

Associating with the Humiliated: Paul's Hermeneutic of Transformation in Romans 12:1-16

Paul guided the Roman Christians to develop connection through the use of “mental/emotional” (*phrone*) words, spiritual giftedness and mercy, and relationships with the vulnerable members of the congregation. This was transformation. These three steps can help hermeneutically guide congregants to develop empathy, ministry, and relationships with those who feel marginalized in their communities and relationships. Through victims’ stories, hospitality and acceptance, partnering with local agencies, and the power of the Sacred Texts, preaching can offer connection to vulnerable members in the community and to those offering hope and healing to others.

Romans 12:1-16

The apostle Paul encouraged the early church to practice unity and harmony with each other. While the Roman Christian community consisted of people from various social backgrounds (Rom.16:1-16) it was Paul’s concern that the faith community work together in their spiritual growth and development.¹ Peter Lampe has offered strong evidence that there were economic differences within the congregations (Rom 1:11).² In addition to this there would have existed Gentile Christians, Jewish Christians who had not met Paul (and would have been unaware of the Antioch decision concerning circumcision), and Jewish Christians who were recently converted during Paul’s mission. Even though the apostle had not met many of these Christians, he pressed for unity, as he did in all his congregations. One of the ways that Paul encouraged this was to call the wealthy to help those who were less fortunate in society (Rom. 12:13; 1 Tim. 6:18; 1 Cor. 16; 2 Cor. 7-8; Gal. 2:10). Paul referred to the less fortunate as *ταπεινοίς*. This word, similar to the Hebrew *עַנְוִים*, usually translated humble, was also used to describe those who were poor, vulnerable, oppressed in society, and dependent on others for

¹Witherington indicates that Paul is not suggesting that they form a new group but maintain a united but diverse group. Witherington, 280. This includes adaptability, unity, and diversity.

²Lampe, 183.

support.³ Those who are oppressed have only one option in society, forgive and learn to persevere (Luke 6:27-36). Those in positions of power and influence must resist their cultural roles to “lord it over” others by empowering the powerless. Since the oppressed are equated with Jesus, in the Gospels (Matt. 25; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 14:13-14) the church has the potential to learn something from their method of surviving on the margins of their societies. The church also has the opportunity to practice Christ’s love by responding to the needs of the weak.

The Roman church’s quest for unity would have involved encouraging and supporting the weak or oppressed. This would require patience, mercy, hospitality, endurance, blessing their oppressors, and mourning. For this reason Paul called the community to associate with the humiliated (ἀλλὰ τοὺς ταπεινοὺς συναπαγομένοι, Rom.12:16).⁴ Associating with the oppressed in society gave the church the perspective of powerlessness, patience, endurance, and other noble characteristics that are present in the kingdom of God.⁵ Paul challenged the church to practice these virtues among the community (12:9-21).⁶ The early Christians were to be sacrificial (12:1-2), not think highly of themselves (12:3), were to use their gifts to encourage the church (12:4-8), and were to practice a “genuine love” (12:9).⁷ Paul seems to suggest that a “living sacrifice” (which the ancient hearer would contrast with a “dead sacrifice” or animal sacrifice) was not

³Poor, afflicted, humble, poverty. *Brown-Driver-Briggs*, 776-77. In Roman society it was the distinction between the *humiliores* and *honestiores*. Those who were *humiliors* would be those individuals on the margins of society. While the Roman church consisted of diverse ethnic groups, there would have also been economic diversity.

⁴While Fitzmeyer, 656, and Witherington, suggest that this term may refer to “lowly tasks,” Keener indicates that Paul’s use of “high mindedness” in this text, would refer to those in a different social class. Keener, 149.

⁵Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans 22*; Origin, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans 5*: 72, 74. “We must not look on the saints as beggars but see them as people who have needs like our own. The practice of hospitality does not simply mean that we should entertain those who come to us. It means also that we should go out and invite others to come in.”

⁶The string of participles, according to Witherington, may reflect the Hebrew and Aramaic expression of rules, community codes, and conducts of behaviors. Witherington, 292. Here Paul may be referring to what “transformation by the renewing of one’s mind” involves.

