

Preaching and pastoral ministry

Peter Adam

Whatever happened to Preaching?

[This is from 'Preaching and Pastoral Ministry', in *The Anglican Evangelical Crisis*, ed. Melvin Tinker, Christian Focus Publications, Fearn, 1995].

It is one of the ironies of the currently celebrated Evangelical Renaissance in the Church of England that it seems to have lost its way in the area of Preaching. How has a tradition which looks back to Reformation Preachers including Bishop Latimer and Bishop Ridley, John Calvin and Martin Luther, whose commitment to Preaching is so perfectly expressed and reflected in the Book of Common Prayer, the Thirty Nine Articles and The Ordinal, and whose tradition of Preaching includes such masters as George Whitfield, Charles Simeon, John Stott and Dick Lucas, lost its way in Preaching in the 1990's? It is a double irony that while this Evangelical Renaissance is also celebrating the rise in Biblical scholarship over the last fifty years it should fail to ask the question why this outpouring of biblical scholarship is not producing great or even good Preachers.

This decline in Preaching among Evangelicals within the Church of England can be observed from the following evidence:¹

Kenneth Hylson-Smith in his book *Evangelicals in the Church of England 1734-1984*² studies the growth and development of Evangelicals over 250 years. His section on the period 1945-1984 includes a number of themes of development within Evangelical thought such as social involvement, liturgy, hymnology, the ministry of women, the charismatic movement. It marks no comparable development in the theology or practice of Preaching. On the contrary, in his epilogue Hylson-Smith comments:

*'as we have seen in scanning the past two and half centuries, no Christian tradition glories more than Evangelicalism in the supremacy of the Bible and the truth it contains. Nevertheless much contemporary Evangelicalism is "light weight, even flimsy compared with its antecedents". There is a wide-spread lack of seriousness, and a paucity of concern for searching the Scriptures and applying Biblical teaching to individual, church and community life.'*³

Another commentator on modern Evangelicalism is Michael Sayward in his book *Evangelicals on the move*⁴. His comment on the modern generation of Evangelicals is 'excellent when it comes to providing religious music, drama and art. Not so good when asked to Preach and teach the faith or to express it in writing. As a publisher said to me 'where is the next Michael Green?'⁵ Sayward quotes the Declarations of Intent from the Nottingham

¹ I am aware that I will need to convince some readers that all is not well with Preaching among Evangelicals in Anglican circles, so I have chosen evidence which cannot be easily dismissed as coming from an alarmist lunatic fringe.

² Kenneth Hylson-Smith, *Evangelicals in the Church of England 1734-1984*, T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1988

³ Hylson-Smith, *op. cit.*, p.35 I-2

⁴ Michael Sayward, *Evangelicals on the move*, Mowbray, Oxford, 1987

⁵ Sayward, *op. cit.*, p.92

Conference of 1977. It is interesting to note that the Intentions do not include a commitment to Preaching and teaching the Bible.

Further evidence is the disquieting silence on the subject of Preaching in the recently published *Evangelical Anglicans: their role and influence in the Church today*.⁶ The subject of the book is Evangelical contributions to Anglicanism, and it is intended to be a reflection and illustration of the kind of thinking that goes on within Evangelical Anglicanism today. With chapters on subjects like Evangelicalism and the sacraments, on social ethics and economic issues, and on the gender issue, one might have expected a chapter on Evangelicals and Preaching, a summary of the development of Preaching within Evangelicalism over the past fifty years and the good effect that this has had on the Church of England. No such chapter has been written, and the issue is too important to neglect. In fact the most extensive reference to Preaching is found in David Atkinson's chapter on pastoral ministry where 'the proclamation and teaching model' is one of five contemporary models of Evangelical pastoral care (the others are nurture, service, therapy and mission) and this model is described in one paragraph.⁷ If David Atkinson reflects the state of Evangelical preaching accurately then Evangelical Preaching is in a bad way.

It is no surprise then that John Stott who provided such an impressive model of Bible teaching and Preaching after the Second World War has written in his book *The Contemporary Christian*⁸:

*'where are the Timothys of the next generation? Where are the young Evangelical men and women, who are determined by God's grace to stand firm in Scripture, refusing to be swept off their feet by the prevailing winds of fashion, who are resolved to continue in it and live by it, relating the Word to the world in order to obey it, and who are committed to passing it on, as they give themselves to the ministry of conscientious exposition?'*⁹

Rather than Evangelicals succeeding in influencing the Church of England with a robust and forthright theology and practice of Preaching, the reverse seems to have happened, that is, Evangelicals seem to have been influenced by the prevailing mood of the Anglican Church and their society and submitted to the general decline in Preaching.

So Donald Coggan (who has been writing on Preaching for over fifty years) in a recent book *On Preaching*¹⁰ writes of the dangers of contemporary Anglican practice.

