Speaking Without Words:
The Role of Nonverbal Communication in Pastoral Ministry

by

Steven W. Smith

Date: March 1, 2018

Approved:

Luke A. Powery, Supervisor

Christine Parson-Butt

J. Warren Smith, D.Min. Director

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Ministry
in the Divinity School of Duke University

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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

This thesis will address the role of nonverbal communication for clergy, while examining the impact such communication has on the ability of a congregation to most fully receive the gospel. My thesis contends that information shared by clergy is not received adequately by congregations when those providing such messages fail to understand the connection between content being offered, and the manner in which the content is delivered. My contention is not that communicating is merely a matter of technique; the Spirit works through our shortcomings as speakers to provide powerful messages which inspire transformation. Instead, my assertion is that we as clergy have a responsibility to embrace nonverbal communication practices that best serve to enhance reception of the good news, whether that communication is shared during a sermon, while teaching a class, participating in a meeting, or offering pastoral care.

Methodology to be employed during this work will draw together resources and experiences shared by communication consultants from my earlier employment as a television meteorologist, and research available through texts related to nonverbal communication practices and the psychology of communication. Offerings from both early and contemporary church leaders will be included, as I seek to incorporate theology and homiletics related to nonverbal communication.

The primary conclusions of the study are 1) Oral communication is enhanced or subverted depending on the manner in which nonverbal communication accompanies the spoken word. 2) Nonverbal communication is transmitted in numerous ways, including facial expression, gestures, body posture, and eye contact. 3) Gender plays a role when interpreting nonverbal communication.
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1. Introduction

This thesis proposes that nonverbal communication will either enhance or detract from the ability of clergy to successfully administer the various offices of their call, particularly in the area of preaching. As an example, Jesus’ command at the end of Matthew to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you”¹ requires a commitment to effective communication. Making and teaching disciples necessitates both verbal and non-verbal interaction with those one wishes to evangelize; the result of that interaction depends in large part on the effectiveness of the person offering communication. My contention is not that preaching is merely a matter of technique; the Spirit works through our shortcomings as speakers to provide powerful messages which inspire transformation. Instead, my assertion is that we as clergy have a responsibility to embrace verbal and nonverbal communication practices that best serve to enhance reception of the Good News. Successful communication and therefore, evangelization, become greatly diminished when adherents fail to embrace effective communication skills, both verbal and non-verbal.

Proficient communication is, of course, a necessary component in most vocations. As is the case in the evangelization work to which Jesus calls us, the degree to which we are successful in communicating largely determines outcomes in other vocations. An example may be drawn from my experiences as a television meteorologist before my

current work in full-time ministry. Working with a consultant, our staff became increasingly aware of the importance of verbal and non-verbal transmission of information, and employed the phrase “demand to be heard”\textsuperscript{2} as our mantra. This expression served to remind those of us communicating to an audience that the way we use our voices, and the ways we position our bodies either demands a viewer’s attention (which after all, is the goal of broadcasting) or not. *Demanding to be heard* requires a strong voice, appropriate eye contact, and body language that invite relationship with those receiving information. *Demanding to be heard* suggests to an audience that information being offered in the communication is important, and is something recipients need and want.

The counter to the notion *demand to be heard* is to communicate in a manner which suggests, often subliminally, that what one has to offer is not important. Speaking with a non-supportive voice, failing to maintain appropriate eye contact, and body positioning that does not invite relationship all suggest to an audience that what is being related is not worth one’s attention. Such practices do not demand that people receive the information.

Over the years, significant contributions have been made in the field of nonverbal research. My goal with this thesis is to draw on this research for the sake of the church, while also including insights that have been available yet often neglected from the church fathers, Protestant Reformers, and founders of the Methodist movement. Among others,

\textsuperscript{2} Lynn Gartley, Executive Vice President, Talent Dynamics, Dallas, TX.
contributions from Wesley, Augustine, Ambrose of Milan, Gregory the Great, and Justin the Martyr are included in this work.

Those who have dedicated their lives to the carrying-out of the Great Commission, specifically, pastors who work to prepare a weekly sermon have a precious gift to share with their congregations. The message of the gospel is that gift; the reception of that gift often initiates transformation. Yet, if those entrusted with this gift do not employ effective verbal and non-verbal communication skills, delivery is fumbled, risking its diminished reception.

Setting aside verbal communication, this work will defend my thesis that nonverbal communication practiced by clergy has the potential to enhance—or detract from—the ability of clergy to successfully administer the offices of their call. This work is intended for clergy as a resource for understanding the significance nonverbal communication maintains within virtually all aspects of ministry. Skillful nonverbal practices enhance delivery of sermons, teaching of classes, home and hospital visits, and any number of other occasions necessitating a sharing of information and pastoral presence.

1.1 Outline of the Thesis

The first chapter will examine the history of research related to the field of nonverbal communication, beginning with words from the philosopher Confucius dating over 2,500 years ago. Early scholars from Athens and Sicily will be explored, including Quintilian and Aristotle as they address ethos, pathos and logos. A description of Cicero’s *Five Canons of the Republic*, often cited by contemporary researchers as
foundational in the field of nonverbal communication, is also included in this opening chapter. Significant insights offered by researchers from more recent decades including Mark L. Knapp and Judith A. Hall, Thomas Wilson, Paul Ekman, and David Matsumoto et al., will explore theories and historical studies related to the origins of nonverbal communication, while also providing documentation in this field.

Having addressed the history of nonverbal communication research, Chapter Two will then focus on the link between theology and nonverbal communication. The familiar theological idea described in the beginning of John’s gospel, “Word made flesh,” provides us with an important connection between body and expression of the Word. The notion of the Word becoming flesh suggests that Christianity embraces a “body-minded” quality to the faith. Augustine reminds us there are ways in which a speaker may enhance the interest of those receiving information (including information related to theology), and that body language plays a role in this enhancement. Augustine introduced and explained the Ciceronian doctrine of the orator’s three aims: to teach, delight, and move. These aims are more readily met when words are supported with helpful nonverbal communication from the preacher. In On the Orator, Cicero considers

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the importance of gesture while including the role of facial expressions and eye contact for aiding the theological orator in conveying theology. This chapter will also include Ambrose of Milan’s systematic account of *De Officiis*, and the connection between the state of the soul and expression of the body, providing for us a clear theological connection between one’s faith and the manner by which it may be communicated in nonverbal ways. More contemporary offerings, including that from Richard F. Ward, will remind us of the preacher’s body itself serving as a site where she or he embodies an engagement between self and Other. This embodiment becomes evident through the manner in which the Other becomes revealed through body language.

Chapter Three provides a practical look at the importance of nonverbal communication as practiced through eye contact. Research from David Matsumoto, Hyisung C. Hwang and Mark G. Frank will be featured along with others, all pointing to the eye region as the most reliable source of nonverbal communication compared to other facial features. Ian Berry and Julius Fast offer insights not merely related to gaze (eye contact) but also to the lowering of gaze, along with other nonverbal communication expressed through the narrowing or widening of eye openings, all of which enhance or detract from information being offered or received verbally.

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11 Matsumoto et al., *APA Handbook of Nonverbal Communication*.
Palmer and K. B. Simmons examine nonverbal cues related to eye contact, while suggesting that eye contact serves as a means to increase or decrease a speaker’s “likeability factor.” In a similar study, K. Floyd and G. B. Ray support this theory, linking the level of likeability of a presenter to their ability to increase appreciation for, and likeability of, the presenter of information. Issues related to trustworthiness of a speaker, with eyes being used as conduits for communication in classroom and hospital doctor-patient settings, will also be included in this chapter, informed by the research of Tonya Reiman, V. P. Richmond et al., and Peter Verhaak.

Gestures will be featured in Chapter Four; evidence will be offered that gestures alter the manner in which communication is received. Gestures conflicting with spoken words will create greater difficulty for those processing information included in speech, as also highlighted by S.R.H. Langton, C. O’Malley and V. Bruce. Gesturing as a means to facilitate lexical retrieval (helping a speaker “find” words) is also part of this chapter, demonstrating the multi-faceted use of gestures. Issues related to the misinformed perception of sign language as a form of gesturing will also be addressed in

this chapter, as phonological, morphological, and syntactic rules related to sign language will be provided. A significant researcher and author, Susan Goldin-Meadow, differentiates between sign language and gesturing, pointing to gesture’s lack of formality and adherence to a specific structure, as is the case with sign language. Emblems, with their defined meanings dependent on cultural contexts, also serve as important forms of nonverbal communication within the framework of gestures. D. McNeil is one researcher considered in this chapter who describes the use of illustrators as gestures, while defining the differences between iconic and deictic types of illustrators.

Chapter Five will discuss facial expressions as an important form of nonverbal communication. The research of Alan J. Fridlund and James A. Russell on physiognomy, otherwise known as face-reading, is examined, along with F. P. Secord’s work on facial stereotyping. Such stereotyping and assignment of personality traits to people according to their facial features and expressions serve to enhance or detract from the ability to discern information conveyed verbally. E.A. Haggard and F.S. Isaac, early researchers in the area of micromomentary facial expressionism, argue that these microexpressions can provide clues about what people are feeling as they either share or

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receive communication. While Knapp and Hall\textsuperscript{25} assert that reliable interpretation of facial expressions is dependent on society and culture, Carol Kinsey Goman\textsuperscript{26} identifies the universality of certain facial expressions, including joy, sadness, surprise, fear, disgust, and anger.

Nonverbal communication in the form of body posture is the subject of Chapter Six. Body positions serve as a way to perceive attitudes (Knapp and Hall),\textsuperscript{27} restrict the flow of information between communicants (J. B. Bavelas),\textsuperscript{28} while also serving as a conduit for \textit{emotional contagion} (E. Hatfield, J. T. Cacioppo, R. L. Rapson).\textsuperscript{29} This chapter will also detail body postures defined as closed (arms folded, legs crossed, body turned away) and open (arms and hands open, legs uncrossed, direct-facing body to communicant/ audience). Goman\textsuperscript{30} will explain how such body positions, usually subliminally, offer nonverbal cues that enhance or detract from receptivity of information. The chapter concludes with research by Allan and Barbara Pease,\textsuperscript{31} who point to patterns established during early child development that continue into adulthood. Included in this work is research exploring the manner in which children create barriers between themselves and perceived threats by hiding behind a parent’s legs, which become perpetuated in adulthood when these same children, now adults themselves,

\textsuperscript{25} Mark L. Knapp and Judith A. Hall, \textit{Nonverbal Communication in Human Interaction} (Belmont, CA: Thomson-Wadsworth, TX, 2006).
\textsuperscript{26} Carol Kinsey Goman, \textit{The Nonverbal Advantage} (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2008).
\textsuperscript{27} Knapp and Hall, \textit{Nonverbal Communication in Human Interaction}.
\textsuperscript{30} Goman, \textit{Nonverbal Advantage}.
\textsuperscript{31} Allan and Barbara Pease, \textit{Body Language} (New York: Random House, 2004).
subconsciously create barriers by folding their arms in front of their bodies, crossing their legs while sitting, or using other instruments (coffee cups, books, etc.) to form barriers.

Chapter Seven will feature the significance gender plays in the perception of both the communicator and audience; such perceptions and stereotypes influence the manner in which information is delivered and received. Important research from the field of feminist theory (Ruth Pidwell)\textsuperscript{32} related to body and gender is included, pointing us to Greek philosophy and Christian doctrine as contributors to women’s oppression and subsequent negative stereotypes. J. Butler\textsuperscript{33} and H. Moore\textsuperscript{34} contribute research related to two other theories associated with gender, including the social constructionist and embodied subjectivity views of the body. Elizabeth Grosz\textsuperscript{35} and Pidwell propose that preaching incorporates these stereotypes and perceptions of the body, which serve to alter the manner in which people are respected, and therefore, the manner in which information is received. This chapter will also include work from social scientists such as Kathleen S. Verderber\textsuperscript{36} and Goman, who support earlier research related to the significant role perceptions of gender and gender diversity play in the ability to impart and receive information. This chapter will also offer groundbreaking research by R. Birdwhistell,\textsuperscript{37} who concludes that tertiary differences related to the nonverbal behavior

\textsuperscript{34} H. Moore, “‘We Stand’: Sex, Gender and Sexual Difference,” \textit{Feminist Review} 46 (1994): 78-95.
\textsuperscript{35} Elizabeth Grosz, \textit{Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism} (St. Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1994).
\textsuperscript{36} Kathleen S. Verderber, Rudolph F. Verdeber, and Deanna D. Sellnow, \textit{Communicate!} (Boston: Wadsworth, 2014).
of males vs. females are not necessarily associated with chromosomal, hormonal, or anatomical differences. Instead, as Birdwhistell suggests, non-biological factors manufactured in part by the socialization of gender roles taught by society are more likely reasons for such behavior and perceptions.

The final chapter will seek to summarize this work as a way of reminding the reader of the important role nonverbal communication plays in clergy offices. I contend that nonverbal communication may be practiced as a form of spiritual discipline, tying in an example from a model offered by John Wesley’s life. Also included are five suggestions on how to apply the material included in this work to enhance pastoral communication.

With decreased membership and church attendance, particularly in mainline denominations, it is critical that clergy recognize the importance of engaging congregations with effective verbal and nonverbal communication practices. Throughout this study, my intent is to demonstrate how enriching it is to have both modern technical scholarship as well as patristics from which to draw. My hope and prayer is that this thesis will be a helpful resource for my sisters and brothers who work each day to engage people with the Good News.
2. History of Nonverbal Communication Research

We are not asked merely to call ourselves Christians; we are to be Christians through our deeds.

—St. Ignatius of Antioch, Epistle to the Magnesians

To appreciate research that informs today’s clergy community, it is important to acknowledge both the historic and contemporary offerings related to the field of nonverbal communication. This chapter will provide an overview of nonverbal communication research offered through the years, providing context for information included in successive chapters.

As this thesis will emphasize, there are many ways we knowingly or unknowingly communicate nonverbally. Our history as a people includes, yet is not limited to, the movements we make with our bodies, our facial expressions, even fragrances with which we adorn our bodies; all have served to enhance or detract from the effectiveness of communication since humankind first attempted to share information.

Exploring the history of nonverbal communication research enables us to uncover helpful contributions, including the quote included in the introduction of this chapter. St. Ignatius recognized that living out one’s faith necessitates more than spoken words; indeed, our bodies and what we do with them become a way of demonstrating the faith we declare.

2.1 Early Years of Research: From Confucius to Quintilian

For centuries, research in the field of nonverbal communication has explored such areas as visual cues included in body language (known as kinesics), distance (proxemics),
physical environments and appearance, touch (haptics), use of time (chronemics), and eye contact/gaze (oculesics). Although much of the scientific study of nonverbal communication post-dates World War II, this does not mean that significant earlier research did not occur. The words of the philosopher Confucius from over 2,500 years ago provide valuable commentary on communicating without words, and they continue to be instructive for contemporary clergy. According to some researchers, Confucius made observations on what today would be referred to as the coordination of verbal and nonverbal signals. As an example, the ancient philosopher suggested there is a correspondence between facial expression and the spoken word. This observation is easily applicable to today’s clergy: if one is preaching about the joy found in relationship with Jesus, the verbal message becomes sabotaged if the facial expression communicated nonverbally by the preacher seems mournful. In contrast, a message of urgency and tension is undermined if an expression radiates a smile.

We may also look to scholars in Athens and Sicily for early research in the field of nonverbal communication. As Knapp offers, work in practices related to nonverbal communication was first emphasized by the Roman orators and teachers. These nonverbal behaviors were recognized as a way to produce more persuasive orations, surely a goal pursued by pastors desiring to inspire congregations.

As the Roman rhetorician Quintilian proposed, nonverbal cues should be used in a way that is harmonious with the words being offered. We find examples of Quintilian


2 Ibid.
emphasizing the importance of gestures accompanying spoken words in his work, including:

The gestures of which I have thus far spoken are such as naturally proceed from us simultaneously with our words. But there are others which indicate things by means of mimicry. For example, you may suggest a sick man by mimicking the gesture of a doctor feeling the pulse, or a harpist by a movement of the hands as though they were plucking the strings. ³

Whether employing gestures or mimicry, preachers are most effective at communicating to their congregations when successful at supplementing spoken word with these lessons offered by Quintilian.

2.2 The Role of Ethos, Pathos and Logos

Within this research, we find both Quintilian and Aristotle addressing ethos, pathos and logos, with ethos attached to the self-portrayal of the speaker. During the fourth century BCE, Aristotle compiled his thoughts into a work called On Rhetoric, which included these three persuasive appeals. More specifically, ethos relates to the credibility of the speaker, recognizing that if audiences are to receive information from a speaker, they must deem him or her credible. Credibility is granted if those receiving information believe the speaker is respected, of good character, trustworthy, and maintains authority on the topic being addressed. With ethos, the appearance of credibility is considered, with such characteristics implied through both verbal and nonverbal means. This speaks to clergy, who may either confirm or lessen their credibility with these communication practices.

³Quintilian, The Orator’s Education, 6:5.
Pathos relates to the persuasiveness of an orator while appealing to the emotions of an audience. Emotional connections inspired by the speaker, certainly including preachers, conjure feelings of love, hate, fear, compassion and envy. These emotions may be conveyed by both verbal and nonverbal means from a pulpit, with hand gestures and facial expressions supplementing verbal communication as information is being shared. Aristotle defined pathos as “putting the audience into a certain frame of mind,” \(^4\) while Quintilian redefined ethos and pathos to describe various intensities of emotional affection. \(^5\)

Logos points to the logic of information conveyed during communication. In order for audiences to be receptive, a speaker must present information in a way that accurately presents facts and statistics, while supplementing this information with evidence of its truth. Because of their emphasis on logic, one might think of C. S. Lewis or N. T. Wright as authors who are logos-centered in their writings. Of the three, Aristotle proposed that logos should be the most important of the three persuasive appeals. As a logical thinker and philosopher, he argued that if one demonstrated logos, there should not be a need for ethos or pathos. However, Aristotle also recognized that these three elements of communication reinforce one another. Logos without the other two persuasive appeals is not sufficient alone; all three are necessary for effective communication.