⁷ The verb ἀνυπόκριτος suggests true rather than fake love. “He is demanding a love that, like the love that inspired God’s action in Christ, goes beyond mere words and protestations to embrace the alien and the enemy.” Byrne, 376. Fitzmeyer also compares this to actors on a stage who “portray” Agape. Fitzmeyer, 652-53.

only their calling but a “logical/rational” one.⁸ While ancient philosophers suggested that sacrifice required the offeror’s pure heart and devotion, Paul reminded them to offer themselves to God (Rom 1:18-31; 6:19).⁹ Paul’s use of four mind words in 12:3 suggests that 12:3ff provided a pattern for the Roman Christians to be “transformed by the renewing of their minds” (12:2).¹⁰ The movement from high thoughts to sensibility is to be displayed in Rom. 12:4-8.¹¹ This can also be accomplished by using the gifts to build up the weak in the community through *acts of ministry* (διακονεω).¹²

Moving the Reader Forward

Paul used an ancient form of *Paraenesis* to move the reader to appropriate “Christlike” action. At the end of Rom 9-11, he wrote that God’s desire was to “have mercy on all humans...” (Rom 11:32). He followed this verse with a doxology, praising God for this mercy (ἐλεω, Rom 11:33-36) only to continue the next section as an appeal to this “mercy” (ὀικτιρμον, Rom 12:2).¹³ Yet Paul, used a common paraenetic phrase παρακαλεω ουν to motivate the community to respond through mercy, compassion, and the love shown by God.¹⁴ This paraenetic involved

⁸Augustine, *On Romans* 71 = seems to suggest that doing good will lead one to repentance.

⁹Keck, 95; Summers, 51-52.

¹⁰ὑπερφρονειν, φρονειν, and σωφρονειν all suggest that Paul may be addressing those who are high minded in society. The Christians were to move from high-mindedness to wisdom. Keener, 144-45; 149. Campbell translates this as “do not be super minded but sober minded...” Campbell, 196.

¹¹Witherington, 292.

¹²Fitzmeyer suggests that this term can mean service or administration of material aid to members of the community. Fitzmeyer, 648. Collins also suggests that the term means to act as a go between in the community. Collins, *Diakonia*, 191, 336; *Are All Christians Ministers?*, 38-39; Bash, 36, 39; and Carter, 268. Clarke believes that Collins is inaccurate in his writing that διακονειν means intermediary. Clarke suggests that Paul’s use and Jesus’ actions give διακονεω a servile nature. I am not convinced that Clarke sufficiently argues this point but appreciate his balance in the argument. He indicates that Christian ministry and leadership was different than Greco-Roman leadership and goes to great lengths to show that Paul attempted to use common leadership terms in the Christian community but theologically called the leaders to become servants. Clarke, 233-45.

¹³While Witherington indicates that these two words are not the same, they fit within the word range Paul is using as a Hebraist. Witherington, 284. See also Paul’s use of both words in Rom 9:15. See also Keck, 95.

¹⁴Keck, 95; Karris, 82; Fitzmeyer, 637, 639. “In 12:9–21 Paul offers “paraenesis,” a series of loosely fitted exhortations, most of them widely paralleled elsewhere in the ancient world. Although by their nature such exhortations are of general significance, Paul still writes with the Roman believers in mind. In 12:9–13 he urges loving and serving fellow believers; in 12:14–21 he addresses relationships with people more generally, preparing

three parts. First, they were to be *transformed* by the renewal of their minds to the Empire of God, rather than be conformed to the standards of their culture.¹⁵ While Paul elsewhere had written that this age was temporary (1 Cor 1:28; 2:8, 7:31, 13:8) the Empire of Jesus is permanent.¹⁶ The beginning of this transformation developed mentally. In Rom 12:3-4 they renewed their minds through:

- Υπερφρονειν (v3) infin
- Φρονειν (v3) infin
- Φρονεν (v4) infin
- Σωφρονειν (v4) infin
- Αλληλους φρονουντες (v16) partic
- Μη τα υψηλα φρονουντες (v16) partic
- Μη γινεσθε φρονιμοι (v16) adj

Notice the progression downward from v3-4 and v16 onward. This mental process is similar to Phil 2 yet portrays Paul's challenge to those who needed to embrace the *humiliors*. Their transformation and development for unity began as a conscious decision to act. They were to choose to be united with their oppressed brothers and sisters.

