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A Newsletter of the Amy Foundation



The Preacher as Wilderness Guide

By Jim Schmitmeyer

*Editor's note: This reflection on preaching, written by Father Jim Schmitmeyer, isn't just about preaching. Jim, a writer, makes us think about **writing** with daring, expression and vividness—and relevance—for our culture.*

"If you're not living on the edge, you're taking up space."

In one sentence the college-age daughter of a friend of mine described a bracing attitude toward life, a feral attitude seldom sighted on the carpeted terrain of a modern church.

Life on the edge. Let the dead bury the dead. Do-or-die discipleship. Sell-what-you-have or get left behind.

When was the last time you heard the gospel preached with vigor?

"Nice homily, Father."

"Thank you, George."

The parishioner steps away and I think to myself, "Missed the mark again."

Nice homily. But *nice* lives at a safe distance from the edge.

Bible folk, on the other hand, thrive on the edge. When necessary, they pull up stakes and load up faith in backpacks and panniers. Naomi and Ruth trek the badlands of Moab. David forages for food in the forests

of Engeddi. John wears camel hide to protect his skin from the burning eye of God.

The Word of God passed from mountaineers to outfitters to trappers (Moses, Joseph, and Simon the Tanner to name a few). Yet preachers today overlook the function of wilderness guide. Many—at least in liturgical churches—speak in hushed tones and polite discourse. They've forgotten to scout the trail for peril, guide hikers across the rocky scree then urge them to jump the chasm of death.

The church requires wilderness guides because life on the edge demands belief.

Frontier Language

Preaching can be biblical, doctrinal, liturgical, catechetical, or evangelistic. Its content varies according to style and occasion. Yet a persistent misunderstanding of preaching's basic purpose remains. Preaching exists not to inform listeners but to *move* them.

This means that precise categories and definitions—though necessary in theological classrooms—pollutes the streams of the wild country where adventure and commit-

ment roam.

In *The Word of God in Words*, Bernard Brandon Scott distinguishes the language of the settlement from the language of

Continued on page 3 ➤

Prayer Requests

We believe "The prayers of the righteous availeth much." We invite you to pray with us about various aspects of The Amy Foundation Ministry.

Please join us in asking for God's direction and for the leading of the Holy Spirit as we work to help Christians obey Christ's mandate to make disciples by teaching obedience of all His commandments.

Amy Prayer List:

- Amy Writing Awards — increased number of submissions in 2008.
- For the Lord to open the hearts of editors to material that we provide through the Internet Syndicate.

Jim Schmitmeyer is pastor of two churches in Ohio. In 2000, he received the Best New Author award from the Catholic Press Association. His most recent book is *Stable Faith: Portraits of Grace from the Heartland* (Twenty-third Publications). This article first appeared in Today's Parish Minister (www.todaysparishminister.com). Reprinted with permission.

Does your writing spark?

By Jim Schmitmeyer

Writers seek out sharp nouns and fast verbs. Qualities that mark the work of popular writers include direct address, vivid scenes and high tension, to name a few.

Direct Address

Sample A: *A severe drought gripped the land. The people requested Elijah to petition the Lord.*

Sample B: *Ask a farmer what he'd say to Elijah. Better yet, ask him on a day the combine breaks down and the temperature hits ninety. Why, he'd come at the prophet shaking his fist. "Rain? Where've you been? We needed rain months ago!"*

Vivid Scenes

Sample A: *The Resurrection narratives employ various techniques to convey the physical reality of the glories body of Jesus.*

Sample B: *Mary clung to him. Thomas ran a finger across his scars. The disciples watched in*

awe as he ate a piece of fish. It was him.

No pack of wild dogs had dragged the remains of the tortured body off to the woods.

Tension

Sample A: *Paul's companions failed to support him when he was summoned to court. He found solace in the Lord instead.*

Sample B: *The door opens on the chamber. The crowd gawks. In the back, a heckler. Paul stops, cranes his neck. Alexander. He said he'd be here. The guard grips his shoulder, 'Move!'*

A man glares at Paul, spits. Rufus, where are you? Paul cranes his neck. Luke? A hard shove, Paul trips, falls on the marble. The guard yanks him to his feet.

Paul's eyes search the faces. Alone. He's all alone. ◀

Where can you find more writing advice?

Purdue's Online Writing Lab (OWL), found at owl.purdue.edu, offers free writing advice, newsletters, links, and examples.

The **Web English Teacher** at webenglishteacher.com has a searchable web site with helpful links on a wide range of topics.

