

## Article

# George Calling: A Rhetorical Analysis of Four Broadcast Sermons Preached by the Rev. George F. MacLeod from Govan in 1934

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**Abstract:** George F. MacLeod was one of the most significant Church leaders in twentieth-century Scotland. He advocated parish renewal and mission within the Church of Scotland and founded the Iona Community. His contributions to the Church received national and international recognition. His notable strengths included the quality and popularity of his preaching. Be this as it may, there has been little detailed and systematic analysis of his sermons. This article provides an in-depth rhetorical analysis of four of his sermons. These four sermons were delivered in 1934 from Govan and broadcast on the radio. These sermons were chosen because Govan was a particularly formative context for MacLeod, 1934 was a significant year, and his radio preaching reflected and extended his wider popularity. This analysis drawing of the rhetorical codes of homiletician John S. McClure explores the nature of MacLeod's popular radio preaching in terms of how he used Scripture, language, expressed theology, and interacted with culture. It demonstrates that MacLeod's preaching was kerygmatic, image-driven, realistic but hopeful, and dialectically portrayed aspects of culture as sources of divine revelation.

**Keywords:** George MacLeod; preaching; rhetorical criticism; religious radio preaching; Scotland



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## 1. Introduction

This article will provide a rhetorical analysis of four sermons preached by the Rev. George F. MacLeod in 1934 and broadcast on the radio, from Govan, in Glasgow, Scotland.<sup>1</sup> It will introduce MacLeod and the rhetorical situation in which he delivered the sermons. It will then describe the sermons and provide a rhetorical analysis of their content. This analysis will explore how Scripture, language, theology, and culture were encoded in the sermons. This will give insight into the kerygmatic, image-driven, realistic but hopeful nature of his popular broadcast sermons as they were preached in a dialectical engagement with culture. It will also show how his own practice was congruent with how he described preaching, not least his own.

## 2. Rev. George F. MacLeod (1895–1991)

Duncan Forrester, in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, describes George Fielden MacLeod as “among the most flamboyant and charismatic Scottish church leaders of the twentieth century, and possibly the most influential” (Forrester 2004, p. 804). In turn, MacLeod's biographer, Ron Ferguson, while stating that MacLeod's contribution “will best be assessed fifty years from now”, yet calls him one of the Church's twentieth-century “giants” (Ferguson 2001, p. 415, originally published in 1990). MacLeod's influence was spread during his ministry through his powerful personality, ability to communicate, determination, willingness to experiment and innovate in mission and ministry, his views of the gospel, and the often controversial causes he supported.

MacLeod was ordained as a Church of Scotland minister in 1924. In some senses, this choice of vocation was not surprising. He was born in Glasgow, Scotland, in 1895 not only into an aristocratic family but into “one of Britain's most formidable ecclesiastical dynasties”

(Ferguson 2001, p. 24). It was not simply that the “powerful MacLeod house” had given “more than 550 years of ordained service to the Church” but that in doing so, the ministers had frequently achieved prominence and recognition in church and society (Ferguson 2001, p. 24). Be this as it may, Christian ministry was not his first choice. Instead, in 1913 following schooling in one of England’s “most illustrious” public schools, the “famous College of St Mary, Winchester” (Ferguson 2001, p. 44), MacLeod went to study law at Oriel College, Oxford (Ferguson 2001, p. 50). This trajectory, however, was interrupted in 1914 by the outbreak of the First World War. MacLeod served in the war with distinction. Following the war, however, he changed his vocational direction. Thus in 1919, he began to study theology at Edinburgh University in preparation for entering Christian ministry. As to this change in direction, Ferguson writes that it “ran in the blood” and the sort of service to the Church that every male in the MacLeod dynasty had to consider seriously (Ferguson 2001, p. 72).

As the above suggests, there were many socially conservative influences on MacLeod’s life and vocational choice. Yet, there were other significant formative experiences. There was the experience of the war. On the one hand, MacLeod recounted a decisive conversion experience near the end of the First World War where he knew he had to turn his life around (Ferguson 2001, pp. 71–72). On the other hand, he was dissatisfied with the nature of the religion he had seen offered during the war and the subsequent ability of the Church to address post-war scientific questions, changing moral values, and new social arrangements (Ferguson 2001, pp. 71–74). While studying in Edinburgh, there was his experience of the poverty of particularly young people, meaning that “for the rest of his life, George would have a burning compassion for under-privileged youngsters” (Ferguson 2001, p. 75). In turn, there was his theological education, if not so much in Edinburgh (Ferguson 2001, p. 74) then during his post-graduate fellowship year in 1921 at Union Theological Seminary in New York. There he was exposed to liberal theological ideas concerning the study of the Bible and to the teaching of such social gospellers as H.E. Fosdick and Sloane Coffin (Ferguson 2001, p. 76).

Following his ordination, MacLeod would have ministries with the Talbot House (Toc H) organization and parish churches in Edinburgh and Govan before founding the Iona Community in 1938. The Iona Community may be regarded as his most significant and lasting contribution to the Church (Ferguson 2001, pp. 413–14). It was primarily for this work that, in 1989, he received the prestigious Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion. Ferguson says this award was “regarded as the Nobel Prize for Religion” and “merely confirmed George MacLeod’s stature as one of the outstanding international Christians of the twentieth century” (Ferguson 2001, pp. 411–12).

As indicated above, at times, people recognized MacLeod’s various achievements. He was the first non-Anglican invited to give lectures on Pastoral Theology to ordination candidates for the Church of England at Cambridge University in 1936 (MacLeod 1936, p. 9). In 1937, he was awarded an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree from Glasgow University (Ferguson 2001, p. 146). In 1956, he was appointed as “Chaplain to the Queen” (Ferguson 2001, p. 281). In 1957, he became Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland (Ferguson 2001, pp. 286–87). In 1967, he was given a life peerage and became “Baron MacLeod of Fuinary” (Ferguson 2001). In 1987, he was presented with the Union Medal from Union Theological Seminary, New York (Ferguson 2001, pp. 406–8).