Second, the Christians *encourage*, παρακαλων, others in the church by using gifts that emphasized social justice (Rom 12:8). Giving to the needs of others (ὁ μεταδιδους ἐν ἁπλοτητι) was an act of charity or alms.¹⁷ The one who leads (προϊσταμενος) indicates protection of the

for relationships with the state in 13:1–7. Paul frames 12:9–21 with exhortations to choose “good” rather than evil (12:9, 21); he has already shown that what is “good” is the will of God (12:2), and will continue encouraging them to do “good” in 13:3–4.” Keener, 147.

¹⁵Witherington, 286, and Keener, 144-145, indicate that transformation in the Greek addresses the inner change while conformation deals strictly with outer change.

¹⁶Ron Clark, *The Better Way: The Church of Agape in Emerging Corinth* (Eugene: Resource, 2010); 122-24.

¹⁷“The qualification provided by the attached prepositional phrase ὁ μεταδιδους suggests that giving of alms from one’s own resources is in view.” Byrne, 373. Fitzmeyer cites Job 31:17; Prov. 11:26; Luke 3:11; Eph. 4:28; T. Iss. 7:5; Herm. Vis. 3.9.4 as texts that indicate this word means giving to the poor. Fitzmeyer, 648.

less fortunate.¹⁸ Practicing mercy (ἐλεωv) is also a word that is used for alms and gifts to the poor (Matt. 6:2-3). It referred to the mercy of God in this letter (Rom 9:15, 32). “These very qualities of adaptability and self-sacrifice for the sake of the community are precisely what one would expect a rhetor to speak about when the goal is unity, concord, harmony in a fractured or divided community.”¹⁹ The community moves from a “high mind” to practicing “humility” by serving others, especially those who would have been marginalized.

Finally, the Christians are to *develop relationships* with their brothers and sisters who were part of the *humiliors*. Rom. 12:9-19 provided a list of twenty participles which involve sharing with the oppressed and endurance. Paul called the Christians to acts of mercy by sharing with those who were poor or needy (ταις χρειαις των ἀγιων κοιωνοθντες). They were to practice hospitality (την φιλοξενιαν) which meant a love for strangers and outsiders. Rather than being high minded (υψηλα φρονοθντες) they were to associate with the vulnerable (τοις ταπεινοις συναπαγομενοι).²⁰ This suggests that the early Christians, in their service to the oppressed,

¹⁸“Paul could mean one who provides resources, in the sense of a well-off person who acts as a *patronus* for the less-advantaged. The fact that in the present context this gift occurs between two others denoting ‘social service’ suggest that the latter is what Paul has in mind.” Byrne, 374. The verb προῖσταμι also has a meaning in Greek literature that means helping the less fortunate. It also suggested that the leader was a protector. Isocrates was the first to use προῖσταμεvov as protector in the fifth-century BCE. He wrote that the Athenian aliens were judged by the protector or patron that they chose. The leader also had the responsibility to protect outcasts in the city (Isocrates *De Pac.* 53:6). Plato mentioned that the leader of democracy was the protector προῖσταμεvov of the city (*Resp.* 565.c.9). In the fourth-century Menander also wrote that each Athenian citizen acted as protectors over a resident alien. This is found in a fragment from one of his plays for Perinthias (Menander *Perinthiae Fragmenta Aliunde Nota* 1:1). In the first-century BCE Dionysius used the term for patrons among the Romans (*Antiq. Rom.* 2:11:1.7). See also, Clark, “Family Management or Involvement? Paul’s use of προῖσταμεvι in 1 Timothy 3 as a Requirement for Church Leadership.” *Stone Campbell Journal* 9 (Fall 2006): 243-52.

¹⁹Witherington, 282.

