D.T. Niles’ Theory of Preaching- a Reformation Assessment

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to ascertain to what extent D.T. Niles’ theory of preaching is Reformed and Biblical and can help in the dialogue between Western and Non-Western Christianity. The study achieves this aim by employing the qualitative case-study research to meet four objectives. First, it describes Niles’ theory of preaching as found in his trilogy of lectures on preaching, explicating especially the double calling of the preacher, the double content and the pneumatological character and nature of preaching, the three-fold purpose and double consequences of preaching. Second, it interprets Niles’ theory of preaching in the light of his own cultural background and in dialogue with the works of key Reformation figures including Erasmus, Zwingli, Luther, Calvin and Bullinger’s Second Helvetic Confession. Based on this examination, the study determines that Niles’ homiletical theory is in concert with the theology of preaching of the Magisterial Reformers as summarised in Bullinger’s classic statement: ‘The preaching of the word of God is the word of God’. Third, this study evaluates critically Niles’ theory of preaching within the normative context of the preaching of Jesus in the Synagogue in Nazareth and the wider New Testament teaching on preaching and finds that Niles’ homiletical theory is in agreement with Scriptural norm. Fourth, having found Niles’ theory of preaching to be broadly in concert with the understanding of the Reformers and the Biblical teaching on the nature of preaching, this study undertakes the pragmatic task of developing a global theology of preaching that would promote dialogue between Western and Non-Western Christianity. This study was undertaken because of the dearth of theologies of preaching written from a Non-Western perspective and the lack of dialogue between Western and Non-Western homiletical theories. The result of the investigation is the conclusion that the preaching of the word of God is the word of God since preaching is a pneumatological event where God is present in the act of human preaching so long as the preacher himself is lawfully called and the content of his preaching is Christological and soteriological.

Key Words

Theology of Preaching, Biblical Preaching, Second Helvetic Confession, Homiletic Theory, Reformation Preaching, Asian Preaching, Daniel T Niles, Indian Preaching, Asian Preaching
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I dedicate this thesis to the memory of my late father, the Revd Dr Subramaniam Karoon, the first and the finest preacher I ever heard. Soli Deo Gloria.
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1.0 Introduction

1.1 TITLE & KEY WORDS

1.1.1 Title

‘D.T. Niles’ Theory of Preaching – A Reformation Assessment’

1.1.2 Key Words

Theology of Preaching, Biblical Preaching, Second Helvetic Confession, Homiletic Theory, Reformation Preaching, Asian Preaching, Indian Preaching

1.2 BACKGROUND & PROBLEM STATEMENT

1.2.1 Background

I. Asia is a diverse continent and thus has a variety of homiletical approaches. Given its own cultural background, Japan’s Protestant church “stands in the Reformation tradition of the sermon as the Word of God” (Fukada & Kato, 1995:233). In India, there are various ways of ‘preaching the gospel’; dramas, Bhajans and Kirtans are common in evangelistic missions especially in villages. In Indian Churches, preaching together with the Lord’s Supper remains central to Christian worship (Prakash, 1995:238-241). Even though in India much has been written concerning homiletical practice, little attention has been given to the study of homiletical theory (Satyaranjan, 2009).

II. The intent of this thesis is to study the theory of preaching of the renowned non-Western theologian, Reverend Dr Daniel Thambyrajah Niles. The aim is to focus especially on his lectures on preaching. Daniel T Niles was born in Ceylon, trained for the ministry in India, served as pastor in Ceylon and worked in various capacities at the World Council of Churches. Today, he is being increasingly recognised as an outstanding Christian thinker (Bailey, 2008:203-208) and as one of the great unrecognised preachers of the twentieth century (Kay, 2007:173-174). Niles delivered, in three continents, three series of lectures on
the work of a preacher. In 1952, he gave the Bevan Memorial Lectures in Australia on *Preaching the Gospel of the Resurrection* (Niles, 1953). In 1957, he was the first Asian to deliver the Lyman Beecher Lectures in Preaching at Yale. His lectures were entitled, *The Preacher’s Task and the Stone of Stumbling* (Niles, 1958). Finally in 1958, Niles gave the Warrack Lectures on Preaching in Scotland on the theme *The Preacher’s calling to be Servant* (Niles, 1959). This trilogy contains what is probably the most thorough recent engagement with homiletic theory from a Non-Western perspective.