*'We shall rear a generation of Christians accustomed to the Eucharist but foreigners to many of the great truths of the Christian faith. They have never had the opportunity of listening, Sunday by Sunday, to a steady, intelligent, interesting exposition of the things most surely believed among us. They have been fed with snippets, little bits and bits, nice thoughts for the day, but nothing, or practically nothing, from which bones and spiritual tissue can be built.'*¹¹

He quotes John Donne 'if there be discounting or slackening of Preaching, there is the danger of losing Christ'.¹²

⁶ *Evangelical Anglicans: their role and influence in the Church today*, edited by R.T. France & A.E. McGrath, S.P.C.K., London, 1993

⁷ France & McGrath, *op. cit.*, p.154

⁸ John Stott, *The Contemporary Christian*, I.V.P., Leicester, 1992

⁹ Stott, *op. cit.*, p.172

¹⁰ Donald Coggan, *On Preaching*, S.P.C.K., London, 1978

¹¹ Coggan, *op. cit.*, p.9

¹² Coggan, *op. cit.*, p.13

Another writer with a long-term view is T.H.L. Parker. In 1947 he wrote a book called *The Oracles of God: An introduction to the Preaching of John Calvin*, and in 1992 produced the book *Calvin's Preaching*. The earlier book, *The Oracles of God*, included in its final chapter an appeal to the Church of England to be recalled to its fundamental commitment to Preaching. This appeal is omitted in the later book, but not as Parker makes clear, because the appeal is not still appropriate. He writes:

*'a word or two of explanation may not come amiss on why the final chapter of The Oracles of God is now omitted. It is most assuredly not because I consider that the churches in this country no longer need to be recalled to fundamentals. On the contrary, it appears to me that the Church of England (for I have no right to speak of others) is, in almost every respect that is worthwhile, in a far worse state now than it was in the 1940's. Doctrinally, morally, and in the understanding of its task as the Church of England, the failure has been disastrous. What wonder that a Church which picks and chooses what it wants out of the Bible should become confused in its theology, flabby in its morals, and with little to state but the worldly obvious — the day after worldly liberals have stated it more convincingly?'*¹³

This general move away from the Bible and from Preaching perhaps reflects our contemporary commitment to an Enlightenment stance, which gives a distrust of external authorities, and the search for individuals to come to their own understanding of the truth. This preoccupation is represented in that close triangle of theologies which tend to concentrate on personal and internal revelation within the individual rather than objective revelation in the history or in the Bible: this triangle includes traditions which may on the surface appear to be poles apart but in practice are close together: the Charismatic emphasis on the immediate inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Liberal emphasis on the authority of the individual's reason (nowadays tinged with emotion), and the Quaker emphasis on the immediacy of God speaking to the soul.

It is customary now to blame theological education for the decline in Preaching. A cluster of influences may have had a bad effect, including the move away from 'confessional theology' to 'university theology', treating the Old Testament as if it were not part of the Christian Bible, uncertainty in the area of Revelation; and perhaps the pastoral theology departments of our colleges have placed more emphasis on various pastoral ministries and neglected Preaching as a primary focus of pastoral ministry. Or is it that our theology has changed, that the loss of the pastoral epistles (1 & 2 Timothy and Titus) from our usable Canon has meant a change in our theology of ministry? But perhaps it is just that we are reflecting more general changes in the churches and in the world.

In the context of our changing world Neil Postman in his book *Amusing Ourselves to Death*¹⁴ comments on the radical changes in our society in terms of communication. He looks at the television age and the ability to turn everything into entertainment and amusement. It is fascinating to notice that he describes the age that is past as the age of Exposition. 'Exposition is a mode of thought, a method of learning, and a means of expression.'¹⁵ He further characterizes Exposition as 'the sophisticated ability to think conceptually, deductively, and sequentially; a high valuation of reason and order; an abhorrence of contradiction; a large capacity for detachment and objectivity; and a tolerance for delayed

¹³ T.H.L. Parker, *Calvin's Preaching*. T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, p.x

¹⁴ Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Methuen, London, 1985

¹⁵ Postman, *op. cit.*, p.64

response.”¹⁶ He further describes Jonathan Edwards sermons as ‘tightly knit and closely reasoned expositions of theological doctrine.’¹⁷ Postman also notes that the age of Exposition has now been replaced by the Age of Show Business.’¹⁸

Of course Postman is not concerned with the Preaching and teaching of the Bible yet it is interesting to notice that he uses the word ‘exposition’ which is commonly used in our Christian circles to refer to the ‘exposition’ of the text of the Bible. If in Postman’s word the age of Exposition has been replaced by the Age of Show Business then in ecclesiastical circles perhaps the age of the Exposition of Holy Scripture has been replaced by less systematic and intentional use of Scripture as a basis for public teaching and Preaching.