²⁰In view of τοις ταπεινοις συναπαγομενοι it could mean “give yourselves to lowly tasks.” Fitzmeyer, 656. In light of the context I still believe that the Christians are being called to relationship with the oppressed rather than occupational choices. “The adjective could, however, be neuter (giving the sense ‘but adopt humble thoughts’), which would give a tighter correspondence with the neuter plural ταπεινοις in the previous phrase. But ταπεινοις normally has a personal reference in biblical Greek.” Byrne, 380.

continue to develop relationships with their brothers and sisters who were in the lower margins of society.

As he had insisted at the start...the key to this is that people do not “think haughty thoughts”...that is, assess themselves more highly than the reality warrants. The antidote for this divisive tendency is to associate with the lowly (τοις ταπεινοις συναπαγομενοι), that is, with the poor and disadvantaged, who in worldly terms are of no value but who, according to the gospel, have supreme value in the sight of God.²¹

Setting, Location, and Personality

Evidence suggests that the Roman church included upper class Romans, slaves, and poor Gentiles and Jews.²² This mixed group provided a valuable opportunity for the upper class to learn from their humble brothers and sisters in the faith. If Juvenal is correct, Romans hated Jews, especially those who were considered “lower class,” the artisans and merchants in this massive city.²³ Those who worked with their hands were viewed as doing menial labor, unbefitting to a wealthy Roman elite. In addition to this, many of the Pauline congregations were led and hosted by those who existed barely above the subsistence line.²⁴ Tensions would have been common within the Roman congregation both ethnically and economically.

Acts 20:1-4 offers spatial capacity for Paul to have written the letter to the Roman Christians during his three month stay at Corinth, before his final visit to the Macedonian congregations and his trip to Jerusalem (Acts 20:1-4). In his letter to the Roman Christians he wrote that he had planned to visit Jerusalem then pass through Rome on his way to Spain (Rom

²¹Ibid., 378.

²²Lampe, 183.

²³Juvenal, *Satires* 14.96-106.

²⁴Friessen, 367.

1:11-17, 15:23-33). According to Acts 21-28 his plans were not the Lord's plans and we have little information concerning his visit to Rome (Acts 28).

It is important that in Romans 16 he indicated connection with the congregation. Phoebe, a *διακονον* or administrator/ambassador for the Corinthian church, had been sent to deliver Paul's letter and share his welcome. Paul offered greetings to those in his ministry such as Priscilla and Aquilla (who would have recently returned from Corinth, Rom 16:3), Epenetus (an Asian convert at Ephesus, 16:5), Mary, Andronicus, and Junias (who have been with Paul in his Macedonian ministry, 16:6-7), and Ampliatus, Urbanus, and Apelles (16:8-10). These individuals had a personal relationship with Paul and possibly comprised one of the house church communities (16:5). Paul also offered indications of relationships with the remaining members including Rufus, who may have been the son of Simeon who had carried Jesus' cross (Mark 15:21; Rom 16:13), and his mother.

Paul personally knew some within the Roman Christian community. Whether this group represents the majority of the congregation or a small group within the church is hard to tell. However, with the expulsion of Jews from Rome under Claudius and the return of them through Nero, one suggestion among scholars is that tension in the congregation had developed between those Jews who had left and those Gentiles remaining.²⁵

The evidence may suggest that Paul's letter was delivered shortly after a return or influx of Jews who had been expelled. Some, as Priscilla, Aquilla, Epenetus, and the rest of Paul's team might suggest, would have been fairly new Jewish Christian converts. Another group (possibly present at Pentecost, Acts 2:10) would have been a more original Jewish Christian community,

²⁵Seutonius, *Claudius*, 25.

although not aware of the doctrinal views of Acts 15 and the inclusion of Gentiles. It is possible that Gentiles had become Christian but this might be more likely through Paul's team rather than the earlier founders of the congregation. As we read in Acts and the Diaspora, tensions would have existed between Gentiles, Gentile inclusive Christian Jews, and non-inclusive Christian Jews. Some, not knowing the development of the Antioch decision (Acts 15-16), would still struggle with including Gentiles without following Torah, circumcision, or dietary restrictions.