III. Although Niles’ writings are increasingly coming under scholarly examination (Furtado, 1978)¹ his theory of preaching has not yet been subject to scrutiny especially from a reformed perspective. Dr Hughes Old gives a good summary of Niles’ preaching but does not probe his homiletical theory (Old, 2010). Satyaranjan concentrates on Dr Niles’ style of preaching (Satyaranjan, 2009). As one of the outstanding and influential Christian thinkers of the twentieth-century, Niles’ theory of preaching is worthy of scholarly study. While Niles himself does not directly refer to the reformers or the Reformation creeds in his lectures, he does aim to start his lectures from a Biblical base. It will thus be helpful to probe Niles’ understanding of the nature of preaching and to compare his position with some of the key figures of the Magisterial Protestant Reformation and to then assess the usefulness of his view. Perhaps this can pave the way for a theology of preaching that will appeal to a global Christianity that is a polycentric faith, comprising both Western and Non-Western churches, whose adherents are now far more numerous in the majority world than in Europe or North America.

IV. The *Second Helvetic Confession* (Latin: *Confessio Helvetica posterior*) was written in 1562 by Heinrich Bullinger as a private exercise and revised in 1564 (Ella, 2007). Bullinger himself was a Swiss Reformer who succeeded Zwingli as Pastor at *Grossmunster* in Zurich (Euler, 2006). Though less controversial than Luther or Calvin, Bullinger is being increasingly

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recognised as one of the most influential theologians of the Protestant Reformation (Gordon & Campi, 2004).

The Second Helvetic Confession quickly gained support in the Reformed Churches in Switzerland who had found the First Helvetic Confession too short and too Lutheran. Soon thereafter, it was adopted by other Reformed Churches in Scotland in 1566, in Hungary in 1567, in France in 1571 and the Reformed Church in Poland in 1578. Today, next to the Heidelberg Catechism, the Second Helvetic Confession is the most generally recognised confession of the Reformed Church (Schaff, 2007:233).

The Confession begins with an opening chapter on ‘The Holy Scripture being the True Word of God’. Within this chapter and in its fourth article, it says thus:

THE PREACHING OF THE WORD OF GOD IS THE WORD OF GOD. Wherefore when this Word of God is now preached in the church by preachers lawfully called, we believe that the very Word of God is proclaimed, and received by the faithful; and that neither any other Word of God is to be invented nor is to be expected from heaven: and that now the Word itself which is preached is to be regarded, not the minister that preaches; for even if he be evil and a sinner, nevertheless the Word of God remains still true and good.

Neither do we think that therefore the outward preaching is to be thought as fruitless because the instruction in true religion depends on the inward illumination of the Spirit, or because it is written "And no longer shall each man teach his neighbour..., for they shall all know me" (Jer. 31:34), And "Neither he who plants nor he that waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth" (I Cor. 3:7). For although "No one can come to Christ unless he be drawn by the Father" (John 6:44), and unless the Holy Spirit inwardly illumines him, yet we know that it is surely the will of God that his Word should be preached outwardly also. God could indeed, by his Holy Spirit, or by the ministry of an angel, without the ministry of St. Peter, have taught Cornelius in the Acts; but, nevertheless, he refers him to Peter, of whom the angel speaking says, "He shall tell you what you ought to do (Schaff, 2007:832).
Reformation scholars have neatly summarised Bullinger’s central thesis on preaching in Latin as: *Praedicato verbi Dei est verbum Dei* (Dowey, 1994:5-18). But Bullinger and the *Second Helvetic Confession* can only be properly understood within their own historical and theological contexts. For this reason, the thesis seeks to examine Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam. As a key forerunner of the Protestant Reformation in Europe (Rummel, 2008), Erasmus’ understanding of preaching will set the stage for the investigation of the views of the Protestant Reformers. Luther (Barth, 2013) and Calvin (Backus & Benedict, 2011) are selected for their prolific writings, their extensive influence and their place as undisputed leaders of the Magisterial Protestant Reformation. Huldrych Zwingli has been chosen as he was predecessor to Bullinger at Grossmunster in Zurich (McEnhill & Newlands, 2004:234-239). ‘Reformed’ here refers to the Magisterial Protestant Reformation in Europe in the sixteenth century to distinguish it from both the Radical Reformation and the Counter-Reformation of the Roman Catholic Church.

