THE TYNDALE BIBLICAL THEOLOGY LECTURE, 1976*

WHAT IS PREACHING ACCORDING TO THE NEW TESTAMENT?

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H. H. Farmer begins his book *The Servant of the Word*, first published in 1941, with the following statement: "If one were asked to indicate in the briefest possible way the most central and distinctive trends in contemporary Christian theology, one would be tempted to answer 'the rediscovery of the significance of preaching'"./1/ I suppose that in 1941 such a statement indeed could be made. Not only was Britain engaged in the Second World War, a situation which prompted many people to go to church again, but on the theological scene the impact of the theology of Karl Barth, which is often called a 'theology of the Word of God', was increasingly felt. In addition, Farmer was still rather optimistic in his view of the Western world in general and of the church in particular. As to the former he wrote "that this country of ours still has in large measure among the main springs of its life a Christian way of looking at things, despite all the evil that is in it"./2/ As to the latter he wrote: "Today, as the ecumenical conferences, especially the Madras Conference, brought home to us with irresistible force, the Christian Church stands as the only truly international and dynamically alive society in the midst of a humanity falling to pieces around us"./3/

Today we find ourselves in a totally different situation. If any part of the church's life and activities is under strong criticism, it is the sermon. Again and again the question is asked whether preaching has any meaning at all in our day and age. Many people, and among them

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* Delivered at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, on 4th January, 1977.

1. Herbert H. Farmer, *The Servant of the Word*, Nisbet, London (1941) 9.
2. *Ibid.* 11.
3. *Ibid.* 11/12.

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there are quite a few theologians, believe that the sermon, as we still know it, is a relic of the past. They usually point to the changed position of the church in the whole fabric of society. In the past the church had a central position, and consequently the sermon too was quite important. But since the process of secularisation started in our western world the church has increasingly lost its influential place. Large sections of society, such as the intellectuals and the common labourers, have left the church. To many others, who still attend occasionally or even fairly regularly, the sermon does not mean much. It has become or is becoming an antiquated means of communication. Especially since the mass media (first the daily papers, then the radio, then T.V.) have become the normal sources of information the sermon can no longer serve as a proper means of communication. It addresses itself to only one of man's senses and presupposes a linear mode of thought, while the mass media address man as a totality and try to give the information too as a totality, in the all-at-onceness of face to face communication. Moreover, recent investigations have shown that the sermon on the average produces little effect./4/ Less than one third of those who attend a church service are able to reproduce the central message of the sermon clearly and accurately, while even in their lives generally very little is changed by the message they have heard. Many scholars believe that this is due to an inherent weakness of the sermon as a means of communication. True communication is a matter of reciprocity, while the sermon by nature is a matter of one-way-traffic. Moreover, life is far too complicated for one man to do justice to all its various facets. In our modern industrialized world one man cannot possibly interpret the Gospel in all its riches to an audience that consists of so many different people, often living in quite different situations and circumstances. Another point of critique is that the sermon is far too introvert. It generally deals with and concentrates on the personal needs of the people who attend the service and so it tends to confirm their personal religion and the political and social *status quo* . Finally, we must also mention the resistance of many younger theologians to the Barthian 'theology of the Word of God', with its emphasis on the sermon. It

4. Cf. Clyde Reid, *The Empty Pulpit*, Harper & Row, New York (1967) 30f.

is all very well to say that the sermon is the third form of the Word of God, but we should not forget that as such it is just an ordinary means of communication and that its effectiveness ultimately depends on the question whether it is a suitable form of information. If its effect appears to be minimal, we cannot save it by some wonderful theological notion à la Barth, but we simply have to draw the conclusion that we have to look for other, more suitable forms of communication.

It is obvious that this kind of criticism (and we gave only a sample of it!) touches the very nerve of our preaching activity. We may neither ignore it nor simply give in to it. We have to take it seriously and at the same time submit it to the test of God's Word. For this reason it seemed to be very meaningful in this lecture to reflect on the question: *what really is preaching*? If there is to be a true renewal of preaching, this can only happen in the way of discovering the answer to this question. At this point I am in full agreement with the Roman Catholic scholar Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, when he writes: "The experience of the lay apostolate and the liturgical movement has shown that a renewal on the level of technique alone is not really a renewal at all, and is in practice neither effective nor lasting. True renewal must begin with a profound appreciation of the nature of preaching, a realization of just what preaching is"./5/

To find an answer to this question we have to return to the New Testament, for there we find the origin of what Christian preaching is. One may even go a step further and say: the New Testament itself is the result of preaching and a form of preaching. Form-critical research has, I believe, shown convincingly that much of the material which we now have in the Gospels, originally, in the period of oral transmission, was passed on in the preaching of the Early Church. Taking his clue from Luke 1:2 ("those who from the beginning

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5. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul on Preaching*, Sheed & Ward, New York (1964) XIV, XV. Cf. also Dominico Grasso S.J., *Proclaiming God's Message, A Study in the Theology of Preaching*, Notre Dame University Press (1965) XVII.

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were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word") Martin Dibelius, one of the pioneers of the form-critical method, concluded: "The first stories of Jesus came from the circle of witnesses who afterwards themselves became preachers. Then there followed other preachers, who had not been eye-witnesses. These again passed on the stories in their sermons"./6/ Likewise C. H. Dodd, after a careful analysis of the contents of the Gospels, concluded "that the fourfold Gospel taken as a whole is an expression of the original apostolic preaching.... There never existed a tradition formed by a dry historical interest in the facts as facts. From the beginning the facts were preserved in memory and tradition as elements in the Gospel which the Church proclaimed"./7/ The New Testament epistles too are closely linked with preaching. Although they are not sermons in the technical sense of the word, they certainly contain much material that was part of the preaching of the writers. The book of the Acts of the Apostles also contains much sermonic material. Especially the first half bears witness to the part played by public preaching in early Christian witness./8/ Finally, the Revelation of John is deeply kerygmatic, not only in the chapters 2 and 3, which contain written 'sermons' to the seven churches, but also in its prophecy of the future.

Because of this over-all kerygmatic character of the New Testament it is all the more amazing that it nowhere offers an explicit discussion of what preaching actually is. It does tell us that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is to be proclaimed. More than once it records the great commission of 'preaching the Gospel to the whole creation', which Jesus gave to the apostles and in them to the whole church. But none of the New Testament writers gives a deliberate and explicit exposition of what preaching is. All we have is a great number of scattered references. But they are surely enough to get a clear picture of what the New

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6. Martin Dibelius, *Gospel Criticism and Christology*, Nicholson & Watson, London (1935) 31; cf. F. F. Bruce, *Tradition Old and New*, Paternoster, Exeter (1970) 58ff.
7. C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments*, Hodder & Stoughton, London (1963) 55, 56.
8. Cf. F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, 59f.

Testament writers mean by 'preaching'. In this lecture we shall not explicitly deal with the contents of the apostolic preaching, although at times we have to touch on it; nor shall we study the various sermons recorded in the Book of Acts in order to discover the apostolic method of preaching. We shall concentrate on the question of the essential nature of preaching according to the New Testament, using a twofold approach. In the first place, we shall briefly study some of the key terms for preaching in the New Testament. In the second place we shall study some of the main theological statements, in particular in the epistles of St. Paul.

I Some Key Terms

The New Testament does not have one particular word that is *the* term for 'preaching'. The remarkable thing is that, while we generally use only one term, the New Testament has a great variety of terms. In his article on κηρύσσειν in the New Testament, in Kittel's famous *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Friedrich mentions no less than 33 different verbs and rightly points out that our almost exclusive use of 'preaching' for all of them is a sign, not merely of poverty of vocabulary, but of the loss of something which was a living reality in primitive Christianity./9/

(a) *Kērussein*

Undoubtedly the verb κηρύσσειν takes a prominent, perhaps we may say the prominent, place among these 33 verbs. In the opening part of the very first Gospel, the Gospel of Mark, it appears to occupy a key position. It is used of John the Baptist in 1:4, of Jesus Himself in 1:14 and a little later of the apostles in 3:14. According to the philologists it has an old-Persian root *xrausa*, meaning to cry out loud and clear, as when one cries out a message in the presence of many people. In Greek usage, outside the New Testament, it has a variety of meanings, but is in particular used for the activity of an herald (a κῆρυξ) who makes an announcement or declaration. An interesting example

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9. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT)* III, 703.

is the use of the verb by Plutarch. In 197 B.C. the Roman general Titus Quinctius defeated the army of King Philip V of Macedonia, at Kynoskephalei in Greece. The following year, on the occasion of the Isthmian Games, a delegate from Rome, a certain Flaminius, announced this victory of the Romans to the Greeks present at the games. (Plutarch uses the verb κηρύσσειν here!) At the same time Flaminius also announced the liberty and autonomy of Greece. The two facts were connected. At the moment that Flaminius announced the victory, the Greek virtually became free. By his 'proclamation' he, as it were, set an existing fact into motion. New freedom became a reality for the Greek.

In the New Testament κηρύσσειν has this same double meaning. It is the announcement of an event, but at the same time also of what this event has done or does to the listener. In the act of the κηρύσσειν the event becomes reality for the listener. It is therefore of essential importance that the herald brings the right announcement. He is not allowed to give his own opinion, but may only pass on a message he himself has received from the one who sends him. Friedrich says: "It is demanded that they (the heralds) deliver their message as it was given to them. The essential point about the report which they give is that it does not originate with them. Behind it stands a higher power. The herald does not express his own views. He is the spokesman for his master."/10/ The New Testament again and again emphasizes this content of the message. This is probably also the reason why the noun κῆρυξ occurs only three times in the New Testament (1 Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:11; 2 Pet. 2:5). In ordinary Greek literature the κῆρυξ himself has a position of significance at the court. He is a very important man, to whom not only political but also religious significance is ascribed. He is a 'sacral person'./11/ In the New Testament such connotations are absent, for the herald is not the main thing, but his work: the announcement of God's salvation in Jesus Christ. It is therefore not surprising to see that the main emphasis in the New Testament is on the verb κηρύσσειν. According to

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10. *TDNT* III, 687/8.
11. *TDNT* III, 691.