MacLeod, however, also created if not courted controversy. This controversy was partly due to the nature of the causes he promoted. These included renewal in worship, ecumenical relations, political and social activism, and pacifism from some time in the 1930s. It was partly due to jealousy of his status and popularity (Ferguson 2001, p. 97). It was partly a result of his determined manner, described as “arrogant enthusiasm” (Sproxtton 1964). Maxwell MacLeod, in a poignant reflection upon his father receiving the Templeton Prize, beautifully captured something of MacLeod’s prophetically maverick character when he stated:

What makes this award utterly appropriate to the man is that it is not given for conventional behaviour. It is not given to loyal servants of the Church, to bureaucrats or even to honour great learning. No, this award is given to specifically honour anguished souls who act because they must in order to sleep at nights. To trouble-makers who have turned over tables screaming blue murder. To intellectual vandals who break moulds with unwise words. To shockers who refuse to let us turn on the television and forget our ghastly world. It is given to the Solzenitzyns, the Dalai Lamas, to the George MacLeods. (MacLeod 1990, p. 16)

In turn, Ferguson, in his memorial tribute to MacLeod, described him as the “Gun-slinging Gambler from Govan” who perhaps never understood “the number of sniper rifles trained on him from dilapidated buildings” (Ferguson 1999, p. 49).

To analyze the preaching of MacLeod, therefore, is to consider the practice of a significant and controversial twentieth-century figure in Scottish church history. Indeed, “one most likely to demand a mention in the history of the world Church” (Kernohan 1975, p. 19). Be this as it may, Ferguson’s work (Ferguson 2001) remains the definitive biography. Later work on MacLeod is much more limited in scope and focuses on specific aspects of MacLeod’s life and ministry, such as his prayers (Gordon 2009) and his contribution to the Iona Community (Muir 2011). While commentators including Ferguson comment upon MacLeod’s gifts of communication and the power and quality of his preaching, I am not aware of any detailed or rhetorical analysis of his sermons apart from a performance analysis of his open-air preaching (Blythe 2011).

### 3. Rhetorical Context

The four sermons analyzed in this paper are all taken from the book *Govan Calling* (MacLeod 1934). This book is a somewhat eclectic collection of MacLeod’s *Sermons and Addresses, Broadcast and Otherwise* (MacLeod 1934). MacLeod acknowledges as much when he writes, “These sermons and addresses find themselves fashioned into print only because each, at one time or another, has been called for in that medium” (MacLeod 1934, p. v). Several of them are undated. There is no clear or coherent explanation of the order of the different items in the collection. There are fifteen main items followed at the end with a poem entitled “What was St. Columba Like?” (MacLeod 1934, pp. 165–67). The four sermons chosen were all preached from Govan, were preached in 1934, and were broadcast on the radio. These three factors help establish the rhetorical context of the sermons.

#### 3.1. Govan

It was in 1930 that MacLeod, at the second time of asking, responded positively to the call from the congregation of Govan Old Parish Church in Glasgow to become their minister. A post in which he remained until 1938. At the time of his call to Govan, he was a collegiate minister in the wealthy and influential St Cuthbert’s Church of Scotland in Edinburgh (1926–1930). He was the “Darling of the Establishment”, attracting large congregations with an anticipated glittering ecclesiastical career (Ferguson 2001, pp. 96–106).

MacLeod’s choice, therefore, to leave St Cuthbert’s and go west to Govan left many people wondering if he had made a good career move (Ferguson 2001, p. 112). Govan, situated on the south bank of the River Clyde in Glasgow, was a proud industrial ship-building community, but it had suffered considerably in the economic recession of the 1920s (Ferguson 2001, p. 110). During MacLeod’s induction events in October 1930, the Rev. John Anderson, while bringing greetings, spoke about the “prolonged unemployment” suffered particularly by young men and the negative personal and social consequences of such (Govan Press 1930b, p. 2).<sup>2</sup> Then, only days after his induction in October 1930, MacLeod attended a lecture by Dr. Jones on “The Govan of Yesterday and Today” (Govan Press 1930b, p. 3). One report on the lecture said, “he let us know a great deal about how many of our citizens live in hovels that are not fit for cattle” (Govan Press 1930b, p. 5). Such a situation encouraged political radicalism. A newspaper report in 1931 spoke of a

large demonstration against unemployment. It reported that violence had broken out in various places, although not in Govan, even though there were “hundreds of men hanging about the streets in idleness” (Govan Press 1931a, p. 6). As with the community, the Govan Church had declined, not least in the active participation of those who lived within the parish. Ferguson writes, “By 1929, when the parish minister left, broken in health, there was something of an air of defeatism around. The church building itself was grimy and grey, and obviously needed quite a bit of attention” (Ferguson 2001, pp. 110–11). At MacLeod’s induction events in October 1930, several speakers highlighted the change and challenge MacLeod had taken on. The Rev. G. D. Cadenhead said that before the congregation reached out to MacLeod, “Their new minister had been exercising a ministry of growing influence and fruitfulness in another city” (Govan Press 1930a, p. 5). Consequently, the only justification that they could have for reaching out to MacLeod was that they could offer MacLeod “A work more needy and more difficult” (Govan Press 1930a, p. 5).

Ferguson states that one of the main reasons MacLeod went to Govan Old Parish Church was its close connection to the Pearce Institute community center, which gave MacLeod the opportunity to “experiment” with ideas of parish renewal and community outreach (Ferguson 2001, pp. 110–12). By the time MacLeod arrived in Govan, his proposed plans, imagined and real, were the public talk of the church and town. Some anticipated a “cyclonic scheme of reform” (Govan Press 1930b, p. 2). It was even reported that Peter McIntyre, a well-known Govan communist and street orator, had been telling people what MacLeod was going to do with the Pearce Institute (Govan Press 1930b, p. 2). MacLeod responded with humor to some of these claims stating to the congregation, “I have not come to experiment on you—but with you” (Govan Press 1930b, p. 2).