2.3 The Five Canons of Rhetoric

Other early contributions include the “Five Canons of Rhetoric,” organized by the Roman orator Cicero around 50 BCE. In approximately 95 CE, Quintilian expanded this work with his twelve-volume textbook on rhetoric, *Institutio Oratoria*. This text, along with the Five Canons of Rhetoric, would prove to be substantial resources in the field of rhetorical education well into the medieval period.

As they are described in the following paragraphs, one may understand how sermons will become more effective when incorporating each canon. The Five Canons of Rhetoric are: *Inventio* (invention), which is the process of developing and refining an argument to be presented. *Dispositio* (arrangement) is the process of arranging and organizing an argument for maximum impact. For example, we find the work of invention and arrangement occurring for clergy as scripture passages are selected and exegesis begins. *Elocutio* (style) is the process of determining how to present an argument using figures of speech and other rhetorical techniques. Part of a preacher’s sermon preparation work includes determining how to create mental images for a congregation, which may be considered a form of *Elocutio*. *Memoria* (memory) features the process of learning and memorizing a speech so it may be delivered without notes. Even preachers who use notes employ this technique, as they work to memorize enough words to maintain appropriate eye contact with a congregation. This practice also includes memorizing famous quotes, literary references and other facts to be included.

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during the delivery of speeches. Also included in the Five Canons of Rhetoric is *actio* (delivery), which is the process of practicing how a speech is to be delivered, using tone of voice, pronunciation, speech gestures, and other forms of nonverbal communication methods. It is in this area of delivery that we find an emphasis on gestures, eye contact, facial expressions, and other forms of nonverbal communication. Gideon Burton\(^8\) offers that delivery concerns itself with *how* something is said, rather than *what* is said. We may point to the Greek word *hypokris*, meaning “acting,” to contextualize the rhetorical practice of delivering information through the use of gestures and vocal training. In antiquity, the manner in which information was communicated through a speech was considered a crucial component, particularly since delivery may be used to elicit powerful, persuasive emotions in an audience.

Over the ensuing centuries, some researchers drew from elements of the *Five Canons of Rhetoric* while assigning them to other branches of study. Along with memory, delivery has often been excluded from rhetorical texts, while nevertheless maintaining a strong place in rhetorical pedagogy. Other examples include the sixteenth century practice of associating rhetoric primarily with style and delivery, with invention and arrangement transferred to the realm of logic. According to James Jasinski,\(^9\) the impact of this shift is noticed today in the tendency of some European scholars to view rhetoric as the study of tropes and figures of speech, disconnected from aspects of communication related to argument.

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While theories related to the performance of preaching and communication theory continue to evolve and shift, the classical canons still play a role in contemporary research. Nancy Lee Harper\textsuperscript{10} describes the canons as a paradigm for all communication theory. As such, they remain significant in contemporary thought and research related to the field of communication.

2.4 Examining the Art of Speaking (Verbal and Nonverbal)

“What an artist!” commented one of my fellow seminary students during a class about preaching. This student was awed by the manner in which the professor delivered her introductory sermon for the class. Speaking, whether lecturing a class, telling a story to a Sunday school group, or preaching a sermon, is a form of art as suggested by researchers and orators; this has been recognized for centuries. Thomas Wilson’s \textit{The Arte of Rhetorique}, published in 1553,\textsuperscript{11} provided orators with instruction on how to speak with a pleasing tone, how to gesture well, and how to pronounce correctly. Other researchers\textsuperscript{12} reference the inferior quality of pulpit oratory, pointing to advice offered on the practice of gestures performed by preachers and lawyers which included discussions of acting, facial expression, posture, movement, projection, tone, pace and modulation.

In what is described as the \textit{elocution movement} which began in the 1750s and continued into the twentieth century, elocutionists focused on body movements,

\textsuperscript{12} P. Bizzell and B Herzberg, eds., \textit{The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from the Classical Times to the Present} (Boston: Bedford Books, 1990).
developing detailed lists on the ways body and voice are used together to provide effective communication. Irish actor Thomas Sheridan sought to improve the practice of delivery in rhetorical study. In one of his published lectures, Sheridan developed what is now considered standard speech-text material on oral interpretation, vocal expressiveness, and gestures. Words, Sheridan argues, are not the only constituent of language. Expressions and gestures, as preachers will acknowledge, also communicate. Indeed, they are more primitive than words, more natural where words are artificial, more universal where words are national, and more expressive of emotion than the sophisticated language of words.

Another well-known elocutionist, Gilbert Austin (1753-1837) authored an elaborate notation system which featured over fifty foot movements, over one hundred arm positions, and thousands of hand positions, along with other nonverbal behaviors. His illustrations from Chironomia are still reproduced as an aid for public oratory. Austin’s detailed notations represent an important contribution in the field of nonverbal behavior.

2.5 Advancements through Modern Scholarship: Gestures and Facial Expressions

Imparting emotions of joy and peace often embraced in scripture and through sacraments of the church are not merely offered through spoken words; they are also reflected through gestures and facial expressions of clergy. This important link between

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verbal and nonverbal communication has been observed by researchers and scientists for centuries. As these scientists\textsuperscript{15} suggest, much of contemporary scholarship pertaining to gestures and facial expressions may be traced to two works published in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century: Andrea de Jorio’s \textit{Gestural Expression of the Ancients in the Light of Neapolitan Gesturing}\textsuperscript{16} and Charles Darwin’s \textit{The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals}.\textsuperscript{17} De Jorio connected his study of the gestural behavior of people in Naples to the work being conducted by archeologists and others, believing his findings would aid in understanding gestures depicted on Greco-Roman pottery, paintings and sculptures that were being unearthed. As a result of this work, de Jorio established the importance of context in understanding gestures, identifying the manner in which gestures function as substitutes for words, and treating gesture as an established code analogous to verbal language.

     Darwin was also adept at compiling, describing, and interpreting observations related to gestures and facial expressions. Darwin was among the first to study facial expression in the context of evolutionary principles, utilizing pictures to illustrate the importance of such expressions. A century after his observations from largely anecdotal data, scholars conducting more systematic research confirmed the validity of many of his observations. Such observations have proved to be foundational to contemporary research in this field.

By the twentieth century, in seeking to understand the ways nonverbal communication practices enhanced or detracted from the spoken word, researchers such as Ekman,\(^{18}\) in his foundational model of nonverbal practices, described how nonverbal language function to influence spoken communication. Ekman proposed that there are six ways in which nonverbal cues interact with spoken words: in our interactions, nonverbal communication may repeat, conflict with, complement, substitute for, accent or moderate, and regulate what is spoken. This model has perpetuated the belief that nonverbal communication is important; in fact, many texts on interpersonal interaction utilize Ekman’s categorization to define nonverbal language and how it functions.

Contemporary research related to the integration of nonverbal cues while speaking, particularly those studies examining facial expressions and various gestures, have provided important insight. Much of this work includes analysis of the coordination of gestures and facial expressions with speech, and the manner in which such practices impact reception of information. This systematic study can be traced to the 1950s, when scholars offered many labels for this integration. Such labeling included mixed syntax, comprehensive communication act, multichannel process, composite signal, integrated message, and multimodal communication. Some researchers\(^{19}\) prefer to label the whole


system of interconnected cues “language” rather than make distinctions between verbal and nonverbal behavior.

2.6 Ongoing Research: Our Bodies, Environment, and Kinesics

As work continued through the mid-twentieth century, the field of nonverbal study expanded while offering new ways to understand the implications of this research. A subfield of research called visual rhetoric focuses on the interpretation and critique of images. By the 1990s researchers\textsuperscript{20} had proposed that material rhetoric is more closely related to nonverbal cues, since it reflects on the significance of that which is material, such as use of space, structure and environment, recognizing these as factors in nonverbal communication. Other research has included a focus on the human body as a means of communication. Hawhee\textsuperscript{21} recommends the work of rhetorician Kenneth Burke who portrays rhetoric as more than studying the form and features of language, but instead, language as symbolic action. Burke points to the movements and appearance of the body to what he called a “somatic” (physical, body-based) manner of communicating. Without anything being said, according to Burke, the body and the way it is used and positioned denote meaning and communication. Other scientists,\textsuperscript{22} while focusing on bodies and movements of bodies, use body rhetoric as a term to describe their thesis, and a way to

\textsuperscript{21} D. Hawhee, Moving Bodies: Kenneth Burke at the Edges of Language (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2009).
\textsuperscript{22} J. Selzer and S. Crowley, eds., Rhetorical Bodies (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999).
define how bodies and movement of bodies communicate independently of the spoken word.

Well-known within nonverbal communication research is the work of Birdwhistell and Hall during the 1950s, which resulted in the publication of Introduction to Kinesics and Silent Language. Working from the assumption that communication systems are like languages and can be described by their units, Birdwhistell argued that meaning is created in a different way from that suggested by models of what is “good” or “persuasive” from earlier research. Instead, nonverbal communication may be understood within its context, and in fact is a social event conducted between people. Birdwhistell’s conception of nonverbal communication as an identifiable social action provided a significant foundation for other research in this field.²³

Both clergy and laity often use touch as a means to convey messages. A touch on a shoulder may denote sympathy, while shaking a hand may be a way of responding to exciting news. Touching as a way of communicating nonverbally became a focal point of study in the 1950s as well, with Tactile Communication by Frank²⁴ offering new insights while also including research other social scientists were able to use as a foundation for their work. This work reveals significant communication that occurs through touch, including the way touch is able to communicate comfort and establish dominance, while also serving to create bonds between both people and animals. As examples, a pastor touching the shoulder while counseling someone experiencing grief

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²³ Matsumoto et al., APA Handbook of Nonverbal Communication, 5f.
conveys comfort, while a strong grasp offered in a handshake denotes dominance. An
embrace shared between both people and pets serves to create unique bonds.

The 1960s produced significant advances, particularly related to the role specific
areas of body play in nonverbal communication practices. Specifically, R.V. Exline’s\textsuperscript{25}
work with eye behavior provided fresh insights in the category of eye contact and
subliminal nuances of communication. Two other contributions from the 1960s focused
on nonverbal behaviors in classroom settings.\textsuperscript{26} These studies explored the potential
impact of subtleties communicated nonverbally by teachers, and their impact on student’s
academic success. The other contribution included a classic rhetorical article from
Ekman and Friesen dealing with the origins, usage, and coding of nonverbal behavior.\textsuperscript{27}
This work identified five areas of nonverbal study (emblems, illustrators, affect display,
regulators, and adaptors) that served to guide their own research, along with the work of
future researchers in the field.

\textbf{2.7 Codes and a Holistic Approach}

As is the case with other areas of research, the field of nonverbal communication
study was often difficult for a general reader to digest. By the 1970s, efforts to make the
material more applicable became more commonplace. As an example, Fast’s \textit{Body

\begin{footnotes}
and Sex of Respondent,” in \textit{Affect, Cognition and Personality}, ed. S Tomkins and C. Izzard (New York:
1966); Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson, \textit{Pygmalion in the Classroom} (New York: Holt, Rinehart and
\item[27] P. Ekman and W. V. Friesen, “The Repertoire of Nonverbal Behavior: Categories, Origins, Usage and
\end{footnotes}
Language\textsuperscript{28} became a significant resource in the 1970s as an article featuring the journalist’s account of nonverbal study from the perspective of various researchers, and was followed by a number of books that attempted to produce material on the subject increasingly understandable to the general public. Although simplifying the material at times led to a misrepresentation of original findings, this work allowed consumers, including church congregations, to apply their new-found perceptions of nonverbal communication to many diverse areas.

Other notable work in the 1970s included an effort to clarify the significance of nonverbal communication involving facial gestures. In particular, Ekman and Friesen developed the Facial Action Coding System in 1978, an elaborate research tool that is helpful in distinguishing muscles used in genuine and artificial smiles.\textsuperscript{29} Others\textsuperscript{30} would supplement this resource with additional nonverbal communication research which aids in predicting future behavior.

In the 1980s and during more recent decades, research generally has placed an emphasis on addressing the area of communication more holistically, recognizing that communication does not typically occur independent of either verbal or nonverbal means. It has become clear that nonverbal communication without considering verbal cues, context and circumstances cannot be counted on to accurately depict actual communication taking place, either consciously or subconsciously.

\textsuperscript{28} Julius Fast, \textit{Body Language} (Lanham, MI: Rowman and Littlefield, 1970).
\textsuperscript{29} See, e.g., http://www.paulekman.com/product-category/facs/
This merging of verbal and nonverbal communication practices is important in church settings, as pastors are tasked with sustaining and growing their communities of faith. Each year numerous conventions and workshops are organized and offered to assist and inspire this work. As we seek to resource our church leaders, it is important to embrace both historic and contemporary research in the field of nonverbal communication. The material presented in this opening chapter has provided a historical foundation for the remainder of this thesis, including the next as the relevance of nonverbal communication for theology and homiletics is considered.
3. Theology, Homiletics, and Nonverbal Communication

You have to acknowledge and complain that often, because you talked too long and with too little enthusiasm, it has befallen you to become commonplace and wearisome even to yourself, not to mention him whom you were trying to instruct with your discourse, and the others who were present as listeners.

—St. Augustine, The First Catechetical Instruction

With these words from Augustine, a preacher is reminded of the importance of communicating in a manner that fosters interest and inspiration. Many of us may recall frustrating experiences of listening to a preacher when we wish we could study the text being used ourselves. We discern the importance of the topic, yet the manner in which it is delivered detracts from our ability to stay with the speaker. Clearly this is not merely a modern problem due to short attention spans, for Augustine himself had to exhort pastors to be more enthusiastic.

An examination of homiletics, along with contributions from early and contemporary church figures, is illuminating when considering the importance of nonverbal communication practices employed by clergy. Nonverbal communication is one critical means of imparting enthusiasm from preacher to congregant, while highlighting the danger of communication becoming, as Augustine notes, “commonplace and wearisome.”

3.1 Preaching as Performance

Along with my brothers and sisters performing the same task, among my duties as a pastor is to write a weekly sermon that will successfully convey the Good News. As sermons are written, the fact that their delivery will involve a performance component
must always be kept in mind. Augustine himself acknowledged the differences between writing and speaking. Lost in the written word are the cadence of speech, intonation of voice, pauses and gestures, and the choreography of body and word.\(^1\) Such nonverbal practices play a key role in the message’s reception. Learning effective ways to provide information includes learning how to perform like the masters. Augustine belittled the ancient obsession with rule books while insisting, as Cicero had, that the eloquence of orators necessitated “raw talent, good practice, and good models.”\(^2\)

In addressing homiletics and the manner in which the Word is shared, Richard F. Ward\(^3\) proposes the way a pastor prepares her or himself for narrating the biblical text and sermon can either deepen or diminish the participation of all who worship. Along with the necessary exegesis of text, Ward also describes preaching as “a performance, a complex of creative processes that punctuate the preparation, enactment, and embodiment of sermons.”\(^4\) As I observe preachers, I witness the interplay between research and performance referenced by Ward. Certainly, solid research and exegesis are foundational for a strong sermon. Yet neglecting details related to performance can undermine such research and exegesis. Adam Hamilton, pastor of the Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kansas, is an example of a preacher who first builds a foundation for his sermons through exegesis and research. His interpretation of the biblical text is then performed in a manner which allows congregations to readily receive information being

\(^1\) William Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1985), 408.
\(^2\) Ibid., 203.
\(^4\) Ibid.
offered, through helpful, relaxed nonverbal communication practices. Conversely, Anglican cleric John R.W. Stott, named by Time Magazine in 2005 as one of the 100 most influential people of the world, was not someone who supplemented performance of the word in a manner that matched his ability for research. Though undeniably popular and effective in many ways, his lack of eye contact, stiff body posture, and absence of gesture may have detracted from the ability of people to most effectively receive his sermons.

Performance, at its root a positive term which literally means “form coming through,” does not call the preacher merely to utilize dramatized theatrics. Instead, the significance of the more nuanced aspects related to performance, particularly body language and nonverbal cues, must be recognized and incorporated into sermon preparation and delivery, leading to the importance of considering specifically the relevance of performance in homiletics.

3.2 Performance and Homiletics

Churches ordain leaders to teach and preach the gospel, which, as noted, involves an act of both verbal and nonverbal “performing.” At a time when many mainline denominations are experiencing declining membership, it becomes more important not only to inform congregations, but also to engage congregations. Engagement is not synonymous with superficial entertainment. On the contrary, engaging people is critical for inspiring deeper discipleship and necessitates an inclusion and enhancement of nonverbal communication practices. These practices, as explored in more detail in
subsequent chapters below, may include appropriate gestures, eye contact, positioning of hands, and other forms of body language.

As we consider the many aspects of communication, we benefit from contributions offered by both contemporary homiletic researchers and early church fathers. As an example of the latter, Augustine, in addressing both verbal and nonverbal communication, argues that eloquence, described as fluent or persuasive speaking or writing, is an essential trait for effective communicators, and that eloquence may actually be imparted through body language. Connecting this specifically to clergy, Augustine implores Christians not to shrink from using rhetoric (which includes spoken and unspoken words) when sharing the gospel.\(^5\) At the same time, Augustine stated that a traditional education is not required, with its surfeit of rules. Instead, eloquence may be acquired by listening to eloquent Christians while seeking to imitate them and their (nonverbal) mannerisms. Augustine proposed there was no lack of Christian speakers and writers who demonstrated sufficient combinations of eloquence and wisdom while communicating.

Preachers who dismiss the importance of performance in a sermon will sometimes suggest that offering the Word is enough, and that it is the role of the Holy Spirit to engage the listener. It is true Augustine seems to support this notion to a certain extent, proposing that for those speakers not successful at acquiring eloquence, a close adherence to the words of scripture is an acceptable option since the scriptures are both wise and

eloquent on their own; he points to Paul and Amos as examples. One qualification, it might be noted, is that for Augustine intelligibility is to be prioritized over eloquence; colloquial usages, even those that offend the ears of the educated, are sometimes to be preferred in order to connect meaning to an audience.

