

SECTION 1

THE CHARACTER OF PREACHING

“BUT HOW CAN THEY CALL ON HIM IN WHOM THEY HAVE NOT BELIEVED? AND HOW CAN THEY BELIEVE WITHOUT HEARING ABOUT HIM? AND HOW CAN THEY HEAR WITHOUT A PREACHER? AND HOW CAN THEY PREACH UNLESS THEY ARE SENT? AS IT IS WRITTEN: HOW WELCOME ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO ANNOUNCE THE GOSPEL OF GOOD THINGS!”

ROMANS 10:13-15

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR CHRISTIAN PREACHING

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INTRODUCTION

What is the basis for preaching as one of the primary expressions of the Christian faith both inside and outside of the Church? Is preaching only a cultural aspect leftover from the earliest days of the struggling, persecuted Church, or is there a legitimate and biblical basis for the Church to continue to utilize preaching as an expression of her faith?

The thesis of this paper is that a biblical basis exists for Christian preaching. This thesis will be defended by utilizing a bifocal approach in examining the above questions. The first (and major) part will focus on the biblical basis of Christian preaching as a method of communication and instruction. The second part will focus on the biblical basis of the content of Christian preaching.

Phillips Brooks's concept of preaching as the communication of divine truth through human personality to other persons will be the operative definition used throughout this paper.¹ The traditional Protestant canon will serve as the primary source. The method employed will be a survey of the biblical materials in the canon related to preaching. Use of both the Old Testament (O.T.) and New Testament (N.T.) reflects two of the three sources for the development of Christian preaching, Hebrew religion and the Christian gospel (the third source being ancient oratory).² The Bible's authority for guidance in matters of faith and practice is presupposed. A secondary purpose of this paper is to provide a biblical basis and introduction to a study of the history of Christian preaching across the centuries.

John R. W. Stott began the opening chapter of *Between Two Worlds* with the assertion, "Preaching is indispensable to Christianity. Without preaching a necessary part of its [Christianity's] authenticity has been lost."³ Assuming this intimacy does indeed exist, what

¹Phillips Brooks, *Lectures on Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1969), 5-8, 14-28.

²See Edwin Charles Dargan, *A History of Preaching* (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1905), 1:14.

³John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1982), 15.

is the foundation? This section explores four biblical bases for the intimacy between Christianity and preaching as a method of Christian communication and instruction.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS

O.T. Antecedents

In the Genesis record God is described as speaking creation into existence.⁴ Shortly after mankind's creation he is entrusted with the responsibility of using words to name the reality surrounding him, including all animal life.⁵ One does not progress very far into the Protestant canon before being confronted with the biblical writer's understanding of words communicating power, whether spoken by God or persons.

The office of the priest supplied another O.T. antecedent for Christian preaching. The priestly acts of Enoch, Noah, Isaac, and Jacob included speaking words of counsel from the Lord.⁶ By the time of Moses and Aaron the office of priest had become formally established.⁷ The nature of the office implied a divine choice⁸ and consecration.⁹ It was a religious order, not a political one. Priestism was denied through the action of the people in laying their hands on the heads of their sacrifices and freely confessing their sins to God alone. Their consciences were free and unhindered. The office of the priest represented life, not death. Its function implied representing all the people, offering sacrifices, and interceding on the people's behalf.¹⁰ However, the office of priest fell into suspicion, laziness, and immorality. The sense of a divine call began to be lost.¹¹ One only can speculate that if the priests had remained faithful to their tasks and retained a higher sense of divine calling the need may have diminished for as many prophets which later arose in Israel to proclaim God's message. However, the priest's responsibility to speak words of counsel from God contributed to the historical tradition inherited by the Church in using preaching as a means of instruction and communication.¹²

⁴Gen. 1:3-27.

⁵Gen. 2:19-20.

⁶Jude 14; 2 Pet. 2:5; Gen. 27:27-29; 49:3-27.

⁷Dt. 26:3; Lev. 9:22-24; Num. 6:22-27; 17:1-18:7.

⁸Heb. 5:1, 4.