V. In seeking to study the preaching-theory of Daniel T Niles within the framework of the statement on preaching in the *Second Helvetic Confession*, we also seek to investigate Jesus’ preaching in the synagogue in Nazareth (Brosend, 2010), especially in the context of Paul Bradshaw’s assertion that we cannot accurately know much about New Testament liturgy, including preaching (Bradshaw, 2010).

VI. All theology is contextual even if theologians and theological movements do not always acknowledge this (Dyrness & Karkkainen, 2008:viii). In an increasingly globalised world, it is imperative to acknowledge this diversity of Christian difference. Amidst the present religious resurgence, complex flows of migrants, capital and technology, and the dramatic growth of Christianity in some areas and its retraction in others, we are in the midst of a massive re-formation of the Christian church at the global level (Jenkins, 2012). As Amos Yong contends, today “theologies are multi-perspectival, multidisciplinary, and multicultural.” This approach means “taking seriously the insights of all voices, especially those previously marginalized from the theological conversation—for instance, women, the poor, the differently abled or disabled, perhaps even the heretics!” (Yong, 2005:239-240).
The use of the term ‘global theology of preaching’ reflects this attempt to bring together voices, testimonies and perspectives from Western and Non-Western Christianity. It is acknowledged that the term ‘global’ is often used to refer to “universal” projects and grand concepts. But this very ambiguity illustrates the complexity and dynamic nature of this exercise: one way to pursue the “global” is by shaping theologies that are authentically “local” in the sense of being reflective of particular locations. The term global here does not envisage a universal theology that can speak to all places at all times; such a thing would probably have to await the Parousia. Rather, the term ‘global’ here means bringing together, listening carefully to and putting into a dialogue voices from different local contexts.

The present attempt to provide a homiletical dialogue between Western and Non-Western Christianity is to contribute to a larger conversation in which alternative views on issues are expected and invited. The goal is to involve a wide selection of voices in the conversation, especially those who for various reasons have not been heard from. In a world (including a ‘Christian’ world) that is marked by tribalism, we need this dialogue. As Miroslav Volf wrote:

In order to keep our allegiance to Jesus Christ pure, we need to nurture commitment to the multicultural community of Christian churches. We need to see ourselves and our own understanding of God’s future with the eyes of Christians from other cultures, listen to voices of Christians from other cultures so as to make sure that the voice of our culture has not drowned out the voice of Jesus Christ, “the one Word of God” (Volf, 1996:53-54).

The use of the term ‘theology’ is to be construed broadly as that which reflects the faith and practice of Christian groups around the world, the worshiping and witnessing body of Christ worldwide. The desire is to see theological reflection and practice as a worldwide dialogue, with theologians from various locations bringing together the riches of their faith communities in an authentic dialogue in order that God may be glorified and the kingdom advanced. This project desires the vision that Jürgen Moltmann wrote about concerning the way Trinitarian theology should be done in contemporary times:
Truth brings assent, it brings about change without exerting compulsion. In dialogue the truth frees men and women for their own conceptions and their own ideas. . . . Christian theology would wither and die if it did not continually stand in a dialogue like this, and if it were not bound up with a fellowship that seeks this dialogue, needs it and continually pursues it (Moltmann, 1981:xiii).

1.2.2 Problem Statement

The main problem is that there are not many studies on the theology of preaching done from a non-Western perspective. This is understandable since the story of the non-Western church is today a fast-moving one (Old, 2010:565). Certainly, there is no scholarly assessment of Daniel T Niles’ theory of preaching. Although influential throughout Asia, the name of Daniel Niles is largely forgotten or under-estimated in the Western Church (Kay, 2007:173-174). Moreover, contemporary homiletical scholarship tends to centre on the techniques of preaching rather than the theology of preaching. Even when the theology of preaching is touched upon, there is little connection that is made with the Protestant Reformers and their views on preaching. In India, there is a scarcity of studies of the historic protestant creeds of the Reformation and little attention seems to have been given to the study of the theology of preaching. Thus there is very little dialogue between Western and Non-Western Christianity on the theology of preaching. Yet Christianity today is a polycentric faith whose adherents are now far more numerous in the majority world than in Europe or North America.

