CHRISTOLOGY OF PREACHING

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Contemporary homiletic theory is often driven by immediate pragmatic ends: change lives, draw a crowd, attract seekers, or affect an immediate response. These ambitions in sum are not morally disabled. The problem is that in the expediency to accomplish selective ends, one may forget that biblical preaching is always informed by a salient theology. Clearly the declaration of the good news is shaped by one's ecclesiology, theology proper, pneumatology, doctrine of man, and of course a doctrine of revelation.

Recent literature on expositional preaching generally begins with an assumed or stated premise that expository preaching must be accompanied by a proper doctrine of revelation.[1] Specifically, the longstanding

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[1]For example: Harold Bryson, *Expository Preaching: Preaching through a Book of the Bible* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1995); Bryan Chappell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994); Al Fasol, *Essentials for Biblical Preaching: An Introduction to Basic Sermon Preparation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989); Sidney Griedanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), and *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); Walter Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981); Walter Liefield, *New Testament Exposition: From Text to Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984); John MacArthur Jr., *Rediscovering Expository Preaching* (Dallas: Word, 1992); Wayne McDill, *Twelve Essential Skills for Great Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994); Stephen Matthewson, *The Art of Preaching the Old Testament Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002); David L. and Stephen K. Olford, *Anointed Expository Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1989); Ramesh Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons: A Seven-Step Method for Biblical Preaching*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001); Hadden Robinson, *Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001); John Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982); Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit* (Chicago: Moody, 1999). All of these texts include a modicum, if not a full development of a doctrine of revelation and its relationship to preaching. These works were all published within the last twenty years. It is interesting to note that two historically important works on preaching, John Broadus' *The Preparation and Delivery of*

evangelical argument for expository preaching has been the perfect nature of Scripture. An example of this foundational argument is found in the preface to John MacArthur's work on expository preaching. He begins the book with five postulates that serve to illustrate the relationship between inerrancy and exposition:

1. God is.
2. God is true.
3. God speaks in harmony with His nature.
4. God speaks only truth.
5. God spoke His true Word as consistent with His true Nature to be communicated to people.[2]

What then does this mean for preaching? MacArthur goes on to write,

1. God gave His true Word to be communicated *entirely* as He gave it, that is, the whole counsel of God is to be preached (Matt. 28:20; Acts 5:20; 20:27). Correspondingly, every portion of the Word of God needs to be considered in the light of its whole.
2. God gave His true Word to be communicated *exactly* as He gave it. It is to be dispensed precisely as it was delivered, without altering the message.
3. Only the exegetical process that yields expository proclamation will accomplish propositions 1 and 2.[3]

The logic is that the perfect nature of Scripture begs its sufficiency. In turn, the sufficiency of Scripture begs that it be treated with faithful expository proclamation. If Scripture is sufficient then the text of Scripture must move beyond influencing the sermon. Rather, the text should determine the essence of the sermon, so that the sermon borrows its content, structure, and "spirit" from the text. (By "spirit" I mean the author's intended emotive aims of the text, determined by the genre, so that the dramatic tension of a narrative or the sting of a Pauline rebuke, is reflected in sermons respectively). This is expository preaching: faithful exposition born from the conviction that the content, the structure, and the emotive design are all inspired and perfect.

Sermons and Andrew Blackwood's *The Preparation of Sermons* contain little if no discussion of a doctrine of revelation.

[2]MacArthur, *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, 25.

[3]Ibid., 25, 26.

However, Christian preaching should begin with Christ. Preaching, along with all theological conversations, could begin with Jesus, but preaching ought to begin with Christ in particular for the reason that Christ is God's Communication. There is more to say about Christ, but not less: He is no less than the very act of communication, means of communication, and end of communication. God's means of communication should influence, if not dictate, the means chosen by the preacher. The purpose of this article is to examine four Christological passages and their implications on preaching. These are passages about God's communication of Himself and in this way helpful to understand Christian pastoral preaching.

Limitations

There are at least two apparent problems with examining these Christological passages as preaching texts. These will be addressed before the passages are examined. First, the incarnation is unique. It is clear that the incarnation is singular and distinct. It is obviously more than a metaphor for preaching ministry. Therefore this argument will be approached with that understanding, honoring the singular importance of the incarnation.