When James Smart wrote of the ‘Strange Silence of the Bible in the Church’¹⁹ he opened a debate which has not yet been answered or resolved in the wider churches, and is I think also an issue for Evangelicals. So it seems that Evangelicals have lost their way in the area of Preaching, and that this confusion reflects the Church of England, the wider churches and the world in which we live. If it is an irony that an age which has seen so much biblical scholarship should not have produced Preachers and teachers of the Bible, it is also an irony that the age which has seen such an explosion in the translation and production of the Bible should also have produced a generation who are unused to its teaching.

Can we reclaim Preaching?

1. An appeal for the ministry of the Word in Pastoral Ministry.

The life of the people of God in every age is characterized by the presence of the words of God. Adam is addressed by the Lord God, Abraham received the promise, and Moses is called by God and brings the words of God to the people of Israel. The prophets speak the words of God, Jesus speaks as the Father directs him, and the apostles make known the word of truth, the gospel. If the life of the people of God is characterized by the presence of the words of God, so too it is characterized, at least from the time of Moses, by the Ministry of the Word, as prophets, prophetesses, wise men and women, disciples, apostles and their fellow workers exercise a many-faceted Ministry of the Word among the people of God.

So we see, for example, in Paul’s letter to the Colossians many aspects of the Ministry of the Word. The Colossians have heard and understood ‘God’s grace and all its truth’ (1:16) and they learnt it first from Epaphras whom Paul describes as ‘our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf (1:7). If the church of God at Colossae has been founded by the ministry of Epaphras then Paul in his letter is continuing that ministry and what we now call the Epistle to the Colossians is an example of Paul’s written Ministry of the Word. And as the Colossians are to pass on their letter to the church of the Laodiceans, so too they are to read the letter from Laodicea (4:16). So reading is also the Ministry of the Word. The Colossians are also to be those who engage in Ministry of the Word. ‘Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God’ (3:16). And their ministry to outsiders is also a Ministry of the Word. ‘Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone’ (4:6).

¹⁶ Postman, *op. cit.*, p.64

¹⁷ Postman, *op. cit.*, p.55

¹⁸ Postman, *op. cit.*, p.64

¹⁹ James D. Smart, *Strange Silence of the Bible in the Church*, London, S.C.M., 1970

This same diverse Ministry of the Word is found in the life of our congregations today where in private conversation, in counseling, in one-to-one evangelism, in the public reading of the Bible, in teaching and Preaching the Scriptures, in public evangelism, in small group training, and in home Bible studies we are exercising many different forms of the Ministry of the Word.

We do so confident of the power and usefulness of the Word of God. Paul characterises the Holy Scriptures as 'able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus' (2 Timothy 3:15). And he further describes the effectiveness of Scripture as 'useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.' If Scripture is thus useful for changing character, its use also results in God's people being 'thoroughly equipped for every good work' (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). Or in Ephesians we discover that without speaking the truth in love the congregation may be described as 'infants tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming' (Ephesians 4:14). Rather when the people of God engage in the ministry of speaking the truth in love Paul says they 'will in all things grow up into him who is the head, that is Christ' (Colossians 4:15).

While my main subject is a particular form of the Ministry of the Word which we call Preaching, my aim is not to promote Preaching while ignoring other important Ministries of the Word. Indeed in my opinion, if we try and make Preaching do all the work of the many different Ministries of the Word, we will certainly fail. By neglecting other important ministries we put too much pressure on public Preaching and teaching. Thus the broad base of my appeal is for the Ministry of the Word in pastoral ministry. That is, that in many different ways we allow God to teach us through his Word, conveyed to us through the men and women of faith.

While I want to encourage every form of the Ministry of the Word, I want to focus on Preaching in particular for the following reasons:

1. Preaching is addressed to the body of believers, the church, and so it can help corporate maturity, and not just individual edification.
2. Preaching to the assembled church reflects the nature of the Bible, which is in the most part addressed to the community, not to individuals. The best way to hear the Bible is in the congregation.
3. The public Preacher and teacher provides a powerful public model of interpreting, using and obeying Scripture.
4. It is essential that the Bible speaks clearly to the corporate culture of the congregation, and forms its vision and ministry.

2. An appeal for the Ministry of the Word in pastoral ministry, especially in Biblical Preaching

Donald Coggan makes the point that a 'healthy doctrine of Preaching springs from a healthy theology Begin with an inadequate or feeble doctrine of God' and the pulpit utterance will be feeble.' Coggan characterises a healthy theology of Preaching as deriving from the belief that God is a God who speaks: 'ours is not a silent God, a God who sits, sphinx-like, looking out unblinking on a world in agony.'²⁰ God is also a God who sends and as Coggan points out 'there is an unbroken chain from the creative word in Genesis 1 to those who

