193). This also strongly suggests that Thielicke’s system of sermon preparation far exceeded the mere “composition of the message” and included significant reflection upon the actual delivery of the sermon or a mental rehearsal (Dirks, 1972:193).

Another aspect of Thielicke’s sermon preparation noted by Dirks was his familiarity with great theologians and preachers of the past. Dirks reports that in virtually every sermon Thielicke delivered there were abundant quotations from the Church Fathers, early Christian theologians and biblical scholars, and especially Martin Luther, his “foremost and most often used authority” (Dirks, 1972:192). Thielicke was also fond of appealing to secular poets and other sources outside the Christian faith. Likewise, he believed that every minister could benefit from regularly reading sermons of the great preachers of the past who also evidenced a wide scope of literary interests and a healthy appreciation for those who came before them (Dirks, 1972:195).

Dirks also reports that Thielicke’s own skills as a theologian, philosopher, and Christian ethicist assisted him in the rigorous preparation of his sermons and led to his effectiveness in the pulpit. He concludes that Thielicke’s “broad background in theology and ethics, his method of developing the sermon, his use of the Bible, and his thoroughness in preparation together with other strengths in his preaching” were the prime factors that made it possible for him to “preach in such a way that his preaching appeals to persons of widely varying theological positions” (Dirks, 1972:286). It was also evident to Dirks that Thielicke had no patience with what he called “slipshod preaching,” the kind that lacked sufficient preparation and was “false to the

Reformation” (Dirks, 1972:171). Evidently, Thieliicke believed very strongly that both his methodological approach and his theology of preaching were consistent with that practiced by the Protestant Reformers.

5.1.1.4 *Pulpit style, physical description, and vocal qualities*

As for the actual live delivery of the sermon, Dirks describes Thieliicke as a very large and physically imposing man who walked with a high degree of “dignity,” yet with the “relatively relaxed movement of one who is accustomed to being observed” (Dirks, 1972:185). He is also described as having “an open, friendly, well-shaped face, which is capable of a wide range of expressions” (Dirks, 1972:185). While under observation at St. Michael’s in Hamburg, Dirks reports, Helmut wore the “customary Lutheran robe” that was distinguished by its wide, flared collar that rose rather uncomfortably to the level of the chin (1972:185). Throughout his typical hour-long sermons, Thieliicke was able to maintain a high level of vocal and emotional intensity and repeatedly took “a handkerchief from his pocket to wipe the perspiration from his forehead” (Dirks, 1972:186).

Dirks notes that Thieliicke’s voice was a “deep bass” and powerfully resonated throughout the auditorium (1972:186). Yet, his was not an artificial ‘pulpit voice’ but one that sounded natural and unforced. When Thieliicke expanded or contracted the volume of his voice, Dirks reports that there was “no undesirable change of quality” and that this fact convincingly demonstrated that he had “mastered the art of public speech far beyond the average minister” (Dirks, 1972:186).

5.1.1.5 *Illustrations and rhetorical skills*

Dirks’s research on Thieliicke also revealed that the high quality and clever structure of his sermons evidenced his “minute attention to the details of rhetoric” (Dirks, 1972:188). For Dirks this point was most powerfully confirmed by means of his effective use of sermon illustrations as a rhetorical device. According to Dirks this was a feature of Thieliicke’s preaching that uniquely distinguished him from other pulpit ministers (1972:179). He states that his brilliant use of colorful and compelling illustrations, by which the listeners could easily recognize and identify themselves in

the sermon, was one of Thieliicke's most obvious homiletical strengths (Dirks, 1972:163). He claims:

The outstanding characteristic of Thieliicke's use of illustrations is that they are chosen and told in such a way that it is possible for the listener to identify with the persons or action in the illustration (Dirks, 1972:179).

This resulted in a tight connection between the audience and the sermon and brought an immediate and powerful sense of "contemporary relevance" to Thieliicke's messages (Dirks, 1972:287). Thieliicke believed that for sermon illustrations to be counted as effective, they should "inspire the listener" to do what the preacher is suggesting in the sermon (Dirks, 1972:180). As for the source of his sermon illustrations, Thieliicke claims that he "started various collections in files and card indexes in order to have suitable quotations and other materials at hand" and that he continually looked for anything in his reading that could be used illustratively in the pulpit (Thieliicke, 1995:292). This exercise also kept him knowledgeable of current affairs and human needs and enabled him to preach with the freshness and relevance he aimed for.

5.1.2 Thieliicke's particular appreciation of Spurgeon

A final introductory matter that should be briefly acknowledged is Thieliicke's great love and appreciation for the famous English Baptist minister Charles Haddon Spurgeon (b. 1834, d. 1892). Thieliicke's original 1961 book *Vom geistlichen Reden: Begegnung mit Spurgeon*, which was later translated into English and released in 1963 as *Encounter with Spurgeon*, was an appropriate tribute to the preacher that he most admired. This work is a combination of Thieliicke's personal tribute to Spurgeon that was prefaced to selections from Spurgeon's own *Lectures to My Students* that was first published in 1875. Thieliicke, a Lutheran, was enthralled by Spurgeon, a Baptist, because his courageous preaching of the Word of God kindled a great spiritual fire across England "and turned into a beacon that shone across the seas and down through the generations" (1963b:1). Skinner (1984) notes that in stark contrast to Spurgeon, other Victorian-age preachers

neglected the needs of their hearers, ignored logic, disdained doctrine, and bored congregations with material of little value, delivered in a style both verbose and irrelevant. Sermons lacked spiritual power and experiential authenticity (1984:16).

However, Thieliicke recognized that Spurgeon was “no mere brush fire of sensationalism, but an inexhaustible blaze that glowed and burned on solid hearths and was fed by the wells of the eternal Word” (1963b:1). As Spurgeon preached the Scriptures, the Word of God suddenly became

so close that you not only hear its messages but breathe its very atmosphere. The heart is so full of Scripture that it leavens the consciousness, peoples the imagination with its images, and determines the landscape of the soul by its climate. And because it has what might be called a total presence, the Bible as the Word of God is really concentrated life that enters every pore and teaches us not only to see and hear but also to taste and smell the wealth of reality that is spread out before us here (Thieliicke, 1963d:9).

Though Spurgeon preached for audiences numbering in the thousands every Sunday for many years, Thieliicke admired him for never running dry as a preacher of the Word. The freshness and zeal of his pulpit was due to the fact that he was “never anything but a recipient” of the same Word he proclaimed, and he “gave what only flowed into him in never ceasing supply from the channels of Holy Scripture” (Thieliicke, 1963b:1-2). Thieliicke believed that Spurgeon was not only a superior example of pulpit eloquence and homiletical excellence but was also worthy of emulating in terms of his personal piety and humble devotion to Christ. Thieliicke was impressed at how Spurgeon

immersed himself in the quietness of prayer and meditation, receptively filling his mind and soul, and then went forth recreated from these quiet hours to pour himself out without reserve. Hence the temptation of becoming the star preacher and enjoying the respect and adulation of men held no attraction for him (Thieliicke, 1963b:7).

In the end, however, Thieliicke would argue that Spurgeon should be read, studied, and respectfully imitated by all ministers because he was a preacher who was demonstrably “endowed with the power of the effectual Word,” and the lives of countless people were “actually changed, and moral laxity was replaced by order and peace” (Thieliicke, 1963b:5). What was singularly impressive about Spurgeon in Thieliicke’s eyes was the fact that his only weapon of transformation was the Word of God, and by its faithful proclamation it “created its own hearers and changed souls” (Thieliicke, 1963b:1).

5.1.3 Summary

The aim of this introductory section has been to supply a sufficient foundation for evaluating Thieliicke’s published sermons that explicitly treat the PES. By understanding his unique homiletical strengths, Thieliicke’s effectiveness in addressing

the narrow theme of the PES may be better appreciated and imitated by modern preachers. To summarize, it is clear that Helmut Thieliicke was a remarkable preacher for a number of significant reasons. First, he possessed the necessary verbal and non-verbal skills that made him an exemplary pulpit communicator. Second, he was dedicated to the rigorous preparation of textually controlled sermons that were relevant to the lives of his congregants. Third, he was familiar with successful preachers from the past, most notably Charles Haddon Spurgeon, and sought to learn from their examples.

5.2 Thieliicke's stated views on preaching: definition, criticisms and correctives and the link between preaching and theology

Before the preaching of Helmut Thieliicke on the narrow subject of the PES can be sufficiently evaluated and analyzed (below in 6.0), it is necessary to consider how he viewed preaching in general. This will involve 1) ascertaining how he defined the task or act of preaching, 2) taking into consideration his serious criticisms of contemporary preaching and suggested correctives, and 3) noting the dynamic link he recognized between preaching and theology. At the outset, however, it would seem reasonable to provide a limited bibliographic survey of some of the more noteworthy definitions of preaching that have their roots in roughly the same historical context in which Thieliicke lived and preached. This will place him within the proper frame of reference and will facilitate a better understanding of his views on the subject as well as his specific points of criticism. The following authors have been chosen by the researcher because they have been recognized as authorities in the field of homiletics in the time period corresponding to Thieliicke's unique historical setting of World War II and its aftermath. (For example, note the early to mid-twentieth century sources listed in the bibliographies of Blackwood [1947], Ford [1979], and Stott [1982], where these names and monographs appear.)

Karl Barth:

Barth, the renowned Swiss Reformed theologian, set forth his conviction, most notably against the background of Schleiermacher's influence, that in the act of pulpit proclamation the minister is speaking the actual Word of God (Glick, 1960:31). Consequently, God reveals Himself in the form of the written and spoken Word, "that is

to say with attendant cognitive and linguistic form and content, and not via some mysterious and nebulous feeling or sense of ultimacy” (Hart, 1995:83). In fact, Hart has claimed that Barth’s entire theological project may be reduced to a “theology of proclamation” since he insists that the “only legitimate starting point for truly theological activity” is the fact that God has “proclaimed his Word to mankind” and thus has “revealed Himself” (1995:81). Glick has noted that Barth

did not attempt to “go beyond” Schleiermacher and Baur, Troeltsch and Harnack, but set theology on a different road. To the psychologism and the relativism which he saw within theological circles, he counterpoised a position which took as its central theme the *Einmaligkeit* of a speaking God (1960:3-31).

Preaching in Barth’s view “is the Word of God which he himself has spoken; but he makes use, according to his good pleasure, of the ministry of a man, by means of a passage from Scripture” (Barth, 1963:9). This simple definition of preaching should be interpreted in view of Barth’s unique understanding of the written Word of God that naturally flows from his dialectical presuppositions regarding the full divinity and the full humanity of this and all forms of divine revelation (Hart, 1995:85). Barth sees the Word of God as being manifested in three specific forms, each of which is both divine and human existing as “one perichoretic reality” (Hart, 1995:86):

For Barth Jesus Christ is God’s Word, holy Scripture is God’s Word, and the preaching of the church is God’s Word. God speaks in each of these three places and we cannot discern any greater or lesser among them in this respect (Hart, 1995:87).

At its core Barth sees preaching as the “explanation of Scripture” (Barth, 1963:9), which is but one form of God’s mysterious Word (Hart, 1995:85). This inscripturated form of the Word represents the preacher’s ultimate source of authority, and it “stands in the place of Jesus Himself” whose presence, either in His historic or risen mode of being, is not accessible but must be “mediated to us by the text of Scripture” (Hart, 1995:88). The sacred task of preaching

follows from the command given to the Church to serve the Word of God by means of a man called to this task. It is this man’s duty to proclaim to his fellowmen what God himself has to say to them, by explaining, in his own words, a passage from Scripture which concerns them personally (Barth, 1963:9).

Since the Word of God is being communicated to the audience by means of the minister’s verbal proclamation, his “prime duty” above all others is the “preparation of his sermon” (1963:63). Preaching, then, is no trivial matter. Rather, it is a solemn duty

and awesome responsibility, functioning as the divinely authorized mechanism for effecting the salvation of sinners by means of a living encounter with the Word. As Barth claims, when preaching is “true to what God has revealed to us,” it effectually brings about the reconciliation of sinners to God (1963:22). Barth also asserts “wherever men receive this Word,” the Word that is proclaimed by the minister, “there is the Church, the assembly of those who have been called by the Lord” (1963:22).

Andrew Blackwood:

Blackwood, the Presbyterian minister and former professor of Practical Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary, calls preaching “the noblest work on earth” and has offered one of the classic and uncomplicated definitions of this activity (1948:13). Preaching, he writes, may be defined as the communication of “divine truth through personality” or “the truth of God voiced by a chosen personality to meet human needs” (1948:13). This simple working definition echoes that of P. Brooks in his earlier and popular *Lectures on Preaching* (1877:5): “Preaching is the communication of truth by man to men. It has two essential elements, truth and personality.” Both men have stressed the tension that exists in preaching between that which is divine, the truth of God in the written Word, and the human component, the personhood of the preacher through which God speaks.

Frank Colquhoun:

Colquhoun, the former Canon Residentiary of Southwark Cathedral, likewise notes that preaching is first and foremost concerned with the truth and particularly God’s truth as found in Scripture. Yet, preaching also involves the personality of the preacher, and in this regard it may be said that in the act of preaching “God uses the agency of human persons to convey His message and effect His purpose” (1965:25). Colquhoun observes that the incarnate Christ is the Word of God in the *primary* sense; the written Scriptures are the Word of God in the *secondary* sense; and the sermon is the Word of God in the *tertiary* sense (1965:27). Thus, the word proclaimed by the preacher becomes the Word of God precisely “because he points away from himself to the Bible and the Christ to whom it bears witness” (1965:27). Preaching then demonstrates God in action both through the personality of the one preaching and in the activity of the Holy Spirit who enables the hearers to “respond in repentance, faith and obedience” (1965:27).

James Daane:

Daane, the founding editor of *The Reformed Journal* and former professor of Ministry and Theology at Fuller Theological Seminary, takes pains to emphasize the highly mysterious and even paradoxical nature of Christian preaching:

There is something about the sermon as the *form* of the proclamation of the Word of God, and something about the pulpit as the *place* where the church speaks to itself and to the world, which indicate that pulpit proclamation is so effective as to suggest the mysterious (1980:2).

He argues that preaching is simultaneously “the very human word of church proclamation” as well as a “divine Word uttered by God” (1980:13). He explains:

God is present in preaching; indeed God himself speaks his Word in the church’s proclamation and gives utterance to his voice in the voice of the preacher.... The pulpit is, therefore, where the action is.... The congregation in the pews hears not only its minister, but its God (1980:8).

He also believes that preaching the effectual Word is more than the voice of God to the church speaking through her minister; it is nothing less than “an enactment of the Word” (1980:3). The one who preaches the Word of God is actually *doing* the Word in the spirit of James 1:22 and this “no less than one who works in the streets for justice and righteousness” (1980:3). As this Word of God is preached, the congregation hears God’s voice that effectually and mysteriously creates a community of people who then become doers of the Word themselves (1980:3). A Protestant pulpit, he also argues, is a sacred and holy place precisely because “God is present and from there he goes forth and is heard in the midst of the congregation” (1980:9). Like the incarnate Word, the inscripturated Word takes on a more personal human form in the act of preaching, and when rightly proclaimed by the minister, “the written Word approximates more closely the Word which became flesh in Jesus Christ” (1980:15).

Charles Harold Dodd:

Dodd, the Welsh New Testament scholar and Protestant theologian, also offers a very succinct definition of Christian preaching. He understands this activity as “the public proclamation of Christianity to the non-Christian world” (1964:7). Dodd distinguishes preaching from teaching and claims that the apostles maintained this distinction: “For the early Church, then, to preach the Gospel was by no means the same thing as to deliver moral instruction or exhortation” (1964:8). Following more closely the New

Testament record of the preaching of Paul, Dodd has observed that there were unique contents that characterized the apostolic preaching of the Gospel, or the *kerygma*: “the facts of the death and resurrection of Christ,” which were proclaimed in “an eschatological setting” (1964:13). For Dodd, therefore, preaching is more narrowly defined in terms of the announcement of the *kerygma* following the example and practice of the first century apostles.

Peter Taylor Forsyth:

Forsyth, the Scottish Congregational minister and principal of Hackney College, London, claimed that “with its preaching Christianity stands or falls” (1980:1). He argued that preaching is the central feature and distinguishing mark of Christianity and of truly Christian worship. He also defined Christian preaching against the background of other forms of speech:

It is quite different from oratory. The pulpit is another place, and another kind of place, from the platform. Many succeed in the one, and yet are failures on the other. The Christian preacher is not the successor of the Greek orator, but of the Hebrew prophet. The orator comes with but an inspiration, the prophet comes with a revelation (1980:1).

According to Forsyth, the preacher’s message must derive from the Scriptures, from the “sacrament of the Word” (1980:6). To preach messages grounded in the Bible is the only way the minister may be true to the apostolic example and to the Protestant Reformation that recovered the central place of “the Bible over the Church” (1980:8).

The apostolic succession is the evangelical [succession]. It is with the preachers of the Word, and not with its episcopal organisers. Our churches are stone pulpits rather than shrines. The sacrament which gives value to all other sacraments is the Sacrament of the living Word (1980:7).

Forsyth argues that the Bible is “the book of that Christian community whose organ is the preacher,” and, therefore, it has a “living connection with the community” (1980:9). Preaching then is strictly defined as the proclamation of the truth of the Word of God, and ministers that are considered Christian in any sense of the term must see the explication of the Bible as their very “charter” (1980:9).

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones:

In his classic work *Preaching and Preachers* (1971) the famed Welsh Protestant theologian and minister of Westminster Chapel says that any “true definition of preaching” must include the affirmation that the minister’s main objective in the pulpit is to do nothing less than “deliver the message from God” to his audience (1971:53). The preacher in the pulpit is “the mouthpiece of God and of Christ to address those people” (1971:53). With these things appropriately considered, Lloyd-Jones asserts that it is no exaggeration to view “the work of preaching” as “the highest and the greatest and the most glorious calling to which anyone can ever be called” and “the most urgent need” both in the Christian church and in the world at large (1971:9). Lloyd-Jones also has observed that when one considers

man’s real need, and also the nature of the salvation announced and proclaimed in the Scriptures, you are driven to the conclusion that the primary task of the Church is to preach and proclaim this, to show man’s real need, and to show the only remedy, the only cure for it (1971:26).

In light of this universal need of salvation, Lloyd-Jones states that the “chief end of preaching” is “to give men and women a sense of God and His presence” by means of the delivery of the written Word (1971:97).

John Stott:

Stott, the former Director of the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity, defines the task of Christian preaching in his popular homiletics book *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century*, first published in 1982. Stott argues that preaching is “indispensable to Christianity,” and without it “a necessary part” of the church’s “authenticity” would be lost (1982:15). This is true because Christianity, at its most basic level, is “a religion of the Word of God” (1982:15). That is, it is a religion of revelation, and, more specifically, a religion that claims that God has condescended to fallen humanity to reveal Himself “by the most straightforward means of communication known to us, namely by word and words” (1982:15). This Word from God to sinful man was sounded initially through the voices of the Old Testament prophets whose main task was that of interpreting “the significance of his actions in the history of Israel” (1982:15). Secondly and preeminently, God spoke His words in the incarnate Christ, the Word of God made flesh in the Person of the Son.

Thirdly, Stott notes that through the act of preaching God speaks today by His Spirit, and the inscripturated Word proclaimed from the pulpit “bears witness to Christ” (1982:15). Accordingly, we may then speak of the Word of God as “scriptural, incarnate, and contemporary” (1982:15). For Stott the fact that the Spirit of God still speaks in a contemporary way through the written Scriptures provides “the paramount obligation to preach” (1982:15).

Samuel Volbeda:

Volbeda, the Dutch Reformed theologian and former professor of Church History at Calvin Seminary, has defined preaching as “the oral publication by the Church of the written Word of God to the saved for their edification and to the lost for their salvation” (1960:22). When a minister preaches the Scriptures, it is nothing less than “a communication of truth from God to man through the instrumentality of the Church” (1960:22). The act of preaching stands on the assumption that God is a personal, Trinitarian being and that He “communicates His thoughts to creatures whom He has made capable of receiving His Word” (1960:22). Since any act of communication from God to man is properly called “revelation,” preaching may be thought of as “divine revelation mediated by man after a definite fashion” (1960:23). Volbeda explains that in the light of mankind’s fall into sin, the nature of God’s revelation to humans has changed:

Before sin, God communicated with man immediately. We have reason to believe that if sin had not intervened, God’s dealings with all men alike would always have been only direct (Jer. 31:34). Now that sin has come and redemption is possible only through Christ, the incarnate Son of God, salvation as inclusive of all good things will be forever mediated by Christ (John 14:6) (1960:23-24).

He then argues that this necessitated that God would speak for a time through Israel’s inspired prophets, followed by a period of redemptive history when God spoke through His Son. In this present redemptive epoch, God continues to speak via the “intermediary of the pulpit” (1960:24). Today, God uses uninspired men “to proclaim His written revelation,” and thus preaching is a vital part of “the machinery of redemption” (1960:24). For Volbeda, preaching has a definite “redemptive connotation” and is both appropriate and vital for “a world in which sin and grace are the factors of history” (1960:24).

With these representative definitions of preaching in view, it is clear that certain components are common among them, including 1) that preaching is a solemn responsibility, 2) that preaching is the oral communication of the very Word of God, 3) that effective preaching involves the personality of the preacher, 4) that the proclamation of the written Word should bear redemptive fruit in the lives of the hearers, and 5) that to one degree or another modern preachers are a continuation of the offices of the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles. Furthermore, it will become evident below that Thieliicke includes some of these same components in his stated definition of preaching. This would seem to indicate that Thieliicke stands within a homiletical tradition that values fixed definitional parameters related to the act of preaching. That is, a tradition that narrowly defines preaching as the oral explication and application of a text derived from the written Word of God.

5.2.1 Preaching as defined by Thieliicke

With a number of definitions of Christian preaching in view, one is now in a position to evaluate the way that Thieliicke defined the act of pulpit proclamation. His specific comments and broader convictions on this matter may be distilled into four headings for consideration: 1) The necessity of hearing the Word of God, 2) The definition of preaching, 3) The context of Christian preaching, and 4) The dangers associated with preaching.

5.2.1.1 *The hearing of the Word*

One of the critical things that Thieliicke believed about the inscripturated Word was that God designed it to be *heard* and not simply read (1965:42-44, 200; 1965b:24-25). This implies that the Scriptures were intended for *proclamation*. Such a claim obviously presupposes that there would be someone specifically trained and commissioned to deliver verbally this inscripturated and effectual Word to those in need of hearing God's message of redemption. Thieliicke claimed that in Christian preaching "the Word becomes flesh again," and by virtue of being heard, it

enters into our own time, wearing the dress of the present, [and] the ancient laws of the proclamation of the Word come into play and it becomes apparent that this Word is a divider of spirits and a hammer which breaks the rock into pieces (Thieliicke, 1965b:40).

Thielicke believed that the preaching of the Word of God delivers the Savior to those who would, by virtue of the Spirit's empowerment, hear the gospel and receive Him by faith. (See 5.2 where this point will be more fully addressed.) The proclamation of the gospel by the preacher is a "deed-word" event that accomplishes much more than simply an explication of the "general nature of God" as revealed in Scripture, but audibly announces "God's Yes" over and against His word of judgment (Thielicke, 1977:188) and effects saving faith in the hearts of sinners (Thielicke, 1974:134). The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments contain the record of "the great acts and messages of God," that, when proclaimed,

tell us that we came from him, with all that we are and have; but we have become unfaithful to our origin and the purpose for which we were created and have gone off to a far country. They also tell us that God wants to bring us back home, to our salvation, and they tell us what he has expended and sacrificed in order to bring us to his goal (Thielicke, 1965a:3-4).

Preaching, in his view, is an audible "act of mercy" where the sinner hears that "God is no longer against me" but has become the "Immanuel, who establishes his Yes to the sinner" (1977:188). Because it is a Spirit-empowered activity, the hearing of this proclaimed Word has profound redemptive effects:

When I hear the Word of God as it is meant to be heard, i.e., in Christ, then I have to hear at one and the same time both death and life, both judgment and grace. I come from death and judgment, even though it be cancelled death and judgment. I come from the fact that a gulf yawns between what God wills of me and what I am. It is the function of the law to make known this gulf, to keep it open as gauze keeps a wound from superficial healing and thus protects against the illusion of restoration to health. The Nevertheless of God, which he speaks to me in the gospel, and with which he acknowledges me in spite of everything, is to be known for what it is only against this background (Thielicke, 1977:187-188).

5.2.1.2 *Preaching defined*

Resting upon Thielicke's belief that the Word of God must be heard from the pulpit, his straightforward definition of preaching naturally follows. Preaching, he claims, is not simply the act of speaking "about God" in much the same way as one would carry on a casual conversation about persons or facts or as one might give a lecture on a certain topic, but it is the act of speaking the very Word of God—"the efficacious Word of pardon" contained in the Scriptures (Thielicke, 1982:243). This message of forgiveness and pardon through the Word that became flesh "must be spoken in worldly terms" and encounter the hearers "where they are" in their life-situation (Thielicke, 1965b:95). This

means that in the act of preaching the “dividing wall between the sacred and the profane” is removed, and the Savior is delivered into the horrid conditions of fallen humanity where He again speaks His Word of salvation and grace in the present moment (1965b:95). True Christian preaching, therefore, is characterized by its contemporaneity, freshness, and relevance. As a consequence, no sermon preached by a minister can be regarded as ‘timeless’ in the sense of possessing a transcendent relevance that spans all historical epochs. Thieliicke explains this interesting point by observing that if one hears a modern sermon that could have been preached ‘as is’ in the 1880s,

this seeming timelessness indicates, not an excellence, but rather the degeneration of preaching.... The impression of timelessness can be achieved only by ignoring one’s own time and never allowing the Word to become flesh. Therefore such a sermon could have been preached back in 1880 (1965b:98).

It is thus a virtue and not a deficiency that preaching defined this way, as the written Word becoming flesh, is necessarily “bound to its time and reflects its time” (Thieliicke, 1965b:98-99). However, his argument is not that the Word of God itself lacks timelessness and transcendent relevance for every age but only that it must be preached with freshness and uniquely applied to each audience in its own time. Therefore, every preacher should realize that he “owes the ultimate message only to his time,” and when his ministry of proclamation has come to its conclusion “he hands the torch on to others” (Thieliicke, 1965b:98-99).

5.2.1.3 The context of Christian preaching

To grasp fully Thieliicke’s definition of preaching, it is essential to consider his convictions regarding the proper context for Christian proclamation. Thieliicke believed that worship and preaching must of necessity stand together and that each complements the other. He claimed that “liturgy is the supporting leg of worship and preaching is the free leg” (1982:243). In other words,

[a]s liturgy recites the classical biblical and traditional texts, it brings what is canonically established to worship. It is as it were the score, while preaching is the musical interpretation, which includes the subjectivity of the witness (Thieliicke, 1982:243).

Worship serves the sermon by means of the liturgy, which acts as a theological “corrective” and “stationary element” for the benefit of the hearers (Thieliicke, 1965:99). In the movement of the church’s liturgy,

the Holy Scriptures are read and the ancient prayers of the church are said.... Here alongside of the voice of the venturing witness is the superpersonal voice, the 'we' of the church which has sounded through the centuries.... The *cantus firmus* is the liturgy and the counterpoint is the sermon: the sermon can swing out in a wide arc, it can be venturesome. Thus the service of worship is an integral, indivisible whole (Thielicke, 1965b:99).

In the service of worship, the liturgy also allows the congregation to become active as participants. By means of the elements of confession, prayer, the responsive reading of Scripture, and singing, the worshippers become more than "an audience that remains passive" while the sermon is "being preached at" them (Thielicke, 1965:97). The liturgy then has "complementary significance for the sermon" in promoting such active participation and personal engagement (Thielicke, 1965:97). Likewise, the participation of the audience is further encouraged if the sermon is "contemporary" and corresponds "with the time in which it is preached" (Thielicke, 1965:97). For Thielicke this requires that the message be delivered by one who "trusts in the Spirit who moves where he wills" (Thielicke, 1965b:97).

Thielicke's understanding of this specific context for Christian preaching, however, is balanced by his recognition of the temptations associated with "Liturgism" (Thielicke, 1965:84). This ministerial sin occurs when the preacher takes flight from the hard work of preaching and embraces the false belief that his *main* duty is the creation and maintenance of the proper order of the service of worship. Thielicke explains that many ministers fall into the trap of unduly promoting

a set order which must be performed according to the formulary and the rubrics. Often this is accompanied by a great deal of solemn play acting, dressing up in liturgical vestments, and wanderings to and fro from the epistle side of the altar to the gospel side, from the altar to the lectern, pulpit, and the sanctuary rail. We are regaled with symbolisms, synthetically contrived or borrowed from Catholicism.... it often looks as if the Word of God has emigrated from the text into textiles (1965b:84).

So it is clear that for Thielicke the setting of worship provides the proper arena for the proclamation of the Word of God, but the Word as it is proclaimed must remain central in worship. Thielicke believed that to do otherwise would lead to the "downgrade" of the pulpit, and such a move would always prove fatal for the church and the gospel (Doberstein, in Thielicke, 1965b:ix).

5.2.1.4 *The dangers of preaching*

As previously suggested (in 5.1.1.3), Thieliicke warned that the task of preaching is an inherently dangerous one involving a measure of risk that every pulpit minister must assume if he is to be faithful to his calling. The central danger of the pulpit is related to the necessity of translating and contemporizing the message of the Scriptures—a task that is essential to effective proclamation. Thieliicke was deeply concerned that preaching might devolve into

the unproductive flow of words which is no longer geared into real life as men live it and only makes people say, “There’s nothing there for me” or “This never touched me at all.” It does not even elicit a protest, it does not even offend. Only boredom triumphs (1965b:80).

The sermon must contain explanations of the biblical text and applications that are relevant to the actual life of the hearers if there is to be any connection to the audience at all (Thieliicke, 1965b:79). However, Thieliicke cautions that this involves “breath-taking risks” which will invariably cause the minister to approach the boundaries of Christian orthodoxy:

For he who dares to carry the Word into our time has given up all chance to retreat into the safety of tradition. He who simply repeats the old phrases takes no risks; it is easy to remain orthodox and hew the old line. But he who speaks to this hour’s need and translates the message will always be skirting the edge of heresy.... *Only he who risks heresies can gain the truth* [emphasis his] (1965b:40).

What makes such risks inevitable is the very nature of truth itself, particularly when fallible humans in the act of preaching proclaim that truth. As Thieliicke says, the “enunciation of truth” is “never possible without a calculated risk” and, therefore, “heresies must be ventured in order to gain truth” (1965b:96). To illustrate this point, Thieliicke appeals to two well-known biblical texts. First, he argues that the Sermon on the Mount recorded in the Gospel of Matthew is laden with risks when it is preached. The teaching of Jesus in that portion of Holy Scripture might well “turn a man into a visionary fanatic” (1965b:96). As another example, if one were to preach from the Epistle to the Romans where Paul explicates the doctrine of justification by faith, the inherent risk there is that this essential doctrine might “turn a man into a libertine who flouts obedience because, after all, if he has faith nothing can happen to him” (1965b:95). What Thieliicke apparently means by this is that the minister cannot control how his audience reacts to what he has preached. Any truth, even that proclaimed by

Jesus Himself, may be misused and abused, and there is little that any minister can do about such a danger. So while the minister has no control over his audience in this regard, he does have “the promise that in the truth he will not perish but rather that it will make him free” (1965b:96). That is, he can be assured that the truth of the Scriptures will bear the fruit of salvation in his own life, and that his efforts to sound the truth are not in vain.

A secondary ministerial danger that Thieliicke was keenly aware of is that of distraction. He explains that the stage is set for the minister to become distracted by the very nature of the preaching task itself. The development of sermons that are both faithful to the text of Scripture and connect to the hearers in meaningful ways is extremely hard work and involves great personal discipline. Thieliicke maintained that this was one of the reasons that faithful, substantive preaching was not being heard very much in his day. Over time other ministerial obligations take the pastor away from his primary duty of preparing and delivering the Word of God. The sacred responsibility of preaching is easily avoided when the minister throws himself into the

hectic business of “running” a congregation, the busyness that sucks up all one’s energy and creates the illusion that one is consuming oneself in the service of the kingdom of God (1965b:84).

Other temptations for the minister, such as traveling to attend or speak at various conferences of the church or denomination, promote the grand illusion that the preacher is “serving the world-wide church” (Thieliicke, 1965b:81). Yet, at his place of ministerial calling “the hard task of day-by-day ministry is left undone” and the “onerous task of boring into the hard wood of sermon preparation is forgotten” (Thieliicke, 1965b:82). Thieliicke categorized this process as the virtually imperceptible encroachment of a “lurking latent secularization” which threatens the reduction of the role of pastor to that of “administrator and entertainer” and leads to the “denigration of the church into a social club” (1965b:96). For such reasons, preaching the truth of Scripture is a profoundly dangerous enterprise.

5.2.2 Thieliicke’s specific criticisms of preaching and his correctives

Commensurate with his passion for the preaching of the Scriptures and his belief in the power of the proclaimed Word to effect change in the lives of people, Thieliicke was deeply concerned about the state of preaching as he observed it in his day. In 1965 he

stated his concerns in a monograph entitled *Leiden an der Kirche: Ein persönliches Wort*. This was translated that same year into English by Doberstein and published in America as *The Trouble With The Church: A Call for Renewal*. On the opening page Thieliicke quickly set the stage for his criticisms of modern preaching:

Anybody who keeps in mind the goals which the Reformation once set for itself can only be appalled at what has happened in the church of Luther and Calvin to the very thing which its fathers regarded as the source and spring of Christian faith and life, namely, preaching (1965b:1).

Thieliicke believed that the spiritually anemic preaching of his day had virtually emptied the church of her life and vitality and, even more sadly, had effectively destroyed any truly redemptive connection the church had with the world. Thieliicke had expressed this same concern two years earlier in his tribute to Spurgeon (1963b). As he scanned the preaching landscape of the late 1950s and early 1960s Thieliicke realized that, while there was “workmanlike” exegesis being performed in many pulpits, the preaching emanating from them was

remarkably dead and lacking infectious power. Very often it strikes us as an unreal phantom that hovers above and is isolated from what people feel are the actual realities of their life and what they talk about in their language (1963b:2).

He bemoaned the fact that a terrible low point in the life of the church had been reached where preaching, the kind witnessed in the New Testament and historically modeled in the Protestant Reformation, had “decayed and disintegrated” and was essentially extinct (1965b:2). The sounds flowing from many pulpits were uncertain, indistinguishable, and fully incapable of provoking human hearts and exposing their need for God’s grace in Christ. As Thieliicke put it, it was preaching that “never gets under anybody’s skin” that fueled his concerns (1965b:2). In a word, preaching had become *boring*, and by this Thieliicke did not mean that it lacked the power to captivate the audience and hold their attention but that it spiritually paralyzed them. It was a “lukewarm drip” from the pulpit that did not enflame the hearer’s emotions by unleashing the power of the Word on their souls (1965b:40-41). Like a bath in tepid water, the sermons that Thieliicke criticized possessed no shock value, and they failed to connect to the deeper spiritual needs of the audience (1965b:40-41). Such defective sermons made them neither angry nor happy, neither excited nor passive, and under such a droning sound “even the demons fall asleep” (Thieliicke, 1965b:41). For Thieliicke, “conventional preaching” was the problem, which he defined as preaching that always takes “the safest road so as to prevent any unpleasantness from arising” (1965b:40). As a result such boring preachers,

who offered powerless and unconvicting messages, had become “unbelievable and unconvincing” (1965b:18). Thieliicke feared that this situation would not only bring down catastrophic consequences for the church but also signaled the fact that the real “trouble with preaching” was located in the soul of the preacher himself, “in a pathological condition of his existence” (1965b:18). For Thieliicke it was simply axiomatic: the man in the pulpit who bores those in the pew “must also be boring himself. And the man who bores himself is not really living in what he—so boringly—hands out” (1965b:9-10).

Years later, as Thieliicke reflected on his concerns about the state of preaching, he further clarified what he meant in his criticisms of boring preaching. In his autobiography he pointedly spoke of these boring, disconnected, powerless messages as “degenerate sermons” (1995:293). Thieliicke articulated two different types of preaching, or sermons, that may be so negatively classified. The first type is a politicized message that has as its goal “the transformation of the sermon into a particular political position” and that offers it to the hearers as “the Christian position” (1995:293). Thieliicke argued that in his experience this kind of corrupted sermon

mostly gains the upper hand among [preachers] whose spiritual substance is too diluted for them to give a rousing proclamation of the gospel. They are then forced to give their sermons a political shot in the arm to lend their dead spirituality the appearance of life (1995:293).

Yet such politically laden preaching is bereft of any lasting significance at all, and those repeatedly exposed to it have every right to question whether there is a legitimate need for preaching or for the church in the first place.

People very soon wonder why it should need the circuitous route of the pulpit to get this political message across and whether they could not get the same thing cheaper and without the Christian paraphernalia by simply going straight to a political meeting (1995:293).

The second type he identified is the kind of sermon that evidences “a certain ritualism that suppresses or at least obscures the personal faith of the individual through the excessive use of time-honored phrases and traditional *mucica sacra*” (Thieliicke, 1995:293). By this, Thieliicke apparently was referring to sermons that are filled with worn-out spiritual and theological clichés, biblical expressions, or phrases from Christian hymnody, which had long lost any meaning or relevance for the audience. This is likely the same class of defective preaching that Lloyd-Jones later categorized as “pulpiteerism” and “showmanship,” where “the form becomes more important than the

substance, the oratory and the eloquence [become] things in and of themselves” and preaching “becomes a form of entertainment” (1971:15). Such messages may appeal to the sense of hearing or promote one’s appreciation for the minister’s rhetorical prowess, but they are void of the Spirit-borne power to change lives for the sake of the Gospel.

As to the causes of such a pronounced declension in preaching, Thieliicke suggested at least two precipitating factors, one primary and the other secondary. The *secondary* cause he identified, one that could be more immediately recognized and remedied, was the distraction resulting from the many tangential duties that are often associated with the Christian ministry:

In the hectic bustle of ecclesiastical routine [preaching] appears to be relegated more and more to the margin of things. The big city pastor must spend his evenings sitting in meetings of esoteric church organizations.... During the day he is being chewed up by instructional classes, occasional services, pastoral calls, and the Moloch of his bureaucracy (1965b:1).

D. Macleod sounded a similar concern in his 1959 essay “The Marks of Effective Preaching.” Like Thieliicke, Macleod also noted that preaching in the later twentieth century had become ineffective because many pastors adopted the notion that they were “pastor-directors of the congregation,” or they saw themselves as “a sanctified manager of the organization” (1959:35). In such a dizzying environment of multitudinous activities and expectations, Thieliicke claimed that the mind of the minister “dissipates” in the morass of “business”; his physical and emotional strength is deflected to non-essential tasks, and his heart is inevitably cooled by the cares of life (1965b:2). To survive and to be considered a success in the eyes of their peers and ecclesiastical authorities, Thieliicke claimed that distracted ministers often resort to manipulation. They employ “all the techniques of mass suggestion,” and function as “engineers of salvation” who have become adept at the use of religious propaganda and “subliminal influences” rather than as heralds of God’s Word (Thieliicke, 1963b:1). Doberstein, Thieliicke’s chief translator and collaborator on his *The Trouble with the Church*, makes an observation in the preface to the English edition that reflects Thieliicke’s serious concerns about such pastoral distractions and associated temptations:

It is commonplace to say that we have gone through a generation in which the minister has allowed himself to become at best a ‘pastoral director’ and consequently preaching has disintegrated.... Whenever we find, even in this day, a vital, living congregation we find at its center vital preaching. The man who cannot preach and will not devote himself to it with the best that is in him is

not likely to be any more effective, credible, and convincing, so far as the gospel is concerned, in a discussion group, a cell group, a buzz group ... as a conductor of ceremonies, or as an organizer and manipulator of God's human beings (1965b:viii-ix).

Despite all of his concerns about the ever-expanding list of pastoral duties, Thieliicke believed that the *primary* cause of the downgrade of the pulpit and of Christian preaching was a malady he called "docetism" (1965b:66). Whereas the secondary problem of ministerial distraction could be quickly solved by the effective employment of the art of delegation, the primary pulpit sickness was much more severe and deeply entrenched in the very heart of the minister himself.

Within the discipline of dogmatic theology, docetism refers to the early Christian heresy that denied the full humanity of Jesus, seeing Him only as a kind of phantom who merely 'seemed'—from the Greek *dokein*, meaning 'to appear'—to be human (Ferguson, Wright, and Packer, 1988:201-202). According to Thieliicke the first and second century docetic heretics envisioned Jesus as "a more or less spectral heavenly being, who lacked any real solidarity with human existence" (1965b:66). Thieliicke was convinced that this early heresy was freshly incarnated in modern liberal theology but with a distinctive twist. The modern version of this heterodox view of the nature of Christ

constitutes a curious antithesis to this position in so far as it reverses the ancient heresy as it were and sees in Christ only an ultimate culmination of humanity, a *homo religioissimus*, to whom divine attributes are at most symbolically ascribed (1965b:66).

Whereas the ancient docetics denied Christ's full humanity, the modern docetics, embodied in Protestant liberalism, deny His deity.

Thieliicke, however, recognized the presence of an even newer incarnation of this primal heresy that had penetrated the church from a different place, no longer polluting the doctrine of Christ—the church's Christology—but now corrupting the doctrine of man—the church's anthropology (1965b:67). Thieliicke argued that the presence of this newer form of docetism that had successfully traversed the theological spectrum from liberal to conservative was indicated by the way theologians and pulpit ministers referred to *man*:

[We] speak of 'man,' who does not exist at all as this nominalistic collective concept. And yet this collective term is common parlance in the pulpit as well

as in the theological lecture hall. So the real, individual man who sits beneath the pulpit or the lectern feels quite untouched whenever this phantom being is mentioned (1965b:67).

In docetic preaching the term “man” is considered only in the “abstract,” and he is treated and referred to “as if he has only a phantom body” (Thielicke, 1965b:67). That is, according to Thielicke, theologians and preachers have successfully removed man from his history—his day-by-day existence—and have isolated him from the real world in which he lives, treating him in a radically individualistic way (1965b:67). Thielicke saw a definite philosophical link between this docetic view of man and the existentialism associated with Bultmann, Sartre, and Heidegger (1965b:69). In existentialist philosophy, the world “appears as something by which human existence is essentially hampered and confined,” and this has led to the corruption of Christian anthropology: “This is what causes us to speak of ‘man’ and to mean by this the supposedly ‘real’ who is set apart from his world and freed from its fixation” (Thielicke, 1965b:69).

In terms of preaching, the docetic error is particularly devastating as it results in the loss of any vital connection between the sermon and the persons addressed. The *docetic* sermon never touches an authentic human being. It is addressed to the man who is *not* really there in the audience—the abstracted individual who, as Thielicke argues, does not even exist (1965b:70-77). The sermon is preached in such a way that the Bible, with all of its great themes that herald the redemption of sinners and their incorporation into the body of Christ, never truly intersects with the lives of those in the audience. Thielicke illustrates this error from Christ’s commandment regarding the love of one’s neighbor (Matthew 5:43):

This [docetic] preacher will presumably talk quite simply about “two men” who confront each other as neighbors or as enemies. And here already the questions begin: Do these “two men” exist at all? What is their sex, their age, their vocation, their definite social and geographical situation? Does it make no difference whether they confront each other as landlords or as renters, business competitors, or as persons who are attracted to each other by erotic feeling ... Question upon question! Obviously, therefore, this commandment is not simply a matter of “two men” who are to love each other, but rather two men “in situation,” in a definite situation, to whom this challenge applies and whose situation is also affected by the commandment to love” (1965b:70).

Consequently, in docetic preaching there is the functional absence of relevance and meaningful application. The sermon is, therefore, powerless to confront the listeners in the midst of their actual life-situations with the redeeming power of the Gospel:

[T]he man of whom [the minister] is speaking and whom he is addressing does not appear in the sermon at all. Then the hearers who are troubled by very real situational problems feel that they have been bypassed (1965b:76).