⁹Exodus 29; Leviticus 8.

¹⁰Ex. 28:12, 19; Lev. 4:3; 9:22-24; Num. 6:22-27; Heb. 5:1; 8:3.

¹¹1 Sam. 3:12-14.

¹²For further discussion, see George Arthur Buttrick, gen. ed., *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), vol. 3, s.v. "Priests and Levites," by R. Abba; suppl. vol., s.v. "Priests," by B. A. Levine; James Orr, gen. ed., *The International*

Hebrew prophecy provided another O.T. antecedent in the historical basis of Christian preaching as a means of instruction and communication. Although the premonarchy prophets (Abraham, Moses, and Joshua) were transitional figures and primarily administrators, they did engage in the communication of divine truth to other persons.¹³ By the time of the judges the early prophets began to emerge. This group included males and females.¹⁴ There also is an account of a “school of the prophets” taught by Samuel.¹⁵ During the period of the monarchy (both under the united and the divided kingdoms) prophets continued to exercise their ministries.¹⁶ The ninth century B.C. saw the rise of the writing prophets, beginning in the Southern kingdom and spreading to the Northern kingdom.¹⁷ The writing prophets continued through the postexilic period.¹⁸ This long history of Hebrew prophecy helped to prepare the way for Christian preaching.

The prophets’ ability to discern and to describe events was attributed to their belief that God had divinely called them and placed his words in their mouths.¹⁹ Each divine call was different. Nevertheless, each call was initiated by God, created tension in the individuals’ lives, and preserved the personhood of the ones involved. The prophet’s call influenced the direction and emphasis of his ministry and authenticated his message. The divine call enabled the prophet to stay with the intended task when circumstances became undesirable

Standard Bible Encyclopaedia (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1939), vol. 4, s.v. “Priests,” by William G. Moorehead.

¹³Gen. 20:7; Dt. 18:15; 34:10; Joshua 23-24.

¹⁴Ex. 15:20-21; Jg. 4:4; 6:8-10; 1 Sam. 3:20; 2 Chr. 35:18; Mic. 6:4.

¹⁵1 Sam. 10:5-10; 19:18-20.

¹⁶For the united kingdom see 2 Sam. 7:2; 12:25; 15:27; 24:11; 1 Chr. 25:5. For the Southern kingdom see 2 Chr. 9:29; 11:2-4; 12:5-15; 13:22; 15:1-8; 16:7, 10; 19:2; 20:14-17, 37; 24:17-22; 25:5-16; 1 Kg. 16:1-12; 2 Kg. 14:1-7. For the Northern kingdom see 2 Chr. 18:1-34; 1 Kg. 11:29; 13:1-32; 14:2-18; 17-19; 20:13-28, 35-43; 21; 22:1-39; 2 Kings 1; 2-9; 10; 13; Mal. 4:5.

¹⁷For the Southern kingdom see Obadiah; Joel; Is. 6:8-9; 61:1; Micah; Nahum; Zephaniah; Jer. 1:6-9; 7:28; 20:9; Habakkuk. For the Northern kingdom see Jonah, Amos, and Hosea.

¹⁸For exilic prophets see Daniel and Ezek. 2:1-7. For postexilic prophets see Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

¹⁹Gen. 12:1-3; Ex. 3:1-4:17; 1 Samuel 3; 1 Kg. 19:16, 19-21; Isaiah 6; Jeremiah 1; Ezek. 1:1-3:15; Hos. 1:2; Jl. 1:1; Am. 7:14-15; Jon. 1:1-2; 3:1-2; Mic. 1:1; Nah. 1:1; Hab. 1:1; Zeph. 1:1; Hag. 1:1; Zech. 1:1; Mal. 1:1. See also Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1964-76), vol. 2, s.v. “*evangelizomai, evangelion, proevangelizomai, evangelistas*,” by Gerhard Friedrich, 708-9.

and adverse. His task primarily was one of “forthtelling” the word of the Lord to the people of the day, although there were occasions of “foretelling” future events.²⁰ The aspects of a divine personal call and of the task of forthtelling the word of the Lord are O.T. antecedents, which contributed to the historical basis of Christian preaching as a method of communication and instruction.