Yet we also recognize the importance Augustine placed on the role of performance in homiletics. The need to maintain an audience’s attention led Augustine to introduce and explain the Ciceronian doctrine of the orator’s three aims: to teach, to delight, and to move. Augustine later rephrased these aims as “to be listened to with understanding, with pleasure, and with obedience.” While warning against the danger of over-emphasizing the entertainment factor, Augustine proposed that Christian speakers should make these goals their own.

These aims of the Ciceronian doctrine may then be combined with another Ciceronian triad: “The eloquent speaker will speak of small things in the restrained style, moderate things in the mixed style, and important things in the grand style.” However, Augustine found these to be inappropriate in the ecclesiastical context, where there are no matters of minor importance. In contrast to other orators, Augustine believed the aim of giving pleasure was the least important of the three, while nevertheless emphasizing the need for the speaker to be at least mindful of all three. For Augustine, the primary objective was engagement of the audience, best accomplished when appropriate style is created through the combination of spoken word and nonverbal communication.

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Ibid., xviii.
3.3 Personality and Performance

In my experience observing and working alongside clergy, the connection between one’s personality and performance as a preacher is clear. From the world of meteorology, NBC Today Show’s Al Roker’s performance when delivering his forecast reflects his personality: ebullient, energetic, and at times, quite silly. Roker is very animated with delivering his forecast; his body is almost always in movement as he gestures excitedly at weather graphics. Compare Roker’s personality and performance to someone with a different demeanor, such as Dr. Greg Forbes of the Weather Channel. Forbes’ personality is more reserved than Roker’s, which results in a less animated on-air presentation. Forbes only moves his body occasionally when delivering forecasts, and seldom gestures to accentuate words he speaks. Speaking mostly from a desk, Forbes’ body language suggests a more cerebral approach to delivering forecasts for an audience. Both of these personality-driven styles of communication have for decades proven effective at successfully delivering forecasts to a wide range of audiences.

Preachers exhibiting a strong connection between personality and performance include Ravi Zacharias, who specializes in the field of apologetics on his nationally syndicated program “Let My People Think.” Zacharias’ energetic, excitable style of preaching performance mirrors his personality. A calm, more sedate performance is exhibited by Dr. David Jeremiah, host of “Turning Point.” Jeremiah speaks deliberately, does not punctuate his words often with gestures, and as a reflection of his personality, seldom varies his facial expressions, all of which seem in keeping with his kind but serious nature.
Jana Childers and Clayton Schmit argue that many successful preachers are extemporaneous performers, describing their personalities as high-wire artists, lion tamers, sideshow barkers and more. In this description, the authors argue that individual personality shapes the style in which a sermon is delivered—that is, performed. While homiletic training may be consistent for two preachers, one’s personality will override the manner in which a sermon is delivered. For this reason, it becomes important when self-critiquing that preachers evaluate the way their personalities affect their performance. Those who are naturally boisterous may find the content of their message overwhelmed by body movements that match or surpass their extroverted nature, while those more introverted may unknowingly feature body posture that impedes relationship with a congregation. In both cases, personality influences performance.

### 3.4 Theology and Performance

Might theology animate and inspire performance? There are some who likely balk at making a connection between theology and performance. Yet a central theme of Christian theology is incarnation—Word made flesh. This is perhaps most famously and profoundly expressed in the opening words of John’s gospel:

> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made that has been made; without him nothing was made that has been made. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

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8 John 1:1-3, 14.
Here we find an event in which the Word becomes the embodiment of divine presence. The notion of the Word becoming flesh suggests that Christianity embraces a “body-minded” quality to the faith. However, studies of contemporary preaching have generally dismissed this dimension of worship in favor of a language-centered approach, as Frances Smith\(^9\) suggests. Ward\(^{10}\) states that this quality (embodiment) of the Word animates the set of practices performed by a preacher, including the public reading of texts, traditions of liturgical enactments, personal narratives and rituals, along with the communal performances of rites, festivals, prayers, and protests. The Word, and therefore theology, becomes visible not only with speech, but also via the body through gesture and movement. These nonverbal entities make visible and more pronounced characteristics of the Word and associated theology. Although the Word remains Other, preachers also share the Word by incarnating it through gesture and body movements along with the spoken word.

In considering theology and performance, Luke Powery\(^{11}\) proposes that by singing the gospel, the preacher embraces the incarnational aspects of preaching, an affirmation that preaching necessitates not just words, but also hearts, hands, bodies and voices to share the Word. As Powery offers: “The gospel is more than a word. It is an event expressed through a body, just as God’s Word took on a human body.”\(^{12}\) Since

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\(^{10}\) Ward, “Speaking of God,” 60.
\(^{12}\) Ibid., 13.
singing is essentially sound running through the body, the proclaimed Word should be sung. To sing is to be human and incarnational, recognizing that preaching involves more than the intellect. “Singing the Gospel in the pulpit is essential for a fuller understanding of what it means to proclaim the incarnate word in an enfleshed manner.”

In preaching, we find theology embraced and shared through both verbal and nonverbal practices. Ward ties preaching to performance, which includes elements of body language. He describes effective preaching as something dependent on congregational cultures and context, and the ability of the speaker to engage with those receiving information. “Accordingly, the preacher’s body itself becomes a site where he or she embodies (through the form and event of preaching) an engagement between self and Other, inscribed, expressed and formulated as a sermon.”

Recognizing the possibility of sharing theology through body language, theological schools and seminaries have experienced an increased interest in performance studies. Described as “embodiment,” practitioners link effectual communication to a legacy of elocutionists, expressionists, interpreters and teachers of speech, while embracing the importance of the body doing theology.

In January of 2012, while speaking to a class at the New England Conference licensing school for local pastors, I engaged in a conversation with one of the students on the topic of body language as a means for communicating theology. Rather than thinking of preaching merely as performance, students were invited to consider themselves as

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13 Ibid.
conduits through which theological ideals may be expressed. John McClure’s\textsuperscript{15} notion of rhetorical schema was helpful during this conversation, acknowledging the importance of organizing the diverse components of preaching to communicate theology effectively. The organization of these components includes the ability to coordinate words with appropriate body language that will foster, not impede, the delivery of theological ideals. While practicing preaching in front of each other, one student’s nervousness caused her to clench her hands tightly in front of her, causing a distraction for those observing her preaching. Another student fidgeted with a pencil throughout his preaching, again causing the content of his sermon to be missed by many. By eliminating these distractions and adhering to more helpful nonverbal practices, the students were able to become better vehicles through which to communicate theology provided in their sermons.

Paul Campbell\textsuperscript{16} uses the phrase “aesthetic communication” when describing preaching; that is, engaging in theological discourse involves both words and aesthetics. The way one postures, gestures and otherwise employs body language communicates, or at least enhances or detracts from, a verbal presentation of theological ideals. Performance theorist and theatre director Richard Schechner metaphorically likens sermon preparation with an unproduced play, in that it is “a shard of an as yet

 unassembled play” and therefore a “shard of an as yet unassembled whole.”17 Among the shards we find performance and aesthetics, accomplished by the body. The most effective sermons use voice and body to share theology; as Ward describes it, “Language that is called a sermon achieves its entelechy in the body and voice of the preacher.”18

As is the case with acting, which necessitates combining voice with body while presenting ideas, the preacher also utilizes both voice and body movement when communicating. As Jana Childers argues:

Preachers are concerned, as are actors, with the truthful interpretation of texts. This interpretation process is... a generative and incarnational activity. Something new is born out of the coming together of text and interpreter, something in which the integrity of each is still preserved.19

3.5 Evolution of Attitudes Toward Body Language

At certain times in the history of the church, hand gestures and certain body movements were deemed to be inappropriate for those who desired to remain true to a “godly” way of life. For example, Elochukwu Uzukwu20 offers that in the cenobitic life, meaning community life regulated by religious rule and custom, it was best, according to its Western manifestation (e.g. Ambrose, Augustine, Gregory the Great, Cassian), to practice not individual gestures, but motions as community. Accordingly, a novice is trained to renounce individual body movement in favor of his community’s corporate

movement. The elimination of individual movement, including gestures, was thought to characterize a purer monastic life.

This restriction of bodily movements led to distinctive interpretations of certain biblical passages. According to Uzukwu:

In the footsteps of Ambrose of Milan, references to the dance of David and similar gestures common in the psalms became sublimated. They were reinterpreted as piety and ecstatic union through which the Christian is brought in tune with the cosmic rhythm.  

Since certain movements of the body, including gestures and dance, were suspect, those who practiced such movements due to their occupations were considered reprobate. Such people included those connected with the theater, along with minstrels, comedians and jugglers. Dances that had become commonplace in churches, even ceremonies for use by the mendicant orders, were eventually condemned by church leaders. It is not surprising, then, considering the widespread condemnation of body movement and gestures, that such applications to preaching the Word became restricted.

However, a shift in attitude by church leadership occurred beginning in the twelfth century. Gestures and body movements previously suspect were no longer frowned upon. Indeed, Hugh of St. Victor describes how such practices of body movement and gestures were adapted by aristocracy and royalty. Certain monastic orders, including the Franciscans, promoted what were defined as acceptable behavioral

21 Ibid., 8.
patterns in their preaching. In fact, eventually the body would be perceived not as a
vehicle for condemnation, but as an instrument of salvation.

Among the strictures instituted for preachers by Methodist founder John Wesley
was Rule 8: “Take care of anything awkward or affected, either in your gesture or
pronunciation.” Wesley asserts that gestures should be “well-adjusted to the subject, free
from affection, and such as will not offend.” He also provides instruction not only
regarding the proper use of voice, but also related to body movements and gestures while
preaching. Such advice includes a prohibition for stretching one’s arms more than a foot
sideways while preaching; extending arms wider may be perceived as more dramatic than
helpful. Seeking to prevent theatrics, Wesley admonished: “Endeavor to be serious,
weighty, and solemn in your whole deportment before the congregation. Be aware of
clownishness. Be courteous to all.” It seems Wesley well understood that nonverbal
behaviors, such as gestures and body movement, had the potential to enhance or detract
from the spoken word.

3.6 Preaching with Signs and Symbols

In my previous work as a television meteorologist, recognizing the role of signs
and symbols created and offered through body language (known as semiotics) was
critically important in successfully communicating to an audience. Signs and symbols
demonstrated while delivering the forecast included hand gestures when pointing at a

23 Richard P. Heitzenrater, “John Wesley’s Principles and Practice of Preaching,” Methodist History 37.2
(January 1999): 98.
24 Ibid.
map, or the way my body was positioned in a closed or open manner. For example, when pointing at a weather map positioned to my right with my left hand and arm, my body was forced to turn away from the camera, sending a nonverbal cue that I was not inviting relationship with the audience. This could be corrected by using my right arm and hand to point to the map, allowing my body to maintain an open and inviting posture.

In the same way, clergy benefit by understanding the significance of signs and symbols and their role in communication. In considering semiotics, Phillip Cary25 offers that Augustine extends the Ciceronian notion of expressive signification to speech through signs and symbols. As indicated by Cary, perhaps it could have been words expressed within a Ciceronian passage that prompted Augustine to first consider the connection between bodily gestures and the spoken word. Cicero considers the importance of gesture and voice while emphasizing the role of the face and eyes in aiding the orator in expressing his meaning:

All action proceeds from the soul, and the image of the soul is the face, and the eyes are its indicators (indices). For these are the only part of the body which can fashion significations (significationes) and alterations for every movement of the soul.26

Cicero further indicates that gestures express what is in the mind via nonverbal means:

It is through the eyes, whether tense or relaxed, quizzical or cheerful, that we should signify (significemus) the movement of our souls (motus animorum) in a way suitable to the particular kind of oration. For action is as it were the discourse of the body (Est enim action quasi sermo corporis), which ought all the more to be congruent with the mind

(menti). For nature gave us eyes to make plain the movement of our souls (ad motus animorum declarandos), as it gave mane, tail and ears to the lion or the horse.27

Cicero introduced for Augustine the concept of movement from soul to body, in contrast to the prevailing thought of expression flowing from body to soul. It is from this movement that expressionist semiotics derives its name—that is, the movement of expression in which the soul takes its thoughts and feelings and makes them evident.28 As a rhetorician, Cicero’s interest for orators is to align their thoughts and emotions with the spoken word.

Whether from a weather forecast on television or a sermon in a church, an audience best receives information when spoken words are coordinated with emotional signals. One of Augustine’s innovative adaptions of Cicero is the idea that to speak is to give nonverbal emotional signals. Cicero draws from Greek illustrations, such as smoke as a sign of fire, and tracks as a sign of animals passing through. In the same way, sadness in the soul of a preacher is indicated to an audience by a sorrowful countenance on the preacher’s face. Yet Augustine also concludes that certain facial movements are involuntary natural signs of emotions such as fear and grief. The distinction between voluntary and involuntary is important; as Cary29 observes, the kind of signification that interests Cicero and Augustine is a voluntary production. What differentiates “given” signs from “natural” signs in Augustine’s classification involves the presence of will or intent to signify. Augustine’s primary interest applies to this second type of sign. In his

27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
On Christian Teaching and later works, Augustine focuses on the kind of sign that he was the first to classify as such: those which are voluntary expressions of what is said in the soul. For clergy, both voluntary and involuntary signs are important to acknowledge when preaching. While involuntary, or natural, signs are more difficult to discern and control, both impact the manner in which sermons are received.

Considering Augustine’s work on the importance of signs, we can understand how these signs, when displayed by clergy, may enhance or detract from verbal communication. For example, if a preacher is rhapsodizing about the joy of being made new in Christ while at the same time projecting nonverbal signs of discontent or sorrow, confusion and uncertainty are bound to occur among the congregation. Ambrose of Milan also identifies a connection between the state of the soul and expression by the body. According to Warren Smith, Ambrose embraced the notion that the external form and bearing of the body reflect the internal disposition of the soul. The state of one’s internal being—including mood, emotions, and moral character—can be evidenced by his or her external actions. One implication is that there should be physical evidence observed in the body language of one who is in true repentance. As examples, Ambrose associates tears and lamenting with the inward spirit of contrition. Sorrow inspired by a deep sense of shame should serve to transform body posture. Ambrose, as Smith observes, holds

that even as physical beauty is a visible sign of a person’s overall good health, so too decorum is the external expression of an honorable character.

Might these signs also enable an audience, even subconsciously, to infer the condition of a preacher’s soul? Yes, according to Augustine, who argues that along with these natural signs, other signs which he refers to as “given” are also used to give bodily expression to what is in the soul. As Cary\(^{33}\) states, the foundation of specifically Augustinian semiotics is an expressionist definition of “given sign” as a means of communication. In Augustine’s words:

> Given signs are those which living beings give one another in order to show (ad demonstrandos), as far as they can, the movement of their souls (motus anima) or else some meaning or understanding. And we have no other cause or reason for signifying, i.e., giving signs, than to bring out what is borne by the soul giving the sign and transfers it into another soul.\(^{34}\)

Think of the significance of Augustine’s statement for today’s preacher; these given signs offered nonverbally serve as an indication of the state of the preacher’s soul. How, then, can an audience trust the content of a sermon if the soul of the speaker is suspect due to a perception provided through a given sign? Bartow’s\(^{35}\) conclusion aids in summarizing Augustine’s rationale connecting emotion and delivery with this statement: “Preachers are charged with the responsibility of representing their thoughts and their honest responses to those thoughts as faithfully as possible, through the use of their voices and their bodies.”

\(^{33}\) Cary, *Outward Signs*, 76.
\(^{34}\) Augustine, *On Christian Teaching* 2:3, as cited by Cary, *Outward Signs*, 76.
Augustine’s example suggests that the written word in teaching has a complexity all its own and is necessary for sharing information.36 Yet in preaching we find a vehicle with which to deliver information both verbally and nonverbally, which changes the way information is received. Harmless asks us to consider musicians; the studied phrasing of a musician writing for a scholarly journal differs from the studied phrasing of a classical guitarist performing before a live audience. Both demand scholarly expertise, but their respective expressions of that expertise differ. For the preacher, as for musicians, erudition is less visible, its expression more spontaneous, its effect more immediate. Like the classical guitarist, gestures aid in providing expression to the words offered by the preacher, gestures which enhance spoken communication.

3.7 Denominational Differences

In my personal observations as a United Methodist pastor, I recognize the denominational differences between our practices and the traditions of others when sharing the word. Within the United Methodist tradition, as is the case with other denominations, it seems geography plays a role in how body language is used by preachers and accepted by congregations. For example, in the New England Conference of which I am a member, preachers generally tend to be less demonstrative with body movement and, therefore, body language. This may be due to the fact that northern congregations are more comfortable with preaching that exhibits less movement and fewer emotions. In contrast, at least according to my own observations and conversations

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with clergy located in the South, United Methodist churches in southern U.S. states are more likely to include preachers more demonstrative, and congregations more receptive to this style of preaching.

When considering differences between a Catholic and Protestant approach to communicating the Word, C. Pickstock’s\textsuperscript{37} liturgical emphasis on place and physicality has implications for the role of nonverbal communication in the contemporary Protestant sermon. Historically, worship in the Protestant context has promoted the ministry of the Word, or ministry of preaching, over a more liturgical approach as offered in the Catholic church. Ruth Pidwell\textsuperscript{38} suggests this emphasis reflects a persistent Protestant suspicion of outward form, while favoring the inward feeling. Yet outward form becomes part of all communication genres and includes, as E. Goffman\textsuperscript{39} states, “all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers.” Therefore, the physical body and the way it is used and presented must be included in the analysis of general communication.

\textbf{3.8 Final Thoughts}

Are we able to discover theological inferences in body language? Since homiletics comprises the study of both the composition and \textit{delivery} of a sermon, body

language may indeed be considered a vehicle through which theological thought is delivered to a congregation. According to David Jacobsen:

The goal of homiletical theology is to help preachers become aware of ways in which all theology is ever and always present and at work in preaching (even when unrecognized by the preacher or congregation) and in which all aspects of preaching can contribute to the total theological understanding of preacher and congregation. Homiletic theology is theology in connection with all phases of preaching.40

Preachers are tasked with delivering sermons that make ancient biblical texts relevant and meaningful to the people who comprise congregations centuries removed from the origin of these texts. By embracing what has been offered by both early and contemporary figures in the fields of homiletics and theology, clergy are better able to succeed in delivering sermons that motivate, direct, and inspire.