Hearers exposed to such practically irrelevant preaching will likely believe that the Word from the pulpit has not personally addressed them, and over time the act of delivering the sermon inevitably loses its central place in the ministry of the church. Thielicke concludes that such homiletical docetism is responsible for the widespread “abstractness,” “colorlessness,” and “debility” of the modern pulpit, and it represents a contemporary temptation that all ministers must steadfastly resist (1965b:69). This danger would seem to be especially concerning in view of those difficult situations in which the minister would be expected to address the PES. In Thielicke’s unique historical context, with all of its instances of horrific evil and suffering, the temptation for the minister to avoid such complex theological issues as the PES would have been most acute. The homiletical path of least resistance may have demanded more generalized, abstracted messages of God’s love, mercy, and sadness over the human condition in contrast to sermons that spoke directly to the specific pains and evils being experienced.

However, Thielicke has asserted that the powerless, irrelevant pulpit, which is characterized by the neo-docetic heresy, results from a more basic flaw in the heart of the minister himself. Stated more forthrightly, the docetism of the sermon results from the docetism present in the preacher’s own soul. Thielicke expresses this fundamental shortcoming by raising a simple question about the one preaching: “Does the preacher himself drink what he hands out in the pulpit?” (1965b:4). Wenzel (1968:394) likewise articulates the same central question, one that he also believes is vital to understanding the demise of preaching: Is the minister himself “confronted by the message he is seeking to proclaim”? Thielicke claims that the persons in the pew want to know whether or not the preacher of the sermon actually lives within “the house of the dogma he proclaims” (1965b:5). Or is it the case that his pulpit and his study are “places outside of this world” so that the “center of gravity in his life lies elsewhere” and, therefore, he is not “living in the house of his own preaching” (1965b:5-6)? Such a preacher only *appears* to be human in the pulpit in the same way that the propagators of

the docetic heresy asserted that the human Jesus was only a phantom or apparition. This species of docetism is evident when “the house of doctrine and the house of life” are segregated in the heart and life of the minister (Thielicke, 1965b:13). An internal “dichotomy” then develops where one should not be permitted to exist, and this leads invariably to an intolerable “contradiction” between what the preacher teaches and the way he lives in the world (Thielicke, 1965b:13,15). For Thielicke, such a resulting condition represents “hypocrisy in the fullest sense of the word” and ultimately destroys the preacher’s credibility in the eyes of his audience (1965b:15). This essential element of pulpit integrity is centrally concerned with “the relation of the faith to the person,” in this case the preacher himself, and is thus focused upon the question of whether the minister “is really practicing his faith” (Thielicke, 1965b:15). Thielicke understands this issue as related to the most basic question of what it means to be a preacher in the first place. The faithful minister of the Word is not only one who “confesses and declares his *message*” he is also one who “declares his *encounter* with the message” (Thielicke, 1965b:50). That is, he delivers biblical messages that have first confronted and shaped his own life, and in this way he preaches from the overflow of his own personal spiritual journey. A minister’s sermons will be effective only to the degree that he “communicates to his hearers the fact that he himself has *experienced* this truth” [emphasis added] (Thielicke, 1965b:50).

Thielicke’s antidote to this fatal pulpit malady is to be discovered in studied reflection upon the prophets of the Bible and how they performed their function as human vehicles of divine revelation. The biblical prophets were men who lived in the times they preached. Their messages were “vivified” by the fact that they had endured many “terrible experiences in a peculiar way” that prepared them for their sacred task (Thielicke, 1965b:7). The prophet

was compelled every day afresh to break through his own fears, terrors, and troubles and look to the hills from whence comes our help. He had to learn in his own person to cope with the apocalyptic situation which threw the average person into shock, panic, or numbness and see it *sub specie aeternitatis*—simply because he had to climb up a pulpit or some makeshift platform to tell his beaten and beleaguered listeners that all this had something to do with God, with His judgment and visitation (Thielicke, 1965b:7).

The main lesson that modern preachers should learn from Israel’s ancient prophets is that the life of the preacher and the message he is ordained to proclaim must “come into the closest possible contact” (Thielicke, 1965b:8). Preaching should be influenced and

touched by life itself with all of its varied experiences and emotions. Thieliicke argued that it is necessary that the preacher's message be "infused" with what transpires in his personal life and in the lives of his audience members, particularly the painful events that raise questions about eternity (1965b:9). The minister should proclaim his message as one who equally shares in the realities of life in this sin-ravaged world and as one who is not above the troubling, though common, tribulations of those who suffer under sin's curse.

In order to navigate successfully through the persistent struggles, the painful difficulties, and the perplexing questions of his own existence, Thieliicke counsels the minister to "let the Psalms, the Prophets, and the Gospels have greater power over him than the frightful hour which was in fact threatening to overwhelm him" (Thieliicke, 1965b:9). He must be constantly nourished by the Word of God and by the doctrines of the Christian faith. This will enable the preacher to deliver to his hearers what he himself has received—namely, "the means of grace through which God both mortifies and vivifies" (Schaibley, 1992:16). Macleod likewise asserts that the truly effective preacher, therefore,

must know basically the substance of his proclamation and must be himself a living endorsement of its truth.... Effective preaching begins with the man who claims that God's "word was in mine heart as a burning fire" (Jer. 20:9), and who cannot be restrained from preaching its redemptive efficacy for every man, regardless of his peculiar need (1959:36).

Preaching from a heart that is enflamed with a dynamic faith in the living God—a faith lived out within the full spectrum of human life *post lapsum*—will provide the essential connection that must be established and maintained between the pulpit and the pew and will inject a much-needed element of authenticity and power into the act of proclamation.

To foster this kind of anti-docetic preaching, Thieliicke suggests that ministers begin by assessing their own disciplines as related to the Scriptures. The practice of reading, studying, and meditating upon the text of Scripture should be evacuated of all utilitarian goals. Thieliicke recognized that ministers are prone to fall into the habit of approaching the Scriptures pragmatically, as if the singular goal of their reading and study is the preparation of sermons. However, he saw this as a most grievous and common mistake that would ultimately lead to the bifurcation of life and doctrine. Rather, following the example of preachers like Spurgeon, the minister of the Word must

read the Bible without asking in the back of his mind how he can capitalize homiletically upon the text he studies. He must first read it *as nourishment for his own soul*. For the light which we are to let shine before men is borrowed light, a mere reflection. He who will not go out into the sun in order to play the humble role of a mirror, reflecting the sun's light, has to try to produce his own light, and thus gives the lie to his message by his vanity and egocentric presumption [emphasis added] (Thielicke, 1963b:10).

Paradoxically, a preacher cannot be truly successful and considered faithful as a minister of the Word if he works at "the art of preaching" (Thielicke, 1963b:13). Such a motive betrays an "ulterior purpose" and will result in the minister becoming nothing more than a "*routinier* ... a servant, not of the kingdom of God, but of the task of perfecting the preaching machine" (Thielicke, 1963b:13). A preacher such as this may deliver impressive sermons that please the audience and are deemed masterpieces of "ecclesiastical 'strategy,'" but what actually flows from his pulpit is "a paradoxical self-refutation of the message, because his own existence testifies against it" (Thielicke, 1963b:13). In this case, the minister is no longer worthy of being reckoned as credible by his listeners and is

condemned to consume his own substance and expend his capital to the point of bankruptcy. Because he is not a recipient, he must himself produce and seek to overcome the empty silence within him by means of noisy gongs and clanging cymbals. Thus he ends in the paralysis of emptiness, and his empty, droning rhetoric merely covers up the burned-out slag beneath (Thielicke, 1963b:13).

Another course of correction recommended by Thielicke concerns the minister's relationship to those who regularly hear him. Thielicke recognized that the best sermons flow from a living dialog between the pulpit and the pew, between the minister of the Word and the people under his spiritual charge. For Thielicke, it was imperative that every minister of the Word understand the necessity of preaching for the benefit of "people living today" (1965b:21). For this to be possible, the minister must work to acquire a comprehensive, experiential knowledge of his audience:

I must know at what point they raise questions, so that I can "latch on" to these questions, and I must know where they do not have questions, so that I must first stir them up to ask the pertinent questions. I must know whether they feel safe and secure, in order that I may shake them, or whether they are troubled with anxiety, that I may be able to comfort and encourage them (1965b:21).

Such knowledge of the audience can only be gleaned from many personal interactions, ministry opportunities, pastoral counseling, and the development of trust between the pastor and the people over time. It would seem evident that Thielicke strongly believed that the tasks of preaching the Word and pastoring the people could not be legitimately

separated from one another. The preacher must preach from the perspective of his experiences with the people to whom he provides spiritual care. Preaching and shepherding then represent the dual roles of the one office, and each complements the other. As one who fervently sought to be a faithful and effective preacher himself, Thieliicke maintained that it was imperative that he remain

involved in an unending dialogue with those to whom I must deliver my message. Every conversation I engage in becomes at bottom a meditation, a preparation, a gathering of material for my preaching.... Thus life in all its daily involvements becomes for me a thesaurus in which I keep rummaging, because it is full of relevant material for my message (1965b:22).

As a practical exercise during his weekly sermons, Thieliicke states that it was his consistent practice to concentrate upon one member of the audience, selected at random, and preach to that individual as if engaged in a personal dialog (1995:132). The others in attendance would then “listen of their own accord,” having been drawn into the ongoing conversation (1995:132). Thieliicke believed that the application of this simple technique would prevent any audience member from feeling as if the sermon were not specifically addressed to him and would also promote the kind of authenticity that was needed in the pulpit (1995:132).

Along with Thieliicke’s emphasis upon preaching as a dialog nourished by loving pastoral care, he also believed that humility was a much-needed virtue in the pulpit as well. The minister of the written Word must “be able to confess that he is helpless at certain points” (Thieliicke, 1965b:53). That is, he must be perceived as one who also lives under the shadow of his own humanity with all of the same frailties and points of vulnerability that his people regularly experience. In his autobiography, Thieliicke comments that he first identified the great value of such honesty and transparency in the pulpit, as well as the powerful connection this established with the audience, when he had to preach while undergoing a “spiritual crisis” himself (1995:132). For example, he notes the troubling experience he once had when he ran into a Nazi schoolteacher or when he had to preach on the day after four of his former students were killed in battle. He says that he would cope with these difficult situations by

openly confessing my spiritual crisis from the pulpit.... I thus always attempted to be completely honest and not to say anything to the congregation that I was not at the same time prepared to say to myself” (1995:133).

A final corrective promoted by Thieliicke concerns the way the actual sermon is to be structured by the minister as he makes his preparations to deliver it. Specifically, he

argued that the sermon “should be an intellectual organism,” and that this should be evidenced by the presence of

a central point; each individual sermon must have an organizing center that grows out of the text.... So in hunting and in preaching one must know what one is after, and then one must concentrate on that. Therefore one cannot say everything in every sermon (1965b:54-55).

Thielicke recognized in the New Testament’s record of Christ’s sermons the kind of organizing center he believed was critical to effective preaching. Following closely the example of Jesus, the modern preacher should avoid the temptation of attempting to “speak the truth in the form of a quantitative expatiation upon all truths” but should choose one of the text’s “microcosms” and then begin “searching it and penetrating to its core” (1965b:55). In order to achieve this goal—the identification of one central point to be preached from a given biblical text—the virtue of contentment will be required of the minister. He must be at peace with a sense of incompleteness in his preparations and in the finished product of the sermon (Thielicke, 1965b:60-61). As Thielicke colorfully cautions, “We must let rabbits go today—not because they are less important than the stag, but because today we are hunting stags” (1965b:60-61). Good preaching then is characterized by an appropriate set of textual and thematic boundaries. A skilled minister of the Word will not attempt to “crowd all eternity into one sermon” but will master the art of discovering an organizing center around which the message will be constructed and delivered (Thielicke, 1965b:61).

It seems clear, therefore, that while Thielicke had very serious and legitimate concerns about the state of preaching in his day, he did believe that powerful, life-transforming sermons *could* and *should* be reclaimed by the application of his correctives. This is a significant fact in view of the anti-authoritarian bias spawned by the atrocities of the Third Reich and, particularly, by the perversion of Christianity and the rampant abuses of church power perpetrated by the German Christian movement, both of which had a devastating impact upon post-war Europe (see Babik, 2006; Baranowski, 1980; Wierzbowski, 2012). Thielicke remained steadfastly confident that the church, which Christ established by His divine authority, “will go on preaching” with that same heavenly authority “until the Last Day and the gates of hell will not prevail against it” (Thielicke, 1995:132).

5.2.3 The vital link between preaching and theology

As was previously noted (in 4.0), Thieliicke believed that the critical relationship between theology and proclamation should never be discounted. Even a limited survey of some of the more popular mid-twentieth and early twenty-first century homiletical literature (representing a broad theological perspective from neo-orthodox to Southern Baptist) reveals a widespread concern that Christian pulpit ministers should be engaging in “theological preaching” of the kind that “relates the central doctrines of our faith to the challenging and portentous movements of our time and to the everyday life of our people” (Rust, 1955:145). Several noteworthy homiletical authorities have articulated the intrinsic relationship between theology and preaching:

Karl Barth:

Preaching must faithfully adhere to doctrine, that is, to the Confession of our faith, which is not a summary of the religious ideas drawn from our own inner consciousness but a statement of what we believe and confess because we have received it and have heard the Word of Revelation (1963:30).

John Johnson:

When preaching reflects theology which is no longer Biblically dogmatic, it becomes stratospheric. The preacher who attempts to explicate it ends up somewhere on cloud nine. Preaching becomes blanched and eviscerated. It fails to quicken the heart and stir the spirit. The two-edged sword is too dull to cut through pride and indifference. Its pierce cannot awaken the slumbering. It can spread the butter, but cannot cut the meat. Theology which centers in cultic folderol, psychological popularity, sentimental moralism, or bourgeoisie respectability, with a few Biblical sentiments and maxims thrown in, can hardly produce serious proclamation (2005:269).

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones:

What is preaching? Logic on fire! Eloquent reason! [Preaching is] theology on fire.... Preaching is theology coming through a man who is on fire (1971:97).

Albert Mohler:

Every pastor is called to be a theologian.... The health of the church depends upon its pastors functioning as faithful theologians—teaching, preaching, defending, and applying the great doctrines of the faith (2008:105).

Eric Rust:

No man can really preach the Gospel without a theology.... There are preachers who say: "I don't believe in all this doctrinal stuff. I don't preach theology. I am an evangelist. I preach the Gospel." It is almost as if a medical man were to say: "I don't believe in all this anatomy and physiology. I am a quack. I peddle colored water." The truth is that no man can be an effective preacher of the Gospel unless his preaching is undergirded by solid dogmatic affirmations and unless it is illustrated and made intelligible by some sound theological thinking (1955:146).

John Stott:

[T]heology is more important than methodology.... Homiletics belongs properly to the department of practical theology and cannot be taught without a solid theological foundation.... Technique can only make us orators; if we want to be preachers, theology is what we need (1982:92).

5.2.3.1 Theology follows proclamation

One of the chief components that these strong statements would appear to have in common is their equal concern for preaching that is doctrinally anchored and theologically challenging. However, Thieliicke has provided a unique contribution to this vital discussion of the way that homiletics and dogmatics are interrelated. The distinctive concern that Thieliicke has sounded has to do with the priority of proclamation over theology. For Thieliicke "theology follows the proclamation of the Word; it cannot in principle precede it" (1974:196). He argues that "we do not understand in order to believe; we believe in order to understand," and this ordering essentially reverses the position of priority that might be normally given to theology. Thieliicke explains:

I do not first learn from God's active Word what his action is or can be and then go on to reflect on this experience of God's possibilities. I first reflect on what I can accept as the ostensible work of God. The order of precedence between theology and proclamation is thus reversed (1974:197).

Thieliicke explains that at the beginning of his pastoral ministry he was very reluctant to preach because of his belief that the proclamation of the Word must follow theological reflection and mastery of the cardinal doctrines:

I had lived under the foolish illusion that I could only set foot in the pulpit when I had got the theological theory completely clear in my mind. It was for this reason that I had always avoided preaching whenever possible (1995:131).

However, not long after he had gained the actual experience of preaching he then understood the faulty nature of this assumption:

I learned to understand that *faith comes from preaching and that theology is merely the result of later reflection on this faith. Thus, theology does not, as I had previously imagined, precede preaching but follows it.* In retrospect, I now know that I could not have written the eight volumes of my systematic theology—ethics, dogmatics, and the history of theology—if I had not had the spiritual experiences I owe to my preaching duties [emphasis added] (1995:131).

According to Thieliicke, to argue for the reverse of this position, moving theology to the forefront over proclamation, is simply “theological arrogance” (1974:197). In such a situation, theology would be illegitimately ascribing to itself “a primacy for which it is quite unsuited,” and, as a consequence, the church would suffer greatly (Thieliicke, 1974:197). The practice of theology, disconnected from its dependence upon the proclamation of the Word, terrorizes “the community of those who are called to the miracle of the Spirit” (Thieliicke, 1974:197). Ultimately, it is a practice that is

bound to fail, for its whole enterprise is mistaken and it leaves out of its calculations the reality of the Spirit who precedes reflection. It is thus condemned to a permanent situation of preliminary inquiry (Thieliicke, 1974:197).

Since the New Testament *kerygma* “manifests a combination of theology and proclamation” the relational link between the two is thereby established (Thieliicke, 1974:199). However, because the Spirit of God grants faith and the understanding of the Word by the mechanism of the proclaimed Word itself, preaching must of necessity precede theology.

Theology puts its question on the basis of the encounter with the proclaimed Word and exposure to it. Hermeneutics then investigates the question and its modalities and conditions. It is the epilogue in a process which is effected by the creative Word in the miracle of the Spirit. It is never a prologue (Thieliicke, 1974:198).

That is, one is able to interpret the Bible and its “kerygmatic core” only when one has “been touched by this *kerygma*” and has “come to faith through the witness of the Spirit” (Thieliicke, 1974:201). For Thieliicke, faith *cannot* come by any means except by the preaching of the Word (see 5.3.1 below). Consequently, before anyone can faithfully “practice theology,” one must have first been “reached by the Word of proclamation” which alone possesses the power to renew one’s very existence (Thieliicke, 1974:199).

However, Thieliicke argues that this spiritual renewal, which must serve as the foundation for the practice of theology, does not occur in a “perceptible, chronological succession” (1974:199). There is no

moment of pure proclamation just as there is no pure state of contemplation or feeling. As proclamation is appropriated and articulated and passed on, it is already caught up in reflection.... What is proclaimed and passed on ... is always present in interpreted form. This process of interpretation is itself theology (Thieliicke, 1974:199).

Thieliicke employs a simple illustration in order to substantiate this point. He notes, for example, that a public performance of a Shakespearian play does not have to be postponed “until a philological analysis” of the play has been conducted; to the contrary, he argues that “a good performance, which is quite possible without such an analysis, may ultimately contribute to it” (1974:198).

5.2.3.2 *The necessity of humility and love*

With the proper relationship of theology and proclamation now in view, Thieliicke calls upon theologians to understand that their primary task is that of serving the preaching of the Word and providing “equipment for preachers” (1965b:28). Admittedly, this will require a significant measure of humility on the part of the theologian. Since the discipline of theology proper is “dubious” like all other human endeavors, those practicing it must always remember

how little we know our own hearts and how little we can control the hearts of others, and that we consequently have to entrust everything to the judgment and grace of One who is higher than we (Thieliicke, 1995:235).

In his *Little Exercise for Young Theologians* (1962d), Thieliicke warned that “the study of theology often produces overgrown youths whose internal organs have not correspondingly developed” and that there is “actually something like theological puberty” (1962d:12). Many young theologians and preachers have not arrived at a sufficient state of maturity:

He has not yet come to that maturity which would permit him to absorb into his own life and reproduce out of the freshness of his own personal faith the things which he imagines intellectually and which are accessible to him through reflection (1962d:12).

For this reason Thieliicke says that he did not permit his first year theology students to preach: “I do not tolerate sermons by first-semester young theological students

swaddled in their gowns” (1962d:12). He believed that one who is still learning and maturing should not preach to others “during the formative period in life” when pride is such a temptation (1962d:12.) Yet, if preaching is, in fact, the “greatest intellectual achievement that can be demanded of a theologian,” then the summit of the theological enterprise is reached when the Word of God and the majestic doctrines therein are proclaimed in ways that prove to be relevant to the lives of average people (1995:291). Theology, therefore, is the task of the church, and this crucial responsibility may be summarized as that of demonstrating the “existential relevance of the doctrines and dogmas of the church” through the ministry of proclamation (Dirks, 1972:168).

In addition to the requisite humility required by theologians, Thieliicke also calls for love as an essential character trait. For Thieliicke, love is indispensable to the practice of theology because theology itself is a discipline that is “concerned with the very love of God, with His coming down, His search, His care for souls” (1962d:17). The truth of the Word of God, expressed by the theologian through the mechanism of proclamation, must be combined with love in order to avoid the “gnostic pride” that may otherwise result (1962d:16). Thieliicke believed that every theologian and preacher must appreciate the constant tension that exists between truth and love, as well as the resulting effort required in order to maintain their appropriate balance. To fail to perceive and preserve this delicate equilibrium is “precisely the disease of the theologians” (Thieliicke, 1962d:17):

Sacred theology is not a word to be taken lightly upon our lips.... It can be sacred theology or diabolical theology. That depends upon the hands and hearts which further it (Thieliicke, 1962d:37).

The application of humility and love to both homiletics and dogmatics will ensure that the questions and spiritual problems of the “ordinary washerwomen and the simple hourly-wage earner” will not be neglected (Thieliicke, 1962d:4).

5.2.4 Summary

To this point it is apparent that Thieliicke defined preaching as the carefully prepared and contextually relevant proclamation of the written Scriptures. Furthermore, he affirmed that in the act of preaching a human being delivers the re-creative Word of God to other humans in need, and this task is performed most faithfully within the specific and unique context of Christian worship. Thieliicke was also deeply concerned

about the downgrade in preaching that characterized his distinctive historical era. Along with pointed and insightful criticisms of contemporary preaching, he has offered some simple and practical correctives aimed at the recovery of dynamic pulpit proclamation. Moreover, Thielicke believed that the preaching of the Word must necessarily precede theological reflection, and in this way dogmatics serves homiletics. He argued that the ultimate task of the theologian is to assist the pulpit minister by laying the proper groundwork for the proclamation of the Scriptures.

5.3 Thielicke's view of the role of the Holy Spirit in preaching

Helmut Thielicke's writings, particularly His theological corpus, manifest his deep interest in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit (1974:129-211; 1982:1-126). As the researcher will attempt to demonstrate below, his attention to the work of the Spirit, primarily through the instrumentality of the written Word, has substantial implications for his views of preaching. Thielicke's understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit in pulpit proclamation may be examined from two fronts: 1) how he understood the relation of the Holy Spirit to the written Word of God and 2) how he understood the relationship between the Holy Spirit, the preacher, and the audience.

5.3.1 The Spirit and the written Word

Thielicke believed that the principal aim of the act of preaching was to declare, explain, and apply the written Word of God to people in need (Dirks, 1972:164-165; Thielicke, 1965:43; 1974:198). For Thielicke, every act of proclamation that could be justly classified as authentic Christian preaching must ultimately be designed to "make the Word of God known" (Thielicke, 1965:43). He explains:

Having its origin in oral proclamation, Scripture presses back to its origin, i.e., to the presentation of its message by the spoken word. It seeks to be preached, being itself no more than the score which must be sounded faithfully in living notes (1982:109).

A sermon, by its very nature as "exposition" rather than mere "recitation" (Thielicke, 1982:109), is an attempt to expound some portion of Holy Scripture

and in this exposition shows that it is seeking to help people to appropriate it with understanding. [The sermon] therefore calls the text out of the "then" when it was written into the "now" in which it is heard and is intended to meet and speak to the hearer (Thielicke, 1965:43).

However, this very fact that the subject matter of the sermon is the written Word of God presents an intractable problem for both the preacher and the audience. Closely following the contours of orthodox Lutheran theology (Thielicke, 1982:3), Thielicke maintained that in view of the sinful nature of man the knowledge of God is impossible, even for those creatures who, despite their spiritual alienation from the Creator, retain the divine image and likeness. According to Thielicke, there are two reasons for this. First, there is an epistemological barrier between the Creator and the creature, and this is the “basic epistemological problem” of theology itself (Thielicke, 1982:6). God is “not one object among others” and, therefore, He “escapes objectification, and lies outside the radius of human reason, which is limited by the horizon of experience” (Thielicke, 1982:6). Though God makes all human knowledge possible, “he himself is not knowable as the basis of knowledge. He upholds the world nexus but is not himself to be found in it” (Thielicke, 1982:6). Appealing to texts such as 1 Corinthians 2:11, Thielicke further explains that no exhaustive creaturely knowledge of God is possible because “only God knows what is in God,” and there is “no being that is analogous to God” (1965:42). Therefore,

if there is to be such a thing as theological knowledge, an understanding of the Word and the mighty acts of God, then the analogy to God which men have given up [in the fall] must be restored in a new act of creation. The divine Word must create its own hearers” (1965:42).

Then, added to this epistemological problem, which Thielicke recognized only as the initial symptom of a greater spiritual infirmity, is a second factor (1982:6). Man is a sinner and by nature rejects the self-revelation of God (Thielicke, 1982:11). According to the New Testament man is “no longer free to be open to the truth” and, by means of his rebellion against God, has put himself “in a position of bondage, of darkening (Romans 1:21), of being ‘given up’ (1:24, 26)” (Thielicke, 1982:6). In such a hopeless spiritual condition, the knowledge of God is impossible because of this “deeper ontic disturbance” within the heart of man:

From the moment of the disruption of creation and man’s fall into alienation it has always been in man’s interest that God should not exist, or at least that he should not exist as he has disclosed himself to us in the Bible as Lord and Judge, so that we are forced to understand ourselves in our dependence, in our being referred to him, and in our need of redemption (1982:6).

Since the very instant of the fall, man has existed “in a state of permanently suppressing the truth, of holding it down by force” (Thielicke, 1982:6). Being spiritually dead and

“a prisoner of his own defection from God,” he is unable to hear and understand the Word and, particularly, the message of salvation in the Gospel (1982:xxvi).

The spiritual and moral condition of fallen humanity, particularly with reference to God’s self-revelation, has dire implications for the ministry of preaching. The preacher himself, also a sinner, is powerless to bring about the conditions under which the Word may be received in the hearts of his hearers. He cannot raise them to spiritual life, produce faith in their hearts, or overcome their persistent resistance to God’s Word, and he is unable to bring them to repentance and the humble acceptance of the proffered salvation. The understanding and reception of the Word

is dependent on conditions for which the preacher can only pray, but which he can neither presuppose nor produce by means of his own persuasive power. This is why the pulpit prayer is essential to the sermon (Thielicke, 1965:44).

With this in view, Thielicke argued that the act of preaching the written Scriptures, naturally preceded by the arduous process of biblical hermeneutics, is a most unique and challenging enterprise, one vastly unlike other forms of speech or human communication:

For spiritual hermeneutics, and thus the exposition of Holy Scriptures which takes place in preaching, can be carried out only with an ultimate humble reservation, namely, the realization that the expositor himself *cannot* bring about the sought-for understanding and that here as everywhere else the exposition (understood as human ‘work’) is powerless. For the expositor does not have it in his power to create the conditions under which understanding and appropriation are possible at all. For, after all, these conditions consist in the hearer’s having been *called* into the new being, into a new conformity with God. This, after all, is the only way in which an end is put to the condition in which he sees but does not perceive and hears but does not understand. This miracle only the Holy Spirit can perform through the Word which creates its own hearers (Thielicke, 1965:43-44).

Therefore, a true miracle, produced in the hearts of sinners by the Holy Spirit, is essential to both the preaching and the hearing of the Word. Since the Word gives testimony to the one who is “the Wholly Other,” and from whom all men are “separated not only by the *diastasis* of Creator and creature but also by the alienation of the fall,” the work of the Holy Spirit is necessary in order to “open up this word to us” (Thielicke, 1982:xxv, 12).

At this point the fundamental connection between the Spirit and the Word, or “the hermeneutics of the Holy Spirit,” is most clearly articulated by Thielicke (1982:6). He

held that the inscripturated Word of God and the ministry of the Holy Spirit “may be distinguished but not separated” (1982:94). The written Word “contains the Spirit,” and the Spirit is “hidden in the letter of the Word” (Thielicke, 1982:94). For this reason “the Spirit never works without the instrumentality of the Word” (Thielicke, 1982:95).

In order for the sinner to hear, understand, and respond affirmatively to the Word that is proclaimed in Christian preaching, Thielicke believes the Spirit must first perform the work of regeneration (1974:156-157). This means that the ministry of preaching will be fruitless unless the Spirit of God moves powerfully through the Word in the hearts of the hearers bringing about a profound and fundamental change in their status as people in bondage to sin, guilt, unbelief, death, and the blinding effects of the fall that cause them to resist God’s self-revelation. He explains:

The power of presentation that is proper to the Spirit works by bringing and appropriating the Word to us. It moves towards us and we accept it. The saving address *to* us becomes an event of reception *in* us. As we are empowered to accept salvation we are drawn into it. We are taken up into salvation history (1982:8).

Thielicke has set forth at least two notable claims concerning the connection between the Spirit and the written Word proclaimed in preaching. First, he argues that the Scriptures are active, effectual, and self-attesting. For this reason he describes the Bible as the “active Word of God” that possesses the inherent power to change “the conditions of my being by bringing me into the truth of being” (Thielicke, 1974:200). This “active Word” also “mediates” the truth and “is plainly the instrument of the miracle of the Spirit” that actually effectuates the forgiveness of sins (Thielicke, 1982:95) and brings about “new birth and the new creation of the spiritual man” (Thielicke, 1974:202). Thielicke believed that the written Word is effectual and active primarily

in the sense that in the law and the gospel it breaks off the old existence and starts a new one, bringing sins to light and forgiving them, changing God’s rejection into acceptance which gives me a new future and makes me a new creature in the miracle of the Spirit (1974:196).

In the preaching of the Word the texts of the Holy Scriptures “have spoken to me” and “have become for me an active and transforming Word” (Thielicke, 1974:200). Since the preaching of the written Word is attended by the “creative work of the Spirit within it,” what is sounded and heard “does not return empty” but “works, accomplishes, and creates” (Thielicke, 1977:38). Thielicke’s belief in the inherent power of the written

Word is not limited to preaching. He claimed that the “effectual Word” is also spoken in “pastoral counseling” where the Scriptures are applied with even more specificity to the compounded spiritual problems resulting from the fallen human condition (1974:196).

Secondly, Thieliicke taught that the Word, energized and applied by the Spirit of God, produces faith in the heart. Initially, the Holy Spirit, active in the Word, revives the sinner’s heart, removes the spiritual scales from his eyes, and enables him to understand that God is personally addressing him in the Word:

The Spirit’s testimony does not just point us away from the self and its pre-conditions and activities. It also has the positive function of directing us to the self-evidence of the Word and of him to whom it bears witness (Thieliicke, 1974:132).

The primary ministry of the Spirit, carried out in concert with the Word, is to “relate to us what this word tells us of the great acts of God, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting” (Thieliicke, 1974:133-134). It is through the instrumentality of the Word that the Spirit then

evokes faith, kindles fervent love, and opens up immediate access to God by illuminating the mighty acts of God as a nexus into which I am taken up and whose earlier stages are of contemporary or existential significance to me, so that in the simpler and more expressive language of Scripture I am pricked in the heart (Acts 2:37) (Thieliicke 1974:134).

The saving faith that is produced in the sinner through the instrumentality of the Word is nothing less than a “new creation by the Spirit” (Thieliicke, 1977:38), and it arises in the heart

through proclamation in the power of the Spirit (Galatians 3:2). The Spirit’s power of presentation expresses itself in making us contemporary with the Christ event. In faith we participate in Christ’s death and resurrection by dying and rising again with him (Romans 6:4ff.; Galatians 2:19; Colossians 2:12; 3:1). We are drawn into salvation by it as we receive salvation and acquire access to it (Romans 5:2). By it God’s Spirit finds an entry into us (Romans 8:9, 11), so that we are set in the new analogy (Thieliicke, 1982:10).

Therefore, this faith is not to be confused with “an inner light after the manner of mysticism or enthusiasm” (Thieliicke, 1977:38-39). The Spirit miraculously endows the sinner with the ability to hear the Word, testifies to its fundamental truthfulness, and then prompts faith in the heart while granting “participation in the self-knowledge of God” (Thieliicke, 1977:38). Accompanied by the Spirit, the Word “creates the

conditions under which it discloses itself” to the sinner and thereby creates its own receptive audience (Thielicke, 1974:37-38). Thielicke asserts that this is a miracle of the Spirit that transcends “all human control,” and by it “the Word opens itself up to hearing and appropriation” (Thielicke, 1977:38). The proclaimed Word necessarily comes first, and then faith follows as produced by the Spirit. Saving faith then is impossible apart from the proclamation of the Word of God and the powerful application of that Word to those who hear. In the act of preaching, “it is the Spirit of God himself who confesses this Word” and “bears witness to it as his own” (Thielicke, 1974:158). Thus, the relationship between the preached Word and faith “can be thought of only as one in which the Word has undisputed primacy” (Thielicke, 1977:40).

5.3.2 The Spirit, the preacher, and the audience

Concerning the relationship between the work of the Holy Spirit, the preacher, and the audience, Thielicke’s primary concern was that of promoting the minister’s full dependence upon the inherent power of the Word as applied to the audience by the Spirit. Thielicke had evidently witnessed an alarming trend in the preaching of his day. He observed that some of his contemporaries, lacking the requisite confidence in the power of the Spirit released through the preached Word, had adopted other means and mechanisms by which they hoped to produce change in the lives of their hearers. However, Thielicke was convinced that when preachers and churches began to rely upon artificial, external methods and techniques, even though they may produce apparent results, they are no longer dependent upon the work of the Holy Spirit (Thielicke, 1965b:48-49; 1982:9-10). He feared that the employment of clever devices and strategies and the attempt to manufacture excitement through “attractive novelties” would eventually “make the work of the Holy Spirit unnecessary” (Thielicke, 1965b:48-49). As far as Thielicke was concerned, preachers who might be tempted to use such methods should perform a rigorous self-examination to see

whether they are men who have been struck by the message and are now bearing witness to that message with new means, or whether they are merely clever fellows who are suffering from their brain waves or liturgical playboys who want to try a new twist (Thielicke, 1965b:49).

The fundamental reason for the adoption of these methods, what Thielicke referred to as nothing more than the use of “human artistry, modish rhetoric, or even wordy nonsense” that shamefully “conforms to the age and says whatever tickles the ears of

the hearers,” is that “the Word’s own spiritual power of presentation is not trusted” (1982:9-10). The preacher himself is not convinced that the message he preaches “will be endowed with the *pneuma* and become God’s own Word in spite of the weakness of human lips and the fragility of earthen vessels” (1982:107). For Thielicke, the solution to this critical problem of the introduction of man-made mechanisms and novelties into the pulpit must begin with the preacher himself and his personal encounter with the power and sufficiency of the written Word as energized by the Spirit. He must preach

as one who has been reached and affected, that the Word has made itself present to him by the Spirit, and that he for his part now calls those who are assembled into this presence (1982:9).

The preacher “to whom the Word has actualized itself by the power of presentation” can do nothing less than bravely proclaim what “has happened to him” (1982:9-10). The “bold and hazardous task” of preaching, if it is to be true to the apostolic example, must be performed by one who is

convinced that he need not bear the responsibility for its success and that Another is there interceding for him. He knows that not he but the Spirit of God himself is able to reach and open the hearts of his hearers. And only to the degree that he is assured of this will he mount the pulpit consoled and strengthened (Thielicke, 1965b:24-25).

Yet Thielicke cautioned that this kind of confidence in “the miracle of the Spirit” is not easily achieved (1965b:24-25). One must “practice” relying upon the Spirit’s power, pray fervently, and give careful attention to “the message of the text which is being preached” (1965b:24-25).

It should be acknowledged that on this specific point Thielicke is not alone in his concerns about the Spirit, the preacher, and the audience. For example, Adams asserts that apart from the dynamic power and presence of the Holy Spirit, working both in the preacher and in the audience, our “preaching is worthless, indeed, injurious” (Adams, 1982:7). However, the preacher who is fully dependent upon the Spirit’s activity may be assured that God will bless his efforts, even in spite of “poorly exegeted and constructed messages” (Adams, 1982:7). Barth cautions, however, that the minister’s dependence upon the assistance of the Spirit in no way absolves him of his responsibility to labor intensely in the production of the sermon:

The preacher has no right to rely on the Holy Spirit in matters for which he is responsible, without making any effort himself. With all modesty and earnestness he must labor and strive to present the Word aright, even though he is fully aware that only the Holy Spirit can in fact *recte docere* (Barth, 1963:35).

Ferguson claims that the minister's anointing with the power of the Holy Spirit is the "chief thing of all the work of preaching" (2006:21). Martin, in a monograph dedicated to the subject of the Spirit's role in preaching, notes that the divine operations of the Spirit, both in the delivery and in the hearing of the sermon, are an "indispensible necessity for every preacher of the Word of God if his ministry would meet the biblical standard of what preaching ought to be" (2011:7). Furthermore, Martin claims that

unless we have the spirit of the prophets resting upon us, the mantle which we wear is nothing but a rough garment to deceive. We ought to be driven forth with abhorrence from the society of honest men for daring to speak in the name of the Lord if the Spirit of God rests not upon us (2011:16).

Sounding a note very similar to that of Thielicke, Mohler characterizes Spirit-empowered preaching as the humble acknowledgement that the "human instrument has no control" over the message he proclaims nor "over the Word as it is set loose within the congregation" (2008:47). Rust has argued that apart from the guidance of the Holy Spirit the minister of the Word has no real authority upon which to stand as he delivers his message (1955:153). To preach effectually and authoritatively, the minister must enter the pulpit with "theological certainty" and with the accompanying confidence that only the Holy Spirit can "bring to birth in his heart" (Rust, 1955:153).

5.3.3 Summary

Helmut Thielicke was convinced that one should expect the Spirit of God to work in the hearts and lives of sinners primarily by the instrumentality of the written Word, particularly as it is preached. When one hears the Word proclaimed, God speaks with both power and contemporary relevance. For Thielicke, the inscripturated Word is effectual, authoritative, and self-attesting. As the Word is preached, God discloses Himself, testifies to His great acts in the history of redemption, and meets people where they are, calling them to faith and salvation. Thielicke also argued for the development of the minister's full confidence in the Spirit as he prepares and delivers his message from the pages of Holy Scripture. Artificial means or man-devised techniques that might otherwise be employed to move the hearts of men should be avoided. Rather, the minister must carry out the duties of his office with the settled conviction that apart from the Spirit's empowerment and guidance all preaching will be ineffectual.

5.4 Thielicke's view of preaching in light of the PES

Having examined Helmut Thielicke's general philosophy of preaching, with particular focus upon how he viewed the Spirit working through the instrumentality of the written Word, it is now appropriate to move toward a detailed evaluation of his sermons that directly treated the PES. The specific aim of this section is to provide an introduction to the final chapter of this thesis where a selection of Thielicke's sermons on the PES will be examined. First, the researcher shall offer a brief summary of Thielicke's theological position on the PES, and secondly, the researcher shall list the sermons on the PES that have been chosen from various collections of his published manuscripts that will be analyzed in 6.0.

5.4.1 Thielicke and the PES

While Thielicke's views concerning the numerous theological themes that intersect the problem of evil have been treated previously (4.0), it would seem helpful to provide an overall summary of his approach to the PES. What makes this both necessary and compelling is Thielicke's own candid admission that his entire life of theological study was motivated by his personal experiences with the PES. In his autobiography he confesses: "My theological work was always only a superstructure placed upon the experiences and sufferings of my life" (1995:85). He also claims that all of the complex theological problems he wrestled with throughout his professorial career "emerged not as the result of purely intellectual processes" but grew from the many "conflicts" which persistently confronted him in the course of his early life (1995:84). The numerous experiences of suffering and personal tribulation, as well as the deep theological reflection they prompted, eventually impacted his preaching in a most dramatic way. In fact, he notes that the relationship between his "thought and life," which came into particular focus as he dealt with evil and suffering, "was later to reveal itself more immediately and openly" in his sermons than it did in his "systematic thought" (Thielicke, 1995:85).

In the first volume of Thielicke's three-part systematic theology, he briefly addresses the PES and other related questions that pose exceptional difficulties for Christian theism. Three key points are made that will aid in the assessment of his sermons on the PES.

5.4.1.1 *The PES is a persistent theological problem for preachers*

First, Thieliicke recognizes that the PES will be a persistent problem for all Christians, especially for those who have the responsibility of teaching and preaching. He asserts that the “question of theodicy” is always present somewhere in the background of every theological discussion since it deals with the very nature of God Himself (Thieliicke, 1974:380). Consequently, theologians and preachers alike will always be addressing the numerous questions precipitated by the PES such as “why God permits this or does that, or whether he exists at all” (Thieliicke, 1974:380). This would seem to imply that to one degree or another, every sermon that seeks to present the Christian message of salvation or otherwise faithfully follow the contours of redemptive history will necessarily touch on the PES, even if only tangentially.

5.4.1.2 *Many theological questions related to the PES are unanswerable*

Secondly, Thieliicke admits that there are a host of general theological questions associated with the PES that cannot be answered satisfactorily or treated pedagogically. These would include:

What is the meaning of history? How can God allow evil? What about predestination and free will or the omnipotence of God and opposition to him? How can the statistical fact that some are predestined and others are not be harmonized with the righteousness of God? (Thieliicke, 1974:381)

Thieliicke believed that “illuminating” responses to these complex questions could not be provided solely within the sterile atmosphere of the “pedagogical method” (1974:381). Rather, these theological perplexities should be contemplated from the perspective of “the details of personal experience and faith” (Thieliicke, 1974:381). A vibrant personal faith in God

bears witness here that God cannot be imprisoned in a world-view in which everything is easy. We can only believe in him whose thoughts are higher than ours; we cannot put these thoughts into systems. We are thus liberated from all systems. We are not imprisoned in a Christian world-view or in Christian ideologies. We are summoned to openness and to ventures of a higher order (Thieliicke, 1974:380).

5.4.1.3 *A Christocentric focus is essential to preaching on the PES*

Thirdly, given the unanswerable nature of such theological questions and the mysterious nature of God and His ways, Thieliicke suggested that a minister's paramount concern in preaching should be that of focusing upon "Christ and the gospel" in order that we may "know our sin and his grace" (1974:318). That is, the minister's first priority is not to attempt to answer or explain all of the intricate questions of Christian theology but to adopt a Christocentric, gospel-oriented approach to preaching. The person in the pew must first be led to the point of his own "faith-encounter with the free grace of God" as the Word is preached in the illuminating, life-giving power of the Holy Spirit (Thieliicke, 1974:318). The minister of the Word should recognize that the problems and questions associated with the PES "are not for beginners who have not yet come to the point of detailed experience. This wine is too heady for infants. Each doctrine has its own measure, time, and age" (Thieliicke, 1974:318). It is only after a living faith in Christ has been birthed in one's heart that the contemplation of the difficulties posed by the PES can begin. If the minister follows this essential order, Thieliicke believes that there will be less confusion generated by the complicated and persistent questions that reflection on the PES prompts and a firmer foundation for the worship of God (1974:318).

5.4.2 Thieliicke and preaching on the PES: a selection of examples from his published sermons and some initial observations

The central aim of this thesis necessitates an investigation of a selection of the published sermons of Helmut Thieliicke that address the subject of the PES. Before commencing with this examination the researcher shall identify these sermons and then offer some initial observations concerning Thieliicke's preaching on the PES.

5.4.2.1 *A list of Thieliicke's sermons on the PES*

The following is a selection of thirty-five of Thieliicke's published sermons that explicitly treat the PES. The sermons are presented chronologically as they appear in their respective collections according to the date on which they were first published in English. The titles of the messages, the page numbers where they appear in the collections, and the biblical texts upon which they are based (if applicable) are also

provided. It should be noted that with the exception of the four meditations selected from *Faith: The Great Adventure* (1985), each of the sermons that will be analyzed were first delivered to live audiences.

Our Heavenly Father: Sermons on The Lord's Prayer (1960):

This sermon series was originally preached in the city of Stuttgart, initially started at the Church of the Hospitallers and later completed at St. Matthew's Parish Church.

1. "Our Father, Who Art in Heaven, Part One" (pp. 17-29)—Matthew 6:5-6.
2. "Thy Kingdom Come" (pp. 55-67)—Matthew 11:2-6.
3. "Thy Will be Done" (pp. 68-76)—Matthew 7:21.
4. "Lead Us Not Into Temptation" (pp. 115-130)—1 Corinthians 10:13.
5. "Deliver Us From Evil" (pp. 131-145)—Matthew 4:1-11.