Although the precise origin is not known, at some point in the latter period of the prophets (the exile) the synagogue developed.²¹ This development influenced preaching greatly in the years to come.²² The Israelites may have developed the synagogue system while in exile in foreign lands and separated from the Temple in Jerusalem. When they returned to Palestine after the exile they established synagogues in most of their communities.²³ At first the people met only for the exposition of the Law.²⁴ Later, prayers and preaching were added. The elders were responsible for the management of the synagogue. The rulers (usually selected from the elders) controlled the services, decided who would read from the Law and the Prophets and who would preach.²⁵ One official, the servant, was responsible for the maintenance of the synagogue and served as an elementary teacher. Those who prayed and often read Scripture were known as delegates. Two almoners received the alms and three almoners distributed the alms. An interpreter translated the passages of the Law and

²⁰For further development in a popular style of the life and ministry of Hebrew prophets see F. B. Huey, Jr., *Yesterday's Prophets for Today's World* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1980); see also Buttrick, vol. 3, “Prophets, Prophetism,” by B. D. Napier; “Prophets in the N.T.,” by M. H. Shepherd, Jr.; “Prophetess,” by B. D. Napier; suppl. vol., “Prophecy in Ancient Israel,” by M. J. Buss; “Prophecy in the Early Church,” by E. E. Ellis; “Prophecy, False,” by J. Crenshaw; Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962); Orr, vol. 4, “Prophecy, Prophets,” by C. vonDrelli; R. B. Y. Scott, *The Relevance of the Prophets* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1953); Leon J. Wood, *The Prophets of Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979).

²¹It should be noted that most of the information concerning the synagogue comes from interpolations from later sources. Much of what is known is speculation at best. See Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 2 vols. (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1892), 1:143; Azriel Eisenberg, *The Synagogue through the Ages* (New York: Bloch Publ. Co., 1974); Joseph Gutmann, ed., *The Synagogue: Studies in Origins, Archaeology, and Architecture* (New York: KTAV Publ. House, 1975); Kaufmann Kohler, *The Origins of the Synagogue and the Church* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1929).

²²Dargan, 1:20; H. C. Brown, Jr., H. Gordon Clinard, and Jesse J. Northcutt, *Steps to the Sermon* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1963), 21.

²³T. Harwood Pattison, *The History of Christian Preaching* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1903), 9.

²⁴See Neh. 8:1-8.

²⁵Cf. Lk. 13:14; Acts 13:15.

the Prophets, which were read in Hebrew, into Aramaic for the people.²⁶ Ten persons were required before worship could begin. The order of worship began with the recitation of the Shema (Dt. 6:4-9), preceded and followed with the congregational blessings. Prayers were the next element, selected from a cycle of eighteen prayers or eulogies. A pericope from the Law for that Sabbath was read, followed by a pericope from the Prophets.²⁷ When the sermon was added as a part of the worship service it was originally a method of dealing with matters of conscience and the resolution of right and wrong by exposition of the Law (the scribes). Later the sermon assumed a more devotional character. Anyone might be asked by the ruler to preach. A benediction pronounced by a priest followed the sermon; the congregation answered with “amen.”²⁸

The development of the synagogue provided the early Christian preachers with a people “trained in hearing the exposition of God’s Word in a special place set apart for sacred discourse.” It also provided them with a place in many towns in which to preach. “The general structure of the synagogue building, the type of service, the use of Scripture for divine instruction influenced Christian preaching for all time.”²⁹

New Testament Models

John the Baptist provided the biblical link between the preaching in the O.T. and the N.T. He used preaching as a tool to communicate the “immediate coming of the promised reign of God”³⁰ and to call the people to a response of repentance.³¹ Our Lord himself chose

²⁶Cf. 1 Cor. 14:28.

²⁷The Pentateuch was divided into 154 pericopes, so that it was read through every three years; the interpreter did not necessarily translate the readings from the Prophets verse by verse, but in paragraphs of three verses.