Secondly, one may fairly ask, "Why deal with inferred communication passages when there are explicit passages on preaching?" For example, there is a host of popular literature on preaching that describes Christ's way of communicating, then prescribes ways that a pastor should communicate, all the while ignoring the plain teaching of Scripture. Some will examine Paul on Mars Hill and treat his precedent for quoting secular poems as prescriptive for pastoral preaching. While there is precedent in Paul, some accept Paul's strategies as prescriptive, while ignoring passages in the other epistles in which Paul explains clearly how, and what, one should preach.[4] It is imperative, therefore, to affirm the clear New Testament passages as primary passages that deal plainly with preaching, and to acknowledge that a student of preaching would begin with these texts.

With these dangers noted why then pursue a homiletic theory from implicit and not explicit passages on preaching? Three reasons are sufficient.

First, preachers are communicators. There is more to say about preaching, but it could be said fairly that contemporary preaching is often cursed with individuals so committed to a certain style of preaching that they fail to communicate. The ministry of the word is not the attempt to mirror a style or react against a style, rather it is to make the teaching of the text plain.

Secondly, this communication that preachers practice is a borrowed

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[4]For example, see 1 Cor 1; 2:1–5; 1 Tim 4:1–8; or Titus 1:9.

art. Preachers did not invent communication. The first recorded act of communication is Genesis 1:3, where God said "Let there be light."[5] This is a difficult communication model to study. For while there is a sender of the message (God) and there is a message (the command for light to be) the receiver of the message is harder to define. We only know that the light got the message, and became. The first act of communication between two parties is Genesis 1:26, "Let Us make man in our own image." Preachers did not invent communication. Communication existed perfectly in the Godhead long before we trifling beings came attempting to do imperfectly what God has always done perfectly.

Thirdly, the incarnation is perfect communication. If one were to define communication as representation, then one could say that the incarnation is the ultimate act of communication. In John 1:18 the apostle notes that "No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him." The invisibility of the Father seems almost inconsequential because the Son has "explained him." Christ perfectly represented the Father, and therefore perfectly communicated the Father. Thus the incarnation is ultimate communication, because God is communicating God.

So while it is essential to acknowledge the temptations involved in looking at the Christological passages as preaching passages, and to acknowledge the need to approach these passages with exegetical honesty, it is still impossible to ignore that every preacher is attempting to do what Christ did perfectly, and that at the least Christ's incarnational ministry can be instructive for Christian preaching. Four Christological passages will now be explored for their implications on preaching.

The Christological Passages

John 1:1–5

"In the beginning was the Word . . ."

It has been suggested that John's use of λογος to describe Christ is an attempt to address the Greek philosophic mind. It has also been suggested that λογος is written to the Semitic mind. While many things have been suggested by John's use of λογος,[6] perhaps the simplest explanation is the best, namely that Christ was God's Speech. Calvin translated verse one:

[5]Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture references are from the Holy Bible, New American Standard Bible (NASB).

[6]For a sample discussion of possible Greek and Semitic influences see Simon Kistomaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1953), 69–70.

"In the beginning was the Speech, and the Speech was with God, and the Speech was God."[7] Calvin wrote,

> As to the Evangelist calling the Son of God the Speech, the simple reason appears to me to be, first, because he is the eternal Wisdom and Will of God; and secondly, because he is the lively image of His purpose; for as Speech is said to be among men the image of the mind, so it is not inappropriate to apply this to God. And to say that He reveals Himself to us by His Speech. The other significations of the Greek word *logos* do not apply so well. It means, no doubt, definition, and reasoning and calculation; but I am unwilling to carry the abstruseness of philosophy beyond the measure of my faith.[8]

Thus Calvin is suggesting that the answer to the λογος question is quite simple. Christ was the Communication of God. Two conclusions can be drawn from this approach: First, Christ was what God wanted to say and second, Christ was the way God wanted to say it. Both of these entities are present in John 5:19,

> Truly, truly I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son does in like manner.

Thus, the existence of Christ was the mind of God. To pursue Calvin's thought, since the existence of the Son is the communication of the mind of the Father, then the work of the Son is the visible expression of the mind of God. Therefore, the healing miracles are actually God's Speech on the power of His Son, and on His attitude toward human suffering. Christ's commentary on taxes to be given to the federal government is God's Speech on the Christian's relationship to earthly powers. Jesus' actions at a well in Samaria were God's speech entitled, "What I think about loose women." The keynote address is the cross, whereby in the actions of His Son God held forth that He loved humanity and was forever committed to the salvation of the elect. In the beginning was the *Speech*. The existence of Christ was the mind of God.