For Paul the concern was not only promoting unity within the congregations, but forming a united, diverse, and healthy congregation. Paul similarly taught unity within the Asian, Syrian, Greek, and Roman churches through *paraenesis*, promoting unity, using gifts that benefit others, and mutuality or self-sacrifice for the community.²⁶ It would seem likely, if Paul wrote many of his letters during his 3 month stay in Corinth (Acts 20:1-4), that these issues were not only fresh on his mind, but common in all of his churches. Likewise Paul called the Roman Christian community to transformation, practicing gifts, and developing relationships within the diverse body of believers.

Preaching and Pastoring Today

One of the difficult tasks that pastors, ministers, and/or preachers experience involves motivating congregants to action. Due to a highly consumeristic society, labeled McDonaldization by John Drane,²⁷ many members and visitors to congregations attend to “observe” the sermon, which has become an important part of the worship service. A recent Gallup pole indicates that the sermon plays a highly important part of the worship and why

²⁶Fitzmeyer, 638; Karris, 82; Witherington, 281.

²⁷Drane, 4-5.

people choose a congregation.²⁸ Witnessing or experiencing a sermon places a tremendous emphasis on why people come to a church, with high expectations that the proclamation powerfully touch individuals personally. While Long indicated that the preacher as “witness” offers a powerful message by bringing the hearer to the text, we find ourselves struggling to move the hearers toward spiritual growth.²⁹ Craddock has written that our preaching extends beyond the pulpit as a “pastoral presence.”³⁰ Tisdale suggested that we “exegete” our congregations through various methods of study, context, and interviews yet with the rise of larger congregations that becomes an overwhelming task.³¹ Tisdale also wrote that prophetic preaching attempts to work with the congregation, rather than in opposition to it, however with a culture that resists and distrusts leadership this becomes even more difficult.³²

The pressure also seems to fall on the preacher as witness to motivate congregations to become disciples and followers of Jesus. Even more difficult is the task of leading a congregation whose busy schedules allow only once per month or twice per month weekly attendance.³³ How can we motivate our people to not only listen to the message, but be persuaded to act? How will we as leaders, lead diverse people without forcing an agenda but through the simple form of paraenetic? Can we “appeal” to the mercy of God to motivate others.

Agape

Paul’s letter to the Roman Christians sought to motivate people to strive for unity. He challenged a congregation which consisted of converted Romans, immigrant Jews, and Jewish

²⁸Miltmore, April 17, 2017.

²⁹Long, 55.

³⁰Craddock, 39-40.

³¹Tisdale, *Preaching*, 64; and *Prophetic*, 44-54.

³²Ibid., 54.

³³Drane, 43.

Christians who had accompanied Paul while on the mission field. These diverse perspectives of Torah and Gospel were also ethnically and socially diverse. Today, we experience diversity within our congregations. At Agape, we have worked to understand community from diverse denominational perspectives, ethnicities, and social classifications. What does it mean to be a community that reflects the mercies and compassion of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit? How can I/we as leaders move diverse groups from sermons, class teaching, or mentoring in smaller groups?

As a community we have become active in community agencies that address gendered violence, houselessness, trafficking, and addiction recovery. Our congregation has not only been open to those on the streets and others in prostitution on Sunday mornings, but they have intentionally practiced serving and developing relationships with many of those “marginalized” in our city. Through writing, teaching, preaching, public speaking or providing trainings, or sharing stories our congregation has developed empathy for those who are vulnerable in our communities. It has also challenged us to confront power structures and dynamics in our community. There has been tension between the temptation to be conformed by a consumeristic society and transformed by renewing our minds toward the Gospel of Jesus.

First, *renewal of the mind* is a necessary practice for those in our faith communities. As Paul encouraged the congregation to move from “supermindedness” to “sobermindedness” homileticians can guide congregants to a similar journey.³⁴ I have done this through victim’s testimonies with Bible college students, members in our current church plant, and writing.³⁵ In

³⁴Keener, 147.