How The World Began (1961a):

This series of messages, based upon the first eleven chapters of Genesis, was delivered in Hamburg at St. Michael's Church.

6. "The Primeval Witness" (pp. 13-25)—Genesis 1:1-2.
7. "God's Autograph" (pp. 41-56)—Genesis 1:6-25.
8. "Man, the Risk of God" (pp. 59-71)—Genesis 1:26-31.
9. "How Evil Came Into This World" (pp. 121-135)—Genesis 3:1-7.
10. "Guilt and Destiny" (pp. 152-169)—Genesis 3:8-15.
11. "The Mystery of Death" (pp. 170-184)—Genesis 3:8-19.
12. "The Cain Within Us" (pp. 187-201)—Genesis 4:1-8.
13. "Floods and Fires" (pp. 235-251)—Genesis 6:9-22; 7:17-24.
14. "Noah—The Adventure of Faith" (pp. 252-269)—Genesis 8:15-20.
15. "The Fear of Our Fellows" (pp. 273-287)—Genesis 11:1-9.

Christ And The Meaning Of Life (1962a):

This is a collection of sermons Thielicke preached on German radio and television.

16. "World History and World Judgment" (pp. 7-15)—Various texts.
17. "Jesus Christ in the Front-Line Trenches" (pp. 16-19)—No stated text.
18. "Is Technology Diabolical?" (pp. 138-146)—No stated text.

The Silence Of God (1962b):

These messages were originally composed and delivered between 1942 and 1951 in various venues.

19. "I Am Not Alone With My Anxiety" (pp. 3-9)—Various texts.
20. "The Silence of God" (pp. 10-21)—Matthew 15:21-28.
21. "The Great Mercy" (pp. 32-42)—Luke 7:36-50.
22. "On the Threshold of the Future" (pp. 50-58)—Genesis 9:14.

I Believe: The Christian's Creed (1968):

This series of messages on the *Apostle's Creed* was preached at St. Michael's Church in Hamburg.

23. "I Believe in God the Father" (pp. 16-28)—Matthew 7:11.
24. "I Believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth" (pp. 29-41)—Psalm 104:24, 29, 30.
25. "An Additional Question: Do Miracles Really Happen?" (pp. 42-54)—Matthew 17:20.
26. "Descended Into Hell" (pp. 121-133)—Luke 16:19-31.
27. "An Additional Question: Where are the Dead?" (pp. 134-147)—Philippians 3:20-21.
28. "From Thence He Shall Come to Judge the Quick and the Dead" (pp. 201-214)—Matthew 24:36-44.

How To Believe Again (1972):

Thielicke first preached these messages at St. Michael's Church in Hamburg.

29. "How We Learn to Speak With God" (pp. 90-100)—Luke 11:9-13.

30. “When Nothing Makes Sense” (pp. 182-193)—Matthew 11:2-6.
31. “What is the ‘Death Of God’ All About?” (pp. 207-220)—John 9:1-3.

Faith The Great Adventure (1985):

This is a series of printed sermons that were based upon meditations Thielicke previously authored for the German Christian publication *Glaubensinformation*.

32. “Love Is Stronger Than Death” (pp. 100-107)—John 21:15-19.
33. “How Does One Cope With Unresolved Questions?” (pp. 108-115)—Matthew 11:2-6.
34. “The Adventure of Discipleship” (pp. 126-143)—Luke 10:17-24.
35. “Prayer—The Way of Peace” (pp. 150-154)—John 16:23-24, 32-33.

These thirty-five sermons may be categorized and illustrated by the following table:

Sermon Title	Sermon Text	Sermon Theme
“The Primeval Witness”	Genesis 1:1-2	The problem of suffering is made acute by its apparent meaninglessness.
“God’s Autograph”	Genesis 1:6-25	Human suffering and evil promote faith in God’s love.
“Man, the Risk of God”	Genesis 1:26-31	God’s love for mankind requires the risk of his rebellion.
“How Evil Came Into this World”	Genesis 3:1-7	Evil, and the suffering that results, has come into the world through the devil’s temptation.
“Guilt and Destiny”	Genesis 3:8-15	Human sin has devastating consequences.
“The Mystery of Death”	Genesis 3:8-19	Death is the result of human guilt.
“The Cain Within Us”	Genesis 4:1-8	The murderous heart of Cain resides within every human being.
“Floods and Fires”	Genesis 6:9-22; 7:17-24	Though mankind has fallen, God has fixed the boundaries of his self-destruction.
“Noah—The Adventure of Faith”	Genesis 8:15-20	God’s gift of free will to mankind implies the possibility of rebellion.

“On the Threshold of the Future”	Genesis 9:14	The goodness and mercy of God are not exhausted by human sins, sufferings, and sorrows.
“The Fear of Our Fellows”	Genesis 11:1-9	Sin has turned mankind against himself.
“I Believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth”	Psalms 104:24, 29-30	We must trust our Father when life is painful and difficult.
“Deliver Us From Evil”	Matthew 4:1-11	The devil is real and he is “behind all the dead and bloodshed.”
“Our Father, Who Art in Heaven, Part One”	Matthew 6:5-6	The history of the world is “a story of humanity without a Father.”
“I Believe in God the Father”	Matthew 7:11	God our Father provides meaning to human existence.
“Thy Will be Done”	Matthew 7:21	Man’s own will has destroyed him. Human life is a “constant boycott” of God’s will.
“When Nothing Makes Sense”	Matthew 11:2-6	God can be trusted, despite what we cannot see nor understand.
“How Does One Cope With Unresolved Questions?”	Matthew 11:2-6	Faith in Christ is strengthened through trials.
“Thy Kingdom Come”	Matthew 11:2-6	Human kingdoms have been built in defiance of God’s Kingdom.
“The Silence of God”	Matthew 15:21-28	God can be trusted in the times of silence, the painful experiences of suffering and grief.
“An Additional Question: Do Miracles Really Happen?”	Matthew 17:20	God’s power of love and grace overcomes the guilt and consequences of humanity’s sin.
“From Thence He Shall Come to Judge the Quick and the Dead”	Matthew 24:36-44	In the end, Christ will have the victory over all powers.
“The Great Mercy”	Luke 7:36-50	While God owes us no explanations, He grants us abundant mercy.
“The Adventure of Discipleship”	Luke 10:17-24	The life of discipleship is one of learning to trust the love and power of the Father.
“How We Learn to Speak With God”	Luke 11:9-13	The world is not governed by fate but by a Father.

“Descended Into Hell”	Luke 16:19-31	God the Father reaches out to us in our darkest and most painful moments.
“What is the ‘Death of God’ All About?”	John 9:1-3	Through Christ we see into the heart of God and experience His love.
“Prayer—The Way to Peace”	John 16:23-24, 32-33	Christ stands at our side in all of life’s anxieties.
“Love Is Stronger Than Death”	John 21:15-19	The powers of darkness and death have been overcome by the love of Christ for us.
“Lead Us Not Into Temptation”	1 Corinthians 10:13	Following the fall, human life is dangerous.
“An Additional Question: Where are the Dead?”	Philippians 3:20-21	Nothing can come into the life of a Christian that has not first passed through the Savior’s hands.
“I Am Not Alone With My Anxiety”	Various Texts	Anxieties, produced by human rebellion, are calmed by the Father’s hand.
“Is Technology Diabolical?”	No Stated Text	Man’s God-given powers of construction may also be used for destruction.
“World History and World Judgment”	Various Texts	We must know the Judge in order to understand His judgments.
“Jesus Christ in the Front-Line Trenches”	No Stated Text	Jesus is with us in the most difficult of times.

5.4.2.2 *Some initial observations concerning Thielicke’s sermons on the PES*

As the chart presented above suggests, the thirty-five sermons selected for this study may be initially considered in terms of three categories: 1) the sermon titles, 2) the canonical distribution of the sermon texts, and 3) the sermon themes as related to the PES. As to the distribution of the sermon texts, twelve are based upon biblical passages from the Old Testament, nineteen are drawn from the New Testament, and four sermons have no discernable foundational text. Specifically, eleven of the messages are taken from Genesis and one from the book of Psalms. With the exception of two of the sermons, the New Testament texts are drawn from the Gospels, with ten based upon Matthew, four on Luke, and three on John. There is also one sermon each from 1 Corinthians and Philippians. What is noteworthy about this textual distribution is the

fact that the majority of Thielicke's sermons addressing the PES were based upon biblical narratives (Genesis, Matthew, Luke, and John). This is somewhat surprising since one might anticipate that sermons treating the PES would be significantly dependent upon texts from the New Testament epistles where the core doctrines of the Christian faith, particularly those touching themes associated with human sin and its consequences find greater explication (Romans 1:18-32, 3:9-20; 2 Corinthians 4:3-18; Galatians 5:1-21; Ephesians 2:1-3, 6:10-20; James 1:2-17; 1 Peter 1:5-9, 2:21-25, 4:12-19, 5:6-11; 2 Peter 3:3-13, for example). Thielicke was apparently drawn toward the historical record, particularly that of the sayings of Jesus as they were uttered in the context of His relationships with people. This appears to support the fact that Thielicke, as demonstrated above, was very reluctant to address the PES from a purely dogmatic or pedagogical perspective. His overall approach, as articulated in his writings and evident in his choice of sermon texts, was to establish an immediate connection to his audience via the biblical narratives and especially the Gospels.

The titles Thielicke selected for these messages are also quite revealing. The thirty-five sermon titles may be classified into three simple groupings: 1) titles that express compelling questions such as *"How Evil Came Into the World,"* or *"How Does One Cope With Unresolved Questions?,"* 2) titles that introduce important issues and life-situations such as *"Man, the Risk of God,"* *"Guilt and Destiny,"* or *"The Mystery of Death,"* and 3) titles that directly expose biblical or theological themes such as *"Thy Kingdom Come,"* *"On the Threshold of the Future,"* or *"Descended Into Hell."* What is apparent about these titles is that they are interesting, simply stated, and carefully designed to establish an immediate connection with a diverse audience. In the choice of these particular sermon titles Thielicke has avoided any technical theological jargon and philosophical language that might otherwise intimidate the hearer or reader. It would appear that he has been true to his ardent desire to speak the language of the laity from the pulpit, particularly as he addressed the complexity of the PES.

Regarding the various themes of these individual sermons, the following two initial observations may be set forth. These and other observations will be further developed below in 6.0. First, Thielicke has stressed the fact that the PES exists because of human sin. These sermons demonstrate a pronounced clarity and courage in the way sin is exposed for what it is, with all of its horrible consequences. There is no attempt to soften or sidestep this fundamental truth. Thielicke believes that we must accept the

responsibility for the presence of such evils in the world. While Satan and the demons are real and continually assail us with a host of temptations, the burden of responsibility for the world's suffering and death falls squarely upon those human moral agents who have been created in the divine image and likeness. Secondly, there is a repeated emphasis upon God as *Father*. This seems to be Thielicke's favorite image of God, and he deploys it with great frequency when addressing the PES and related issues. The evils in the world may be traced to the fact that humans have abandoned their Father, through their rebellion have perverted the world He has created, and must be reconciled to Him by the ministry of Christ. And as believers in Christ suffer the continuing effects of humanity's cosmic rebellion, God the Father, who governs the world with perfect wisdom, is ever with them in love, mercy, strength, and comfort.

5.4.3 Summary

Clearly, Helmut Thielicke was driven to address the PES to his generation out of a concern to respond to many of his own troubling questions about evil and suffering. The fact that he had personally experienced much tribulation in his life also led him to approach preaching on this subject with great pastoral caution and sensitivity. He was careful not to probe the great mysteries of divine sovereignty and the presence of evil in ways that would distract the listeners from the simplicity of the Gospel message. He was also prudent in the choice of biblical texts and titles for these messages, choosing to confront the PES within the canonical framework of the unfolding drama of redemption, especially the earthly life and teachings of Jesus, and thereby maximizing his connection to the audience.

5.5 Chapter summary

In this chapter the researcher has attempted to examine Helmut Thielicke's views on preaching, with special focus upon confronting the PES homiletically. Following a brief description of Thielicke's preaching as reported by one of his students (Dirks, 1968, 1972), the researcher has examined his perspectives on preaching in general, including his criticisms of modern preaching and suggested correctives, and has specifically considered his interest in the role of the Holy Spirit in both the act of preaching and the hearing of the message. Finally, the researcher has considered

Thielicke's unique perspective on preaching in light of the PES including the identification of thirty-five of his published sermons that directly treat the subject.

In the next chapter the researcher shall set forth the results of a thorough investigation of these thirty-five published sermons on the PES. The intent of this examination and report is two-fold: 1) to understand how Thielicke confronted the PES homiletically and 2) to identify the particular features of his sermons on the PES that may assist pulpit ministers today. In the course of this analysis special attention will be given to the sermon texts—their structure, themes, rhetorical strategies, points of application, use of illustrations, and other practical components that would aid in appreciating how Thielicke excelled as a preacher in these specific ways.

CHAPTER SIX

6.0 THIELICKE AS MODEL: AN ANALYSIS OF A SELECTION OF PUBLISHED SERMONS DEALING WITH THE PROBLEM OF EVIL AND SUFFERING

Up to this point in the present thesis, the researcher has explored Helmut Thielicke's early life and career as a theologian and preacher, introduced the philosophical and theological challenges of preaching on the PES, offered a brief analysis of the theological foundations of Thielicke's preaching on the PES, and examined his general views of preaching and, in particular, his views of preaching on the difficult subject of the PES. In this chapter the researcher shall consider how Thielicke may serve as a model for contemporary preachers who address the PES homiletically. This will involve a report and summary of an initial analysis of thirty-five of his published sermons that explicitly treat this subject. These messages, chosen from among seven of his translated and published sermon collections, address the PES from numerous biblical texts and were delivered by Thielicke in various settings and venues from 1942 until the late 1970s (see 5.4.2.1). However, in order to prevent this thesis from becoming unnecessarily lengthy, the researcher will offer a detailed report on a smaller selection of two sermons from each of the seven published collections that contain messages addressing the PES. These fourteen messages will provide a sufficient illustration of Thielicke's approach to preaching on the PES that is demonstrated in the larger selection of thirty-five sermons.

The sermons selected for this investigation and report will be examined in the following manner. After identifying the biblical text (if stated), the title, and the setting of the sermon (if known), each of the messages will be analyzed according to four major criteria: 1) the overall theme of the sermon, 2) the way the PES surfaces in the sermon, 3) how the PES is addressed in the sermon, and 4) the presence of any noteworthy rhetorical features in the sermon.

Following the analysis of this smaller selection of Thielicke's sermons on the PES, the researcher will offer some general observations and initial conclusions that are applicable to all thirty-five of the messages. Then in the final section of this thesis, the researcher shall consider the practical and specific implications that develop from these

thirty-five messages and how Thielicke's published sermons on the PES may assist modern preachers in treating this subject.

The limited selection of fourteen sermons chosen for illustration and reporting are set forth below according to the date of the collection's publication in English. The sermons are treated in the order in which they appear in the collection. The numbers in parentheses represent the page numbers of the respective volumes that are referenced.

6.1 An analysis of fourteen published sermons by Helmut Thielicke that illustrate how he addressed the problem of evil and suffering in his preaching

6.1.1 Sermons from the collection entitled *Our Heavenly Father: Sermons On The Lord's Prayer* (1960)

In the preface to this collection of sermons, Thielicke explains that these messages were preached in Stuttgart at the Church of the Hospitallers during the war years and, specifically, at the time of the Allied air raids on Germany: "the declining days of a reign of terror, and finally through the period of total military and political collapse and the beginning of the occupation" (13). This series of eleven messages was finished in the small confines of the auditorium of the St. Matthew's parish house after the destruction of the Church of the Hospitallers. Thielicke describes the hearers of these sermons as those with the "torment of doubt and despair" etched on their faces and the deep "hunger and thirst for a valid comfort and encouragement that would stand the test in the hours of work, in hours spent in underground shelters, suffering agonies of body and mind" (13-14).

6.1.1.1 "Thy Kingdom Come"—Matthew 11:2-6

The setting of the sermon:

In a footnote Thielicke states that this sermon was preached from the choir loft of the Church of the Hospitallers in Stuttgart. Allied air raids, he notes, had reduced the beautiful church to ruins and the "center of the city of Stuttgart was also totally destroyed" (55). Within the body of the sermon itself Thielicke provides another striking comment about the setting of this particular message: "Here we are gathered in

a ruin and here I am standing before you in my old army boots, because I no longer possess the proper clothes for services” (63). While this is a sermon on the second petition of the Lord’s Prayer, Thieliicke will appeal to Matthew 11:2-6 for his primary biblical text.

The theme of the sermon:

In this most compelling sermon on the PES Thieliicke’s main emphasis is upon the presence of God’s power and love in the midst of man’s self-induced destruction. He will argue that the promise of salvation through Christ and the assurance of God’s kingly rule through His Son are discovered most convincingly in the deepest depths of human need.

How the PES surfaces in the sermon:

With the Church of the Hospitallers and the city of Stuttgart lying in ruins, Thieliicke begins this message in a most unexpected way. He announces to his audience that there is a peculiar “comfort” in the fact that “a sermon can begin with these words: ‘We shall continue our study of the Lord’s Prayer’” (55). He then expresses his confidence that despite the abysmal conditions prevailing at the time there is no need to “interrupt and search for the Bible texts appropriate for catastrophe. The words of the Lord’s Prayer are immediate to every situation in life” (55). With this, Thieliicke expresses his confidence in the power of the proclaimed Word to bring eternal consolation to the “little bewildered remnant of the congregation” that was gathered among “the ruins of our venerable church” (56).

At this early point in the message, Thieliicke makes a bold assertion to the audience regarding the terrible events they are presently experiencing. He presents his point in the form of a question that surely sparked immediate interest in the hearts of his listeners:

For if we take eternity as our measure, what actually has happened? Is God any less the Father than he was before? Do the overwhelming events which have just happened have no place within the Message or are not these events themselves a message in which God sets his seal, in terrors and woes, in destruction and fire, upon what he has always been proclaiming in judgment and grace? (56)

Thielicke sees both the grace and wrath of God in the sufferings of the very hour in which he preaches. He explains that due to the “terrible exceptional situation” confronting his audience and their nation, the people of his day have “learned to see the face of death behind people and things” (56). The harsh reality of a world at war has caused “the face of death” to peer out “from behind the fractures of the living” (56-57). However, Thielicke announces that it is in such a ruined world, saturated as it is with the stench of death, that the prayer for the coming of the kingdom of God is to be lifted. The balance of the sermon will aim at expounding on this thesis using Matthew’s account of the imprisonment of John the Baptist as his textual launching point.

How the PES is addressed in the sermon:

In this message Thielicke attempts to address the PES—as it was being experienced by his audience members—by referring to what he terms “two lines of the Bible” which “intersect” one another in the course of human history (57). When seen and understood these two lines will help one make sense of the relationship between God and the evils being witnessed in the war. The first line is one that descends away from God as mankind “moves farther and farther away” from the Father (57). This is the descending path upon which man has walked in his rebellion against God since the fall in the Garden of Eden. This road is characterized by man’s pride and “stubborn self-will” (57). According to Thielicke, “What began as the protest of the individual, as individual sin [in Adam], continued as collective sin” in the biblical record (57). In fact, Thielicke explains to his audience that the whole sweep of biblical history explicitly reveals that

[m]an in his self-seeking defiance has given himself over to the dominion of alien lords and tyrants, to whom he can surrender of his own free will but whose domineering, demonic grip he cannot shake off once he has crossed the boundary “beyond God” (57).

The ultimate result of this willful descent into the abyss of self-rule is “the mystery of divine *judgment*” (57). This first line, representing man’s cosmic mutiny against God’s righteous rule, finds its point of termination in the pouring out of the divine wrath. However, Thielicke carefully assists his listeners in understating God’s wrath and judgment from a more biblically informed perspective. Appealing to Romans 1:24, he explains that popular conceptions of divine judgment—that God destroys sinners “with a thunderbolt from heaven”—are far from the way Scripture details the expression of

God's wrath. Rather, as Paul states, God's wrath consists in the giving of the offenders over to their own desires. God's judgment entails His abandoning sinners "to their own wretchedness and compelling them to pursue their chosen road to the end, and go through every phase of its terrible course" (57). This is the most "fearful judgment" possible, for there is

nothing more terrible than the man who is left to himself. For all the instincts and energies which were previously directed toward God are now turned in upon himself, and he himself becomes the victim of his own self-seeking, his megalomania, the lie in his own life (58).

Then Thieliicke boldly claims that this biblical presentation of the divine wrath "provides the key to unlock the mystery of our apocalyptic world situation and also the mystery of the terrible visitation upon our own city" (58). In other words, the answer to *how* God could "permit" such unspeakably terrible things to happen in the world is that He has left man to the consequences of his rebellion (58). This is "the fearful form" that the divine wrath has taken and, sadly, "the progress of this fate" is unstoppable (58). Mankind "must drink the drugged cup to its last dregs" if he is ever to learn "what is good and what is evil" (58). The first line, therefore, is the "descending line of decay" which culminates in all of the "terrors of a world which is its own destruction" (59).

Thieliicke then speaks to his audience about a second line, one that appears alongside of and simultaneous with the first descending line and represents the "*coming of the kingdom*" or the presence and sovereign reign of Jesus Christ (59, 60). This line is one of positive progress of the ever-expanding reach of God's rule in His Son that grows stronger and emerges more definitively "in the very midst of decline and decay" (60). To the very degree that the horrors and miseries of man's rebellion repeatedly and inevitably play out in human history, "God's dominion on earth mysteriously goes on growing on earth—even now" (59). By this, however, Thieliicke does not imply the "gradual Christianization of the world" as in post-millennial eschatology but only that "in, with, and under the world's anguish and distress" and "in, with, and under the hail of bombs and mass murders" God is ever "building his kingdom" (60). Again, it is critical to note that for Thieliicke the kingdom of God is essentially "*where Jesus Christ is*" (60). This being the case, it follows that even in the darkest hours of world history Christ is spiritually present in saving power just as He was once physically present in divine power in a world of similar pain and darkness (60). Thieliicke then explains that this is precisely the truth that John the Baptist realized while imprisoned, helplessly

“watching the collapse of all his previous illusions about the kingdom of God” (60). There he discovered through the Word of Jesus Himself that God’s kingdom “appears precisely at the place where there is blindness, lameness, leprosy, and death” (61). According to Thieliicke, this point is also illustrated by the Lord’s explicit teaching in Luke 17:21 to the effect that the kingdom of God was a *present* reality (61). The people of Christ’s day were just like those of the modern era who simply assumed that the kingdom of God “would be an earthly utopia where ease and comfort reigned” (63). Yet, this much cherished and popular “delusion” was shattered by the stunning words of Christ informing them that His reign, contrary to all that that might be expected, was in the very midst of “human misery” (61). Thus, the kingdom of God properly understood is “the light that is ineluctably drawn to the benighted places of the earth where people sit in darkness” (61).

At this point in the sermon Thieliicke moves to apply this profound understating of the kingdom of God to the current desperate situation facing his audience. In this most moving section of the sermon, Thieliicke admits that belief in God’s reign and in His very existence has been challenged by the degree of suffering unleashed by the war:

The earth has been plowed too deep by the curse of war, the streams of blood and tears have swollen all too terribly, injustice and bestiality have become all too cruel and obvious for us to consider such dreams to be anything but bubbles and froth.... Where in this world, which is increasingly being turned into a valley of tears, contrary to the plan of God, can even the slightest trace of the kingdom of God be found? (62-63)

However, despite the incomprehensible pain and suffering that was being witnessed and experienced, Thieliicke shockingly claims that more has been learned about God’s kingdom “in the clash of air raids and the terrors of our cellars and underground shelters” than in the times of peace and well-being (63). Strangely, it is the sight of “mass graves” and the many destroyed structures and churches of the German cities that “make us turn our eyes away from the passing and the relative” and serve to re-focus them upon “that reality against which the gates of hell shall not prevail” (63). In other words, God is at work even in the evils of war to instill in men “a keener sense of what belongs to the transitory side of life and what has to do with God’s eternity” (63). But according to Thieliicke, there is an even greater benefit as well, one that results from the presence of the kingdom in the Person of Christ. Thieliicke explains that in the very shadow of death itself

we have also learned to know the rod and the staff of the Good Shepherd himself. The person who has gone through the nights of bombing with his hand in the hand of God, the person who has said to himself when whistles and sirens were screaming and the noise and shaking was at its worst, “If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord,” that person has experienced what that hand of God means with a reality that he has perhaps never known before in his life and in a way that he cannot forget (64).

In an ironic way, then, God’s kingly reign through Christ His Son is more real in the shadow of the PES than in the light of prosperity and freedom from pain. There is more evidence of God’s existence and of His eternal Fatherly love in the “valley of the shadow of death” than in isolation from the torments of this life. This, for Thieliicke, is the “mysterious hiddenness” of the kingdom, the fact that God rules in “catastrophe” and that His power “grows mightily” in the midst of earthly terrors, compelling men to “lift up their heads ‘because their redemption is drawing near’” (65).

Thieliicke concludes this sermon with an appeal to his audience members to embrace Christ as Lord, the One to whom “every knee shall bow” either in adoration or as overcome by His glory that “can no longer be overlooked” (66). Thieliicke urges them to believe in God’s rule that is “hidden beneath the cross” of Jesus, and he poignantly asks, “What could you do with that bomb crater without the cross?” (66). In his closing words, Thieliicke directs his listeners to consider the promises of God, His good purposes for the world, and the final victory to which the apostle John so boldly testifies in Revelation: “There the course of the world is revealed as seen from its end” (67). There in the final book of Scripture one discovers that in the end the kingdom of God shall come “in all its fullness and immensity,” and this is the hope to which all must cling (67).

Noteworthy rhetorical features:

Structure—

A most unique feature of this sermon is the clear division of the message into two distinct parts, or central points, that Thieliicke has made very obvious to the reader. While on the whole the message still retains a flowing and conversational character—a recurring stylistic feature of Thieliicke’s sermons on the PES—it is nonetheless one of the rare sermons that possesses a discernable structure and analytical framework that

seems typical of much modern preaching. Following the introduction, Thieliicke moves into the body of the sermon by means of a well-defined transitional statement announcing his two main points. Each point is clearly identified by the terms “first” and “second” (57, 59). Following the explication of these two main ideas, Thieliicke transitions into an extended application section followed by his moving appeal for decision that serves as the conclusion to the sermon.

Illustrations—

Thieliicke has made liberal use of illustrative material in this message. The seven illustrations he employs appear in the following order: 1) an unidentified quotation from what Thieliicke refers to as “the old soldier’s song” (56), 2) an unspecified quotation from a work by Goethe, 3) a paraphrase of an unspecified quotation from Martin Luther, 4) a reference to Luther’s distinction between the right and left hands of God, 5) Thieliicke’s personal reflections on some of the dark and discouraging times in his life when his faith in God was seriously tested—he specifically recounts his encounter with a widow near the site where an allied bomb had killed her husband, 6) a comparison of the growth of the kingdom of God to a bridge under construction, and 7) a paraphrase of an unspecified quotation by Joseph Wittig, a German theologian.

It should also be noted that while this message specifically treats the Lord’s Prayer found in Matthew 6, Thieliicke’s text has actually been drawn from Matthew 11. Thieliicke announces within the sermon itself that John’s experience in prison and the testing of his faith in the Savior (Matthew 11:2-6) is an illustration of the nature of Christ’s kingdom (60). Thus, in one way, the entire sermon serves as an illustration of the meaning of this second petition of the Lord’s Prayer.

Collateral biblical texts or references—

In the course of this sermon Thieliicke makes use of the following collateral texts of Scripture: 1) Genesis 11 and the tower of Babel, 2) Romans 1:24, 3) Matthew 24:38, 4) Luke 17:21, 5) Romans 9:23, 6) Romans 14:8, 7) 1 Corinthians 15:28, and 8) the book of Revelation.

Summary:

In this message Thieliicke has addressed the PES from the perspective of two central points. First, he has explained the culpability of man himself for the present condition of the world and the plenitude of suffering that characterizes much of life. This, he says, is the evidence of God's righteous judgment, which he defines as the abandonment of men to their own twisted desires. Secondly, he has explained how the kingdom of God has appeared and is growing in the very midst of man's moral failure. He suggests that the proof of God's existence and fatherly love may be found in the suffering and evil itself and that Christ's life, death, and resurrection convincingly witness to the power of God to overcome the consequences of all human sin.

6.1.1.2 "Thy Will Be Done, As It Is in Heaven"—Matthew 7:21

The setting of the sermon:

In a footnote to the text of the message, Thieliicke explains to the reader that the sermon was interrupted by sirens and an "ensuing air attack" and that shortly thereafter the Church of the Hospitallers in Stuttgart was completely demolished (68). This message was the last to be preached in that venue. The remaining sermons on the Lord's Prayer were preached in St. Matthew's parish house, "the largest auditorium available at that time" (13).

The theme of the sermon:

In this message Thieliicke aims to demonstrate that the world as we experience it, with all of its attendant evils and tragedies, is a world in which the will of God is *not* being accomplished. The "backdrop" of this petition that the will of God should be done on earth is the terrible fact that it is man's will that is currently reigning. The status of the world, therefore, is that of one given over by the Father to its own devices and desires. Precisely because the will of man prevails, men can find no true and lasting happiness or peace.

How the PES surfaces in the sermon:

Thielicke introduces the sermon with the provocative observation that fate seems to control the world, at least upon initial observation. He explains that as men take the time to contemplate their individual lives, particularly as they are so often characterized by innumerable “pelting blows and burdens” that threaten to “break” them down, the conclusion that human beings are simply “orphans delivered to the mercy of pitiless and utterly ‘unfatherly’ fate” is difficult to avoid (68). However, he suggests that it is this stark realization that prepares and enables us finally to “realize the tremendous liberating power that comes from being able to say: ‘Our *Father*’” (68). With this realization of God’s fatherly presence and love, further insight into the world as we experience it is gained. Looking at the history of this world through the lens of the Lord’s Prayer makes it apparent that it is clearly not God’s will that “men kill and die,” and neither is God the author or the final cause of the evil that is being perpetrated (69). To the contrary, Thielicke claims that such a petition as is offered here would not even be necessary if the will of God “were really being done among us and if we ourselves and the whole world were not living our life in a constant boycott of his will” (70).

Thielicke then notes that even a casual glance outside to the world as it presently is should not lead one to the conclusion that “it is God’s will that nations should exterminate one another” or that “churches and homes should sink into dust” or that there should be “the sad nights of the homeless and the bereaved, the mortal struggles and panics in the pits and cellars deep beneath the earth” (69). Rather, these terrible realities, including those that remain yet unseen, all witness to the fact that God has granted man his own wishes. The will that is being done is that will “which God has now given up to itself” (69). Therefore, an appeal to fate is not a proper or legitimate response to the evil and suffering in the world outside.

How the PES is addressed in the sermon:

From these opening remarks concerning fate, Thielicke challenges his audience to move from a consideration of the *exterior* pains and sufferings of life to those found inside one’s own soul. He asserts that there is also ample evidence of the tragic accomplishment of the human will in every heart:

Is all that goes on rumbling in our own hearts—the protesting thoughts that will not be reconciled, the fretful spirit of worry and anxiety, the egoism in our attitude toward our neighbor—is all this that goes on within us in thought, word, and deed, and even in our dreams, really the will of God? Is not this again our own will, which is so terribly hard to break and which never tires of arrogantly turning down the latch when God knocks on the door of our heart? (69-70)

This means that one cannot become obsessed with the condition of the world, be it most pitiable and tragic, without first considering the terrible fact of one's own moral guilt and culpability. In other words, the evil in the exterior world where the divine will is most decidedly being violated—and that in most horrific ways—should not be contemplated without first recognizing the reign of the human will in one's own heart. Thus, our sadness and pain are not initially caused by what happens in world history but by that which has transpired in our own souls. In this light, Thielicke challenges his audience with the following penetrating question: "Is it not our own will that really makes us so unhappy? Is it not our own will that we want to be freed from when we cry, 'Thy will be done'?" (70). Then Thielicke claims that if this is true then it logically follows that this petition in the Prayer at once "plunges us into repentance" and submerses our souls in "godly grief" (70). And while this is indeed a most "bitter, dark corridor that must be traversed," it is the only pathway that ultimately leads to salvation (70).

At this point in the message Thielicke turns to explain in greater detail the exact nature of the divine will, particularly as Christ spoke of it in John 4 during his encounter with the woman at the well. There Jesus made the startling claim that his very "food" was to accomplish the will of the Father (John 4:34), and for Thielicke such an enigmatic statement can only mean that the "principal meal" of His life was the doing of the Father's bidding (70). The Lord Jesus was essentially saying that

[i]t is my *nature* to do this. In exactly the same way that it is a natural urge to be hungry and seek to satisfy that hunger, so my whole life is animated by a single impulse: to live in unbroken contact and complete harmony with the Father (71).

According to Thielicke, this has significant relevance for the PES since we are all "hungry" and are, to one degree or another, controlled by inner impulses (71). However, our hunger has been fundamentally changed by virtue of humanity's fall into rebellion against God. Now we are "strange creatures" who

barricade ourselves within our own nature (our sick and altered nature), resisting the will of God and everything he decrees concerning our life as if our whole

happiness depended on our having *our own* will. Here is where a profound sickness and perversion appears: it is not only because of weakness that we men fail to do God's will, not only because we lack the necessary energy to obey or are too sluggish and give up too soon (71).

Thielicke declares that the evils of the world may only be explained by the fact that for a season the human will has prevailed over the Father's and that our "standards of value have become so twisted and distorted that we do not *want* to do otherwise" (72). Thielicke then illustrates this simple point by observing that

our will constructs and pursues certain plans for our life. The more it does so, the more purposeful it is—and, after all, this is really a positive quality. We are determined, for example, to have a certain standard of living, we want to achieve success, we want our families to be happy—and if it turns out otherwise, we clench our fists and curse the will of God that spoils our plans or we fall into doubt and despair, and our loves grows cold (72).

The pursuit of our personal wills becomes a vicious cycle from which there is no apparent salvation. Achieving our plans and aims only produces greater hunger and emptiness of soul, for "no man, no matter if he has tried it a hundred times, has ever yet found happiness in pursuing his own will" (72). Thus, for Thielicke any consideration of the PES must be initiated with an honest assessment of the condition of one's heart and the humble acknowledgement that the pursuit of one's own will, to the neglect of God's, is fundamentally self-destructive.

From this, Thielicke moves his audience toward a consideration of how the sinful pursuit of the human will is connected to the work of Christ and is, thus, a step toward "a blessed state of liberation" (73). First, he explains that in His passion and death Jesus "took this sick will of ours upon himself and became our brother, struggling in the depths with his own will" (72). This was demonstrated most dramatically in Christ's experience in Gethsemane where He "wrestled in a bloody sweat with his fate, the fate that would lead him to the gallows and utter bankruptcy" (72). Thielicke explains that Christ was not striving with His Father in an attempt to convince Him to acquiesce to the Son's plans, but He was "struggling in order that his own will should *not* get between him and the Father; he was struggling not to lose contact with the Father" (72). The poignant words of submission spoken by Jesus in that most dreadful hour, "not My will but Thine be done" (Luke 22:42), were not voiced with "clenched teeth—as it might be said by someone who has made superhuman efforts and still must capitulate against his will," but were declared in the spirit of glad surrender. In essence, Jesus said,

‘Thanks be to thee, O God, that I may surrender my will to thine. Thanks be to thee that now I can throw overboard all my willfulness, all my own dreams and hopes. Thanks be to thee that I may renounce them all, and that now it no longer hurts me to do so, that it is really no sacrifice at all, but that I can cheerfully put myself in thy hands’ (73).

True happiness, therefore, can only come to those who follow the example of Jesus in the self-subjugation of their personal wills. As the angel appeared in order to strengthen the Lord in His moment of total surrender (Luke 22:43), every believer in Christ may likewise expect that his own hour of submission to the Father’s will shall also be one of a “deep, mysterious, hidden happiness” (73).

Thielicke concludes this sermon with a strong word of encouragement to his listeners regarding the trustworthiness and love of God the Father, especially “in the midst of tumult and war” (75). He states that literally everything that comes into the life of one of His dear children must first “pass muster” before the “Father’s heart” (75). Thielicke tenderly summons his audience members to trust in God’s love and wisdom despite the fact that His dealings often “appear to be utterly horrible, cruel, and incomprehensible” (75). The believer’s “tormented gaze” must still find its rest in the Father’s compassion and greater power to “transform and hallow the destinies that flow through them” (75).

Noteworthy rhetorical features:

Structure—

It is interesting that Thielicke takes Matthew 7:21 as his announced text for this sermon rather than Matthew 6:10 where the words of this petition actually occur in the Lord’s Prayer. This unique feature of Thielicke’s messages comports with his style as self-described preacher of textual-thematic sermons. This being the case, the sermon follows Thielicke’s well-established pattern of tracing a major theme through its biblical usage and applying that theme to his listeners in a contemporary way. In keeping with the elegant movement of his sermons, this message reads much like a personal letter written to a friend rather than a theological treatise or a formal speech.

Illustrations—

In a pronounced deviation from his typical practice, this message contains only two illustrations. The first is a passing reference to a comment from Immanuel Kant regarding the human inability to do that which is truly good. The second is a paraphrased quote from Nietzsche concerning acquiescence to the forces of fate.

Collateral biblical texts or references—

In this message Thieliicke appeals to Matthew 18:10 and John 4:34.

Summary:

The central aim of this sermon on the PES is discovered in Thieliicke's persistent emphasis upon human responsibility for the condition of the world. Once again he has located the cause of human suffering in the human will, which stands in diametrical opposition to the will of God the Father. Yet, Thieliicke has also shown that the horrible consequences of human sin have been borne by God the Son and in this way the Father also suffers along with the world. His timely pastoral counsel for those who do suffer, whether at the hands of others or on account of one's own misdeeds, is to trust in the Father's overarching love, perfect wisdom, and holy will as embodied in the Person of Jesus Christ. This kind of faith in Christ "puts the bickering, complaining soul to rest and gives us, instead of gloomy resignation to fate, a foretaste of the peace of God" (76).

6.1.2 Sermons from the collection entitled *How the World Began* (1961a)

This collection contains nineteen sermons based upon the first eleven chapters of Genesis. Thieliicke preached these messages over a two year period in the city of Hamburg at the St. Michael's Church.

6.1.2.1 “Man, the Risk of God”—Genesis 1:26-31

The setting of the sermon:

This sermon is the fifth message in the collection. No further identification of the setting is provided.

The theme of the sermon:

The central theme of this sermon is stated in the introduction as Thielicke focuses the attention of the audience upon the creation of man and particularly the words of Genesis 1:26, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion...” Thielicke argues that with the creation of human beings, specially made in the divine image and likeness, God took a monumental but necessary risk with the entire universe and all of human history.

How the PES surfaces in the sermon:

Early in the sermon Thielicke explains that on one hand the formation of man could mean the “coronation” of creation, as these unique beings, empowered by God to “rise above the dull level of reflex and instinct” and granted a “mind and a will,” make the choice to live as “a partner and co-worker with God” (60). Or, on the other hand, the creation of God’s image-bearers could prove to be the “first stage in a tremendous descent” that is initiated in the Garden and ultimately “leads to a disturbed and desolate earth” and “transforms the child and image of God into a robber and rebel” (60). Would this act of creating man result in good, or would it bring “war and rumors of war to the farthest planets?” (60).

How the PES is addressed in the sermon:

Having introduced the “breath-taking thought” and admittedly “blasphemous” theme of divine risk, Thielicke explains its necessity and potential consequences (60). The “risk” of which he speaks is the risk of the PES—that man would use his freedom and rational powers to rebel against God, destroying both his neighbor and himself, and polluting human history and personal experience with guilt and unspeakable suffering. That this

act of creation was so potentially risky is suggested by the subtle pause that Thieliicke finds in the biblical text between Genesis 1:25 and 1:26. The text's transition from the ending of v. 25, "and God saw that it was good," to the beginning of v. 26, "Then God said," is ominous, transposing the creation symphony into "another key" (59). At this most decisive point in the creation week God "halts and soliloquizes" (59). Here we find

the kind of baited breath with which we ourselves are familiar when we approach a decisive point in some piece of work on the success of which everything depends. We stop and stand off for a while (60).

This divine pause signals the inestimable magnitude of the choice to endow human creatures with rational and moral powers that might be turned back against God for evil purposes. Here God risked the very real possibility that "the child would become a competitor, that the child would become a megalomaniacal rival of the Creator" (60).

The reason such risk was necessitated—a "venture of God in which he bound himself to man"—has to do with God's special love for humanity (60). For Thieliicke, God's love for humanity demands that He fully expose Himself to the real "possibility of being reviled, despised, denied, and ignored by man" (61). Apart from such risky exposure and vulnerability, true love, at least as God defines it, cannot exist. Thieliicke then briefly illustrates this love-motivated risk by referencing the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15. By means of this parable, God teaches us that when He created man in His own image He was "ready to suffer the pain the father [in the parable] endured when he let the prodigal son go into the far country" (61). The excruciating inner torment and "deep wounds" that were inflicted upon the father by the son's self-destructive rebellion illustrate God's sorrow over His own intransigent children whom He will not give up (61). The grief and suffering present in the father's heart are the proof of divine love, a love that could never exist under any other conditions but those of freedom and risk. Thieliicke then explains that this risk-bearing love reaches its glorious consummation in the cross of Jesus Christ: "There God exposed himself to his rebellious children, put himself at their mercy, and let his most beloved die by their hand but for them" (61).

For Thieliicke all of the evils known and experienced by the human race find their ultimate source in the divine risk that was inherent in man's creation as God's image-bearer (60). He explains to his audience that though man bears the image and likeness of God, he is still capable of reverting to his essential "animality," his "roots in the

animal kingdom” (64-65). Thielicke observes that as Psalm 49:12 announces, mankind is like the animals that also perish. Man is

related to the fishes, the dogs, and the cats, in whom hormones and glandular secretions circulate just as they do in our fellow creatures; that we can appear before him as people who are lashed by the same libido as they are, and in whom—different from and worse than with animals—all these things are capable of condescending into inextricable complexes (65).

While bearing the divine imprimatur, man can descend to the lowest depths, to the “dark subhuman abysses of our being into which we will allow no man to look” (64) and can behave as one with “unruly blood” (65). In this light, man’s sin is primarily that of abusing the good gifts granted to him by God, specifically the gift of creaturely freedom. However, this gift has not come without responsibilities, essentially expressed in the Scriptures as the responsibility to love God and our neighbor (61). Since man has loved himself more than God and his neighbors, evil and suffering have come to the world, and for this man is uniquely accountable to God in distinction from other creatures. Human beings, originally commissioned as God’s “viceroys” over the creation, have succumbed to pride, self-love, and the illusion of their “autonomy” (67-68). With the idolatrous rejection of mankind’s place and privileges, the human story has “become godless” and “an alien element has been smuggled into the plan of God” (68). Now, all men are “bracketed by the day of creation” and “the day of the Last Judgment,” and in between there is evil and death (69). Thielicke strongly declares that man cannot jettison the consequences of his sin despite what he might attempt:

No matter where he goes, whether it be Mars or Venus, immediately the same old story will begin all over again, the same old story that took place when the forbidden fruit was plucked in some mythical garden. Then Cain’s fratricide will occur on Venus too, and the tower of Babel will rise on Mars (70).

Following a lengthy illustration of the point that man cannot run from his guilt nor from the judgment of God (a space traveler’s first visit to Venus, 69-71), the sermon is rather sharply concluded with one simple affirmation. While it is true that man “cannot escape” the hands of God, by faith in His unceasing love he “can be safe in them” (71).

Noteworthy rhetorical features:

Structure—

Thielicke has employed a conversational style and structure in the construction and delivery of this message. One point naturally leads to the next in a remarkably seamless fashion. Additionally, this sermon is filled with personal pronouns, most noticeably “I” and “we,” as Thielicke seeks to keep his audience involved in the subject matter. As will be seen below, there are a large number of illustrations that surface in this sermon, the conclusion itself being composed of a lengthy illustration that sets up the final words of the sermon.