MacLeod’s time at Govan would be transformative for him and his later ministry. To be sure, some claimed that the high point of his ministry was the years at St Cuthbert’s before his preaching and views “became distorted by his intense commitment to pacifism and socialism” (Ferguson 2001, p. 96.) In response to such claims, MacLeod responded, “Of course, I wasn’t preaching the gospel then” (Ferguson 2001, p. 106). Certainly, it was during the Govan years that MacLeod began to see the need and necessity for the idea that was to become the Iona Community. In a story variously told, MacLeod claims that a starving man called Archie Gray, whom he first encountered at an open-air meeting in Govan, was the Iona Community’s founder because of his prophetic challenge to the Church (Ferguson 2001, pp. 150–51). Thus, when in 1944, MacLeod published the book, *We Shall Rebuild*, in which he explained the work and vision of the Iona Community; he dedicated the book “To the people of Govan, who were the first to understand that the Iona Enterprise was no departure from our work but an attempt to extend that work to the Church at large” (MacLeod 1944, p. 2). In describing the significance of MacLeod’s move from Edinburgh to Glasgow, Ferguson writes,

Thus did the young prince of Scotland’s preachers set out westwards on a journey that was to change his life, and the lives of many people ever since. In the process, the darling of the establishment was to become the unholy disturber of the Kirk’s peace. (Ferguson 2001, p. 106)

To put this more directly, the Govan years “radicalized” MacLeod (Ferguson 2001, p. 135). Therefore, the four sermons in this paper were delivered during MacLeod’s formative Govan years.

### 3.2. The year 1934

Following on from the above, Ferguson suggests that 1934 was a “decisive year” in MacLeod’s life and ministry. (Ferguson 2001, p. 135). There are several reasons worth highlighting. First, MacLeod had emerged with renewed hope and faith following a trip to the Holy Land, where he had gone in 1933 to recuperate from physical and mental exhaustion (Ferguson 2001, pp. 121–34). MacLeod describes something of this experience in his sermon, “Things that are not Worth Dying For”, which was “Broadcast to the Empire, on the Eve of the World Economic Conference from St. Martin’s-in-the Fields”, London,



1933 (MacLeod 1934, pp. 97–104). He led a successful mission of friendship which would provide a model of mission for others, and “the church and Pearce Institute were bursting with life” (Ferguson 2001, p. 135). “The germ of the idea of the Iona Community” was already “growing in the mind of this increasingly impatient visionary” (Ferguson 2001, p. 134). His political views were becoming more distinct. Thus, in a talk entitled “Christ and Patriotism”, “Delivered at the Student Christian Movement Conference, Swanwick” in 1934, he advocated a form of “patriotic pacifism” (MacLeod 1934, pp. 15–32). He also continued to successfully develop and promote his form of “Celtic” worship. Thus, on 24 December 1934, Govan Old Parish Church held “what was reckoned to be the first Christmas Eve service to be held in a Protestant church in Glasgow in three centuries” (Ferguson 2001, p. 138). In addition, his book *Govan Calling* which contained several of his talks and sermons was published, sold well, and indicated his popularity as a speaker and broadcasting preacher (Ferguson 2001, p. 135). Therefore, the rhetorical context for the four sermons analyzed in this paper was not simply that they were preached in Govan but during a significant year of development and success in MacLeod’s ministry.

### 3.3. Radio Preaching

An additional feature of the rhetorical context is that all four sermons were broadcast on the radio. By the time MacLeod went to Govan in 1930, he was already an established radio preacher on the British Broadcasting Corporation, which had only started religious broadcasting in “earnest” in 1923 (Ferguson 2001, p. 96). Writing about MacLeod’s time at St Cuthbert’s, Ronnie Falconer says, “There he became the darling-preacher of Edinburgh’s West End and Scotland’s first religious broadcaster of note” (Falconer 1978, p. 149). MacLeod saw such preaching as a mission opportunity to reach a much wider audience than otherwise possible (Ferguson 2001, p. 97). He was successful. Some other ministers had to change the times of their evening services so that members of their congregation could listen to MacLeod on the radio (Ferguson 2001, p. 97).

From the beginning at Govan Old Parish Church, MacLeod saw the broadcast services as part of the broader mission and ministry of the congregation. In the *Govan Old Parish Magazine* for December 1930, he noted that many letters of appreciation had been received from a recent broadcast service mentioning the congregational singing. MacLeod then said that it was up to the congregation to determine whether they would be a success because they required the church to be full to remove the echo. He continued, “We hope very much that the congregation will look at these services as a service which we can render to Scotland, and will continue to support them as splendidly as they supported the first” (MacLeod 1930).

The local newspaper, the *Govan Press*, with evident pride in the popularity of the local minister, also regularly advertised and reported upon these broadcast services. On 25th December 1931, the newspaper reported,

The evening service last Sunday at Govan Old Parish Church was broadcast to Scotland, and in many a home in town and country, cottage and mansion, the Christmas message of the Rev. Geo. F. Macleod the parish minister, came with the charm of freshness, hope and cheer. (Govan Press 1931b, p. 4)

In March 1932, along with the advert for a forthcoming broadcast service, the report observed, “The frequency of these broadcast sermons is an evidence of their helpfulness and the popularity of the parish minister” (Govan Press 1932a, p. 4). In January 1933, another report said, “The Rev. George MacLeod, minister of Govan Old Parish Church, has a pleasing delivery in his broadcast addresses, as heard on the loud speaker. There is no suggestion of strain, nerves, or shouting so common in others more self-conscious.” (Govan Press 1933a, p. 4). Yet another report, in July 1933, claimed that MacLeod “is fast becoming one of Britain’s most popular broadcasting ministers” (Govan Press 1933b, p. 5).

Falconer writes with apparent hyperbole about MacLeod’s radio broadcasts, “His broadcast sermons gripped a nation-wide audience, with working men and their idle comrades at street corners discussing little else on Mondays and in the week that followed”

(Falconer 1978). Nevertheless, it seems clear that MacLeod's radio preaching was both a local and a national expression of his Govan ministry through which his preaching gained wider audiences and popularity.