Friedrich it occurs 61 times./12/ Remarkably enough the noun κήρυγμα occurs only 8 times. Friedrich draws a rather sweeping conclusion from this, as to the theological significance of the terms. He writes: "Emphasis does not attach to the κήρυγμα, as though Christianity contained something decisively new in content - a new doctrine, or a new view of God, or a new cultus. The decisive thing is the action, the proclamation itself. For it accomplishes that which was expected by the Old Testament prophets. The divine intervention takes place through the proclamation. Hence the proclamation itself is the new thing. Through it the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ comes"./13/ I do not believe that this conclusion can be maintained in the light of the New Testament evidence. The New Testament nowhere says that the act of proclamation performs the miracle of salvation. It is *not the act itself* that does it, but *the particular message* that is proclaimed, namely, what God has done in Jesus Christ. As a matter of fact, on the previous page Friedrich himself has said that in the New Testament κηρύσσειν is the "*declaration of an event*". Indeed, both belong together: *declaration* and *event*, this particular event: what God has done in Jesus Christ. But then we must also add: wherever this event is proclaimed, it inaugurates what this event has accomplished. The new situation, brought about by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, now becomes reality for every listener who accepts it in faith.

(b) *Euangelizesthai*

The second important verb is εὐαγγελίζεσθαι which occurs 44 times in the New Testament. According to Friedrich/14/ it is synonymous with κηρύσσειν. Several times the words are used interchangeably or even together (Luke 8:1). Having its background in the Old Testament, especially in some passages in Second Isaiah (Is. 52:7 and 61:1-3) it emphasizes that proclamation is the bringing of 'good news' (εὐαγγέλιον). Just as in the case of κηρύσσειν it is used in the Gospels, of John the Baptist (Luke 3:18), of Jesus (who applies Is.

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12. *TDNT* III, 704.
13. *TDNT* III, 704.
14. *TDNT* II, 718.

61:1-3 to Himself, cf. Luke 4:18; Matt. 11:5) and of the disciples (Luke 9:6). In all cases the good news is that in Jesus the promised Kingdom of God has come. After the resurrection Jesus Himself becomes the object of this εὐαγγελίζεσθαι, cf. Acts 5:42; 8:35; 11:20; 17:18; Gal. 1:16. At times it is used for preaching in the absolute sense (Acts 14:7; Rom. 15:20; I Cor. 1:17; 9:16,18).

Always however, just as in the case of κηρύσσειν, it is the proclamation or preaching *of an event*. The preaching is not itself the saving event, but it is the revelation of the saving event. But as its revelation it also makes this saving event a reality for all who hear and believe the message. Friedrich is undoubtedly correct when he writes:. "εὐαγγελίζεσθαι is not just speaking and preaching; it is proclamation with full authority and power. Signs and wonders accompany the evangelical message. They belong together, for the Word is powerful and effective. The proclamation of the grace, of the rule of God, creates a healthy state in every respect. Bodily disorders are healed and man's relation to God is set right.... Joy reigns where this Word is proclaimed (Acts 8:8). It brings σωτηρία (I Cor. 15:1f.). It is the ὁδὸς σωτηρίας (Acts 16:17). It effects regeneration (I Pet. 1:23-25) . It is not a word of man, but the living eternal word of God.... Hence εὐαγγελίζεσθαι is to offer salvation. It is the powerful proclamation of the good news, the impartation of σωτηρία"./15/

(c) *Marturein*

The third important verb in the New Testament, μαρτυρεῖν, is of a different quality. It has its origin in the courtroom. The μάρτυς is the man or woman who testifies what he or she personally has seen or heard about the matter that is under investigation. This is also the fundamental meaning of the term in the New Testament. μάρτυρες are the people who testify what they have seen and heard, namely, of what God has done in Jesus Christ. The emphasis is on factuality. "The New Testament

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15. *TDNT* II, 720.

knows only witnesses who are bound to the facts"./16/ No wonder, therefore, that the term plays such a prominent part in the writings of Luke, the 'historian' among the evangelists. His first book, the Gospel according to St. Luke, ends with the great commission, in which intentionally the term is used (24:48). His second book, the Acts of the Apostles, begins with the same commission and again the term μάρτυρες is used; the rest of the book recounts the story of how this commission was executed by the apostles, even "to the end of the earth" (Paul in Rome!). In Luke's writings, however, the emphasis is not only on the fact that the μάρτυς declares facts directly known to himself, but these particular facts are the facts of the history of Jesus, "and witness cannot be borne to these facts unless their significance is also indicated and an emphatic appeal is made for their recognition in faith"./17/ Hence "the witness to facts and the witness to truth are one and the same". Or in other words, the μαρτυρία is also kerygmatic, it is a proclamation that calls to faith. In the same way the terms are also used in the Johannine writings. After recounting the piercing of Jesus' side by one of the soldiers, John writes: "He who saw it has borne witness - his testimony is true" (John 19:35; cf. 21:24).

It is obvious that in this original sense of the word no preacher of today can be called a μάρτυς. No preacher of today has personally witnessed the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. However, this is not the last word in the matter. In the New Testament we notice a gradual extension of the word μάρτυς. First of all we think of the application of the term to Paul in the Acts of the Apostles. In Acts 22:15 and 26:16 Paul is called a witness. Of course, he is not a witness in exactly the same sense as the older apostles, who were with Jesus during his earthly ministry (cf. Acts 1:21, 22). On the other hand, he is a witness of the resurrection, in the sense of having been appointed by God "to see the Just One and to hear a voice from his mouth" (22:14). It is therefore going too far, when Strathmann says that Paul actually is a witness in the

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16. R. Schippers, *Getuigen van Jezus Christus*, Wever, Franeker (1938) 198.
17. *TDNT* IV, 492.

sense of the "confessing witness", i.e. the witness who witnesses to the significance and story of Jesus./18/ Paul himself would disagree with this, as appears from the fact that again and again he puts himself on one level with the other apostles, since he has also met the risen One. Quite different, however, and here we have a clear change in the use of the word μάρτυς - is the fact that in Acts 22:20 Stephen is also called 'your witness'. Here we agree with Strathmann when he says: "The genitive 'sou' shows that we are still wholly in the sphere of the original sense. Stephen is not called a witness because he dies; he dies because he is a witness of Christ and because of his evangelistic activity. Nevertheless there is no sense any more of the man who from first-hand knowledge can bear witness to the facts of Jesus' history. He is simply the confessional witness"./19/ The same is true of Revel. 2:13, where Antipas is called 'my witness'. The word as used here does not yet mean 'martyr', although this meaning undoubtedly developed from this kind of text. I think Strathmann is again right when he says that Antipas "is not a witness because he is put to death; he is put to death because he is a witness, i.e. in the sense of proclamation of the Gospel"./20/

All this, however, does not mean that the term 'witness' can be applied to the *preacher of today* and that preaching may be seen as a kind of μαρτυρεῖν in a secondary sense. Today's preachers are only '*traditores*' of the original witness of the first eye- and earwitnesses. Their preaching is only 'passing on' the story they have received from the original μάρτυρες. Some theologians want to go even a step further and interpret μάρτυς as it is applied to contemporary preaching and witnessing in general as having "a personal experience of Jesus Christ Himself". "This is the first and indispensable mark of the Christian witness. He cannot speak from hearsay. He would not be a 'witness' if he did. He must be able to

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18. *TDNT* IV, 493.
19. *TDNT* IV, 494.
20. *TDNT* IV, 495.

speak from his own personal experience"./21/ However true it may be that every Christian witness must have "a first-hand, living experience of the salvation of Jesus Christ"/22/, I do not believe that this is the reason why christian preaching today may be called 'witness' in the biblical sense. In the New Testament the emphasis is on the *apostolic* μαρτυρία that is passed on by successive preachers. Preachers should in particular guard against replacing this μαρτυρία by the testimony of their own personal, subjective experiences. They should not even use them as a kind of support for the original μαρτυρία. Nowhere in the New Testament is this required of preachers. Of course, they should personally participate in the Gospel they preach, they should have a personal experience of the salvation in Jesus Christ, but the content of their preaching is and remains the μαρτυρία *of the original* μάρτυρες, as this is passed on to us in the writings of the New Testament.

(d) *Didaskein*

The fourth verb we want to consider is διδάσκειν. In the discussion of the last forty years it has played an important part. Although it is clear that in the New Testament κηρύσσειν and εὐαγγελίζεσθαι (together with the cognate nouns) are the most important verbs for preaching, it has nevertheless been argued that these terms are not important as far as the preaching activity is concerned that finds place in our services every Sunday. The argument is that κηρύσσειν and εὐαγγελίζεσθαι would actually refer to preaching *extra muros*, that is missionary preaching, while the New Testament would have another word for preaching *intra muros*, i.e. congregational preaching. This other word would be διδάσκειν. This view has been propagated especially by C. H. Dodd in his book *The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments*, first published in 1936. On the very first page he states the matter

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21. John R. W. Stott, *The Preacher's Portrait, Some New Testament Word Pictures*, Tyndale, London (1967) 63.
22. *Op. cit.* 65.
23. Cf. H. N. Ridderbos, *The Authority of the New Testament Scriptures*, Baker, Grand Rapids (1963) 65ff.

quite clearly: "The New Testament writers draw a clear distinction between preaching and teaching. The distinction is preserved alike in the Gospels, Acts, Epistles, and Apocalypse, and must be considered characteristic of early Christian usage in general. Teaching (*didaskein*) is in a large majority of cases ethical instruction. Occasionally it seems to include what we should call apologetic, that is, the reasoned commendation of Christianity to persons interested, but not yet convinced. Sometimes, especially in the Johannine writings, it includes the exposition of theological doctrine. Preaching, on the other hand, is the public proclamation of Christianity to the non-Christian world. The verb *keryssein* properly means 'to proclaim'"./24/ This view of Dodd became very influential and was adopted by many other theologians, especially in the English speaking world. A. M. Hunter, for instance, declared that Dodd's thesis was "one of the most important and positive contributions to New Testament science in our generation"./25/ Traces of it are also found in the articles on *keryssein* and *didaskein* in Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*.