²⁸Orr, vol. 5, “Synagogue,” by Paul Levertoff, 2878; see also Buttrick, vol. 4, “Synagogue,” by I. Sonne.

²⁹Brown, Clinard, and Northcutt, 21-22. However, N.T. scholarship has shown that Dargan, as well as Brown, Clinard, and Northcutt, may have overstated the influence of the synagogue on Christian preaching; instead, evidence leads to a case for the strong influence of the Cynic-Stoic street preachers. For a treatment of the Cynic-Stoic preaching see Ernst Weber, *De Dione Christostomo Cynicorum sectatore*, Leipziger Studien, vol. 9 (Leipzig: University Press, 1887); for a classic treatment of its influence on the N.T. preaching see Rudolf Bultmann, *Der Stil der paulinischen Predigt und die Kynisch-stoische Diatribe* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1910); for a more recent and well-argued treatment see Stanley Kent Stowers, *The Diatribe and Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, SBL Dissertation Series, vol. 57 (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1981). For several other significant influences see Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

³⁰Dargan, 1:21-22.

³¹Mt. 3:1-12; Mk. 1:4-8; Lk. 3:1-18; Jn. 1:6-8, 15-28.

to use preaching as a primary means for communication and instruction.³² He commissioned his disciples to preach and taught them to use preaching as an element in their ministries.³³ Preaching was a vital factor in the worship and expansion of the early Church.³⁴ The Book of Acts opens with Peter using preaching as a method for declaring the beginning of the new age.³⁵ Stephen employed preaching to proclaim the gospel.³⁶ Phillip used preaching in evangelism.³⁷ Preaching was basic to Paul's ministry of missions.³⁸ Each of these persons found preaching to be a legitimate and helpful element in the execution of service to God.

The O.T. antecedents of the priestly office, prophetic ministry, and synagogue worship, combined with the N.T. models of John the Baptist, Jesus Christ, the disciples, and Paul, provide a historical basis of examples and tradition relative to a biblical foundation for Christian preaching as a method of communication and instruction.

THE BEHAVIORAL BASIS

In the O.T. commands to preach were directed primarily to individuals for the purpose of fulfilling a specific unique task.³⁹ However, the N.T. included commands to preach which were directed to the disciples of Jesus as a group, to the Church as a whole, and to all Christian preachers.⁴⁰ These commands to preach were connected directly with divine tasks to be accomplished. These tasks included world missions,⁴¹ personal evangelism,⁴² and building up the Church.⁴³ The command to preach often was related to

³²Mt. 4:17, 23; 5:1-7:28; 11:1, 5; Mk. 1:38-39; 2:2; Lk. 4:16-30, 42-44; 5:1; 20:1; Eph. 2:17. See also Kittel, vol. 3, s.v. "*karux (hierokarux), karusso, kerugma, prokarusso*," by Gerhard Friedrich, 706-9.

³³Mt. 10:5-7, 26-27; Mk. 3:14; 16:20.

³⁴Acts 5:42; 6:2; 8:4, 25.

³⁵Acts 2:14-26; see also 3:12-26; 10:42.

³⁶Acts 7:1-53.

³⁷Acts 8:12, 40.

³⁸Acts 9:19-20; 13:5; 14:7-18; 16:10; 17:2-3, 16-23; 20:7-9; 28:30-31; Rom. 1:15; 10:13-15; 1 Cor. 1:17, 23; 9:16; Gal. 1:15-16; 1 Tim. 2:7.

³⁹See Is. 6:8-9; 61:1-2; and Jon. 3:2.

⁴⁰See Mt. 10:26-27; 1 Tim. 5:17; 2 Tim. 4:2.

⁴¹Mt. 28:19-20; Mk. 16:15; Lk. 24:46-47.

⁴²Rom. 10:13-17; 1 Cor. 1:21.

⁴³Eph. 4:11-13.

faithfulness in testifying about God's work for man through Jesus.⁴⁴ The preaching event itself was a sign and reminder of the beginning of the last days.⁴⁵ In the N.T. preaching was a part of commands to obey, instructions to follow, and tasks to accomplish, providing a biblical behavioral basis for Christian preaching as a method of communication and instruction.