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2 Most recent work has been exclusively Korean or Korean-American, see for example Jung Young Lee, Korean Preaching: An Interpretation, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997). The exception is Eun Chul Kim, “Preaching in the Korean Protestant Church (1884-1945): A Study in the Light of John Calvin’s Understanding of Word and Sacrament”, (Princeton: Princeton Theological Seminary, 2001), unpublished thesis
3 See recently, Derek Tidball, Preacher, keep yourself from idols, Nottingham: IVP, 2011
4 The only recent exception known to me is Eun Chul Kim, “Preaching in the Korean Protestant Church (1884-1945): A Study in the Light of John Calvin’s Understanding of Word and Sacrament”, (Princeton: Princeton Theological Seminary, 2001). But this dissertation remains unpublished.
From a biblical perspective, some work has recently been done on Saint Paul’s theology of preaching (Beaudean, 1988). Yet, even here, the emphasis has been to compare his teaching with the prevailing Greco-Roman rhetoric (Litfin, 1994). My aim is to analyse Daniel T Niles’ three series of lectures on preaching, to compare Niles’ view with that of the Magisterial Reformers and the Second Helvetic Confession and to assess it in the light of the example and teaching of Jesus. Finally, I shall seek to formulate a global theology of preaching that will enable dialogue between the Western and Non-western churches of global Christianity.

1.2.3 Main Research Question

To what extent is Daniel T Niles’ theory of preaching Reformed and Biblical and can help in the dialogue between Western and Non-Western Christianity?

1.2.4 Sub-Questions

1. What was Daniel T Niles’ theory of preaching?

2. What was the Reformers’ theory or theories of preaching?

3. What was the Second Helvetic Confession’s theory of preaching?

4. What can we learn from Jesus’ example of preaching in the Synagogue in Nazareth?

5. To what extent does D.T. Niles’ homiletical theory recognise that the preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God as the Second Helvetic Confession does?

6. Could Niles’ theory help us to develop a global theology of preaching to enhance the dialogue within World Christianity, especially between Western and Non-Western Churches?
1.3 THE AIM & OBJECTIVES

1.3.1 The Aim

The aim of this thesis is to obtain an in-depth understanding of Daniel T Niles’ theory of preaching, to compare it with the views of the Magisterial Reformers and to assess it in the light of the example of Jesus, thus seeking to develop a theology of preaching for a World Christianity that is a polycentric faith whose adherents are now far more numerous in the majority world than in Europe or North America.

1.3.2 The Objectives

The objectives of this study must be seen in their relationship to the aim. In so doing, it is intended to approach the subject from the following angles:

1. To describe Niles’ theory of preaching as found in his trilogy of lectures on preaching.

2. To interpret Niles’ theory of preaching in the light of his own cultural background and the works of key Reformation figures including Erasmus, Zwingli, Luther, Calvin and Bullinger’s Second Helvetic Confession.

3. To evaluate critically Niles’ theory of preaching in the normative context of the preaching of Jesus in the Synagogue in Nazareth.

4. To develop a global theology for preaching that integrates the implications of the reflection on Niles for the dialogue between Western and Non-Western homiletic theory.
1.4 THE CENTRAL THEORETICAL ARGUMENT

The central theoretical argument of this study is that Daniel T Niles’ theory of preaching, when found to be broadly in concert with the understanding of the Reformers and the Biblical teaching on the nature of preaching, can be useful for a global theology of preaching in promoting the dialogue between Western and Non-Western Christianity.

1.5 THE METHODOLOGY

The aim and objectives – as identified above – will be approached from a framework that is Biblical, historical and contemporary. In an effort to ensure that the findings of this dissertation are not subject to unfounded accusations of prejudice, I propose to give due recognition to the works of those whose theological sympathies do not necessarily lie within its remit. In so doing, I intend to:

1. Do a descriptive study on how Daniel T Niles viewed preaching by doing a literature-analysis of his trilogy of lectures on preaching. According to Osmer’s categories, the method is to be qualitative, especially of case study research (Osmer, 2008:32-34).

2. Interpret Niles’ theory of preaching in the context of his own Non-Western background and the bibliographical sources from the Magisterial Protestant Reformation regarding the essence of preaching especially as it is expressed in the Second Helvetic Confession. This will help to analyse and interpret the past patterns and contemporary processes of theological contextualisation and construction employed by Christians in and from Western and Non-Western Churches in the appropriation and re-shaping of the faith in diverse socio-political and religious contexts.
3. Evaluate Niles’ theory of preaching in the context of a study of Jesus’ preaching in Nazareth in order to formulate a normative theory on the nature of preaching and assess Niles’ theory in its correspondence with biblical perspectives on preaching.