³⁵For more on creating empathy and motivating hearers through victim’s testimonies see my articles “Associating with the Humiliated,” along with the chapters concerning “Victim’s Testimonies.” The results from the articles suggest that these stories move the students to engage the text and develop empathy.

addition to this prophetic preaching engages the hearer to sympathize and empathize with those suffering injustice, marginalization, and oppression. As Resner states, “Preaching that takes justice as a starting point recognizes that preaching and its relationship to the Bible are a dynamic process.”³⁶ Prophets were not those who “predicted the future,” but were those “under assignment” and “witnesses to the injustices” in their own land.³⁷ The preaching/pastor has an opportunity to prophetically call the hearer and our congregations through stories, passion, and modern Paraenesis to renew their minds. Acknowledging that the poor are poor because of a system that is not fair requires all of us to confront this injustice.

Righteousness expressed in justice thus becomes ‘the indispensable qualification for worship—no justice, no acceptable public worship’... The functional criterion of a just society is found in the treatment of the poor and weak (Is 3:14-15).³⁸

Resistance and disruption refer to our Christian calling to confront, just as Jesus did, that which denies human well-being and community.³⁹

In a culture steeped in consumerism, to which many of our people are conforming, our messages and ministries must guide people to feel and be united to those in need and marginalized in our culture.

Second, the practice of mercy and compassion is a needed ministry in today’s congregations. While many in our congregations carry empathy toward the plight of the modern *ταπεινους*, we must nudge them to put their faith and mercy to practice. A generation simply

³⁶Resner, 13.

³⁷Miller, 78; Wogman, 3-4. “The prophets were real live human beings existing in real concrete social circumstances. They were adults...capable of seeing the world in adult ways, critical and discerning, informed by deep memory from which they did not depart. The strangeness of these prophets, now remembered and given to us through a complicated editorial process, is that they did not...see the world in the same way as most of their contemporaries, especially the power elite. The latter had long since decided that the old traditions of doxology, narrative, and commandment were nice for ‘little children’ but had nothing at all to do with the ‘real world,’ for the ‘real world’ was defined apart from God and shaped by credit, debt, mortgage, interest, surplus, and profits, without any disruptive theological footnote.” Brueggemann, 71.

³⁸Conn and Ortiz, 110.

³⁹Stivers, 7. “Key for the Christian is recognizing how our constructed ideologies can justify oppression and violence.”

clicking “like” on Facebook to DAPL and assuming that this is “active participation” needs a strong Paraenesis. This promotes the difficult work of change within the Empire of Jesus. Each congregation should express a sense of rebellion, change, and protest toward a consumeristic Empire by what they practice.⁴⁰ In our work with domestic abuse, houselessness, and trafficking we have found connections and developed relationships with many agencies. Our people at Agape have been nudged out of their comfort zones (their words) to participate with other agencies to provide relief, support, and a house to those who are most vulnerable in our communities. As our people at Sunday worship continue to practice open community, open arms, and open hearts, the need to excel in “mercy spiritual gifts” become evident. This practice moves members from an American mindset that blames the poor for their own plight.⁴¹

The American Dream, as Smalley suggests, was a description of the ideal life of the thriving American which included stable employment, a house, car, family, and time of prosperity. However, many were not able to experience this “Dream” as Laura Stivers indicated:

Clearly, the economic crisis that began in 2008 has increased the number of people who are homeless. Multiple economic and social factors have precipitated a steady decline over the last thirty years in the standard of living of poor and working-class people (and even a substantial number of middle-class people). The proverbial American Dream is out of reach for increasing numbers of Americans as job security has become more tenuous, pay and benefits have decreased, and costs of basic goods like housing and healthcare have risen exponentially. While not all people end up homeless, many are a paycheck away from ending up on their friends’ or families’ couches.⁴²

What once was considered the American Dream, became more of a nightmare to those who were unable to achieve a career, house, and property. With the economic crisis of 2007,

⁴⁰Wogman, 6.

⁴¹“In Jesus’ moral universe the disqualified get the lion’s share of his compassionate attention. How is it, then, that we who seek to aid the poor still harbor notions of the deserving or undeserving poor? What have we—we who dare to bear Christ’s name in the world—become?” Coats, 155. See also McMickle, 5; Smalley, *The Rich and the Rest of Us*, location 185.

⁴²Stivers, *Disrupting Homelessness*, 2.

many who were attempting to attain this “Dream” found themselves facing poverty, eviction, and in some cases, houselessness. With the current definition of “houselessness” including transitory lifestyles, camping, and “couch surfing,” the number of houseless increases dramatically.