In recent years, however, scholars have become rather critical of the thesis of Dodd. They usually point out that it is impossible to make a clear-cut distinction between the two terms. In the first place, the terms are often used together. Again and again we read of 'teaching and preaching' (Matt. 4:23; 9:35; 11:1; Luke 20:1; Acts 4;1,2; 5:42; 15:35; 28:30,31). Apparently, the two activities are inseparable, and the various passages clearly show that teaching was not restricted to believers but was aimed at any one who listened in the various places where teaching took place. Even in describing the missionary activity of the disciples and apostles both words are used. They are apparently used interchangeably./26/ Secondly, the content of both terms is also essentially the same. In the various

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24. C. H. Dodd, *op. cit.* 7.
25. A. M. Hunter, *The Message of the New Testament*, Westminster, Philadelphia (1944) 26.
26. Cf. Robert C. Worley, *Preaching and Teaching in the Earliest Church*, Westminster, Philadelphia (1967) 35.

passages we read as objects: 'the word of God', or 'the things about Jesus', or 'the Lord Jesus Christ'. Ridderbos concludes: "What is specific and unique about 'teaching' and 'doctrine', in distinction to *kerygma*, does not lie so much in the content, as in the form. While *kerygma* is the work of the herald, the *didache* belongs to another sphere, that of religious instruction"./27/ The message of redemption is not only 'announced', but it also demands the unfolding, the exposition of its meaning. In this sense 'teaching' and 'preaching' belong together, whereby 'teaching' is the necessary consequence and follow-up of 'preaching'. But it does not supersede preaching. It not only presupposes it, but also takes up the elements that constituted the contents of the preaching. For this very reason Dodd's sharp distinction of the two concepts is untenable. Undoubtedly there is a difference of emphasis. In the missionary preaching the κήρυγμα will be in the foreground. In the preaching to the congregation the emphasis will be on the unfolding of the message, showing all its implications for faith and life. But we should never forget that the Christian congregation too is constantly in need of hearing the κήρυγμα. The message of salvation is not to be compared with a film one has to see only once or a novel one has to read only once and from then onwards one knows the 'plot'. No, the message of the Gospel remains new, also for the Christian congregation. There is no Sunday in our life on which we need not hear the wonderful message of the Father who is waiting for his wandering son, as the final and decisive Word of God for our Christian life. Thus one of the catechisms of the Reformation period, the famous Heidelberg Catechism of 1563, describes the preaching of the holy Gospel as the opening and shutting of the Kingdom of heaven. In answer to the question how this is done, it says: "By proclaiming and openly witnessing, according to the command of Christ, to believers, one and all, that, whenever they receive the promise of the gospel by a true faith, all their sins are really forgiven them of God for the sake of Christ's merits; and on the contrary, by proclaiming and witnessing to all unbelievers and such as do not

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27. Ribberbos, *op. cit.* 74f.

sincerely repent that the wrath of God and eternal condemnation abide on them so long as they are not converted. According to this witness of the gospel God will judge, both in this life and in that which is to come" (Lord's Day XXXI, Answer 84). The authors of this catechism have well understood that congregational preaching is not just διδαχή but always contains the κήρυγμα as well. In the preaching of the Word to the congregation final decisions are taking place, nothing less than the opening and shutting of the Kingdom of heaven.

(e) *Prophēteuein*

In the fifth place we shall briefly look at the term προφητεύειν, which obviously has its background in the Old Testament. There the prophet is the man of the Word of God, that comes to him by means of revelation (cf. Deut. 18:18; Jer. 15:19; Amos 3:7). In the New Testament, too, the prophet is the mouthpiece of God. Friedrich says that in the New Testament the prophet is not a magician or soothsayer, but he is "essentially a proclaimer of the Word of God"./28/ And here too it is a matter of revelation. This is also the reason why the prophets occupy such a prominent place in the New Testament. Paul mentions them immediately after the apostles (I Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11) and calls them, together with the apostles, the foundation of the church (Eph. 2:20). Yet the picture is far from clear in the New Testament. On the one hand, it is a gift (χάρισμα) to the whole church (cf. I Cor. 12:4f.; 14: 26,29,31); apparently every member may receive a revelation when it pleases the Spirit. On the other hand, some members of the church seem to have this gift more permanently. In all cases, however, it is a matter of revelation (I Cor. 14:30), which sometimes refers to a special matter (cf. Acts 11:28; 13:1f.), but usually has a more general meaning. The prophet receives a special insight into the 'mystery' of God's saving work in Jesus Christ (cf. I Cor. 13:2; Eph. 3:5), with the purpose of edifying, encouraging and consoling the congregation (I Cor. 14:3). For this reason, Carpenter

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28. *TDNT* VI, 829.

calls it '*inspired preaching*'./29/ For an example of this kind of prophetic preaching he points to the letters to the seven congregations in Revel. 2 and 3. Here we observe the element of consolation and encouragement, but also of exposing the sins of the congregations (cf. also I Cor. 14:24,25). I do not object to the term '*inspired preaching*' as such, but do wonder whether it is not onesided. The work of the prophet is much wider than preaching. Perhaps it would be more accurate to speak of '*inspired pastoral care*'. This is also the way Friedrich describes the New Testament prophet. "The prophet is the Spirit-endowed counsellor of the community who tells it what to do in specific situations, who blames and praises, whose preaching contains admonition and comfort, the call for repentance and promise"./30/

A very important question for us, of course, is: can we use the term 'prophecy' also as an indication of *present-day preaching* in the church services? In my opinion this can be done only in a limited sense. I do believe that today's preacher is also the 'mouth' of the Lord (Jer. 15:19). He is God's messenger who speaks on behalf of the Lord who sent him. In this respect Zwingli was not erring when, in connection with I Cor. 14:29, he called the first theological school in Zurich 'Prophezei' (Prophecy). On the other hand, the identity is of a restricted nature. The concept of prophecy in the New Testament is much wider than our present-day preaching and pastoral care. It contains certain elements which are missing today. In the New Testament it is a matter of a special χάρισμα. One is not trained to be a prophet, but one is endowed with this gift, an eschatological gift of the Spirit. From this point of view a theological college deserves the name 'school of the prophets' least of all! Furthermore, in the New Testament the prophet receives new revelation in the form of either a deeper insight into the 'mystery' revealed in Jesus Christ or a deeper understanding of the Old Testament Scriptures. Today's preacher is primarily the expositor of the

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29. H. J. Carpenter in: *A Theological Word Book of the Bible*, ed. Alan Richardson, SCM, London (1950) 147.
30. *TDNT* VI, 855.

Scriptures of both the Old and New Testaments. Since the completion of the New Testament canon this charisma, at least in the form of receiving new revelations, seems to have ceased. Whenever in the course of church history it was claimed to reappear (Montanism, the Radical Reformation, the Charismatic Movement, etc.), it always appears to be a matter of subjectivistic 'enthusiasm', which does not add anything to our knowledge of God's work in Jesus Christ.

We should not, however, end on a negative note. We do believe that the *'prophetic' dimension* should be present in today's preaching. Following Friedrich's description of the New Testament prophet we want to emphasize that today's preacher too should address his congregation in its *'hic et nunc'* situation. He should not hesitate, whenever necessary, to expose its sins - the *critical function* of the sermon. He should also comfort the congregation with the Gospel - the *comforting function* of the sermon. He should also try to give clear and concrete indications what his listeners have to do in the situation of their lives - the *guiding function* of the sermon. Whoever preaches in this vein, is a 'prophetic' preacher in the *succession* of the New Testament prophets.

(f) *Parakalein*

The last word we want to discuss here is παρακαλεῖν. We noticed the noun παράκλησις already in I Cor. 14:3, where it was mentioned as one of the tasks of the prophet. But in the New Testament it has a wider meaning and is not restricted to the work of the prophet only. According to Schmitz it has a threefold meaning in the New Testament: 1. It is used of people who come to Jesus, praying for help. 2. It is used for exhorting people on the basis of the Gospel. 3. It is used for eschatological consolation or comfort./31/ The second meaning in particular is important for our subject, because in this sense it is often connected with preaching, especially in Acts and the Pauline Epistles. It is indicative of missionary preaching, "the wooing proclamation of salvation in the apostolic preaching" (cf. Acts 2:40; 9:31; 13:15, and in particular also II Cor. 5:20 - "So we are ambassadors

31. *TDNT* V, 794.

for Christ, God making his appeal through us"). But it is also an aspect of congregational preaching, "the admonition which is addressed to those already won and which is designed to lead them to conduct worthy of the Gospel"./32/ Since it is always an admonition 'in Christ', it is never a merely moral appeal, but it is always the imperative which follows the indicative of God's saving work in Jesus Christ. The παράκλησις is not a call for human achievements or initiatives, but it is the call for 'fruit', the 'fruit of the Spirit' (Gal. 5:22f.).

Summary

If we now try to summarize our findings with regard to the study of some important New Testament terms for preaching, we can list the following results.

The way in which κηρύσσειν is used tells us that preaching is not only the proclamation of a saving event that once took place in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, but it is also the announcement to the listener that, when he believes in this Jesus Christ, he finds himself in the new situation of salvation brought about by Jesus. The proclamation of the event inaugurates the new state of affairs for the believing listener.

εὐαγγελίζεσθαι, which is almost synonymous with κηρύσσειν, emphasizes that preaching is the bringing of a joyful message. The preacher has to bring 'good tidings', he has to 'publish peace and salvation', on behalf of God (cf. Is. 52:7). His message is not one of doom, but is the 'good message' (eu-angelion) that God did not send his Son to condemn the world but to save it (John 3:17).

μαρτυρεῖν, in as far as it is applicable to present-day preaching, indicates that all true preaching has to adhere to the apostolic tradition. The preacher has no right to alter the original facts or to adapt them to his own tastes or to those of his hearers, but he has to pass on the message as it has been delivered to us by the original witnesses. In his second epistle Peter emphatically states: "We did not follow cleverly

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32. *TDNT* V, 795.