THE LINGUISTIC BASIS

O.T. (Hebrew)

Approximately nineteen words occur in the O.T. which refer to preaching.⁴⁶ No formal definition is recorded in the O.T., but a study of several of the terms unveils some characteristics of that which was called preaching. Several terms included the concepts of preaching as a "cry from a herald," a "proclamation," and a "burden."⁴⁷ Other terms connoted "the ability to see," as in a vision (both in the spiritual and the temporal sense).⁴⁸ These concepts formed the idea of one who had the abilities "to see" for the Lord and "to speak" in his name in a bold but compassionate manner.⁴⁹

N.T. (Greek)

Approximately twenty-one words occur in the N.T. which refer to preaching.⁵⁰ As with the O.T., no formal definition of preaching is found in the N.T. However, again several of the terms included the concepts of preaching as a "cry from a herald," a "proclamation," an "announcement."⁵¹ Other connotations included "telling good news," "calling with

⁴⁴Acts 10:42.

⁴⁵Acts 2:4, 17-21.

⁴⁶See William Gesenius, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. E. Robinson, rev. C. Briggs, F. Brown, and S. Driver (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979); Robert Young, *Analytical Concordance to the Bible*, 22d ed. (Grand Rapids: William Eerdmans, n.d.).

⁴⁷See *kara, keraz, keriah, kobeleth, massa, rinnah*.

⁴⁸See *chazab, chozeh*.

⁴⁹Brown, Clinard, and Northcutt, 21. See also Kittel, vol. 1, s.v. "*angelia, angello, an-, ap-, di-, ex-, kat-, prokatangelo, katangelus*," by Julius Schneiwind, 71; vol. 2, s.v. "*evangelizomai, evangelion, proevangelizomai, evangelistas*," by Gerhard Friedrich, 707-9, 714; vol. 6, s.v. "*prophatas, prophatis, prophateuo, prophateia, prophatikos, pseudoprophatas*," by Helmut Kramer et al., 796-97, 810-12.

⁵⁰See Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, trans. W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, 2d rev. ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979); Young.

⁵¹See *dialegomai, diangelo, katangelo, kerugma, kerusso, kerux*.

personal appeal,” “gossiping the gospel naturally,” “discoursing,” “teaching with authority,” and “expounding publicly.”⁵² Common to almost all of the N.T. terms was the aspect of “telling” or “declaring” or “proclaiming.”⁵³ These concepts reflected the idea of the preacher as one who boldly and freely heralded the gospel.

The ideas of preaching in both the O.T. and N.T. involved “heralding,” “announcing,” “proclaiming” in a bold fashion by the authority of God and for the intended welfare of response from the hearers. These concepts provided a biblical linguistic basis for Christian preaching as a method of communication and instruction.

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS

Christian Biblical Doctrine of God

The understanding of God in the Bible as personal and immanent is important to a theological basis for preaching as a tool of communication. The Bible observed that just as it is the nature of light to shine, so too it is the nature of God to reveal himself.⁵⁴ The Bible also presented God as having acted in history and spoken to his people.⁵⁵ This enables one to believe that God desires to be known (self-revelation), has made himself known in the past (via his actions and words), and will continue to make himself known in the present. God created the universes and then spoke his blessing on it. God created a people for himself and then spoke to them through the prophets. God created the Church and then spoke to and through them via the early Christian preachers. “Once we are persuaded that God has spoken, however, then we too must speak. A compulsion rests upon us.”⁵⁶

Christian Biblical Doctrine of Christ

The portrayal of Christ as the Word of God substantiated the concept of God’s willingness to communicate to his creation through self-revelation.⁵⁷ The biblical understanding of Jesus Christ as fully divine and fully human provided a model for God’s

⁵²See *dialegomai, didasko, evangelizo, laleo, parakaleo, prophates, prophateuo, propheteia, prophetikos*.