²⁰ Donald Coggan, *Sacrament of the Word*, London, Collins, 1987, p.31

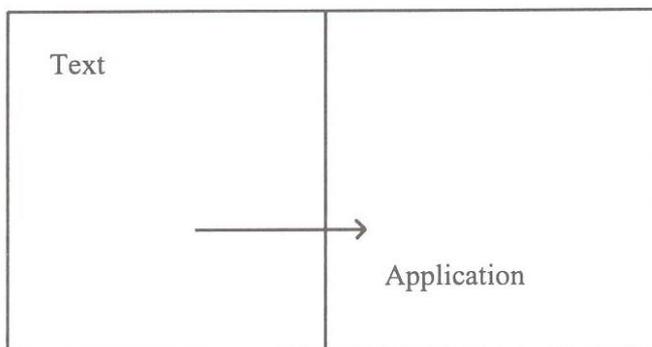
Preach Sunday by Sunday.²¹ Finally this God who speaks and the God who sends is the God who feeds his people and this includes God's ministry from the pulpit 'where minds are stimulated, wills are touched, souls are nourished through the Ministry of the Word.'²²

What then is Biblical Preaching? Biblical Preaching must be concerned with conveying the truth and its impact on the life of the congregation. For Preaching to be truly Biblical it must derive its message from some part or the whole of the Bible.

There are three ways in which Preachers today engage in Preaching which is not biblical.

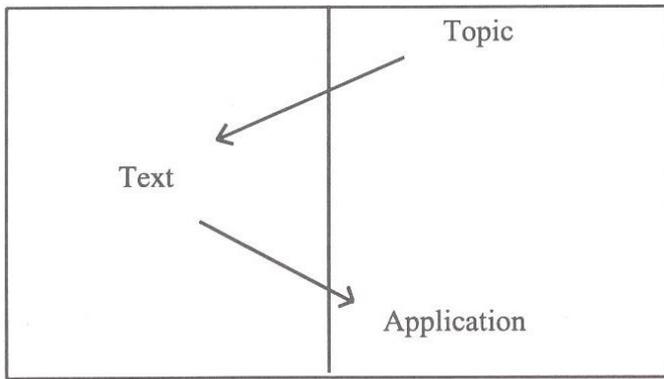
1. Treating a text as a pretext. We can all think of countless examples where the Preacher has already decided what he or she is going to say and the text is merely a pretext to get going. There may be some verbal connection or even theological connection between the text and the sermon, but in fact the substance of the sermon does not derive in any significant way from the text.
2. Preaching a theological framework rather than the text. Again we know Preachers who have five or six sermons which convey their theological framework, and a function of the text of Scripture is to spark off a memory of the theological framework which the Preacher wants to convey yet again.
3. Preaching between texts. This usually takes place when the Preacher reconstructs a Bible story or argument with a vivid use of imagination and the sermon derives its power and impetus from the gaps between the text which have been supplied by the Preacher's imagination. This is common in Preaching biblical stories by imagining the responses of various participants, in more traditional sermons this is marked by the classical phrase of Liberal Anglicanism — 'I like to think...'

Is it possible to engage in topical biblical Preaching? The best way to answer this questions is in terms of the following diagrams. In the usual form of an expository sermon we move from the text to the application.

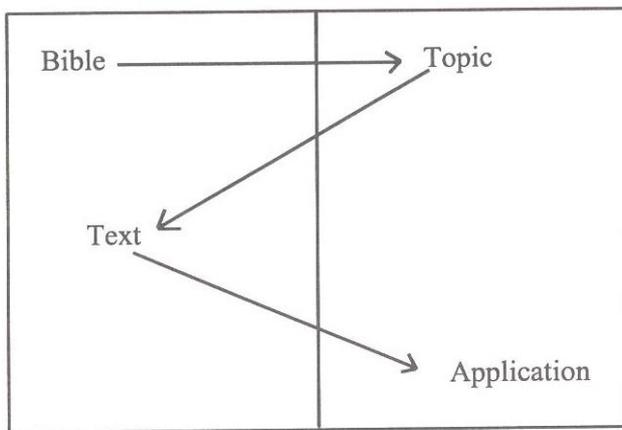


It is of course equally valid to begin with a topic and then to move from the text of Scripture to find a biblical view of the subject and then move to the application.

²¹ Coggan, *op. cit.*, p.32. ²² Coggan, *op. cit.*, p.32



In fact with a topical sermon the sermon as heard looks as if it begins with the topic; but in terms of the Preacher's preparation his or her thinking about the topic; but in terms of the Preacher's preparation his or her thinking about the topic will be informed by the Bible. So the preparation and the sermon can be characterised by the following diagram.



So Biblical Preaching can be *straightforwardly expository* where we begin with a text of Scripture and then explain it and apply it to the life of the congregation and to individuals to whom we're Preaching, or it may be topical in that we can begin the sermon with a topic. As I have shown we will still be doing biblical Preaching, in that our aim must be to apply what God has said in the Bible about the topic to the life of the congregation.

In my experience topical Preaching is very difficult and requires a lot more work than straightforward expository Preaching. The work involved is in thinking clearly about the topic in terms of our modern culture and then even more work in deciding what the Bible as a whole says about the topic. But good topical preaching is always exegetical, if not expository.