This would mean that there was never a time when Christ was not what God was thinking. Every action of the Son was a syllable in the

[7]John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John, Vol II.* Calvin's Commentaries in Twenty Three Volumes, Vol. 17 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 26.
[8]Ibid., 26

Speech of God. There were no wasted words in God's Speech. This is ultimate communication.[9]

Expository preaching attempts to reflect the mind of God on a matter. During the exposition of the text of Scripture there should never be a time when God is not represented. Every word should pitch to the idea of representing the text. A sermon which is largely human opinion on a subject cannot speak the mind of God and so imitate Christ's own communication of the Father. Thus, there is a need for faithful exposition; exposition which faithfully represents the Word of God as Christ faithfully represented the mind of God.

Consequently, this is in contrast to the New Homiletic whose concerns seem largely anthropocentric. The New Homiletic has faced criticism for being closely sympathetic with neo-orthodox theology and for being reflective of postmodern philosophy. However, perhaps the problem of the New Homiletic is that while it takes very seriously what is on the mind of man, this emphasis subjugates understanding the mind of God.

For example, in David Buttrick's *Homiletic Moves and Structures,* one will find less of exegetical practice, and a great deal of the science of semiotics. Buttrick's emphasis is illustrative of the vibe of the New Homiletic; namely, that the chief concern of the preacher is the study of the mind of man. In *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, Barth responds to Schleiermacher by saying, "one can not speak of God simply by speaking of man in a loud voice."[10] A homiletic theory with an anthropocentric strain will be challenged to accomplish the purposes of God in preaching.

By contrast, a faithful exposition of Scripture reveals the words, which reveals the Word, Who reveals God Himself. True expository preaching understands the mind of men, but seeks first to uncover the mind of God. Thus the λογος, the Son, is exposed in the human speech of preaching.

Colossians 1:15–20

"And He is the image of the invisible God . . ."

The structure of Colossians 1:15–20 is to posit Christ's supremacy over all things then to build subsequent arguments around this idea.[11] The

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[9]See Augustine, *On The Trinity*, Book 13, trans. Arthur West Haddan, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers First Series*, ed. Phillip Schaff (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2004), 3:166–82.

[10]Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, trans. Douglas Horton (New York: Harper, 1928), 196.

[11]The textual divisions could begin at v. 9 or 12, and could extend to v. 23 or 29. However v. 15 begins with Christ as the subject proper, and in v. 21 the subject of the sentence transfers to the recipient of the letter.

supremacy of Christ is illustrated by at least five proofs: Christ is the very image of God (v. 1a); Christ is the source of, sustains, and is the reason for all creation (vv. 1b–17); Christ is head over the church by virtue of His resurrection (v. 18); God was pleased that the πλήρομα of Himself be in Christ (v. 19); and Christ is the means of reconciliation to the Father (v. 20). For the purpose of this paper attention will now turn to this first proof, the reality that Christ is the εἰκών of the Father.

In verse 15 Paul uses interesting wordplay, seemingly to point to the contrasting work within the Trinity. He notes that Christ is the *image* of the *invisible*. This is a strange and wonderful rhetorical device, for it presents the dilemma of re-presenting something that is actually invisible. Christ is the visible expression of a God who is invisible. Thus the unknown of the Father is known through the Person of Christ.

Perhaps this is the most pressing rationale for a pastoral ministry that contains serious exposition. The preacher faithfully reveals the Word of God; the words of the Word faithfully represent the Son of God, and God's Son perfectly represents the Father. In this way, the preacher stands in God's direct revelation of Himself as the fallible instrument among the perfect Word, the perfect Son, and the perfect Father. The weight of the accountability to God is almost unbearable. The preacher's unfathomable responsibility is to expose the people to the Word. It seems strange that modern preachers would want to do anything less. The explanation of the text is so pregnant with the weight of responsibility that it alone is sufficient. Miraculously, God has graciously allowed that preaching, through the power of His Spirit, *can* represent the text, the text *will* point to Christ, and Christ *will* point to the Father.