Illustrations—

As for illustrations, the sermon contains a total of nine, each effectively interwoven into the fabric of the message and each apparently chosen for its relevance to the audience in Hamburg. They are as follows: 1) the comparison of God to a “roofer” or “dramatist,” 2) a brief quotation from Goethe’s *Faust*, 3) a quotation from an unspecified work of the German poet Gottfried Benn, 4) the hypothetical case of a woman in a broken marriage who must love her abusive husband, 5) a quotation from Shakespeare’s play *King Lear*, 6) a reference to Beethoven’s *Opus 111*, 7) a quote from an unspecified work of the German theologian F. D. E. Schleiermacher, 8) the example of the “space traveler” arriving on the planet Venus, and 9) a brief reference to *Unternehmen Wega* by the Swiss dramatist Friedrich Dürrenmatt.

Collateral biblical texts or references—

While no collateral texts are factored directly into this sermon, there are a number of biblical allusions, quotes, or references employed: 1) an allusion to Luke 15 and the parable of the prodigal son, 2) a reference to the ‘Great Commandment’ of Luke 10:27, 3) a direct quotation of Psalm 49:12, 4) a direct quotation of Psalm 36:6, 5) a reference to the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, and 6) a reference to the construction of the tower of Babel.

Summary:

In this sermon Thieliicke has approached the PES by appealing to the love of God for those whom He formed in His own image and the risk to both man and the created order that such a magnificent love necessitated. Thieliicke has strongly implied that all of the evils that have befallen mankind since his creation have resulted from this risky venture of love. While arguing in this manner, however, Thieliicke has kept the focus of his approach to the PES upon the guilt of mankind for the abuse of his creaturely freedom and the fact that God will judge all men for their sins on the Last Day. Once again, Thieliicke has not been hesitant to expose the universal culpability of man before God's tribunal in the clearest of terms, as well as the sin-conquering love He has bestowed upon them in Jesus Christ.

6.1.2.2 "How Evil Came Into This World"—Genesis 3:1-7

The setting of the sermon:

This is the ninth sermon in the series. No further identification of the setting is provided.

The theme of the sermon:

In this message Thieliicke seeks to explain to his audience why the world is the way it is. More specifically, he wants to demonstrate why the world is no longer "sound and whole" like it was as the story of the Genesis creation initially unfolds with the repeated divine announcement of its goodness (122, 123). His purpose is to confront directly what he has labeled "the arch-question of all mankind," the question of "how evil came into the world" (123). As the sermon unfolds, Thieliicke will once again lay the responsibility for the fall at man's feet, with special emphasis upon his vulnerability to the clever and effectual temptations of the serpent.

How the PES surfaces in the sermon:

Thieliicke introduces the PES in the opening lines of this message, and does so by means of a moving illustration taken from the war years and his own experiences living

in Stuttgart. While serving in Stuttgart during the war, Thielicke made a habit of visiting a group of young boys from a local Latin school that manned an anti-aircraft battery in the city. The students had received permission from their commanding officer to have Thielicke meet with them on a regular basis to provide “religious instruction” (121). Typically Thielicke discussed the subject of “last things” as they frequently “sat down among the guns” (122). On one occasion, however, the students summoned Thielicke to come and speak to them in the aftermath of a terrible tragedy that had befallen them. Their battery had been hit by a low-level attack and a father of one of the boys, who just happened to be visiting his son at the time, was killed. Thielicke then described the terrible scene for his audience:

The boy carried his dead father away in a wheeled stretcher. The youngsters—for that’s all they were—crowded around me deeply shocked, almost like little chicks around a hen. They were completely broken up and they looked to someone older for protection from a world whose dark enigma had suddenly leaped upon them for the first time (122).

With that pathetic scene of horror and loss unfolding before him, Thielicke confessed that despite all of his theological learning and experience he “felt utterly helpless” as he tried to speak “words of comfort to them” (122). Then, following his visit with the schoolboys on that sad day, something happened to Thielicke on his way home that left a profound mark upon his soul. Somewhere just off the roadway, he saw a beautiful moonlight valley full of trees and flowers that “shimmered in this soft light” (122). As his eyes scanned the lovely scene he noticed that an “unspeakable peace and stillness rested upon the landscape” (122). Yet, upon further reflection in the light of the day’s awful experience with war and death, this peaceful scene became for Thielicke a “parable of the dark threshold which, the account of the Fall says, man has crossed” (122). Then, Thielicke explained his central point to his audience:

Before me lay the seemingly whole and healthy world of a springtime night. But in that moment its very peace was like a stab of pain. For I knew that the peace of nature is delusive, and that I had just spoken, encompassed by a sea of blossoms, with boys whose eyes were filled with dread even though they bravely swallowed their tears (122).

Despite all appearances to the contrary, the world that we live in is not “sound and whole,” and this is because man has “invaded it with his murderous instruments and despoiled it of its peace” (122). This terrible reality of life, hidden by the apparent tranquility and beauty of nature, leaves us with the taunting question of how such a

thing could happen and how evil could invade a world that God once pronounced as “very good” (Genesis 1:31).

How the PES is addressed in the sermon:

Thielicke’s sermon treatment of the PES in this message largely centers on the subject of temptation and, more to the point, the particular strategy the serpent originally employed to tempt Adam and Eve and how these same mechanisms are at work even now. The sermon is filled with various illustrations and quotes, each of which are meant to help explain in layman’s terms how evil entered the world through man’s failure to withstand the serpent’s wiles. In fact, Thielicke sees in the biblical story of the fall a paradigm for all temptation, “for it summarizes in exemplary fashion what we see happening all around us especially within ourselves” (123).

Early in the sermon Thielicke makes a strategic connection between the biblical account of man’s original seduction and transgression of the divine command and our present temptations: “Do not all of us know certain scenes in our lives that recount this story of a temptation? Is it not something like a concentrate of the whole art of temptation?” (123). With this connection, Thielicke links all temptation to the creation story and demonstrates that every person is guilty of succumbing to the craftiness and subtlety of the serpent. To this degree, the consequences of sin, including the horrors of war and death that Thielicke’s original audience was most acquainted with, are to be borne by all guilty sinners.

Having established the basic point that evil has entered the world through the serpent’s temptations, Thielicke moves to a most practical consideration of the way that temptation works in our lives. Appealing to the dialog between the serpent and Eve (Genesis 3:1-7), Thielicke constructs a working theory regarding the essential nature of all temptation and, hence, the entrance of all evil and suffering into the good creation. Several points emerge which Thielicke offers to his audience as practical assistance in facing and recognizing temptation. First, he suggests that the devil rarely, if ever, reveals himself as he really is, and thus all temptations come to us in disguise. Ironically, the first temptation in the garden “begins not with the crash of the kettle drum but rather with the sound of oboes. One might even say it has in it hymn-like motifs” (124). In a most counterintuitive fashion, Satan appears in a “thoroughly pious”

manner and not in the way that one might expect (124). He comes to Eve on *religious* or *spiritual* grounds and not with the blunt declaration that he is some kind of “atheistic monster” who is going to take over and destroy “your paradise, your innocence and loyalty, and turn it all upside down” (124). Thieliicke suggests that had the serpent appeared in such an obviously diabolical mode, Eve would have never succumbed to his schemes. He then illustrates this point by relating a personal story to his audience. Following the division of Germany after the war, Thieliicke and his students often ministered in a camp for refugees from the East sector. On one occasion they put on a “Punch and Judy show” for the children in the camp and Thieliicke himself played the part of the devil (125). He describes the colorful manner in which he represented the evil one:

I wielded a horrible, fiery red puppet in one hand and mustered up a menacing and horrible voice to represent all the terrible discords of hell. Then in tones brimming with sulphur I advised the children to indulge in every conceivable naughtiness: You never need to wash your feet at night; you can stick your tongue out at anybody you want to; and be sure to drop banana skins on the street so people will slip on them (125).

Then Thieliicke explains the children’s unexpected reaction to his presentation of the devil. Rather than successfully tempting them to disobey and engage in forbidden activities, Thieliicke says that the children “actually shouted me down with ear-splitting protests” and would “have absolutely no truck with the devil” (125). The truth gleaned from this simple experience is that had Satan appeared in such an obviously evil fashion the fall would have never occurred. To the contrary, “the devil does not declare himself” outright, but assumes the role “as a representative of the good, even as the advocate of God” (126).

Secondly, Thieliicke observes that one of Satan’s strategies of temptation involves the use of dialog and discussion. He finds in the question, “Indeed, has God said...?” (Genesis 3:1), an attempt to start a theological discussion with Eve about the veracity of the Word of God. What looks legitimate, and even helpful initially, is actually a clever tactic designed to entrap the unsuspecting. Having drawn the woman into a discussion of the Creator and His Word, the tempter suggests that

God doesn’t want you to miss anything in your life. He wants you to avail yourself of all the potentialities with which the great Creator endowed your body. After all, wasn’t it God who put this passion into your veins? (127)

Such talk and endless discussion is a most vital component in the “serpent’s program,” and the Tempter himself is nothing but a “spirit of discussion” (127). Thielicke then gives his audience some examples of questions being posed by the devil to modern ears: “Did God really say, ‘You shall love your neighbor?’ But tell me, who really *is* your neighbor?” (127-128); “Did God forbid you to live your life to the full and use all your instincts?” (128); “Did God forbid you to think about yourself once in a while instead of your neighbor?” (128). Such questions can be discussed *ad infinitum*, and “the Tempter knows that as long as you keep making a problem of it and talk it to pieces, you will never lift a finger for your neighbor” (128). With such evil-intentioned conversations and theological discussions, Satan invites the naïve to “step on a trap door that looks like a parquetted floor” (127). It is only later, after it is too late, that one realizes that he has “stepped into a trap” leading to a “bottomless pit” (127).

Finally, Thielicke explains that the tempter’s seductions often come in the form of a positive spiritual challenge. While we would naturally expect that Satan would lead us to “rebel against God,” in reality he does quite the opposite (129). In the temptations of the Garden of Eden, Satan comes to Eve under the guise of giving her the unique opportunity to “champion God and break a lance for him, as it were” and to become “religiously active” (129). With the most heinous of intentions, the devil “actually fires Eve’s piety; he activates her belief in God” (129). The serpent’s question about what God had said “introduced this pious exercise” and moved Eve to become “God’s defender” (130):

‘No,’ says Eve ... ‘he did not forbid that at all. He even permitted a great deal and gave us a lot of choice. We are allowed—most generously!—to eat of all the trees in the garden. God excepted only the *one* tree in the midst of the garden; we’re not even supposed to touch that one’ (130).

With this maneuver, characterized by his “well-reasoned arguments,” the serpent laid the snare for the woman and set her up for the transgression of the divine prohibition (129). This demonstrates that Satan is “far too subtle to appeal only to the baser instincts” but seeks to turn otherwise good intentions into opportunities for evil.

Having laid out the basic ways that temptation functions in our lives, Thielicke brings his sermon to a conclusion with an emphasis upon prayer. He explains that if the story of the first temptation teaches us anything it communicates the critical importance of praying for God’s protection *before* we find ourselves in a tempting situation—before

we realize that we are trapped in the “high tension zone of the perilous tree” (131). We must learn to pray “when we are still sober and prudent, at the beginning of the day,” long before we are “caught in the foils of our own passions” (130). Thielicke counsels his audience to develop the daily spiritual discipline of setting aside “a few minutes with God each day, in which he is our *whole* concern” (131). This discipline will keep us from getting “pinned down in our cares” and praying the “panicky prayers uttered in the air-raid shelters” which are ineffectual, insincere, and are “not addressed to God at all” (132). To the contrary, we should pray as a matter of first course, and our prayers for deliverance must be positive rather than negative: “Lord, I thank thee for the powers thou hast given to me; grant that I may use them in thine honor and for thine ends!” (133). In the midst of such humble petitions, we discover the liberating truth that

Jesus Christ also stands on *our* side. He knows what temptation is, for he endured it himself. He knows what death is, for he has tasted it himself. He knows all about us. And therefore he is with us, even when the darkness falls all around us.... Between me and every dark and evil temptation stands Jesus Christ (135).

Noteworthy rhetorical features:

Structure—

This sermon seems to reveal more of a discernable structure than the previous ones in this series from the book of Genesis. There are three distinct sections, or major emphases, that serve as the simple framework for the message. First, there is the acknowledgement of the reality of death and suffering and the resulting question that this poses for mankind. Secondly, there is the exploration of the way that temptation functions, using the story of the seduction of Eve as a model. Finally, there is the practical exhortation regarding prayer and, specifically, for God’s deliverance from temptation and evil through Jesus Christ, the One who is always standing between evil and His people.

Illustrations—

This sermon is filled with illustrative material, drawn from personal experiences, literature, and music. In order of appearance they are as follows: 1) the account of the boys manning the anti-aircraft guns in Stuttgart, 2) a quotation from *The Moon Hath Risen on High* by the German poet Matthias Claudius, 3) a reference to the music of the

Austrian composer Joseph Haydn, 4) a brief quotation from *Faust*, 5) the personal account of Thieliicke's visit to the refugee camp, 6) an extensive quotation from *Crime and Punishment* by the Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky, 7) a reference to the practice of *Jugendweihe*, a public ceremony performed in the German Democratic Republic whereby teenage children pledge their loyalty to communism, 8) Thieliicke's elaborate modern paraphrase of the temptation narrative in Genesis 3, 9) a quote from an unspecified song by the German playwright Bert Brecht, 10) Thieliicke's reference to the prayers he often heard uttered in the air-raid shelters during the Allied bombing of Germany, and 11) a reference to an engraving entitled *Knight, Death, and the Devil* by the German artist Albrecht Dürer.

Collateral biblical texts or references—

In this message Thieliicke employs only two collateral biblical references: 1) the story of Christ's temptation in the wilderness (Matthew 4) and 2) Christ's exhortation in the Sermon on the Mount to avoid anxiety (Matthew 6:25).

Summary:

In this sermon Thieliicke has focused his attention on what is perhaps the most vexing theological question of all—how evil first made its appearance in the world. He responds to this most complex issue with both forthrightness and simplicity, locating the initial entryway of evil within the human heart itself. While many questions remain unanswered and others are unanswerable, Thieliicke's message compellingly moves the listeners to a consideration of the Bible's teaching on temptation, sin, and the consequences of succumbing to the schemes and strategies of Satan. Additionally, one of the main strengths of this sermon is Thieliicke's frequent use of effective illustrations, most notably his imaginative paraphrase of the temptation narrative.

6.1.3 Sermons from the collection entitled *Christ and the Meaning of Life* (1962a)

This is a collection of twenty-eight sermons that Thieliicke delivered on radio and television.

6.1.3.1 “Jesus Christ in the Front-line Trenches”—No stated text

The setting of the sermon:

This very brief sermon meditation appears as the second message in the series. While not stated explicitly, the message was evidently presented during the season of Advent.

The theme of the sermon:

This meditation, composed of less than four pages in the English translation, has its focus upon the event of the incarnation of Christ. Thieliicke’s main theme is that Christ has come to the place of our greatest struggles and sorrows, what Thieliicke calls the “front line trenches” of life (19). By becoming incarnate in human flesh, the Son of God exposed Himself to all of the pains and terrors that men endure in their fallen state. This fact provides believers with the assurance that there is “nothing that he did not endure with us” and, therefore, He “understands everything” that one might possibly experience in this life (18). Christ, therefore, is the only true source of comfort in life and death.

How the PES surfaces in the sermon:

Thieliicke commences this sermon with an illustration that immediately injects the PES into the message. He describes the time during the Second World War when his own home was destroyed in the Allied bombing raids and the way he sought relief from “the heaviness of heart” that overwhelmed him (16). To escape the intense inner torment of those days, Thieliicke would often fill his mind with images of

a peaceful village with cows coming down the roads to their barns, and people talking about the harvest and sitting around the lamp in the evening, a place that was spared the tumult of war. The people said a friendly “Good evening,” the cozy lamplight shone through the chinks in the black-out curtains, and everything was as I had imagined it to be (16).

However, despite the momentary relief such imaginations provided for him in those terrible hours, he confesses that the “longed-for peace would not come into my heart” (16). The pleasant imaginary scene only left him “ostracized” and profoundly tormented rather than tranquillized (16). Oddly enough, Thieliicke further explains how his search

for peace in the recesses of his mind drove him back to “the ruined city and the people whose faces were still marked by the runes of terror” (16). He continues:

There I felt at home. They understood what I had gone through because they had suffered it themselves. The people in the [imaginary] village did not understand. To them I was a somewhat disquieting apparition from another, frightening, world (16-17).

Thielicke then explains to his audience the lesson that he learned from this unusual experience of being mysteriously drawn back to the scene of his trials. The people who are most qualified to come to the aid of the afflicted are those who have themselves been sorely afflicted. In the sphere of his own pain Thielicke learned that “[t]here is nothing more comforting than to have people who understand one” (17). In the final analysis “[w]ounds must heal wounds” (17). As counterintuitive as it may sound, those who are suffering will seek relief and consolation from fellow-sufferers. Those who are “wounded” by life’s many travails will always “seek refuge with the wounded” (17).

How the PES is addressed in the sermon:

At this point in the sermon, Thielicke speaks of the unusual experience that many people have at the time of Christmas—an experience that directly parallels his own experiences during the war. He suggests that many people seek relief and comfort in the sounds and scenes of Christmastime and in the pleasant memories of childhood that typically are prompted by this special season of the year. Ironically enough, however, one is inevitably overcome by a “secret feeling of uneasiness” with the sudden realization that “the world around the candles is so different from our ordinary life” (17). In other words, at such times there is a sense of disconnection between life as it is being experienced in the moment and life as one might imagine it to be as impelled by the beauty and tranquility of a “secure little village” or manger scene (17). However, Thielicke asserts that the true intent and message of Christmas is “totally different” than one might suppose (18). Despite the fact that the celebration of the incarnation of Christ has become awash with “sentimentality” and the biblical story of the Savior’s humiliation has been “turned into an idyll,” the real meaning of this blessed event is most comforting. The Christmas story concerns the suffering and abuse of the Son of God. It details His experience of “life-long hostility” culminating in the brutality of His death upon “a gallows that had the form of a cross” (18). Paradoxically, the terrors associated with the story of Christ’s incarnation and earthly life—a human life defined

by unjust suffering and death—proves to be “infinitely more comforting than the soft, sweet spirit we seek at Christmas, which afterwards leaves only a hung-over, let down feeling” (18). The Christmas story, properly understood, announces to the whole world that “Jesus Christ did not remain at base-headquarters in heaven” where He received only long distance reports concerning “the world’s sufferings” (18). Rather, He freely

left the headquarters and came down to us in the front-line trenches, right down to where we live and worry about what the Bolsheviks may do, where we contend with our anxieties and the feeling of emptiness and futility, where we sin and suffer guilt, and where we must finally die (18).

The Advent of Christ, then, is the divine testimony to the fact that God also knows that “[w]ounds must heal wounds,” and, therefore, Jesus Himself “became one of the wounded because he wanted to be one of us” (18). In His incarnation, the Son of God became the “Companion” who is present with every believing sinner “in the front-line trenches” (19). Armed with this knowledge one can “accept everything from his hand, for his hand knows and controls all things” (19).

Noteworthy rhetorical features:

Structure—

This brief sermonic meditation is largely focused upon Thieliicke’s opening illustration. There is no announced biblical text or appeals to any specific biblical passages. The message and Thieliicke’s basic point regarding the fleeting peace produced by one’s imagination are connected and applied to the celebration of Christmas in a conversational style.

Illustrations—

There are only two illustrations in this sermon. The first is his opening recollection of his experiences in the war years, particularly the tragic event of the destruction of his private residence by Allied bombers. The second is a passing reference to the poetry of Gottfried Benn, the German novelist and poet.

Collateral biblical texts or references—

As indicated above, there are no biblical references in this sermon with the exception of the general appeal to the season of Advent.

Summary:

In this sermon, Thieliicke has explained that the only way one may find lasting comfort amidst the afflictions of life is by means of the presence of those who have likewise suffered. Only the wounded can comfort the wounded. This fact, he explains, accounts for the odd compulsion one feels to return to the scene of one's troubles where other sufferers may be found. Having established this point, Thieliicke then applies his thesis to the celebration of Christmas. In the event of the incarnation, Christ Himself came to the scene of man's deepest sorrows and "became one of the wounded" in order to provide eternal salvation, comfort in suffering, and hope for the future (18).

6.1.3.2 "Is Technology Diabolical?"—No stated text

The setting of the sermon:

This message appears as the twenty-second sermon in the collection. No further identification of the setting is provided.

The theme of the sermon:

Thieliicke's intention in this brief message is to argue that the PES is, at least in part, intrinsically connected to man's advances in technology. He will suggest that while there is a positive and beneficial side to the rapidly evolving world of technology, man himself has remained basically the same. Men are sinners alienated from God and resolutely opposed to His sovereign rule. While technology may indeed be good and helpful—"simply because it is exact and based upon calculations"—man himself "is not all right" (142). His transgressions against God have rendered him "unpredictable" and "incalculable" (142). In his mutiny against the Creator he has "thrown off the ultimate authority" which consists of "the commandments of God" (142). Thus, his ever-

widening knowledge and the innumerable advances it fosters will be misused in the service of his selfish and often murderous ends.

How the PES surfaces in the sermon:

In the sermon's introduction, Thieliicke sets forth the subject of technology and suggests rather subtly that with the technological advances being witnessed in the twentieth century—such as the “modern assembly line,” the advent of “automation” as well as “steam, electricity, and atomic power”—man himself “is becoming more and more a functionary” whose relative “freedom of action” is rapidly diminishing (138). According to Thieliicke, man's freedom

diminishes, as it were, to the one instant which he exercises the initiative in starting these processes and in the next instant these processes themselves become autonomous and lead us where we do not wish to go (138-139).

Thieliicke also observes that, in addition to the loss of his freedom, man's increasing technological skills lay the foundation for his own de-humanizing:

Once we pursue the idea that all things can be “made,” including man himself, it turns out, paradoxically, that man is the one who ends up being “made.” This secular, physical realm reluctantly but unmistakably opens up metaphysical vistas (139).

As human history has evidenced, technology in the hands of sinners may be used most diabolically with the result that “we are moving about incautiously, shiveringly, and often terrifiedly in this new atomic world” (140-141).

How the PES is addressed in the sermon:

As the message progresses, Thieliicke shifts the focus more explicitly to man's moral culpability for the misuse of technology. He argues that the Creator has endowed all human beings with a “creative capacity” that was designed originally to be employed in the service of the divine will. However, in seeking to be a god unto himself, man has turned this “power of construction” into one of “destruction” (141). These devilish powers, resulting from man's desire “to be a Titan,” reveal themselves whenever man “proposes to be autonomously self-creative” and vainly attempts “to throw off the ultimate sanctions” (141). This fact, according to Thieliicke, is grippingly illustrated by the Old Testament story of the tower of Babel (Thieliicke does not identify the text or

quote it). In this biblical “parable,” Thieliicke finds a direct parallel to the dilemma confronting his audience (141). At the site of the tower’s erection, the people of Babel effectively sought to depose God and “with Promethean defiance were bent on building a tower which would soar to the realms of the heavens from which they supposed they had banished him” (141). This ancient technological marvel was intended as “an architectural symbol of their own super-humanity” (141). The resulting judgment upon the sinful actions and intentions of the tower’s builders, the confusion of their languages and their ultimate dispersion into various races and tribes, rendered the tower incapable of becoming for them “a center that would gather and bind men together” (141). Thieliicke claims that the critical lesson to be learned from this episode is that

[t]he people who have deposed God and determined upon their own super-humanity can no longer trust each other. They know that now each one of them is subject only to the dictatorship of his own will to power and no longer bound to an ultimate authority (141-142).

This attitude of autonomy in turn renders man thoroughly “unpredictable” and “afraid” and a horrifying process of moral degradation inevitably ensues (142):

When man himself has become unpredictable and sinister, the technological enhancement of his power only makes him more sinister. If one cannot trust the normal man, then much less can one trust the man who has enhanced his greatness and power by means of technology. Once man has become an unpredictable and sinister being, then the moment he acquires a bow and arrow he is even more to be feared, and he reaches the pinnacle of sinisterness when he is equipped with atomic power (142).

Thieliicke abruptly concludes this sermon with a brief appeal to the power of the gospel to alter radically man’s outlook on life and, consequently, his use of technology. He asserts that it is only in view of the message of salvation in Christ that one sees his true relationship with and responsibility towards his neighbor. The gospel message forever abolishes the “law of retaliation and reciprocation” and paves the road for the establishment of “the I-Thou relationship” (145). With its promotion of the “Golden Rule,” the gospel of Christ “lays upon me the obligation to make a fresh start and take the free, venturesome initiative” (145). The gospel promises personal redemption and injects “a fresh, creative breeze into my relation to my neighbor” and eventually makes “all things new” (145-146).

Noteworthy rhetorical features:

Structure—

In this brief message there is little apparent structure to be found. The introduction is easily discernable and smoothly transitions into the body of the message where Thielicke sets out his basic premise regarding the sinful misuse of technological knowledge. As witnessed in many of the sermons assessed previously, Thielicke has sprinkled this message with ample illustrative material. A decidedly unique feature of this message, however, is Thielicke's incidental employment of Scripture. There is no announced text for this message and only a brief, though unidentified, reference to the Old Testament account of the tower of Babel. This fact gives the sermon a certain 'academic' feel and, thus, it reads more like a lecture than the biblically based message.

Illustrations—

Thielicke has chosen seven illustrations for this message or roughly one per page of printed text. They appear in the following order: 1) a paraphrase of an unspecified quotation from Nicholas Berdyave, the Russian philosopher, 2) Thielicke's appeal to the telephone as an illustration of a device that ultimately takes over one's life, 3) a reference to the "Hegelian-Marxist concept of the transformation of quantity into quality" (140), 4) the mention of Konrad Lorenz, the Austrian zoologist, and his books about animals, 5) a reference to Goethe's *Faust*, 6) a paraphrase of an unspecified quotation of Arnold Gehlen, the German philosopher and anthropologist, and 7) a paraphrase of an unspecified quotation from J. Robert Oppenheimer, the American theoretical physicist and developer of the first atomic bomb.

Collateral biblical texts or references—

Other than a brief appeal to the Old Testament account of the tower of Babel there are no biblical quotations or collateral references in this sermon.

Summary:

In this message Thieliicke has sought to establish a link between the PES and man's diabolical misuse of evolving technology. While technological advancements may serve the betterment of humanity, in the hands of sinners such advances will inexorably become the very mechanism of human destruction and the source of incalculable acts of evil. He has also suggested that the gospel both confronts and counteracts man's self-worship and the very desire for autonomy that leads to the misuse of technology in the first place.

6.1.4 Sermons from the collection entitled *The Silence of God* (1962b)

This is a series of sermons and lectures that Thieliicke delivered during the period from 1942-1951 (see 3.3.3). In the preface to the series, Thieliicke describes the general setting of these messages as a time of "extreme trial" and the "darkest hours in our lives" (ix). The specific settings of the individual messages and the locations from which they were first delivered are not identified.

6.1.4.1 "I Am Not Alone With My Anxiety"—Various texts

The setting of the sermon:

This message appears as the first sermon in the collection. No further identification of the setting is provided.

The theme of the sermon:

The central theme in this very brief sermon (just over six pages in the English translation) is that of anxiety. Thieliicke will define anxiety, at least as it is being experienced by his generation, as "the fear of life" rather than the fear of death (4). Ultimately, the anxiety with which men are acutely afflicted results from humanity's broken relationship with God the Father. A world without a Father, suffering alone and ever reeling under the interminable weight of its guilt, is one beset with the sheer meaningless of human existence. However, in the love of Christ one finds the cure for this universal spiritual malady. God the Father has revealed His love in the Person of

the Son, the very One who has borne the curse for humanity's transgressions and is ever with us in all of life's travails.

How the PES surfaces in the sermon:

Thielicke initiates this sermon with a reference to a survey that was apparently conducted at the time the message was first delivered. The authors of the survey, mainly concerned with attitudes and beliefs prevalent among "young people," raised the question, "What is your basic reaction to life?" (3). Thielicke reports that sixty percent of the respondents claimed that "anxiety" was their biggest concern (3). From this, Thielicke moves to challenge the prevailing definition of anxiety as the "fear of death" (3). Taking clues from Germany's war-torn setting (the years 1942-1951), Thielicke strongly suggests that the fear of death is not apparent at all (3):

It can hardly be said of our generation that it is particularly afraid of death. I hardly need to adduce in proof examples from the war, and especially from the wartime bombing. It has often been observed with surprise that one does not have to be religious not to be afraid of death. The apathetic, the atheists and nihilists can all show a definite nonchalance in face of mortal peril, and even an idealistic readiness for death (3).

Thielicke then asserts that there is ample evidence to support the thesis that anxiety actually "refers to the fear of life" as opposed to the fear of death (4). As he sees it, his generation is "afflicted by fear of destiny, by anxiety at the dreadful possibilities of life" (4). When people speak of their persistent anxieties, Thielicke claims that the real issue at hand is the unrelenting question of the presence of God in the face of life's evils. Man is afraid of "the dreadful *horror vacui*, the fear of emptiness" (4). By confessing his anxiety, Thielicke asserts that men are "really asking where God is," and this is particularly true "in the face of the mass slaughter of war, or the frightening development of technics which seem to press us inexorably towards destruction and final catastrophe" (4). Thus, anxiety may be simply understood as "the secret wound of modern man" who has come to the realization that life has little or no meaning at all (4).

How the PES is addressed in the sermon:

Having introduced his initial definition of anxiety and established its link to the PES, Thielicke further explains to his audience how anxiety should be viewed in light of the gospel, particularly the condescension of the Son. First, Thielicke maintains that,

strictly speaking, anxiety is caused by the fear of the unknown and is, therefore, triggered by “the indefinite” (4). The apparent indefiniteness of life represents “the full terror of anxiety” which surrounds “all things, even our joys and festivities in the world” (5):

For now, the whole world, with all its hopes and fears, is called into question; even the gods to whom we pray, and therefore the powers of hope, lie under the shadow of the twilight of the gods. In times of disaster the serpent is, so to speak, tightening its coils (5).

Next, Thielicke anticipates and answers the question that might then be raised: “What is the source of this anxiety for modern man?” (5). Simply stated, anxiety finds its primary source in the “silent nothingness” of man’s existence in a “fatherless world” (6). Man has come to the horrible realization that he is alone in the universe, and, as a consequence, life is fundamentally devoid of significance. In a world without God, there are “no ultimate sanctions” but only the “endless void” which doggedly spoils every human endeavor without exception. Even more tragic is the fact that this anxiety cannot be reversed or arrested by anything man might attempt as a cure. Thielicke observes that many people simply try to ignore the “question of meaning,” choosing to live “only for the day and therefore vegetating” (7). Yet, such efforts are ultimately futile. To the contrary, Thielicke claims that

[m]an does not free himself from anxiety or meaninglessness by continually putting the question of meaning and succor, but by not putting it, by ceasing to be man, by making himself anonymous, by smothering himself in the mass, or by becoming the executive organ of process and functions whose purpose and goal no longer concern him. Here rest is found. It is the deceptive peace of the technical nirvana, of self-immolation (7).

Thielicke explains to his listeners that the attempted flight from reality toward anonymity is in evidence “everywhere in modern life” and that every sinner bears “this mark of anxiety and flight therefrom on their forehead” (7).

With these claims set before his audience, Thielicke raises a final question concerning the possibility of the “genuine conquest of anxiety” as opposed to surrender to “this deceptive evasion” (7). The answer, he asserts, is to be found in the words of Jesus found in John 16:33. There, Christ warned of the reality of trials and tribulations in this life but also set forth the promise that He has already overcome the world with all of its pain, suffering and anxiety. Thielicke explains that this promise of Jesus means that with the Savior’s conquest of “the powers of guilt, suffering and death” there is also the

assurance of “forgiveness and justification” for the sinner (8). That is, there is in Scripture a definite link between sin and anxiety, and this fact explains why the New Testament sets forth Christ’s final victory over suffering and death within the framework of salvation and the forgiveness of trespasses (8). Thus, Christ has won the victory over all of the “powers of anxiety” and, consequently, over “the threat of meaninglessness” as well (8).

Thielicke concludes this brief sermon with an appeal to see the love of Christ as the “positive force which defeats anxiety” (8). He observes that the enslaving power of anxiety is vanquished only by the redeeming love of the Father. Essentially, anxiety is nothing less than “a broken bond” between God and man (8). This fracture however, can only be repaired by the personal and experiential knowledge of God’s love in Christ, a love in which one loses all anxiety (8). If one has experienced this amazing love, then there is no need to be overcome by fears “even in the darkest forest” of life (8-9). The love of Christ is the love of One who was Himself confronted with “the constricting riddles of life” and overcame them all on behalf of those who trust in Him (9). Christ also left us with an example to follow as well, for in the Garden of Gethsemane He brought His crushing anxieties to His Father (9). There, in that moment of inexpressible transaction, Christ surrendered to the Father His troubles and those of all who believe in Him. Therefore, if one who knows the Savior is anxious, then he can “rest assured” that he is “never alone” with his anxiety (9). For everyone who is in Christ, there is

no longer a mist-covered landscape into which I peer anxiously because of the sinister events which will there befall me. Everything is now different. We do not know what will come. But we know who will come. And if the last hour belongs to us, we do not need to fear the next minute (9).

Noteworthy rhetorical features:

Structure—

This short message reveals a subtle, yet readily discernable, structure. Thielicke has built this sermon on three basic points that may be reconstructed in the following manner: 1) the linguistic root of the word “anxiety,” 2) the source for modern man’s anxiety, and 3) the final conquest of anxiety. Each point is explained with commendable simplicity and illustrated thoroughly. Another unique feature of this

message is its lack of an explicitly stated scriptural text. The discerning reader will recognize Thielicke's biblical foundation only in the last third of the message where he quotes but does not identify John 16:33.

Illustrations—

Thielicke has utilized a total of eight illustrations in this message. They appear in the following order: 1) the opening illustration of the survey of young people on the question of life, 2) a reference to "Communist soldiers" who were "found to be more afraid of physical pain than of actual death" (3), 3) a paraphrase of an unidentified saying of Martin Luther, 4) a reference to the "Midgard serpent of German mythology" (5), 5) a lengthy reference to an unidentified work of Jean Paul, by whom Thielicke apparently means Johann Paul Friedrich Richter, the German romantic writer, 6) a reference to a quote from Dostoevsky in *The Brothers Karamazov*, 7) a reference to the play *No Exit* by Jean Paul Sarte (Sartre), the French existentialist philosopher and playwright, and 8) a reference to *Man in the Moon* by Ernst Jünger, the German writer and philosopher.

Collateral biblical texts or references—

In addition to the quotation of John 16:33, Thielicke appeals to three other biblical passages in this message: 1) the book of Job, 2) a veiled reference to 1 John 4:18, and 3) a quotation of Matthew 27:46.

Summary:

In this message, Thielicke has tackled the problem of anxiety, both by defining it in terms of sin and estrangement from God and by demonstrating its ultimate cure in the redeeming love of God in Christ Jesus. In terms of the PES, Thielicke has located the source of human suffering in the Fall and, thereby, offered hope in the midst of tribulation through Christ alone.

6.1.4.2 “The Silence of God”—Matthew 15:21-28

The setting of the sermon:

This sermon appears as the second message in the collection. In a footnote, Thieliicke indicates that this sermon was delivered in 1943 during the battle of Stalingrad.

The theme of the sermon:

Thieliicke’s central aim in this message is to explain and illustrate the nature of saving faith, using as his primary text the encounter between the Canaanite woman and Jesus as recorded by Matthew. He will demonstrate that the “silence of God,” as illustrated by the Lord’s silence in the face of the woman’s cry for mercy (Matthew 15:23), serves as “the greatest test of our faith” (12). He will also link this divine silence to the PES, which, he admits, is the most formidable impediment to faith in Christ (16-17). In the end, he will call upon his hearers to emulate the faith of the woman by confessing their sins and unworthiness, trusting in the truthfulness of His Word, and humbling themselves before the “power of this Golgotha night of silence” (15).

How the PES surfaces in the sermon:

Having introduced the background, basic storyline, and main characters in this episode from the Gospel of Matthew, Thieliicke makes an emotion-laden reference to the situation in Stalingrad, perhaps one of the most horrific battles of World War II (fought between August 1942 and February 1943). He connects the silence of Jesus in response to the woman’s plea with the apparent “silence of God” in the face of the ongoing battle for Stalingrad and the incalculable suffering and casualties that resulted:

Is God not silent about Stalingrad? What do we hear above and under its ruins? Do we not hear the roar of artillery, the tumult of the world and the cries of the dying? But where is the voice of God? When we think of God, is it not suddenly so quiet, so terribly quiet, in the witches’ kitchen of this hell, that one can hear a pin drop even though grenades are bursting around us? (12-13)

Thieliicke suggests that many of the members of his audience are also asking such apposite questions about the love, justice, and even the very existence of God in light of the terrible events unfolding in the infamous battle. Because this text of Scripture touches such a sensitive nerve, dealing as it does with the apparent apathy of Jesus

before such a pathetic and needy woman whose demonized daughter was gravely ill, Thielicke calls this “one of the most profound and indeed unfathomable stories in the New Testament” (11). Having established a connection between this biblical text and his contemporary situation, Thielicke will seek to explain and illustrate the nature of the woman’s faith in the Savior despite His silence and will further relate this story of the birth of authentic faith to the PES.

How the PES is addressed in the sermon:

Thielicke begins addressing the complexities of the PES by appealing to the imprisonment of John the Baptist (Matthew 11:1-6). Like the Canaanite woman and “men of the twentieth century,” John was “tortured by questions” prompted by human suffering (13). Thielicke explains that John also experienced the “silence of God” and wrestled profoundly with “God-forsaken questions” concerning his imprisonment and the secret divine purposes at work in the permission of such things to occur. Thielicke paraphrases the Baptist’s tortured concerns:

What sense is there, and does it not drive us mad, that the so-called Messiah moves about with His disciples in the sunshine while His herald is so completely incarcerated behind impregnable walls and stands under threat of death? In despairing complaint [John] rises against this destiny of the silence of Jesus. “How long do you keep us in suspense? Tell us freely whether you are the Christ.” Call down from heaven that you are.... Why do you allow this vacillation between faith and doubt? Why do you not make things clear, God? (13)

Thielicke suggests that these are the concerns of all men in the face of the PES, although articulated in different ways. The sufferings of this world cause men to look for answers and to turn toward heaven for a word that will make sense out of what is being experienced on earth.

At this point, Thielicke begins a lengthy explication of the nature of saving faith, employing the Canaanite woman as the paradigm. He begins this examination with the observation that by persistently pursuing Jesus, the woman renounced her confidence in men. She realized that “they are not merciful” and are of little help in times of need and suffering (14). The woman made the critical choice to turn to “the silent Jesus” and threw herself upon the mercy of His “higher thoughts” (14). In a way that is initially inexplicable, she was able to rest in the knowledge that the Savior was “fitting stone to stone in His plan for the world,” and this despite the fact that in that painful moment she

could “see only a confused and meaningless jumble of stones heaped together under a silent heaven” (14). Thielicke then pauses to ask his audience members to consider honestly their own present situation in the world: “How many meaningless blows of fate there seem to be!—life, suffering, injustice, death, massacres, destruction; and all under a silent heaven which apparently has nothing to say” (14). This question sets the stage for the detailed analysis of the woman’s trust in the Savior and the manner in which she expressed it under such adverse conditions. It is at this point in the message that Thielicke reveals his special concern for those among the audience who are not believers in Christ. He anticipates that some might claim that they simply cannot exercise faith in Christ and could not possibly believe the “other things” that Scripture declares about Him (16). He verbalizes what some such skeptics and disbelievers may be thinking at that very moment:

I find it impossible to be a Christian when there are so many objections, when God so often seems to be so terribly unjust and human arrogance triumphs, when faith in love and righteousness is left in the lurch and when the loving Father above the pavilion of the stars is just a childish dream. How can I be a Christian? I can perhaps agree that those to whom faith is given, who can accept all of this, are fortunate. But faith is not given to me. I do not belong (16).

However, Thielicke believes that the woman’s simple words to Jesus in response to His rebuff (Matthew 15:24, 26) are most informative and reveal that she also had arrived at similar conclusions, at least initially. Her desperate cry, “Lord, help me!” (Matthew 15:25) and shocking reply, “Yes, Lord, but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their master’s table” (Matthew 15:27) display her humble recognition that she has no claim upon the grace and mercy of the Savior and no right to demand answers from Him regarding her personal plight. This response shows her acceptance of the Savior’s words and resignation to His will. She accepts the “justice” of His kingly silence and recognizes that He possesses “the right to pass on” (18). She has absolutely “no claim” on Him (18). For Thielicke, this is the heart of saving faith. The woman was willing to “take the risk of simply coming to Jesus,” knowing full well that her “acceptance by God” could never be taken for granted nor simply assumed (18). That is, the woman did not misappropriate or abuse the grace of God as revealed in His Son. Thielicke explains that she was not at all like so many “European Christians” who have “gradually become accustomed to the dangerous and unhealthy idea that the grace of God is thrown at us” (18). She did not believe that it was “the duty or obligation of Jesus” to bear and forgive her sins and take her safely through “the black gate of death” (19). She is exemplary in that, despite the tormented state of her soul, she allowed for

the possibility that “grace may justly pass her by” (19). Thieliicke claims that such a humble posture before the Lord is essential, for it demonstrates that saving faith is coming to birth in the soul:

And I make bold to say that even the most orthodox churchman will not enter the kingdom of heaven unless he is continually surprised that mercy has been shown him. We cannot say that we do not merit wrath or that grace must be ours (19).

Saving faith, therefore, takes Christ at His word while placing no demands on Him. The woman in question has simply met the Savior and in humility “stretched out her hand to Him” (11). Faith, then, can be defined as the “full confidence that He will put things right,” even when they appear to be so terribly wrong (20). Faith is the sinner’s admission that he does not deserve “to belong” to Christ and has no legitimate “claim” upon any blessing or mercy that the Savior may dispense (20). Ultimately, faith acknowledges that the cross of Jesus was “God’s greatest silence” as the “power of darkness was allowed to make its final bid against the Son of God” (14). By the miracle of the Spirit’s work, faith knows that the “silence of God” is the suffering of God with us and is the Father’s own experience of “the fellowship of death and the depths with us” which brings healing and salvation (14). In the end, Thieliicke submits that in this woman’s encounter with Jesus it was “not her great faith that has triumphed,” but, rather, that “she has triumphed because she has taken the Savior at His word” and thereby “caused the heart of God to prevail against the silence of God” (20).

Thieliicke concludes this sermon with an impassioned word of direct application to his audience. He challenges them to “wrestle with this Lord, as the woman of Canaan did, even when He seems to be silent” (21):

We should not let Him go until He blesses us. We should show Him our empty, longing hands. And He, who gives His children bread and not stones, who showed grace to a poor woman even though she was no churchwoman and enjoyed no high esteem, will also extend His grace to those who dare not believe that they are called and elect, but who yet pray every hour: “Truth, Lord,” and “Have mercy upon us” (21).

Noteworthy rhetorical features:

Structure—

This sermon manifests more of a purely exegetical structure than previous messages evaluated so far. This is to say that Thieliicke has closely followed the contours of this New Testament narrative and has provided more of a verse-by-verse explication and application of the passage under consideration. If there is a discernable structure to this sermon, it is the way Thieliicke carefully works through the passage, giving particular focus to the interchange between the woman and Jesus as it naturally unfolds in the text. Thieliicke has also made liberal use of illustrative materials, and the illustrations seem to be placed at regular intervals within the body of the sermon. This also contributes to the subtle framework of the message.

Illustrations—

Again, there are abundant illustrations used in this sermon, and they appear in the following order: 1) a brief reference to the Dutch artist Rembrandt and his gift of using light at margins of his paintings, 2) a paraphrase of an unspecified quote from Martin Luther, 3) a reference to *And God Is Silent*, by the German author Edwin Erich Dwinger, 4) a reference to Goethe's *Faust*, 5) a quotation of a line from an unidentified poem (apparently known to the audience), 6) a reference to a quotation from St. Augustine, 7) a reference to a quotation from Walter Flex, the German author, 8) an unspecified quotation from Voltaire, the French historian and philosopher, and 9) a quotation from an unspecified work of Martin Luther.

Collateral biblical texts or references—

In this sermon, Thieliicke makes reference to only two other passages of Scripture. The first is the account of the imprisonment of John the Baptist as recorded in Matthew 11:2-6. The second is a reference to the miracle of the calming of the seas by Christ in Matthew 8:24.