My appeal for Biblical Preaching is, of course, an appeal for a particular model of ministry. The model of the minister as student and teacher of the Word of God has now largely been replaced by the manager, the facilitator or the president, the social worker, the counselor or the presenter of liturgy. I want to recall us to a model of ministry which has, I think, all but disappeared. John Stott describes Simeon's ministry in these terms:

'His over-riding concern was so to expound Scripture that his congregation would receive it undiluted and uncontaminated by worldly wisdom. To him "Biblical exposition" meant opening up some part of Scripture so that the people could feed upon it. "My endeavour," he wrote to his publisher, "is to bring out of Scripture what is there, and not to thrust in what I think might be there. I have a great jealousy on this head: never to speak more or less than I believe to be the mind of the Spirit in the passage I am expounding." Those words seem to me to be the

*clearest statement ever made of the expositor's goal. Would that more Preachers could wholeheartedly echo and endorse it today!*²³

My appeal is for such a Ministry of the Word especially in Biblical Preaching. We can further extend the appeal as follows.

3. An appeal for the Ministry of the Word in Pastoral Ministry, especially in expository Biblical Preaching

Haddon Robinson says 'expository Preaching is the communication of a Biblical concept derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the Preacher, then through him to his hearers.'²⁴

Or John Stott has recently described Preaching as 'to Preach is to open up the inspired text with such faithfulness and sensitivity that God's voice is heard and God's people obey him.'²⁵

As we have seen, Preaching which in its presentation begins with a text of Scripture can be described as Biblical Preaching. So can Preaching which begins with a contemporary topic, as long as the Preacher's statement of the topic, treatment of the topic, and application of the Bible's teaching on the topic is faithful not only to the parts of Scripture but also to the whole. So my broad commitment is to Biblical Preaching. What then are the arguments for *expository* Biblical Preaching? That is, Preaching which in shape and substance *and in appearance* begins with a text of the Bible?

The motto of those who engage in expository Biblical Preaching must be 'let the Bible speak, let God speak'!

The best argument for expository Biblical Preaching, that is Preaching our way through a chapter of a book of the Bible or a whole book of the Bible, is that it allows us to take seriously the context of the passage on which we're Preaching. While it is perfectly possible to choose a passage from anywhere in the Bible and Preach on it, if we are to do the passage or text justice we must explain its context. The advantage of expository Preaching is that there is some continuity of context, and people in our congregation can learn the salutary discipline of treating every text in its context.

Here context, of course, means historical context, theological context (the movement of salvation history), literary context, cultural context and intellectual context. One of the great features of the Bible is that we can see how much God respected the human authors in that he caused them to speak and write in a way which perfectly reflected their human, cultural and theological context, though they were not restricted by it. I believe that in our use of the Bible, especially in our public teaching of it, we ought to imitate God's respect for the human authors and not arbitrarily remove them from their context.

Another argument for expository Preaching is that it allows God to set the agenda for us. For the danger with topical Preaching is that we assume that our current issues are the real agenda.

²³ *Evangelical Preaching: An anthology of sermons by Charles Simeon*, an introduction by John R.W. Stott, Multnomah Press, Portland, Oregon, 1986, p.xxxiii

²⁴ Haddon W. Robinson, *Expository Preaching*, I.V.P., Leicester, 1986, p.20

²⁵ John Stott, *The Contemporary Christian*, I.V.P., Leicester, 1992, p.208

It must be very confusing for newcomers to church services, who haven't been culturally conditioned to our way of doing things, to meet two, three or four readings from the Scripture which appear to be plucked at random from various pages of the Bible. It must be as disturbing as it would be for the average church-goer to attend the theatre for an evening of Shakespeare and hear a couple of lines from Hamlet, a scene from Richard III and a few helpful thoughts from Julius Caesar. The idea that we can take two, three or four readings from different parts of the Bible and stick them together is a form of liturgical fundamentalism in which we pay appropriate respect to the unity of Scripture deriving from the one mind of God, but fail to take note of the diversity of Scripture and God's respect for the different human authors and different contexts. One of the ironies of our lectionaries is that the more sophisticated and carefully thought-out the lectionary, the more dislocating they are to the average parishioner. If we are to have two or three readings in our services, I think the best lectionary form is one where there is not attempt to make any connection between them, but rather to work our way through different books of the Bible. My suspicion is that today it is probably more helpful to choose one book of the Bible and to try and take it seriously in the context of public Preaching and teaching.

Expository Biblical Preaching was found amongst the best Preachers of the early church — we can still read expository sermons of Augustine and Chrysostom. It is instructive to notice the reasons why expository Preaching died out after the time of Augustine and Chrysostom. Thomas K. Carroll characterises the changes in Preaching in the early church and, in particular, the move away from the expository Preaching of the Bible as occurring for the following reasons.