The fact that these sermons were broadcast gives them a particular nature. This is something that MacLeod recognized. In the "Foreword" to *Govan Calling*, he writes,

If their "tempo" frequently approximates to the staccato firing of a machine-gun, it is because we must use modern weapons, however ugly, to make any headway against the enemy to-day. A world that—through wireless—has become accustomed to the ludicrous demand that every subject under (and including) the sun should be adequately discussed "in fifteen minutes" must share the blame. (MacLeod 1934, p. v.)

These sermons, therefore, are a particular rhetorical expression of MacLeod's ministry. Be this as it may, they are located and embedded within his local and yet broader ministry in a significant year in Govan. MacLeod indeed describes them as "constructed in the midst of that bombardment of interruption which is now the normal experience of every active minister of the Gospel" (MacLeod 1934, p. v).<sup>3</sup>

#### 4. The Four Sermons

MacLeod delivered the four sermons, which are the focus of this article, in 1934. Three are dated to significant events, New Year's Day, Lent, and Whit Sunday. The other is undated other than the year. They are introduced in that order.

The first sermon has the title "Renewal" (MacLeod 1934, pp. 53–60). It was broadcast on the first Sunday of the "New Year" in 1934. The Scripture text was 2 Corinthians 4:16, "*Though our outward man perish, yet is our inner man renewed from day to day. Wherefore we faint not*" (MacLeod 1934, p. 55). Following the text, MacLeod contrasts the vitality of the spiritual over and against the decay of the physical. In doing this, he yet stresses that the spiritual can break through to transfigure the physical. This sermon contains a particular encouragement to those in hospital, but in keeping with the move he makes in this sermon, he bases this upon the encouragement that their spirit can give to others.

The second sermon has the title "The Cross" (MacLeod 1934, pp. 1–12). It comes first and is the longest sermon in the book. It was broadcast in "Lent" 1934. The text was John 12:32, "*I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying by what manner of death he should die*" (MacLeod 1934, p. 3). As MacLeod put it, "This sermon is concerned with the necessity of the Cross: why there was a Cross" (MacLeod 1934, p. 3). MacLeod explores how the Cross attracts people. He presents this in a progressive move from outer to inner levels of attraction. This progression goes from the attraction of those who overcome difficulty to the nature of undeserved suffering to, ultimately, the self-revelation of God on the cross of Jesus Christ.

The third sermon has the title "Babel and Pentecost" (MacLeod 1934, pp. 71–78). It was broadcast "to the Empire" on "Whit Sunday" 1934. It has no text at the beginning, but MacLeod mentions both Genesis 11 and Acts 2. In this sermon, MacLeod states the need for a modern and scientific world to be open to the power that comes down from above if people are to fully achieve human success and community. "Pentecost tells us that the world will only find harmony and peace *if* the basis of its common speech be the Word of the Living God" (MacLeod 1934, p. 78). Furthermore, he maintains that it is in the language of the Galilean and his followers that such a "common language" can be found (MacLeod 1934, pp. 77–78).

The fourth sermon has the title "The Christian Climb" (MacLeod 1934, pp. 61–70). The text was Mark 10:32, "*And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem: and Jesus was going before them and they were amazed: and they that followed were afraid*" (MacLeod 1934, p. 63). It was broadcast in 1934 but has no other dating. In this sermon, MacLeod likens the Christian life to a "climb." He focuses not merely on the journey but the companions' dependence upon one another. Here he stresses the mission that can be carried out

anywhere and the importance of the Church. Nevertheless, ultimately this sermon points to Jesus Christ, who leads the way.

Of course, these sermons, as described, are published sermons. The analysis is of published sermon texts. This has limitations. It may well have been MacLeod's cultured accent shaped by his education in England that gave him a popular radio voice. This analysis does not consider that aspect of his rhetoric. This said, these written texts give an insight into the sermons as they would have been preached. MacLeod regularly prepared a written text for his sermons. Typed copies of sermon texts from his Govan days indicate his writing and then re-writing and correcting words and phrases, leaving a marked final sermon text.<sup>4</sup> This is consistent with research into his prayers. (Gordon 2009). It is also wholly consistent with how others talk about his meticulous preparation for preaching and prayer (Ferguson 2001, p. 246; Muir 2011, pp. 208–10). In these published sermons, we may not see the marked emphasis and underline, but we need not doubt that these written texts represent well what MacLeod would have said. Indeed, it may be that they had to be written to be delivered on the radio.

## 5. Analysis and Discussion

This analysis focuses on four main features of MacLeod's preaching. These are how he used Scripture, how he used language, the theology expressed, and how he represented culture in his sermons. This approach draws on the work of John S. McClure and his book *The Four Codes of Preaching: Rhetorical Strategies* (McClure 2003).<sup>5</sup> This is an approach to the textual analysis of sermons designed for sermons. While originally designed for preachers to analyze their own sermons it is used here to provide a hitherto absent detailed analysis of MacLeod's preaching. The claim is not that the features identified made his preaching popular. Instead, the claim is that these are the features of what was influential and popular radio preaching in 1934.

In addition to the above, this rhetorical approach gives greater insight into several claims MacLeod made about the nature of preaching. Three seem important. First, in a circular to his parishioners and published in the newspaper in October 1932, he stated,

Christian pulpits are erected primarily to proclaim the Gospel of Salvation: in its simplicity and profundity. And once we get a real grip of the Gospel, most modern problems cease to be perplexities and get on the road towards solution. (Govan Press 1932b, p. 4)

Second, in his 1936 lectures on preaching, MacLeod claimed that to "speak the truth in love", preachers had to "first of all, love" (MacLeod 1936, p. 64). This involved listening to the ideas of other people. Yes, even that of the "publican and sinner", seeking among these ideas the "pure gold" of the Kingdom as well as the "dross" (MacLeod 1936, p. 64). Third, his claim in the same lectures that "the most modern" and if "rightly done, the most effective" form of preaching was preaching in "pictures." He called this approach the "Modern Parabolic" approach (MacLeod 1936, p. 84).