4. Eye Contact

For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then we will see face to face.

—Paul the Apostle, 1 Corinthians 13:12

These words from the Apostle Paul suggest information is best communicated during face to face interaction. Common phrases such as “We are seeing eye to eye now,” “His was an icy stare,” and “She could kill with a glance” indicate an ability to communicate through eye contact. Transitions from confusion to comprehension often occur when we are able to communicate face to face with individuals and audiences since we are able to enhance verbal communication with nonverbal practices, including eye contact. The well-known expression “Eyes are the window to the soul,” often attributed to Shakespeare, recognizes that the way we engage or fail to engage others through eye contact impacts how communication is received. Whether a communicator is a doctor, classroom teacher, or member of the clergy, appropriate use of eye contact aids in the successful delivery and reception of information. As is the case with other forms of body language, establishing eye contact invites relationship; the inability to do so produces the opposite effect: disengagement with the speaker and therefore with the message being presented.

As coordinating pastor for a church led by a young man who had not yet been ordained, I attended a church meeting with this pastor and his staff parish relations council. Perhaps due to his introverted nature, this pastor often kept his eyes lowered when addressing someone or a group of people. As I observed the meeting, I noticed a disconnect occurring between the pastor and the group with whom he was interacting.
The content of his message was spot-on, yet it did not seem people were receiving his communication adequately. After the meeting, I met with the group for some follow-up questions. I asked the council what they thought of their new pastor, to which one person replied as others nodded in agreement: “I have a hard time hearing someone if they don’t look me in the eye!” The person’s point was not, of course, that he couldn’t hear his pastor audibly; instead, he was implying he could not receive the pastor’s communication fully because there was a lack of consistent eye contact. Failure of the young pastor to offer eye contact suggested a lack of interest in the information being communicated, which often prompts a subliminal question: “If the person speaking isn’t interested in this information [indicated by lack of eye contact], why should I be interested?”

Along with indicating lack of interest, failure to maintain eye contact also suggests an aloofness of the communicator, which serves as a significant barrier to receiving information. Aloofness not only suggests disinterest, but also an attitude of superiority over an attended audience, which is another way to disengage with those receiving communication. The individual in this story is a promising young pastor, as he is gifted in numerous areas. Yet his failure to recognize the significance of maintaining eye contact subverted his efforts.

Appropriate eye contact from a pastor invites a congregant into relationship while offering appreciation and friendship, opening the gates for effective communication. Since the pastor and congregation I am mentoring are just beginning their relationship, they have not had much time to develop trust and respect for one another. Eye contact denotes respect for the person receiving communication, something this pastor’s council
members were not detecting. In addition, particularly in western countries like the United States, eye contact denotes sincerity of character, and an emphasis on the urgent nature of the message being delivered. By not engaging eye contact, a subliminal message is offered suggesting that what is being communicated is not important enough to require such engagement. Peter A. Anderson\(^1\) argues that eye contact is an invitation to communicate, and that avoiding eye contact (called civil inattention) communicates avoidance. With eye contact, appreciation is subliminally offered to a person, or in the case of a pastor, to a congregation. Once appreciation is established, friendship is offered to an audience; both of which (appreciation and friendship) are achieved through eye contact. Once appreciation and friendship are established, information is received readily, even enthusiastically, by a congregation or those gathered for a council meeting.

The young pastor and his board experienced what scientists discovered long ago, that along with other forms of nonverbal communication, eyes serve as conduits through which information may be shared. Mark Knapp and Judith Hall\(^2\) offer that eyes regulate the flow of information between communicants, monitors feedback, express emotions, and indicate comfort levels while communication is being offered and received. Establishing eye contact signals openness to relationship and communication (something that was lacking in the interaction with the young pastor and members of his board) while breaking eye contact indicates a closing of that channel. No wonder the person in the


meeting referred to earlier felt like he could not “hear” the young pastor, even though the volume of his voice was adequate.

4.1 Creating an Impression

While a pastor may struggle in certain facets of ministry, a high likeability factor often covers a multitude of sins! While this statement may be an exaggeration, there is something to be said for the success of a church leader and how well that person is “liked.” Among the chief responsibilities of a pastor is to successfully communicate with others, whether that communication occurs during preaching, leading a study group, participating in a meeting or interacting with someone during counseling. Favorable and unfavorable impressions are achieved (including a “likeability” factor) by the ability of a person to maintain appropriate eye contact. The failure of the young pastor noted previously to maintain sufficient eye contact created an unfavorable impression. His lack of eye contact not only inhibited people from receiving information adequately; it also fostered a negative perception. Certainly the prophetic nature of a pastorate will create tension and perhaps even for some, an unfavorable opinion of a pastor who is doing his or her job quite well. Yet, there is something to be said for working to enhance likeability in relationships through eye contact. According to Judy K. Burgoon, Laura K. Guerrero, and Kory Floyd, consistent eye contact creates favorable impressions assigned to presenters of information, while gaze aversion fosters negative perceptions. Maintaining a high amount of eye contact connotes interest, attention, friendliness and

composure, while gaze avoidance suggests disinterest, non-receptivity, non-composure, and possibly disdain. These researchers contend that at least in the United States and similar cultures, the multiple meanings associated with a high degree of eye contact are mostly positive, while meanings associated with limited eye contact are largely negative. Therefore, it may be concluded that preachers who prepare first-rate sermons through research and exegesis may undermine the success of their efforts due to lack of eye contact with her or his congregation.

The impression of likeability is an important factor for a congregation with regard to the ability to receive information offered in a sermon. Along with smiling, eye contact is a key component in projecting a friendly image. M. T. Palmer and K. B. Simmons\(^4\) examined which nonverbal cues served to increase likeability, and which of those cues induced higher favorable reactions. People reported that their liking increased when people employed consistent eye contact, along with smiling and illustrator gestures. In a similar study, K. Floyd and G. B. Ray\(^5\) linked the level of likeability of the presenter to their ability to establish and employ eye contact; this nonverbal practice increased appreciation for, and likeability of, the presenter of information.

Consistent eye contact also infers confidence on the part of the pastor, a key element in gaining the trust of a congregation. Tonya Reiman\(^6\) offers that establishing

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eye contact confers self-confidence and trustworthiness, which provide a nonverbal cue to an audience that the information being shared is accurate and dependable. Those who consistently break eye contact for long periods during the delivery of information communicate low confidence in the material being shared and in the ability of the communicator to deliver information. Lack of consistent eye contact may also infer disinterest in both the subject matter and audience, which serves to disengage the audience from receiving information adequately.

Creating an impression of intelligence may also be achieved through the practice of eye contact. Evidence supports that people who achieve higher scores on standardized tests of cognitive ability engage more consistently with eye contact compared to those scoring at lower levels. The researchers suggest that observing the rate of eye contact, whether on tape or in person, serves as a cue for accurately judging intelligence levels. Following this rationale, a congregation may perceive a preacher to be more or less intelligent, depending on the rate of eye contact practiced by clergy.

4.2 The Eyes of Emotion

Understanding is also more easily conveyed to an audience when a preacher uses his or her eyes to communicate an emotion. Think of how the reading of a scripture passage is enhanced when emotions contained within the reading are mediated to a congregation through eye contact. As Allison Gopnik observes, new research suggests

the subtle movement and engagement of our eyes send out complex signals about what we feel and hold as important. Eyes that are suddenly widened indicate an emphasis and enthusiasm about a point being made verbally, while eyes that are downcast and narrowed convey sadness or disillusionment. Researchers\(^9\) conclude eyes are able to accentuate emotions through particular words. Communication related with adjectives, for example, is enhanced with a widening or narrowing of the eyes as these words are spoken. When a preacher describes a person or scripture passage as *beautiful* while widening their eyes, the meaning of beauty denotes a positive emotion. Conversely, when eyes are narrowed as the same word is offered, a sense of negativity and sarcasm accompanies the communication, which undermines the preacher’s intent.

The degree to which eyes open and close may also serve as a reflection of various emotional states. The rate of eye blinking for a pastor expresses anxiety levels for those both offering and receiving information. Excessive eye blinking indicates a higher level of anxiety, while a lower rate suggests less anxiety being experienced during an exchange of information. If a pastor is perceived as being anxious while preaching or attending to pastoral duties, those involved in such interaction are made uncomfortable, negatively impacting communication.

Psychiatrists\(^10\) report normal blinking, needed to lubricate and protect eyes, occurs approximately 6 to 10 times per minute for most adults. People experiencing anxiety

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blink up to 100 times per minute; the rate of this excessive blinking serves as a nonverbal cue, communicating a higher than normal level of emotional distress. When congregations perceive a high rate of anxiety due to excessive eye blinding from clergy, information is less readily received.

Since researchers have established that eyes and adjacent areas serve as accurate determinants of emotion due to their involuntary movements, clergy would do well to understand the ways in which eye movement may enhance or detract from the ability of a congregation to receive communication. Julius Fast\(^{11}\) argues that while the eye ball alone is not able to express emotions (other than pupil dilation), the emotional impact of the eye occurs due to the manner in which they are displayed in connection with the face around them. Length of glance, opening and narrowing of the eyelids, along with many other manipulations, allow numerous nonverbal cues to be communicated.

A phenomenon known as *emotional contagion*, whereby the mood or emotion of a person is influenced through eye contact, may have subtle to even profound impact on the performance of a speaker. Hatfield et al.\(^{12}\) state that mood and emotion are influenced by another’s mood or emotion via subtle and sometimes subconscious processes via eye contact. Attitude, mood or emotion of a preacher may be influenced when she or he receives information conveyed by a congregation member through eye contact. The positive or negative emotional contagion conveyed may serve to alter the mood and emotion of the preacher, serving to impact the manner in which information is conveyed.

\(^{11}\) Julius Fast, *Body Language*, 139f.
\(^{12}\) E. Hatfield et al., *Emotional Contagion*, 128.
being shared. Conversely, the mood and emotion of an audience participant may also be altered when clergy convey such emotions through eye gaze. A speaker has the ability to create a more receptive audience by expressing favorable emotions through eye contact. The same may be stated with regard to fostering a detrimental attitude in an audience; frustration, anger, superiority or indifference communicated through eye contact may create a less receptive attitude within a prospective audience.

Hostile and aggressive emotions between a pastor and congregation, and from a congregation to pastor through a process of emotional contagion, might also exist if eye contact is deliberately avoided, or lengthened inappropriately. Research from P. C. Ellsworth, J. M. Carlsmith and A. Hensen\(^\text{13}\) states that a gaze longer than ten seconds will likely produce irritation and discomfort for an audience member. Prolonged eye contact may be used as a form of insult toward another person, even engendering an aggressive response. Hostility may also be aroused when a specific person is visually ignored, particularly when the other person knows this action is deliberate. This is less true of a congregation maintaining eye contact with a preacher, since eye contact between an audience and speaker is more common and acceptable.

### 4.3 Biological Influences and Eye Movement

When considering messages conveyed through eye contact, pastors must recognize that some forms of eye language are involuntary. Researchers\(^\text{14}\) investigating


the eye region propose evidence for two brain systems that govern nonverbal facial communication; one is considered a voluntary emotion system stemming from the cortical pyramidal motor system, while the other is an involuntary emotion system stemming from the phylogenically older extrapyramidal system. Therefore, movements of the muscles around the mouth are more controlled by the communicator in contrast to the muscles around the eye region. These muscles around the eye are more difficult to control and manipulate, which suggest the eyes and surrounding facial area to be more accurate indicators of emotions. With simple movements, eye gaze facilitates social communication while providing an important source of sensory information. According to H. Kobayashi and S. Koshima,15 numerous species appear to have developed perceptual abilities related to information processing through the eyes. Likewise, the morphology of the eyes has evolved in such a way as to enhance nonverbal communication.

The lowering, raising or sideward glance of eyes also presents forms of nonverbal communication, which is an important factor for preachers who read from a script. Such pastors will lower their eyes while referring to their written text, which detracts from maintaining eye contact with a congregation. Yet if practiced appropriately, lowering eyes when reading from a script may not be problematic. For preachers reading from a text, font size and the height of a pulpit are important considerations when attempting to maintain eye contact with a congregation. Glancing at notes during transitions and not

during the relating of important points also helps with the enhancement of communication through eye contact.

Specific movement of eyes may also suggest emotional states. Ian Berry\textsuperscript{16} states that a downward glance often indicates humility and submission. A downward glance may be a gesture indicating that the communicator doesn’t pose as a threat while inviting non-confrontational relationship. Such gestures may serve to inspire a congregation to relax, fostering a more receptive environment.

The upward glance often indicates that the preacher is attempting to recall information for their presentation or speech. Generally, an attempt to recall words and statistics is indicated by an upward glance with eyes looking to the left; an upward glance with eyes looking to the right suggests the communicator is using her or his imagination to communicate more effectively. For clergy, it is also important to note the “eye-language” of those being preached to, for this form of nonverbal feedback may provide cues as to how people are reacting to a message. For example, looking sideways signifies a person is bored or irritated. The sideways glance also may serve as a cue to the preacher that a distracting noise, lack of clarity, too much information, or a general disturbance is impacting the distribution of information.

An averted glance in any direction may also be a cue to the preacher that those receiving communication are struggling to process information. A. M. Glenburn, J. L.

\textsuperscript{16} Ian Berry, \textit{Body Language; How to Master the Art of Nonverbal Communication With People} (Lexington, KY: Ian Berry, 2016), 29-31.
Schroeder and D. A. Robertson\textsuperscript{17} offer that the averted gaze, which may include the closing of eyes, implies a shift in attention from external matters (observing, listening to a speaker) to internal matters (attempting to process difficult information.) The closing of eyes is an attempt to block external stimuli and distractions while working to comprehend difficult information.

\textbf{4.4 Influence of Gender}

This exploration of nonverbal communication conveyed through eye contact is not complete without considering the role of gender. In its February 2017 edition, \textit{Christianity Today} featured an article\textsuperscript{18} stating one out of every eleven Protestant preachers is female, three times the number compared to just twenty-five years ago. Of the fifty-nine United Methodist churches comprising the Northern Maine District in which I serve, over 50\% of clergy are female, which represents a significant shift from thirty years ago, when the vast majority of preachers were male. This shift is an important factor when considering the role gender plays in the area of eye contact. As demonstrated in various studies,\textsuperscript{19} males and females differ in the use of gaze. Females employ eye contact during interaction on a more consistent basis compared to males, including measures of gaze frequency, duration, and reciprocity. Along with adult subjects, such differences have been measured in infancy and early childhood, but they

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\textsuperscript{19} For example, J. A. Hall, \textit{Nonverbal Sex Differences: Communication Accuracy and Expressive Style} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984).
become more pronounced during adulthood. These patterns of gazing are most prominent when the measure of eye contact involves duration rather than the actual number of individual looks. Male gaze patterns are more frequent but are of shorter duration compared to female patterns. These gaze patterns will be reflected in the gender of preachers and should be considered when interacting with specific clergy.

Gender also influences the rate at which female and males establish eye contact. Judith A. Hall and Sarah D. Gunnery\textsuperscript{20} offer that in addition to women gazing at their dyadic partners more than men, women are gazed at by others more than men. Therefore, since women tend to gaze more, and because individuals tend to gaze at women more, female-female dyads exhibit more eye contact compared to cross-sex or male-male dyads. This pattern may influence the manner in which a preacher perceives how information is being received by congregations, since the rate of eye contact is influenced by gender. Understanding differences in eye contact practiced by male and females is important for clergy, and something that often is not discussed in a homiletics class.

Other differences pertaining to gender relate to those who are preaching, contrasted with those receiving the preaching. A study from 1988 demonstrates that men exhibit a pattern called high-visual dominance, meaning that men use eye contact more frequently while speaking than while listening. In contrast, women do the opposite. Females establish eye contact most often while listening, and less often when speaking.\textsuperscript{21}

It is important to acknowledge these gender differences when assessing a congregation’s reception of a message.

4.5 Learning from Other Vocations

During my entrance interview at Duke Divinity School, I was asked to explain if my position as a television meteorologist featured any similarities to my role as a pastor. I explained how the critical nature of eye contact was emphasized by media consultants during my twenty-two years in sharing weather forecasts on-camera, and how that instruction has carried over to my role as a preacher. I have benefitted as a pastor, particularly in the area of preaching, from my former vocation. This is certainly true of other vocations when considering the significance of eye contact.

Verbal and nonverbal communication research during physician-patient interaction reveals the importance of eye contact. P. F. M. Verhaak examined eye contact with patients; his work indicated that physicians’ eye contact was associated positively with the amount of information provided by patients. Similarly, A. P. Duggan and R. L. Parrott found physicians’ lack of eye contact with patients to be a factor in negatively impacting dialogue and attitude during the encounter. Neuro-linguistic science enables researchers to link eye contact and movement to areas of nonverbal communication. Carol Kinsey Goman states that in most cases lack of appropriate eye

contact is interpreted as being impolite, insincere, or even dishonest. In one study, letters
from a hospital were analyzed, revealing that 90% of patient complaints were related to
lack of eye contact from the physician, which was perceived to communicate a lack of
caring.

The field of education provides further examples of eye contact being used as
signals for communication in classroom settings. When instructors pose questions to a
class, students who wish to offer an answer will establish eye contact with the instructor,
thereby inviting dialogue. Conversely, students who do not wish to respond will
typically break eye contact with the instructor, even looking toward the floor to indicate
an unwillingness to engage the question being posed. This information should be helpful
to pastors when leading study groups; the way participants react to questions serves as
cues. In addition, V. P. Richmond\textsuperscript{25} reports that students learn more from teachers who
establish eye contact most of the time, and less from teachers who look at the board or
their notes more frequently.