Summary:

This sermon has focused upon saving faith, especially as it is expressed toward Christ in the midst of suffering and the perceived silence of God. Thieliicke has attempted to demonstrate that faith necessitates that one must take a certain risk in approaching Christ, the risk that He will leave one “open to censure” and disillusionment and that one’s deepest questions about the world and the divine purposes will go unanswered (12). That is, true faith in Christ operates when God has *not* made things clear; especially His purposes that are at work in the permission of evil and suffering in the world (13). Saving faith has also been addressed from the negative perspective as the refusal to make demands of Jesus or to otherwise presume upon His mercy and grace. Furthermore, authentic faith, Thieliicke says, does not simply “consist in regarding something as true,” or mere assent, or as the “capacity for dogmatic understanding,” but in “a struggle, in a dialog with God” (11). Thieliicke has also challenged his audience to follow the example of this humble woman who brought her pain and questions to the Lord with no expectation of a favorable outcome.

6.1.5 Sermons from the collection entitled *I Believe: The Christian’s Creed* (1968)

This series of sermons, based upon the *Apostle’s Creed*, was preached in the city of Hamburg at St. Michael’s Church where, at the time of publication, Thieliicke had been ministering for ten years (xiv).

6.1.5.1 “I Believe in God the Father”—Matthew 7:11

The setting of the sermon:

This sermon appears as the second message in the series. No further identification of the setting is provided.

The theme of the sermon:

In this sermon Thieliicke addresses the subject of *meaninglessness*, which might be the greatest challenge related to human suffering, particularly in light of claims that the God of the Bible—who in Christian theology is affirmed as both omnipotent and

omnibenevolent—does exist. While the physical and emotional pains and personal losses associated with the PES are indeed difficult to bear, the apparent meaninglessness of the experience of tragedy, suffering, and death is a most formidable impediment to faith in God. Over the course of this message Thieliicke will appeal to the Old Testament story of Job as an illustration of the way out of the desperate trap formed by the ostensible purposelessness of human suffering and pain. His specific aim is to answer the question, “What way can there be out of this deepest imprisonment of the soul?” (16)

How the PES surfaces in the sermon:

Thieliicke immediately introduces the subject of the PES with an opening illustration involving the French painter Paul Cezanne (1839-1906). Thieliicke observes that Cezanne was known for his propensity to “utter a rather stereotyped groan” expressing the emptiness and futility of life as he experienced it (16). In view of his life of loneliness and frequent failure Cezanne would often exclaim, “Life is terrible” (16). However, as Thieliicke explains, this complaint had less to do with the normal burdens of life that all people experience from time to time (he mentions Cezanne’s failed marriage, the contempt of his own family members who apparently did not appreciate his artistry, and a lack of respect from his contemporaries) and was more directly related to “the meaninglessness that comes sweeping in like a chilling draft from the background of life” (16). Thieliicke then suggests a series of rhetorical questions to his audience that most naturally flow from such an observation concerning life—questions that were doubtless representative of the kind being silently raised by those present when the sermon was first delivered:

Why is great accomplishment not rewarded in life? Why does success so often come to those who don’t deserve it, while others, through no fault of their own, are left in the shadows? Why do the cold calculators and the “realists” get the long end of the stick, while the kind, unselfish people and the champions of ideal values are at best ranked among the “also-rans”? Does life have any plausible standard by which it parcels out suffering and gifts? Isn’t the whole thing cruelly meaningless and characterized by haphazard chance? (16)

For Thieliicke, questions of this type express the very real and universal fear that there is no higher purpose behind the sufferings that are common to this life. The mere presence of such reverberating uncertainty accompanied by the recognition that “life can be terrible because it is so enigmatic,” says Thieliicke, “suggests why we human beings are

always looking for the meaning of our life” (16). Admittedly, this stark reality of the ultimate meaninglessness of human existence, most especially in the shadow of the atrocities of the Second World War, makes it most difficult to embrace the claim of Jesus as recorded in Matthew 7:11—that “there is a Father behind this world” (16). This assertion, even coming from the lips of the Son of God, appears as “simply a comforting fiction which has been pasted together because otherwise people could not endure life as it is” (16).

How the PES is addressed in the sermon:

While acknowledging the apparent meaninglessness of life’s torments, Thieliicke engages his audience in an “inquiry into faith” and seeks to demonstrate how personal trust in God the Father as revealed by the incarnate Son supplies the antidote to the looming hopelessness that many have experienced (17). Yet before he discusses and illustrates this faith, Thieliicke explains that such belief in and of itself is powerless to solve the questions touching life’s meaning in the face of so much gratuitous suffering in the world. Faith alone, as it is normally understood, does not supply “an easy solution” to all the perplexities and pains that people experience, many of which have no discernable purpose (17-18). He warns that the “concept of faith in God cannot be misused to solve all problems in a cheap and easy way” and cautions against those who claim that mere belief in His existence sufficiently answers “the question of meaning” (17-18). That is, faith cannot be defined in a shallow, rather nebulous way as a generalized affirmation that God exists only as a “principle of a just world-order” or as the “good director behind the scenes who justly distributes reward and punishment” (18). A deeper kind of belief is required, and for Thieliicke the story of Job is the greatest illustration of this truth and of the nature of authentic faith in God as Father.

Thieliicke explains that at the outset of the story Job wrongfully assumes that faith, or mere belief in the existence of God, “pays off” and is a “reasonable recipe for life” and “the best way to get ahead” (18). However, as the narrative unfolds and as it graphically details the escalating disasters that God allows to strike Job and his family through the hand of Satan, this flimsy belief in God as “the Director of the world” quite easily gives way to desperation and hopelessness (19). Satan’s well-designed strategy has apparently accomplished its goal. Job cannot understand how God could allow such repeated tragedies to befall him, and he is susceptible to the demonic suggestion that

“there is no God at all, that everything is only blind chance or cold natural law” (19). Thieliicke proposes that Job’s mind was filled with questions such as “How could God let such things happen?” and he further contemplates how

the blessing of God [Job’s land, cattle, possessions, and children] is suddenly turned into its opposite. The divine meaning of life, of which he has been firmly convinced, becomes a grotesque, grinning mask; the image of the kind and just Father seems to turn into a mocking, sardonic caricature (19).

However, Thieliicke explains that Job still fights his way to “a new confession faith,” but one that remains essentially defective (20). His announcement that “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” is actually an expression of Job’s belief that life’s meaning “lies in the fact that God has higher laws and rights,” and He can “take away what he has given, for, after all, everything belongs to him” (20). That is, Job’s faith rests upon the supposed presence of a “hidden meaning” associated with his pains and tribulations (20). Job has “faith in meaning” but not necessarily faith in God, and there is a substantial difference between the two that Job would soon discern and appreciate (20).

As the Job story continues, this “faith in meaning” is assaulted by even more suffering and torment. Job ultimately reaches the point where his physical and emotional pain is of such severity that it “becomes utterly maddening” and “all progress towards meaning ceases” (20-21). What remains for Job are “the awful alternatives of regarding God as a sadist or of believing in the blind spite of a fate over which no one has any control” (21). Thieliicke claims that at this point in the story

Job is finally driven to this extreme loss of faith. Anyone of us who has gone through severe and endless torment knows what this is, having perhaps himself suffered the fate of Job which ends in his renouncing God because he can no longer see any meaning, because faith in a God who permits meaninglessness and brutally stupid things to happen simply collapses (21).

Then Thieliicke asserts that when one has reached such a conclusion regarding God and the world, it is most natural to assume the philosophical posture of the stoic who capitulates to the forces of fate. Such a person faces adversity and the inexplicable brutalities of life with a kind of “calm” that refuses to resist the impersonal forces at work in the world (21). By adoption of this mindset, Thieliicke claims that one can at the least be delivered from “the fatigue of constant, nerve-wracking quarreling with his fate” (21). Thus, in the very end, when the mere belief in a benevolent deity who exists

“above the starry sky” is assaulted by intense and unrelenting suffering, fatalism is often the result (22-23).

Thielicke then makes the stunning claim that for those who “do not know Jesus Christ,” fatalism is the only viable option and is “still the wisest thing to do” (21). There are, then, only two options available for men—either belief in impersonal chance and fate or belief in Christ. It is this all-important lesson that Job ultimately learned in his encounter with the PES. In the end, Job learned to say “Yes” to the will of God (22). In the same way that Christ would poignantly exemplify in Gethsemane, Job finally “ceased to refuse the bitter cup of suffering” and fully embraced it as coming “from the hand of his Father” (22). His faith in God as Father was evidenced by his acquiescence to the divine will. True faith, then, confidently exclaims, “Thy will be done” and seeks the accomplishment of God’s eternal plan “even when we cannot understand it and when it goes against our grain” (22). Ultimately, Job came to know something that only those who trust in the Savior can know:

He knew to whom he was saying this Yes and to whose will he was surrendering. He did not capitulate to fate, but acquiesced in the will of his Father. In saying Yes, he threw himself upon a heart that beat for him, a heart that bled for him when he suffered in pain (22).

To the claim by some that even this view of faith may finally resolve into fatalism itself, Thielicke asserts that those who do, in fact, know the Lord Jesus Christ, “do not say to God: ‘Do what thou wilt! There is no escaping thy will’” (22). Rather, believers in Christ understand that the will to which they are committing themselves is “a good will,” emanating from the heart of the Father who knows our needs much better than we do (23). For Thielicke, this kind of child-like trust in the Father’s heart may be simply illustrated. While it is true that the “tomorrow’s events” remain unknown even for the followers of Jesus, we may view them as details that have been “recorded in a closed and sealed letter” written by God:

I do not know what the letter contains. But I see the One who sends it, and I know how he feels toward me. Therefore I look forward to those secret marching orders with a confident and happy mind, even though they may send me in a direction which is precisely opposite from that which I consider meaningful and desirable (23).

Faith, then, in its fully biblical and mature expression, leaves the determination of meaning in the hands of God the Father.

As Thieliicke progresses toward the sermon's conclusion he moves the audience to consider how Christ reveals the heart of God, particularly as a Father who has deep feelings of love and compassion for His children. For Thieliicke, it is only in Christ that the Father becomes one's Savior (24). Furthermore, it is in the life and death of Christ that we discover the comforting truth that God shares in human suffering and, most remarkably, He "suffers more over me than I myself suffer," for "God is the one who loses and suffers, because he loves the most" (24-25). The God to whom we must say, "Thy will be done" is the One who "suffers because of me and who shares my lot all the way to the torments of Calvary" (25).

The sermon comes to its conclusion with a most remarkable and thoroughly unexpected point of application. Thieliicke speaks of the laughter that should accompany one's confession of faith in Christ, even in the face of terrible experiences of suffering and tribulation. He declares, "It is high time for us to bear witness to our Lord not only through preaching but also by our laughter" (26). For Thieliicke, laughter, and more specifically "the laughter of redemption," is a distinctive characteristic of faith in Christ that stands in stark contrast to the "laughter of diversion" that marks the unbelieving world (26). This redemptive laughter is the sole possession of those who have "a relationship with the Father" who graciously "extends his hand" to sinners "in Jesus Christ" (26). While believers in Christ still experience all of the tribulations, stresses, and pains associated with life, there is the accompanying certainty that one's fellowship with the Father "cannot be touched by anybody or anything" (27). This fact is the great source of joy and laughter, even in the depths of affliction:

The persecutions of the church are like this. Therefore God's praise is not silenced even when the church of Jesus Christ exists in the midst of the terrors of ideological tyranny. Ultimately, his church remains untouched by myrmidons of terrorism, though the hearts of Christians may quail and cringe (27).

Such heaven-sent laughter is appropriate for all those who trust the Father who has "snatched his Son from the grip of death and made a laughingstock of the world and all its 'fury' and 'bitter war'" (28).

Noteworthy rhetorical features:

Structure—

This sermon seems to be structured around Thieliicke's opening illustration from the life of Paul Cezanne and his daunting assessment of the sheer meaninglessness of human life. Thieliicke then takes the balance of the message to respond to Cezanne's disastrous conclusion. The message, controlled as it is by this antagonistic challenge, has but one essential point, and that point is to demonstrate from the Word of God that meaning in life may only be discovered and experienced through faith in Christ. That is, the apparent purposelessness that one confronts, especially within the experience of human suffering, is overcome only by the knowledge of the Father's love in Christ His Son.

Illustrations—

In addition to the appeal to Paul Cezanne, Thieliicke uses the following illustrations: 1) a reference to Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi minister of propaganda under Hitler, and his definition of "the meaning of life" (17), 2) an unspecified quotation from the poet Gottfried Benn, 3) a reference to Goethe's *Faust*, 4) a reference to the imprisonment of Wolfgang Borchert, the German author and playwright, who was critical of the Nazi regime, 5) Thieliicke's personal recollection of his friendship with the mother of a convicted criminal, 6) a paraphrase from *Tonio Kröger* by the German novelist Thomas Mann, 7) a quotation of *Huttens Letzte Tage*, by the Swiss poet Conrad Ferdinand Meyer, 8) a quotation of a line from the hymn "*Jesus, Priceless Treasure*" by the German hymnist Johann Franck, 9) Thieliicke's explanation of how he practices the art of diversion as an insufficient antidote to depression and the sense of "melancholy" that often accompanies the harsh realities of life, 10) the quotation of a line from an unspecified hymn by Paul Gerhardt, 11) the illustration of the unopened letter from God, 12) an unspecified quotation from Blaise Pascal, 13) a reference to the medieval Christian practice of *risus paschalis*, or "Easter laughter" (17), 14) an unidentified quotation of a line of poetry that was evidently familiar to the audience, and 15) an unspecified quotation of a hymn.

Collateral biblical texts or references—

In this message Thieliicke alludes to or quotes the following biblical passages: 1) the book of Job, 2) the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9-13, 3) the words of Jesus in Matthew 23:37, and 4) Christ's promise of peace in John 14:27.

Summary:

Thieliicke has identified the core of the PES in terms of the assumed meaninglessness of human suffering. He has observed that at some point in the experience of pain (whether physical or emotional), there is the loss of hope resulting from the seemingly gratuitous nature of the painful experience or situation. Thieliicke has appealed to the story of Job as paradigmatic of this universal phenomenon. He has also, however, demonstrated how the assumed purposelessness of suffering is countered by the reality of God's suffering love for sinners as displayed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. True faith in God the Father, as demonstrated by humble acquiescence to His loving will, is the only hope of salvation from such hopelessness and despair.

6.1.5.2 "Descended Into Hell"—Luke 16:19-31

The setting of the sermon:

This is the tenth sermon in the collection. No further identification of the setting is provided.

The theme of the sermon:

Thieliicke's purpose in this sermon is to explain and apply the meaning of the phrase "He descended into hell" that appears in the *Apostles' Creed*. Thieliicke will define the biblical concept of 'hell' utilizing Christ's parable of the rich man and Lazarus found in Luke 16. In this message Thieliicke will also deploy his belief in the possibility of post-mortem salvation, especially for those who have unduly suffered in this life or, because of factors beyond their control, have not had the opportunity to hear and respond to the message of Christ. His central claim, however, is that God's love for sinners in Christ

will ultimately triumph over all evil and the consequences of man's sin, especially death itself.

How the PES surfaces in the sermon:

The subject of the PES appears only as the subtle background of this message as Thielicke's central emphasis is upon setting forth his understanding of the nature of hell. Unexpectedly, however, the sermon begins with a series of rhetorical questions about the possibility of the existence of heaven. Thielicke states that the idea of heaven has suffered at the hands of skeptics and unbelievers alike and has driven many people away from any serious consideration of the claims of Christianity. Then Thielicke explains that the notion of hell has introduced an even greater degree of antipathy to the Christian gospel, particularly as it is often cast in terms of unquenchable fire and "horribly mythological" images of millions of disembodied souls locked in eternal agonies (122). Additional questions are prompted by these popular Christian assumptions about the nature of hell, such as "Where could this place of torment be located geographically, anyway?" (122). Thielicke also confirms that even "convinced Christians" themselves have their serious misgivings about hell:

Doesn't it sound strange when Jesus, of all people, talks about hellfire (Matt. 5:22) and says that weeping and gnashing of teeth will someday seize the loveless and the unrighteous (Matt. 22:13)? And what about his speaking of a frightful time when we must render account of our lives and answer for what we have done (Matt. 12:26; 25:10)? (123)

Yet, for Thielicke, the greatest of the arguments against the existence of a place of torment for the unrighteous is that of the alleged incongruity of this notion with the love of God. Many people assume that the existence of hell is simply "inconsistent with a God of love and with a Savior who sacrifices himself for the lost" (123). The average man on the street, as it were, is prone to ask whether or not "a happy ending to all the fuss and confusion of our life" would be "much more in keeping with the basic theme of a religion of love" (123). The church is at once confronted with a significant question:

Is it really supposed to be a binding article of faith, then, when the official confession of the church does a monstrous thing like permitting Jesus Christ and hell to occur together in *one* sentence, "He descended into hell"? (123)

In this sermon, therefore, Thielicke seeks to provide his defense of the doctrine of hell while offering the foundation for hope in the present sufferings of this life, sufferings that are obviously connected to man's sin against God.

How the PES is addressed in the sermon:

As noted above, the PES serves as the understated background of this sermon. There are two places in the message where Thielicke speaks more directly to this issue and both are connected to the doctrine of hell as articulated uniquely in the creed. First, Thielicke seeks to comfort his audience members with the fact that while those who trust in Christ are not shielded from the evils of this world or personal afflictions, they are nonetheless safe in the Father's tender care:

But the loss of the one dearest to me, the final torments of multiple sclerosis, the sight of a brutally murdered child—all this need not be hell as long as I hold on to the fatherly hand which reaches out to me in my darkness (124).

Thielicke states that for those who trust in the Father's love despite their painful life-situation, there will be the promise of eternal comfort like that expressed in the Heidelberg Catechism's answer as to "why Christ went down to hell in this way" (130). The creed teaches that in the most difficult tribulations and tests that one may experience, there is yet the assurance of one's full redemption by the Savior who also "suffered in his soul both on the cross and before" (130-131). A great "place of refuge" is available for all who trust themselves to the care of the Savior, and in the "shelter" of the Father's arms one is "no longer frightened of even the darkest mystery" (133). However, no such hope or comfort is available for those who choose not to trust in God the Father. If in the midst of one's pain and suffering there is the rejection of the Savior and the willful absence of faith in the "higher thoughts" of God, then "the burden of outer and inner torment can reach the critical point where it becomes a hell" (124). Such persons as this have, as the parable of the rich man and Lazarus graphically demonstrates, "forfeited once and for all" the meaningful life that the Father had planned for them (128). They have "reached a crossroads" and made the wrong choice and now must "face up to what they have not believed" (128). Those who refuse the offer of the gospel have turned their life into an "illusion" and by their rejection of Christ have consigned themselves to "joyride without a goal" (129). As Thielicke powerfully expresses it, unbelievers will experience the "separation from God in all its forms. It is ultimate forsakenness" (124).

Thielicke then addresses the PES in a second way in this sermon. He unveils his interest in speaking on behalf of those who have experienced a decided disadvantage in life, one that has created conditions in which faith in Christ is virtually impossible. Thielicke states his passionate concerns for those who have never had the opportunity to hear the call of the gospel, particularly “those who lived before Christ,” as well as “the millions in Russia and Asia” who do not know Him (132). There are also those whose lives have been so damaged and affected by various types and degrees of suffering that any hope that they might freely embrace God’s proffered mercy is overwhelmed by the magnitude of their pain (132-133). For these people who have lived at such a spiritual disadvantage there must be a merciful provision from God. Thielicke finds a basis for optimism regarding this very situation in the parable of Luke 16. For Thielicke, this parable, along with Peter’s enigmatic words in 1 Peter 4:6 (that the gospel has been preached to the dead), suggests that death is not the final barrier for such profoundly disadvantaged persons. Thielicke tells his audience that there is reason to believe that “God has still other ways of getting to *us*, ways that, as men, we do not have at our disposal. Perhaps *he* yet has ways, beyond death and beyond our limited period” (132). This possibility, as Thielicke further explains, is perfectly commensurate with the “immeasurable” love and mercy of Christ and demonstrates His sovereign power and authority over all people, both “living and dead” (132). That Christ can, when certain conditions prevail, give the gift of post-mortem salvation displays His ability

to find even the dead who call to [Him] and all those who prayed to false gods because they didn’t know [Him]; all those who have now been forsaken by their fetishes and idols; all those who were carried off in their childhood and died prematurely; and even the atheists who were withdrawn from [His] word or who heard only a distorted caricature of it (132-133).

Thielicke then states that this understanding of the wide reach of salvation, extending even to certain persons among the dead, more gloriously exalts the limitless mercy of God and the inexhaustible efficacy of Christ’s atoning death and resurrection. In short, the suffering of the Savior “was great enough to make up for them, too” (133).

At this point, Thielicke brings the sermon to a conclusion by speaking of the sadness that God the Father experiences in His heart when someone willfully rejects His love and the “paradise” freely offered to sinners. He states that when someone turns away from Christ the heart of God is saddened by the fact that such a one “can no longer come to him” (134). For Thielicke, this, in the final analysis, “is hell” (134). In light of

hell's reality, then, one must take advantage of the gospel promise and walk through "the door to the wedding feast" which stands "open" to all (134).

Noteworthy rhetorical features:

Structure—

This message has been structured in keeping with the free-flowing, conversational pattern that has characterized the majority of Thieliicke's sermons evaluated to this point. The message contains a large number of illustrations, which, as has been frequently demonstrated above, is also quite typical of Thieliicke's homiletical style.

Illustrations—

Thieliicke has included fourteen illustrations in this message and they appear in the following order: 1) an unspecified reference to Nietzsche's views on the existence of hell, 2) Thieliicke's reference to a recent magazine article that addressed the subject of hell, 3) a reference to Martin Luther's beliefs about hell, 4) a quotation from Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, 5) a reference to a child anxiously awaiting the arrival of Christmas morning, 6) Thieliicke's description of the average unbeliever whose separation from God results in no apparent torment at all, 7) a quotation from *Doctor Faustus*, by the English playwright Christopher Marlowe, 8) a quotation from *Diary of a Country Priest*, by George Bernanos, 9) a brief reference to the sinking of the *Titanic*, 10) a passing reference to an unnamed book by an author whom Thieliicke identifies only as Högveld, 11) a quotation of Question 44 of the *Heidelberg Catechism*, 12) a quotation from a sermon delivered by Martin Luther at Torgau in 1533, 13) the quotation of a line from hymn No. 572 in the *Service Book and Hymnal of the Lutheran Church in America*, and 14) Thieliicke's story of an eight year old boy who quizzed his mother about the existence of heaven and hell.

Collateral biblical texts or references—

Thieliicke appeals to or references the following collateral biblical passages: 1) Matthew 5:22; 12:36; 22:13; 25:10, 2) 1 Peter 4:6, and 3) Psalm 139:8.

Summary:

While this sermon deals most directly with the existence of hell, and particularly Christ's descent into hell as set forth in the *Apostle's Creed*, Thieliicke has utilized the opportunity to speak to the PES. This sermon is noteworthy for Thieliicke's sermonic articulation of his belief in the possibility of salvation after death. It is apparent that this unorthodox belief is motivated by the PES, especially in terms of the experience of gratuitous personal suffering or a disadvantageous life-situation that makes it impossible for one to hear and respond intelligently to the gospel offer. In this way, God triumphs over all evil and pain, and the PES is ultimately absorbed into the victory of Christ over death. Thieliicke has also clearly set forth the scope and power of Christ's death and resurrection and has claimed that the sufferings and tribulations of this life are mitigated by the knowledge of God's faithfulness and sovereign purposes.

6.1.6 Sermons from the collection entitled *How To Believe Again* (1972)

The collection contains fifteen sermons that Thieliicke delivered at St. Michael's Church in Hamburg. Thieliicke states that his purpose in these messages was to answer the question, "And if there *be* a God...?" (20). That is, he sought to speak to those among his "contemporaries" for whom "'God' is an open question" (7). He states that his audience for these sermons was largely composed of non-Christians and his primary concern was to set up a confrontation between his hearers and the God who *does* exist—the One who "reveals himself as the master of the game" (20).

6.1.6.1 "When Nothing Makes Sense"—Matthew 11:2-6

The setting of the sermon:

This sermon appears as the thirteenth in the collection of messages. No further identification of the setting is provided.

The theme of the sermon:

This sermon addresses the subject of meaninglessness in the face of suffering. Thieliicke speaks of the "disconsolate musings" that all people experience at some time

in their lives (183). Such thoughts, he claims, are prompted by the consideration of how one's life might have turned out if certain conditions or situations had been different and, especially, how God should make our lives "turn out if he really is God" (183). Like each of the sermons in this collection, there is a direct apologetic theme and purpose in this message. Thielicke will argue that such despair, prompted as it is by the PES and the pervasive sense of meaninglessness in life, is overcome only by looking in faith to Jesus Christ and by trusting in the providential workings of God the Father who turns human pain into joy.

How the PES surfaces in the sermon:

Thielicke begins this sermon with an illustration of how we often express our belief that things cannot "keep on this way" whether we are referring to seasons of joy and peace or times of sorrow and affliction (182). In the pleasant times we believe that "hard times will certainly come again," and in the periods of difficulty we are confident that better conditions will again prevail (182). Thielicke claims that we have an inner expectation that everything will change about life, and this applies to economics, politics, the relationships between the nations of the world, and our own personal histories. Thielicke then connects this universal human mindset to that of John the Baptist whose probing question to Jesus from his prison cell, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" (Matthew 11:3), expresses the same prevailing sentiments. John, having preached a message of imminent judgment upon the arrival of the Lord Himself (Matthew 3:1-12), had reached a point of despair seeing that the "anticipated catastrophe did not occur" as announced (183):

He sat imprisoned in some dank hole. And the sadder and viler it got, the more intensely he picked up every report from outside that came to him: When would the anticipated overthrow finally arrive? When would the foundations of the earth shake because the man from Nazareth had given the word—had *finally* given the word? (183)

Thielicke explains that John fell into a state of despair because the world as he experienced it "ran along its old tracks" with little deviation (183). This precipitated questions in his mind concerning the meaning of his life and particularly the significance of his present tribulations—"Was he perhaps to languish there until he came to the end of both his life and his illusions?" (183)

With these thoughts before his audience, Thieliicke states that all of us have shared in John's despair and disillusionment; "Doesn't this musing, heretical, protesting John live again among us and in us?" (184-185). We have each entertained mental visions of the way that our lives should play out only to experience an often-painful reality that directly militates against such dreams. As Thieliicke explains, there are many occasions for all of us when "something completely different happens," something that we do not in the least desire or expect to occur (183). For example, an employment opportunity that "suited us to a 'T'" is granted to someone else, or the cure for a debilitating disease "is denied us" (183). Yet, accompanying these unanticipated deviations from our own life-plan is the secret that we are guarding deep in our hearts:

In the process we had secretly set up a chance for God to prove that he was the director of our life. But he didn't take advantage of the opportunity. Cancer and multiple sclerosis ran their normal course without any intervention from him (183).

In short, like John the Baptist, we have unknowingly constructed a series of measurements or "pigeonholes" that define what we expect from life and from God Himself (184). Despair, the loss of hope, and, in many cases, the abandonment of belief in God result from the fact that certain events in our lives do not "fit" into our "scheme," most especially those involving pain and suffering (184). This, for Thieliicke, is the birthplace of self-professed atheism.

At this critical place in the sermon, Thieliicke further expands this point. He suggests that in view of the dreadful histories of men like Hitler and Mao Tse-tung, dictators who have ordered "mass executions" and perpetrated acts of evil in proportions that are both unspeakable and incomprehensible, our expectations for the kind of pleasant existence we believe God *should* supply us with are finally destroyed. When God does not "fit what we have expected of him" and has the audacity to act in ways that are different than He "ought to do," we "immediately threaten him by saying that we don't think he exists" (184). In other words, men deliberately choose to disbelieve in God because He has failed them. The PES, to state this differently, prompts men to abandon their belief in God, to "let him go when he doesn't operate according to plan" (184). The ultimate question therefore—one expressed long ago in John's prison cell—is "*How are we supposed to believe then?*" (184).

How the PES is addressed in the sermon:

Having set this important question before his audience, Thieliicke raises another perhaps even more controversial point for consideration. Turning from the issue of doubt as it relates to God in terms of general theism, he challenges his listeners to assess the impact that Christianity has had upon the world. This move is clearly designed to reflect the objections that Thieliicke has anticipated from his audience (184-185). He asks,

[W]hat changes in the world has two thousand years of Christianity brought? Isn't there still suffering and sinning, loving and killing, just as there always was? Has even *one* war been avoided, *one* prison become superfluous, or even *one* nation become a truly just state because Jesus Christ existed? Is he then really the one for whom the world waited as for a fulfillment? (185)

While such issues were and are being raised about the veracity of the claims of Christianity, particularly in view of the PES, Thieliicke explains that John the Baptist's inquiry concerning the identity of Jesus did not spring from intellectual curiosity or "out of interest in the philosophy of religion" but from concerns about his own "being or nonbeing" (185). That is, his questions about the meaning of life were thoroughly "existential" and ultimately focused upon the extraordinary claims of Christ (185). Suffering prompted John to seek an answer to a "basic question," one that dealt with his "personal future" which was inexorably linked to his expectations regarding the Messiah (185). John's inquiry, voiced indirectly to Jesus, expresses the fundamental issue faced "by anyone who feels the earth shake beneath his feet while his heart shrinks from the ugly face of meaninglessness" (186). Thieliicke wants his audience to understand that, in the first place, John's personal tribulations plunged him to a much deeper level of inquiry. It forced him to face issues of ultimate significance, and for Thieliicke this is a most positive outcome. Secondly, Thieliicke wants his hearers to see how John the Baptist did not simply give in to his despair and abandon his belief in God but took his fears and pain to Jesus (186). John did not simply "call out his question into dark, empty space," but he "posed it to Jesus Himself" (186-187). Thieliicke explains that John displayed a "despairing confidence" in the Lord (187). He believed that Jesus knew the answer to this question and to all questions dealing with life and death, and he rested in the confidence that Jesus would soon tell him the answers (187). Thieliicke observes that John, unlike many modern skeptics and unbelievers, did not ask for or demand "proof" in any form before he would believe in Christ, but thrust himself upon His mercy and goodness in the midst of his doubt and despair (187). In an act of humble trust, John

addressed Jesus personally, turning directly to him. The *one* word that this Nazarene will now speak suffices for him. That is the extent to which, despite all skeptical brooding, his confidence in this Nazarene and his integrity remains unbroken (187).

Thielicke then explains that John, “in a premonitory and certainly unconscious way,” did what the Lord Jesus would do later as He faced the “still darker hour of Golgotha” (187). In a moment of time “the power of despair and nothingness broke over the crucified” and He cried out, “My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me?” (187). In Thielicke’s view, the cry of the Son of God from the cross “is like a declination of the message of John” (187). Careful observers of the life and death of Jesus will learn what to do when evil or suffering strikes. Jesus refused to “simply cry out his need into the night of Golgotha,” or ask, “Where is God?” (188). Rather, He communicated to His Father exactly what it was that gripped and shattered His heart (188). In that unsurpassed moment of suffering and agony, Jesus

doesn’t talk “about” God (as one would an unknown X that melts away completely into nothingness): he says “thou” to his Father; he says, “my God.” He doesn’t complain to an unknown; he casts himself on his Father’s heart. At the moment, indeed, he no longer understands the decision of that heart. But he trusts that that heart beats for him nevertheless. And therefore he is really not forsaken, but remains in contact with the Father (188).

From this, Thielicke returns to the question he posed earlier about the difference that Christianity makes in a world like ours that is filled with suffering and death. He explains that the answer given to John’s question, that the blind, the deaf, and the leprous have been healed and that the dead are raised (Matthew 11:5) was meant to teach us that suffering will continue until the final judgment. The world will remain as it is:

People will marry and be given in marriage. They will shout to high heaven and die of grief, there will be suffering and death, and even the furies of war and the hoofbeats of the apocalyptic horsemen will resound over the earth “until he comes.” Then he will not actually “transform” the world; he intends to be our Savior in the midst of this world (190).

However, in the midst of his suffering and doubt John learned the lesson that all people need to learn: that wherever the Word of Christ is spoken and believed “something *happens* and nothing remains as it was” (191). Those who trust in the Savior will soon understand that sickness, disease, tragedy, suffering, and death itself are under His authority. These terrible and unwanted intrusions become glorious opportunities for faith, and they are the very “material” from which God fashions our peace and joy

(191). Jesus transforms the multitudinous anxieties of life into “the raw material for a new hope” (191). When evil or tragedy strikes, the one who has faith in Christ can be assured that these have first “passed his inspection and gotten his ‘OK.’” (192). In the end, John discovered the truth that all sufferers also need to find and embrace, and that is that by trusting in the Savior the tribulations of life can be “received with his greetings” and the “joys are doubled” while the “pain is cut in half” (192). And for Thieliicke, faith in Jesus is defined as the simple confession that “You [Jesus] are my only comfort in life and death,” the One who is “the first and the last,” and “the one and only person for whom we could wait” (193).

Noteworthy rhetorical features:

Structure—

The structure of this message is very much in keeping with Thieliicke’s somewhat casual, informal style of sermon construction that is characterized by a noticeable absence of any well-articulated points and a flowing rhythm. About two-thirds of the way into the message he enunciates dramatically his singular point, and this has been expressed in an italicized sentence in the English translation—“*No one leaves Christ as he came to him. Everything is transformed*” (191). Structure-wise, the message seems to gently encircle this singular theme, which Thieliicke further advances by means of a number of well-posed rhetorical questions (190).

Illustrations—

Thieliicke employs a total of seven illustrations in this message. They appear in the following order: 1) the opening illustration dealing with life’s expectations, 2) a reference to the evil regimes of Hitler and Mao Tse-tung, 3) a brief quotation from the novel *Halftime*, by the German writer Martin Walser, 4) a reference to the destruction of Pompeii in 79 A.D., 5) a series of quotations from *Another Country*, by the American novelist James Baldwin, 6) a brief and unspecified quotation from Rudolf A. Schröder, the German poet and member of the Confessing Church, and 7) an imaginary dialog between a child and his mother which illustrates the security of a parent’s love that is analogous to the love which binds the sinner to Christ.

There is only one other additional biblical reference in this sermon. Midway through the message Thieliicke appeals to Christ's cry of dereliction on the cross (Matthew 27:46).

Summary:

By appealing to the account of the imprisonment and suffering of John the Baptist, Thieliicke has sought to exhort his audience members to face the reality of pain and tribulation in the world with what he has termed a "despairing confidence" in the present comfort and final triumph of Christ (187). He has all but admitted that embracing Christ as Savior does not prevent nor exhaustively explain the experience of evil and tragedy but does, however, define its significance within a redemptive framework. He asserts that no suffering, therefore, is utterly void of any meaning when considered within the larger picture of Christ's death and resurrection and God's overarching providence. Once again Thieliicke has focused upon the nature of God as Father and has passionately appealed to his listeners to trust the compassionate heart of the Father who is revealed by Jesus Christ.

6.1.6.2 "What is the 'Death of God' All About?"—John 9:1-3

The setting of the sermon:

This sermon is the fifteenth message that appears in the collection. No further identification of the setting is provided.

The theme of the sermon:

The central idea in this message, which is based upon the Lord's encounter with the man born blind as recorded in John 9:1-3, is that only a believer in Christ possesses the potential to understand that God uses suffering, even that which is evidently gratuitous, for the development of personal faith and the promotion of His glory. Thieliicke will defend the thesis that the only person who has "the right and the credentials" to declare the "'nevertheless' of faith and to testify to the living God's presence" is the one "who

has himself been able to sing the praise of God in the dark” (213). He will also suggest that suffering is a part of the normal experience of the believer and the unbeliever alike and that, in fact, “all the great men of faith have also been sufferers” (217). Such men “were confronted by the black wall and the void,” and they “made it through the most difficult crises of faith until they finally experienced the very thing which had driven them to despair as a visitation—a gracious visit” (217). Yet for those outside of the saving faith in Christ, suffering like that experienced by the blind man appears as patently meaningless and provides the compelling confirmation that man is alone in his pain and must discover the purpose for his life in a universe devoid of the reality of God.

How the PES surfaces in the sermon:

Thielicke introduces this sermon with a direct appeal to the PES and the fundamental question it ordinarily precipitates. He states to his audience that the passage from John 9 on the man born blind actually “revolves around” the ageless question: “Why is there meaninglessness and tormenting suffering in the world—and how can God let it happen?” (207). He also candidly admits that this question, dealing as it does with “why there must be ‘suffering’ in the world, and whether gods or men are responsible for it” is, to be sure, “one of the oldest and toughest questions of mankind” (207-208). Thielicke then provides some contemporary examples of the kind of gratuitous suffering that ignites such queries:

A look at a traffic accident which tears a mother from her children is enough. One single case of multiple sclerosis is enough, or the sight of a cancer victim in the last stages of the disease suffices to throw into question our belief in a divine governance of the world and, even more, in a kindly Father in heaven (207).

These examples might naturally prompt yet another key question relative to the PES: How can the believer’s faith in the God whom he cannot see possibly be sustained in the presence of such visible examples of pointless suffering? Or, as Thielicke suggests, doesn’t the mere observation of life’s “gruesomeness” totally “refute” any supposed belief in God? (207). Thielicke then expands this idea of meaningless pain, which is suggested by the man’s congenital blindness, to include the more typical routines of life. He speaks of the “treadmill of our daily routine” and suggests that life’s normal duties “are also areas from which springs the question” of whether life is simply a “meaningless cycle in empty space” (208). By doing this Thielicke makes the implicit

point that the PES is troublesome for all people, even for those whose lives may have been spared from the kinds of tribulation and affliction witnessed in the sermon text. What is needed from the believing community, then, is an appropriate response to this line of persistent questioning posed by the PES.

How the PES is addressed in the sermon:

In grappling with the questions advanced by the PES, Thieliicke first explains how those outside the Christian faith have dealt with the vanity of life. Most notably, there have been those claiming that man's search for meaning in a world full of suffering is simply a "gigantic hoax" (208). According to Thieliicke, those arguing this way believe that "if men changed the social structures with an eye to justice and righteousness" then questions pertaining to the divine allowance of evil "would take care of themselves" (208). In other words, if man could pour all of his energies and talents into the creation of a perfectly just state or society, then evil would be a thing of the past, at least in its moral form. The "question of God" would, in such a utopian environment, become "irrelevant as soon as man began to take this world into his own hands with energy and foresight" (208). However, Thieliicke argues that this philosophy is fatally flawed given the sinful nature of mankind: "Even if all the utopias should bring a perfect world into being (only assumed for the moment!), would wasted motion and meaninglessness really cease?" (208-209). The individuals living in such an allegedly perfect world would, as Thieliicke claims, "continue to suffer from one another" and from the looming inner awareness that, apart from God, there is no transcendent purpose for human existence (209). Thus, the question of "why there is so much suffering and pain in the world" and how such things may be "brought into harmony with faith in a kind and almighty God" will go on relentlessly "until Judgment Day" despite what men might do or attempt (209).

Thieliicke then transitions into an explanation of how the story of the blind man is relevant to modern men. Basically, this account teaches the followers of Jesus that the proper question in the face of human suffering, even that which is *a priori* gratuitous, is not "Why did this happen to me?" but, rather, "For what purpose has God sent that to me?" (210). Thieliicke admits that on the surface such a subtle change in the way one personally addresses the PES seems like a "cheap trick," and one is compelled to ask whether or not such generalizations are permitted (210):

Can one really say, then, that every plane crash, every death of a child by hunger or accident is good for “something” and therefore has meaning? What meaning could that be? I am afraid that here we either start to stammer or we begin to speculate or just simply to mouth phrases (211).

Yet, Thieliicke asserts that to draw the conclusion that any talk of God’s hidden proposes for the allowance of evil is disingenuous is to join the ranks of those theologians who have asserted that “God is dead” (212). By this he means that

[God] is dead to us; he is absent; he has no more significance for us. The world is handed over to itself and its self-contained laws. That, and nothing else, is the reason for the existence of meaningless suffering and the blind dice-game of chance (212).

If these theologians are correct, then no instance of suffering has any meaning whatsoever:

Therefore the suffering of the man born blind—and especially the far greater suffering of the Jews gassed by the Nazis—has no sense either. It just arose from arbitrary, even coincidental intersections of causal chains.... What we have experienced is only an excess of insanity.... Alone and forsaken, we have been handed over to the play of energy and matter (212).

In contrast to this hopeless vision of life and its essential insanity, Thieliicke asserts that there are a number of credible witnesses—Christians who cried out to God from the depths of their pain and despair—whose testimonies should be consulted. Thieliicke offers Stephen (Acts 7:54ff), Job (Job 35:10), and the three Hebrew children who were thrown into the fiery furnace (Daniel 3) as examples of believers who offered praise to God “in the dark valley” (213). These men, and others like them, who have “effectively dispelled the specter of the death of God have reduced it to empty words” (213). In the midst of the “extreme situations” into which these witnesses were thrust, their faith in God was formed and released (214). As a consequence, these believers offered to the world “the testimony of extremity” that should be heard by all (214). However, Thieliicke cautions his audience to avoid the erroneous conclusion that these exemplary individuals were able to discover an obvious meaning in their respective experiences of pain and that such knowledge accounts for their steadfastness and endurance as believers. To the contrary, these men were not able to “see any meaning either” but simply trusted in Him “who does know the meaning” (216). Believers in Christ who follow these examples of faith are able to rest their fears and questions about life and death in the Savior who has “seen into the heart of God himself” (216). In Him they have discovered the Father’s eternal love, that same love “that comes down to the

manger in Bethlehem and to the cross of Golgotha, to the hungering and thirsting, to the humble and the offended and to the wounded conscience” (217). The certainty of this divine love is sufficient for the sufferings and tribulations that will surely come into every life. A glorious promise of God “awaits us precisely in the pain and suffering, and even in the experience of meaninglessness and the absurd” (217). True faith, then, “must hold fast to [God’s love] in the darkness in order to experience it in an overpowering way” (217).

Thielicke concludes this sermon with a call to faith in Christ. He summons his audience members to believe in the promise that Jesus gave to be with all who belong to Him until the end of the world (217). “Everything,” he claims, depends upon whether or not one opens the door to the Savior who is still knocking on human hearts (217).

Noteworthy rhetorical features:

Structure—

Thielicke has constructed this message upon the framework of numerous illustrations and brief biblical references. There is little explanation or deep exegesis of the announced sermon text but an abundance of illustrations and points of application related to the question of the ‘Death of God.’ No formal sermon points may be immediately discerned, but a flowing rhetorical style befitting of a conversation is apparent.

Illustrations—

Thielicke has employed a total of twelve illustrations in this message, and they are drawn from a wide range of sources. They appear in the following order: 1) a lengthy appeal to and quotations from the French existentialist philosopher Albert Camus, 2) a reference to the Marxist philosopher Herbert Marcuse, 3) a quotation from an unspecified work of Nietzsche, 4) a quotation from an unspecified work of Jean Paul, the German novelist, 5) a reference to the Cologne Kirchentag of 1965, 6) a reference to the memoirs of Carl Zuckmayer, the German playwright, 7) a reference to the biography of Heinrich Grüber, the German theologian and activist, 8) a reference to the American spacecraft Apollo 8 that orbited the moon on Christmas Eve, 1968, 9) an

unspecified quotation from Martin Luther, 10) a quotation of a verse from the hymn “*From Heaven Above to Earth I Come*,” by Martin Luther, 11) a reference to the book *God Is Not Quite Dead*, by the Czech Communist Vitezslav Gardavsky, and 12) a quotation of a verse from the hymn “*Christ Jesus Lay in Death’s Strong Bands*,” by Martin Luther.

Collateral biblical texts or references—

Thielicke appeals to the following collateral biblical passages or books: 1) the Book of Job, 2) Acts 6: 15; 7:45ff, 3) Job 35:10, 4) Daniel 3, 5) Psalm 73:23, 6) Matthew 28:20, and 7) Mark 5:27-30.

Summary:

In this message Thielicke has directly addressed the PES and the sense of meaninglessness that it brings about, especially in view of suffering for which there is no obvious good that results. Christ’s encounter with and subsequent healing of the man born blind has provided the platform from which Thielicke sets forth the necessity of faith in Christ and advances his belief that true faith in the Savior allows one to rest in the hiddenness of God’s ultimate purpose for the allowance of such evils. In the end, this story serves as an invitation to “take a chance with [Christ] who can call for graves to open and for dead eyes to see” (220).