### 5.1. Scripture

To talk about MacLeod's use of Scripture is to draw upon McClure's "scriptural code" (McClure 2003, pp. 15–51). This relates to how the preacher interprets Scripture in their preaching to create the sort of "remembering" that moves "a sacred person or event from the past into the present, into the here and now" (McClure 2003, pp. 16–17). He suggests five possible styles. One is "translation", which is when and where a preacher essentially "brings over" the meaning of a Scripture text into the present in either a literal or more dynamic equivalence method (McClure 2003, pp. 20–24). Translation is a common approach in evangelical congregations where lessons are carried over almost directly from the Scripture text into the current context. Another style is "transition" (McClure 2003, pp. 24–29). Transition is when the preacher discerns the meaning from a historical-critical study and inquiry behind the text. A third style is "transposition", which pays attention to

the literary forms of the text and its likely impact on the listener and seeks to reproduce that impact through the sermon on the listeners (McClure 2003, pp. 29–36). Again, another style is what McClure calls “trajection” (McClure 2003, pp. 42–46). Trajection involves an interpretation of the Scripture using the present to try and find new meaning in the Scripture text through a contextual interpretational lens. None of these seem to describe MacLeod’s approach adequately. Instead, MacLeod’s approach best fits what McClure calls “transformation” (McClure 2003, pp. 36–42).

In the transformation approach to Scripture, “The text brings with it an encounter with the truth of oneself and the truth of God”, demanding “a decision and reorientation of human existence” (McClure 2003, p. 37). In this approach, the preacher is less concerned to expound or explain a passage of Scripture but is much more concerned to proclaim from a text “the scandalous claims of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the call to repentance, to a yes or no stance in relation to those claims” (McClure 2003, p. 40). In this approach, the concern is “kerygmatic”, the proclamation of the “gospel” (McClure 2003, p. 40). Thus, it pays more attention to “the Subject about whom the text is written, namely Jesus Christ, crucified, resurrected, and laying claim to human lives” than the specific meaning of any particular Scripture text (McClure 2003, p. 38).

This transformational approach to preaching Scripture is evident in all four of MacLeod’s sermons. In the “Cross”, he does not seek to explain the text in context. Instead, he preaches its claim, making it clear from the beginning that people might find this disruptive.

This sermon is concerned with the necessity of the Cross: why there was a Cross. If we are to be orthodox, nothing is more certain than that God allowed the Cross. He let it happen. He used it. It is what upsets many young people to-day. (MacLeod 1934, p. 3)

While we may expect this approach in a sermon about the Cross, this approach is evident in all four sermons. In no sermon does MacLeod attempt to find a series of propositions from an exposition of the Scripture text to be translated over into life. Instead, he points to the disruptive necessity of responding to Jesus Christ. In “Renewal”, as MacLeod proceeds, he names his message as the “Gospel” (MacLeod 1934, p. 58) and states, “And that spiritual force that alone can save us is all about us, and just longing to break through to solve our every problem” (MacLeod 1934, pp. 58–59). Further, as the sermon reaches its conclusion, he clarifies that ultimately, the “Subject” of his message is Jesus Christ and his claim on people’s lives:

It is only in Jesus Christ that we will see new creation, and we cannot break through to Him. He is longing to break through to us to us. But He can only break through to humble and believing hearts. And only as we let Him break through shall we see Him walking on the waters—not of Gennesareth, but Thames. (MacLeod 1934, p. 60)

In “Babel and Pentecost”, the emphasis is on the “confounding” activity of God and the necessity of “power that comes down from on high” (MacLeod 1934, p. 77). As the sermon proceeds to its conclusion, MacLeod makes it clear that this power is “the Spirit of Christ” and that “Pentecost tells us that the world will only find harmony and peace if the basis of its common speech be the Word of the Living God” (MacLeod 1934, pp. 77–78).

In the “Christian Climb”, he emphasizes that this climb begins with a “decision” to follow “behind that Leader who, with unperturbed pace, is always going on before” (MacLeod 1934, p. 65). To follow is to respond to the “call” of Christ, which will take a person away from “safer lives” (MacLeod 1934, pp. 65–66) This response involves faith:

Well, we might not see Christ quite clearly: but we do know the response of our hearts: something deep within us makes us trust Him. If you cannot see Him, will you not trust to the footsteps of the best man you can find, in your office, games, or home, whom instinctively you know is a little higher up than you? If you do, from time to time you will catch a glimpse of Christ beyond that man,



cutting for you and him the steps. And at the top be very sure you will meet Him face to face. (MacLeod 1934, p. 69)

MacLeod, therefore, according to McClure's categories encodes Scripture in a particular way. That is, regardless of the Scripture text he offers little exposition as might be expected in some evangelical preaching. Instead, he proceeds to give a more evocative proclamation of the Gospel, centered on the person of Jesus Christ who makes a transformative demand on the present. While providing less detail than an expository approach, this approach still gives authority to Scripture and a more direct style to the preaching.

## 5.2. Language

To discuss MacLeod's use of language is to draw upon McClure's "semantic code" (McClure 2003, pp. 52–92). This code is concerned with how language is used in the sermon to communicate meaning. This includes how a sermon is structured and organized. McClure identifies two main styles, each with two substyles. First, he identifies the "connotative style" (McClure 2003, pp. 61–63). This is where meaning is revealed alongside the words being used in an open-ended rather than fixed way. One substyle of this is the "artistic" style when and where the meaning is often delayed using images and illustrations (McClure 2003, pp. 63–67). The second substyle is "conversational", where there is a dialogue between differing opinions allowing, as it were, truth to emerge (McClure 2003, pp. 68–72). The second main style is "denotative" (McClure 2003, pp. 72–73). This is where the preacher seeks to use language so that meaning is fixed and precise without delay (McClure 2003, pp. 72–73). The first substyle of this approach is the "assertive style" (McClure 2003, pp. 73–80). In this style, the preacher preaches as though what they are saying is the accepted meaning. The second substyle of the denotative is the "defensive style" (McClure 2003, pp. 81–85). This is when and where the preacher will draw upon and use a range of arguments "from Scripture, tradition, experience, and science to support his or her radical truth claims" (McClure 2003, p. 82).