4. Develop a theology of preaching that works with Niles’ theory and Bullinger’s statement as a base for dialogue between Western and non-Western homiletic theory. In this way, there will be an exploration of the significance for contemporary religion and society of the current global diaspora of Non-Western Christianities. Such a survey of theological reflection and practice from Western and Non-Western Christianity is set in the context of a conversation that does not privilege a single area of the world or one particular historical period. Positively this reflects the intention to contribute to theological reflection that is nourished by a variety of settings and practices.

This methodology reflects the four tasks for practical theological interpretation as formulated by Osmer (2008:4):

- The descriptive-empirical task in answering the question: What is going on?
- The interpretative task in answering the question: Why is it going on?
- The normative task in answering the question: What ought to be going on?
- The pragmatic task in answering the question: How might we respond?
2.0 Niles’ Theory of Preaching

2.1 Introduction

There are few public names that command more respect in the correspondence between Asian Christianity and its global counterpart than that of the Reverend Doctor Daniel Thambyrajah Niles whose intellect made him “the peer of any Marburg theologian or Oxford prelate” and whose innocence and humility left “even his most sophisticated Western colleagues in awe of him” (Old, 2010:587). Born in Ceylon (now called Sri Lanka), Niles received his theological training in India, became General Secretary of the East Asian Conference of Churches and was a renowned churchman within the World Council of Churches. Despite his passing in 1970, Niles remains the mentor of many Asian theologians (Ariarajah, 2009) and is now beginning to be increasingly recognised in the West for his perceptive biblical and theological insights (Bailey, 2008:203). The aim of this chapter is to do a descriptive study on how Daniel T Niles viewed preaching by doing a literature-analysis of his trilogy of lectures on preaching, incorporating elements of how the original audience received it and how those who studied his contribution typified its character and significance. According to Osmer’s categories, the method is to be qualitative, especially of a case study type research (Osmer, 2008:32-34). To this end, the chapter will seek to look at D.T. Niles the man, his social, political and theological context in an Asia emerging towards independence, his core theological beliefs and his theory of preaching before drawing some conclusions.

2.2 Niles - The Man

Daniel Thambyrajah Niles (affectionately known as "D.T.") was born near Jaffna in Ceylon on 4th May 1908. He was a fourth generation Christian, being the son of a well-known lawyer and the grandson of a distinguished pastor and poet. His great-grandfather had been “one of the first two men to become Protestant Christians in Jaffna, Ceylon” (Thompson, 1970) in
1821 by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission. Niles’ grandfather was a Methodist minister (Niles, 1965:54-56).

Niles lost his mother when he was only one. His father remarried and Niles had eight siblings after him. Probably due to the pressure of a large family, Niles’ father wanted his firstborn to become a lawyer. But God had other plans. One of Niles’ teachers, a Hindu, urged Niles’ father to enter his son into the Christian ministry. In the mystery of divine providence, it took a Hindu teacher to remind and assure a Christian lawyer (as Niles’ father then was) that God would look after his family (Niles, 1965: 56-57).

Niles’ education was undertaken at the famous Jaffna Central College in Jaffna in Northern Ceylon. Upon graduation, he appears to have worked for a short time as a maths teacher in the middle school at Jaffna Central College. After this, Niles went to Bangalore in South India to do his theological training in what is today called the United Theological College. His ministerial training in Bangalore took place between 1929 and 1933 (Furtado, 1978:19). By this time, the young Niles was already active in the Student Christian Movement. In 1933 he became this group’s (SCM) national secretary and in this capacity participated in the meeting of the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) in Sofia, Bulgaria. After this, he seems to have worked briefly on the staff of WSCF in Geneva (Furtado, 1978:22-26).