6.1.7 Sermons from the collection entitled *Faith: The Great Adventure* (1985)

This is a collection of eighteen sermon and sermonic meditations translated into English by David L. Scheidt and published in 1985 as *Faith: The Great Adventure*. Thielicke states that this collection was originally produced (in 1980 as *Glauben als Abenteuer*) for the purpose of prompting reflection and meditation on some of the lesser-known biblical texts that, upon first glance, “appear to have nothing to say to us” (v). Thielicke also notes that the sermons contained in this series developed from his work with the German Christian publication *Glaubensinformation* (vi). It is not clear whether these sermons were ever delivered orally or were intended only for reading.

6.1.7.1 “How Does One Cope With Unresolved Questions?”— Matthew 11:2-6

The setting of the sermon:

This message appears as the fourteenth in the collection. No further identification of the setting is provided.

The theme of the sermon:

In this message Thieliicke summons his readers to take their doubts and questions about the goodness and existence of God to Christ Himself. Following John’s example as he sought the true identity of Jesus from his prison cell, those who are beset with worries and tribulations, who struggle to understand the meaning of life and doubt the existence of a good and loving God in the light of life’s horrors should also address their inquiries directly to the Savior. According to Thieliicke, it is only by doing this that “we give him the chance of responding and taking responsibility for his promise; if there is something to him” (110). For Thieliicke, saving faith in God begins in this most basic way and never starts “at the top with such ideas as that of the Trinity or of predestination” (112). To the contrary, “faith begins below where we become familiar with the facts” of Christ’s essential identity as the Son of God and the Savior of sinners (112).

How the PES surfaces in the sermon:

Thieliicke introduces the PES with his opening statement in this message. He asserts that everyone who becomes familiar with the account of John the Baptist’s imprisonment and the questions prompted by his sufferings fully understands what motivated his inquiry. Like John, the many worries and cares of life also “surround us like so many bars” (108). Thieliicke explains that these concerns are prompted, for example, by the “growing crime rate and the escalation of terrorism,” or more personal complexities such as “illness, unemployment, increasing isolation, age, [or] death” (108). These are the terrifying “encirclements that we cannot break or escape” (108). Accompanying these universal realities are the ubiquitous questions that drive all men into the core of the PES: “If a righteous God were ruling the universe the world would have to look quite different. How can God permit this or that?” (108).

How the PES is addressed in the sermon:

Thielicke explains that John the Baptist serves as a model for those who have such fundamental questions about God and evil. Like his modern counterparts, John was also “tortured” by the very same questions regarding the identity of Jesus—desperate questions prompted by his own experience of suffering both personally and in the world in which he lived (109). However, John’s approach to his painful and uncertain circumstances was not that of one who had only a “theoretical interest” in solving deep philosophical problems or “the puzzles of the universe,” nor was he concerned about constructing a sufficient “theodicy” (108-109). Rather, he contemplated his life and the identity of Jesus with a “disappointed involvement” (109). That is, he was not intellectually or emotionally detached from his profound dilemma. He turned with his troubling questions “directly to Jesus” as a man who was strangely magnetized to the One from Nazareth (109). Given what he faced, the easier thing for John would have been to renounce all belief in Jesus. He could have readily succumbed to his pain and his unfavorable situation and declared that Jesus was nothing but a “mad fool” whom he had blindly followed (110). As Thielicke explains, “When one can wash his hands of a former authority one is free to make a new beginning and look around for other guiding stars, wait for their appearance, and try it with them” (110). Yet, despite what one might expect, John approached the Lord with his pain and doubts. The reason for this, Thielicke suggests, is that John had previously heard about the “works of Jesus” (110). He had come to understand that “Jesus helps, comforts, confers peace, and intervenes in need and sickness with his power; indeed that he himself seeks [the sick and afflicted] in love and stays close to them even though they reject him” (110). This basic knowledge of Christ made a powerful and lasting impression on the Baptist, and this is the primary reason “he is so tortured” and faces an ever-increasing perplexity as he sits “helplessly in his dark hole” (110). It is for this very reason, Thielicke asserts, that John finally “turns to the Lord himself with his question-message” (110).

Then Thielicke states to his readers that the story of John’s imprisonment teaches the lesson that no one who has ever encountered Jesus as He is revealed in the Gospels “gets entirely away from him” (111). The story of the life of Christ, one universally known, leaves its indelible imprint on the hearts and minds of all who encounter it. Thielicke then illustrates the truth of this bold claim by noting that even “the greatest antichrists and atheists—from Nietzsche down to our day—testify to their respect for

Christ” (111). Not one of history’s notorious skeptics or disbelievers could “tear themselves away from Jesus any more than could John as he sat in prison” (111). However, unlike John, the doubters and scoffers such as Nietzsche refused to believe that Jesus had the “final, saving word” but embraced the self-damning notion that the last word on matters of ultimate significance belonged to “the great doers and changers of the world” (111). This is the ineradicable line of demarcation between salvation and judgment. John took his pain and doubts to the Savior about whom he had heard so much, believing that He alone had the answers to the most difficult questions of all.

Thielicke also finds it instructive that in responding to John’s question regarding his identity, Christ speaks of the miracles that He has performed in keeping with the prophetic announcements. Yet, this is not meant to place the focus or location of John’s faith upon the miracles themselves—for such alleged acts of power could well be merely “legends”—but to direct John’s attention to the source of the power released in such happenings (112). That is, Christ answers another implicit question for John, one dealing with the “kind of power [that] is at work here; that of God or that of Beelzebub” (112). Thielicke explains that the miracles that Jesus performed were designed to lead sinners “to the person of the One who performs miracles,” and that in the time of personal crisis, such as that spawned by the PES, a decision about Jesus must be made “on that basis only” (112). Thus, in the strictest of terms, “Jesus’ reply to John does not point to miracles but to himself, to the mercy inherent in his helping deeds” (112). For Thielicke, this dramatic interchange between John and Jesus demonstrates that personal saving faith is belief in the One who came for “the least of us” (113). Authentic faith, therefore, rests upon Jesus “and his person” and in the fact of His “descent to us, [and] his love for us which is so great that he takes upon himself the fate of one who is tortured” (113).

Thielicke concludes this sermon with a practical challenge to follow the example of John by giving the Savior an opportunity to prove Himself to be faithful and true within the scope of everyday life. He states that “The question of whether I can trust Jesus,” the very question raised by John, “can be answered only by putting that person to the test on the most varied levels of life” (113). He explains:

I must be convinced that what Jesus says is convincing. I must hear and be moved by what he says in the Sermon on the Mount where he uncovers the depths of a person and at the same time shows how one can find his way to another path to love and trust. I must let myself be worked on as Jesus was by

the children, by a pressured mother, by the thoughtful Nicodemus or a seeker such as the rich young ruler (113).

To state this another way, when one is confronted with the PES and questions such as those faced by John, one must seek out the Word that Christ has spoken, for with Jesus “Word and miracle are the same: Word is the miracle seen from within; miracle is the Word seen from without” (113). And it is this Word that “completes the miracle of forgiveness and healing” (113). From the midst of pain, confusion, tormenting questions, and even doubts about the existence of the God of Holy Scripture, one must hear or read the Word that testifies about Christ and then simply test Him to see whether or not He is real. Only the person who “dares such an experiment” can ever truly “experience who [Christ] is” (114). Faith and confidence always imply the taking of a “risk,” and there are no guarantees that one will “come to faith” at the end of the trial (114). Such testing is “only a method,” yet it contains the promise that “God will not cast out one who seeks him with all his heart” (114).

Noteworthy rhetorical features:

Structure—

While this message follows Thieliicke’s normal pattern of structuring his sermons in a conversational style, it appears to be dramatically bisected by a statement and a related question located mid-way through. First, Thieliicke asserts rather forcefully that “Our decision [to believe or disbelieve] rests on [Christ] and his person. He is the secret theme of his miracles” (113). Then, Thieliicke poses a rhetorical question for the audience: “How does Jesus present himself in his miracles and message to John? How did he want to come to John and to us?” (113). From this point on, Thieliicke makes an impassioned appeal for his readers to put Christ to the test, and this plea finds its point of consummation in his final question: “Is the John in us willing to take the risk of bringing to Jesus his own lameness ... in order to ... give him the opportunity of showing himself as the mighty Savior in our life?” (115).

Illustrations—

Thieliicke has employed only three illustrations in this sermon. They appear in the following order: 1) a reference to Nietzsche, the German philosopher, and Alfred

Rosenberg, the Nazi war criminal whom Thielicke identifies as “the Nazi zealot against homosexuals” (111), 2) a reference to Gotthold Lessing, the German author and philosopher, and 3) a mention of Paul Gerhardt’s passion hymn “O Sacred Head Now Wounded.”

Collateral biblical texts or references—

There are two additional groupings of biblical references in this sermon that are listed only parenthetically. It is not clear whether Thielicke intended them only for the benefit of the readers of the sermon or if they were included in his original manuscript. The first grouping of collateral texts is Isaiah 35:5f, 28:18f, and 61:1. The second grouping of texts is Mathew 12:2, 4ff, and 21:33.

Summary:

In this sermon Thielicke has called upon those who are perplexed and suffering to put Christ to the test, and to seek Him fervently while focusing only upon His essential identity as the Son of God rather than upon philosophical or theological questions. Faith, he has claimed, necessitates risk, and Jesus demands such a risk as is witnessed in the story of John’s imprisonment. The account of John’s question to Jesus teaches us that one must be “willing to take the risk of bringing to Jesus his own lameness, blindness, inconsolable poverty, in order to be made new and happy by him” and to provide Jesus with “the opportunity of showing himself as the mighty Savior in our life” (115). Thielicke has also emphasized the power of the Word of God and has summoned skeptics and disbelievers alike to expose themselves to the claims of Scripture regarding the life and ministry of the Savior. This, for Thielicke, is the only way that one may “be free even in chains and comforted in the deepest depths” (115).

6.1.7.2 “Love Is Stronger Than Death”—John 21:15-19

The setting of the sermon:

This is the thirteenth sermon in the collection. No further identification of the setting is provided.

The theme of the sermon:

In this brief sermon Thieliicke attempts to demonstrate that one's passionate love for Christ overcomes the sufferings that all of His followers must endure in this life, including even the fear of death itself. If one loves the Savior in the way that Jesus exhorted Peter, then the many tribulations and sorrows one faces are less burdensome and distressing.

How the PES surfaces in the sermon:

The PES is introduced very late in this sermon, as Thieliicke's initial concern is to discuss the definition of love and, more particularly, what it means to love Christ. Following this, he turns to the subject of suffering by making an appeal to the martyrdom of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Thieliicke will explain how a love for the Savior can sustain one in the darkest and deepest times of affliction.

How the PES is addressed in the sermon:

First, Thieliicke engages in a lengthy explanation of the meaning of the word 'love' as it appears in the sermon text. He makes the point that following the resurrection of the Lord Jesus the disciples themselves were essentially new men. Not only had the Lord Himself "become different" by means of His resurrection, His followers had also been radically changed (100). Their lives had a "new beginning" and this newness is most notably on display in the colorful life of Peter (101). The previous life of this man, notoriously exemplified by "that scene of the threefold denial of Christ," has completely "passed away" in view of the resurrection of the Savior (101). This sudden and miraculous change, according to Thieliicke, is also the experience of all followers of Jesus in every age and place who share in the same benefits and blessings of His resurrection life (101). As Jesus makes clear to Peter in the sermon passage, the kind and degree of love He is commanding is that which results in the full dedication and surrender of one's life to the Savior. It is a love that "completely relinquishes" its "own way" (106). For Thieliicke, the modern example of this special love is Bonhoeffer, who both experienced and demonstrated a love for Christ "in its extremist form" (106). Bonhoeffer "unconditionally" gave himself to Christ and to the gospel and courageously followed His Lord "where his natural inclination [was] not to go" (106).

Thielicke then raises the question, “How can one survive this test?” (106.) That is, how is it possible to die with the degree of courage and fearlessness exemplified by Bonhoeffer when “the Gestapo murdered him” (106)? Thielicke answers:

Certainly not by the strength of a will that only fights against something, that is, the drive of self-preservation, to conquer anxiety, yearning, and fear of total and cold rejection. That would only be the resistance of a brave and naked no against the deniers. With Jesus everything is positive. In such borderline situations and in the hours of extreme inner turmoil I should set before my eyes the face of Him whom I love (106).

In other words, Bonhoeffer faced his sufferings and eventual murder with a love for Christ pulsating in his heart. His concerns were not with his immediate situation, as horrible as it was. Rather, he loved His Savior with a passion that was “stronger than all torture” to which he was subjected (107). In the final few moments of his extreme trial, Bonhoeffer was “bound in heart” and was therefore unable to “betray” the One whom he loved (106). In that awful experience of suffering he discovered the “joy” of the One whom He loved, and that very love proved to be “stronger than the suffering to which [he was] called” by God (106).

Practically speaking, then, all believers in Christ are likewise filled with this same love. Because the Lord has been raised from the dead, the Christian, as Thielicke explains, is able to do that “which was done for him” (106). Namely, every believer can joyfully endure life’s tribulations and ultimately face death as empowered by his love for Christ (106). The PES, then, must be met by a deeper love for the One who has so loved the sinner. In the same way that Jesus challenged Peter to love Him, the Savior summons all of His disciples to “love more than the others or than oneself before one received Jesus Christ” (107). In the end, this is the way that love conquers death.

Noteworthy rhetorical features:

Structure—

Though unstated, a subtle and simple structural framework is discernable in this sermon. In the first of two main divisions, Thielicke explores the concept of love and makes a number of comments regarding the way love is misdefined and misapplied by believers and non-believers alike. In the second part of the message, Thielicke shows how one’s love for Christ, when properly understood, empowers one to endure

suffering and affliction. It is also noteworthy that this message lacks a formal conclusion, which is atypical in comparison to the messages evaluated so far. The sermon ends very abruptly and lacks the appeal for faith that characterizes many of his messages.

Illustrations—

This short sermon contains six illustrations, and they appear in the following order: 1) a passing reference to Martin Kähler, the German theologian, 2) a reference to the problem of juvenile delinquency, 3) a reference to Rudolph Bultmann, the German theologian, 4) the account of the murder of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German pastor and theologian, 5) a quotation of an inscription authored by Count Zinzendorf, the German reformer, and 6) a reference to *The Last Ones on the Scaffold*, by Gertrud von Le Fort, the German novelist.

Collateral biblical texts or references—

Thielicke makes reference to the following biblical passages or episodes in this message: 1) 2 Corinthians 5:17, 2) Christ's transfiguration, 3) Christ's encounter with Nicodemus, 4) Christ's weeping over Jerusalem, and 5) Galatians 2:20.

Summary:

Thielicke has attempted to demonstrate how a vibrant love for Christ can sustain the believer in the most difficult situations imaginable. He has explained how Christ's resurrection has turned the sinner into a radically new person, filled with a love for the One whose death and resurrection secured the gift of eternal salvation. He has also asserted that tribulation and suffering should be faced with one's eyes upon Christ and not focused upon that which causes the pain. In the end, the love that Christ has for the believer and the believer's reciprocal love for Christ will produce a joy and peace that not even death can suppress.

6.2 Initial observations and conclusions

Having analyzed a selection of Helmut Thielicke's sermons on the PES it is now possible to set forth several initial observations and conclusions. These may be categorized under the following headings: 1) Initial observations and conclusions regarding the communicative dimension in Thielicke's construction and delivery of the sermons and 2) Initial observations and conclusions regarding Thielicke's approach to the PES in the sermons.

6.2.1 Initial observations and conclusions regarding the communicative dimension in Thielicke's construction and delivery of the sermons

With regard to the construction and delivery of these messages on the PES, the following observations and conclusions may be set forth concerning 1) text selection, 2) structure, 3) illustrations, 4) simplicity, 5) attention to preparation, 6) audience connection, and 7) convictions.

6.2.1.1 *Text selection*

With only rare exceptions, the thirty-five sermons analyzed in this thesis have been based upon a specific text of Scripture. Thielicke's own claim that his approach to preaching may be classified as *textual-thematic* would appear to be largely consistent with his actual practice. From this observation one might reasonably conclude that Thielicke believed that preaching, at least as it is understood in the Christian tradition, should be squarely founded upon the Bible and that the task of preaching is the explanation and application of the Word of God. This insight would locate Thielicke within that more theologically conservative tradition of Christian homiletics that functions from the conviction that "every sermon should be an exposition of a biblical text" (Daane, 1980:57) and that "the subject of preaching is most profoundly the Word" and "the exposition and application of the Word of God" (Schuringa, 1995:185, 188). Several notable homileticians representing the more conservative side of the theological spectrum have championed this same conviction concerning the nature of Christian proclamation and the indispensability of the Scriptures as its starting point, including Johanson (1951:356), Miller (1954:37-62), Clinard (1962:88), Robinson (1980:15-29), Stott (1982:98), Runia (1983:37), Lose (2006:207-213), and Mohler (2008:15-21).

Johanson (1951:356), for example, argues that the preacher “stands between two great realities: the Word of God and the assembled congregation. His task is to bring about a personal encounter between the Word of God and the minds of men.” It seems clear enough that this belief guided Thieliicke in the construction of his published sermons on the PES. By basing these messages upon a particular text from the Bible, Thieliicke avoided the kind of subjectivism that Stott later warned against when he noted that “most Western preaching is too subjective” precisely because it is divorced from the text of Holy Scripture (Stott, 1982:98). One might also conclude that Thieliicke would agree with Schuringa (1995:184) in his criticism of sermons that have no discernable biblical foundation:

The sermon is never to be based upon some current event, human experience, personal opinion or topic of the day.... Only in total submission to Scripture can preaching be liberated to deliver a vital message for today’s world.

While Thieliicke was concerned to confront the specific issue or theme of the PES, particularly as his generation wrestled intellectually, spiritually, and physically with the terrible atrocities of the Third Reich, he nonetheless labored to discover the source for his messages, as well as his authority for addressing his generation, within the written Word of God. In every way, then, Thieliicke’s sermons on the PES may be rightly classified as biblical (see Mohler, 2008:65, and Adam, 1996:59-86).

6.2.1.2 *Structure*

It has also been duly noted in the analysis above (6.1) that Thieliicke’s sermons on the PES manifest a markedly subtle structure. By and large these messages are presented in a conversational style and noticeably lack the kind of rigid structural properties that seem to characterize many expository or textual sermons. Among the messages surveyed, one is hard pressed to discover a clearly delineated outline or the three points that have come to typify biblical or expository preaching (e.g., Robinson, 1980:115-134). Some homileticians have applauded this clearly delineated outline approach to sermon structure as the favored methodology. Daane (1980:57), for example, counsels preachers against assuming that there is only one appropriate sermon style or construction format. He states that it is not necessary that

the *structure* of every sermon must be the same. From the viewpoint of formal construction, there are several types of sermons. The message of the text can be legitimately and effectively brought across to the listener in a variety of ways (1980:57).

Bussis heartily recommends the type of conversational style employed by Thielicke and defines it simply as “the *spirited* discussion of an idea, as an enlarged and *animated* conversation resulting from conviction about a vital subject” (1964:49). He further states that this kind of sermon construction “is to be preferred” as the more effective homiletical methodology (Bussis, 1964:49). Likewise, Hughes (2000:141) commends this approach for its ability to stimulate a dialog between the pulpit and the pew, particularly as the preacher utilizes well-prepared questions to promote audience reflection and response:

In this mode of preaching [utilizing questions], the Word of God presents itself as insights which come to the preacher in the act of preparation and, hopefully, engage listeners as the sermon unfolds. The Word is anticipated and then, within the field of that anticipation, it presents itself to the hearer. In other words, this kind of preaching invokes the Word, it does not tell it.

This approach to constructing and delivering sermons on the PES would seem to be more effective in that it guards against the tendency to transform the message into an academic lecture or treatise on systematic theology—a danger that would seem to be more acute given the deeply theological nature of the subject matter. The conversational approach to preaching deployed by Thielicke, while remaining an authoritative and effectual Word from God to people in need, might also foster more pastoral interaction with the listeners on the specific matters addressed in the message. With regard to the deeply perplexing subject of the PES, this point would seem to be most essential in that many other relevant issues and questions might likely surface in the minds of the listeners—questions requiring personal conversation and counsel with parishioners apart from the formal preaching service.

6.2.1.3 *Illustrations*

Another distinguishing characteristic of these sermons on the PES is Thielicke’s liberal use of a wide variety of colorful illustrations. As demonstrated above (6.1), there are instances where Thielicke employs two or more illustrations per page of printed text. However, despite the abundant use of illustrations, Thielicke never allows them to assume the place of prominence in the sermon. He is able to keep the focus of the listeners upon the truth or truths he is presenting and does not permit the sermon illustration to be “an end in itself” or an unnecessary distraction (Daane, 1980:74-75). As Lloyd-Jones has explained (1971:232-233), “[I]llustrations are only meant to illustrate truth, not to call attention to themselves,” and he has also argued that the abuse

of illustrations is “one of the factors that accounts for the decline in preaching because it helped to promote the impression that preaching was an art, an end in itself.” Thielicke’s use of illustrations appears to have avoided these pitfalls. Each story or reference to a poem, hymn, play, author or event was evidently chosen with great care in view of the unique interests and circumstances of the audience. This care is further supported by the fact that seldom did Thielicke take the time to explain to his listeners the identity of those individuals whom he quoted or referenced. He simply assumed that the members of the audience knew of whom or of what he spoke and this would lend credibility to the suggestion that Thielicke had studied his audience as diligently as he had examined the text of his sermon.

It might also be argued that Thielicke’s abundant use of illustrative material would be especially beneficial when preaching on the PES. Illustrations, at least as Thielicke has made use of them, tend to humanize the otherwise abstract theological issues that necessarily come into play in discussions of the PES. By including a personal element in each of his sermons, Thielicke has brought the complex subject matter of the PES down to earth and clothed it in human flesh. Indeed, his choice and utilization of illustrations in these specific sermons have effectively clarified the rich biblical truths he so passionately desired to communicate to his audience.

6.2.1.4 *Simplicity*

Thielicke’s sermons on the PES also display a commendable simplicity. Even though he is addressing the most formidable theological and philosophical challenge to Christianity and to the very existence of the God of the Bible, Thielicke speaks (and writes) with a discernable lack of theological jargon. Having noted this fact, it is critical to establish the distinction between a sermon that is *simple* and one that is *simplistic*. While these messages on the PES are uncomplicated, straightforward, and constructed in a conversational style, they do not offer simplistic, trite, or cliché-filled answers to the complex questions being raised about God and the presence of evil in Thielicke’s time. While simple, that is, uncluttered with unnecessary technical matters of theology and philosophy, the sermons are nevertheless deeply profound and address the most difficult issues of the day in a direct and readily comprehensible manner. It is most evident that Thielicke’s aim in preaching with such admirable simplicity was to turn his listeners into healthy and mature Christians first and theologians later. The

simplicity of these sermons on the PES is also made manifest by the fact that Thielicke was, to employ Stott's terminology, loyal to the text of the Bible and sought to "enable God's revealed truth to flow out of the Scriptures into the lives of the men and women of today" (Stott, 1982:136, 138). Utilizing Stott's language once more, one might affirm that Thielicke functioned as a "skillful expositor" who opened up the text "or rather permits it to open itself up before our eyes, like a rose unfolding to the morning sun and displaying its previously hidden beauty" (Stott, 1982:229).

As suggested above, Thielicke was also simple in his style or in that method of sermon construction advocated by men such as Bussis (1964:49) who argued for a "simple conversational style that avoids the display of rhetorical techniques." Bussis (1964:49) strongly advanced this simple approach for the following reasons, each of which are relevant to Thielicke's chosen methodology: 1) It displays the preacher's interest in the audience, 2) It is fresh, 3) It is clear and straightforward, 4) It is understandable and utilizes a common vocabulary, 5) It is concerned more with communication than with delivery like in a lecture, and 6) It is more authentic. Daane also appealed for the kind of simplicity Thielicke practiced in his messages on the PES: "*Every sermon must say one thing, and one thing only; and this one thing must be capable of statement in a single sentence* [emphasis original]" (1980:58-59). The lack of sermon points or a typical outline would also have been enthusiastically welcomed by Daane, who believed that "[t]he more points a sermon tries to drive home, the less it drives home. A many-pointed sermon makes no point; it only conveys confusion" (1980:58-59). It would seem that Thielicke, as Lloyd-Jones counseled his students, was also determined to avoid the mere suggestion of "professionalism" and "every suspicion of artificiality or cleverness" that an overly complex message might otherwise advance (Lloyd-Jones, 1971:209-209).

6.2.1.5 Preparation

It would be hard to imagine anyone reading these thirty-five sermons on the PES and not being immediately and significantly impressed with Thielicke's obvious attention to preparation. Even though these messages are simply constructed and are designed to appeal to an audience composed of a variety of people from different backgrounds, they are yet the obvious product of disciplined preparation. Thielicke's sermons on the PES are a case in point, illustrative of the fact that the simple sermons require a greater

degree of forethought and preparation. His meticulous efforts to ready himself to preach are made evident by his ability to take the Scriptures and, most notably, those difficult biblical texts associated with the PES and to explain and illustrate their meaning with simplicity and appropriate pastoral sensitivity. Such a connection between the pastor, the people, and the written Word of God—as was apparent in Thieliicke’s preaching—is the result of a process of disciplined reflection upon the text’s meaning and its specific application to the hearers and their unique context. Thieliicke exegeted both his text and his audience and evidently believed that if the preacher is “handling the very words of the living God,” then “no trouble should be too great in the study and exposition of them” (Stott, 1982:99). With Stott (1982:212-213), one may conclude that “[t]he great preachers who have influenced their generation have all borne witness to the need for conscientious preparation,” and this claim most certainly applies to Helmut Thieliicke.

6.2.1.6 *Audience connection*

Thieliicke’s sermons on the PES also manifest a pronounced concern for contemporary relevance. That is, Thieliicke obviously desired to preach in such a way as to establish a close connection between the text of Scripture, the preacher, and the audience. This desire would seem to account for his rich employment of personal pronouns, his attention to careful preparation with the needs and circumstances of his audience in view, his choice of illustrative material, his application of the texts, and the simple structure of his messages. In the more recent literature of Christian preaching, the subject of relevance, or audience connection, and its critical place in the task of biblical preaching has been well documented (Killinger, 1962:51; Clinard, 1962:85-86; Bussis, 1964:49; Belgum, 1968:352-355; Lloyd-Jones, 1971:121, 227; Walter, 1981:56; Stott, 1982:100, 139, 147; Chapell, 1988:101-106; Schuringa, 1995:188-189). It is apparent that Thieliicke operated from the conviction that truly biblical preaching, or textual-thematic preaching, must pay special attention to the issue of relevance. According to his own testimony he believed that the

[h]istorico-critical study of the Bible therefore provides material for honest appropriation and contemporization. But this material requires to be worked through. And in every new text and therefore in every new sermon it compels the preacher afresh to face the task of making it relevant and timely (Thieliicke, 1965:21).

Schuringa (1995) has expressed similar sentiments concerning the establishment of contemporary relevance. He observes that mere “[e]xposition alone is not preaching” since the Word of God “must also be applied” (1995:188-189). The application is not a “dispensable appendix” but an “essential characteristic, without which the vitality of preaching is quenched” (Schuringa, 1995:188). Thielicke’s ministerial history and preaching reveal his ardent desire to understand the unique needs of his listeners, to feel empathy for them, and to apply the Word of God directly to their situation in the power of the Holy Spirit (Thielicke, 1965:21). Evidently, it was this very conviction that the preacher must address the real needs of his audience which motivated Thielicke’s parish visitation and his frequent trips to the front lines of the war where he could interact personally with German soldiers (see 2.1). Lloyd-Jones (1971:121), arguing for a similar link between the message, the pastor, and the audience, asserts that the preacher needs to “look at the people listening to him, the people who are sitting in the pews. After all he is preaching to them.... He is there, primarily, to address people who have come together in order to listen to him and to what he has to say.” Stott (1982:147) has articulated the same views, and he counsels that all sermons must “grapple with real questions [and] real issues” and that every minister of the Word should

build bridges into the real world in which [our people] live and love, work and play, laugh and weep, struggle and suffer, grow old and die. We have to provoke them to think about their life in all its moods, to challenge them to make Jesus Christ the Lord of every area of it, and to demonstrate his contemporary relevance (Stott, 1982:147).

Again it must be noted that Thielicke was able to preach with a remarkable degree of contemporary relevance on the exceptionally difficult subject of the PES. He successfully avoided the error of preaching past his audience, theologically speaking, while at the same time proclaiming biblical messages that were distinctly doctrinal in content and spoke to the needs of his listeners in practical ways (Thielicke, 1968:xiii). It appears most evident that Thielicke embraced the same philosophy of preaching as that advanced by Clinard (1962:85-86):

A return to theological preaching is essential if the minister is truly to speak to his day. Contrary to those who have seemed to believe that the preaching of theology would fail to communicate with the modern mind, the preacher must center his communication in doctrine—doctrine expressed in understandable language, but doctrine nonetheless.... This of all days, when man’s basic problems are known to be theological, problems of insecurity, grim reality, human bankruptcy, materialistic dogmatism, and world consciousness, the preacher must proclaim an authoritative and cosmic message. The message must be redemption centered.

The messages surveyed in this thesis (6.1) have supplied compelling evidence that Thielicke was especially concerned that his sermons reach those he referred to as “seekers” (Thielicke 1968:xi). His intent was to preach to them in such a way that a vital connection was established between the “seeker,” despite his or her life-situation, and the Word—a dynamic linkage that would place the listener in the position of making a decision either for or against Christ and the gospel. The seeker must “be led to face the granite greatness of a message that brooks no evasion” (Thielicke, 1968:xi), and this could be accomplished only by giving studied attention to the ways in which the sermon might connect existentially with the hearers.

6.2.1.7 *Convictions*

It is clear from the sermons analyzed and reported on above that Thielicke possessed deeply held convictions about preaching, including its necessity and efficacy, as well as convictions regarding the demise of preaching as he observed it in his day (see Thielicke, 1965b: 1-38 and 5.0 above). Within these sermons on the PES this fact is made evident simply by the passion and zeal that one discerns upon reading the published manuscripts. Clearly, Thielicke was determined to preach and to proclaim the written Word of God despite the terrible conditions and adversities he faced throughout the majority of his public ministry. One does not so faithfully and compassionately discharge the duties as a minister of the Word (apparently with little regard for personal comfort and safety) apart from well-established convictions about the very nature of preaching itself, namely that it is God’s ordained method of speaking to His people, calling the lost to Christ, nourishing a robust faith that will stand the test of affliction, and providing hope to all who believe. Obviously, Thielicke shared the convictions of many of his fellow Reformed and Lutheran ministers that

the sermon is not merely the transmission of information, however true it may be. Neither is it merely communication of information about Scripture’s one subject, Jesus Christ, in accordance with the precision of the biblical-theological method. God uses preaching as a means of communicating the gift of faith to the listener (Schuringa, 1995:185-186).

It is also evident that Thielicke understood that the duty of preaching could not be reduced to merely “*talking* about God” in a dispassionate way, much like one might give an academic lecture or report on the weather or the day’s news (Johanson, 1951:357). Rather, Thielicke would surely agree that preaching is the unique act of “letting God himself talk through a human voice” (Johanson, 1951:357), and that the

proclaimed Word is, in fact, “the Word of God which he himself has spoken” (Barth, 1963:9). While Thieliicke would also agree that the preached Word of God “does not work *ex opera operato*” and that “the Spirit must accompany the Word” (Schuringa, 187), he nevertheless manifested an undeniable trust in the power of the proclaimed Word to bring salvation, healing, consolation, and hope to all who received its message with faith.

6.2.1.8 *Summary*

To summarize, Thieliicke’s sermons on the PES are based upon specific texts from Scripture that he explicates, illustrates, and applies in a very simple and flowing style. The sermons are full of illustrations drawn from contemporary life as well as from numerous historical, literary, musical, artistic, and philosophical sources. These messages on the PES are also characterized by meticulous preparation and studied attention as to how the sermons connect with and apply to the needs and interests of the listeners. Finally, it is quite apparent that Thieliicke preached on the PES with deep convictions as to the nature and necessity of the preaching task itself and the efficacy of the proclaimed Word as invigorated by the Holy Spirit.

6.2.2 Initial observations and conclusions regarding Thieliicke’s approach to the PES in the sermons

With regard to Thieliicke’s approach to the PES in these messages, the following observations and conclusions may be set forth concerning the themes of 1) human sin, 2) Christocentricism, 3) God as Father, 4) theological mysteries, 5) faith, and 6) eschatological focus.

6.2.2.1 *Human sin*

Thieliicke’s thirty-five published messages on the PES are characterized by an explicit and deliberate emphasis upon human sin and guilt before God. Thieliicke has unashamedly confronted his listeners with the disturbing reality of man’s fallenness and moral culpability before God (e.g., 1960:57, 58, 71, 73; 1961a: 65, 69, 70, 122, 123; 1968:26, 124). In addition, he has boldly asserted that human suffering and that of the entire creation that now groans for its redemption have resulted from mankind’s

spiritual mutiny against the Creator (e.g., Thieliicke, 1962a:18, 141, 142; 1962b:7, 8, 19, 20). The evils that humans perpetrate and endure are, in the end, self-caused (Thieliicke, 1972:185, 208-209). When the question of ‘Why does God allow suffering?’ is raised, Thieliicke’s consistent answer is that in man’s moral freedom—the power of contrary choice and the liberty lovingly granted to him by God the Father—he has sought to maneuver himself into the position of sovereignty over the Creator and the creation (e.g., 1961a:59-61; 1962b: 7, 8, 19). This attempt to become autonomous and free from all divine control, however, has precipitated the judgment of God against mankind whereby the Creator has given up humanity to its lustful, self-destructive designs. In short, the PES exists in both its *moral* (acts of evil perpetrated by human agents) and *natural* (sickness, disease, natural disasters, etc.) expressions because men have transgressed the divine will and have misused and perverted God’s good gift of free choice and authentic moral agency (Thieliicke, 1961a:67-68; see also 4.2 above). This emphasis on sin is significant not only for its clarity and bold expression in Thieliicke’s messages but also for the fact that he offers human guilt as a reasonable and sufficient explanation for the presence of evil over and against any explicit attempts to deploy a theodicy or a defense in response to the PES (see 3.0 above). Rather than directing his audience members to consider a logical syllogism or a philosophical justification for the presence of evil and human suffering (see 3.0 and 4.0 above), Thieliicke compels them to examine their own personal guilt before God as lawbreakers and rebellious children who have alienated themselves from their Father (e.g., 1962a:18). It might be further suggested that Thieliicke had such confidence in the power and efficacy of the proclaimed Word, particularly the *kerygma* with its call to repentance and faith in Christ, that he believed any attempt to offer a more philosophically nuanced response to the PES was both unnecessary and, in fact, distracting (1963a:7-12). That Thieliicke is able to set forth the reality of human sin and guilt so tactfully and with an obvious pastoral sensitivity is also remarkable and commendable. While bold in his claims he is yet tender in his approach, often using personal pronouns to include himself as one who is equally under the divine indictment as a guilty sinner. To conclude, it is apparent that Thieliicke’s messages on the PES are characterized by a robust and biblically informed view of human sin and its pervasive consequences.

6.2.2.2 *Christocentricism*

Thielicke's sermons, including those specifically addressing the PES, are remarkably Christological in focus (Cardwell, 1963; Smith, 1990). That is, these messages on the PES consistently have their focus in the redemptive work of Christ and in His final victory over sin and death (e.g., Thielicke, 1960:59-60, 63-64, 66, 72, 73, 76; 1961a:61, 135; 1962a: 18-19, 145-146; 1962b:8-9, 11, 13, 16-17, 20; 1968:21-22, 24-25, 26-27, 129-130, 132-133, 134; 1972:185, 187, 191, 217-217. See also 6.2.2.7 below). Thielicke's apparent aim in these messages is to move his audience members away from theological or philosophical speculations regarding the PES and toward a focused consideration of the Person and work of the divine Son of God, especially in view of the terrible consequences of mankind's sin against the Father. He offers no hope for sufferers apart from Christ Himself and, therefore, employs this Christological emphasis to appeal for repentance, contrition, and faith in the resurrected Son that leads to the experience of peace amidst the trials of life (1968:124). Thielicke also strongly emphasizes the presence of the Son as well (1962b:8-9; 1968:27). Not only has Christ been raised from the dead and assumed his seat at the Father's right hand where He reigns over the cosmos as the sovereign Lord of all, He is yet spiritually present with those who place their trust in Him (e.g., Thielicke, 1960:59-60). Thielicke also stresses that it is Christ alone who reveals God as Father and only in His Son may the Father's loving heart be known and experienced (e.g., 1960:73, 75; 1968:24). It is also in Christ that there is a living hope for the future. Thielicke strongly emphasizes the *parousia* of Christ and the cosmic restoration that will accompany his Second Advent (e.g., 1960:59-60, 61, 65. Also see 4.3.2 and 6.2.2.6 below). In Christ there is, therefore, forgiveness of sins and restoration to the Father, present comfort in life's sufferings and tribulations, and the certainty of eternal life and the renewal of all that man's sin has ruined (Thielicke, 1960:27, 75; 1968:133; 1972:188).

6.2.2.3 *God as Father*

Thielicke's sermons on the PES are characterized noticeably by the theme of God's Fatherhood. As one navigates the thirty-five sermons selected for this investigation, it becomes apparent that this is perhaps *the* central and controlling motif of his preaching on the PES. With few exceptions, Thielicke appeals to this rich biblical theme in each of the sermons (e.g., Thielicke, 1960:19, 20, 22, 56-57, 68, 70-71, 72, 75; 1961a: 17-18,

19, 24, 47, 197, 254, 276; 1962b:7, 8, 9, 14; 1968: 16-17, 22-23, 24, 27, 34-35, 36-37; 1972:93, 95, 98; 1985:153-154). Thieliicke utilizes this theme in a number of differing ways that are particularly associated with the PES. First, he asserts that sin is essentially man's act of rebellion against the Father, a malicious defection from His authority and revealed will and the rejection of His great love (e.g., Thieliicke, 1960:57-58, 72; 1961a:61; 1962b:6,8). Whatever suffering man endures and in whatever form it appears, man has brought it upon himself in his mutiny against the Father and his relentless pursuit of self-rule (Thieliicke, 1960:20, 72; 1961a:276; 1962b:7). This fallen world is, therefore, a fatherless world filled with spiritual orphans destined for continual suffering and eventual self-destruction (Thieliicke 1960:20, 57). Secondly, Thieliicke explains to his listeners that salvation is fundamentally a return to the Father, made possible only by contrition and confession (e.g., 1960:73; 1962b:14). While Thieliicke sees all men as children of the Father (1961a:197), they are yet universally guilty of abusing the Fathers' gifts (1961a:254) and of seeking independence from His family (1961a:276), and are thereby spiritually alienated from Him and destined for wrath (1960:56-57). The singular remedy for this terrible dilemma is repentance, or a wholesale return to the Father's house in the spirit of humble contrition and creaturely dependence (1968:17, 24, 26-27; 1972:188, 217). Thirdly, Thieliicke declares that the Father can be known in a saving way only through the Person of the Son (1960:27,29). It is only the Son who both reveals and demonstrates the love and mercy of the Father by means of His incarnation and cross (Thieliicke, 1972:188), and it is only by the Son that one has access to the Father's gracious gift of everlasting life (Thieliicke, 1972:95; 1985:153-154). Faith placed in the Son, who is the only worthy object of one's faith, is ultimately trust placed in the Father Himself (Thieliicke, 1968:24), and this is man's solitary hope for salvation and freedom from life's suffering-induced anxiety and soul-paralyzing meaninglessness (Thieliicke, 1968:17). Fourth, Thieliicke repeatedly assures his listeners that the Father sovereignly governs the cosmos, including the suffering that we experience in this sin-ravaged world (e.g., 1960:25, 27, 75; 1961a:19-20; 1962a:142; 1962b:57; 1968:23, 52, 132). Even the actions and machinations of Satan himself and his demonic minions are included under the divine control (Thieliicke, 1960:126). Thieliicke consistently articulates a robust and comprehensive view of divine sovereignty, arguing that nothing accidental ever happens in the world (1968:35) since God's sovereign control extends to the smallest details of life (1968:34), especially human suffering, whether that resulting from moral or natural evils (1960:75; 1968:124). For Thieliicke, this is yet another way of declaring that there is a sovereign

Father behind and above the world (1960:23, 24, 56; 1968:16), and this comforting truth necessarily excludes the possibility of fate or chance as explanations for the presence and destructive consequences of human sin. Since God controls all things in the world that He has made, He can then be trusted to act in ways that express His love and ultimately result in good for those who belong to Him (Thielicke, 1961a:47; 1968:23, 36-37, 133; 1972:98). Additionally, Thielicke also explains that since God exercises such meticulous and wise control over all events and is always present with those who belong to Him through Christ (1960:23; 1968:27; 1985:153-154), the believer can rest securely in the certainty that instances of pain and suffering must first pass through His loving hands before they are experienced by His children (1960:24, 75; 1961a:19, 53; 1968:133). Finally, Thielicke appeals to the Father as the ultimate judge of all men and nations who will stand under the divine inspection on the great Last Day (1962a:14). For those who persist in unbelief and the rejection of the Father's loving overtures—that is, the rejection of the gospel itself—there will be the outpouring of the divine wrath. However, for those who have returned to the Father through Christ there will be the bestowal of eternal salvation signaled by the joyous revelation that in the Son the Father's justly deserved wrath has been conquered by His infinite and unmerited love (Thielicke, 1961a:256).

6.2.2.4 *Theological mysteries*

In several of his sermons on the PES Thielicke alleges the existence of theological mysteries witnessed by Scripture that are intellectually inaccessible to finite minds and, therefore, must be embraced by faith in the loving heart of the Father as revealed through Christ the Son (e.g., 1960:57; 1961a:161, 176; 1968:36-37). This is especially significant in that Thielicke deploys his appeal to such mysteries in an effort to respond directly to the many questions that are precipitated by the PES (e.g., Why did God allow Satan and evil to enter the cosmos? Why does God not eradicate all evil? What good can come from human suffering?). Rather than utilizing a standard theodicy or defense (Thielicke, 1985:108-109), he argues that God's relationship to Satan, sin, evil, and suffering—in terms of their origin, causation, and permission—is enshrouded deep within the divine counsel (e.g., Thielicke, 1960:57-58; 1961a:166). He asserts that God's hidden and incomprehensibly mysterious purposes are presently being executed in world history according to His wise counsel and that the believer is to find comfort in this certainty even in the midst of present pains and tribulations (Thielicke, 1960:75, 76;

1961a:71; 1972:183, 212, 220). Beyond this, and his dual emphasis upon human agency and moral culpability, Thielicke offers no explicit *explanation* for the PES in these sermons.

6.2.2.5 *Faith*

Faith is another prominent and most significant theme in Thielicke's messages on the PES. In the sermons previously surveyed, Thielicke defines what faith *is*, explains what faith *is not*, and then speaks of what faith *does*. According to Thielicke, faith is most simply defined as trust in the Person of Christ and in His unique identity as the Son of God (1962b:11; 1985:112). Faith is the believer's confession that Christ is the only available source of comfort in life and death (Thielicke, 1972:193). This trust in Christ, however, is often tested or strengthened by trials and tribulations which, in the Father's loving hands, serve as divinely ordained mechanisms to solidify further the suffering believer's faith-union to the Savior (Thielicke, 1962b:12-13, 16). Faith is also the sinner's humble recognition of his utter unworthiness to gain any divine blessing and his admission of the absence of all rights and privileges to which he might otherwise appeal before God (Thielicke, 1962b:18). Faith is also set forth as the sinner's full surrender to the divine will (Thielicke, 1968:22), especially in those pain-filled seasons when God seems silent or absent altogether (Thielicke, 1962b:14). Furthermore, faith in God for Thielicke is characterized by a sense of rest or acquiescence to the higher thoughts and ways of the Father despite the fact that these are noetically inaccessible to finite creatures (1968:124). Faith accepts Christ's promise, contained in Scripture, that God is providentially governing and guiding all events in world history according to His sovereign, yet unrevealed, plan (Thielicke, 1972:183). Relatedly, Thielicke explains that authentic faith includes the subsequent assurance (1961a:71) that all trials and tribulations, however painful or deadly, must first pass through the Father's hands before entering the lives of His children (1972:192). However, Thielicke also declares that faith is *not* fatalism—the sad resignation of one's life to the impersonal and harsh forces of fate or chance (1968:22)—and neither is it to be confused with belief in the mere existence of God (1968:18). Additionally, faith should not be misunderstood or misidentified as belief in meaning itself (Thielicke, 1968:20-21) or as belief in some transcendent purpose for life that is divorced from the Father's sovereign and good purposes (Thielicke, 1968:18). To the contrary, faith both *rests* and *risks* everything on Christ (Thielicke, 1972:114; 1985:114); it clings to God's love as embodied in the

Savior (Thielicke, 1972:214, 217), and it enables the sufferer to laugh with joy even while undergoing tribulation (Thielicke, 1968:26). Thielicke also claims that true faith stands against the persistent assaults of doubt as a Spirit-empowered “Nevertheless” (1972:213); it thrives in life’s extreme situations (1972:214) and directs one into the present experience of supernatural peace (1960:76).