As stated above, MacLeod's approach to Scripture is a very kerygmatic style. This scriptural style might anticipate an assertive semantic style. Certainly, MacLeod proclaims the gospel. Nevertheless, he was also aware of "modern" questions that he needed to address. In the "Cross", MacLeod speaks about theories and opinions contrary to his message (MacLeod 1934, p. 3). In contrast to these opinions, in this and other sermons, he uses human "experience" to challenge these views. "Men may rebel at theology, but they cannot deny their own experiences, and in other realms than the strictly religious, what we may describe as an experience of the Cross does inevitably thrill men" (MacLeod 1934, p. 5). This appeal to experience will be discussed further below under MacLeod's engagement with culture.

Be the above as it may, and in terms of MacLeod's overall semantic approach, there is a strong artistic connotative style. All four sermons work with a dominant image. In "Renewal", it is the image of the spirit breaking through to transform the physical, as demonstrated through MacLeod's experience of a visit to an elderly lady. In the "Cross", it is the image of the cross. In "Babel and Pentecost", it is the combining of technology and the spiritual as illustrated through the story of a man in a "funicular railway worked by hydraulic power" (MacLeod 1934, p. 73). In the "Christian Climb", it is the experience of climbing as described to MacLeod by an experienced climber. In three of these sermons, "Renewal", "Babel and Pentecost", and the "Christian Climb", this image is introduced early. In "Renewal" and "Babel and Pentecost", the sermon's meaning is delayed by starting with a story that presents the image. In the "Climb", MacLeod makes it clear where he is going quite early, stating, "Have you ever thought of the Christian life as a climb?" (MacLeod 1934, p. 63). This question, however, is immediately followed by an extended discussion on climbing. Thus, the detailed connection between the image and the message is delayed. In all three of these sermons, it is then primarily the image rather than the Scripture text, which he expands and explains.

The sermon the “Cross” is somewhat different in that MacLeod makes his meaning clear from the beginning. “This sermon is concerned with the necessity of the Cross: why there was a cross” (MacLeod 1934, p. 3). It appears here that MacLeod felt that this image was known and did not need to be painted. Be this as it may, what MacLeod then explores in this sermon is more the symbol of the cross rather than any doctrine of the atonement. Furthermore, as he explains why people are attracted to the cross, he draws on a range of supportive illustrations and stories drawn from culture, literature, and Scripture (MacLeod 1934, pp. 5–7, 11).

As indicated above, MacLeod often supported the dominant image in his sermons with other illustrative material. In three of the sermons, “Renewal”, the “Cross”, and the “Christian Climb”, he quotes poetry. In all sermons, he wordsmiths his own language into pictures. In “Renewal”, after discussing people in hospital, he asks, “Is the Gospel no more than a spiritual stretcher-bearer party, to relieve the casualties on the battlefield of life?” (MacLeod 1934, p. 58) In the “Cross”, he states

His life from start to finish was like a sun giving warmth to all who came within its rays; but in His Cross that same sun became focused, as through a lens, till the warmth of His example becomes so concentrated as to set on fire all that it touches. (MacLeod 1934, p. 6)

In “Babel and Pentecost”, he criticizes the modern desire to build upwards as though to God, with the imagery of unsafe scaffolding:

Every man begins to see that science, which we thought to raise us, is by itself just as likely to depress us: that machinery, the scaffolding on which we hoped to build a new eminence for man, is, like as not, more ready to topple over on us. (MacLeod 1934, p. 74)

In the “Christian Climb”, MacLeod first introduces in his open description the importance of a good rope for climbers and then later returns to the picture in his application, saying,

He binds us with a rope through which there runs the red thread of sacrifice to recall to us the manner of this climb. The fellowship of the Church is precisely the fellowship of the rope: once we are braced in we become inevitably a strength—or danger—to the company. (MacLeod 1934, p. 68)

Such language using simile and metaphor is common throughout MacLeod’s sermons.

Some might suggest that MacLeod’s preaching is thematic. He certainly deals with themes, as is suggested by his titles. Nevertheless, this description is not sufficient. For the themes are encoded in artistic rather than denotative language. This encoding goes beyond the mere illustration of otherwise stated truth. Rather it points to the fact that MacLeod believed that truth could be communicated through story and image. This is consistent with Ferguson’s description of MacLeod as the “Celtic Spellbinder” who could “distinguish between facts and truth” and who “knows a good story when he tells one” (Ferguson 2001, p. 70).

### 5.3. Theology

To discuss the theology of MacLeod’s sermons is to draw on McClure’s “theosymbolic code” (McClure 2003, pp. 93–135). This approach looks at the preacher’s understanding of how God is operative in the world through how God is represented in the language of the sermons. This is a narrative reading of the sermon in so far as it is concerned with exploring how the preacher represents the interaction between various “characters” or “actants” (McClure 2003, p. 96). As defined by McClure, these characters are the “sender”, frequently God. The “receiver”, frequently humanity and creation. The “object”, is the goal of the narrative. The “subject”, “the hero or the protagonist”, is frequently Christ. The “helper” who helps the subject achieve their goal, such as the Spirit or the Church. The “opponent” is the one who “impedes the effort of the subject” (McClure 2003, pp. 96–97).

In sermons, these characters described above interact in such a way as to demonstrate one of four main views of God's operation in the world. First, God may be present but is not actively engaged in the described struggle. McClure calls this the "Low-Negative Style" (McClure 2003, pp. 105–10). Second, God is actively involved in the struggle yet has not triumphed. This is the "High-Negative Style" (McClure 2003, pp. 110–6). Third, God has triumphed to establish some equilibrium in the described situation. This is the "Low-Positive Style" (McClure 2003, pp. 116–20). Four, God has triumphed in such a way to bring "gain" and "increase" over and against what existed previously. This is the "High-Positive" style (McClure 2003, pp. 121–24).