When the rich and the poor compete for housing on the open market, the poor don’t stand a chance. The rich can always outbid them, buy up their tenements or trailer parks, and replace them with condos, McMansions, golf courses, or whatever they like. Since the rich have become more numerous, thanks largely to rising stock prices and executive salaries, the poor have necessarily been forced into housing that is more expensive, more dilapidated, or more distant from their places of work.⁴³

Involvement in ministries of compassion, mercy, and hospitality also builds trust and love within a community. In our efforts to build new houseless camps, aid domestic violence victims and children, and provide support for county and state service providers it has been important to help in the methods that they suggest. Members also become connected and serve or partner with many from these agencies to not only provide aid but become direct providers themselves. This also helps members to not only identify with the struggles of those on the margins of society, but to experience the injustices.

Finally, *developing relationships* with those considered “oppressed” offers powerful witness to the grace and mercy of God. As Brown indicates, “Being concerned for the working poor may not seem to be such a big deal for some. But it should be, because many of the working poor look like you and me. Many of our own children are living in poverty.”⁴⁴ Recognizing the face of oppression and poverty happens when we develop relationships with others. Paul describes it as “associating with the humiliated.” Campbell indicates that this unity and association confronts our cultural values and the way our world views those on the margins of society. “The church’s resistance to the powers, in fact, begins with its own communal practices.

⁴³Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed*, 199.

⁴⁴Brown, 19.

Such resistance does not primarily involve a set of ethical norms or moral pronouncements or decision-making processes but rather a specific people who practice a concrete alternative to the ways of death in the world.”⁴⁵ Campbell also suggests that this emotional connection provokes us to respond.⁴⁶

Conclusion

Preaching is a difficult task for the modern congregation. Even more, our increased diversity within these congregations and our ministry to those on the margins will not only increase anxiety and tension among our people, but make proclamation a difficult task. However, Paul’s letter to the Roman Christians offers us opportunities to guide our people to transformation, rather than conformation by our cultural standards. This transformation offers grace and mercy in unity, while practicing patience and allowing for diversity. A threefold process of “mental humility,” the practice of mercy giftedness among the congregation, and developing relationships with those on the margins of our society not only can promote peace and harmony—it can transform us to be people, like our God, of mercy.

⁴⁵Campbell, *The Word Before the Powers*, 133.

⁴⁶Campbell, *Word on the Street*, 18.

References Cited

- Abernathy, Alexis D. Editor. *Worship That Changes Lives: Multidisciplinary and Congregational Perspectives on Spiritual Transformation*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008.
- Augustine. *On Romans*.
- Bash, Anthony. "Deacons and Diaconal Ministry." *Theology* 102 (Jan.-Feb. 1999).
- Brown, Diana. "Faith Plus Persistence Pays Off," 17-21, *Just Preaching: Prophetic Voices for Economic Justice*, edited by André Resner. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2003.
- Brueggemann, Walter. "Ancient Utterance and Contemporary Hearing," 67-75, *Just Preaching: Prophetic Voices for Economic Justice*, edited by André Resner. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2003.
- Campbell, William S. "Universality and Particularity in Paul's Understanding and Strategy of Mission," 195-208. Burke, Trevor J. *Paul as Missionary: Identity, Activity, Theology and Practice*. London: T & T Clark, 2012.
- Campbell, Charles L. *The Word before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002.
- Carter, Warren. "Getting Martha out of the Kitchen: Luke 10:38-42 Again." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 58 (1996): 268.
- Clark, Ronald R., Jr. "Associating with the Humiliated: Victimaization as a Tool for Teaching Biblical Studies in a Christian College Setting." *Journal of Religion and Abuse* 7:1 (2005): 61-79.
- _____. "Is There Peace Within Our Walls? Intimate Partner Violence and White Mainline Protestant Churches in North America." *Religion and Men's Violence Against Women*, 195-206. Edited by Andrew Johnson. New York: Springer, 2015.
- _____. "Submit or Else: Biblical Texts Used by Batterers in Intimate Partner Violence." *A Cry Instead of Justice: The Bible and Cultures of Violence in Psychological Perspective*, 87-106. Edited by Dereck Daschke and Andrew Kille. T and T Clark International, 2010.
- _____. "Using Victim's Testimonies with the Prophets," and "Victim's Testimonies in the Apocalypse." In *Teaching the Bible: Practical Strategies for Classroom Instruction*. Edited by Mark Roncace and Patrick Gray. Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 2005.
- Clarke, Andrew D., ed., *Serve the Community of the Church: Christians as Leaders and Ministers*, First-Century Christians in the Graeco-Roman World. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000.