While the representation of Christ brings accountability to the preacher, it also brings an equal accountability to the listener. The listener is accountable to God for the simple reason that God communicated Himself to us in the person of Christ.[12] In *The Everlasting Man*, G.K. Chesterton argues for a distinct human origin when he writes,

> It is the simple truth that man does differ from the brutes in
> kind and degree; and the proof of it is here; that it sounds like
> a truism to say that the most primitive man drew a picture of

[12]This is illustrated by the relationship of Colossians 1:15, "All things were created by Him and for Him"; and Romans 1:20, "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse." The implications of this integration on the problem of those who have not heard the Gospel will not be explored here. However an important aside is the weight that this natural revelation adds to the responsibility of preachers to connect nature and Christ.

a monkey and that it sounds like a joke to say that the most intelligent monkey drew a picture of a man. Something of division and disproportion has appeared; and it is unique. Art is the signature of man.[13]

Some suggest that the drawings of the primitive man were not art in a technical sense. Rather, the drawings were an attempt to re-present certain events making them more of a chronicling than an expression of art. Regardless, they were at least representation and certainly communication. Thus if "art is the signature of man," perhaps communication is the accountability of man. In other words, the presence of communication allows a holy God to hold men liable since they have been communicated to through the person of Jesus Christ.

There is a sense of accountability to a God who has so clearly revealed Himself and will again reveal Himself. All preachers therefore, are doubly accountable to represent a text faithfully, which in turn represents Christ perfectly, who represents the Father perfectly.

Philippians 2:5–11

"Although He existed in the form of God, [He] did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself"

Paul's description of Christ's ενκένωσεν or "emptying" is a source of textual, and historically, theological concern, namely that Christ chose to set aside his rights as God. This does not suggest that He was no longer God, rather that He made a conscience choice to daily neglect the use of His attributes with which He was fully endued.

In essence Christ concealed Himself so that He might reveal the Father. Thus the veiling of Christ's full identity was necessary for God to be known fully.

In the same way the Christian preacher's "rights" are willfully suspended in an effort to reveal the Father. Christ's emptying was a necessary means of accomplishing the communication of the incarnation. Preaching can only veil God or the preacher, if the preacher is not veiled, then God will be. Thus the preacher must be tied to the text in a way that hides himself and throws light upon God through the Scripture. As François Fénelon noted,

[13]G.K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993), 33–34.

The good man seeks to please only that he may urge justice and the other virtues by making them attractive. He who seeks his own interest, his reputation, his fortune, dreams of pleasing only that he may gain the bow and esteem of men able to satisfy his greed or his ambition.[14]

The divesting of oneself of rights, privileges and status seems particularly foreign to what any human, preacher or not, desires. The natural desire of a preacher is to consummate the call of God within the pride of one's ability. This position is antithetical to Christian preaching for the very reason that the proclamation of the Word of God cannot be separated from its means. There is no separation from the means of communication, Christ incarnate, and the message He came to preach.[15] Christ came to say that one must die to himself and then find life in Him. The medium in which He spoke those words was a broken, humble spirit of an individual who, in reality, laid claim to all that existed. The clarity of the method of Christ did not veil, rather it facilitated, the message of the Gospel. The message Christ preached was modeled in the way that He preached it. Can Christian preaching do any less?

All internal desires for wealth, fame, notoriety, attention, accolade, praise, and comfort fight the very message preached. What blistered irony that when a sinful spirit carpets the heart of the preacher, the most faithful explanation of the Word is drowned. It defeats the purpose of God. And, if God will not use this type of man, then logically cunning exegesis and contemporary application cannot overcome this errant posture.

Hebrews 1:1–5

"And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power."

The author of Hebrews structures this chapter to show the superiority of Christ over the prophets and over the angels. To build this argument he notes that, among other things Christ is the χαρακτὴρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ, the exact representation of the Father. Apparently this text seems to have a cohesive relationship between Paul's idea of Christ as the εἰκὼν

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[14]François Fenelon, *Dialogues on Eloquence*, trans. Wilbur Samuel Howell (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1951), 62.

[15]This is an allusion to Marshall McLuhan's suggested relationship between the message and medium of communication. The Christological application of McLuhan's thought is a subject worthy of further explanation. For an anthology of McLuhan, see *Essential McLuhan*, ed. Eric McLuhan and Frank Zingrone (Perseus: New York, 1995).

of God. (Col 1:15). While the two texts are similar, they emphasize two different facets of Christ's character.

In the Colossians text, the emphasis is on the visibility of Christ versus the invisibility of the Father. The value of the εἰκὼν is that he is the visible of that which cannot be seen. The emphasis in Hebrews 1:3 is on Christ's representation of the essence of the Father. What Christ represented was truly God. This in turn aids an understanding of Colossians 1:19, namely that the Father was pleased that the πλήρωμα of God was in Christ. From these passages one can conclude there was nothing that God wanted to reveal of Himself that Christ was not. When Christ ascended he left nothing unsaid. All that the Father wanted to communicate was done so perfectly through Jesus. If the preacher is to model perfect communication, he must ask if he has said what the text said. It is true that some sermons never seem to end, yet the liability exists to sit down when God is not finished speaking. Within customary constraints, the text should be mined for God's full revelation of Himself, knowing that until this has happened the sermon is not finished.