\textbf{4.6 Feedback through Eye Contact}

A preacher may gauge the effectiveness of communication by monitoring eye
contact of a congregation. Facial expression and eye contact imply attention and interest,
suggesting an attitude of “Good, continue.” Conversely, other visual cues such as a
furrowing of the brow, a shifting of position, and other body language indicate confusion.
By maintaining eye contact, preachers are able to sense this confusion, resulting in a

\textsuperscript{25} V. P. Richmond, D. R. Lane, and J. C. McCroskey, “The Relationship between Selected Immediacy
determination to communicate more clearly. Knapp and Hall\textsuperscript{26} point to the example of a child on a playground, pleading with parents to watch while he or she performs various activities on playground equipment. Being watched provides assurance and encouragement, while also infusing meaning into the child’s actions. Without the witness of parents, the actions of the child feel pointless and unimportant. In the same way, receiving feedback from a congregation through eye contact may serve to assure and encourage a preacher.

Feedback through eye contact also occurs through interactional synchrony, meaning that both preacher and congregation are connected through the delivery of information. Geoffrey Beattie\textsuperscript{27} contends that lack of eye contact leads to an inconsistency of synchrony, with this micro-behavior serving as a deterrent to effective communication. Maintaining eye contact opens a channel of feedback, which then establishes relationship, congeniality, and partnership as information is shared. R. J. Davidson and K. Hugdahl\textsuperscript{28} propose that because people’s behavior is so fundamentally motivated by what they term “approach and avoidance tendencies,” it is not surprising that feedback conveyed through eye contact fosters such tendencies. In short, eye contact facilitates feedback and social engagement, whereas an averted gaze signals avoidance.

As is the case with other forms of body language (e.g. crossed arms), Goman\textsuperscript{29} states that eyes are able to function in ways that enhance or disrupt feedback. Eye

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{KnappHall} Knapp and Hall, \textit{Nonverbal Communication in Human Interaction}, 343.
\bibitem{Beattie} Geoffrey Beattie, \textit{Visible Thought} (New York: Routledge, 2004), 5f.
\bibitem{Goman} Goman, \textit{Nonverbal Advantage}, 55f.
\end{thebibliography}
blocking is a means of disrupting the flow of feedback and is described by Goman as a survival mechanism that protects the brain from perceiving negative images. Eye blocking occurs when difficult news is delivered; as an example, those receiving news of employment termination or the death of a loved one will close their eyes as a means to block the reception of such information. Visually, eye blocks include closing, rubbing, or covering eyes with hands or objects. The significance of eye blocking may be lost on a preacher when gauging reaction of a congregation due to its frequent use. Such visual cues serve as indications as to how readily a sermon is being received, and may prompt a preacher to change tactics regarding the manner in which information is being shared.

As Jesus states “The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light.”

For clergy, eyes have the ability to communicate love, inspiration and encouragement. Pastors are able to enhance verbal communication by supporting the spoken word with eye contact that aids in infusing church bodies with the light of God’s healing presence and grace.

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30 Matthew 6:22.
5. Gesture

Like a conductor “rendering” Beethoven so that that particular music exists in that occasion, so the preacher renders a text so that it only exists in that particular form in that particular occasion of speaking.

—Walter Brueggemann, *The Word Militant*

Much like a conductor of music utilizing gestures when leading an orchestra, a preacher is most effective when the spoken word is supplemented by body language, including certain gestures. Imagine the impact on a congregation if a pastor were bound in place, with no ability to move his or her body when delivering the Sunday sermon. Gestures assist congregations in deciphering information, since gestures complement speech, whether a joyous message of reconciliation or a prophet’s lament.

Not surprisingly, the number and nature of gestures occurring in church settings typically vary depending on the idiosyncrasies of the individual performing them, and within the context of denominational differences. Emphatic bodily movements are more common in Pentecostal services due to the charismatic nature of such services, compared to an Episcopal community featuring more liturgically-based practices. Also, gestures are not always cross-culturally intelligible, which is important for clergy to acknowledge when preaching or leading a meeting away from familiar community. This will be explored later in this chapter.
How important are appropriate gestures for preachers? As indicated by S. D. Kelly, A. Ozyurek and E. Maris,\(^1\) processing information will become more difficult when gestures conflict with the spoken word. These researchers provide strong evidence that gesture and speech form an integrated system. Moreover, such integration by the recipient of communication is not always voluntary, but is often automatic.\(^2\) Indeed, if gesture-speech integration were optional, congregations could choose to disregard gesture in favor of concentrating solely on the words spoken by clergy. However, experimental evidence supports that gestures cannot be ignored, even when listeners are explicitly instructed to do so. This points to the importance of understanding and practicing appropriate gesturing when sharing a message in a church or other clergy setting.

Gesturing is a life-long practice and begins during early childhood development. Children learn to gesture before they are able to speak words, so this activity becomes their primary form of communication. Children typically begin to gesture between 8 and 12 months of age, with most instances serving a deictic purpose as children point toward or hold objects. M. Guidetti\(^3\) proposes that like adults, children use points and hold-ups (holding of objects) as conventional gestures (emblems) that are common to their culture. Examples include a shaking of the head from side-to-side indicating a “no” response, and hands at shoulder height with palms facing upwards suggesting an “I don’t know” reply

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to a question. The deictic gestures and emblems displayed by children before they can speak are relatively simple, but they mark the beginning of children’s linguistic development. M. L. Rowe and S. Goldin-Meadow conclude that during the early stages of language development when children are learning their first words and building a vocabulary, the number of different meanings communicated by children through gestures indicates the total number of spoken words they will acquire in the next few years.

5.1 Hand Gestures

Hands—more specifically, the way they are positioned and used—serve as powerful conduits for positive, negative, and distracting communication. Most preachers, particularly early in their careers, maintain at least some level of anxiety when preaching to a congregation or speaking during a meeting. Such anxiety often “leaks out,” or is manifested, through body movements. As an example, some people pace back and forth while communicating as a way of coping with anxiety. Others may rock back and forth on the balls of their feet, while others may blink their eyes incessantly. Such practices become distractions for those attempting to absorb what they otherwise hope to be helpful guidance. Anxiety also “leaks out” in a preacher’s hand gestures, particularly among those who are inexperienced. These hand motions typically occur unbeknownst to the speaker; the wringing and indiscriminate flipping of hands along with other gestures become common barriers and distractions to effective communication.

While hand gestures related to anxiety and nervousness may be obstacles to communication, this form of body language may also aid in accentuating and enhancing important points offered during preaching. Scott McLean\(^5\) offers that hand movements become positive instruments for communicating when used for two purposes: to illustrate speech and convey verbal meaning. Such hand movements help to express specific thoughts and the process leading to such thoughts. Successful use of hand gestures are an important component of expressing thoughts and ideas more efficiently.

Hand gestures may also be observed to interpret the nature of communication to be shared. Examples may be found in the field of broadcast journalism; Peter Bull\(^6\) relates that news broadcasters, while reading stories from an anchor desk, provide nonverbal communication through the positioning of their hands. Bull’s research indicates when a news anchor’s hands are together with the fingers interlocked, a casual, friendly, more “folksy” story is about to be shared. In contrast, when the hands are placed apart, or when one hand is placed over the other with palms facing down on the anchor desk, serious news is about to be delivered. Now, switch the news anchor sharing news with a pastor leading a meeting or conducting a pastoral care visit. Following the example of the newscaster, a pastor may subliminally communicate the nature of information about to be shared through the positioning of his or her hands.

Gestures, including hand gestures, come in many different forms and are displayed in numerous ways. As we continue to explore this topic, it is helpful to provide


a framework in which gestures may be categorized, which is addressed in the following sections.

5.2 Defining Five Categories of Gesture

What qualifies as a gesture? Researchers define gestures as any action with the hands, arms, fingers, facial features, or even the entire body that is used to communicate to another individual. In my previous position as a television meteorologist, gestures were an important way of supplementing my speech as I pointed to features on a weather map, while also positioning my body in ways that focused attention to features on weather graphics. As a pastor, I find gestures to be equally important as I bring emphasis and clarity to preaching points and verbal illustrations.

Since gestures are movements that typically accompany speech, they are most commonly thought of as co-speech gesticulations. Though a preacher’s entire body may be involved, typically, gestures are accomplished with the movement of hands and arms. More subtle forms may be utilized through slight movements of the head, shoulders, or even the eyes, whether the practitioner is a TV meteorologist or a United Methodist preacher. There are many types and forms of gestures, both common and unique. In an effort to provide categorizations for gestures as a form of nonverbal behavior, P. Ekman and W. V. Friesen, have produced five categories. Preachers, like other public speakers, display most if not all of these gestures in the course of a career delivering sermons.

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1. **Affect displays** refer to emotions experienced by the communicator, preachers included. Examples include a smile, frown, or even a sudden raising of the body inspired by sudden joy.

2. **Regulators** invite conversation and relationship with another party. They often take the form of leaning-in during conversation, or a head nod to invite another person to engage in dialogue. This gesture is often employed by television news anchors and reporters as they lean slightly toward the subject of an interview, or toward the camera (and therefore the audience watching at home.) Clergy ministering during pastoral care calls in hospitals and homes often use regulating gestures as they lean in to increase engagement. In short, regulators serve to invite relationship with a visiting pastor.

3. **Adaptors** are movements not necessarily used to enhance communication; examples include a preacher straightening his tie or other article of clothing, brushing back an errant lock of hair, or otherwise making an adjustment to one’s personal appearance. Yet adaptors, if used repetitively, may serve to distract those attempting to receive communication. Adaptors are often used without the speaker being aware of them and may serve as a cue to a congregation as to the speaker’s anxiety; therefore, adaptors and nervous fidgeting often go hand-in-hand.

These first three classifications (affect, regulators, and adaptors) are not as common as the remaining two, emblems and gestures.

4. Unlike illustrators, **emblems** can stand on their own without speech. Examples of emblems include sports officials indicating a specific penalty on a field of play, or military leaders desiring to communicate strategic positions and other information through hand gestures, or emblems. In the midst of civil strife and protests during the era of the Viet Nam War, one of the most familiar emblems became the peace symbol, which
included a hand gesture with two fingers (the pointing and middle finger) extended upward to form a V. This emblem endures as a hand gesture promoting peace.

Preachers prone to using emblems while speaking outside their community, culture, even denomination, would do well to acknowledge that many emblems are culturally based. In other words, they portray culture-specific meanings whose interpretation is vitally important, since an emblem might be offensive in one culture while benign or even positive in another. As an example, placing both hands at the side of one’s head while pointing upward with the pointing fingers signals anger in some cultures, while in others it indicates something demonic (important to know if preaching), while in still others it is representative of a desire for sex (again, important to know if preaching!). In Nepal, grabbing both earlobes is a sign of apology; in China, holding an earlobe indicates an item is too hot to touch. Covering an eye with an open hand in Iran signifies you are calling someone a liar. Other examples include the “A-OK” gesture, which features forming a ring with an index finger and thumb while the remaining fingers point upward. This gesture suggests all is well in North America, refers to money or coins in Japan, means “worthless” or “zero” in France, and is considered an obscene gesture in other cultures.

Middle class North American culture, which of course includes a large segment of the U.S. church population, has fewer than one hundred emblems, as compared to, for example, Israeli student culture, which utilizes over 250. Therefore, a visiting Rabbi speaking to a Christian community may create confusion for the audience if the Rabbi uses an emblem familiar to Jewish youth, but not to a different group.
Despite cultural differences, emblems generally perform six functions in all cultures: insulting others, providing interpersonal directions, greeting others, signaling departure, replying positively or negatively to request, and commenting on physical or emotional states.

Whether leading worship or a council meeting, clergy use emblems when speaking to enhance verbal communication, or without speaking as independent gestures. The movement of one’s head from side to side or up and down communicates a no or a yes response without the need for words. A shrugging of one’s shoulders when preaching or participating in a church meeting also provides an emblem, indicating the speaker is either not sure of an answer or is apathetic to the subject.

5. Gestures that accompany speech are categorized as illustrators. Unlike most gestures, illustrators are often not used deliberately. D. McNeil\(^9\) describes illustrators, also known as co-speech gestures, as “a window on the mind,” since they often are used by communicators to convey (sometimes subconsciously) what they are thinking about, or what sorts of emotions are linked to the communication. High-energy preachers, such as those leading charismatic churches, display the emotions they are experiencing through illustrators. These gestures differ from the other four categories in that they are always produced along with speech. In fact, their meanings are difficult to interpret without accompanying speech. Without the spoken word, illustrators may be

misinterpreted. As an example, someone might illustrate the phrase “the baseball player sliding into the base was safe” by moving hands out from the body with palms facing downward. If the same illustrator was used for “the back yard is very wide and flat,” confusion would result without the accompanying spoken word. In the same way, a preacher may state “God’s grace is available to all people” while raising his or her arms with palms facing upward as an illustrator. Yet if words do not accompany the gesture, the illustrator might be misunderstood.

Ekman and Friesen\textsuperscript{10} also include rhythm gestures, or beat gestures, as a form of illustrators, which features a head or hands moving to highlight and emphasize certain words in speech. As an example, someone speaking about a list of items for purchase at a hardware store may include a movement (beat) of the head, or a movement of hand when naming each item. Such beat gestures emphasize and accentuate the need for specific items during the speech provided. Picture a Sunday school teacher listing the fruits of the spirit to a class, with beat gestures accentuating each word: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Within the category of illustrators, we find subcategories as first proposed by McNeil.\textsuperscript{11} These categories, iconic and deictic, are defined by the manner in which they convey meaning. Iconic elements employ representative worldly images along with the use of metaphors. Such gestures indicate objects, shapes, or movement of an object or event. An iconic gesture may include indicating the size of a ball by acting as if she is

\textsuperscript{10} Ekman and W. V. Friesen, “Repertoire of Nonverbal Behavior,” 62.
\textsuperscript{11} McNeil, \textit{Hand and Mind}, 44.
holding the ball. A choir director uses an iconic illustrator when tracing the shape of the earth while singing to the congregation “He’s got the whole world, in His hands!” The movement of an object may be simulated as the communicator retraces the movement of the object with her hands, as is the case with the choir director. Someone attempting to explain the depth of water flooding the basement by using their hand to indicate the level of water serves as an example of an iconic illustrator, which might also be used by the preacher explaining the mounting level of flooding water while rain fell for forty days and forty nights.

The other subcategory of illustrators—deictic (also termed indexical)—is used to draw attention to people, events, objects or locations within proximity of the speaker. The most familiar deictic illustrator is accomplished with an extended finger used for pointing, yet such gestures may also employ other parts of the body, such as a pointing of the chin, or an elbow thrust in a certain way to indicate direction. Drawing attention to objects by touching or holding them may also be categorized as deictic gestures, which are often used by preachers sharing an object lesson with children during worship. While the direction of the point or the holding of an object may provide some meaning, without speech it is typically difficult to determine the exact meaning of the illustrator. This is particularly true of those who cannot speak, such as children or those who have lost the ability to speak. Without the spoken word, it may be difficult to discern meaning immediately, potentially requiring several attempts to arrive at a connection with the communicator.
5.3 Three Dimensions of Gesture

Along with Ekman and Friesen’s system of organizing and categorizing types of gestures, W. C. Stokoe has established a framework helpful in determining the meaning of gestures. As argued by subsequent researchers, the way a gesture is presented and the context in which it is presented are important to determine. Stokoe’s system includes three dimensions for measuring gestures and involves the coding system developed for American Sign Language. These dimensions include (a) location; (b) hand shape; and (c) the movement trajectory of the hand, arm, or body.

Location of a gesture provides critical information regarding its meaning. Whether, for example, it is offered in front of a preacher’s torso or in front of the face provides added nuance to a message. Location of the actual body itself may be considered in two distinct ways. The neutral space, which is defined by McNeill as the area in front of the torso, includes areas from the chin down to the waist. When gestures occur in this region, body location is not relevant. Instead, this neutral space can be thought of as a generic stage from which the gesture event is being performed. On the other hand, in other contexts body location becomes significant (in other words, is no longer neutral.) This might involve a gesture performed on the body; examples include a preacher using a rubbing gesture on a hip to indicate soreness of the disciples as they

12 Church et al., “Measuring Gesture,” 504-06.
followed Jesus on his long journey to Jerusalem, or a pointing of a finger to the head to suggest help is needed to recall a name or memory from a passage of scripture.

Hand shapes are utilized to reinforce information, typically about an object or person. The shape of the hand mimics the shape of, or in some other way references, certain objects. As examples, a preschool teacher’s hand may take the shape of a letter of the alphabet, or a youth group leader may indicate the levelness of a skate park, depending on the shape of the hand. A pastor may mimic the tongues of fire visiting Jesus’ followers on the day of Pentecost with fluttering fingers and various hand shapes.

The third dimension—the movement of the hand, arm or body—may be representative of an image or action. A finger moving across a map indicates geographical movement from one place to another; similarly, the shape of an object can be indicated by tracing, for example, a square or a triangle in the air. The opening and closing of a hand may denote a desire to shake hands, or indicate the opening of a flower blossom. A preacher may motion to a kneeling rail as a way of inviting people to come forward to receive the sacrament of communion.

### 5.4 Gestures as Memory Prompts

Preachers gesturing an invitation to participate in the Eucharist is merely one of many ways this form of nonverbal communication supplements the spoken word. Gestures also serve to aid a speaker in “finding” words. Have you ever lost your place when speaking to someone or an audience? Ever wondered what a preacher was trying to say when it seems he or she was “looking” for the right words? Gestures are beneficial whether a sermon has been planned and rehearsed, or if communication occurs
spontaneously during a church council meeting or pastoral care visit. Such gestures serve as cues to a congregation or meeting attendees as to what a pastor is seeking to communicate. F. Rauscher, R. Krauss and Y. Chen\textsuperscript{15} suggest that certain gestures both stimulate the ability to find a word, and help an audience understand what word the speaker is after. This is particularly true of preachers who do not depend on reading from a script but rather are more extemporaneous story-tellers. For the preacher working without a script, if she or he forgets the word for an auger, for example, a gesture mimicking the circular motion made by an auger will produce the word. P. Chawla and R. Krauss\textsuperscript{16} suggest that support for the lexical access theory comes from the observation that speakers are especially likely to gesture during unrehearsed speech, or when they use words that are unpredictable due to the surrounding context. This theory is important to acknowledge since research\textsuperscript{17} indicates that both adults and children (and we assume, preachers!) are more successful at finding correct words when they are allowed to gesture.