In the sermon, "Renewal", God is the giver, humans struggling with problems are the receivers, the object is bringing together the spiritual and the physical, Jesus Christ is the subject, the opponent is those ideas and attitudes that separate the physical and the spiritual, and the helper is the "spiritual force" which is "just longing to break through to solve our every problem" (MacLeod 1934, pp. 58–59). The primary position in this sermon is low-negative as to be effective, people need to accept the message on offer. Nevertheless, MacLeod makes the claims of the sermon based upon a high-positive example of what such a breakthrough can look like. This sermon starts with MacLeod recounting an experience of spiritual transfiguration when he visited a very elderly lady whose prayers drew him into an experience concerning which he concluded,

It is experiences like that which make leap into letters of living fire the highest thrusts of the Apostles fancy . . . It is the spirit that giveth life—wherefore we faint not and the spiritual becomes the only bearable interpretation of the world. (MacLeod 1934, p. 57)

Therefore, in the low-negative of this sermon, we have the high-positive of what happens when the spiritual breaks through.

In the sermon the "Cross", God is the giver, human beings are the receivers, the goal is for people to accept the necessity of the Cross, the hero is Jesus Christ, and the opponent is what MacLeod identifies as the modern attitude of "many young people to-day" (MacLeod 1934, pp. 3–5). This attitude is that the Cross is not necessary for the Christian faith. In this sermon, the helper is the strange human attraction that crosses such as undeserved suffering can have for people. The dominant theological symbolic code in this sermon is low-negative as people again need to receive it to benefit from it. Nevertheless, it is predicated upon what God has already done in and through the Cross of Jesus Christ.

In the sermon "Babel and Pentecost", God is the giver, humanity the receiver, and the goal is for people to accept the importance of the spiritual. The subject is Christ and the promised Spirit, the helper. The opponent is modern human self-sufficiency based upon scientific and technological achievements. This sermon starts with a low-positive story about technology and nature complementing one another in some sort of realized equilibrium. However, again, the dominant style is low-negative because people need to appropriate what is available to realize the benefits.

In the sermon the "Christian Climb", God is the giver, those seeking fulfillment in life are the recipients, the object is "perfections sacred height" (MacLeod 1934, p. 65), ultimately the vision of Christ face to face (MacLeod 1934, p. 69). Christ indeed is also the subject. The opponent is the perceived safety people can find in the valley in contrast to the challenge and fear of the climb. At places in this sermon, MacLeod addresses the high-negative human experiences of God's apparent noninvolvement and a "walk in the dark" (MacLeod 1934, p. 66). Yet he counters this by saying, "If you will walk through the darkness in faith, be assured that, when your plight is wellnigh desperate, chinking through the trees, in God's own time, there glints the dawn!" (MacLeod 1934, p. 67). In turn, in this sermon, the Church is very clearly the helper. MacLeod states that the Church was "ordained" for such a task (MacLeod 1934, p. 67). Therefore, in this sermon, we have high-negative moments, but ultimately it has an overall low-negative tone because although we may not see Christ, he is the leader who has gone on up ahead (MacLeod 1934, p. 69).

MacLeod is realistic about human struggles. Nevertheless, he certainly sees God as active in the world with Christian resources available to those who will reach out to and for them. This theological style is consistent with his kerygmatic approach to the Scripture and his gospel message of salvation as something which, if not yet appropriated, is nevertheless available to break in to bring transformation. This means that his sermons offer hope as he addresses the human condition in a variety of contexts.

#### 5.4. Culture

The final area of analysis is MacLeod's view of culture as encoded in his sermons. This analysis draws on McClure's "cultural code" (McClure 2003, pp. 136–69). The code considers how the preacher refers to cultural artifacts and people's life experiences and what this shows about the preacher's understanding of the relationship between culture and the gospel message. McClure draws upon and adapts H. Richard Niebuhr's work *Christ and Culture* to highlight four main styles by which preachers represent culture in their sermons (McClure 2003, p. 143). These are as follows. The first is "identification", where a preacher identifies certain cultural factors and experiences as representing the nature of the message they are preaching (McClure 2003, pp. 143–49). The second is "dialectical", where the preacher takes a critical yes and no stance toward cultural expressions and experiences (McClure 2003, pp. 149–58). The third is "dualist", where the preacher essentially denies that any homiletical meaning is located in culture even while recognizing that culture is the arena in which the Christian life is lived (McClure 2003, pp. 158–62). The fourth is "sectarian", where the meaning of the gospel and at least the dominant culture are opposed to one another (McClure 2003, pp. 162–66).

MacLeod makes many references to culture in his sermon. He is no sectarian. At times MacLeod points to the knowledge of faith that the Church holds. Nevertheless, he explicitly says, "Do not imagine that to return to Galileans' ways is to return to primitive life. It is not to scorn invention or to be afraid of science" (MacLeod 1934, p. 78). At other times his approach appears dualist when "illustrations, appeals to authority, anecdotes, and all kinds of cultural information are practical tools in service to the semantic code" (McClure 2003, p. 158). In the "Christian Climb", he uses climbing as an image to illustrate the nature of the Christian life without necessarily attributing to climbing itself some revelatory significance of the gospel of Jesus Christ. However, even here, we may suspect that for MacLeod, this is no mere illustration but that the yearning for the physical in nature may at least negatively indicate the loss of the spiritual. This would undoubtedly be consistent with what he states in his 1936 lectures on preaching. There MacLeod speaks about the importance of "analogies" to connect with listeners in their interests (MacLeod 1936, p. 56). Nevertheless, in discussing what he sees as the modern concern with the physical and natural, he also states, "They may seem to be breaking from the trammels of the Church, but at least they are breasting out towards a revelation of our God" (MacLeod 1936, p. 68). While therefore, MacLeod may use cultural references for the semantic value of illustrating what he is saying, his cultural references reveal a more complex understanding.