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devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty" (II Pet. 1:16)./33/

It is, however, not sufficient for the preacher simply to repeat the original facts, but he also has to unfold their meaning and their results, both dogmatically and ethically. Moreover, the original revelation requires "that it be connected with the preceding revelation, and that it be sharply distinguished from the other religious views, and defended against false doctrines and heresy"./34/ The verb διδάσκειν emphasizes this aspect. Paul thus exhorts the Thessalonians to "stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter" (II Thess. 2:15). A minister should really 'teach' his congregation and, like Paul, declare to it "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27).

Finally, both προφητεύειν and παρακαλεῖν teach us that true preaching is not just recounting and unfolding the message about Jesus Christ *in the abstract*, but also requires that this message be applied to the concrete situation of the hearers. Christian preaching thus has a critical, a consoling and a guiding function.

Summing up, we may say that the various terms used in the the New Testament clearly show that Christian preaching is more than just recounting the story *about* the Word of God that was spoken in Jesus Christ. In Christian preaching *this Word itself* comes to the hearers. Yes, we cannot escape from the daring conclusion that Christian preaching *is* the Word of God coming to men. As Friedrich says: "The word proclaimed is a divine Word, and as such it is an effective force which creates what it proclaims. Hence preaching is no mere impartation of facts. It is event. What is proclaimed takes place."/35/

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33. In this verse the word μάρτυρες is not used, but ἐπόπται. An ἐπόπτης is 'one who watches or observes'. Here: an eyewitness. Cf. *Arndt* 305.
34. H. N. Ridderbos, *op. cit.* 75.
35. *TDNT* III, 709.

II New Testament Teaching

Our second line of approach is that of studying New Testament statements about preaching. As we have stated before, the New Testament nowhere gives an explicit and detailed exposition of what preaching is. On the other hand, there are many scattered references and statements, which throw light on the question under discussion.

The Gospels

From the Gospels we learn that Jesus Himself commissioned his disciples to preach the Gospel. In Mark 3 we read that He appointed twelve disciples, giving them a twofold task: a) to be with Him; b) to be sent out to preach and have authority to cast out demons (3:14,15). Here we see that from the very beginning it was Jesus' design to give to His chosen disciples the commission of preaching. The passage, however, does not give any indication of what this 'preaching' is, apart from the fact that the verb κηρύσσειν is used. The matter becomes clearer, when we study the story of the mission of the Twelve, as described in Matt. 10:5ff. A similar commission is given: "Preach (κηρύσσετε) as you go, saying: 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand'. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons" (10: 7,8). At the end of the instruction, however, Jesus adds some very significant words: "He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me" (10:40). Here we have a very fundamental statement about the relationship between Jesus, the Commissioner, and the disciples who are commissioned by Him. Jesus identifies Himself with His apostles in their mission. Within the framework of this commission they are no longer a 'Mr. Simon Peter' or a 'Mr. Andrew', but they act as Jesus' representatives, and Jesus willingly and intentionally identifies Himself with them. He even includes God in this identification, for He Himself in turn is commissioned by God and this commission also implies an identification on the side of the Divine Commissioner. In Luke 10, where we read the story of the mission of the seventy, the identification is explicitly focussed on the preaching activity of those who are commissioned. In verse 16 we read: "He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me".

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Here Jesus identifies Himself with the message of His disciples, both positively ("he who hears you") and negatively ("he who rejects you") and again the identification is extended to God Himself.

Before the resurrection this mission of the disciples is limited to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 10:5,6). After the resurrection the commission becomes universal. The apostles have to go and make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19; cf. Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8). At the same time Jesus gives them the promise that He will be with them "always, to the close of the age" (Matt. 28:20). He will be at their side, assuring the effect of their mission. In the resurrection narrative of John the matter becomes even more explicit. After the greeting, the risen One first repeats the commission: "As the Father sent me, even so I send you". But He does more. Again He identifies Himself with their words: "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained". We speak here of 'identification', because forgiving or retaining sins is not a human possibility. However wrong their intentions may have been, the scribes, mentioned in Mark 2, were right when they said: "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Mark 2:7). When therefore Jesus gives this 'power' (ἐξουσία, compare Mark 2:10 with Matt. 9:8!) to his disciples, it can only mean that their words are *his* words. Or to say it again in the words of the *Heidelberg Catechism*: in the preaching of the Gospel the keys of the Kingdom function: the Kingdom is opened to believers and shut against unbelievers (Lord's Day XXXI, Answer 83).

The Pauline Epistles

When we now turn to the epistles, we shall concentrate on the Pauline epistles, because this apostle in particular makes many references to his own commission and to how he understands it. It is a well-known fact that in his letters Paul follows the custom of his day in first mentioning his own name, then the name of the addressee(s), then the greeting. It is striking, however, that in most cases he not only mentions his name, but also adds that he is an apostle. The Epistle to the Romans, for instance, begins as follows: "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, *called to be an apostle*, set

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apart for the Gospel of God" (Rom. 1:1). Likewise, the first Epistle to the Corinthians begins with the words: "Paul, *called by the will of God to be an apostle of Jesus Christ*" (I Cor. 1:1). In the same letter he states, with a view to the factions and divisions in this congregation, that he is thankful to have baptized only a few of them (I Cor. 1:14-16), and then he continues with the important statement: "For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel (εὐαγγελίζεσθαι)" (I Cor. 1:17). In the third chapter he repeats it in other words: "I planted" (3:6), and "I laid a foundation" (3:10). In other words, he is primarily and essentially a missionary preacher who goes out to those who have not yet heard the Gospel.

This does not mean, however, that he despises preaching in and to the congregation. As a matter of fact, in Acts 18 we read that he stayed a year and six months in Corinth, "teaching (διδάσκων) the word of God among them" (18:11). In Acts 20 he reminds the elders of the congregation at Ephesus, where he stayed two years (cf. 19:10), that he went among them "preaching (κηρύσσων) the kingdom" (20:25)./36/ There is no indication in Paul's letters that he makes a fundamental difference between two kinds of preaching, the one *extra muros* and the other *intra muros*. In both cases it is basically the same activity. In both cases it is the same message, the message about Jesus who is the Christ and in whom God's new aeon has dawned.

The Word of God

Repeatedly Paul describes the message he brings as 'the Word of God' or 'the Word of the Lord' or, in an even shorter formula, 'the Word'. To the Thessalonians he writes that they "received the Word in much affliction" (I Thess. 1:6) and that "the Word of the Lord" sounded forth from them in Macedonia and Achaia (1:8). In the second letter to this same congregation he asks them to pray for him "that the Word of the Lord may speed on and triumph" (3:1). Similarly he asks the Colossians to pray for him "that God may open to us a door for the

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36. It is clear that at least Luke does not differentiate between κηρύσσειν and διδάσκειν in the way suggested by C. H. Dodd.

Word, to declare the mystery of Christ" (Col. 4:3; cf. II Tim. 2:9; 4:1; also I Pet. 1:23f.; Heb. 4:12f.). In all these passages the term 'Word' or 'Word of God' or 'Word of the Lord' refers to the *preached Word*./37/ This is the more striking, because Paul (and the same is true of the other New Testament writers) also uses the term 'Word' for the *written Word* of the Old Testament (cf. Rom. 9:6,9; 13:9; I Cor. 15:54; Gal. 5:14), and there can be no doubt that in all these passages "God Himself is firmly regarded as the One who speaks in Scripture"./38/ Even when at times a human author is mentioned, the underlying idea is that God is the real Subject of this written Word and that it carries a divine authority. By using the same terminology for his own preaching the apostle obviously claims that God is also the real Subject of his preaching and that it carries the same divine authority as the Old Testament Scriptures.

That this is indeed the view of Paul becomes abundantly clear in a passage in his first Epistle to the Thessalonians, namely, I Thess. 2:13, where he writes: "We also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the Word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as what it really is, the Word of God which is at work in you believers". The reference is obviously to the preached Word ("Which you heard from us"). Of this preached Word it is emphatically stated that it is not a word of men, but the Word of God. Of course, the apostle does not deny that it was spoken by a human being. How could he? But using a figure of speech in which a relative contrast is expressed in an absolute way (cf. also Matt. 6:19; John 6:27; Psalm 51: 16,17; Joel 2:13), he argues that the message he preached was not of man's devising, but had its origin in God and therefore is in very truth God's own Word. It is not half human, half divine, whereby it is left to the Thessalonians to determine which parts are human and which divine; neither is it a human word that, where and when it pleases God, may *become* the Word of God. No, its real essence is that God Himself speaks in and through the words of His servant.

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37. *TDNT* IV, 116.
38. *TDNT* IV, 111.

Here we meet with the real *secret of all apostolic preaching: it is God's own Word.* He Himself is speaking. This is also the meaning of the genitive in terms such as 'the Word *of God*' and 'the Word *of the Lord*'. This genitive does not primarily indicate the person about whom the Word speaks, but the person whose Word it is. "It emphasizes the conviction of the Early Church that the word they proclaimed was not the product of human wisdom, but truly of divine origin". /39/ The same idea is expressed in Rom. 10:14, when Paul asks: "How are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him whom they have never heard?"/40/ People have to hear the Lord Himself! But how can they hear Him? The next question in Paul's *catena* of questions answers this: "How are they to hear without a preacher?" Literally it says: without one heralding (κηρύσσων)? Again preaching and the Lord are identified. Whoever hears the heralds hears Him on whose behalf the herald makes his proclamation.