6.2.2.6 *Eschatological focus*

Finally, it is clear from this survey that Thielicke’s sermons on the PES have a decidedly eschatological focus and orientation. In a most deliberate and carefully calculated way, Thielicke persistently reminds his audience of the final vindication of Christ on the Last Day and the blessings of hope and assurance that this truth now yields for sufferers (e.g., 1960:135; 1961a:68; 1962b:55; 1968:53-54; 1972:190; 1985:134). Thielicke’s frequent eschatological references are used to convey several major truths that are directly connected to the PES. First, Thielicke explains that until the day of Christ’s Second Advent and coronation as cosmic King, suffering and evil will continue to characterize human history in an apparently unabated manner (1960:60; 1961a:68). In this interim period, between the day of creation and the Last Day, the powers of destruction are still present and active in the world and even the people who belong to the Lord will continue to suffer the consequences of humanity’s fall into sin and ruin along with the impenitent (Thielicke, 1961a:68, 239; 1968:206). This means that Christ’s decisive victory over the powers of darkness will emerge from the midst of universal wickedness and the horrible tribulations resulting from it (Thielicke, 1960:60). Secondly, Thielicke asserts that the suffering now being experienced by believers in Jesus is being used by God to prepare them for eternity with the risen Savior and Lord (1962b:55). Faith in Christ is born and tested in the crucible of pain and doubt (Thielicke, 1972:214, 216-217). In the experience of suffering the believer learns to orient his life toward Christ’s eschatological triumph (Thielicke, 1968:203). Scripture, particularly those biblical passages that depict the Day of Judgment, permits the believer to view his present circumstances in light of the end. That is, it is through the lens of the written Word of God that one may view human history and one’s present experience of tribulation from its divinely ordained point of termination (Thielicke, 1985:134). Thirdly, Thielicke argues that Christ’s eschatological victory over the powers of hell, foreshadowed by His miracles and made explicit by His bodily resurrection and ascension into heaven, is the full guarantee of the believer’s final

triumph over all the powers of evil and death itself (1960:67, 135; 1962b:8; 1968:53-54). The experience of the believer will be identical to that of the Lord to whom he is in union by faith (Thielicke, 1960:143-144), and this necessarily entails a life of suffering and death followed by resurrection and glorification. Fourth, the believer's faith in the resurrected Christ is the only sufficient source for hope in present afflictions and tribulations. Thielicke claims that faith in the Christ who shall yet return spells the death of anxiety, despair, and meaninglessness (1962b:8). Thielicke also asserts that even while suffering the believer in Christ may experience Christ's own peace, the very peace He knew as He suffered under the eternal weight of humanity's sins (1968:203). Finally, Thielicke affirms that at the return of Christ all pain and suffering shall end and the cosmos will be radically transformed, purged of all evil, and submitted to the full and explicit reign of Christ (1972:190). A new heaven and a new earth will then emerge and salvation will thus be consummated (Thielicke, 1961a:182).

6.2.2.7 *Summary*

The thirty-five sermons that were initially examined and the fourteen that have been specifically reported on above have revealed several key elements in Thielicke's overall approach to the PES. He has made a concerted effort to set forth a vigorous biblical doctrine of sin and has emphasized mankind's universal guilt and its terrible and equally ubiquitous consequences. These sermons have also evidenced a strong Christocentrism accompanied by a consistent appeal to the Fatherhood of God, particularly as the Son reveals the Father's merciful heart and provides the sinner with access to Him by faith. Thielicke has also been sensitive to the presence of theological mysteries, notably those associated with God's relationship to the origin of sin and Satan, the permission of moral and natural evils, and human agency. These messages have strongly emphasized the necessity of personal faith in the Father through Christ, which not only redeems the sinner but also comforts and sustains the sufferer in his present afflictions. Finally, Thielicke's sermons on the PES have manifested a pronounced eschatological orientation with an emphasis upon the final victory of Christ over all evil powers, the certainty of which provides the ground for the sufferer's temporal hope.

6.3 Implications for constructing sermons on the problem of evil and suffering with an eye on contemporary preachers

The central research question posed by this thesis is: How did Helmut Thielicke address the PES in his preaching, and what may be learned from his example that would be of benefit to contemporary preachers? This would seem to be a most important question given that contemporary ministers of the written Word are also confronted by the theological, homiletical, and pastoral challenges presented by the PES (see 3.2 above). Suffering is a universal experience and the troubling questions it poses for parishioners are as persistent and vexing as those faced by Thielicke. In answer to this central research question there are some significant implications from the previous analysis and summary that may be extracted and explicated. These may in turn be utilized to develop a simple description of a model sermon on the PES for the practical benefit of contemporary ministers. However, before proceeding along these lines the question of the relevance of Thielicke's sermons on the PES for contemporary preachers must be addressed. It might be claimed that there is little that could be gleaned from Thielicke's admittedly effective preaching ministry that would be both applicable and transferable to preachers in the twenty-first century. Thielicke's preaching and ministry context—particularly the years just prior to, during, and immediately following the Second World War—were unique and extraordinary by any measure. Consequently, a modern Christian preacher might legitimately raise the question as to how Thielicke's sermonic response to the incomprehensible and historically unique horrors of human suffering in his generation might be of any possible benefit today. While this question is indeed complex and anticipates a number of critical factors related to preaching in a postmodern context as well as the act of preaching itself—factors that far exceed the boundaries of this present thesis (see Reynolds, 2001; Hunt, 2003; Mohler, 2008)—it may be more simply addressed by appealing to two broad doctrinal categories that are foundational for Christianity and the Christian gospel as historically understood and articulated among Protestants (for example, note the following confessions of faith and their respective understandings of the doctrine of Scripture and the doctrine of man: *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, I, VI; *The Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion*, VI, IX; *The Belgic Confession*, 3, 4, 5, 7, 14, 15; *The Twenty-Five Articles of Religion of the Methodist Church*, 5, 7; *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, I, III; *Assembly of God Fundamental Truths*, 1,4; *The Evangelical Free Church of America Statement of Faith 2008*, 2,3; *The Augsburg Confession*, II; *The Epitome of the Formula of Concord*, I).

First, Protestants have affirmed that the inscripturated Word is eternally relevant. Because the Bible is the inspired and fully authoritative Word of God, it is necessarily intended for all people of all places and generations. And if it is divinely intended for all people of all ages, then one may conclude that its very preservation by God further signals and guarantees this abiding relevance. Scripture is, in fact, “God’s word *then* which he preserved for us *now*” (Adam, 1996:100). Clearly, the divine intention in the giving of the written Word was “that the historic revelation would serve future generations” (Adam, 1996:101). As Stott colorfully explains, the Bible is not “like a relic or fossil” that one might discover in a museum but is a “living word to living people from the living God, a contemporary message for the contemporary world” (1982:100). In every way, then, “Scripture is God’s Word for today” (Adam, 1996:101) both as “*kerygma* and *didache*” and, therefore, it “remains unchanged from age to age” (Colquhoun, 1965:77). Protestants, who have routinely articulated a high view of the necessity of preaching (e.g., Miller, 1959; Greidanus, 1988; Willimon, 1992; Goldsworthy, 2000; Hunt, 2003; Smith, Jr., 2008; Motyer, 2013), would appear to be in agreement that the message of Scripture, eternal in its power and transcendent in its scope and relevance, must be proclaimed to every generation of people until the very end of time. This strongly implies that modern preachers have before them the same task and responsibility given to ministers in every era—that of declaring what God has spoken as revealed in the sacred text. Simply stated, contemporary ministers should follow Thielicke’s example given the conviction that preaching today is fundamentally “no different from preaching in any other age” (Colquhoun, 1965:77). Out of faithfulness to their calling as ministers of the Word, preachers must proclaim the Scriptures and should do so in the full confidence that the divine Author of the Word “is still alive, and can still use his words by his Spirit” to speak effectually and relevantly to people today (Adam, 1996:102).

Secondly, Protestants have also affirmed that the human condition has remained unchanged since the Fall. That is, human nature, stained and distorted as it is by sin, is essentially the same as it was at the instant of Adam’s transgression. The passage of time, the extension of human populations around the globe, and the rapid advance of culture, education, and technology have not changed man’s spiritual status before God. This means that “[t]he Bible’s portrait of humanity in its fallen state is perpetually up to date,” and because of this, “the Bible still speaks so convincingly to man’s condition today” (Colquhoun, 1965:78). In the simplest of terms, humans are still suffering

today, often in gratuitous measures, and one would be guilty of the worst kind of moral blindness to assume that the present tribulations of this world are any more or less horrific and perplexing than those witnessed by Thielicke's generation. The consequences of mankind's rebellion against God are yet being experienced, both in terms of individual persons under divine wrath as well as the groaning of the creation itself as it writhes under the massive weight of human guilt (Romans 1:18; 3:23; 5:12-14; 8:22). And since the human condition before God remains as it was following the Fall, there is the enduring necessity of proclaiming the gospel and responding to the PES from the pages of Scripture (e.g., Thielicke, 1962a:142). With this in view, one may conclude that there is much to be learned from Thielicke's example of preaching on the PES. His messages, in terms of their structure, content, and themes as well as his approach to preaching on the PES, are relevant indeed. The world remains under the curse of Genesis 3 and humanity is unchanged in its alienation from the Creator and in its spiritual death. Yet, the gospel is still the "power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16), and faith itself still "comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17). Therefore, the Word must be proclaimed, especially in view of the PES, and Thielicke's example would appear to be both challenging and appropriate for contemporary ministers.

6.3.1 Significant implications for preaching on the PES

At this stage it is necessary to consider in more specific terms how Thielicke's preaching on the PES may serve modern preachers. Initially, it must be recognized that all ministers of the Word will face the monumental task of responding to the numerous spiritual and intellectual challenges posed by the PES. As under-shepherds of God's people, preachers must have a word from God concerning human suffering and the pervasive effects of sin and evil on the world. For parish ministers who are commissioned to give comprehensive spiritual care to a specific community of believers, this is particularly critical. The PES will inevitably interrupt the course of the minister's preaching and routine care of the flock. For example, a minister, who in the normal course of his ministry is preaching through a book of the Bible or is engaged in a sermon series on a particular theme or topic, will eventually need to pause and address specific instances of suffering experienced by members of his church or community from the Scriptures. In much the same way that Thielicke sought to provide his generation with a biblical response to the PES as encountered during and after the

Second World War, the modern pulpit minister must also confront directly the various occurrences of suffering witnessed and experienced by his parishioners if he is to be faithful to his calling (e.g., 2 Timothy 2:24; 4:1-2; Titus 1:9; 2:1). Thielicke's textual-thematic approach (see 5.1.1.1) would be most appropriate in such cases. Like Thielicke, who sought to discover those texts of Scripture that would provide him with an authoritative platform from which to speak to the PES, the modern preacher will also find it beneficial to proclaim and apply such passages in his own ministry context. Aside from the adoption of the textual-thematic method, there are at least eight additional areas where Thielicke's preaching on the PES is exemplary and relevant for modern preachers. These eight specific areas of focus relative to preaching on the PES—or contemporary homiletical implications—may be categorized under the following headings: 1) The preacher himself, 2) Biblical authority and sufficiency, 3) Confidence in the preached Word, 4) Christian doctrine, 5) The greatness and sovereignty of God the Father, 6) Human guilt, 7) Christological focus, and 8) Eschatology.

6.3.1.1 *The preacher himself*

The first implication for modern pulpit ministers in view of Thielicke's preaching on the PES concerns the preacher himself. Modern ministers of the Word can learn from Thielicke that the most effective preaching, and especially preaching on the subject of suffering, arises from the minister's own experience with tribulation, either that which he has known personally and or that which he has witnessed in the lives of his parishioners. This is another way of stating that Thielicke's example teaches modern pulpit ministers that one may not legitimately bifurcate the work of the pastor from the work of the preacher, especially in view of the PES. According to Scripture, the pulpit minister is also a shepherd of souls (1 Peter 5:2). He is not simply an expositor of the Word, as essential as this task is, but a divinely commissioned guardian of Christ's flock who must feed, nourish, comfort, and protect his people in all the varied circumstances of life in a fallen world (Adams, 1974: 75-134; Still, 1984:17-38). According to Still, "The pastor by definition is a shepherd, the under-shepherd of the flock of God" (1984:17). And since God's flock exists in a fallen and sin-scarred world, all authentic pastoral work is, therefore, "inescapably linked with suffering," and this includes the vital ministry of proclamation (Adam, 1996:170). In the course of his pastoral ministry to people in the depths of pain, the preacher's pulpit ministry will gain

fresh relevance and power while his love for his flock and for the sacred Word that he proclaims will only increase (Barth, 1963:53). Therefore, as Adam further counsels, the preacher must be

concerned to deal with the real world of the congregation individually and corporately. This means looking beyond the congregation as they present themselves on a Sunday in order to understand what is going on behind their church attending facades (1996:167).

The only possible way that the minister might effectively proclaim the Word to his people who live in the real world is to be personally touched by that world himself and acquainted with the needs of those under his charge. Stott affirms that one of the greatest gifts any preacher can bestow upon his parishioners is “a sensitive understanding of people and their problems” such that “he can anticipate their reactions” and may respond properly to their needs from the pages of Scripture (1982:61). Still claims that the greatest task that any man can perform is that of “being used to release the all-searching Word of God upon a company of needy souls” (1984:35). Thielicke clearly embodied this essential commitment to be among his people in their times of affliction, not only for the purpose of providing the comfort of his presence as a pastor but also for discerning their particular troubles and how the preached Word might speak to them. It seems most apparent that both the power and the passion of Thielicke’s preaching ministry flowed from his personal experiences with suffering (e.g., his early experiences of death, his life-long sickness, and his numerous tribulations during and immediately following the war years) and from his close pastoral interaction with fellow sufferers. Runia (1983) has powerfully articulated this very point with reference to modern ministers. He claims that because the Bible is the “living Word of God,” a biblical sermon invariably finds a “point of interaction” with the “concrete situation of those who hear the message” (Runia, 1983:65). Therefore, faithful preaching occurs “only when the minister, in solidarity with his congregation, tries to accomplish this intersecting” by means of studied reflection upon the Scriptures and faithful and compassionate ministry to his people (Runia, 1983:65). Runia further claims that even the use of a sermon text is “co-determined by the situation of the congregation” (1983:67). That is, adequate sermon preparation cannot take place apart from the pastor’s ministry to people and, thus, the preacher must look at his text “through the eyes” of his audience (Runia, 1983:71). This is echoed by Colquhoun who claims “the pastor should be a master of two languages: the language of divine revelation preserved in Holy Scripture and the language of the world spoken by the man

in the street” (1965:86). Daane has likewise argued that “[w]hat a preacher is and what a preacher’s function is, are interrelated, and both derive from the nature of the word preached. In a code word: The preacher is part of what is preached” (1980:6).

While this counsel is indeed appropriate for all preaching and preachers, it is especially relevant for addressing the PES homiletically. Thielicke’s example compellingly demonstrates that the minister of the Word must preach as one who has also been touched by the PES with all of its associated perplexities, doubts, fears, and pains. He must adopt the mentality of the apostle Paul who “saw suffering as an integral part of his ministry” (Adam, 1996:170). A faithful pastor following Thielicke’s example will enter the sufferings of his people in the way that Christ entered and embraced those of the world. Preaching on the PES in the mold of Thielicke, then, will require a “love and obedience to God and Christ, commitment to the truth of God, love for people, hard work, relating to the real world in which people live, suffering, and a life of ministry” (Adam, 1996:171).

6.3.1.2 *Biblical authority and sufficiency*

The second implication for modern pulpit ministers in view of Thielicke’s preaching on the PES concerns the authority and sufficiency of the Bible. Thielicke’s practice of proclaiming and applying carefully chosen texts of Scripture in order to address the needs of his generation as they lived with the traumatic effects of the PES is very significant for modern pulpit ministers. That he did so with such consistency reveals his apparent belief that the proclaimed Word was both authoritative and sufficient for the immediate situation of his listeners. Thielicke’s sermons on the PES reveal that he deliberately chose to address the intellectual, emotional, theological, and existential complexities created by PES from the pages of the Bible rather than from other sources (e.g., philosophy, literature, history, or science). This would further suggest that he worked from the presupposition that the Bible was his sole and fully sufficient source of authority for confronting the most vexing questions of life and that his task as a minister was to deliver that Word. As stated above (see 5.2.1.2), Thielicke defined preaching as inherently biblical in nature. It is the act of declaring the “efficacious Word of pardon” set forth in the Scriptures (Thielicke, 1982:243). Thielicke would presumably agree with Daane that a sermon is “inextricably tied up with the *Word*. Without the Word, no sermon” (1980:49). And Thielicke would likewise embrace Barth’s assertion, that the

minister's primary task is to "cause the testimony presented in the text to be heard" and that the very "purpose for preaching is to explain the Scriptures" (1963:64). Thieliicke's belief in the proclaimed Scriptures as both authoritative and sufficient, particularly in view of the PES, is illustrated movingly by his series of messages on the Lord's Prayer found in the collection entitled *Our Heavenly Father: Sermons on the Lord's Prayer* (1960). These messages were preached in the city of Stuttgart during the height of the Allied bombing of Germany, a period Thieliicke describes as a time of "the horrors of air raids, the declining days of a reign of terror," and a "period of total military and political collapse" (1960:13). Thieliicke states in the book's preface that his deliberate aim in preaching from the Scriptures on the Lord's Prayer at this specific time in the lives of his listeners was that he might bring the comforting Word of God into that appalling scene of destruction and death (1960:13-14). He believed that the words of this prayer, recorded in the Scriptures, were fully able to speak to the people in their darkest hours and would provide them with the hope and direction they needed to press forward with life. He asserted that there "was not a single question [concerning the distresses and terrors of the War] that we could not have brought to [this passage of Scripture] and not a one that would not have been suddenly transformed" (1960:14). That is, Thieliicke affirmed, and demonstrated by his consistent practice, that the Word of God was sufficient for the moment, however terrible, and should be preached to people in their most desperate life-situations.

From this example, the modern preacher may be both encouraged and challenged to bring the authoritative Word of God to people in need and to do so with the assurance that it will be sufficient for their painful circumstances whatever their cause or magnitude. Purves (2001:2) has stated this essential point with particular passion:

I detect today a lack of confidence among pastors in the efficacy of Word and sacraments to effect healing and blessing, as well as a failure among theologians to present the gospel in a manner that allows pastors to discern directly the pastoral power of the Word of God. Pastoral work is concerned always with the gospel of God's redemption in and through Jesus Christ, no matter the problem someone presents.

The evidence presented above (6.1) suggests that Thieliicke evidently operated from the belief, expressed by Colquhoun, that

[the] Bible is the preacher's textbook.... [It is the] authoritative Word which it is his main business to expound and on which he bases the whole of his message. Only as he looks at the Scriptures in this light will he be able to meet the needs of those to whom he ministers (1965:41).

Runia has observed that the tendency among some contemporary pulpit ministers is to “question the usefulness and validity of preaching in our modern day,” and that some have even raised serious doubts regarding “the very existence of the sermon as an indispensable part of the church’s life and worship” (1983:3). The effects of this tendency, to deemphasize the preached Word and the act of preaching itself—and, by consequence, to deemphasize the minister’s chief function as one who delivers that Word—may be exacerbated by the PES. If it is assumed by the minister that preaching from the Scriptures is not necessary for the ongoing life and health of the church, it would seem less likely that he would be inclined (or expected by his parishioners) to turn to these same Scriptures in those seasons when the weight of the PES falls upon his congregants. And to the degree that the neglect of preaching from the Scriptures impoverishes the church, then congregants are much less likely to be prepared to face times of suffering and evil from a biblically informed perspective. Thieliicke, therefore, serves as an exemplary model of the basic assumptions about the Word and preaching that should govern the contemporary minister’s approach to the routine care and feeding of his flock and, especially, his duty of bringing the authority and sufficiency of the Word of God to bear upon the pains and tribulations of his people.

6.3.1.3. *Confidence in the preached Word*

The third and closely related implication for modern pulpit ministers in view of Thieliicke’s preaching on the PES concerns the minister’s confidence in the preached Word and in the act of preaching itself. Thieliicke’s sermons on the PES reveal his essential trust in the power of the preached Word to comfort and effect change in the lives of his congregants. It is quite apparent that he carried out his task as a minister of the Word with a high degree of expectancy. He expected the Word to have its effect on his listeners not only in terms of providing perspective and comfort in their times of doubt and affliction but also of moving them to a personal decision (see 5.1.1.2) to trust actively in Christ despite their circumstances (e.g., Thieliicke, 1985:112-113). This would explain Thieliicke’s persistently biblical, or textual-thematic, approach to preaching as well as his determination to persist in faithfully proclaiming the Word despite the opposition that continually confronted him. This fact, concerning Thieliicke’s confidence in the Scriptures and in the task of preaching, is especially noteworthy in consideration of the PES. Thieliicke recognized that what his listeners needed most in the darkest hours of their torment was a Word from God delivered with

confidence and conviction. He believed that God's written Word, set forth in the act of preaching, would be effectual in meeting the unique human needs associated with the PES and in prompting his listeners to place their faith in the Father's eternal love and infinite wisdom as revealed in Christ.

Modern preachers should be closely attentive to Thieliicke's example of preaching the Scriptures with confidence and a sense of expectancy propelled by the conviction that God both speaks and acts in the preaching event. Stott has categorized the "contemporary loss of confidence" in the preached Word as the "most basic hindrance to preaching" and has sounded the warning that "there is no chance of a recovery of preaching without a prior recovery of conviction" (1982:83, 85). Ash (2009:96) has offered a similar word of exhortation especially with reference to the PES: "Only the preached word of Christ, the word of grace preached again and again, pressed home with passion and engagement, only that word will create God's assembly to rebuild a broken world." Daane (1980) has expressed this same concern and aimed his criticism directly at evangelical preachers who have otherwise enunciated their affirmation of Scripture's inspiration and inerrancy. While many self-confessed evangelicals confess "a high view of Scripture," their actual practice, according to Daane, betrays a "very low view of the Word of God as proclaimed in the sermon" (Daane, 1980:viii). He further notes that this tragic phenomena is "one of the strangest paradoxes in the church today: vigorous defense of the Bible as the Word of God ... with a low esteem for the preaching of that same word to build up the church of Christ" (Daane, 1980:viii). Miller (1954: 8, 17, 35) and Barth (1963:12, 33, 37) have offered similar challenges to preachers as well. Notably, Miller (1954) has given voice to the kind of confidence regarding the act of preaching that is evident in Thieliicke's messages on the PES. Preaching, he claims, is "not simply saying words but accomplishing a Deed—the actualization of redemption in the lives of men as the redeeming word is announced and responded to in faith" (Miller, 1954:8). This would appear to be the kind of confidence that Thieliicke's messages on the PES have exemplified. Thieliicke's remarkable history of preaching on the PES from the pages of the Bible demonstrates that the Word of God, delivered to suffering people by ministers brimming with confidence in its inherent power, is the divinely ordained and effectual vehicle for their healing, consolation, and transformation.

6.3.1.4 *Christian doctrine*

The fourth implication for modern pulpit ministers in view of Thieliicke's preaching on the PES concerns the necessity of Christian doctrine. Thieliicke's sermons on the PES have manifested a strong doctrinal content. Theological themes such as original sin, salvation, divine sovereignty, the Trinity, Christology, Satan and the demonic, the Second Advent, miracles, and the church are in abundance in these messages along with other essential Christian doctrines. Such a heavy theological content might seem counterintuitive especially when speaking to the PES. That is, one might expect less theological content and more supportive substance in such messages granted the perceived need to provide immediate comfort to the afflicted. However, Thieliicke's sermons on the PES reveal his stated belief that the "hard metal" of Christian doctrine was especially needed by people undergoing tribulation and affliction (Thieliicke, 1963:a11). This point is especially instructive for contemporary preachers who might be tempted to deemphasize doctrine at such emotionally sensitive times as in the experience of suffering or death. It should be noted, however, that Thieliicke mastered the art of preaching doctrinally driven sermons with both pastoral sensitivity and rhetorical simplicity. Thieliicke did not allow his sermons to become lectures on systematic theology or academic discourses on the PES. Rather, he was able to take the relevant and complex doctrines of the Christian faith—those discovered in the biblical texts from which he preached—and explain and apply them homiletically in a way that connected to the needs of his widely diverse audiences.

Contemporary preachers can learn from Thieliicke's example that all sermons must integrate sound Christian doctrine (see Hughes, 1992 and Tucker, 2007). Thieliicke's consistent practice would certainly support Colquhoun's contention that "[t]here is really no such thing as non-doctrinal preaching" and that "[a]ll Christian preaching must have some theological content" (1965:52). As stated above (5.2.3), Thieliicke maintained that theology served the task of preaching (Pless, 2009:457), and this was especially important for him in view of the PES. It is apparent that Thieliicke resolutely believed that suffering people needed truth and not just consolation. Obviously, suffering raises a host of enormous theological questions and Thieliicke's sermons on the PES demonstrate his readiness to anticipate and answer these questions with appropriate compassion and straightforwardness. Nevertheless, by any definition Thieliicke's messages on the PES would be classified as doctrinal. And, as Barth has

counseled (1963:30), they were preached with the historic confessions of the church in view and motivated by the conviction that theology is both appropriate and essential for God's people, particularly in their afflictions (see Dreyer, 2007:1480). In the more recent literature of Christian homiletics, Smith, Jr. has expressed similar views:

Doctrine has a subservient role in preaching.... doctrine's mission is to be a servant to proclamation. Doctrine's purpose is not merely to be derived, constructed, and formulated and to remain in the archives of academia for scholarly use only. Rather, doctrine is the possession of the church and must be preached. Preaching extracts its communicative strength from the reservoirs of doctrine and draws its riches from the wells of its truth (2008:15).

Thielicke's sermons treating the PES embodied this belief and modern preachers should follow his example in preaching messages that are informed by the doctrines of the Christian faith, yet with the awareness that the church is not composed of theologians. Rather, ministers are called to preach all of God's truth to all of God's people, most of whom may possess only a rudimentary understanding of the key theological themes of Scripture and, nevertheless, are in need of the "hard metal" of truth especially in light of the PES.

6.3.1.5 The greatness and sovereignty of God the Father

The fifth implication for modern pulpit ministers in view of Thielicke's preaching on the PES concerns the greatness and sovereignty of God. Thielicke's sermons on the PES are characterized by a grand vision of God the Father and they articulate a veritable catalog of the divine attributes. These messages set forth the God who is holy, sovereign over all things, worthy of worship and adoration, merciful, at war with the forces of evil, and determined to save all who place their faith in His divine Son (e.g., Thielicke, 1968:132). Thielicke's preaching on the PES is thoroughly theocentric with particular stress upon God's majestic and incomprehensible sovereignty (e.g., Thielicke, 1960:26,27, 126; 1961a: 17-20, 55; 1962b:54-57; 1968:53, 132). In reading these sermons one is never left with the impression that the trials and tribulations of life, and the often gratuitous suffering witnessed in the world, loom larger in Thielicke's mind than the greatness and power of God the Father who reigns over life and death. And most critically for Thielicke, this great and sovereign God has revealed Himself to sinners as the Father—the Father who, as Judge of all men and nations, mercifully withholds His wrath and waits for his recalcitrant children to return from the far country where they have sinfully squandered His gifts and blessings (e.g., Thielicke, 1961a:61).

The God disclosed in Thielicke's sermons on the PES is both great and good. His love is unfailing and tenacious. His mercy is never exhausted by human wickedness despite its frequent inhuman expressions. His comfort is never overcome by the most painful and unimaginable of tribulations. His power is never compromised by the most intense spiritual attacks of doubt and fear. The reader of these sermons is at once lifted from the quicksand of disbelief and death and thrust into the presence of the One who controls even the devils of hell and will not suffer His children to know even one pain that has not first passed His loving scrutiny (e.g., Thielicke, 1960:27; 1961a:71).

As stated above (6.2.2.4), Thielicke's vision of God the Father is also accompanied by a consistent emphasis upon His hiddenness, transcendence, and mysterious ways that human beings may not fully probe or comprehend. While the Father is near to those who are suffering and is lovingly involved in the details of the lives of His children, He remains mysterious in His purposes and plans for both individuals and for the whole world (e.g., Thielicke, 1960:75, 76; 1961a:166). In a most exemplary way Thielicke's sermons on the PES recognize and faithfully reflect the healthy biblical tension that exists between God's immanence and His transcendence, between His compassion and His aseity, and between His knowability in Christ and His secret sovereign designs. Adam (1996:21) gives expression to this substantial point:

Theistic, biblical transcendence means that the sovereign God is totally free to be involved in the intimate details of his creation without compromising his transcendence. The sovereign transcendence of God means he can be immanent within his universe, act within it, and communicate within it, without losing his transcendent power.

With such vigorous theological and biblical balance in view, Thielicke is able to navigate the intricacies of the PES with appropriate ministerial sensitivity while setting forth an exalted and profoundly comforting view of the divine power and nature. Rather than seeking to respond to the PES directly by way of theological or philosophical explanation, Thielicke proclaims the immensity of the divine love, the scope of the divine power, and the necessity of respecting the many worship-inducing mysteries that remain hidden within the divine counsel.

Contemporary ministers of the Word should be guided by Thielicke's repeated emphasis upon the sovereignty and power of the God of the Bible who has made Himself known as Father. While it may be argued that setting forth the divine greatness and power is a requirement for all sermons (e.g., Piper, 1990:22; Adam, 1996:21), this

would seem to be especially critical in preaching on the PES. Thieliicke is not content to emphasize only one side of the theological dilemma posed by the PES (divine sovereignty or human agency). Rather, he places stress upon both poles of the biblical antinomy while summoning his listeners to trust and worship the Father whose thoughts and ways exceed human comprehension. In a masterful way, Thieliicke is able to paint a magnificent picture of the unrivaled grandeur and inestimable power of God while at the same time offering his congregants the assurance of the Father's nearness and the sinner's obligation to repent and trust in His saving love. This skill would serve all ministers well and would enable them to faithfully proclaim the whole counsel of God at a most critical time in the life of their parishioners.

6.3.1.6 *Human guilt*

The sixth implication for modern pulpit ministers in view of Thieliicke's preaching on the PES concerns human guilt. As noted above (6.2.2.1) Thieliicke's sermons on the PES are also characterized by a distinct fearlessness in confronting the sinfulness of humanity and the corresponding guilt and moral culpability that hovers over the race. This seems rather remarkable in view of the assumption that the purpose of such messages on the PES is primarily related to the provision of consolation for the sufferers. Thieliicke evidently sees no antipathy between the need to bring pastoral support to those who are suffering and the obligation of clearly setting forth the guilt of humanity before God as well as boldly clarifying the connection between human sin and the PES. As far as Thieliicke is concerned, the PES is the direct result of mankind's spiritual mutiny against the sovereign God, and this critical truth must be enunciated with particular lucidity if sufferers are to find hope in the gospel (e.g., 1960:67; 1961a:135; 1962a:18; 1968:17, 124, 133). More simply asserted, Thieliicke is not afraid in the least to preach on sin, and this theme is apparent in the sermons analyzed in this thesis (e.g., Thieliicke, 1960:57; 1961a: 122-123; 1962a:141-142; 1962b:7-9; 1968:124; 1972:185; 1985:108, 113). The love of the Father, preeminently displayed in the cross of Christ, can only be known as one discovers his personal guilt and unworthiness before God's holiness. Correspondingly, the comfort available to sufferers is known only in proportion to their recognition of their weakness and need for the healing grace of Jesus. For Thieliicke, the PES should find its initial point of investigation not in the hidden counsels of the divine mind but in the reality of human sin, the terrible evidence of which is undeniably in view throughout human history. Approached from this

perspective, the subject of the PES can be addressed with a decidedly redemptive trajectory, prompting the listeners to contemplate their own contribution to the condition of the world. For Thieliicke “the sanitation of the world must begin with me,” for it was “[t]hrough the human heart the creation was corrupted and therefore the cure must also begin in man’s heart [emphasis original]” (1960:105, 108). With the root of the PES exposed, Thieliicke is then able to direct his hearers to the grace, forgiveness, and healing that is available through Christ to all who believe.

Contemporary pulpit ministers can learn from Thieliicke’s practice that there is no need to avoid or diminish the subject of human guilt when seeking to preach on the PES. Such avoidance of this subject might result from the minister’s fear of being criticized as overly pessimistic regarding human nature, or of the charge of offering overly simplistic answers to complex theological problems. Faithful, biblical preaching will necessarily require the minister to expose “the sinful, worldly, and self-determining patterns of fallen humanity” (Jensen, 2000:10). Thieliicke’s persistence in locating the cause of evil and suffering within the human heart keeps the focus upon what is clearly revealed in Scripture, namely that mankind’s sin has resulted in catastrophic consequences for the whole race. By doing so, Thieliicke will not allow the PES to become the source for mere theological speculation or a distraction from the reality of human guilt and the need for personal repentance. Rather, he handles the PES in such a way as to place the emphasis upon the responsibility of man before God as a dependent, sinful creature. This allows him to set the PES within the framework of redemption and provides him with the foundation from which to bring true comfort and hope to sufferers rather than a shallow emotional palliative. As Beeke (2009:7) correctly observes, apart from a biblical emphasis upon human sin and guilt, it is likely that the minister will unwittingly

reduce peace to mere peace of mind, an emotional or psychological state of well-being or calm. The preacher of this type of peace becomes a counselor or therapist who massages away knots of unhappiness that may intrude upon our psyches. Grace loses its meaning when it is divorced from the gospel revelation of the wrath of God against sin and the sufferings of Christ on the cross to atone for sin.

Because of Thieliicke’s determination to maintain the linkage between sin and suffering, he is able to offer the hope and power of the gospel in a most effective and exemplary way.

6.3.1.7 *Christological focus*

The seventh implication for modern pulpit ministers in view of Thieliicke's preaching on the PES concerns his Christological focus. As evidenced above (6.2.2.2), these sermons confront the PES within the context of the redemptive work of Christ. That is, Thieliicke refuses to address the PES apart from Christ's ministry as Redeemer and Lord and the one through whom the sinner gains the saving knowledge of God the Father. For Thieliicke, it is only within the scope of salvation and consummation through Christ that the PES may be properly contemplated. In these messages on the PES Thieliicke reveals Christ as the one who enters human suffering at the command of God the Father (e.g., 1961a:61; 1962a:19; 1968:22). He takes on humanity's sin and depravity as the Substitute (e.g., Thieliicke, 1960:72-73; 1962a:18; 1962b:8; 1968:24-25, 123). He absorbs God's wrath upon the cross and conquers the power of death and hell by means of His bodily resurrection (e.g., Thieliicke, 1960:67; 1968:133; 1972:217). Furthermore, Christ is with His people in their afflictions, and He shepherds them safely to their eternal destination despite the terrible hardships and afflictions they must endure along the way (e.g., Thieliicke, 1960:60,73; 1961a:135; 1962a:18-19; 1962b:8-9; 1968:23, 27-28; 1972:216). Christ is also the source of the believer's present hope, and His Spirit provides the strength to endure until the last day when He shall be revealed as the conquering King (e.g., Thieliicke, 1960:59, 60; 1962b:9, 11, 20).

This Christological focus is very instructive for modern ministers who preach on the PES. Thieliicke's sermons are worthy models of how all sermons, and particularly those on the PES, should be properly framed within the biblical metanarrative of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation (cf. Miller, 1954: 150-151; Clowney, 2003:11, 45). Runia (1983:55) affirms that

our reading and preaching on the Bible must be Christocentric.... The God about whom we hear in the Bible is the Father of Jesus Christ and the redemptive history of which the Bible speaks has its very centre in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Addressing the PES with the work of Christ centrally focused keeps the emphasis where Scripture places it, rather than allowing the knotty theological problems associated with the PES to assume the place of prominence in the sermon or to be treated purely in the abstract. Thieliicke's methodology maintains Christ and, thus, the gospel itself centrally stationed in his sermon with the PES serving as the fittingly understated backdrop for

the grace of God found in the Savior. It is only in view of Christ's life, death, resurrection, and victorious return that mankind's sin and its horrible consequences may be adequately defined, and it is only in light of Christ's true identity as the Son of God that salvation may be properly understood in all its glory. It is no exaggeration at all to claim that Thielicke does not so much preach on the PES as he preaches Christ in light of the PES. That difference of emphasis, while indeed subtle, is most critical, and for Thielicke it may well define the difference between *preaching* on the PES and *teaching* on the PES. Thielicke will not allow his preaching on this subject to devolve into speculation, and he will not suffer the pulpit to be turned into a lectern thereby deflecting the central focus of the message away from its Christological moorings.

6.3.1.8 *Eschatology*

The eighth and final implication for modern pulpit ministers in view of Thielicke's preaching on the PES concerns eschatology. Thielicke's sermons on the PES are consistently filled with hope and are decidedly oriented toward the future (e.g., 1961a:19, 169, 181; 1962a:18; 1962b:54, 55, 58; 1968:140, 214), and this is a key consideration for modern ministers who would learn from his example. Despite the fact that Thielicke is bold in his declaration of mankind's guilt before God, and equally unflinching in his claim that men have brought down the justly deserved consequences of their sin upon themselves, he is nonetheless able to challenge his listeners to look forward in the hope of ultimate healing and salvation in Christ. Eschatology, for Thielicke, is not a subject for mere speculation or theological fodder for debates about various theories concerning the details of the Second Advent. Rather, the Scripture's vision of God's eschatological triumph through His Son and the ultimate renewal of the cosmos serve as the ground of the believer's present peace and confident assurance in the midst of temporal adversities and sufferings. Contemporary preachers should give studied attention to how Thielicke fills his sermons on the PES with eschatological themes and how his deployment of these themes provides the interpretive grid for understanding suffering in its biblical context. Thielicke's listeners are never confronted with the reality of their sin and its terrible consequences apart from the assurance that God will have the last word on human history and that the Father's grace and mercy will triumph in the end. This eschatological intensity prevents Thielicke's straightforward emphasis upon human guilt from overwhelming his audiences and leaving them in anguish and despair. In a most exemplary way, he effectively strikes

the balance between the fact of human wickedness and moral culpability on the one hand and the assurance of God's triumphant grace and power on the other. That is to say, in these sermons, the PES—though plainly depicted with all of its associated difficulties and relentless questions—is consistently counterbalanced by the Father's promise of Christ's climactic victory (e.g., Thieliicke, 1961a:182-183, 247, 251, 252, 268; 1962b:59; 1985:114). Thieliicke never confronts the PES in abstraction, as some might be tempted to do, but always addresses it within the larger scope and flow of redemptive history. Additionally, he does so not only with deliberate emphasis upon the eschatological conquest of the Son but also with persistent stress upon the present blessings this certainty affords all who trust in the Savior (e.g., 1960:67, 153; 1961a:250; 1962b:8, 55; 1968:140, 203, 213). Likewise, contemporary pulpit ministers would benefit from following Thieliicke's example of balancing the reality of humanity's fallen condition and its terrible consequences with the hope-producing certainty of Christ's eschatological triumph.

6.3.1.9 *Summary*

Thieliicke's thirty-five published sermons on the PES have revealed several specific implications for contemporary ministers who preach on the PES. First, Thieliicke's messages on the PES were not divorced from his ministry as a pastor to suffering people. Thieliicke's own personal experience of the PES and his pastoral care of suffering people significantly influenced his preaching on the subject, giving him a level of knowledge, sensitivity, and credibility that served him well as a pulpit minister. Second, these sermons give evidence of Thieliicke's commitment to the authority and sufficiency of the Scriptures, particularly as they address the PES. Thieliicke was commendably determined to deliver the life-giving Word of God to people in the deepest experiences of affliction, knowing that the preached Word would be fully sufficient for their needs. Third, and relatedly, Thieliicke's sermons on the PES also reveal his confidence in the proclaimed Word and in the act of preaching itself. Thieliicke preached from the conviction that only the Word would meet the unique needs of sufferers and that preaching was the divinely ordained means of bringing people into vital contact with God the Father and, thus, delivering salvation and hope to sinners. Fourth, Thieliicke's sermons on the PES are doctrinal. That is, they were developed and preached with the essential truths of Christianity in view. Thieliicke believed that sufferers needed exposure to the core doctrines of the faith and to the way

these truths are practically embraced and applied in times of tribulation. Fifth, Thieliicke's sermons on the PES are noteworthy for their depiction of the greatness and sovereignty of God. These messages are thoroughly theocentric and literally saturated with compelling reminders of the divine attributes, particularly God's sovereignty and fatherly love in the face of suffering. Sixth, these messages also are exemplary in their honest and direct treatment of human sin and guilt. Thieliicke believed that despite the perplexities and problems associated with the presence of evil and suffering, sinners need to know of their personal culpability before God. He saw no apparent discontinuity in placing stress upon human responsibility for the PES and in enunciating God's overarching sovereignty over all of life, even humanity's sins. Seventh, Thieliicke's sermons on the PES find their ultimate focus in the Person and work of Christ. He has treated the PES only in view of the life, atoning death, and resurrection of the Son. Rather than seeking to provide intellectually satisfying answers to the many questions posed by the PES—a task Thieliicke believed was impossible given the fact of man's noetic depravity and the hiddenness of God—Thieliicke has directed his listeners to the Christ who has conquered man's sin and satisfied God's just wrath on their behalf. Finally, these sermons are oriented toward the future and move the listeners to look forward in hope-filled anticipation of the consummation to be ushered in by the return of Christ.

6.3.2. A model for sermon construction on the PES

In light of these initial observations and specific implications, it is now possible to describe in simple terms the vital elements for constructing a sermon on the PES using Thieliicke's example. This basic description is offered in the hope that modern pulpit ministers may more readily incorporate Thieliicke's approach in their own preaching on the PES. The following model for sermon construction is described from eight vantage points. They are: 1) the minister and the sermon's preparation, 2) the selection of the sermon's text, 3) the sermon's structure and rhetorical elements, 4) the sermon's exalted depiction of God, 5) the sermon's emphasis upon human guilt, 6) the sermon's Christological focus and appeal to personal faith, 7) the sermon's doctrinal content, and 8) the sermon's eschatological trajectory.

However, before proceeding with this description, it should be observed once again that contemporary audiences are also in need of the kind of textual-thematic sermons on the

PES that Thielicke carefully designed and passionately delivered to his generation. As argued above (6.3), the human condition before God has remained the same since the Fall. Therefore, the basic spiritual needs of fallen humans are essentially consistent in every place and time (e.g., for redemption, forgiveness, hope, direction, consolation, peace, and assurance). With this reality comes the irrefutable fact that the PES remains a critical and universal issue that should be addressed from the pulpit out of faithfulness to the ministerial calling (e.g., 2 Timothy 4:2). In addition, the preached Word of God remains the divinely ordained mechanism for the salvation of sinners, the nourishment of Christian believers, and the overall edification of the Church. Thus, Thielicke's sermon methodology, at least in its essential components as delineated above, would offer contemporary preachers a worthy and practical model for fulfilling their pastoral obligation as human instruments through which God's healing Word comes to His people.

6.3.2.1 The minister and the sermon's preparation

A sermon on the PES utilizing Thielicke's preaching as an example will be the product of careful preparation. Two specific areas of preparation are noteworthy. In the first place, the minister will prepare himself by reflecting upon his own experience with the PES and those of his parishioners. From the well of his personal and ministerial experiences as the under-shepherd of God's flock, he will anticipate the needs, questions, and the specific problems being faced by his congregants with reference to the PES. In doing so, his preaching will gain both integrity and authority, and he will be enabled to deliver God's Word with a greater measure of sensitivity and pastoral compassion to those in need. Secondly, the minister will engage in the disciplined preparation of the message with a view to biblical faithfulness, simplicity, and maximum connection with the audience. This will involve the study of the biblical text, deep reflection upon relevant matters of theology, and careful observation of his people and ministry context in order to discern how the eternal Word of God may speak directly to their situation by way of specific application. Overall, the minister will view himself as a human vessel through which the life-giving Word of God will be delivered and as the compassionate theologian of his parish who is equipped to offer biblical truth to those under his charge.