Christ left the pulpit of His incarnation knowing that He had not wasted a word expressing to the world the essence of the Father. Again, echoing the Colossians text, the preacher is called to represent the Word exactly, which represents Christ exactly, who in turn represents the Father exactly.

Application

If those charged with the exposition of Scripture are to understand the mission to imitate the obedience of the incarnation it would have at least nine effects on the pulpit ministry.

1. *There will be a refusal to represent the text weakly*.
   How could one offer anything but faithful exposition of a Word that so faithfully, and perfectly represents One who so faithfully and perfectly represented the Father.
2. *The preacher will see himself in the line of God's chosen revelation of Himself.* (1 Cor 1:21).
3. *The preacher will be profoundly humble*.
   Could arrogance exist where the preacher understood his role as a conduit of the truth of God?
4. *The preacher will refuse to bring anything, any word, or any thought before people in which the net effect was to distract from the text of Scripture.*

5. *The preacher will refuse to use the pulpit as a place to showcase rhetorical ability.*
6. *The preacher will be more committed to the effort needed to communicate the message, mirroring the way that Christ took tremendous pains to communicate Himself in the incarnation.*
7. *The preacher will preach with a confident assurance.*
8. *The preacher will refuse to judge the effect of His preaching by immediate emotional response*. If the incarnation teaches us anything it is that the real fruit is fruit that remains.
9. *The preacher will call for decision*. No one can be exposed to the Christ of Scripture and remain neutral.

Conclusion

John 1 instructs us that Christ is the Word of God. If Christ is the λογος of God, then preachers should speech God. This requires consciously identifying what is on the mind of God as we identify what is on the mind of man. According to Colossians 1, this invisible mind of God was revealed in Christ who is the image of the Father. There is an accountability on the part of people who can so clearly see Christ, and a double accountability to preachers, by faithful exposition, to represent this representation. Hebrews 1 convinces the preacher that he is to strive for exact representation, and Philippians 2 yields that the preacher is to reveal the Father by the emptying of his personal rights and privileges.

Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries there were multiple attempts to decipher ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics. In the late 1800s Napoleon had captured Egypt, and in 1877 French soldiers began to dig in an effort to build a fort for Napoleon. One of the soldiers, Pierre-François Bouchard, found a block of black basalt stone, later to be named the Rosetta Stone. It measured three feet nine inches long, two feet four and half inches wide, and eleven inches thick and it contained three distinct bands of writing. Etched on the stone were three languages: on the top was hieroglyphics, demotic in the middle, followed by Greek on the bottom. Hieroglyphics were common in Egypt, but up to that date no one was able to decipher the mysterious language. While the historical value of the demotic was uncertain, they quickly realized that the names of royalty in the bottom Greek text corresponded to similar characters in the cartouches within the hieroglyphics. After twenty years Jean-François Champollion broke the code and deciphered the meaning of the hiero-

glyphics. The language could not be understood apart from a translating language.[16]

On the Rosetta Stone of the Word of God, Christ is the translating language. One reads Scripture and ponders at the hieroglyphics of a God who would love Israel; the wrath of a God who would destroy Sodom; or the wisdom of a God who would create man. He is beyond comprehension. Yet on the pages of the same book is God's Speech, Jesus Christ. In his humanity he decoded the God who was beyond our comprehension. Thus the bottom Greek of Christ translates for us the top hieroglyphic of God.

Therefore, expository preaching is faithful to the text for the very reason that the text speaks of Christ. In explaining the words of the Word, one is explaining the Son of God Himself Who is revealing God Himself. And, according to 1 Corinthians 1:21, this was the plan of God from the beginning. The plan was for the preacher to reveal God's Son, by preaching God's Word. Therefore, while the impetus for exposition surely merges from a commitment to the sufficiency of Scripture, clearly a commitment to exposition is also borne on the shoulders of a salient Christology.

[16]Richard A. Strachen, Katheleen A. Roetzel, *Ancient Peoples: A Hypertext View.* http://www.mnsu.edu/emuseum/prehistory/egypt/hieroglyphics/rosettastone.html (Accessed 8 September 2006).