The ministry of the apostle

This also explains the position Paul allocates to himself in this whole process. He uses several expressive terms, such as διακονία and οἰκονομία. The former of the two, which in Acts 6:4 is applied to the Twelve, is found in I Cor. 5:18, where Paul says that to him is given the 'ministry of reconciliation'. Perhaps we no longer hear the humble position that is indicated by this term διακονία. For us 'ministry' has almost become equivalent to 'office' and 'office' means some exalted position. But the original meaning of

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39. Cf. Leon Morris, *The Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians*, Tyndale Press, London (1956) 38.
40. The last question is incorrectly translated in the RSV, which reads: "And how are they to believe in him *of* whom they have never heard?" In the Greek we find the relative pronoun οὗ, which is the object of ἀκούειν, a verb that always carries the genitive. If the verse really meant "*of* whom they have never heard", one would expect περί τινος or ὧν.. Cf. W. Sanday, D. C. Headlam, *Romans*, T. & J. Clark, Edinburgh (1950) *ad loc.*; Herman Ridderbos, *Aan de Romeinen*, Kok, Kampen (1959) *ad loc.*; R. C. H. Lenski, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, Wartburg, Columbus, Ohio (1951) *ad loc.*

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διακονία, also in the New Testament, is 'waiting at table', and even when it is used in a wider sense it always has the connotation of one who serves. Paul is but a 'servant of God' (II Cor. 6:4; cf. 11:23), with all the troubles and sufferings which are associated with this service (cf. 6:4,5)./41/ The second term οἰκονομία, is used in Col. 1:25, where Paul says that he has become a 'servant' (διάκονος) of the church, "according to the οἰκονομία of God which was given to me for you, to make the Word of God fully known". On purpose we left the term οἰκονομία untranslated. The RSV has: "according to the *divine office* that was given to me". I'm not sure whether this is a correct translation./42/ The NEB is certainly more careful when it says: "by virtue of the *task* assigned to me *by God*". /43/ The word originally means the task of the steward to whom the management or administration of the house household has been entrusted. In this passage it undoubtedly refers to the apostolic office, but it must not be overlooked that Paul describes this office in terms of stewardship. On the one hand, this is indicative of a position of responsibility, even of authority. On the other hand, it also carries the connotation of limitation. The steward is *not* the owner and therefore is never allowed to dispose at will of the things entrusted to him, but he has to execute the commission given to him (cf. I Cor. 9:17) by the rightful owner. As Paul himself writes to the Corinthians: "This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Well then (NEB), it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy" (I Cor. 4:1,2).

In line with all this is the third term Paul applies to himself and his fellow-preachers of the Gospel, namely, when in II Cor. 5:20 he describes himself and the others as "ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal

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41. Cf. also John R. W. Stott, *The Preacher's Portrait*, 92.
42. It is certainly a possible translation. It is also given by Michel in *TDNT* V, 152, and J. B. Lightfoot also chose "the office of administrator", *Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon* (1879) 167.
43. Cf. also the *Berkeley Version*, which renders: "divine appointment".

through us". The term 'ambassador' has a clear meaning. Charles Hodge describes it as follows: "An ambassador is... a messenger... He does not speak in his own name. He does not act on his own authority. What he communicates is not his own opinions or demands, but simply what he has been told or commissioned to say. His commission derives no part of its importance or trustworthiness from himself"./44/ In other words, the ambassador is totally subordinate to the message he is commissioned to convey. Throughout his letters Paul shows time and again how conscious he is of this state of affairs. In the first chapters of the second Epistle to the Corinthians, where he defends himself against his opponents who in all possible ways have maligned and slandered him, he refuses to appeal to his own status but freely acknowledges that he, Paul, is but an "earthen vessel" (4:7). He also refuses to use all kinds of gimmicks to hard-sell the "treasure" that has been entrusted to him. "We have renounced disgraceful underhanded ways; we refuse to practice cunning or tamper with God's Word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God" (4:2; cf. 2:17). Likewise he admonishes his spiritual child Timothy "to handle the word of truth rightly" (II Tim. 2:15). The word used in the Greek text (ὀρθοτομεῦν) literally means: 'to cut straight' and is used, for instance, of cutting a straight road (cf. Prov. 3:6; 9:5). Here "the main idea seems to be that Timothy must be scrupulously straightforward in dealing with the *word of truth*, in strong contrast to the crooked methods of the false teachers"./45/

There is, however, also another side to the matter. The terms *steward* and *ambassador* in particular bring this out. Indeed, the steward is not the owner, but the latter has given him a great trust by appointing him the manager of the household and by expecting him to run the affairs in an independent and responsible way. What is even more, in relation to the other members of the household and also to outsiders, he *represents* his

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44. Ch. Hodge, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (1859) *ad loc.*
45. Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Tyndale, London (1957) 148.

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master. The same is true of the ambassador. Charles Hodge, whom we quoted before, not only says that the ambassador is a messenger, but adds that he is a representative as well. "He represents his sovereign. He speaks with authority, as accredited to act in the name of his master. Any neglect, contempt or injury done to him in his official character, is not a personal offence, but an offence to the sovereign or state by whom he is commissioned"./46/ In other words, here too we meet with the concept of *identification*. In the passage in which he speaks of himself as an ambassador for Christ (II. Cor. 5:20), Paul immediately adds: "*God* making his appeal through us". In the words of the human ambassador ("through us"), the voice of God Himself is coming to the hearer. It is, to borrow an expression from Calvin, *Dei loquentis persona*. The hearer meets the person of the speaking God.

The efficacy of the preached Word

This also explains why this word preached by Paul and his fellow workers is *effective*. This efficacy is not due to the qualities of the preachers. In fact, Paul denies this again and again. This does not mean that the qualities of the preacher are unimportant. Just prior to that tremendous statement about the preached Word as the true Word of God, Paul writes to the Thessalonians: "You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our behaviour to you believers" (I Thess. 2:10; cf. also the first chapters of II Cor.). Yet the effectiveness of the preaching does not depend on the ethical, let alone the rhetorical, qualities of the preacher. The effectiveness is due to Him whose Word it is. The secret lies again in the *genitive*: it is the Word *of God* (τοῦ θεοῦ). Sometimes Paul uses a word that is related to our word 'energy'. Of the Word of God which he preached to the Thessalonians he says: "which is at work (ἐνεργεῖται) in you believers" (I Thess. 2:13). It is an effective energy in them. A word from the same root is used in Heb. 4:12, where we read: "The word of God is living and active (ἐνεργής), sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart". In other passages Paul uses the word δύναμις, power. E.g. in Rom. 1:16 - "The

46. Ch. Hodge, *Epistle to the Romans* (1835) *ad loc.*

gospel is a power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith". The term 'Gospel', as used here, refers primarily to the contents of the Gospel, but of course it cannot be separated from the act of preaching. This preached Gospel is a 'power of God'. Again the genitive θεοῦ: "The Gospel is that in which God works, which He renders efficacious - unto salvation". In I Cor. 1:18 the same is said of the 'word of the cross': it is "to us who are being saved the power of God" (δύναμις θεοῦ).

This last passage, however, shows yet another aspect that must be taken into account. The 'power of God' which is at work in the preached Gospel does not work *automatically*. Paul makes a very clear distinction: "For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (I Cor. 1:18). The same distinction is found in many other passages. We mention one more: "For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life" (II Cor. 2:15,16). When Paul says 'we' are such an aroma, he does not mean his own person as such or even his purity or devotion of life. No, it is *Paul the preacher* who is such an aroma. And again there is the twofold effect. To one Paul the preacher is a deadly fragrance, producing death. To the other he is a salutary fragrance, producing life./47/ Why? Because the Gospel meets with a twofold response. By some it is *rejected in unbelief*. To the Jews of Antioch in Pisidia Paul says: "You thrust the word of God from you and judge yourself unworthy of eternal life" (Acts 13:46). The result of this act of unbelief is that they condemn themselves, and the Gospel which is meant to be 'a power of God unto salvation' becomes a fragrance producing death. For, in order to produce life, it must be *accepted* by man (cf. Acts 8:14; 11:1; 17:11; I Thess. 1:6; 2:13; James 1:21; cf. also I Tim. 1:15; 4:9),/48/ accepted not by an act of mere intellectual assent but by an existential decision

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47. Cf. Ch. Hodge, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians, ad loc.*
48. Cf. *TDNT* IV, 119.

which involves his total personality and life. "Hearing (ἀκούειν) reaches its goal only by believing (πιστεύειν)" (cf. Acts 4:4; 15:7), and believing proves itself to be true and genuine by doing (James 1:22; cf. I Pet. 2:8; 3:1). A good tree cannot but produce good fruit.

What about preaching today?

So far we have concentrated mainly on what the apostle Paul says about *his own preaching*. But does what he says also apply to *our preaching today?* Is Paul's position (and the same applies to the other apostles) not so unique that we cannot possibly put ourselves and our preaching on a par with him and his preaching? *Dare* we say of our own preaching: it really is the Word of God (I Thess. 2:13)? And even apart from our daring, *may* we say this of our preaching today?

In answer to these questions we must begin with acknowledging the *uniqueness of the apostolate*. These men, who were the witnesses of the resurrection, were commissioned by the risen Lord Himself and endowed by Him with His Spirit. Already before His death he promised them His Spirit as the *Paraclete* (= Counsellor, Comforter, Helper) (cf. John 14:26; 15:26,27; 16:13-15) and after His resurrection and ascension this promise was fulfilled (cf. Acts 2). The same happened to Paul after he met the risen Lord on the road to Damascus. He too was commissioned (Acts 9:15) and received the Holy Spirit (9:17). Paul himself was well aware of this special commission and all its implications. Much later he writes to the Galatians: "I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ... He who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles (Gal. 1:11,12,15,16). Here Paul traces the Gospel which he preaches back to a special revelation in which Jesus, who is the content of the Gospel, was made known to him. For this reason Paul can so emphatically declare that 'his' Gospel (Rom. 2:16; II Cor. 4:3; II Thess. 2:14; II Tim. 2:8) is not "according to man" (κατὰ ἄνθρωπον), that is, a human invention (NEB), a Gospel 'in human style' (Lenski). No, it has its origin in God, is mediated through revelation

and therefore *is* revelation, *is* the Word of God Himself. Or to put it another way, the apostles with their preaching are not a human appendage to the divine revelation in Jesus Christ, but their "preaching or redemption, as apostolic preaching, belongs to the actuality of revelation, and as such it has its own unique character"./49/ This uniqueness not only means that the apostolate is unrepeatable, but it goes much deeper. These men are the instruments of revelation and as such they are the foundation of the church. Christ has bound His church throughout all subsequent ages to their preaching as the final norm of faith./50/

It is quite obvious of course that *in this respect* our preaching can never be equated with that of the apostles. Our knowledge of the Gospel is never first hand, but always second-hand. Contrary to what Paul says of himself in Gal. 1:12, we must confess that we did receive the Gospel from man, from other human beings, and were taught by others. But this is not the end of it. Our second-hand knowledge of the Gospel does not mean that therefore our preaching is only a human word and not God's Word. It is striking that at this point Paul never differentiates between his own preaching and that of his fellow-workers. To the Corinthians he writes about Timothy that "he is doing the *work of the Lord* as I am" (I Cor. 16:10). Undoubtedly the main part of this 'work of the Lord' is preaching the Gospel. Likewise he writes to the Thessalonians: "We sent Timothy, our brother and *God's servant in the Gospel of Jesus Christ*, to establish you in your faith and to exhort you that no one may be moved by these afflictions" (I Thess. 3:2,3). The Pastoral Epistles are full of admonitions to adhere to and to preach the apostolic faith. The same verb κηρύσσειν, which Paul uses for his own preaching, is also applied to what Timothy does. The latter is charged, in the presence of God and Christ

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49. H. N. Ridderbos, *op. cit.* 17.
50. Cf. H. N. Ridderbos, *op. cit.* 14, 15.