1. Theological controversy meant that the sermon often became contentious doctrinal, point-scoring Preaching rather than the straightforward exposition of Scripture;
2. The presence of the catechumenate, those being instructed in the faith, meant that Preaching often became more simple;
3. The liturgical development in the early church meant that pressure built up to have thematic Preaching in liturgical seasons and also the greater liturgical complexity meant that there was less time for Preaching;
4. The lowering standards of education among the clergy meant that many of them were unable to prepare biblical sermons.²⁶

Are we suffering the same pressures today?

One of the great rediscoveries of the Reformation was of the importance of expository biblical Preaching, and Luther and Calvin both provided fine models for the Preachers of their own and subsequent generations.

In my opinion expository biblical Preaching ought to be the main pattern for church life. My own plan is to Preach on one Old Testament book, one Gospel and one Epistle each year. My longest series was on Hebrews which took me nine months, though I hasten to add that I Preached my way through Hebrews in three 3-month segments with a break before the second and third segment. It is also my rule to Preach on one difficult book of the Bible each year, because if we Preachers don't tackle difficult books in our Preaching, then it is very unlikely that our congregation will tackle them in their own Bible reading or home Bible studies.

One reason why I think that it is important for us to engage in the public expository Preaching ministry is because we want to model a good use of the Bible for our people, for

²⁶ Thomas K. Carroll, *Preaching the Word*, Michael Glazier, Wilmington, 1984, pp.63, 197, 206, 220
page 9 of 14

one of our tasks as Preachers is to model good hermeneutics. If we want to encourage our people to read verses and chapters of the Bible in context then the best way to do that is to model it in our own Preaching.

However, I also try to make sure that I Preach one topical series each year ('Christians at Work', 'Current day issues') because, although we encourage our lay people to be able to read their Bibles intelligently and consecutively, it is also true that they need training in moving from an issue which they meet in daily life to the Bible and finding out the Bible's teaching on the subject. So the argument for Preaching a topical series is not only to demonstrate that the Preacher does live in the twentieth century, but also to model how lay people can move from a topic of everyday life to the Bible and find an answer to their dilemmas.

4. An appeal for the Ministry of the Word in Pastoral Ministry, especially in applied expository Preaching

Many people today react against expository Biblical Preaching because the model of expository Preaching which they have heard is little more than a theological lecture on a chapter in the Bible, a model of Preaching which never moves beyond the world of the Bible writers, a style in which there is so much attention to the text that there is no time to attend to the contemporary world. This is not the model of expository Biblical Preaching for which I am appealing.

I notice, for example, that when Paul has explained in 2 Timothy 3 the power and usefulness of Scripture in making us wise for salvation and for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, the application that he makes of this doctrine is 'Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage — with great patience and careful instruction' (2 Timothy 4:2). That is, the use which Timothy is to make of Scripture is to apply it to the people in his care. He is to use it to correct, to rebuke and to encourage; and this will require both great patience and careful instruction.

There are, I think, three reasons why expository preachers don't engage in the task of applying the message of the Bible to their congregations.

The first is that people who are committed to Preaching and teaching the Word of God find that they spend so much time in understanding the text that they run out of time in working on the application for their hearers. Whenever I lend a sermon with the immortal line 'and may God show us how to put this into practice in our lives', I know that I am admitting publicly that I haven't had the time to work out the implications of the text for the life of the congregation. The model which I recommend to others (though don't employ myself) is to spend half my preparation time on the meaning of the text, understanding it clearly, and the other half in working out how it applies to the congregation. A good discipline if not always a successful discipline!

The second reason why people don't apply the text is that they have the belief that the Bible is self-explanatory and contains its own application. Thus the argument runs that we have no need to attempt to apply the Bible to the congregation, since it is to attempt to do what has already been done by the Holy Spirit.

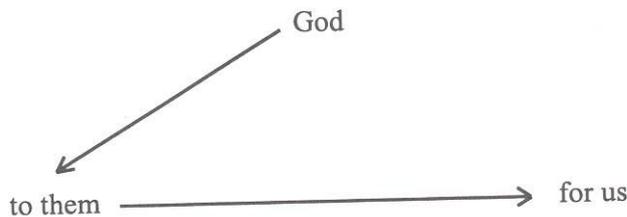
In thinking about this I have found Calvin's teaching on the significance of Christian ministry very helpful at this point. In his sermon on 2 Timothy 4:1, 2, Calvin writes:

'but yet God did not content himself to put forth the Holy Scripture that every man might study it, but he devised of his infinite goodness a second means to instruct us: and it is he would have the doctrine that is therein contained Preached and expounded to us: and for this end and purpose he hath appointed shepherds in his

*church which have the office in charge of teaching. This aid God thought good to add because of our rudeness (stupidity). It was already very much that he had given us his word and caused it to be written that everyone of us might read it and learn it. God showed himself herein very liberal toward us. But when we see he deals with us after our weakness and chews the morsels for us that we might digest them the better: to be short in that he feeds us as little children; we see thereby that we shall never be able to excuse ourselves unless we profit in his school. We might allege that the Holy Scripture is too hard for us if there were not some to expound it to us: but when God has given us both the means to which we might both read and hear, that every man may search and enquire of the truth as it is contained in the law and in the gospel: and moreover seeing we have messengers beside this which come and show us things at more large, and seeing God shows himself more familiar to us, ought not this break our hearts?'*²⁷

So Calvin sees that the task of the Preacher or teacher of the Bible is to explain it and apply it and encourage the hearers to receive it and obey it. Through the Preacher God accommodates himself to our weakness and humanity.