⁵³Kittel, vol. 1, s.v. “*angelia, angello, an-, ex-, kat-, prokatangelo, katangeleus*,” by Julius Schneiwind, 56, 69; vol. 3, s.v. “*karux (hierokarux), karusso, kerugma, prokarusso*,” by Gerhard Friedrich, 703.

⁵⁴Mt. 5:14-16; 11:25-26; Jn. 8:12; 2 Cor. 4:4-6; 1 Jn. 1:5.

⁵⁵Ps. 115:5; Is. 40:5; 55:11; Am. 3:8; 2 Cor. 4:13.

⁵⁶Stott, 96.

⁵⁷Jn. 1:1-3, 14; Heb. 1:1-4.

continuing to speak to his creation through humans via preaching.⁵⁸ Christ's incarnation supplied a paradigm for preaching as both a human and a divine event.⁵⁹

Christian Biblical Doctrine of the Church

The biblical material presents the nature of the Church as being directly related to the present of God (or God's Spirit). This is true even to the point of the Church being referred to as the body of Christ.⁶⁰ In the Church's worship she speaks to God (prayer) and listens for his words (meditation). The biblical teaching regarding the Church's mission is to call the world to God in Christ and to speak the words of God to the world. The biblical method to accomplish this mission includes going, telling, proclaiming, explaining, and exhorting.⁶¹

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR THE MESSAGE OF CHRISTIAN PREACHING

In examining the biblical basis for preaching as one of the primary expressions of the Christian faith, consideration must be given not only to its biblical basis as a method of communication and instruction, but also to the biblical basis of its message.

O.T. Contributions

Little has been written concerning the contribution of the office of the priest to the message of the Christian preacher.⁶² However, it seems reasonable to assert that the worship implications of the priestly functions offer some parallels for the message of the Christian preacher. His responsibility was two-directional: (1) service to God, and (2) service to the people. In representing God to the people and the people to God, the priest's functions involved an incarnational aspect. He communicated not only by what he

⁵⁸Heb. 2:3-4.

⁵⁹See also Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1961), 50-54.

⁶⁰Rom. 12:5.

⁶¹Mt. 28:19-20; Mk. 16:15; Lk. 24:45-47; Acts 10:42; Rom. 10:13-17; 1 Cor. 1:21; Eph. 4:11-13; 2 Tim. 4:2. See also Stott, 109-16.

⁶²This may be due to the critical questions related to the origins, nature, and history of the priesthood. See Aelred Cody, *A History of the Old Testament Priesthood* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969); *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 1971 ed., s.v. "Priests and Priesthood"; Donald E. Gowan, *Bridge between the Testaments* (Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1976); George Buchanan Gray, *Sacrifice in the Old Testament: Its Theory and Practice* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925); A. S. Herbert, *Worship in Ancient Israel* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1959); J. Morgenstern, "A Chapter in the History of the High Priesthood," *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature* 55 (1939): 1-24; Roland deVaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, trans. John McHugh (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1961).

said but also by how he lived. The priest was to demonstrate personal forgiveness of sin, as well as offer sacrifice publicly for its remission; he was to consecrate himself, as well as call the people to holy living; he was to experience worship of God, as well as lead the people in worship. The priest was to apply the admonitions of the holy writings to himself, as well as use them as a source for instruction and direction for others. When the latter aspect of “incarnating” the divine truth became deemphasized or forgotten, the priesthood fell into disrepute.

In contrast to the lack of works dealing with the contributions of the office of the priesthood, much has been written concerning the contributions of the prophets to the message of the Christian preacher.⁶³ An important element of the preaching of the O.T. prophet was the idea that he had received a “word” or message from God, which had to be faithfully passed on. The message did not have its source in the prophet himself but often was introduced with the authority of “thus saith the Lord.” The prophet was responsible for the correct delivery of the message he had received from God. The prophet did not just proclaim judgment but also warned and admonished so that judgment could be averted. The message was passed on in a relevant manner.⁶⁴ Application usually was made to national, ethical, and social issues.