Jesus: "Preach the word" (II Tim. 4:2)./51/ In another passage in the same letter the verb διδάσκειν (= to teach) is used: "What you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (II Tim. 2:2)./52/ Perhaps the most important passage in this connection is II Cor. 5: 18ff., where Paul says that the "ministry of reconciliation" has been entrusted to "*us*". The plural form 'us' is very significant here, I believe. With many commentators I think Paul is not using a 'majestic plural' here, but speaks of himself and 'his assistants' /53/ or 'other preachers of the Gospel'./54/ If this is correct, it also means that the following words apply to *all* preachers of the Gospel: "We are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us" (verse 21). If today's preacher brings the same message of reconciliation as Paul and the other apostles, God also speaks through him. Then his word too is not just a human word, but the Word of God Himself.

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51. Cf. also Acts 6-8 where we read of Stephen's and Philip's preaching activity. Yes, in 8:4 it is said of all those who were scattered by the great persecution after Stephen's death, that "they went about preaching the word" (εὐαγγελιζομένοι τὸν λόγον).
52. For many other passages, see Heinrich Schlier, *Het Woord Gods* (1959) 83ff. Original German title: *Wort Gottes*, Werkbund, Würzburg (1958). Cf. Also Herman Ridderbos, *Paul, An Outline of his Theology*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids (1975) 483.
53. R. C. H. Lenski, *I and II Corinthians*, Wartburg, Columbus, Ohio (1946) 1042, 1048, 1050.
54. Ch. Hodge, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 143, 145, 146. R. P. C. Hanson, in his book *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, SCM, London (1967) 49, believes that the "we" in these verses refers to Paul, but then goes on to state: "This function of reconciliation is... one which by its nature the apostle must needs pass on to others. This passage is, indeed, one of the charters of the Christian ministry in the New Testament". Cf. also *op. cit.* 60f.

III Further Theological Reflection

This was also the understanding of the Reformers. As you may know, *Luther* had a very broad conception of the Word of God. While he fully accepted the Bible as the Word of God, he did not simply equate the Word of God with the Bible./55/ To him the Word of God was primarily and essentially an active concept. God's work is God speaking. Hence also his emphasis on preaching. The written Word, so to speak, comes to life again when it is being preached. It is in particular the nature of the Gospel that it be preached. /56/ and when this happens the preacher is nothing less than the mouthpiece of God. Says Luther: "God, the Creator of heaven and earth, speaks with you through his preachers, baptizes, catechizes, absolves you through the ministry of his own sacraments. These are the words of God, not of Plato or Aristotle. It is God Himself who speaks"./57/

Calvin had an equally high view of preaching. One has to read only his exposition of the necessity and

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55. Cf. A. Skevington Wood, *Captive to the Word, Martin Luther: Doctor of Sacred Scripture*, Paternoster, Exeter (1969) 89f.
56. Cf. Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, Fortress, Philadelphia (1966) 73. "The Gospel, however, is nothing else than the preaching and proclamation of the grace and mercy of God which Jesus Christ has earned and gained for us through his death. It is properly not something written down with letters in a book but more an oral proclamation and a living word: a voice which sounds forth into the whole world and is proclaimed publicly so that we may hear it everywhere". WA 12,259.
57. Cf. Skevington Wood, *op. cit.* 93. Cf. also A. Niebergall, 'Die Geschichte der christlichen Predigt' in *Leitourgia*, II, 264. "The mouth of the preacher and the word which I have heard, is not his word and preaching, but of the Holy Spirit who through such external means gives faith and also sanctifies". WA 45,616,32. Cf. also T. H. L. Parker, *The Oracles of God*, Lutterworth, London (1947) 47.

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significance of the ministry in the *Institutes*./58/ In this connection he writes that God "deigns to consecrate Himself the mouths and tongues of men in order that His voice may sound in them". He too calls the pastors of the Christian church "the very mouths of God"./59/ He does not hesitate to say that "when the Gospel is preached, Christ's blood distills together with the voice"./60/ One may even call preaching an *apocalyptic event*. "When Christ reconciled men to God and to angels, when He conquered the devil and restored life to the dead, when He shone forth with his own righteousness, then indeed God shook the heaven and the earth; and He still shakes them at this day, when the Gospel is preached."/61/ Finally, in connection with the jurisdiction of the church he writes "that the word of the Gospel, whatever man may preach it, is the very sentence of God, published at the supreme judgment seat, written in the Book of life, ratified firm and fixed, in heaven"./62/

This very same high view of preaching we also find in one of the Reformed confessions of the 16th century, namely, the *Second Helvetic Confession (Confessio Helvetica Posterior)* of 1566, which was written by *Heinrich Bullinger*, the successor of Zwingli. In the very first chapter, which carries the heading 'Of the Holy Scripture being the True Word of God', he also speaks of preaching and makes the statement that since has become famous: "*Praedicatio verbi Dei est verbum*

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58. J. Calvin, *Institutes*, IV,i,5 and IV,iii,1.
59. J. Calvin, *Homilies on I Sam. 42, C R* XXXIX, 705.
60. *Commentary* on Heb. 9:20f.
61. *Commentary* on Haggai 2:21.
62. *Institutes*, IV,xi,1. Cf. for a whole series of quotations from Calvin's works, T. H. L. Parker, *op. cit.* 54f.

Dei" - "*The preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God*"./63/ The copula '*est*' (is) indicates identity. That this indeed was Bullinger's intention appears from what follows in the text: "Wherefore when this Word of God (= Scripture) is now preached in the church by preachers lawfully called, we believe that the very Word of God (*ipsum Dei verbum*) is proclaimed, and received by the faithful". These terse and concise statements of Bullinger fully represent the view of preaching held by all the Reformers and all the churches of the Reformation. True preaching is not only a matter of words of men *about* God, but it is the very Word *of* God Himself (cf. I Thess. 2:13).

Subsequent criticism

Since the 18th century this high concept of preaching has increasingly been challenged, and it was by no means an isolated matter. In fact, the criticism of this Reformation view of preaching was the result of a very fundamental critique of the Bible and its concept of revelation. The new view received its clearest expression in *19th century Liberalism* which, in all its variations, rejected the idea that the Bible is God's written Word and therefore God's revelation to us. Of course, the liberal theologians did not deny the great value of the Bible. They did not deny that it is the source of the Christian faith. They were even prepared to admit that in the Bible we do find the highest religious truth. But this truth is often hidden under layers of ideas, both religious and moral, which are quite unacceptable to modern man. The Bible itself is nothing else than a human book that on every page shows the frailty and fallibility of its human nature. It cannot possibly be identified with revelation, but at most it can be called the human record of revelation. In short, the Bible *is* not the Word of God, but in certain parts *contains* a word of God.

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63. This is the heading of the section on preaching, but this heading is original. "It should be noted that the marginal rubrics are original and are emphatically part of the text". *Reformed Confessions of the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Arthur C. Cochrane, Westminster, Philadelphia (1966) 222.

Naturally the new conception of preaching followed the same line of thought. Preaching may not be equated with the Word of God. It is nothing else than a religious address in which the preacher tries to transfer his own religious feelings or insights to the congregation, in order to awaken in the hearers identical religious emotions and ideas. Usually he will do this by taking his starting point in some passage of Scripture, but as this is not to be identified with the Word of God, the sermon naturally cannot be identified with it either. It is no more than a human attempt to convey something of the original impact Jesus made on his disciples, to the believers of today. In this entire process some glimmerings of divine truth may be transmitted, but this can never be precisely identified. Here too one can at most say that the sermon may contain some word of God.

In our century *Karl Barth* has vigorously opposed this liberal view of both Scripture and preaching. His main objection was that in the liberal theology, even though it continued to use the term 'revelation', there actually was no place left for real revelation. Revelation of God by God Himself had virtually been exchanged by man's discovery of God in his search for the truth. Man's religion had virtually taken the place of divine self-revelation. On the other hand, Barth felt that he could not return to the orthodox point of view either. To be true, orthodoxy still knew about revelation, but by identifying it with the Bible it virtually had taken possession of God's revelation, the result being that revelation was no longer the free and sovereign act of God Himself.

Barth's own view can be summarized as follows./64/ As to the Bible, we must begin with the recognition that in itself it is no more than a human witness to God's revelation in Jesus Christ. We must even go further and say: it is not only a human, but also a fallible witness that contains contradictions and errors, even in its religious and theological parts. But how then can we ever hear God's Word in it? Barth's answer is: this is not in our power. Revelation is and always remains a matter of God's prerogative and initiative. Only where

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64. Cf. my book *Karl Barth's Doctrine of Holy Scripture*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids (1962).

and when it pleases God (*ubi et quando visum est Deo*) to reveal Himself to us through this human and fallible witness, this witness *becomes* the Word of God for us and at that moment it *is* the Word of God for us. Only then we can speak of *direct identity* between the Bible and the Word of God. Or to put it in the terminology of the *Second Helvetic Confession*: only then we can speak of '*est*'.