The most authoritative style guides for writing are the **Modern Language Association (MLA)**, the **Chicago Style Manual**, **Gregg Reference Manual**, **American Psychological Association (APA)**. These can be found online or purchased in book stores.

One old standby includes Strunk and White's **Elements of Style**, still available in bookstores.

Eats, Shoots and Leaves: The Zero-Tolerance Approach to Punctuation by Lynn Truss uses fun and humor to educate.

Pen & Sword

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email: amyfoundtn@aol.com

Winning Strategies

For successfully presenting biblical truth through the secular media

Prize-winning authors, when surveyed, offered this advice for Christian writers:

- Make your points with facts and logic that *the audience* will respect.
- Temper your righteous anger and make your points with subtlety and wit, grace and eloquence.
- To become a good writer, you must be well-read. You must know something before you have something important to say. It is not enough to have read the latest book from your favorite television preacher. Read a classic occasionally, then a contemporary novel.
- Use phones and email to communicate with editors. Ask what they are looking for and how you can improve your chances of being published.
- Select timely topics. Good editors want helpful information on subjects that are headlining the daily news.

► Wilderness Guide

Continued from cover

the frontier. The former functions well in family, classroom, and workplace environments where life is predictable, rules are followed and clarity a paramount value.

Frontier language, on the other hand, kicks in when we enter the region of the soul, that unmarked landscape fraught with fear yet full of hope.

Frontier language transports us to places that we've never been. Its words light the night like sparks from a fire, warm the hands like coffee in a cup or spike the spirit like the sting of whiskey.

Head for the Border

David Buttrick urges preachers to shine a light into "the unlit areas" of life, those places where listeners hesitate to travel alone (David Buttrick, *Homiletic Moves and Structures*. Fortress Press, 1988, p. 35). Preachers who have camped in Moses' tent know that curtains drawn around ER beds comprise the "meeting tent" where some listener might encounter God next week. Homilists who have tasted dust on the road know the look of those who have lost their way to Emmaus.

Whether the goal of the homily is a call to deeper faith, fuller understanding of God or more consistent Gospel living, it's the preacher who dares to hike life's frontiers that gains the hearing.

If the preacher avoids tension, for instance, the passion of Christ is never preached. If the preacher fears the heights of ecstasy, the vision of heaven never unfolds. If the preacher's feet never get sore, miracles get overlooked. If the belly doesn't grumble, the multitudes starve. If the preacher

shuns debate, Paul's letters remain tucked at the bottom of the backpack.

Believers are sojourners, preachers the scouts.

Explore, Don't Explain

Professional outfitters know the trails to breathtaking vistas as well as avalanche chutes and other hazards along the way. Such a guide wastes neither time nor words. You listen. You learn. You stand in awe at the power of God.

In a similar way, effective preachers don't waste words on non-essentials. Sharp words catch their attention.

"Drop the sword, Peter," marks the trailhead to street gangs and the response required of today's disciple.

"My God, why have you forsaken me?" leads straight to the camp of despondency and grief.

"Sell what you have" marks the way to retirement plans, portfolios and the steep climb to the heights of trust.

In the hands of an experienced guide, the words "Mary

do not be afraid" rumble like thunder in the heart of a mother.

The notion of preacher-as-outfitter compels homilists and listeners to uncover the ways the sharp edges of ancient texts cut their way into modern life. In this approach to preaching, homilists lead listeners to into the urgent aspects of the text, where together they explore the twists, the turns, and the wonders of life before the face of God.

This means didactic lectures get replaced with dramatic descriptions, conventional wisdom is scuttled. Lessons on polite living give way to ponderings of the mighty power of the Spirit.

No Fear

Listeners have no choice but to follow the trails blazed by their preachers. When homilists lack ministerial courage, their preaching turns predictable.

But when preachers approach their task as a matter of life and death, the Spirit of Christ grabs hold, hearts thrill, lives transform and souls get saved. ◀

Communicating Christ Effectively to Secular Audiences

Amy Syndicate contributor Rusty Wright delivers this workshop around the country, but you can experience it in the comfort of your own home. Learn how non-Christians think and feel, what they want and why. Discover practical tools for analyzing your audience, including their religious persuasion, intellectual level, psychological makeup, needs, moral attitudes, issues and heroes. Tap readers', listeners', or web surfers' felt needs, grab attention, touch hearts and minds, and sensitively communicate spiritual truth. Useful ideas to help Christian communicators connect with secular audiences and nudge them toward faith.

Links to online video workshop and audio workshop, plus handout and Audience Analysis Chart (digital versions) are available from www.probe.org/Rusty.