6.3.2.2 *The selection of the sermon's text*

The sermon itself will be based upon a carefully chosen text of Scripture. Thielicke's own practice, reflected in the analysis above, was to favor the New Testament and especially the Gospels (see 5.4.2.2). A sermon on the PES modeled according to Thielicke's example will generally come from a Gospel pericope, perhaps a miracle story or a didactic narrative from the life and ministry of Jesus. The biblical text will serve as the minister's sole source of authority and will be carefully exegeted beforehand in the minister's study, yet explicated in simple, layman-friendly terms in the sermon itself. The text will also be interpreted and applied in its narrower canonical context (pericope, chapter, book, Testament) and within the broader flow of redemptive history from creation, fall, redemption, and finally to consummation.

6.3.2.3 *The sermon's structure and rhetorical elements*

The sermon will also be uncomplicated in its structure and form. It will be constructed and delivered as a smoothly flowing two-way conversation with the audience, thereby fostering a greater degree of interest and audience connection. It will employ well-designed rhetorical questions in addition to abundant and varied illustrative material that is contextually relevant to the audience and will be richly sprinkled with personal pronouns that serve to bring the minister closer to the experience of his parishioners. The sermon will also be delivered in the language of the people. That is, it will avoid any unnecessary philosophical or theological jargon while still communicating the rich truths of the biblical passage.

6.3.2.4 *The sermon's exalted depiction of God*

The sermon on the PES will also confront the listeners with an exalted depiction of God, particularly in His meticulous sovereignty over the whole of creation, including both natural and moral evils. Most prominently, God will be revealed as the omnibenevolent Father whose relentless love for sinners is never exhausted by the deepest depths of human depravity and guilt. The sermon will emphasize God's merciful initiative in searching for and reclaiming sinners who have turned against Him in defiance of His rule. Yet, the message will preserve the appropriate theological tension between God's transcendence and immanence, between God's holiness and

mercy, and between God's wrath and grace. By means of the sermon, the listeners will learn of an awesome, incomprehensible God who extends His saving grace and merciful forgiveness through His Son to the worst of sinners in the most unimaginable of circumstances.

6.3.2.5 The sermon's emphasis upon human guilt

The sermon on the PES will set forth a clear and biblical emphasis upon human sin as the primary cause of all evil and suffering. Accordingly, it will deal with the subject of God's wrath, defined as the Father reluctantly giving His children over to their own wicked and self-destructive desire for autonomy. The sermon will not speculate on the hidden counsels of God or otherwise attempt to explain the origin of sin and Satan, the relationship between divine sovereignty and human agency, or God's purposes in the permission of evil. Rather, the listeners will be exhorted to recognize their own sinfulness and guilt before God and humbly admit their personal culpability for the evil and suffering that exists. The sermon will boldly declare that the sins and atrocities that have stained the history of humanity since the murder of Cain are those of every one of us. Therefore, the condition of the world, with all of its inhumanity and misery, is but a mirror of every human heart.

6.3.2.6 The sermon's Christological focus and appeal to personal faith

A sermon on the PES following Thielicke's model will be centered upon the Person and redemptive work of Christ. While the PES will be acknowledged with all of its awful clarity, the promise of salvation through Christ the Son will be the ultimate focus of the message. The PES will be considered only in view of God's final answer to man's sin discovered by faith in the resurrected Christ. Consequently, the audience members will be passionately summoned to place their trust in Him as the triumphant Savior of sinners and the ever-present Lord of their tribulations. The message will also exhort sufferers to find comfort in the fact that Christ also suffered as a man and, therefore, He fully understands and sympathizes with all of humanity's pains and afflictions. Additionally, Christ will be proclaimed as the exclusive source of comfort for those in need and as the faithful guarantor of greater blessings yet to come in eternity.

6.3.2.7 *The sermon's doctrinal content*

A sermon on the PES following the example of Thielicke's preaching will also be theologically informed. It will manifest the minister's grasp of the rich theological themes that are central to the Christian faith and relevant to the PES, including doctrines such as creation *ex nihilo*, man as *imago Dei*, original sin, divine wrath, salvation, atonement, grace, divine love, Christ, God the Father, and divine providence. The minister will employ his theological knowledge in the service of the proclamation of the biblical text, thereby guarding against the danger of allowing the message to become an academic lecture on doctrine that is disconnected from the actual situation and needs of the listeners.

6.3.2.8 *The sermon's eschatological trajectory*

Finally, the sermon on the PES will exhort the listeners to consider the promises of God's final triumph through Christ. That is, the sermon will have a perceptible eschatological trajectory. The guarantee of the final victory of the Son over all hostile forces will be set forth as the believer's present ground for hope and consolation in the midst of suffering. The minister will confront the PES only with God's ultimate purposes in view, namely the climactic subjugation of all things to the reign of Son and the total elimination of the effects of mankind's fall into sin. To this degree, the prevailing note of hope will characterize the sermon on the PES.

6.3.2.9 *Summary*

To summarize, a sermon on the PES patterned after Thielicke's example may be described as the fruit of laborious and careful preparation by the minister, as based upon a definite text of Scripture which is then explained and applied to the audience, as rhetorically simple and relevant to the needs and situation of the listeners, as offering an exalted vision of God the Father with particular stress upon his sovereignty, as straightforwardly identifying human sin as the primary cause of the PES, as focused upon the Person and redemptive work of Christ, as informed by Christian doctrine, and as oriented toward God's eschatological victory in His Son. This composite model of a sermon on the PES, based upon Thielicke's own practice, provides the contemporary pulpit minister with a helpful example of how such messages may be constructed and

delivered given the fact that the fundamental spiritual needs of present-day sufferers are essentially identical to those faced by Thieliicke and his generation.

6.4 Chapter summary

In this chapter, the researcher has offered a report on a selection of fourteen of Thieliicke's thirty-five published sermons on the PES that provide an accurate representation of his homiletical methodology. From these published sermons the researcher has set forth some initial observations and conclusions regarding 1) the construction and delivery of the sermons and 2) regarding Thieliicke's overall homiletical approach to the PES. Then, the researcher suggested some specific and practical implications for contemporary preachers based upon Thieliicke's preaching on the PES. The chapter concluded with a simple description of a model for sermon construction on the PES based upon Thieliicke's example.

In the final section of this thesis, the researcher will conclude by reviewing the content and results of this study of Thieliicke's published sermons on the PES. Then, the researcher will suggest some possible areas of future research into Thieliicke's preaching on the PES that may be of further benefit to pulpit ministers and students of homiletics.

CHAPTER SEVEN

7.0 CONCLUSION

The central research question posed by this thesis was: How did Helmut Thielicke address the PES in his preaching, and what may be learned from his example that would be of benefit to modern preachers? In addition to this central research question, four subsidiary questions have also been raised and answered. First, what is the PES and what are the unique homiletical challenges that it presents to all preachers, and specifically in Thielicke's historical ministry context? Second, what is the relationship between Thielicke's theology and his preaching on the PES in terms of presuppositions, theological themes, and the biblical metanarrative, and how did these influence his preaching on the PES? Third, what was Thielicke's overall philosophy of preaching, particularly with reference to the PES? Fourth, how did Thielicke develop and preach his sermons on the PES in practical terms, and is it possible to construct from his example a model that would prove beneficial for contemporary preachers?

With this central research question and the four subsidiary questions in view, the researcher has attempted to arrive at an understanding of how Thielicke treated the PES in his sermons and how he was able to bring comfort and spiritual direction to his listeners in the midst of the horrendous evils associated with the Second World War. Additionally, the researcher has sought to defend the central theoretical argument of this thesis—specifically, that Thielicke's sermons on the PES provide contemporary pulpit ministers with an exemplary model of Christian homiletics in view of the PES.

7.1 Review of contents and results

The central research question and central theoretical argument have been addressed in this thesis over the course of six chapters. A brief review of each chapter is presented below.

7.1.1 Review of Chapter One

Chapter One served as a basic introduction to the PES and the necessity of addressing it homiletically. The researcher acknowledged the difficulties presented to preachers in

view of the PES and how Helmut Thielicke effectively confronted this challenge in his unique ministerial context. Following a review of the relevant literature, the researcher set forth the delimitations of this study, including the central research question, the aim and specific objectives, and the central theoretical argument.

7.1.2 Review of Chapter Two

Chapter Two served as a brief introduction to Helmut Thielicke and his career as a preacher and theologian. First, the researcher summarized his early life and experiences, including his background, home life, education, Christian experience, academic and pastoral assignments, significant influences on his theology and Christian ministry, and the personal and corporate suffering that overshadowed his entire life. Second, the researcher probed the unique historical context of Thielicke's preaching and teaching ministry, including the political and ecclesiological situation and his personal experiences during and immediately after the Second World War. Third, the researcher introduced and summarized Thielicke's significant theological, philosophical, and sermonic writings.

7.1.3 Review of Chapter Three

Chapter Three served as a general introduction to preaching and the PES. First, the researcher considered the relevant theological and philosophical issues associated with the PES. Second, the researcher set forth the unique pastoral and homiletical challenges associated with the PES. Third, the researcher considered Thielicke's unique ministry context as revealed in his published sermon collections.

7.1.4 Review of Chapter Four

Chapter Four served as an investigation of the theological foundations for Thielicke's preaching on the PES. First, the researcher probed Thielicke's theological views on man and creation. Second, the researcher analyzed Thielicke's theological views on the fall of man and the ruin of creation. Third, the researcher investigated Thielicke's theological views on the redemption of man and the renewal of the creation.

7.1.5 Review of Chapter Five

Chapter Five served as an analysis of Helmut Thielicke as a minister of the written Word of God with specific application to the PES. First, the researcher provided a description of the main characteristics of Thielicke's vision of the essence and praxis of preaching. Second, the researcher evaluated Thielicke's stated views on preaching with specific focus upon his definition of preaching, his criticisms and correctives of preaching in his day, and the vital link he articulated between preaching and theology. Third, the researcher assessed Thielicke's views on the role of the Holy Spirit in preaching in terms of His ministry to the preacher and to the audience. Fourth, the researcher investigated Thielicke's views on preaching specifically in light of the PES and introduced an initial list of thirty-five of his published sermons that treat the subject.

7.1.6 Review of Chapter Six

Chapter Six served as a report on thirty-five published sermons on the PES contained in seven of Thielicke's sermon collections. First, the researcher evaluated each of the messages in terms of how the PES was introduced and addressed in the message and noted the presence of any unique rhetorical features. Secondly, the researcher set forth some initial observations and conclusions based upon the analysis of the messages. Third, the researcher identified some specific and practical implications for constructing sermons on the PES with an eye on contemporary preachers and described a model for sermon construction on the PES based upon Thielicke's example.

7.1.7 Summary

The researcher would propose that this thesis has demonstrated that Helmut Thielicke was a remarkable and gifted minister of the written Word who had a most indelible impact upon his generation, particularly as it endured the incomprehensible sufferings related to the rise and fall of the Third Reich. Thielicke was a man personally acquainted with the PES, and his own sufferings significantly influenced both his preaching ministry and his career as a theologian and university professor. Furthermore, the researcher would argue that because of the fundamental and unchanging nature of fallen humanity, the persistence of the PES in every generation,

and the transcendent power and sufficiency of the preached Word, Thieliicke's sermons provide contemporary pulpit ministers with an exemplary and relevant model for addressing the PES homiletically. Thieliicke's theologically informed approach to preaching on the PES, his biblically founded sermonic methodology, his focus upon simplicity and relevance in sermon content and construction, and his pastoral empathy for those in the pew are noteworthy and commendable for Christian preachers in every age who face the challenges of the PES. Contemporary preachers will derive significant benefit from the study of these sermons and the implementation of Thieliicke's philosophy of preaching, namely a timeless model for a return to doctrinally informed and textually driven messages that apply the written Word of God to the unique needs of suffering people in relevant ways.

Finally, this investigation has revealed significant justification for the continuing study of Thieliicke's preaching and, more specifically, his sermons treating the subject of the PES. As set forth in the central theoretical argument, Thieliicke's preaching on the PES—as demonstrated in his published sermon collections—provides an exemplary model of Christian homiletics for every generation of preachers.

7.2 Suggestions for further research

In addition to the narrow focus of this thesis upon Thieliicke's preaching on the PES, the researcher would suggest four additional areas for further investigation. First, it would seem beneficial to probe more fully Thieliicke's views on the ministry of the Holy Spirit both in the act of preaching and in the hearing of the message proclaimed. Included in such a study should be Thieliicke's theological convictions concerning the internal witness of the Spirit in association with the preached Word and the way in which the Spirit speaks through the proclamation of the Word. Second, it would be helpful to investigate Thieliicke's view of the inscripturated Word, especially given his rejection of verbal inspiration *per se*. Researchers working in this area might benefit from probing the connection between the Word written and the Word proclaimed, as Thieliicke understood it. Third, it would be useful to consider how Thieliicke connected the roles of theologian and preacher and why he argued that proclamation must precede theology and that theology must always serve the preaching of the inscripturated Word. Finally, significant benefit might be gleaned from an investigation of how Thieliicke differentiated between teaching and preaching and how he defined them respectively.

REFERENCE LIST

- Adam, P. 1996. *Speaking God's words: a practical theology of preaching*. Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press.
- Adams, J. 1974. Questions concerning the pastoral visitation of the dying. *Westminster theological journal*, 36(2):209-216.
- Adams, J. 1975. *The pastoral life*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.
- Adams, J. 1982. *Preaching with purpose: the urgent task of homiletics*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Aden, L. H. & Hughes, R. G. 2002. *Preaching God's compassion*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Angeles, P. 1976. *Critiques of God: a major statement of the case against belief in God*. Buffalo: Prometheus Books.
- Anon. 1955. Kanzel und Katheder. *Der Spiegel*, 34-39, 12 Dec.
- Aquinas, T. 1975. *Summa contra Gentiles, book one: God*. Translated from the Latin by A. Pegis. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Aquinas, T. 1993. *Shorter summa*. Translated from the Latin by C. Vollert. Manchester: Sophia Institute Press.
- Ash, C. 2009. *The priority of preaching*. Geanies House: Christian Focus.
- Babik, M. 2006. Nazism as a secular religion. *History and theory*, 45: 375-396.
- Baranowski, S. 1980. The 1933 German Protestant church elections: *Machtpolitik* or accommodation? *Church History*, 49(3): 298-315.
- Baranowski, S. 1987. Consent and dissent: the confessing church and conservative opposition to national socialism. *The journal of modern history*, 59(1):53-78.
- Barker, J. 2005. Sowing the wind. *History today*, 55(3):50-57.
<http://web.ebscohost.com> Date of access: 23 Jun. 2010.
- Barth, K. 1957a. *Church dogmatics. Vol. II, The doctrine of God, 1*. Translated from the German by T. H. L. Parker, *et al.* Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark.
- Barth, K. 1957b. *Church dogmatics. Vol. II, The doctrine of God, 2*. Translated from the German by G. W. Bromiley, *et al.* Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark.
- Barth, K. 1963. *The preaching of the gospel*. Translated from the German by B. E. Hooke. Philadelphia: Westminster Press.
- Bartov, O. 1991. Soldiers, Nazis, and war in the Third Reich. *The journal of modern history*, 63(1): 44-60.
- Basinger, D. 1996. *The case for freewill theism: a philosophical assessment*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity.

- Bavinck, H. 2006. Reformed dogmatics: volume three—sin and salvation in Christ. Translated from the Dutch by John Vriend. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.
- Beck, R. & Taylor, S. 2008. The emotional burden of monotheism: Satan, theodicy, and relationship with God. *Journal of psychology and theology*, 36(3):151-160.
- Beeke, J. God-centered theology in the ministry of the Word. *Puritan reformed journal*, 1(1):4-19.
- Belgum, D. 1968. Preaching and the stresses of life. *Lutheran quarterly*, 20(4):352-358.
- Bergen, D. 1996. Twisted cross: the German Christian movement in the Third Reich. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Bergen, D. 1997. “Germany is our mission—Christ is our strength!” The Wehrmacht chaplaincy and the “German Christian” movement. *Church history*, 66(3):522-536.
- Bergen, D. 2001. German military chaplains in World War II and the dilemmas of legitimacy. *Church history*, 70(2): 232-247.
- Berkhof, L. 1996. Systematic theology. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Berkouwer, G. C. 1952. The providence of God. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Bessel, R. 2004. The Nazi capture of power. *Journal of contemporary history*, 39(2):169-188.
- Blackwood, A. 1948. The preparation of sermons. New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press.
- Blaich, R. 2001. A tale of two leaders: German Methodists and the Nazi state. *Church history*, 70(2): 199-225.
- Blocher, H. 1994. Evil and the cross. Translated from the French by David G. Preston. Downers Grove: InterVarsity.
- Bloesch, D. 1968. Thielicke’s ethics: a review article. *Lutheran quarterly*, 20(3):309-313.
- Bloesch, D. 1998. Essentials of evangelical theology. Volume One: God, authority, & salvation. Peabody: Prince Press.
- Bonhoeffer, D. 1959. Creation and fall: a theological interpretation of Genesis 1-3. Translated from the German by John C. Fletcher. New York: The Macmillan Company.
- Boonstra, H. 1985. Review article. *Reformed journal*, 35(7):19-22.
- Bowie, W. 1954. Preaching. Nashville: Abingdon.
- Boyd, G. 2000. God of the possible: a biblical introduction to the open view of God. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

- Boyd, G. 2001. Satan and the problem of evil: constructing a Trinitarian warfare theodicy. Downers Grove: InterVarsity.
- Boyd, G. 2005. Was God punishing us? www.gregboyd.org Date of access: 7 Mar. 2005.
- Bridges, J. 1988. Trusting God even when life hurts. Colorado Springs: NavPress.
- Bromiley, G. 1979. An introduction to the theology of Karl Barth. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Brooks, P. 1969. Lectures on preaching. Grand Rapids: Baker.
- Buse, D. 2008. 1961: Germans begin to confront their recent past. *Debate*, 16(2):189-201.
- Bussis, D. 1964. Preaching the sermon. *The Princeton seminary bulletin*, 57(3):41-52.
- Caemmerer, Sr., R. 1968. The pendulum of preaching. *Lutheran quarterly*, 20(4):335-341.
- Calhoun, A. 2008. Jesus wept. *Touchstone*, 21(3): 13-15.
- Cardwell, W. 1963. Preaching from Bultmann to Thielicke. *Encounter*, 24(2):234-236.
- Carson, D. A. 1990. How long O Lord?: reflections on suffering and evil. Grand Rapids: Baker.
- Carson, D. A. 1999. God's love and God's sovereignty. *Bibliotheca sacra*, 156 (263):260-272.
- Chapell, B. 1988. Facing two ways: preaching to experiential and doxological priorities. *Presbyterion*, 14(2):98-117.
- Christian Jr., F.S. 1977. The gospel and the modern man: a study of the theological method of Helmut Thielicke in the context of modern secularization. Louisville: The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. (Dissertation — PhD).
- Clendenin, D. 1988. Security but no certainty: toward a Christian theodicy. *Journal of the evangelical theological society*, 31(3):322-329.
- Clinard, G. 1962. Changing emphases in contemporary preaching. *Southwestern journal of theology*, 4(2):79-91.
- Clowney, E. 2003. Preaching Christ in all of Scripture. Wheaton: Crossway.
- Colquhoun, F. 1965. Christ's ambassadors: the priority of preaching. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Conway, J. 1992. The political role of German Protestantism, 1870-1990. *Journal of church and state*, 34(4): 819-842.
- Conway, J. 1997. The Nazi persecution of the churches 1933-45. New York: Basic Books.

- Conyers, A. 1981. Teaching the holocaust: the role of theology. *Perspective in religious studies*, 8(2):128-142.
- Cox, J.W. 1975. Eloquent . . . mighty in the scriptures: biblical preachers from Chrysostom to Thielicke. *Review and expositor*, 72: 201-212.
- Daane, J. 1980. Preaching with confidence: a theological essay on the power of the pulpit. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Dahm, K. 1968. German Protestantism and politics, 1918-39. *Journal of contemporary history*, 3(1): 29-49.
- Dauenhauer, B. 2007. Responding to evil. *The southern journal of philosophy*, 45:207-222.
- Davis, S. 1985. The problem of evil in recent philosophy. *Review and expositor*, 82 (4): 535-547.
- Davis, R. L. 1987. The doctrine of man in the preaching of Helmut Thielicke. New Orleans: New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. (Dissertation — ThD).
- Delkeskamp—Hayes, C. 2006. Why patients should give thanks for their disease: traditional Christianity on the joy of suffering. *Christian bioethics*, 12(2):213-228.
- Diehl, J. 1989. Germany in defeat. *The history teacher*, 22(4): 397-409.
- Dilley, F. 2000. A finite God reconsidered. *International journal for philosophy of religion*, 47:29-41.
- Dirks, M. J. 1968. Lay expectation factors in relation to the preaching of Helmut Thielicke. Boston: Boston University School of Theology. (Dissertation — ThD).
- Dirks, M. J. 1972. Laymen look at preaching: lay expectation factors in relation to the preaching of Helmut Thielicke. North Quincy: Christopher Publishing House.
- Dodd, C. H. 1964. The apostolic preaching and its developments. New York: Harper & Brothers.
- Dominy, B. 1971. Review article. *Southwestern journal of theology*, 14(1):102-103.
- Draper, P. 1996. Pain and pleasure: an evidential problem for theists. (In Howard-Snyder, D., ed. The evidential argument from evil. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. p. 12-29).
- Dreyer, T. 2007. Karl Barth as homilist. *Hervormde teologiese studies*, 63(4):1473-1491.
- Duke, R.W. 1965. The preaching of Helmut Thielicke. *Theology and life*, 7:278-293.
- Duke, P. 1985. Preaching to the traumatized. *Faith and mission*, 3(1):41-49.
- Eneienburg, E. 1982. Review article. *The Christian century*, 99(2):766.

- Eldridge, S. W. 2006. Ideological incompatibility: the forced fusion of Nazism and Protestant theology and its impact on anti-Semitism in the Third Reich. *International social science review*, 82(3&4):151-165.
- Elwell, W. A. 1984. *Evangelical dictionary of theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker.
- Erickson, M. 2003. *Christian theology*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker.
- Evans, C. 1982. *Philosophy of religion: thinking about faith*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press.
- Fant, C. 1985. What can preaching do? *Faith and mission*, 3(1):5-11.
- Feinberg, J. 2000. Evil, problem of. (*In Evangelical dictionary of theology*. p. 385-388).
- Feinberg, J. 2000. Theodicy. (*In Evangelical dictionary of theology*. p. 1083-1086).
- Feinberg, J. 2001. *No one like him*. Wheaton: Crossway.
- Feinberg, J. 2004. *The many faces of evil: philosophical systems and the problem of evil*. Wheaton: Crossway.
- Ferguson, S., Wright, D. & Packer, J. I. 1988. *New dictionary of theology*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity.
- Ferguson, S. 2006. Feeding the flock of God. *Evangel*, 24(1): 18-24.
- Fischer, J. 1983. God after the Holocaust: an attempted reconciliation. *Judaism*, 32(3):309-320.
- Forstman, J. 1992. *Christian faith in dark times: theological conflicts in the shadow of Hitler*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press.
- Forsyth, P. T. 1980. *Positive preaching and the modern mind*. Grand Rapids: Baker.
- Frame, J. 2002. *The doctrine of God: a theology of lordship*. Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing.
- Frear Jr., G. L. 1968. *Biblical authority in modern Christian political ethics: a study contrasting Karl Barth and Helmut Thielicke on the subject*. New York: Union Theological Seminary. (Dissertation — ThD).
- Ganssle, G. 1998. The problem of evil.
http://www.gradresources.org/worldview_articles/problem_evil.shtml Date of access: 21 Dec. 2010.
- Geisler, N. 1999. *Baker encyclopedia of Christian apologetics*. Grand Rapids: Baker.
- Gentz, W., ed. 1986. *The dictionary of Bible and religion*. Nashville: Abingdon.
- Glick, G. W. 1960. Karl Barth and the theology of the word of God. *Brethren life and thought*, 5(2): 29-38.

- Goldsworthy, G. 2000. *Preaching the whole Bible as Christian Scripture*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Green, B.L. 1969. *Law and gospel in the theology of Helmut Thielicke*. Claremont School of Theology. (Thesis — RelD).
- Greidanus, S. 1988. *The modern preacher and the ancient text: interpreting and preaching biblical literature*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Grudem, W. 1996. *Systematic theology*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Hall, E., Langer, R. & McMartin, J. 2010. The role of suffering in human flourishing: contributions from positive psychology, theology, and philosophy. *Journal of psychology and theology*, 38(2):111-121.
- Hart, T. 1995. The word, the words and the witness: proclamation as divine and human reality in the theology of Karl Barth. *Tyndale bulletin*, 46(1): 81-102.
- Hasker, W. 1994. A philosophical perspective. (In Pinnock, C., ed. *The openness of God: a biblical challenge to the traditional understanding of God*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity. p. 126-154).
- Hauerwas, S. 1990. *God, medicine, and suffering*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Hauser, R. 1995. Where is God in suffering? a Lenten reflection. *America*, 172(12):17-20.
- Hayman, H. 1888. The economy of pain. *Bibliotheca sacra*, 045 (180): 585-607.
- Helmreich, E.C. 1979. *The German churches under Hitler: background, struggle, and epilogue*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- Hewitt, K. 1983. Place annihilation: area bombing and the fate of urban places. *Annals of the association of American geographers*, 73(2):257-284.
- Hick, J. 1990. Soul-making and suffering. (In Adams, M., and Adams, R., eds. *The problem of evil*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p. 168-188).
- Hick, J. 2010. *Evil and the God of love*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Higginson, R. 1976. Thielicke: preacher and theologian. *The churchman*, 90:178-192.
- Hille, R. 2004. A biblical-theological response to the problem of theodicy in the context of modern religious criticism. *Evangelical review of theology*, 28(1):21-37.
- Hockenos, M. 1998. *Coming to terms with the past: the Protestant Church in Germany, 1933-1948*. New York: New York University. (Dissertation — PhD).
- Hoekema, A. 1986. *Created in God's image*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans.
- Hughes, W. 1992. Exhortations for pastoral preaching. *Reformation and revival*, 1(4):62-80.
- Hughes, R. 2000. Sermons shaped like questions. *Concordia journal*, 26(2):140-146.

- Hunt, A. 2003. The vanishing word: the veneration of visual imagery in the postmodern world. Wheaton: Crossway.
- Jantzen, K. 2001. Propaganda, perseverance, and protest: strategies for clerical survival amid the German church struggle. *Church history*, 70(2):295-372.
- Jantzen, K. 2008. Faith and the fatherland: parish politics in Hitler's Germany. Minneapolis: Fortress.
- Jensen, P. 2000. The importance of preaching the negative as well as the positive. *Journal of biblical manhood and womanhood*, 5(2):1, 10-11.
- Johanson, E. 1951. What it means to preach the gospel. *Theology today*, 8(3):354-366.
- Johnson, J. 2001. Should the Holocaust force us to rethink our view of God and evil? *Tyndale bulletin*, 52(1): 118-129.
- Johnson, J. 2005. On preaching theology. *Concordia journal*, 31(3): 269-272.
- Johnson, T.K. 1987. Helmut Thielicke's ethics of law and gospel. Iowa City: University of Iowa. (Dissertation — PhD).
- Johnson, T. K. 1991. The moral crisis of the West: reflections on Helmut Thielicke and Francis Schaeffer. *Presbyterion*, 17(2): 119-124.
- Jüngel, E. 1988. The Christian understanding of suffering. *Journal of theology for southern Africa*, 65:3-13.
- Kaiser, Jr., W. 1988. The Old Testament promise of material blessings and the contemporary believer. *Trinity journal*, 9(2): 151-169.
- Kapitan, T. 1995. Free will problem. (In *The Cambridge dictionary of philosophy*. p. 280-282).
- Karkkainen, V. 2002. 'Evil, love and the left hand of God': the contribution of Luther's theology of the cross to an evangelical theology of evil. *Evangelical quarterly*, 74(3): 251-234.
- Keepers, B. 2007. My only comfort in life and in death: a pastoral response to open theism. *Reformed review*, 60(2):72-91.
- Killinger, J. 1962. Existential preaching. *The Princeton Seminary bulletin*, 55(3):44-52.
- Kirk, G. E. 1981. Endurance in suffering. *Bibliotheca sacra*, 138(549):46-55.
- Klann, R. 1980. Helmut Thielicke appraised. *Concordia journal*, 6:155-163.
- Köstenberger, A., ed. *Journal of the evangelical theological society*, 2002. 45(2).
- Kunzer, E. 1939. "Education" under Hitler. *Journal of educational sociology*, 13(3):140-147.
- Lampton, W.E. 1969. Worldliness: Helmut Thielicke's quest for relevant preaching. *Southern speech journal*, 34:244-255.

- Leikind, B. 2010. The mystery of evil and suffering. *The humanist*, 40-41.
- Lewis, C. S. 1962. The problem of pain: how human suffering raises almost intolerable intellectual problems. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.
- Linder, R. 1982. Militarism in Nazi thought and in the American new religious right. *Journal of church and state*, 24:263-279.
- Lloyd-Jones, D. M. 1965. Spiritual depression: its causes and its cures. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Lloyd-Jones, D. M. 1971. Preaching and preachers. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Long, E. 2006. Suffering and transcendence. *International journal of philosophy of religion*, 60 (1-3):139-148.
- Lose, D. 2006. The need and art of biblical preaching. *Word & world*, 26(2):207-213.
- Lose, D. 2007. Why preach? *The clergy journal*, 6-8.
- Lund, L. 1960. The waiting father. *Lutheran quarterly*, 12(3):273.
- Lundin, R. 1986. Helmut Thielicke is dead at 77. *Christianity today*, 3:42, 18 Apr.
- Luther, M. 2008. The freedom of a Christian. Translated from the German by M. D. Tranvik. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Macdonald, G. 2002. Speaking into crisis: what we can learn from two pastors—Bonhoeffer and Thielicke—who ministered in terrible times. *Leadership*, 23(1). <http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/2002/winter/10.62.html> Date of access: 22 Feb. 2011.
- Mackie, J. 1964. Evil and omnipotence. (In Pike, N., ed., *God and evil: readings on the theological problem of evil*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall. p. 47-60).
- Macleod, D. 1959. The marks of effective preaching. *The Princeton seminary bulletin*, 52(3): 33-38.
- Macquarrie, J. 1986. Image of God. (In *The dictionary of Bible and religion*. p. 1147).
- Martin, M. 1990. Atheism: a philosophical justification. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Martin, A. 2011. Preaching in the Holy Spirit. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books.
- Matthews, C. 2000. A tale of two judgments: Bonhoeffer and Arendt on evil, understanding, and limits, and the limits of understanding evil. *Dialog*, 80(3): 375-404.
- Melanchthon, M. 2004. Preaching the word in the context of increasing perplexity and hopelessness. *Dialog*, 43(4):279-287.

- Melchert, C. F. 1989. Learning from suffering, silence, and death. *Religious education*, 84(1):37-47.
- Mengus, R. 1992. Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the decision to resist. *The journal of modern history*, 64:S134-S146.
- Merrins, E. M. 1907. St. Paul's thorn in the flesh. *Bibliotheca sacra*, 064(256): 661-691.
- Merrins, E. M. 1912. The ministry of pain. *Bibliotheca sacra*, 069(276): 566-277.
- Miller, D. G. 1954. Fire in thy mouth: preaching the biblical message of redemption. Nashville: Abingdon.
- Miller, R. 2009. The mystery of God and the suffering of human beings. *Heythrop journal*, 50(5):846-863.
- Mohler, A. 2008. He is not silent: preaching in a postmodern world. Chicago: Moody Publishers.
- Moltmann, J. 1993. The crucified God: the cross of Christ as the foundation and criticism of Christian theology. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Montgomery, J. W. 1978. Thielicke on trial. *Christianity today*, 22(12):57.
- Motyer, A. 2013. Preaching? Simple teaching on simply preaching. Geanies House: Christian Focus.
- Muller, R. 1982. Systematic theologies: first and last. *Reformed journal*, 32(10):28-30.
- Murphery, P.W. 1964. The concept of death in the theology of Nicholas Berdyaev, Paul Tillich and Helmut Thielicke. Nashville: Vanderbilt University. (Dissertation — PhD).
- Murray, J. 1977. Collected writings of John Murray 2: select lectures in systematic theology. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth.
- Nash, R. 1988. Faith and reason: searching for a rational faith. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Nash, R. 1992. World-views in conflict: choosing Christianity in a world of ideas. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Packer, J. I. 1990. From the Scriptures to the sermon: some perspectives on preaching. *Ashland theological journal*, 22:43-52.
- Paulson, S. 2007. Categorical preaching. *Lutheran quarterly*, 21:268-293.
- Peters, T. 2002. Grace, doubt, and evil: the constructive task of reformation theology. *Dialog*, 41(4):273-283.
- Peterson, M. 1982. Evil and the Christian God. Grand Rapids: Baker.
- Phillips, W. 1991a. The problem of evil: a pastoral approach; part one: the bad news. *Michigan theological journal*, 2(1):6-18.

- Phillips, W. 1991b. The problem of evil: a pastoral approach; part two: the good news. *Michigan theological journal*, 2(2):106-113.
- Pierard, R. 1991. Radical resistance. *Christian history*, 10(4).
- Pinnock, C., Rice, R., Sanders, J., Hasker, W. & Basinger, D. 1994. The openness of God: a biblical challenge to the traditional understanding of God. Downers Grove: InterVarsity.
- Pinnock, C. 1986. God limits his knowledge. (In Basinger, D., and Basinger, R., eds. Predestination and free will: four views on divine sovereignty and human freedom. Downers Grove: InterVarsity. p. 143-162).
- Piper, J. 1990. The supremacy of God in preaching. Grand Rapids: Baker.
- Piper, J. 2002. Preaching to suffering people. (In Kistler, D. ed. Feed my sheep: a passionate plea for preaching. Morgan: Soli Deo Gloria Publications. p. 241-268).
- Plantinga, A. 1989. God, freedom, and evil. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Plantinga, A. 1990. God, evil, and the metaphysics of freedom. (In Adams, M., ed. The problem of evil. New York: Oxford Press. p. 83-109).
- Plantinga Jr., C. 1995. Not the way it is supposed to be: a breviary of sin. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Pless, J. T. 2009. Helmut Thielicke (1908-1986). *Lutheran quarterly*, 23(4): 439-464.
- Purves, A. 2001. Pastoral theology in the classical tradition. Louisville: Westminster John Knox.
- Quinn, P. 1995. Philosophy of religion. (In Cambridge dictionary of philosophy, 607-611).
- Rahner, K. & Vorgrimler, H. 1981. Dictionary of theology. New York: Crossroad.
- Ramsey, L. 2002. The theology and practice of pastoral preaching. *Quarterly review*, 22(2):179-191.
- Reynolds, G. 2001. The word is worth a thousand pictures: preaching in the electronic age. Eugene: Wipf and Stock.
- Rice, R. 1980. The openness of God: the relationship of divine foreknowledge and human free will. Nashville: Review and Herald Publishing.
- Richardson, A. 1969. A dictionary of Christian theology. Philadelphia: Westminster Press.
- Richmond, K. D. 1988. Preaching to sufferers: God and the problem of pain. Nashville: Abingdon.
- Robinson, H. 1980. Biblical preaching: the development and delivery of expository messages. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

- Rosenberger, H. 1964. Review article. *Westminster theological journal*, 26(2):238-246.
- Rowe, W. 1999. The problem of divine sovereignty and human freedom. *Faith and philosophy*, 16(1): 98-101.
- Rowe, W. 2006. Friendly atheism, skeptical theism, and the problem of evil. *International journal for philosophy of religion*, 59:79-92.
- Rueger, M. 2003. Individualism in the Christology of Helmut Thielicke's sermons: analysis and response. Durham: The University of Durham. (Dissertation — PhD).
- Runia, K. 1983. The sermon under attack. Exeter: Paternoster.
- Russell, R. 1996. Redemptive suffering and Paul's thorn in the flesh. *Journal of the evangelical theological society*, 39(4):559-570.
- Rust, E. 1955. Theology and preaching. *Review and expositor*, 52(2):145-165.
- Sanders, J. 1998. The God who risks: a theology of providence. Downers Grove: InterVarsity.
- Scaer, D. 1982. Review article. *Concordia theological journal*, 46(2):251-253.
- Schaibley, R. 1992. Lutheran preaching: proclamation, not communication. *Concordia journal*, 18(1):6-27.
- Schreiner, T., ed. 2000. SBJT forum: biblical perspectives on suffering. *Southern Baptist journal of theology*, 4(2):101-112.
- Schuringa, H. 1995. The vitality of reformed preaching. *Calvin theological journal*, 30:184-193.
- Skinner, C. 1984. The preaching of Charles Haddon Spurgeon. *Baptist history and heritage*, 19(4):16-26.
- Smith, Q. 1996. Two ways to prove atheism.
http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/quentin_smith/atheism.html Date of access: 23 Dec. 2010.
- Smith Jr., R. 1993. The christological preaching of Helmut Thielicke: the theocratic offices as a paradigm for preaching. Louisville: The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. (Dissertation — PhD).
- Smith Jr., R. 2008. Doctrine that dances: bringing doctrinal preaching and teaching to life. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group.
- Sohn, H.F. 1973. The role of doctrine in Helmut Thielicke's political ethics. Fordham University. (Dissertation — PhD).
- Spiegel, J. 2005. The benefits of providence: a new look at divine sovereignty. Wheaton: Crossway.

- Spykman, G. 1992. Reformational theology: a new paradigm for doing dogmatics. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans.
- Stackhouse, Jr., J. 2007. Following Jesus in the dark. *Christian history & biography*, 94:24-27.
- Still, W. 1984. The work of the pastor. Geanies House: Christian Focus.
- Stone, J. 2003. Evidential atheism. *Philosophical studies*, 114:253-277.
- Stott, J. 1982. Between two worlds: the art of preaching in the twentieth century. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Stuart, P. 2007. The ministry of preaching. *Stimulus*, 15(1): 21-23.
- Tada, J. 2010. Something greater than healing. *Christianity today*, 54(10):30-33.
- Tavard, G. 2003. The mystery of divine providence. *Theological studies*, 64(4):707-718.
- Thielicke, H. 1958. Between God and Satan. Translated from the German by C. C. Barber. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Thielicke, H. 1959. The waiting Father: sermons on the parables of Jesus. Translated from the German by J. W. Doberstein. New York: Harper & Brothers.
- Thielicke, H. 1960. Our heavenly Father: sermons on the Lord's Prayer. Translated from the German by J. W. Doberstein. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.
- Thielicke, H. 1961a. How the world began. Translated from the German by J. W. Doberstein. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press.
- Thielicke, H. 1961b. Nihilism: its origin and nature—with a Christian answer. Translated from the German by J. W. Doberstein. New York: Harper & Row.
- Thielicke, H. 1962a. Christ and the meaning of life. Translated from the German by J. W. Doberstein. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.
- Thielicke, H. 1962b. The silence of God. Translated from the German by G. W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Thielicke, H. 1962c. Out of the depths. Translated from the German by G. W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Thielicke, H. 1962d. A little exercise for young theologians. Translated from the German by C. Taylor. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Thielicke, H. 1963a. Man in God's world. Translated from the German by J. W. Doberstein. New York: Harper & Row.
- Thielicke, H. 1963b. Encounter with Spurgeon. Translated from the German by J. W. Doberstein. Grand Rapids: Baker.

- Thielicke, H. 1963c. *The freedom of the Christian man: a Christian confrontation with the secular gods*. Translated from the German by J. W. Doberstein. New York: Harper & Row.
- Thielicke, H. 1964. *The ethics of sex*. Translated from the German by J. W. Doberstein. New York: Harper & Row.
- Thielicke, H. 1965a. *Between heaven and earth: conversations with American Christians*. Translated from the German by J. W. Doberstein. New York: Harper & Row.
- Thielicke, H. 1965b. *The trouble with the church: a call for renewal*. Translated from the German by J. W. Doberstein. New York: Harper & Row.
- Thielicke, H. 1968. *I believe: the Christian's creed*. Translated from the German by J. W. Doberstein. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.
- Thielicke, H. 1969a. *How modern should theology be?* Translated from the German by H. G. Anderson. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.
- Thielicke, H. 1969b. *Theological ethics—volume two: politics*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Thielicke, H. 1970a. *The doctor as judge of who shall live and who shall die*. Translated from the German by E. Cooperrider. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.
- Thielicke, H. 1970b. *Death and life*. Translated from the German by E. H. Schroeder. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.
- Thielicke, H. 1972. *How to believe again*. Translated from the German by H. George Anderson. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.
- Thielicke, H. 1974. *The relation of theology to modern thought forms*. Translated from the German by G.W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. (The evangelical faith, vol. 1).
- Thielicke, H. 1977a. *The doctrine of God and of Christ*. Translated from the German by G. W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. (The evangelical faith, vol. 2).
- Thielicke, H. 1977b. *The hidden question of God*. Translated from the German by G. W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Thielicke, H. 1979a. *Being a Christian when the chips are down*. Translated from the German by H. George Anderson. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.
- Thielicke, H. 1979b. *Theological ethics—volume one: foundations*. Translated from the German by J. W. Doberstein. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Thielicke, H. 1982. *Theology of the Spirit*. Translated from the German by G. W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. (The evangelical faith, vol. 3).

- Thielicke, H. 1984. *Being human, becoming human: an essay in Christian anthropology*. Translated from the German by G. W. Bromiley. New York: Doubleday.
- Thielicke, H. 1985. *Faith: the great adventure*. Translated from the German by D. L. Scheidt. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.
- Thielicke, H. 1990. *Modern faith and thought*. Translated from the German by G. W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Thielicke, H. 1995. *Notes from a wayfarer: the autobiography of Helmut Thielicke*. Translated from the German by D. R. Law. New York: Paragon House.
- Thiselton, A. 2002. *A concise encyclopedia of the philosophy of religion*. Oxford: OneWorld.
- Trimp, C. 1973. The relevance of preaching. *Westminster theological journal*, 36(1):2-30.
- Tripp, P. 2003. A community of counselors: the fruit of good preaching. *Southern Baptist journal of theology*, 7(4):5-13.
- Tucker, J. 2007. Doctrine-aware sermons: preaching doctrinally-informed and relationally-connected messages. *Journal of ministry and theology*, 11(1):125-145.
- Turner, P. 1978. *Theological anthropology and the state: a study of the political ethics of Yves Simon and Helmut Thielicke*. Princeton: Princeton University. (Dissertation — PhD).
- Vaux, K. 1995. Notes from a wayfarer. *The Christian century*, 112(35). December. Available: Academic OneFile. Date of access: 17 Feb. 2010.
- Volbeda, S. 1960. *The pastoral genius of preaching*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Wall, D. 1981. The confessing church and the Second World War. *Journal of church and state*, 23:15-34.
- Wall, R. 1983. The problem of observed pain: a study of C. S. Lewis on suffering. *Journal of the evangelical theological society*, 26(4): 444-452.
- Walter, V. 1981. Preach the word—grippingly. *Trinity journal*, 2:49-61.
- Walvoord, J. 1966. Review article. *Bibliotheca sacra*, 123(485): 79-80.
- Ware, B. 2002. Defining evangelicalism's boundaries theologically: is open theism evangelical? *Journal of the evangelical theological society*, 45(2):194-212.
- Webster, B. & Beach, D. 2007. The place of lament in the Christian life. *Bibliotheca sacra*, 164(656):388-401.
- Wenzel, A. 1968. Criticisms of preaching in current writing. *Lutheran quarterly*, 20(4): 389-395.
- Wettstein, H. 2001. Against theodicy. *Judaism*, 50(3):341-350.

- Wierzchowski, Z. 2012. Broken and scattered. Polish Baptists during World War II. *European journal of theology*, 21(1): 35-46.
- Willimon, W. 1992. Peculiar speech: preaching to the baptized. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Work, T. 2000. Advent's answer to the problem of evil. *International journal of systematic theology*, 2(1):100-111.
- Yonan, G. 1999. Spiritual resistance of Christian conviction in Nazi Germany: the case of the Jehovah's Witnesses. *Journal of church and state*, 41(2):307-322.