The same is true of Christian preaching. This too is in itself nothing else than an *human attempt* to express in human words what the preacher has heard in the apostolic witness, and to convey to his hearers the *promise* of God's revelation, reconciliation and calling. Careful note should be taken of the words 'human attempt'. The sermon may not simply be equated with the Word of God. But we should also note the word 'promise'. The sermon stands under God's own promise that He will use human words to reveal Himself. And then we find the same solution: where and when it pleases God (*ubi et quando visum est Deo*) to speak through these human words, his self-revelation takes place. At that moment the sermon *is* (*est*!) God's Word for the hearer.

It cannot be denied that this is an attractive, even intriguing solution. Barth seems to steer clear of the onesidedness of both liberalism and orthodoxy. On the one hand, he fully maintains the humanity (and fallibility) of both Scripture and preaching, without falling into the mistake of eliminating the reality of revelation. On the other hand, he fully maintains that God Himself does speak to us through the human words of Scripture and sermon, without falling into the mistake of directly identifying God's Word with human words. The big problem, however, of Barth's solution is that it does not do justice to Scripture's own testimony about itself, nor to what the New Testament says about the essential nature of preaching. Scripture does not know the Barthian distinction of an 'indirect identity' which must *become* a 'direct identity' where and when it pleases God. In the New Testament the '*is*' (*est*, of the *Second Helvetic Confession*) is not the result of a 'becoming' through a divine act of self-revelation, but the New Testament claims that God *has* revealed Himself in Jesus Christ and that this self-revelation for us is to be found *in* the preaching and writings of the apostles. And as we have seen before, the same is said of the

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preaching of the successors of the apostles. Their preaching is not only a human attempt to express the biblical witness to revelation, i.e., to the Word of God, but their preaching *is* the proclamation of the Word of God. Bullinger was indeed right when he said: *Praedicatio verbi Dei est verbum Dei.*

Too massive?

And yet we too cannot suppress the question whether this statement is not too massive. Is it not true that there is a clearly human side to all our preaching? Is there any minister among us who would dare to claim that every single word he says is God's Word? Must we not acknowledge that all our preaching is always a *mixtum compositum*, a mixture of elements of divine truth (hopefully) and human insight (certainly)? But does not this mean that we are virtually moving along the same line of thought as the older liberals, who also believed that there might be some glimpses of divine truth in their religious addresses and discourses?

I do not believe that this last conclusion is warranted. We should never lose sight of the fact that quite a *different view of Scripture* underlies the Reformation view of preaching. Bullinger's statement: *Praedicatio verbi Dei est verbum Dei*, follows after and is the consequence of his confession that Scripture is the Word of God. The chapter, yes, the whole confession opens with the statement: "We believe and confess the canonical Scriptures of the holy prophets and apostles of both Testaments to be the true Word of God, and to have sufficient authority of themselves, not of men. For God Himself spoke to the fathers, prophets, apostles, and still speaks to us through the Holy Scriptures". Two expressions are to be noted in particular: '*the true Word of God*', and '*God still speaks to us through the Holy Scriptures*'. The former emphasizes the essential nature of Scripture: it *is* the true Word of God. The latter emphasizes that man is never the master of this Word. God is and remains the *Subject*: *He* speaks to us. It is not a dead book which contains only messages of the past, but it is the living voice of Him who still speaks to us in our day. In addition, Bullinger clearly states what the *scope* of this revelation is. "In this Holy Scripture, the

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universal Church of Christ has the most complete exposition of all that pertains to a saving faith, and also to the framing of a life acceptable to God". The Bible has not been given to the Church to give us all kinds of interesting items about the history of mankind or the history of Israel, or to provide us with all kinds of scientific data that otherwise would be unknown to us, but it is a *religious* book. It wants to teach us who God is for us and who we should be for Him.

All this is the background of Bullinger's statement: *Praedicatio verbi Dei est verbum Dei*. Emphatically he continues saying: "When *THIS Word of God* (*hoc Dei verbum*) is now preached in the church by preachers lawfully called, we believe that the *very Word of God* (*ipsum Dei verbum*) is proclaimed, and received by the faithful". This is the one great and indispensable condition for all true preaching. Does the preacher proclaim the message of God as given to us in Scripture? If so, it is God's Word and we have to receive it as such. If not, it is not the Word of God and his message should be rejected. There is no other absolute condition, which stands on a par with this. To be true, Bullinger also says that the preaching is to be done by preachers lawfully called. Undoubtedly he says this in opposition to the people of the so-called Radical Reformation who attached hardly any value to the offices, but in their spiritualism and enthusiasm relied on the inner voice of the Spirit, which could come to any believer. Yet Bullinger does not put this condition on a par with that of preaching '*this Word of God*'. This appears from the fact that he explicitly states that the Word-of-God character of preaching does not depend on the qualities of the preacher, for he continues: "the Word of God itself which is preached is to be regarded, not the minister that preaches; for even if he be evil and a sinner, nevertheless the Word of God remains still true and good". I do not think that Bullinger means that it does not matter at all whether or not the preacher is a believer. Undoubtedly he would agree with us that for a good communication of the message it is of the utmost importance that the preacher's heart is in the message. However, in this statement he is not dealing with the *communication* of the message, but with the *essential nature* of the message itself. As to the latter he maintains: the question whether or not it is God's Word that is

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preached is not determined by any religious or ethical quality of the man who preaches, but by the agreement of his message with Holy Scripture. At this point, too, he speaks for the whole Reformation. Luther once wrote: "If somebody preaches the Word of God, then it is called the Word of God, whether he be Peter or Judas; if he does not preach it, one should not listen to him, whoever he may be"./65/ In another place he says that it does not matter whether the Word be spoken by Peter and Paul, or by Kajaphas or Balaam or an ass./66/

The absolute condition that '*this Word of God*' must be preached means, of course, that we have a *fixed norm* for our preaching. This is also the reason why the Reformers and those who followed in their footsteps insisted on textual preaching and attached the greatest value to proper and sound exegesis. For only in this way the preacher can be sure that he does not bring his own ideas but God's message. And if he has this conviction, he may also claim to speak on behalf of God. Yes, he may claim with Paul that he is an ambassador for Christ, God Himself making his appeal through him (II Cor. 5:20). From this conviction Luther once wrote: "For a preacher must not say the Lord's Prayer, nor ask for forgiveness of sins, when he has preached (if he is a true preacher), but must confess and exult with Jeremiah: Lord, thou knowest that what has gone forth from my mouth is right and pleasing to thee. He must boldly say with St. Paul and all the apostles and prophets: *Haec dixit dominus*, Thus saith God Himself; or again: In this sermon, I am a confessed apostle and prophet of Jesus Christ. It is neither necessary nor good to ask here for forgiveness of sins, as though the teaching were false. For it is not my word but God's, which He neither can nor will forgive me, and for which He must always praise and

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65. *Calwer Luther-Ausgabe*, 1966, 109. Cf. also the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, VII and VIII, 19 (*The Book of Concord*, ed. T. G. Tappert, Mühlenberg, Philadelphia (1959) page 171) and 28 (page 173).
66. Cf. also J. C. S. Locher, *De leer van Luther over Gods Woord*, Scheffer, Amsterdam (1903) 248.

reward me, saying: You have taught rightly for I have spoken through you and the Word is mine. Whoever cannot boast thus of his preaching repudiates preaching; for he expressly denies and slanders God". /67/

The other side of the coin

This, however, is not all that is to be said here. There is still another side to the coin. A sermon is not a mere repetition of the sacred words of the biblical passage, neither is it merely a careful exposition of the passage. No, this message has to be *applied* or, even better, *actualized* towards the hearers in their particular situation. A sermon is like an *ellipse with two foci:* the *text of the Bible* and the *situation of the hearers*. And preparing and delivering a sermon means that these two foci have to be interrelated in a process of continual reciprocity. In this whole process the preacher himself is personally involved. He comes to it and works on it with all the theological, psychological and spiritual luggage he is carrying. It is he who expounds the text. It is he who analyzes the situation of the hearers. It is he who actualizes the text toward that situation, on the basis of all previous analysis. Naturally, this means that every sermon bears the marks of the preacher. It also suffers from his limitations, whether it be on the theological plane or on the psychological or spiritual. Who would dare to claim perfection for his work?

For this reason the *congregation* always has to *listen critically*. In fact, the New Testament explicitly commands this. In the New Testament the members of the congregation are never regarded or treated as spiritual minors who live under the tutelage of the preachers, but having received the Spirit they are grown-up sons of God (cf. Gal 3:25;26; 4:4-7), who know the Gospel and are to measure all things, including the message that is brought to them in the name of God, by the standard of that Gospel. So John exhorts the believers: "Beloved,

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67. M. Luther, *Wider Hans Worst*, 1541, WA 51. 516. Cf. K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I,2,747.