Writing Resources

Sally E. Stuart's Christian Writers' Market Guide 2007

stuartmarket.com

The reference tool for the Christian writer:

- contains more than 1,100 markets for the written word;
- lists publishers by the topics they publish;
- describes contests, writers' conferences and groups;
- includes a directory of editorial services, literary agents and market analysis.

Meet the Amy Foundation Staff

Mary Spagnuolo,
Administrative Assistant

Mary has been with the Amy Foundation for over ten years. She was hired just after the completion of Jim Russell's book *Awakening the Giant*. One of her first tasks was to assist in the development of the **Discipled Nation Plan** curriculum and subsequent series of Discipled Nation books.

Mary's "labor of love" is the Amy Writing Awards. The entries submitted are judged anonymously, solely on the merit of the content. As the qualified entries arrive at the Amy Foundation office, the name and date of the publication and the author's name are removed; then the articles are logged into a database. The entries are then submitted to the judges. This task keeps

Mary busy as we receive an estimated 1,000+ entries per year.

Mary has two children who attend a Catholic elementary school. Their extracurricular activities keep Mary quite busy! Her family likes traveling, attending sporting events, and amusement parks.

Mary was raised in the Catholic church, with her parents and numerous others as mentors. An experience she had at a youth retreat while studying for confirmation influenced her Christian life as well.

Her prayer for the Amy Foundation is to continue with the ideals W. James Russell put in place—discipling our nation in this generation. ◀

About the Amy Foundation

The Amy Foundation, founded in 1976 by W. James Russell and his wife Phyllis, was named after their daughter. The Foundation is best known for its Amy Writing Awards, which is a call to present biblical truth reinforced with scripture in secular, non-religious publications. It has been acclaimed as the most popular journalism contest in the nation. All Amy Foundation programs are specifically designed to encourage and equip both professional and non-professional writers to develop and use their skills to the reclaiming of America. It is our hope that you will use its resources to participate in fulfilling Jesus' final instructions as stated in The Great Commission.



Submit Today!

15 writers will receive \$34,000 in cash prizes

The Amy Foundation Writing Awards program recognizes writers who skillfully and creatively present the biblical position on issues affecting the world today in a sensitive and thought-provoking manner. Qualifying non-fiction entries must have been published in a mainstream non-religious publication.

Winning entries will be re-published in an annual collection of prize-winning entries.

For rules, sample articles and submission forms, visit www.amyfound.org or call 877-727-4262.



The Amy Foundation
Discipling Our Nation in this Generation

Internet Syndicate welcomes new editor

Introducing Jim Jackson

Beginning September 1, Don Lindman stepped down from his position as editor of The Amy Syndicate after 11 years of faithful service. Frequent columnist James J. (Jim) Jackson took over the position. Along with his service to the Syndicate, Jim serves on the Amy Foundation Advisory Board and as an Amy Writing Awards judge. We thought it would be fun to introduce Jim using his own words:

Hello Amy Foundation Syndicate colleagues:

I am humbled and thankful for the opportunity to serve as Syndicate Editor. Please indulge me as I use this message to introduce myself and give you a snapshot of who I am and my credentials.

First of all, I am aware that Don Lindman will be a very hard act to follow. He and Joanne are close friends of mine and my wife, Donna, and we plan to stay in contact with them. We wish them well as they enter another phase of their wonderful life together.

I am originally from Chicago, Illinois. A graduate of Chicago State College, I have been a writer in various genres for most of my life. I am a retired State of Michigan executive, where I managed several major programs for nearly thirty years.

In the mid-80's, I joined the *Lansing (Michigan) State Journal* as a member of their Editorial Advisory Board and opinion columnist. I also was self-syndicated in several other newspapers. I have also been a missionary since 1984, and have traveled to six continents,

training others in personal Evangelism and sharing my faith in Jesus Christ as my personal Savior.

In 1996, I was approached by W. James Russell, who had become a regular reader of my columns. He found it interesting that I managed to have columns published (in a secular newspaper) that included biblical truth backed up by scripture, which was the main thrust of The Amy Foundation ministry.

I joined the Amy Foundation Advisory Board. In a short time span, we discovered that we had a core of good writers, and developed a column named "Crossroads," which we marketed to local township and small-town weekly newspapers.

Our columns could cover any topic but were required to be discipling in nature and to include biblical truth, backed up by scripture.

After a period of time, the leadership of the weekly news-

paper association did not seem to want to continue running our column. Mr. Russell believed that the Holy Spirit was leading us to use the exploding Internet to reach more people and to get more of God's truth and Word into the secular press. Don Lindman signed on as Editor, and we recruited past winners of the Amy Writing Awards as syndicated columnists.