Niles was ordained to the Methodist Church ministry in 1936 and spent the first three years as a local district evangelist. According to Satyaranjan, Niles was the youngest delegate at the Madras Conference of the International Missionary Council in Tambaram in 1938 (Satyaranjan, 2009:21-25), taking a prominent part as a speaker and leading a workshop with Henry P. Van Dusen on “The Faith By Which the Church Lives” (Furtado, 1978:57-58). According to Newbigin, it was also at this conference that Niles appears to have disappointed C F Andrews by his Barthian sympathies (Newbigin, 2002).
With his contribution at Tambaram came recognition and prominence. Soon Niles was on his way to Europe as part of a team bringing the message of Tambaram to churches in Britain. According to Furtado, between 1939-40, Niles served as Evangelism Secretary of the World YMCA in Geneva. After this and upon his return to Ceylon from Europe, Niles started his pastoral ministry. During this time also, from 1941 to 1945, Niles was General Secretary of Ceylon’s National Christian Council. Here he appears to have mastered the complexities of ecclesiastical and denominational politics which were to serve him well in the future. In this capacity also he began to organise annual theological conferences in Ceylon, including in the guest list for the first time, Roman Catholics. Unsurprisingly then, in 1945, Niles was selected to be among the initial members of the negotiating committee for church union in Ceylon (Furtado, 1978:72-106). According to his own record, Niles’ views on interfaith dialogue, were influenced by his work at Tambaram with Hendrik Kraemer, "who made me see how essential it was for a Christian to think Christianly of other faiths". In his autobiographical memoir Niles speaks of "the many heart-searching conversations" he had with a Hindu friend as he wrestled with the implications of the gospel and its relation to other faiths.

The outbreak of the Second World War disrupted much of the optimism and hopes of Tambaram. But the end of that war saw Niles preaching, with John Mott, at the inaugural service of the first meeting of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam in 1948. By now, the one time leader of the SCM was wedded to the WCC. He served as chairman of her Youth Department from 1948 to 1952 (Furtado, 1978:113-167), and from 1953 to 1957 “gave half of his time to the Evangelism Secretariat” of the WCC (Visser’ T Hooft, 1971:117). Meanwhile, in 1950, Ceylon’s Methodist Church transferred Niles to the Maradana pastorate, and he became director of the YMCA Bible Study Institute in Colombo. Internationally, Niles addressed the Second WCC Assembly at Evanston in 1954 and was chosen to replace the assassinated Martin Luther King, Jr, to address the Uppsala Assembly in 1968. By then, he had earned a doctorate from the University of London (Lacy, 1984).
According to Furtado, Niles was of the strong view that those involved in ecumenical work should keep firm roots in the local church (Furtado, 1978:159). Niles exemplified this conviction by serving as St Peter’s Church’s superintending Minister whilst holding the evangelism brief in Geneva. At this time, he was also principal of Jaffna Central College. It is for this reason that Niles himself refers to this as "a heavy period for me" (Niles, 1967:15).

It was only in 1946 that Niles was appointed to his first full pastoral charge; he was Minister of Point Pedro in Ceylon for five years. From 1953 he was chairman of the WSCF and together with Philippe Maury developed a programme called “The Life and Mission of the Church” which culminated in 1960 with the Strasbourg conference (Furtado, 1978:157). While still engaged in the work of the WCC, between 1954 and 1964, Niles was Chairman of the Ceylonese Methodist Church’s Northern District (Furtado, 1978:160). In addition to all these responsibilities, in 1959, Niles was appointed the Henry Emerson Fosdick Visiting Professor at Union Theological Seminary, New York, the first “younger churchman” to occupy this chair (Lacy, 1984:174).

The year 1957 Niles brought to fruition India’s Rajah Manickam’s idea of an East Asia Conference of Churches (Kyaw Than, 1971:123; Visser’ T Hooft, 1971:119; Furtado, 1978:206-209). Niles was the new organisation’s first Secretary General and remained in post until 1968. At the EACC’s 1973 assembly in Singapore, this body was renamed the Christian Conference of Asia. In this context, Niles is perhaps best remembered as the compiler of the EACC Hymnal; his own hymns and his translations of Asian hymns were found in this collection. But Niles was always local even when he was national and international. In August 1968, he took over the leadership of the Methodist Church in Sri Lanka as the president of the Methodist Conference. According to Furtado, at the WCC’s Fourth Assembly in Uppsala in 1968, Niles was elected to the WCC presidium (Furtado, 1978:207-209).
Niles travelled widely and according to Newbigin, he journeyed to “all the six continents to preach, lecture and conduct university missions” (Newbigin, 2002:731). The harvest of these labours were published in books including *That They May Have Life* (London, Lutterworth, 1952), *Upon the Earth* (London, Lutterworth, 1962), and *A Testament of Faith* (London, Epworth, 1972).