The preaching which was a part of the experience of worship in the synagogue drew from the sacred writings of the Law and the prophets and was explanatory in nature.⁶⁵ The priesthood, prophets, and synagogue worship provided a background for Christian preaching which was concerned with people’s needs, incarnational in expression, divine in origin and authority, explanatory in nature, and ethical in application.

New Testament Models

“When we say that the main concern of the N.T. is with the act of proclamation, this does not mean that the content is subsidiary. . . . Regard must be had to the content.”⁶⁶ The content of John the Baptist’s preaching pointed to the “Lamb of God,” rather than to himself as the messenger. His message was the same for all people. He called for decision,

⁶³See Bernhard W. Anderson, *The Eighth Century Prophets* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978); Andrew W. Blackwood, Sr., *The Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1917); Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962); F. B. Huey, Jr., *Yesterday’s Prophets for Today’s World* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1980); J. Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1962); R. B. Y. Scott, *The Relevance of the Prophets* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1953); Leon J. Wood, *The Prophets of Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979).

⁶⁴Kramer et al., “*prophetas, prophatis, prophateuo, prophateia, prophatikos, pseudoprophetas*,” 810-12.

⁶⁵See above., pp. 5-6.

⁶⁶Friedrich, “*karux (hierokarux), karusso, kerugma, prokarusso*,” 710.

choice, and fruitful repentance.⁶⁷ “His preaching was ethical, eschatological, and judgmental. He was fearless in his attacks on the sins of the people.”⁶⁸

When Herod placed John the Baptist in prison, Jesus assumed John’s ministry and preached as John did.⁶⁹ The declaration was concerned with the Kingdom of God, living the God-intended life, acceptance by God, and the price and sacrifice involved in following God. His themes were doctrinal and ethical, touching on the areas of domestic, social, and civil life.⁷⁰ However, Jesus did not speak of a prophet who was yet to come. He spoke as a prophet of the fulfillment of expectation and promise. Rather than announcing that something was going to take place, his announcement was the event itself. Unlike John, Jesus was the burden of his own message. He himself was the content of his preaching.⁷¹

The content of the apostles’ preaching was parallel to Christ’s, with the addition of the events concerning his death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and promised return.⁷² The major sources for the content of their preaching were the O.T. as interpreted to them by Christ, the experiences they had had with Jesus, the historic events centering in Jesus, and the individual understandings each gave to the entire picture.⁷³ C. H. Dodd studied the individual understandings reflected in the sermonic material of the apostles and preserved in the N.T. He then sought to determine the common elements in each tradition in order to discover the core content of the preaching of the early Church. Depending mostly on the Petrine sermonic material, Dodd concluded that the kerygma of the early Church consisted of (1) the age of fulfillment has dawned; (2) this has taken place through the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus in accordance with the “determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God” and in fulfillment of O.T. prophecy; (3) by virtue of the resurrection Jesus has been exalted at the right hand of God, as Messianic head of the new Israel; (4) the Holy Spirit in the Church is the sign of Christ’s present power and glory; (5) the Messianic age will shortly reach its consummation in the return of Christ; and (6) repent, receive the forgiveness of sin,

⁶⁷Mt. 3:1-14; Mk. 1:1-9; Lk. 3:1-20; Jn. 1:19-36; 3:22-36.

⁶⁸Lloyd M. Perry and Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Wycliffe Handbook of Preaching and Preachers* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), 12. See also Friedrich, “*evangelizōmai, evangelion, proevangelizōmai, evangelistas*,” 719; Kramer et al., “*prophatas, prophatis, prophateuo, prophateia, prophatikos, pseudoprophatas*,” 836-41.

⁶⁹See Mt. 4:17; cf. Mk. 1:14-15.

⁷⁰Perry Wiersbe, 12-13.

⁷¹Friedrich, “*evangelizōmai, evangelion, proevangelizōmai, evangelistas*,” 712; Friedrich, “*karux (hierokarux), karusso, kerugma, prokarusso*,” 706-8. See also Brown, Clinard, and Northcutt, 22; Dargan, 1:22-23.

⁷²Ibid., 1:24.