The third reason why people are reluctant to apply the Bible today is a growing assumption that the Bible is an ancient text and that to apply it to the twentieth Century is to engage in an impossible exercise. It is probably helpful to remember the phrase which so perfectly summarises the way in which God addresses us in the Bible. The Bible is, as has been said, addressed to them, for us.



This double nature of the Bible is very important to keep in mind. Many people make the mistake of assuming the Bible is addressed directly to us and forget the need to understand it in its theological and historical context, that is it was written first of all to *them*.

On the other hand many today fall into the opposite trap and regard it as primarily to *them* and not written down for *us*. Paul describes the to *them*, for us link in these words, 'these things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come' (1 Corinthians 10:11). And as we have seen, he expects Timothy's ministry to consist in large part in rebuking and exhorting his hearers on the basis of the Word he has received.

The mood in many Anglican circles today is to accentuate 'the pastness of the past' and to see the Scriptures as documents of that past and to imply that the task of applying them to a modern congregation is not only inappropriate but also impossible. However it is important to identify the nature of the gap between the people of Bible times and ourselves. There is, of course, a gap in background information. We find it hard to understand what was happening at Corinth because we're listening to one part of a two-way conversation. But a Christian at Rome would have had the same trouble. It is not an insurmountable barrier. We are also aware of the cultural and theological gap that exists between the assumptions of our own civilization and culture, and the reality of that gap needs no underlining. However a

²⁷ My modernised version of John Calvin's, *Sermons on Timothy & Titus*, facsimile 1579 edition, Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1983, p.945

similar, if not greater, gap existed between the Gentile polytheist and the world of the Old Testament monotheist Scriptures.

While I do not want to underplay the difficulties in applying the Scripture my assumptions are the following:

1. Our main difficulty in applying Scripture is understanding how a particular text relates to the rest of the Bible, and this issue doesn't derive from a particular historical gap but from our need of a biblical theology, an overview of the whole counsel of God, as the context for our understanding Scripture.²⁸
2. The Bible's assumption is that we are in the same theological age as the Christians of the New Testament, we are those upon whom 'the fulfillment of the ages has come', we are in the 'last days'. Whereas people in the Old Testament were addressed in many and various ways by the prophets, in these 'last days' God has spoken to us by his Son. If the event of the Incarnation has been the decisive event of salvation history for the past 2,000 years, then that speaking of God about his Son also remains decisive.
3. We are part of the historic people of God, called in Abraham, inheritors of the promises, a covenant people. There is a theological, historical and organic unity experienced by the people of God in every age, Jew and Gentile alike, and part of our shared inheritance is the Bible through which God addresses us alt.²⁹

My assumption then is that the Scripture was spoken by God *to them, for us*. My assumption must be that it does apply to the congregation, and that my task as a Preacher is to tease out that application and bring it with fervour and enthusiasm to the attention of the congregation so that they will respond with faith, repentance and obedience.

J.L. Packer in his excellent chapter *Puritan Preaching*³⁰ has indicated what a rich heritage evangelicals have in the Puritan tradition in its attention not only to the meaning of the text but also to its application, and he outlines many useful lessons on the way in which we might work on our application to our hearers. Packer comments:

*'the Preacher's supreme concern was to bring men to know God. Their Preaching was avowedly "practical" and concerned with experience of God. Sin, the cross, Christ's heavenly ministry, the Holy Spirit, faith and hypocrisy, assurance and the lack of it, prayer, meditation, temptation, mortification, growth in grace, death, heaven, were their constant themes ... Puritan Preaching was piercing in its applications. Over and above applicatory generalizations, the Preachers trained their homiletical searchlights on specific states of spiritual needs and spoke to these in a precise and detailed way.'*³¹

In my plea for expository Preaching I am not appealing for Preaching which is removed from the life of the congregation and from their daily concerns, rather I am appealing for Preaching which under the sovereign hand of God brings the word of God to ordinary people in their ordinary lives.

²⁸ see, for example, Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*, I.V.P./Lancer, Leicester, 1991

²⁹ a useful practical guide to using the Bible is Andrew Reid, *Postcards from Palestine*, St. Matthias Press, Kingsford, N.S.W., 1989

³⁰ J.I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan vision of the Christian life*, Crossway Books, Wheaton, Illinois, 1990, ch.17

³¹ J.I. Packer, *op.cit.*, p.286-7

5. An appeal for the Ministry of the Word in Pastoral Ministry especially in passionately applied expository Biblical Preaching

One of the common assumptions of our age is that intellect and emotion lie far apart within human personality and within human discourse.