- Coates, William R. "Give to Everyone Who Begg from You," 153-155, *Just Preaching: Prophetic Voices for Economic Justice*, edited by André Resner. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2003.
- Collins, J. N.. *Are All Christians Ministers?* Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992.
- _____. *Diakonia: Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Conn, Harvey M., and Manuel Ortiz. *Urban Ministry: the Kingdom, the City, and the People of God*. IVP Downer's Grove, 2001.
- Craddock, Fred B. *Preaching*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997.
- Donfried, Karl P. *The Romans Debate*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003.
- Drane, John. *After McDonaldization: Mission, Ministry, and Christian Discipleship in an Age of Uncertainty*. Grand Rapids, Baker, 2008.
- Ehrenreich, Barbara. *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting by in America* (NY: Holt, 2001, but the forward is 2008).
- Fitzmyer, Joseph A. *Romans: A New Translation and Commentary*. New York: Doubleday, 1993.
- Friesen, Steven J.. "Prospects for a Demography of the Pauline Mission: Corinth Among the Churches." In *Urban Religion in Roman Corinth*, edited by Daniel N. Schowalter and Steven J. Friesen, 351-70. Cambridge: Harvard University, 2005.
- Howard, James M. *Paul, The Community, and Progressive Sanctification: An Exploration into Community-Based Transformation within Pauline Theology*. New York: Peter Lang, 2007.
- Juvenal, *Satires* 14.96-106.
- Keck, Leander E. "Pathos in Romans? Mostly Preliminary Remarks," 71-97. Thomas H. Olbricht and Jerry L. Sumney, Ed., *Paul and Pathos*. Atlanta: SBL, 2001.
- Keener, Craig S. *Romans: A New Covenant Commentary*, Kindle Edition. Eugene: Cascade, 2009.
- Lampe, Peter, Michael G. Steinhauser, and Marshall D. Johnson. *From Paul to Valentinus: Christians at Rome in the First Two Centuries*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003.
- Long, Thomas G. *The Witness of Preaching*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1989.
- McMickle, Marvin A. "Preaching in the Face of Economic Justice," 3-10, *Just Preaching: Prophetic Voices for Economic Justice*, edited by André Resner. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2003.

Miltmore, John. "Gallup asked Americans why they go to church. It's not for the music." <http://www.intellectualltakeout.org/blog/gallup-asked-americans-why-they-go-church-its-not-music>. April 17, 2017.

Oden, Thomas C. *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998.

Resner, André. "Preaching's Purpose: Thoughts on Message and Method," 11-16. *Just Preaching: Prophetic Voices for Economic Justice*, edited by Andre Resner. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2003.

Seutonius. *The Lives of the Caesars*.

Smalley, Tavis. *The Rich and the Rest of Us*.

Stivers, Laura. *Disrupting Homelessness: Alternative Christian Approaches*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011.

Summers, Kirk, R. "The *Logike- Latreia* of Romans 12:1 And It's Interpretation Among Christian Humanists." *Perichoresis* 15:1 (2017), 47-66. Tisdale, Leonora Tubbs. *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*. Minneapolis, MN.: Fortress Press, 2010.

Tisdale, Leonora Tubbs. *Prophetic Preaching: A Pastoral Approach*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2010.

Winter, Bruce W. *Roman Wives, Roman Widows: The Appearance of New Women and the Pauline Communities*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010.

Witherington, Ben, and Darlene Hyatt. *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-rhetorical Commentary*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2006.

Wogaman, J. Philip. *Speaking the Truth in Love: Prophetic Preaching to a Broken World*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998.