⁷³Brown, Clinard, and Northcutt, 22.

the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the promise of salvation, which is the life of the age to come to those who enter the elect community.⁷⁴

The kerygma reflected in Pauline sermonic material, according to Dodd, was expressed as (1) the prophecies are fulfilled, and the new age is inaugurated by the coming of Christ; (2) he was born of the seed of David; (3) he died according to the Scriptures, to deliver us out of the present evil age; (4) he was buried; (5) he rose on the third day according to the Scriptures; (6) he is exalted at the right hand of God, as Son of God and Lord of the quick and the dead; (7) he will come again as Judge and Savior of men.

Three major elements in the Pauline kerygma which were not in the Petrine kerygma were (1) Jesus is the Son of God; (2) Christ died for our sins; (3) the exalted Christ intercedes for us. The other points were common to both; there was little in the Petrine kerygma, which did not reappear substantially in the Pauline kerygma.⁷⁵

By isolating elements of the kerygma of the early Church according to different traditions, Dodd performed a great service for N.T. scholarship and Christian preaching. However, his assertion that there was a sharp separation between “kerygma” and “didache” in the preaching of the N.T. did not go unchallenged.⁷⁶ By its very nature, declaring the unique historical reality of Christ involves teaching and admonishing; however, “it is teaching which participates in the eschatological and dramatic character of the message.”⁷⁷ Although kerygma and didache are distinct from each other, they are not necessarily inseparable in the preaching of the early Church. Robert Mounce described the two preaching elements as connected through a vital dependent relationship. He visualized the N.T. materials as forming three concentric circles around the death, burial, resurrection, and exaltation of Christ.⁷⁸ The first circle was the kerygma, which interpreted the Christ events for an evangelistic purpose. The second circle was the theological expansion of the first circle. Its goal was to guide the new Christian into a fuller understanding of what God had done through Jesus Christ. The outside circle was the didache, the ethical expansion of the

⁷⁴C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1936), 21-24.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 17, 25-27.

⁷⁶See Francis J. Handy, *Jesus the Preacher* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1949), 11-17; Michel Philibert, *Christ's Preaching—and Ours*, trans. David Lewis (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1963); Robert C. Worley, *Preaching and Teaching in the Earliest Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967).

⁷⁷Schneiwind, “*angelia, angello, an-, di-, ex-, kat-, prokatangelo, katangeleus*,” 72.

⁷⁸Robert H. Mounce, *The Essential Nature of New Testament Preaching* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1960), 133.

inner two circles. It dealt with the new relationship of man to God and was concerned with focusing on practical daily living.⁷⁹

CONCLUSION

“No agency in religion is older than preaching.” Perry and Wiersbe continued the opening of their study by asserting, “If we would understand preaching today, we must examine its heritage.”⁸⁰ In examining the heritage of this ancient agency, this paper has been concerned with whether or not Christian preaching has a biblical basis for its concept and content.

An examination of the history, commands, instructions, behavior, language, and theology in the Bible provided evidence for the concept of Christian preaching. The evidence supplied by the office of the priest and the synagogue was the weakest evidence for the concept of Christian preaching. The evidence drawn from the prophets, disciples, early Church, and Jesus himself was the strongest element in support of the concept of Christian preaching as a method of communication and instruction.

The biblical basis for the content of Christian preaching came to full maturity in the N.T. models of John the Baptist, Jesus, and the apostles. The content of the sermonic material of the N.T. was sometimes Christocentric, sometimes ethical, sometimes eschatological, sometimes kerygmatic, and sometimes existential. It was devoted to the person and work of Christ, the coming of the new age, mankind’s response to the initiative of God, and the implications of God’s work in Christ when applied to one’s relationship to fellow humans. Jesus, his apostles, and the sermonic material of the early Church generally shared a common kerygmatic content. These elements, combined with the preparatory contributions of the preaching content of the O.T., provided a strong biblical basis for the kerygmatic and didactic message of Christian preaching.⁸¹

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Perry and Wiersbe, 11.

⁸¹See Brown, Clinard, and Northcutt, 22-23.