\textbf{5.5 Gestures and Sign-Language}

While presenting at a Northern Maine District workshop, a fellow clergy person shared with me his difficulty in communicating to a deaf woman in his congregation. He explained that he was not able to share “sign-language gestures” well enough to aid the

woman in receiving his sermons. This preacher assumed, as many do, that sign language is a system of gestures. However, gestures do not belong in the same category as sign language, since sign language includes the same underlying structure as spoken languages. This is important for church communities to understand, considering the growing number of churches, particularly large churches, now featuring a person alongside preachers offering sign language to congregations during worship.

Erica A. Cartmill and Susan Goldin-Meadow\(^\text{18}\) state that sign languages are fully structured languages with phonological, morphological, and syntactic rules. Each sign language includes layers of structure, including the use of signs. Morphological structure, pertaining to the use of signs; phonological structure, related to the use of subsign elements; and syntactic structure, which includes the putting-together of signs into sentences, serve as examples of such signs, differentiating sign language from the common gesture.

While some gestures occur naturally during speech and may be considered informal, there are those liturgical gestures which are more intentional and meaningful in the context of a worship service. Examples include making the sign of the cross, or lifting bread and cup during the Lord’s supper. While these gestures may be more common in a church setting, they differ from organic movements associated with more informal moments.

While some gestures share some commonality with sign languages (both involve nonverbal forms of communication), gestures lack the rigid structure and formality of both spoken and sign language. While gestures, with their lack of formality and adherence to specific structure evidenced in the preaching of sermons, may not produce the exact level of understanding with each communicant, gestures do allow for greater freedom for individual variation, according to Erica A. Carman and Susan Goldin-Meadow19.

“By their fruit you will recognize them” states Jesus in Matthew 7:20. Gestures are fruit by which recipients of sermons, pastoral care and teaching may recognize the intent and character of clergy providing these ministries. Just as a conductor of symphonies utilizes gestures as a way to lead an orchestra while producing beautiful music, a pastor employing appropriate gestures conducts his or her congregation in ways that inspire faithful discipleship and transformation.

6. Facial Gestures

_The preacher should be sensitive to the mind of his hearer and never overtax it, for the string of the soul when stretched more than it can bear can very easily snap.... [E]very preacher should give forth a sound more by his deeds than by his words; by good living he should imprint footsteps for men to follow rather than by speaking show them the path of truth._

—St. Gregory the Great, The Book of Pastoral Rule

Often truth is more accurately revealed by facial expressions, which serve to enhance the spoken word. Gestures expressed by the face augment words preached by clergy, while extending pastoral care in hospital or home settings, leading a study class, or working with children. The significance of facial expressions while administering the pastoral offices warrants close consideration in this chapter.

The elevated prose of Martin Luther King Jr. on August 28, 1963, in his famous “I Have a Dream Speech” on the mall in Washington, D.C., serves as a powerful example related to facial expressions. Yet with over 200,000 gathered, most people were not able to observe the face of Dr. King as he spoke. Those in the front of the crowd, particularly those who watched the speech on television, had the advantage of observing the orator’s facial expressions as he delivered his speech. King’s face related messages of joy, weariness, determination and empathy, producing an even more powerful presentation as his words worked in harmony with facial expressions. Dr. King’s example reminds us that the face serves as a primary means of nonverbal communication, offering much for preachers to emulate.
6.1 Reading Faces

Detecting nonverbal messages from Dr. King’s facial expressions is an example of physiognomy or “face reading.” Physiognomy is an ancient practice, dating to ancient Egypt, Arabia and China. Alan Fridlund and James Russell\(^1\) contend that Pythagoras likely originated the scientific study of physiognomy, which Hippocrates and Galen adapted for their medical diagnoses. Through the centuries physiognomy has developed into a practice that provides helpful clues when deciphering nonverbal communication.

The tendency to place such high emphasis on the face as a vehicle for communication, known as facial primacy, is common. For centuries, a less accurate means of discerning communication related to the face has derived from the appearance of the face itself. Faces come in round, triangular, and square shapes, along with a combination of all three. Facial features, including color, texture, nose, eyes, eyebrows and lashes, along with facial hair and hairlines, all influence the manner in which messages are received; parishioners are not exempt from such influences. Facial stereotypes, as outlined by F. P. Secord,\(^2\) have included the notion that those with high foreheads are more intelligent, thick lips denote sexual natures, while wide noses indicate toughness of character. Rather than making judgements based solely on the facial structure and pigmentation of a face, which are not trustworthy, observing facial expressions proves more accurate.


As B. Knutson\(^3\) concludes, people assign personality traits to others according to their facial expressions. As examples, when a person smiles warmly when greeted, s/he is assumed to be friendly and engaging. Conversely, when someone frowns or otherwise displays what might be described as a sour countenance, that person is considered unfriendly, mean and uncooperative. Imagine the impact a preacher’s facial expressions can have on a first-time visitor to a church. Powerful impressions are made, particularly on those who have not had the opportunity to become personally acquainted with a preacher. Such perceptions, while prevalent, do not serve as accurate measurements of nonverbal communication. Instead, it is the way in which the face is manipulated that serves as the primary manner by which to determine these messages. Hyisung Hwang and David Matsumoto\(^4\) term such facial movements *rapid signs*, which are changes to the face created by contractions of the facial muscles that move skin and change the shape of facial features. Therefore, reading faces (physiognomy) is not merely a matter of identifying static expressions. Instead, to obtain information through such nonverbal means, one must also notice how facial expressions change during conversations. Even if some words are not heard, noticing the expression on the speaker’s face will aid the listener in following the conversation.

6.2 Facial Expressions as Rapid Signs

As the name “rapid signs” suggests, many facial expressions are dynamic and change quickly. F. R. Ervin and J. Martin⁵ state that expressions of surprise and fear are among the emotions that are fleeting, and are thus usually quickly replaced by other emotions. The rapid sign of fear in a facial expression typically decreases rapidly as the person thinks about how to deal with the fearful situation. Since transitions between facial expressions depicting emotions and feelings are often fleeting, speakers and audiences alike must be attuned to each other’s facial expressions in order to catch the full import of this important form of nonverbal communication. As an example of these “rapid signs,” a preacher’s facial expression may depict sorrow and fear when speaking of Mary Magdalene’s mournful state as she makes her way to the tomb of Jesus. This expression would then change suddenly to expressions of shock and then joy when the preacher relates Mary’s confirmation of resurrection.

Since lip biting and compressions are ways we pacify ourselves when stressed, they serve as nonverbal cues (rapid signs) for both preachers and congregations. Lip contraction and biting are universal behaviors controlled by the limbic system, therefore they are reliable indicators of authentic communication.⁶ We may not realize how our lips look and feel, but others will take notice. In a church setting, lip biting practiced by a pastor conveys to a parishioner that he or she is stressed, which may subvert words being

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spoken. Conversely, lip biting or pressing observed by a pastor offering pastoral care may serve as a useful indicator when determining how someone is feeling.

Also included in the category of rapid signs are micro momentary facial expressions, or simply micro expressions. E. A. Haggard and F. S. Isaacs\(^7\) were early researchers in this field, identifying these rapid facial expressions after slowing down films of patients communicating with therapists. They discovered that along with obvious signals of changing facial expressions, numerous, more subtle changes were also occurring that were not previously detected. P. Ekman, W. V. Friesen and P. Ellsworth\(^8\) suggest that although such micro expressions are rare and difficult to detect, if noticed they can provide clues about what people are feeling as they either share or receive communication. These micro expressions are not only a means by which a congregation may enhance their reception of a sermon; they also become valuable tools used by preachers to determine how people are receiving a sermon. Subtle changes in facial expressions of congregation members may indicate interest, disinterest, engagement, boredom or confusion. These micro expressions observed by the preacher should serve as cues to change the way a sermon is being delivered.


6.3 Influence of Anatomy

Facial expressions are made possible by the twenty independent muscles in the face, all of which are innervated by a single nerve, the VIIth cranial nerve originating in the brain stem. While some facial expressions are voluntary, some are not. As Hwang and Matsumoto\(^9\) state, facial muscles fall under the neural control of two different areas of the brain: one that controls voluntary movements, the other controlling involuntary movements and reactions to circumstances. The fact that certain facial muscles vary in size, or in fact do not exist in some individuals, affects the manner in which facial expressions can occur. The muscle known as the zygomatic minor muscle (near the cheekbone) is not present in all humans, for example. P. Ekman and H. Oster\(^10\) conclude that despite individual differences in facial muscle structure, the muscles required to perform universal facial expressions are in place, except in rare situations involving developmental issues and malformation. These researchers also state that such muscles exist in infants and can be manipulated at an early age.

Acknowledging that some facial expressions are voluntary while others are not due to biological factors, aids in determining the genuine feelings held by a communicator. Expressions that are involuntary, that is, cannot be helped, serve as more reliable indicators of emotion being experienced and expressed compared to those that are voluntary.

\(^9\) Hwang and Matsumoto, *APA Handbook of Nonverbal Communication*,
6.4 Culture and Context

As is the case with gestures, the display and interpretation of facial expressions may depend on context, cultural norms, and even religious beliefs. Mark Knapp and Judith Hall\(^\text{11}\) provide this example: In one society, funeral attendees are expected to exhibit sadness and sorrow through various facial expressions, while in other societies facial expressions of joy and even ecstasy are expected. In the first example, cultural expectations are met by demonstrating sadness at the loss of a loved one, while in the second example, belief of future glory beyond earthly life is embraced, with the resultant expressions of hope and joy for the future. Therefore, for both preacher and congregation, facial expressions vary depending on expectations fostered by belief systems.

With the increasing ability to meet with people from varying cultures through advancements in visual technology, understanding these facial cues aids in supporting social communication. In my own context as pastor, since the church I serve is located in a university town, our congregation features more diversity compared to surrounding communities, including students from other parts of the United States and from other countries. Therefore, it is important for me as a communicator to recognize cultural differences when interpreting facial expressions, and at the same time understand the varying ways my own facial expressions may be interpreted. The inability to recognize these facial cues across varying cultures limits our ability to share information, whether that information is takes the form of a sermon or involves more casual conversation.

\(^{11}\) Knapp and Hall, *Nonverbal Communication in Human Interaction*, 299.
6.5 A Universal Language

While recognizing these cultural differences in interpretation, researchers also point to the universality of some facial expressions. Paul Ekman’s research concludes there are six expressions universally recognized and understood, including joy, sadness, surprise, fear, contempt/disgust, and anger. To assist in understanding these facial expressions as a means of nonverbal communication, Ekman and W. V. Friesen developed a classification system for various styles of facial expressions. While the styles may be based on personal display rules, with some being displayed in more or less extreme ways, there is generally a consistency in each case. Naturally, the various facial expression styles of preachers and congregations can also be considered within the categories of this system, which include:

**The Withholder.** The face inhibits expressions of actual feeling states. There is little facial movement.

**The Revealer:** This style is the opposite of the Withholder. The face leaves little doubt how the person feels—continually.

**The Unwitting Expressor:** This pattern usually pertains to a limited number of expressions that a person may feel have been masked: for example, “How did you know I was angry?”

**The Blanked Expressor:** In this style, the person is convinced an emotion is being portrayed, but others see only a blank face.

**The Substitute Expressor:** Here the facial expression shows an emotion other than the one the person thinks is being displayed.

**The Frozen-Affect Expressor:** This style manifests at least a part of an emotional display at all times. Some people are born with a facial configuration that, in a relaxed, neutral state, shows the downturned mouth of sadness; others habitually experience an

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emotion (like sadness) enough so traces of the emotional display are permanently etched into the face.\textsuperscript{14}

When a congregation assigns one or more of these categories to a pastor, it is better able to understand its leader’s tendencies and more accurately interpret his or her facial expressions. And conversely, the ability of a pastor to understand his or her listener’s facial expressions is helpful when sharing a sermon or engaging in personal conversations.

\section*{6.6 Facial Expressions as Social Tools}

While the traditional focus on explaining the function of facial gestures points to the expression of emotions, recent research suggests that such gestures are also “social tools” that impact social interaction. Fridlund and Russell\textsuperscript{15} argue that facial expressions become useful supplements while complementing verbal messages inherent during social interactions. For the pastor, these social interactions occur not only during the preaching of sermons, but also when attending to other pastoral duties such as leading meetings, teaching study classes, and visitation to those hospitalized and homebound. As the preacher’s facial expressions and spoken word work together, communication develops that modifies the trajectory of ongoing social interaction. Therefore, in everyday social interaction, face, voice and gesture are all linked. They are all signals that serve the same social end, working together in conjunction with each other.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., as cited by Knapp and Hall, \textit{Nonverbal Communication in Human Interaction}, 300.  
For those churches with a particular emphasis on living out the social gospel in their ministries, the understanding of facial expression as a social tool is important. To care “for the least of these” (Matthew 25:30) without coordinating appropriate facial gestures serves to undermine such ministries. Facial expressions indicative of love, caring, concern and joy serve as social tools during interaction between those offering, and those receiving the social gospel.

6.7 Transference of Emotions

Emotions expressed through facial expressions are known to stimulate the same emotions in people observing them. Known as emotional contagion,\textsuperscript{16} emotions and feelings may be transferred from person to person as they are demonstrated. If the goal of a preacher is to inspire joy in a congregation, that joy may be shared by the preacher exhibiting a facial expression indicative of joy. Carol Kinsey Goman\textsuperscript{17} states that facial gestures and their related emotions, both positive and negative, are infectious. Research suggests a tendency for people to subconsciously mimic observed facial expressions, which fosters a change in mood and attitude. Goman suggests that humans are hardwired to mimic expressions and emotions, and that this practice begins at infancy. Nine-month old babies, when looking at their mothers or fathers, engage longer with their parent and become more joyful when the attending parent displays facial expressions of joy. Conversely, when one-year olds observe someone exhibiting angry or sad facial

\textsuperscript{16} See also Chapter 3 above, pp. 52f.
\textsuperscript{17} Goman, \textit{Nonverbal Advantage}, 67.
expressions, they will mimic such expressions, leading to an alteration in mood. This
instinct continues into adulthood; as Goman states:

Each of us gives and responds to hundreds of facial expressions daily, from co-worker’s
grins to clenched-jaw displays around the conference table. Looked at another way, you
are part of an emotional chain-reaction (contagion) effect in your personal and
professional lives.  

The idea of emotion contagion is supported by Fridlund, who theorizes that
facial displays are signals that influence another’s actions.

The phenomenon of emotional contagion is important for preachers to recognize.
First, as suggested, a preacher must acknowledge the possibility of transferring her or his
emotions to a congregation or conversation partner through facial expressions. She or he
may be inadvertently passing on a type of emotion that will make an audience less
receptive than would otherwise be the case. But the opposite is also true: pastors should
be aware that facial expressions exhibited by a congregation, committee member, or
someone visited in a pastoral care context may alter their own psyche, perhaps negatively
impacting their ability to convey information most effectively.

6.8 Organizing Theories: Facial Expression Program

A helpful tool for communicators and audiences—including preachers and
congregations—attempting to comprehend and organize dominant assumptions and
theories related to the psychology of facial expression, was developed by J. A. Russell
and Fernandez-Dols. The Facial Expression Program (FEP) has provided guidance on

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18 Goman, *Nonverbal Advantage*, 68.
facial expression and emotion for several decades. While some of the assumptions have been questioned by researchers, the impact of the FEP in the field of facial expression and body language study has been significant and provides an important resource for communication in clergy settings.

The Facial Expression Program

There are a small number of basic emotions.

Each basic emotion is genetically determined, universal, and discrete, and includes a unique conscious experience, physiology, instrumental action, and-most important-a characteristic facial expression.

The production (encoding) and recognition (decoding) of these distinct facial expressions constitute a signaling system, similar across species, which is an evolutionary adaptation to some of life’s major problems. The facial expressions are thus easily recognized by all human beings regardless of their culture.

Any state lacking its own facial expression is not a basic emotion, and so discovering which facial expressions signal the same emotion universally provides a list of candidate basic emotions. The seven candidates found so far are happiness, surprise, fear, anger, contempt, disgust, and sadness.

All emotions other than basic ones are subcategories or mixtures (patterns, blends, combinations) of basic emotions.

Voluntary facial movements can simulate spontaneous expressions. Voluntary expressions are deceptive in nature, and culturally conditioned according to “display rules” dictating when an expression can be displayed freely or inhibited, exaggerated, or masked with a different expression. The true emotion “leaks” through the camouflage and can be detected through facial measurement.

Emotional state is revealed by facial measurement. Thus, verbal reports can by bypassed, permitting access to the emotions of newborns and of others unable or unwilling to speak truthfully.

The distinct subjective feelings associated with each emotion are due, at least in part, to proprioceptive feedback from facial movements. This “facial feedback hypothesis” has been offered as one means by which an individual “knows” which emotion he or she is feeling.

Deliberately manipulating the face into the appropriate configuration creates the neurological pattern of the corresponding emotion. For instance, wrinkling the nose

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creates the neurological pattern of disgust. Facial manipulation can then be used in the laboratory to reveal the physiological signature of each emotion.

The ability to recognize the emotion in a facial expression in innate rather than culturally determined, and may be seen as early as just after birth.

The mental categories by means of which recognition occurs (in the self as facial feedback or in others through facial signaling) are genetically rather than culturally determined, and the emotion-words we use thus designate innate and universal categories. Other languages may use other names, but the categories names are the same.

The meaning (“signal value”) of a facial expression is fixed by nature an invariant across changes in the context in which it occurs.

By embracing the information detailed within the twelve points of the Facial Expression Program, pastors and their constituents become better positioned to communicate effectively. For example, recognizing that emotional state revealed through facial expressions may serve to indicate how someone is connecting with communication being offered. Looking for both the basic and combinations of emotions as included in the FEP also serves a pastor well when determining how information is being received by congregants.