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do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world" (I John 4:1f.). But not only the false prophets are to be tested, but the true prophets as well. To the Corinthians Paul writes: "Let two or three prophets speak and let the others weigh what is said" (I Cor. 12:29). The Greek word for 'weighing' (διακρίνειν) literally means: to discern or to pass judgment. "The utterance of the prophet is not to be given uncritical acceptance, but to be tested by those qualified",/68/ namely, those who have the gift of the 'discerning of spirits' (I Cor. 12:10). A similar admonition is given by Paul to the Thessalonians, this time to the whole congregation. At the end of his first letter he writes: "Do not quench the Spirit, do not despise prophesying, but test everything, hold fast what is good, abstain from every form of evil" (I Thess. 5:19-22). Again Paul warns against an uncritical acceptance of anything uttered by a man who claims to be a prophet. The Greek verb used for 'testing' (δοκιμάζειν) is often used for testing metals. Christians should "apply spiritual tests to all that claims to be from God"./69/ And preachers should not begrudge them this right, but rather encourage them to use it. For not the preacher is important, but the message. The very same *Luther* who could speak so highly of his preaching, who even refused to pray for forgiveness after he had finished his sermon, was also very conscious of his own smallness *vis-à-vis* the Word he preached. For a little later in the same book we quoted before, he wrote: "Now look, my dear friend, what a strange thing it is, that we, who assuredly teach the Word of God, are so weak and in our great humility so timid, that we do not like to boast that we are the witnesses, servants, preachers, prophets, etc. of God's Church, and that God speaks through us. Yet this is assuredly what we are, since we assuredly have and teach his Word. Such timidity arises from the fact that we earnestly believe that God's Word is such a splendid, majestic thing, that we know ourselves all too

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68. Leon Morris, *I Corinthians*, Tyndale, London (1958) 200. Cf. also Ch. Hodge, *ad loc.*
69. Cf. Leon Morris, *Thessalonians*, Tyndale, London (1956) 105.

unworthy that such a great thing should be spoken and done through us, who still live in flesh and blood". /70/ We find it even more clearly expressed in *Calvin's* writings. Having spoken of the distinguishing marks of the church, namely, the preaching of the Word and the observance of the sacraments/71/, he goes on to admit that "some fault may creep into the administration of either doctrine (= preaching) or sacraments",/72/ and later on he even writes that "we are warned by example from almost every age that the truth is not always nurtured in the bosom of the pastors"./73/ It is therefore not surprising to see that, especially in his sermons, he continually exhorts the congregation to test the message that is preached to them./74/ In a sermon on Deut. 18:16ff. he says: "God wants that we examine the doctrine (= preaching); there must be an investigation of the doctrine"./75/

Quia - quatenus

All this means, of course, that the Christian concept of preaching contains an inner tension. On the one hand, we must maintain that the preaching of the Word of God *is* the Word of God. On the other hand, we must admit that the human element can and often does obscure the message. This tension should not be resolved by giving up one of the two poles of the tension. If we give up the essential nature of Christian preaching as the Word of God, we land in the morass of subjectivism. If we give up the humanity and fallibility of all Christian preaching we enter the road that leads to the

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70. M. Luther, *op cit.* 519. Cf. K. Barth, *op. cit.* 752.
71. J. Calvin, *Institutes*, IV,i,9,10.
72. *Ibid.*, IV,i,12.
73. *Ibid.*, IV,ix,4.
74. *Het gepredikte Woord, Preken van Johannes Calvijn* (The preached Word, Sermons of John Calvin), edited by J. Douma and W. H. v. d. Vegt, n.d., 9ff.
75. "Il veut, que nous examinions la doctrine, il faut, qu'il y ait inquisition de la doctrine", *C R*, 27, 526f.

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objectivism of the Roman Catholic doctrine of the infallibility of the church, which reaches its zenith in the doctrine of papal infallibility.

No, it belongs to the very nature of Christian preaching in this dispensation that it has to live in this tension. In fact, it applies to all the church's speaking about God's self-revelation in Scripture. For instance, it also applies to the church's *creeds and confessions*. In its creeds and confessions the church has attempted to express and summarize what it has understood as the central message of Scripture concerning certain main aspects of the Christian faith. Here too the church says: this is, according to us, what the Word of God says about this or that doctrine. How serious, for instance, the fathers of the Reformation were in this matter appears from the *Preface* to the *Scottish Confession of Faith* of 1560, which closes with the words: "For we call on God to record that... with all humility we embrace the purity of Christ's Gospel, which is the one food of our souls... Therefore by the aid of the mighty Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ we firmly intend to endure to the end in the confession of our faith, as in the following chapters"./76/ For this very same reason the fathers required from all office-bearers, and in particular from the ministers of the Word, to subscribe to the confession, because (*quia*) they believed them to be in agreement with the Word of God./77/ At the same time they were aware of the fact that all confessional formulations are human and fallible. Hence we read in the same *Preface*: "that if any man will note in our Confession any chapter or sentence contrary to God's Holy Word, that it would please him of his gentleness and for Christian charity's

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76. A. Cochrane, *op. cit.* 165.
77. For the Lutheran position of the 'quia' see J. L. Neve, *Introduction to the Symbolical Books of the Lutheran Church* (1956) 30. For the Reformed position, see C. G. M'Crie, *The Confessions of the Church of Scotland* (1907) 225ff. For the Anglican position, see E. C. S. Gibson, *The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England*, Methuen, London (1912) 43, 57ff.

sake to inform us of it in writing; and we, upon our honour, do promise him that by God's grace we shall give him satisfaction from the mouth of God, that is, from Holy Scripture, or else we shall alter whatever he can prove to be wrong"./78/ As to the subscription to a confession this means that we can never speak one word only, the *quia*, but always have to use two words: *quia* (because) and *quatenus* (in as far as). We promise to adhere to the confession *because* we believe it to be in Agreement with Scripture, but due to the inadequacies of all human documents the promise also implies that we shall adhere to it only *in as far as* the confession does agree with Scripture. If at any time it might appear that the confession is mistaken, our conscience is no longer bound by the subscription. The *quia* and *quatenus* therefore do not exclude each other, but belong together in a dialectical tension. The *quia* without the *quatenus* means pure confessionalism, which simply equates human formulations with God's own Word. The *quatenus* *quia* means pure subjectivism, which ignores that God has given his Word to the church and that whenever the church speaks according to this Word, its speaking is authoritative and binding on the believers.

We believe that a similar dialectical tension also applies to christian preaching. Here too we always have to use two words. Yes, the words *quia* and *quatenus* are quite appropriate here too. We do not say this to relativize all preaching. On the contrary, not using these *two* words in a truly dialectical fashion leads to a thorough relativism! The *quia* alone leads to an objectivism, which at first glance may be attractive because of its certainty, but in the long run it appears to lead to the greatest uncertainty because of its lack of true credibility. The *quatenus* alone leads to subjectivism, which again at first glance may be attractive, because it seems to respect the individual responsibility of the hearer, but in the long run it appears to foster religious eclecticism and thus to lead to a truncated understanding of the christian faith. Both pitfalls can be avoided only if we use both words *at the same time* and if we use them *in the correct order*. The *quia* comes first. It is the basis of all our preaching. We have a sure foundation, namely, the prophetic and apostolic preaching as

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78. A. Cochrane, *loc. cit.*

delivered to us in the Scriptures. This foundation is sure, because *this* preaching (and this preaching alone) may claim the *quia* without the *quatenus*! In all *our* preaching, however, the *quia* is always followed by the *quatenus*. Our preaching is the authoritative Word of God only *in as far as* it is the true exposition and actualization of the prophetic and apostolic preaching. The *quatenus* however, does not remove the *quia*. Rather, it *underlines* the earnestness of the *quia*-claim of our preaching. Even though we are aware of our human inadequacies and imperfections in expounding and actualizing Scripture, we do believe that God speaks in and through our human words, whenever the message of Scripture is passed on in our preaching. Bullinger may have brought out only one side of the coin, when he said: "When this Word of God is now preached in the church by preachers lawfully called we believe that the very Word of God is proclaimed, and received by the faithful", it certainly is the main side of the coin.

And in our day, too, this preaching will *not* be *without effect*. In spite of all modern criticisms of the sermon, we do maintain that preaching still is an *apocalyptic event* in which heaven and earth are moved (Calvin). God Himself speaks in and through it, and whenever God speaks things are happening. His Word does not return empty but accomplishes that which He purposes and prospers in the thing for which He sends it (Is. 55:11). God Himself takes care of this. For He not only sends his message to people, but also sends out his *Spirit* to *illuminate the hearts*, so that people really hear the message and believe it. For hearing and believing are not automatic results. They only take place when the Spirit opens the hearts, as in the case of Lydia (Acts 16:14). But then we should note that the Spirit opens her heart "to give heed to what was said by Paul". The Spirit works in and through and with the preached Word.

The indispensability of preaching

There is no other way of sharing in the salvation brought about by Christ. Paul makes this abundantly clear in Rom. 10. He first asks a *catena* of questions: "How are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher?" (Rom. 8:14), and then he sums it all up in the positive

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statement: "So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ" (Rom. 8:17). Preaching therefore is indispensable, today just as much as in the first century.

Does this mean that we can ignore all the *criticisms* of present-day preaching, which we mentioned at the beginning of this lecture? Are such criticisms actually evidences of unbelief? In my opinion, it would be a serious mistake to draw such a conclusion. When we say that preaching is still as indispensable today as it was in the first century, this does not at all imply that our *form* of preaching is also indispensable! We should never lose sight of the fact that the sermons as we hear them on Sunday in the church services represent a *certain cultural form of preaching*. Throughout the centuries there have been different forms. The way Augustine preached was quite different from that of the Apostolic Fathers, and our preaching is quite different again from that in the Middle Ages or in the century after the Reformation. It may well be that we in our time, which is characterized by new forms of communication, in particular those of the mass media, have to search for other forms. At the same time we have to be realistic. Up to the present such new forms have not come forward. All kinds of experiments with so-called dialogue preaching have not been very successful. As long as the new forms are not available, we should certainly not do away with the old form. We might well end up with having nothing at all, and *that would be the end of the church itself*.

For Luther was right when he said that the church is born out of the Word. The church cannot live without the preaching of God's Word. The faith of the believers will die, unless it is constantly nurtured and renewed by the proclamation of the Word. Moreover, how will the *world* in such a situation hear the Word? For preaching is not just an *intra muros* activity. It should be continued in the *extra muros* preaching to the world. And in this second form of preaching *all believers* are involved. As people of the Reformation we like to speak of the priesthood of all believers. But should we in our time not emphasize the *preacherhood of* all believers? The words of Paul should burn in the hearts of us all: "How are they to believe in him whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher?" (Rom. 8:14). Our world cries out

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for this kind of preacher. What is more, God has appointed all of us to be such preachers. We are all included in that one mighty movement of the Spirit, who through the preaching of the Word of the cross wants to call all people to the redemption by Christ. And the essential nature of this preaching is exactly the same as that of a Paul or a Peter. Of every one who tells the story of Jesus to his neighbour or friend or student it is true: "The preaching of the Word of God *is* the Word of God". Miracle of miracles, God Himself speaks through your and my mouth!

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