As to transitioning from the Lindman era, I don't believe you will notice much of a difference.

One Scripture that I often meditate upon, especially when I am frustrated, or in "writer's block" is Philippians 4:8:

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

God bless you and God bless the Amy Foundation ministry.

—Jim Jackson

The Amy Foundation Syndicate columns, called Real Answers™, may be found at amyfound.org.

Each month, *Real Answers* offers several new articles, free of charge, to editors across America.

For more information, contact James Jackson at amyfoundtn@aol.com.

Thanks, Don Lindman...

... for 11 years of faithful service as

Amy Internet Syndicate Editor!

What follows is an excerpt of Don's final message to columnists:

I want to express my personal thanks and appreciation to each of you for your cooperation in this ministry and for the talent you have shared with us for Christ's glory. I am very impressed with the writers we have and I have said so often. ... I feel like I know most of [the syndicate writers] as if we were sitting at adjoining desks, even though we have never met in person. We have shared personal items as well as professional questions and concerns; I count that a great privilege, the memory of which I will cherish for a long time.

May God's blessing be yours and also to those near and dear to you.

What's Behind Today's Epidemic of Teacher-Student Sex?

Third Place Award of \$4,000

by David Kupelian

It was a bizarre and emotional courtroom scene, but one occurring with disturbing frequency these days. A popular middle school teacher, 43-year-old Pamela Diehl-Moore, had tearfully pleaded guilty to having sex with a child – a 13-year-old male student who had just completed 7th grade – and now stood before a Hackensack, N.J., judge awaiting sentencing.

And what would that sentence be? Considering all the intense media coverage of male sexual predators victimizing female children, one might expect a stiff prison term, accompanied by a withering rebuke.

But when New Jersey Superior Court Judge Bruce A. Gaeta opened his mouth, the words that came out did not express criticism of the teacher, nor acknowledge any damage she had done to her victim.

"I really don't see the harm that was done here," the judge proclaimed, "and certainly society doesn't need to be worried. I do not believe she is a sexual predator. It's just something between two people that clicked beyond the teacher-student relationship."

"Clicked"? With a 13-year-old?

"Maybe it was a way for him, once this happened, to satisfy his sexual needs," the judge added. "People mature at different rates." Gee thanks, Judge.

According to court transcripts, Gaeta summed up his shocking judicial leniency this way: "I don't see anything

here that shows this young man has been psychologically damaged by her actions. And don't forget, this was mutual consent. Now certainly under the law, he is too young to legally consent, but that's what the law says. Some of the legislators should remember when they were that age. Maybe these ages have to be changed a little bit."

Translation: The 43-year-old teacher didn't really do anything wrong in having sex with a schoolboy, the kid wanted it, statutory rape laws are unrealistic and the age of consent should be lowered.

Oh, the sentence? Five years probation – no jail time.

In yet another recent court case, U.S. District Judge J. Thomas Marten in Kansas also questioned whether sex with kids was really bad.

"Where is the clear, credible evidence that underage sex is always injurious? If you tell me because it is illegal, I reject that," Marten said, according to the Associated Press.

Although most judges don't publicly sing the praises of statutory rape like these two – indeed, Judge Gaeta later came under the scrutiny of a judicial fitness review board – many regular Americans apparently agree with them. A lot of us just don't seem to think there's much of a problem when female teachers have sex with their male students.

"What is the deal lately with hot female teachers seducing their 13- to 16-year-old students?!" asked one blogger expressing the prevalent "what's-the-problem?" attitude: "I think the woman is

getting off on the social taboo factor more than anything else. At least, that's what the expert psychologists say. I just wish I had a teacher stupid enough and bored enough in my grade school to make my pubescent dreams come true. If it wasn't illegal and there were no jilted husbands, it's almost a victimless crime."

And Bob Shoop, a Kansas State University education professor and expert witness in 30 court cases involving sexual abuse in schools, summed it up for the Associated Press this way: "I think our society sort of says to the boy: 'Congratulations, that's great. Everybody fantasizes about having a sexual relationship with an older woman.'"

As for the perpetrators themselves, often they just think they're expressing love. ...

Very simply, how do we know sex outside of marriage – whether it be adultery or premarital sex or homosexuality or teachers seducing kids – is wrong, a sin before God and an offense to our fellow human beings?

For one thing, God has provided some major clues for us, the obvious implications of which we somehow manage to ignore – just like the elephant in the parlor.

For some, the most persuasive clues are in the Bible. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament are unequivocal and total in their condemnation of homosexual sex, of fornication (a term rarely used any more), of adultery. Jesus raises the bar

Continued next page ➤

the highest when He says: "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart (Matthew 5:27-28 KJV)."