Along with the Facial Expression Program, other contributions helping to inform clergy have been developed, including a taxonomy of over one thousand facial expressions recorded by N. Chovil during conversations.21 As conveniently summarized by Judee Burgoon, Laura K. Guerrero and Kory Floyd the taxonomy includes syntactic displays, which display grammatical information; speaker semantic displays, which display content and can be redundant or non-redundant with the verbal information; listener semantic displays (which are by definition non-redundant with the speaker’s words); and adaptors (which lack meaning).22

This work is relevant to the preacher since the displays indicate that facial expressions may be used as “emphasizers, underliners, [and] question markers”\textsuperscript{23} as communication is shared between clergy and others. These displays also include indications of personal reactions, portrayals of the action being described, and actions such as facial shrugs. Listener displays facilitate the understanding of someone’s personal reactions. An example of a listener display when interacting with clergy includes a confused look (facial expression) suggesting that the listener is struggling to comprehend. On the other hand, a display (facial expression) indicating comprehension and understanding will typically serve to encourage the speaker as the dialogue continues.

Derek J. Morris has recently called attention to a classic communication study by Dr. Albert Mehrabian which contends that only 7 percent of communication includes spoken words, 38 percent involves the manner in which the words are shared (oral interpretation), and 55 percent of communication happens nonverbally.\textsuperscript{24} This is a powerful lesson for preachers, and points to the importance of one specific means of nonverbal communication: facial expressions. As Morris explains, when a preacher says “Jesus loves you,” there should be a different expression than when stating “The wages of sin is death.” The spoken word, when combined with appropriate facial expressions,\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.\textsuperscript{24} Derek J. Morris, “Effective Sermon Delivery,” \textit{Ministry: International Journal for Pastors} (September 2017): 6, citing Albert Mehrabian, \textit{Silent Messages} (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1971), 43.
provides a powerful means for a preacher to connect the good news to his or her community.
7. Body Posture

We who formerly treasured money and possessions more than anything else now hand over everything we have to a treasury for all and share it with everyone who needs it. We who formerly hated and murdered one another now live together and share the same table. We pray for our enemies and try to win those who hate us.

—Justin the Martyr, First Apology

Transformation typically includes a change of attitude, a change often indicated through body language. Considering that John Wesley emphasized the importance of posture and deportment, it would behoove modern clergy to be attentive in this area. Body posture will enhance or detract from the ability of someone to receive a sermon, teaching, or pastoral care. In the opening quote to this chapter, Justin Martyr indicates transition from a worldly, materialistic, ego-centric spirit to an attitude of Christ. What evidence suggests conversion has taken place? The scriptures reveal Jesus providing a measuring stick that aids in determining the attitude of self and others: “Therefore, by their fruits you will know them” (Matthew 7:20). Though words and deeds might be the most immediate fruit to which Jesus is referring, by extension such fruit is often accompanied by body language revealing one’s heart, mind and attitude.

Before a children’s message was delivered by their Sunday school teacher one morning, a six-year old whispered to me: “Miss Becky looks unhappy today!” Miss Becky is a lovely woman who provides the children’s message each Sunday morning, always maintaining a bright, sunny disposition. Since the young girl made this judgment before Miss Becky spoke, I asked her why she thought her teacher was unhappy. At this, the child crossed her arms in front of her, mimicking Miss Becky. Body posture
suggested to the six-year old that her teacher was in a foul mood, which is ironic since Miss Becky was about to provide a wonderful message about the warmth of God’s love (thankfully, she uncrossed her arms before delivering the message).

7.1 Barriers to Communication

Along with subliminally communicating a foul mood with her crossed arms, Miss Becky’s posture supported researchers’ argument that a crossing of arms creates a barrier for communication. Hiding behind a barrier is a normal response we learn at an early age. Allan and Barbara Pease\(^1\) confirm that children instinctively hide behind parents, siblings and objects when feeling threatened. With maturity, hiding behind people and objects transitions to the folding of arms across the front of the individual’s body as a means of protection. As pastors communicate, what is often an unconscious effort to block a perceived threat or undesirable circumstances (an emotion felt by many when speaking publicly)—the folding of arms—becomes a barrier to communication.

Arm folding, along with subliminally creating a way to protect one’s self, also becomes a way to bring self-comfort and assurance when stressed. Children are often hugged and embraced by parents, siblings and other caregivers when in trying circumstances. As adults, research suggests\(^2\) we attempt to recreate those same comforting feelings by embracing ourselves with an arms-crossed gesture, replacing the security experienced by other arms with our own. Since public speaking is feared by many, arm folding becomes a natural body posture response to that anxiety.


\(^2\) Ibid., 91.
Along with creating a barrier between a communicator and audience, crossed arms suggest the speaker lacks self-confidence. When pastors are placed in positions of authority, that authority potentially becomes diminished depending on the body language of the pastor. While clergy may subliminally be attempting to bring assurance and comfort to themselves, crossing of the arms communicates a lack of confidence. Loss of authority in turn creates another barrier to receiving communication. A congregation may question the confidence of a preacher when a barrier to communication is presented through crossed arms. Uncertainty as to the validity of the message offered by the preacher’s seeming lack of confidence may prompt the listener to question the value of the information being presented.

Crossed arms as a means of protection and comfort is a practice not limited to novice pastors and other public speakers. Even those with years of experience, including politicians and people made famous through media and entertainment, display this type of body posture. Arm crossing in this context may not be as obvious, yet it still exists in various forms. For example, those who wish to exude an air of confidence may bring their arms together while adjusting a shirt or jacket sleeve. Others may bring their arms together to adjust a watch band or bracelet; the main goal is not a clothing or accessory adjustment; rather, the purpose of such body language is to shield one’s self against others when placed in an uncomfortable or even threatening public setting. Prince Charles of England commonly employs this form of body language, as he adjusts his cuff-links on his shirt to give himself a sense of security while walking across an open space in the presence of an audience.
7.2 Objects as Barriers

Objects are also incorporated into forms of protective body posture. For example, a person walking into an important business meeting attended by those in positions of power will often place their briefcase or business folder in front of them as a barrier between themselves and the subliminal threat. A preacher may position a hymnal or Bible (or both) in front of their body for the same purpose—to provide a barrier. For those trained to interpret such body language, this indicates the preacher may be experiencing anxiety and nervousness, and thus may lack self-confidence.

Other examples of using items as barriers to communication include handbags, purses, and cell phones. When in a public setting, particularly when meeting people for the first time, such items and devices are held tightly in front of those who possess them—again, as a means of creating a barrier between them and a subliminal threat. Such body posture communicates a lack of openness to relationship, resulting in negative first impressions. Even flowers may be used as barriers; referencing English royalty again, Queen Anne regularly clutches flowers in front of her while walking in public as a way of providing comfort to herself. The flowers and the necessary position of her arms while holding them creates a barrier between herself and those who may come too close; occupying her hands in this manner also provides her an excuse not to shake hands or allow her hand to be kissed.
One author\(^3\) describes how some executives make judgements about prospective employees based on their behavior on coffee breaks during the interview process. Specifically, one senior executive claimed he could evaluate the comfort and confidence level of interviewees by how high they held their coffee cups. It was his observation that the more insecure individuals felt, the higher they held their coffee. People with their hands held at waist level were considered more comfortable than those with hands chest high.

### 7.3 Body Posture and Attitudes

Elizabeth Kuhnke\(^4\) suggests attitudes related through communication are actually delivered by body posture before any words are spoken. Those wishing to demonstrate an attitude of confidence as preachers, or those interviewing for employment, may convey the desired attitude by standing (or sitting) upright, chest expanded, head lifted upward from the crown, chin held in a horizontal position, weight evenly distributed. Body postures opposite of these positions communicate lack of confidence or apathy.

Unlike eye contact and gestures, which may be specific indicators of emotion, body posture, including the crossing of arms or legs, are more indicative of attitude. Certain body postures suggest attitudes related to what Albert Mehrabian\(^5\) describes as *liking behavior*. Communication becomes more beneficial when an attitude of likability exists. Specific body postures imply an attitude of liking behavior and an inclination

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\(^3\) Goman, *Nonverbal Advantage*, 126.


toward more meaningful conversation. They include a slight lean forward when communicating, more openness of arms and body, more direct body orientation, more postural relaxation, closer proximity and increased eye contact. Opposite behaviors are associated with attitudes that do not inspire meaningful conversation, and may even be interpreted as disliking.

Some body postures accompany attitudes of reluctance, intimidation, or disinterest while involved in dialogue with another person or audience. Other postures suggest an attitude of openness to such relationships. Goman⁶ argues that in closed body postures, arms are folded, legs are crossed, and the body is turned away from those either offering or receiving information. Arm position serves as a nonverbal cue; an open arm posture is often demonstrated with someone who is liked, while arms tend to be folded across bodies when indifference or dislike for the other person is the attitude of the communicator. These postures, including a lowering of the head, may also signify a perceived lower status and thus an attitude of subservience. A rounding of the upper body while hiding the hands also serves as closed signs, suggesting vulnerability. Any and all of these postures discourage relationship and reception of communication. In contrast, postures such as uncrossed arms and legs, with arms positioned either at the side of the body or extended slightly toward the partner through subtle gesturing suggest openness, accessibility, and an overall willingness to interact.

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Open and closed body postures may also serve as nonverbal cues to an audience regarding the attitude and confidence of the speaker. Individuals with open body positions are perceived as more persuasive than those demonstrating closed positions. When a determination has been made, even subliminally, that a preacher lacks confidence in either him- or herself or in the material being presented, a congregation becomes less engaged with the presentation.

When various body postures are not offered singly but instead are combined, different nonverbal messages related to attitude become manufactured. These body postures in certain combinations, often displayed by clergy unknowingly, will produce a variety of positive, negative and mixed nonverbal messages. As examples, leaning back with a closed body posture indicates disinterest or disagreement. Leaning back with an open body posture may indicate contemplation. Leaning forward with a closed body may imply hostility, while leaning forward with an open body designates interest or agreement. Leaning back while sitting with hands placed behind the head suggests for some a superior attitude. Finally, leaning sideways and slightly back with asymmetrical arm and leg positions and loosely held hands can be a sign of relaxation and ease, which then encourages a state of relaxation and ease for the communicating partner. The impact these body posture combinations have, particularly for those attending meetings with a pastor is significant, since nonverbal messages may contrast with the intentions of pastor and attendees alike.
Educational research supports a correlation between body postures, including leaning in particular directions, and the academic success of students. Such nonverbal behaviors exhibited by teachers either enhanced or detracted from the learning environment of the classroom. Students who mimicked the teacher’s positive attitudes (communicated nonverbally through posture) fostered increased chances for happiness and academic success. Mark Knapp and Judith Hall state that while posture is typically considered merely one of several types of nonverbal signals, posture in particular serves to demonstrate the amount of interest people have with each other, as is the case with teachers and students, pastors and congregations. For example, a forward-leaning posture indicates a desire for higher involvement and interest in continuing relationship and dialogue. Positive feelings toward another may be indicated by a leaning-in toward the person or audience being addressed. A preacher seeking to engage with a congregation provides an invitation for engagement when positioning his body toward people, as opposed to backing away from them.

Research also indicates individuals who lean forward tend to facilitate verbal response. A pastor leading a study group may foster increased dialogue with a class when presenting him or herself in this way. This simple act of posture has the ability to increase conversation, or in the case of leaning away from a person or audience, decrease conversation.

8 Knapp and Hall, Nonverbal Communication in Human Interaction, 9.
9 Ibid.
Similarly, leaning away from a person or congregation signals feelings of indifference, negativity or dislike. According to Goman,\textsuperscript{10} leaning backward is a hardwired response from the limbic brain, as we subconsciously attempt to distance ourselves from someone or something we deem as unpleasant or disagreeable. In pastoral care situations, leaning away from those receiving visitation may subvert words of support and concern offered through prayer.

\textbf{7.4 Shared Behavior}

Along with certain body postures which encourage increased or diminished dialogue, behaviors and postures are actually often mimicked by those receiving communication. Often we witness the practice when a parent attempts to lighten the mood of their toddler by offering smiles and joy-filled words to their young one. I know of, and am thankful for, certain pastors in our district who light up a room and lift the moods of those gathered in the room with their positive dispositions. T. L. Chartrand and J. A. Bargh\textsuperscript{11} state that human beings are inclined to mimic body language and behaviors, including the posture of those with whom they are conversing. Termed the “chameleon effect” (also described as “mirroring” and “postural congruence”), such mimicry may alter the way communication is both delivered and received. If a speaker mimics the crossed arms of the person receiving the communication, a different dynamic (closed) becomes established between preacher and congregation. Conversely, if a person

\textsuperscript{10} Goman, \textit{Nonverbal Advantage}, 29.
previously demonstrating a closed body posture eventually mimics the open body posture of a speaker, the dynamic between speaker and audience becomes altered, promoting a more open and communicative relationship. Research also suggests that while mirroring may positively influence the delivery and reception of communication, it must be done naturally and subconsciously. M. LaFrance and W. Ickes\textsuperscript{12} state if someone suspects mirroring behaviors on the part of a conversational partner, s/he is likely to feel manipulated, diminishing the chance for effective and receptive communication.

Postural congruence also serves to indicate the manner in which communication is occurring. J. B. Bavelas\textsuperscript{13} maintains the absence or presence of mimicry may indicate whether participants are talking \textit{with} each other, or \textit{at} each other. When body posture between participants is matched, the communication relationship is considered open. By contrast, when body postures are not matched, conversation falls into the “talking at” category, rendering it largely counterproductive.

As is the case with facial expressions, matching of posture may also foster a phenomenon known as \textit{emotional contagion}. Hatfield et al.\textsuperscript{14} conclude that the display of emotion from one participant often becomes the emotion of the other. Such emotions may have their genesis in displays of posture. A person featuring a closed, inward position may indicate an attitude of sadness or rejection, which then inspires a similar emotion in the partner. If the emotion is displayed by the one interpreting the body

\textsuperscript{14} Hatfield et al., \textit{Emotional Contagion}, 79. On this phenomenon see also above, pp. 52f. and 86f.
posture, emotional contagion may occur, with the emotion of sadness or rejection “caught” by the communication partner.

In 2004, United Methodist delegates attending their General Conference approved a proposal from United Methodist Communications to continue their marketing campaign centered on these words: “Open Hearts. Open Minds. Open Doors.” The spirit these words convey may be enhanced or diminished depending on body posture practices of clergy and their congregations. If churches intend to be open, warm and welcoming to each other and their communities, words offered must be matched with helpful body posture.
8. Gender

Unless the man who means to win understands every aspect of the art (of preaching), the devil knows how to introduce his agents at a single neglected spot and so to plunder the flock.

—St. John Chrysostom, On the Priesthood

In the early church and during ensuing centuries, preaching was embraced as an art to be practiced only by men. While some faith communities continue to restrict female participation, oration and preaching by women have become more commonplace. According to the United Methodist Clergywomen Retention Survey conducted in 2010-2012, female clergy serving local congregations has increased by 20 to 30 percent in all five U.S. jurisdictions.¹ The rise in female pastoral leadership is even more prevalent in the district I serve (Northern Maine), where female clergy outnumber their male counterparts. The increasing ratio of church leadership positions held by women should prompt us to examine the role gender plays in both the offering and interpretation of nonverbal communication.

The gendered body is an essential part of the liturgical context of preaching but is often neglected in studies related to gender and preaching. While written sermon texts are examined with conclusions based on linguistic features, the nonverbal, paralinguistic characteristics inherent in gender-based communication too often receive little attention and interest. Ruth Pidwell² concludes that although for some the body is no longer a

barrier to women assuming positions of leadership in the church, gender continues to influence the manner in which information is received due to assumptions that are typically subliminal. In church settings, congregants assign a “feminine preaching style” to be distinct from a discursive, rational, and hierarchical “masculine” style. Attributes of strength, power, and authority are often associated with masculinity, while emotions, passivity, and feelings (seemingly non-academic) are associated with female preachers. These assumptions influence how information is accepted by congregants.

Complicating studies of gender communication is the fact that people differ in the ways they perceive gender-based language. Depending on early and sustained influences, a person might expect men to relate in stereotypically masculine ways, emphasizing control, competition, status and analytical thinking, while conversely, associating feminine-based communication traits with feelings, emotions, and personal relationships. On the other hand, others do not hold so firmly to such stereotypes. Researchers\(^3\) suggest that perceptions of gender are formed as a result of multiple influences, including biology, internal psychological processes, and social norms and institutions. Cultural influences are constantly at work, influencing the biological elements and the values attached to them.

\(^3\) Victoria Pruin DeFrancisco, Catherine Helen Palczewski, Danielle Dick McGeough, *Gender in Communication* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2014).
8.1 Feminist Theory: Three Views

As proposed by Pidwell, the feminist theory as related to the perception of body and
gender includes three views which are helpful in assessing perceptions held by the church
community. The essentialist theory adjoins the female body with the area of the profane,
pointing to the biological differences between women and men. Feminist researchers
propose that women’s oppression in society may be linked to a combining of Greek
philosophy and Christian doctrine. Historically, (male) philosophers and theologians
assigned qualities of reason, prayer, abstract thought and rationality as activities of the
soul. Conversely, sex, intercourse, and childbearing were confined to the area of the
profane. Women, therefore, were thought of as the gender most inexorably linked with
the body. Therefore, over the centuries females were denied access to platforms of
philosophy and religious leadership. This notion has been embraced by theorists when
pointing to the oppression of women as an accepted practice. Patriarchal control of the
church results according to this theory, since the female body is described as being in a
“fallen state,” as contrasted with the soul, or that which makes a person “essentially
human.”

Secondly, a social constructionist view “holds that values, orientations, and
features of the social field are inscribed on the body and realized through it.” This
includes the idea that society itself imprints on the body an understanding of what it
means to be a “sexed subject.” With this theory, social constructionists reject the notion

5 Ibid., 104.
that the body may be accurately perceived prior to discourse. J. Butler\textsuperscript{6} proposes that words not only say something, they have the power to “do something.” This concept adds significance to the power assigned to the “performativity” of language, which relates to the construction or “performance” of gender. Therefore, in contrast to essentialist theory, a social constructionist view promotes gender as something that occurs in performance, including preaching. As Butler states: “Gender ought not to be constructed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts.”\textsuperscript{7}

Embodied subjectivity is a third view pertaining to body and gender, which proposes, according to H. Moore,\textsuperscript{8} that the body is an interface, a threshold between the material and the symbolic. This idea suggests that the body is a medium through which observers are able to receive communication, by both verbal and nonverbal means. We may understand embodied subjectivity as a means by which we may analyze gender in preaching performances, as suggested by Pidwell.\textsuperscript{9} Performance in preaching incorporates the “word” being “unfleshed.” This expression “word made flesh” takes us to the incarnation, yet also challenges categories of mind-soul versus body-flesh that have influenced Christianity through the incorporations of first Greek and later Cartesian dualistic thought.