I don't know how this assumed opposition has arisen but it has been powerfully effective within the Christian faith, particularly in our own century. The assumption is that intellectual argument must always be cold, rational and unemotional, and that to be emotional is to have left behind intellectual argument. A moment's reflection will help us to realise the falsehood of this assumption, for God is passionately concerned with the truth and is a passionate communicator of the truth as we can see on page after page of the Bible.

Expository Preaching has developed a tradition of being intellectual and therefore not emotional, and it is this tradition which I want to attack. I am trying to commend a kind of Preaching which is intellectual, that is concerned with ideas and the explanation of ideas and response to those ideas, but also Preaching which is passionate and emotional in its presentation.

The idea that we must separate intellect and emotion is a new one. I was very struck by reading again Hugh Evan Hopkin's biography of Charles Simeon to learn what a passionate Preacher Simeon was. Charles Simeon was Vicar of Holy Trinity Cambridge from 1782-1836 and most influential in the model of Preaching which he exemplified in his Sunday ministry and also which he taught through his voluminous writings. Simeon was an expository Preacher and his 26 volumes of expository outlines on the whole Bible indicate his commitment to the whole of Scripture. But he was also a passionate Preacher. The little girl's question, 'Oh Mamma, what is the gentleman in a passion about?' was a question about Charles Simeon in his Preaching.³² We also read of an extraordinary beginning to one of Simeon's sermons. 'Once his text was "will a man rob God" (Malachi 3:8). With much deliberation he repeated it. Then looking around on the congregation he said, in tones that only Simeon could muster, "You have all robbed him" and pointing with his finger in various directions said "You! and you! and you!"³³ If the Preacher's task is to communicate not only the theological content but also the style of the Bible, then the Preacher must be passionate.

In terms of the opposition which we assume between intellect and emotion we often solve the problem by attempting to meet in the middle, by being half intellectual and half emotional. I believe that the way forward is to be both intellectual and emotional in our Preaching. That is, to preach with a firm conviction about the truth and explanation of the truth and also to be passionate in our presentation of it.

As Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote over 20 years ago:

*'What is Preaching? Logic on fire. Eloquent reason ... a theology which does not take fire I maintain is a defective theology ... Preaching is theology coming through a man who is on fire. A true understanding and experience of the truth must lead to this. I say again that a man who can speak about these things dispassionately has no right whatever to be in a pulpit: and should never be allowed to enter one.'*³⁴

Discussions about Preaching often fall into the trap of when a cerebral and intellectual Preacher whose sermons are full of biblical content is told by a more emotional member of

³² Hugh Ryan Hopkins, *Charles Simeon of Cambridge*, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1977, p.65

³³ Hopkins, op.cit., p.63

³⁴ ID. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, Hodder & Stoughton, 1985, p.97

the congregation that his Preaching should be more emotional. He immediately interprets this as the statement that it should be more emotional and therefore have less cognitive content. He does not want to lose the content of his Preaching, so refuses to listen to the request. Or the emotional Preacher, who is challenged to have more Bible in his sermons, takes this as a request that he be less emotional and so will not accede to the request. I believe that Preaching can be both passionately applied, expository and biblical.

As the truth that we Preach comes from God, so the emotion and passion that we convey in our Preaching also comes from God.

*'It is within the church, as the pastor fulfils his holy ministry in word and sacrament, that God draws near to us as he did to them. "God himself appears ... and required his presence to be recognised in our midst." Even though such a treasure is given to us in "earthen vessels" nevertheless in the hearing of the Preached word within the church we hear the same voice as they heard. We "listen not only to his minister speaking but to himself." So real and personal is his presence in such an encounter today that to deny or resist it would be like blotting out the face of God which indeed shines through such teaching.'*³⁵

God is present in his truth and power and we poor Preachers must do our best not to stand in the way of the God who is present and addresses his people through our mouths.

In this chapter I have drawn attention to current difficulties in the area of Preaching and made an appeal for the Ministry of the Word in parish ministry, especially in passionately applied expository Biblical Preaching.

Let me repeat John Stott's appeal:

*'Where are the Timothy's of the next generation? Where are the young evangelical men and women, who are determined by God's grace to stand firm in the Scripture, refusing to be swept off their feet by the prevailing winds of fashion, who are resolved to continue in it and live by it, relating the words to the world in order to obey it, and who are committed to passing it on, as they give themselves to the ministry of conscientious exposition.'*³⁶

Or, how are we teaching, training, encouraging, and nurturing faithful preachers and teachers who will be able to teach others also? (2 Timothy 2:2)³⁷

³⁵ Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin's approach to theology*, in Nigel M.deS. Cameron, editor, *The Challenge of Evangelical Theology*, Rutherford House Books, Edinburgh, 1987, p.125

³⁶ John Stott, *The Contemporary Christian*, op. cit., p.172

³⁷ I am grateful to Janis Lampard and John Altmann for help in writing this chapter.