Following the above, MacLeod's approach to culture is best understood as dialectical. In this approach, the preacher is generally suspicious of the adequacy of culture to contain or express the fullness of the gospel while at the same time recognizing some positive relationships between the two (McClure 2003, p. 149). In the sermon "Babel and Pentecost", MacLeod criticizes modernity, scientific progress, and the attendant self-sufficiency that seeks to achieve human success without reference to the power that needs to come from the above (MacLeod 1934, pp. 74–75). Nevertheless, later in the sermon, he allows that the stated negative aspects of Western civilization can be redeemed in the light of a response to the gospel message. "God's power came down that man might rise. If we accept it rightly, it will release the whole of science and of modern invention for their true purposes in the service of mankind" (MacLeod 1934, p. 78).

At other times, however, consistent with this dialectical approach, he is much more optimistic about how aspects of human culture, particularly human nature, may reflect and

reveal the gospel message. In the sermon mentioned above, “Babel and Pentecost”, while he criticizes self-sufficiency, he yet suggests that what he sees as a somewhat universal human discontent with the modern project to satisfy is an indication that people recognize that something spiritual, from above, is required (MacLeod 1934, pp. 74–75). Likewise, in the sermon “Renewal”, he uses examples of the human spirit as demonstrated by people in hospitals or unemployed people as examples of the spiritual beyond the physical (MacLeod 1934, p. 58).

There is still an even more explicit identification between cultural references and the homiletical message at other times. In the sermon, the “Cross”, he identifies what he sees as a universal response to self-sacrifice and suffering as an “as if” God-given expression of longing after the God revealed in Jesus Christ.

Men may rebel at theology, but they cannot deny their own experiences, and in other realms than the strictly religious, what we may describe as an experience of the Cross does inevitably thrill men. It is as if God, having put it at the centre of the world’s mystery, also put it into the hearts of men to respond to that Cross. All men respond to crosses. (MacLeod 1934, p. 5)

Here, therefore, and in other places, MacLeod clearly draws a close connection between some expression of culture and cultural experience and the meaning and the message of the gospel he is proclaiming. In keeping with this, he is willing to attribute a spiritual meaning to the poetry he cites. MacLeod writes of Kipling’s poem “The Explorer”, “That is a poem of the spirit” (MacLeod 1934, p. 66). Thus, as with Bunyan’s “Pilgrim’s Progress”, which he cites (MacLeod 1934, p. 67), MacLeod is prepared at times to give an allegorical religious status to aspects of human culture and experience at the level of identification.

Be the above as it may, MacLeod’s style in these sermons is dialectical, not strict identification. This is not merely because he criticizes some aspects of culture and identifies with others. It is because even when he moves towards identification, he does this in sermons that make a kerygmatic appeal for people to respond to the gospel to receive what is being discussed and offered. To put that differently, “the meaning that is being preached remains something more than that culture” (McClure 2003, p. 151).

## 6. Conclusions

One of MacLeod’s strengths was the popularity of his preaching as demonstrated not least in his broadcast preaching with the subsequent publication of talks and sermons in 1934. McClure’s rhetorical codes allow a detailed analysis of this preaching. They demonstrate the ways in which MacLeod encoded Scripture, language, theology, and culture in the words spoken and communicated. Consequently, we can see that MacLeod’s preaching in these sermons was kerygmatic, artistically image-driven, realistic but hopeful, and with a dialectical approach to the ways in which culture can reveal the nature of the Christian message being preached. Rhetorically, this was the style of the sermons which had a popular appeal and a wide reach.

All these sermons were delivered in a formative year of his formative ministry at Govan in 1934. In terms of content, the local references are few. His intended audience is clearly wider than his regular and local congregation. The themes he preaches on are quite general in nature. Nevertheless, we see his concern for social and human progress to be married to God’s spiritual power and grace as revealed in Jesus Christ. Spiritual power, which he contended, was not far away and ready to break into the present. This emphasis, in many ways, directly reflected his practice in Govan, which in 1934 was achieving success through his various social and religious reforms. This was a cause for hope. Yet ultimately the sermons suggest that MacLeod’s hope lay in the holistic and transformative power of the gospel.

In these sermons, we also see MacLeod practicing the preaching he advocated. This was gospel-centered preaching. Such preaching started where people were at, not merely to critique but to affirm signs of the Kingdom breaking through into the present. This preaching used pictures. Therefore, in these sermons, we have examples of what MacLeod



meant by “Modern Parabolic” preaching. In later years MacLeod would explain in a letter, “I was born a symbolist and not an expositor. And such a message as I get across requires ‘pictures’” (MacLeod 1949). This would seem to be a very accurate description of his preaching as supported by the rhetorical analysis of these four sermons in terms of his approach to Scripture, language, theology, and culture.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> For the background material, I drew upon some of the content and some unused research from my unpublished 2009 Ph.D., which had a chapter on George MacLeod. This includes the material from *The Govan Press*, which I accessed in the Mitchell Library in Glasgow, Scotland, during my research.
- <sup>2</sup> I note here that while I am aware of the presence of male-gendered language both in historical reports about MacLeod and indeed in MacLeod’s preaching, I do not correct it in my references and quotations as it was representative of the time.
- <sup>3</sup> It seems worth noting that MacLeod, along with some other religious broadcasters, despite their popularity, would later be banned from radio for a time by the BBC because of their pacifist views.
- <sup>4</sup> I have a few photocopies of MacLeod’s marked sermon scripts from his time at Govan which I obtained from the National Library of Scotland during my original Ph.D. research. None of them were of the sermons analyzed in this paper.
- <sup>5</sup> I have used McClure’s methodology in a forthcoming article to analyze several contemporary sermons. In that article, I combine his methodology with another approach to sermon analysis. While I have not copied my descriptions of the approach from one to the other, there will be obvious overlap as it is the same methodology I am describing in both cases. Furthermore, McClure’s approach is complex and detailed in places and what I present is my understanding and application of it as discussed and described in the article.

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