\textsuperscript{6} J. Butler, \textit{Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity} (New York: Routledge, 1990), 34.  
\textsuperscript{7} Butler, \textit{Gender Trouble}, 140.  
\textsuperscript{8} H. Moore, “‘We Stand’: Sex, Gender and Sexual Difference,” \textit{Feminist Review} 46 (Spring 1994): 78-95.  
\textsuperscript{9} Pidwell, “The Word Made Flesh,” 181.
8.2 Cultural Influences

These theories (essentialist, social constructionist, embodied subjectivity) provide a helpful foundation when considering expectations related to gender and communication roles observed in existing culture. This is true in the United States, where underlying assumptions regarding gender are often different in church communities in the Deep South compared to those in New England or the Pacific Northwest. In some cultures, adherence to traditional feminine and masculine roles is dictated, while other groups are less strict in this area. In such groups, it is common for women to display masculine traits while men may exhibit feminine traits. It must also be recognized that gender roles related to communication are ever-changing, particularly in specific areas of the world. As an example, North American culture has experienced significant changes in gender role expectations in the past fifty years. C. E. Medvid and W. K. Rollins¹⁰ propose it has become more acceptable for women to assume roles typically associated with men, including church leadership, and for men to participate in roles and tasks previously reserved for women. With this evolution in mind, it becomes increasingly important to avoid defining another person solely on the basis of biological gender differences. Instead, an effective practitioner of communication bases information and opinions of sex and gender role acceptance on nonverbal cues offered by the communicator (independent of gender alone.)

Kathleen S. Verderber\textsuperscript{11} points to other examples of how culture, particularly American culture, reinforces stereotypes, including the admonishment of a young girl by telling her to “hush up and act like a lady.” Young boys who display emotions may be instructed to “buck up and act like a man.” These practices serve to influence how those of a particular gender are to act, behave and react to others, which eventually translates to the manner by which communication clergy of either gender is received. Depending on influences experienced during both formative and ongoing years, people will differ in the extent to which they embrace these stereotypes associated with gendered co-cultures. Some may not strongly identify with such thinking, and may not behave in accord with these expectations. Therefore, such people will likely not expect such behaviors from those, including preachers, offering communication.

Speaking to cultural influences, DeFrancisco, Palczewski and McGeough\textsuperscript{12} propose that gendered bodily communication is a means through which cultural expectations for binary and inequitable gender identities are maintained, challenged and changed. These identities influence the manner in which information is received by people, depending on how their perceptions of gender have been established and maintained. Therefore, gender plays a role in how micro messages are received by congregations via nonverbal means of communication. This begins with the perception that women and men demonstrate distinctive patterns of nonverbal behavior. As an

\textsuperscript{11} Kathleen S. Verderber, Rudolph F. Verdeber, and Deanna D. Sellnow, \textit{Communicate!} (Boston: Wadsworth, 2014), 53.
\textsuperscript{12} DeFranisco et al., \textit{Gender in Communication}, 22.
example, a study by N. J. Briton and J. A. Hall\textsuperscript{13} demonstrates that people, due to inherent cultural expectations, consider women to be more nonverbally communicative compared to men. Women are perceived to be more adept at sending and understanding nonverbal messages. Males, by contrast, are thought of as louder, more interruptive and less disciplined with body movements and gestures. Nancy Henley and Jo Freeman\textsuperscript{14} conclude that due to cultural assumptions, men are alleged to rely on overt gestures and are more likely to use their hands to express themselves. Women, on the other hand, are thought to use more subtle and restrained gestures and exhibit deferential gestures, such as lowering the eyes when interrupted or confronted. Communicators, including preachers, who employ body language not in synch with these cultural expectations, may encounter difficulty in relating to audiences and congregations until these expectations are set aside.

\textit{8.3 Early Influences, Assumptions and the Role of Genetics}

Mark L. Knapp and Judith A. Hall\textsuperscript{15} offer that differences in nonverbal communication appear early in life, and are shaped by environment. These researchers conclude that gender roles, rather than defined by limited means, are an amalgamation of behaviors, attitudes, and traits defined as desirable for a particular gender. In North American society, gender assumptions assigned to males include assertiveness,

\begin{thebibliography}{15}
\bibitem{KnappHall} Knapp and Hall, \textit{Nonverbal Communication in Human Interaction}, 432.
\end{thebibliography}
autonomy, dominance and task orientation. In contrast, the role of females is typically associated with gentleness, empathy and interpersonal orientation. These early perceptions foster stereotypes of male versus female clergy which serve to influence reception of nonverbal communication, with differences corresponding to these role prescriptions. Therefore, there may exist an expectation as to how men and women are to behave and communicate as church leaders and preachers. In order to receive information adequately from clergy, it becomes important to acknowledge these expectations based on stereotypes and perceptions of gender learned at an early age.

In distinguishing between males and females, R. Birdwhistell\(^{16}\) describes genetic differences as primary sex differences and anatomical differences as secondary sex differences. Birdwhistell also acknowledges other tertiary differences related to nonverbal behavior distinguishing males from females that are not necessarily associated with chromosomal, hormonal or anatomical differences. These non-biological factors are manufactured in part by the socialization of gender-roles taught by society, as proposed by Judith A. Hall.\(^{17}\) Nonverbal gender differences and their associated stereotypes suggest that females are trained to establish close relationships characterized by equality, to be sensitive to others, and to interpret accurately the behavior of others. Conversely, males are socialized to assert a spirit of dominance, to be proactive, and to attract and maintain an audience. These female versus male perceptions often lead to assumptions


that female clergy are more adept in pastoral care settings, while males are more proficient at preaching.

Nonverbal male and female socialized behavior related to power and dominance, however, may be more closely connected with the masculinity or femininity of a task. As an example, males display more nonverbal power-related behavior than females when the tasks are masculine in character or lack a gender link. In contrast, women display more nonverbal power-related behavior than men when the task is feminine in behavior, as proposed by researchers.\textsuperscript{18} These assumptions may lead some congregations to believe that males are better equipped to lead worship and preach, while females are better suited to leading children in a Sunday school setting.

The \textit{expressivity demand theory} proposed by M. LaFrance, M. A. Hecht and A. Noyes\textsuperscript{19} provides insight into genetics and sex differences in nonverbal behavior. Based on their research, it is a combination of gender, relationship and situational contexts that produce various levels of expressivity. Females, for example, typically meet expectations related to expressivity. In care-giving roles women smile more often than men, particularly when people involved are equal in status or power. However, when status and power differ, men are more like women, since both smile more often when in lower positions (laity) while smiling less when in a higher position (clergy). In this research,


situations often dictate the amount of expressivity demonstrated by either gender. While considering these differences, C. F. Epstein\(^\text{20}\) emphasizes the importance of keeping in mind that (a) sex differences are more apparent in children and young adults compared to older adults; (b) context frequently overrides sex differences; and, (c) people differ in the acceptance of gender roles.

### 8.4 Communication Interpretation Based on Gender

These differences referred to by Epstein and other researchers should prompt us to ask questions related to the influence gender maintains when receiving communication from a speaker. Are there differences between males and females when interpreting information offered by a preacher? The role gender plays in the ability to perceive nonverbal communication has been addressed by numerous scholars, including that offered by J. A. Hall.\(^\text{21}\) This research concludes that in most cases, females score higher than males during tests related to judging the meaning of nonverbal cues. Women also score higher when participating in a test known as TONCK (Test of Nonverbal Cue Knowledge), which includes the ability to remember a communicator’s appearance and nonverbal cues. This research also presents the case that the female advantage in decoding nonverbal cues exists from an early age and remains into adulthood.

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A system used to test profiles of nonverbal sensitivity (PONS) developed by researchers\textsuperscript{22} at Northeastern University reveals consistent differences in the ability to decode nonverbal communication. Females scored higher than males in 80\% of 133 different groups participating in the PONS test, which included a variety of nationalities. An examination of the research confirmed that this gender difference existed across multiple ages of the participants.

While research suggests the superior ability of females to judge nonverbal cues in certain areas, there are other examples where male versus female abilities are not pronounced enough to make such assertions. In addition, there are areas where men score higher than women. N. G. Rotter and G. S. Rotter\textsuperscript{23} state that men are more adept at decoding cues related to emotions of anger. According to their research, one gender is not more adept than the other when determining if falsehoods may be indicated through nonverbal cues.

Due to the evidence supporting female’s superiority over males recognizing nonverbal language, a common stereotype exists regarding women and their abilities related to interpersonal sensitivity. As Knapp and Hall\textsuperscript{24} conclude, it is likely this perception of female’s greater skill at decoding nonverbal language contributes to the layperson’s notion of “female intuition” of pastors compared to male pastors. Intuition,

\textsuperscript{24} Knapp and Hall, \textit{Nonverbal Communication in Human Interaction}, 76.
according to these researchers, is an ill-defined term that can mean numerous things, from empathy to extrasensory perception.

8.5 Shared Expressions

Along with differences between genders, there are elements of nonverbal communication that remain consistent between the sexes. Goman\textsuperscript{25} proposes the positioning of arms, legs and bodies serve as nonverbal cues independent of gender. Those resisting information shared by a pastor, whether male or female, often fold arms and or legs as a subliminal barrier. Lowering of one’s head may indicate disinterest, or suggest a subservient gesture. Hiding hands by placing them under one’s legs can be an indication of vulnerability or confusion during staff meetings or study groups. Such practices are shared by males and females alike and should serve as cues to communicators as to how information is being received.

Along with closed body postures, open body postures are similar in either gender. For example, uncrossed legs and arms open with palms exposed indicate comfort and receptivity to information. Arms relaxed at the sides of the body generally indicate a sign of openness, accessibility, and an overall willingness to interact. Therefore, generalities regarding nonverbal communication can be made regardless of gender, including practices involving eye contact, gestures, and body positioning.

As the church continues to be blessed by the increasing number of female clergy amidst its ranks, understanding people’s assumptions and tendencies connected to the

\textsuperscript{25} Goman, \textit{Nonverbal Advantage}, 111.
interpretation of gender-based communication must also increase. In doing so, the church becomes better positioned as an instrument for transformation as we journey forward together.
9. Conclusion

9.1 Jumping Off the Diving Board

The experience and conversation is still very clear to me, even though it took place a few decades ago. I was preparing for my first “live shot” as a television meteorologist, assigned to provide “live” reports from a busy street corner as a blizzard swept through our community. Unlike news anchors, meteorologists do not read from scripts provided through teleprompters; yet weather maps at least provide a story board weather anchors can refer to when delivering forecasts from a studio. However, these props do not exist when reporting from the field. It is just you, addressing the camera as your audience, while an anxious producer provides time cues through an ear piece.

As I was nervously preparing for my first live-shot, the news director stopped by my desk while sharing these words of advice: “Steve, do not even try to memorize a script for your live shots. You are informed, you know the forecast, all the information you need is inside of you. Now you just need to trust yourself, and jump off the diving board.” It was true. I knew the forecast inside and out. I knew what needed to be said, and in what order it needed to be said. I knew the name of the public works official I was going to interview during my live shot, and I knew what questions to ask. I was equipped because I was prepared. Now I had to jump off the diving board, trusting that I knew how to swim.

Like television meteorologists broadcasting from the field, clergy, too, must adequately prepare themselves to offer ministry in its various forms, particularly in the area of preaching. This thesis has argued that along with prayer, reading, and the
exegesis of texts, it is critical for clergy to understand the role nonverbal communication maintains while attending to the offices of a pastorate. Without such knowledge, a pastor may be more susceptible to sinking rather than swimming.

9.2 Nonverbal Communication as a Spiritual Discipline

The traditional spiritual disciplines such as prayer, study, and discernment are typically practiced due to a desire to help create a space—set the stage—for something transcendent to occur. Yet doing so does not guarantee that divine activity will take place—and, in fact, it is not necessary to concern ourselves for when divine activity might take place; the Spirit moves where the Spirit will. Improving nonverbal communication may be understood in this same way. While not guaranteeing a moving of the Spirit, working to understand and practice helpful nonverbal practices, particularly done with proper attitude and motivation, helps to set that stage.

Recently I referred to the concept “means of grace” when delivering a sermon to my congregations. As has been explained to me, means of grace include those conduits God uses to impart God’s presence. Examples of these channels include scripture, prayer, fellowship and the sacraments; all are used as connectors by God to impart grace. Certainly, God is able to impart grace despite inadequate nonverbal communication practices. Yet I do believe the presence of God may be more readily accessed when we are intentional in using helpful eye contact, gestures and other forms of nonverbal communication when leading worship. Perhaps Proverbs 16:30 provides an example of how one might speak of God’s grace, yet have their words subverted by nonverbal means: “One who winks the eyes plans perverse things; one who compresses the lips
brings evil to pass.” It is possible to interpret this ancient adage as acknowledgment of
the impact of facial gestures, and by extension all nonverbal body language. Both clergy
and laity would benefit by prioritizing nonverbal communication, even thinking of it as a
form of spiritual discipline, particularly considering the impact this practice has on
sharing the gospel.

9.3 Where to Go From Here?

This thesis has taken the reader through a great deal of information, some of it
quite technical, which may be overwhelming. Therefore, I offer the following five “first
steps” for those wishing to incorporate this work into their ministry.

1) We may learn from the methods of John Wesley. While studying to become an
ordained priest in the Church of England, Wesley was elected a fellow at Lincoln
College, a smaller college within Oxford University. Reuniting with his brother Charles
at Oxford, the Wesley brothers began to meet regularly with other students for Bible
study, prayer, discussion, and a consistent sharing of the sacraments. Other students,
noticing the regularity of their meetings, made sport of their efforts, first labeling them
“Bible Moths,” then “The Holy Club,” and finally, “Methodists,” since they were so
methodical with their spiritual disciplines. Due to the methodical nature and regularity
of their meetings, these practices became ingrained in these men. Prayer, study and the
sacraments became part of their nature and living due to the regularity in which they were
embraced. Learning from Wesley’s example, by consistently and—yes—methodically
immersing ourselves in spiritual practices while also attending regularly to helpful
nonverbal communication skills, we are able to incorporate these practices naturally into
our daily living. Whether the goal is to lose weight, become a better student, run longer
distances, or become financially independent, employing methodical habits toward
achieving these goals is key, which is also true if one’s goal is to develop nonverbal
communication skills beneficial in pastoral ministry settings.

2) Watch yourself. For twenty-two years as a television meteorologist, I developed a
practice of watching a recording of my forecast at least once every three weeks. Each
time I watched myself, I always picked up on something I was doing with my body that
had an impact on the way I was communicating the forecast. Of course, toward the
beginning of my career there were many corrections to make. Yet even after twenty
years, there were always nuances that needed to be attended to. The point: you will
never notice what needs to be changed unless you watch yourself. Set a goal to record
yourself delivering a sermon, teaching a class, or otherwise interacting with others
consistently. Developing helpful nonverbal communication practices starts with self-
examination.

3) We are always communicating nonverbally. While there may be a tendency to
place an emphasis on nonverbal communication practices when preaching, the other
offices of clergy incorporate this skill as well. Whether visiting someone in a hospital,
rehabilitation facility or in their own home, those seeking pastoral care in the form of
prayers, inspiration and encouragement will more readily receive this ministry when
pastors (and laity) incorporate facial expressions, gestures and other forms of body
language which serve to enhance what is offered in the spoken word. This is also true
while leading a study, providing counseling for relationships, or participating in a
meeting. Our nonverbal communication practices will work to either enhance or detract from our effectiveness as church leaders.

4) Examine one area at a time. In addition to providing a review of the history of nonverbal communication research along with a connection to homiletics and theology, this thesis has offered five main topics for consideration. These areas include eye contact, gestures, facial expressions, body posture, and gender. While much material has been included in this work, for simplicity’s sake it is important to understand that each chapter highlights one conduit that can be used for communicating nonverbally. These conduits may work independent of, or in combination with, each other. Rather than attempting to address all modes of nonverbal communication at once while working toward self-improvement, it is likely more beneficial to examine one area at a time. Using this thesis as a reference, one might start by determining how he or she is utilizing eye contact in helpful ways, before moving on to the next subject. Each chapter provides insights which help to guide and direct self-examination through these five areas of nonverbal communication.

5) Jump off the diving board. As is the case when delivering a forecast “live” from a snowy street corner in Bangor, Maine, there comes a time to acknowledge that you have within you (assuming you have indeed invested the necessary time and energy in the craft) the tools necessary to be an effective communicator. While toeing the end of the board before diving in, you must trust that all will be well and jump in to your work. Again, the example of Wesley is helpful here; when the work of preparation is regular and methodical, nonverbal practices become tools that become more readily available and
used in communication. Yet they will never be deployed if one is not brave enough to jump into the work with both feet. As is the case with the application of other skills, effectiveness and confidence flourish with consistent employment of these practices.

This project is a reflection of my recognition and growing passion for the ways nonverbal communication impact the manner in which information is able to be received by television audiences—and, particularly since entering pastoral ministry, church communities. My work has been conducted with the goal of offering a resource for both clergy and laity as the church moves forward. May it serve as a blessing to all who read it.
Bibliography


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Ancient Sources


Biography

Steve Smith presently pastors United Methodist churches in Orono and Alton, Maine. A graduate of the University of Maine (B.U.S. with an Earth Sciences emphasis) and Bangor Theological Seminary (M.A.), Smith began the D.Min. program at Duke Divinity School in August of 2015. Prior to entering ministry full-time, he served as a television and radio meteorologist for over twenty-five years. Smith and his wife, Judy, reside in Orono, Maine, and have two sons and seven grandchildren.