But the Bible is not the only clue. As I tell my kids, biblical truths are reflected in everyday life. So, stealing and murder and lying aren't wrong just because the Bible says so. Rather, the Bible says stealing and murder and lying are wrong because they *are* wrong. They were always wrong – and the Bible testifies to that timeless Truth that predates the Bible itself. (Remember, in Abraham, Isaac and Jacob's time there was no Bible.)

Let's look at a few more clues.

Here's a stunningly obvious one: Sex has the potential to produce offspring. And since the evidence is irrefutable that children need both a father and a mother, as well as a stable, long-term, loving home life, this one clue alone leads inexorably to the conclusion that sex is meant only for a committed heterosexual marriage.

Another clue: A ghoulish smorgasbord of sexually transmitted diseases – many incurable, like AIDS, herpes and human papilloma virus (thought to be one of the main causes of cervical cancer), as well as hepatitis, syphilis, Chlamydia, gonorrhea and a host of others – is a pretty darn good indicator that we weren't meant to have wanton, rampant sex.

Still another clue: Millions of dead babies – over a million a year just in the U.S. Recent news reports document that in Zimbabwe dead babies clog up the sewers in the capital of

Harare, so many are flushed down toilets and dumped in drains. Getting pregnant when we don't want children tempts us to kill our offspring.

Let's stop for a minute and ask: Just how obvious do clues need to be before we figure out the message? Horrible plagues and millions of unwanted babies seem like pretty good indicators that God didn't intend for us to use our bodies the way many of us do. And yet, in our cleverness we find ways to circumvent these divine roadblocks by way of artificial birth control, abortion, alternative sexual acts and so on. But we're still just making an absurd end-run around God and His obvious restrictions on sex. ...

So, where do we go from here? Quo vadis?

If we just go along with whatever compulsions and

drives we see rising up in us, and wallow in them, and justify them, and condemn anybody who says otherwise, we're living as animals, not humans.

And believe me, that's not truly living. Unless, of course, you're a goat. ◀

Read the full article at www.amyfound.org.

Editor's note: This article was originally published in the March 2006 edition of Whistleblower magazine, titled "PREDATORS: What's really behind today's epidemic of teacher-student sex?"

David Kupelian is a veteran journalist and best-selling author who currently serves as managing editor of both online news giant WorldNetDaily.com and the monthly newsmagazine *Whistleblower*.

Does God Want You To Be Rich?

Fourth Place Award of \$3,000

by David Van Biema and Jeff Chu

When George Adams lost his job at an Ohio tile factory last October, the most practical thing he did, he thinks, was go to a new church, even though he had to move his wife and four preteen boys to Conroe, a suburb of Houston, to do it. Conroe, you see, is not far from Lakewood, the home church of

megapastor and best-selling author Joel Osteen.

Osteen's relentlessly upbeat television sermons had helped Adams, 49, get through the hard times, and now Adams was expecting the smiling, Texas-twanged 43-year-old to help boost him back toward success. And Osteen did. ...

This article was originally published in *TIME* Magazine, September 10, 2006. Although we are not permitted to reproduce the story here, you can read the full article in the *TIME* magazine archives at www.time.com/time/magazine.

No access to the Internet? Call the Amy Foundation at (517) 323-6233 to request a copy of the Amy Writing Awards booklet of 2006 Prize-Winning Entries.



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The United States—A Discipled Nation

A call to -
Annually
assessing
the
behavioral
results of
discipling
obedience

- | | |
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| 1. Faithfulness in marriage vs. divorce and abandonment | 7. Self-control vs. drug addiction and alcoholism |
| 2. Married commitment vs. live-in casual sex | 8. Friendly resolution vs. frivolous litigation |
| 3. Family preservation vs. single parent homes | 9. Law abiding citizenry vs. violent crime |
| 4. True love waits vs. teen pregnancies | 10. Christ-centered rehabilitation vs. growing prison population |
| 5. Uplifting entertainment vs. decadent and degenerate messages | 11. Babies born alive vs. aborted babies |
| 6. Generous Christian giving and work ethic vs. poverty, homelessness, needy | |

"Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord." Psalm 33:12

The Amy Foundation also offers a Discipled Nation Curriculum, a series of 4 user-friendly workbooks that tackle the tough issues of the family, and then initiates discipling activities in our churches and neighborhoods. Use them in Sunday School classes, Bible Studies, and prayer groups. The curriculum may be ordered online at: www.adisciplenation.com.