According to Lacy, Niles “was not, and did not pretend to be, a great theologian, but he had fruitful theological and personal friendships with most of the leading theological thinkers of the time, and these enriched his writing and speaking. He was a great preacher, evangelist and pastor. Above all, he was an expositor of the Bible” (Lacy, 1984:175-178). Bishop Kulandran, who knew Niles well wrote: "He went to the Bible not to pick up a verse but to think with the biblical writers" (Kulandran, 1970:300). Newbigin who worked with Niles described the latter as an “ecumenical statesman, a strategist whose long-term planning did much to influence ecumenical development, and also a skillful tactician who could change a situation with a brilliant and unexpected move. He could outwit his opponents, but he did not make enemies” (Newbigin, 2002:731). According to Newbigin, central to Niles’ whole life was the giving and receiving of friendship. For Newbigin, these words from one of Niles’ final sermons typified the preacher himself: "When I am dead, many things will be said about me – that I held this and that position and did this and that thing. For me, all these are irrelevant. The only important thing that I can say about myself is that I, too, am one whom Jesus Christ loved and for whom he died" (Gal. 2:20).

According to Newbigin, in 1970, Niles went to the Christian Medical Hospital in Vellore, India, for treatment and later an operation for cancer, where he died on 17th July, 1970. “Next to his love of God was the devotion which bound him to his wife, Dulcie, whom he married in 1935. A few months after his death, she followed him. By the time of his death, Niles had been active in the ecumenical movement for four decades and for the last three of these was one of its best-known leaders” (Newbigin, 2002:729-731).
2.3 Niles – The Context

Niles lived and ministered during a time of political, social and theological ferment and change. The early period of the Twentieth century saw the closure of Western colonialism in Asia and the birth of independence for many countries. It was also a time of theological change as there was a widespread drawing of distinctions between Western and indigenous Asian thought. This spirit of challenge and change was seen both in the wider socio-political and the ecclesiastical realms. For much of Niles’ life, Ceylon after independence was gripped by ethnic and religious tensions (Sanders, 2013:99-106). Niles lived through the period which prepared itself and then went through change on the national, social and ecclesiastical levels.

Theologically too it was a time of flux. Niles himself remarks that it was his encounter with Willem Visser’t Hooft that shaped his mature theological thinking. Divinity studies in Bangalore at that time had been deeply influenced by the liberalism that came from Europe. Historical-critical studies and unbelief were common (Morton, 1981:25). It was from this stream that the young Niles had drunk. But when Visser’t Hooft spoke in Allahlabad at the Quadrennial of the Student Christian Movement for India, Burma and Ceylon in 1933, there was a transformation in the theological thinking of the new graduate. Niles began to imbibe the new dialectical theology and sought to study and learn from it.

2.4 Niles – The Thinking

Niles was trained at Bangalore in the milieu of Western theological Liberalism (Morton, 1981:25ff.). As indicated above, in 1933 he met and heard W.A. Visser’t Hooft at the Quadrennial of the Student Christian Movement for India, Burma and Ceylon. According to Niles, this was a turning point in his theological journey, for Visser’t Hooft introduced Niles to the new theological thinking that was sweeping across Europe, even to the reflections and writings of Karl Barth and dialectical theology.
This has caused some to interpret Niles as a Barthian theologian. It is true that Niles did learn much from dialectical theology. This was certainly true of the younger Niles. But as Niles’ own son has made clear, Niles’ “overall frame of reference is Methodist as opposed to the early Barthian dialectical position” (Niles, 1977:1). It is probably more accurate to say that Niles’ theology combined the richness of Eastern Orthodoxy and Western Protestantism with the devotion of surrounding Asian traditions. Niles insisted that “the Christian Faith can be proclaimed; the other faiths can only be taught,” because there is “true and essential discontinuity.” As both writer and preacher, he consistently drew on the Bible as his principal source (Lacy, 1998). In fact, the influences on Niles were varied. He became acquainted with Hendrik Kraemer, John R. Mott and even closer with Pierre Maury who was one-time head of the Reformed Church in France (Hooft, 1959: 9) and John Baillie whom Niles regarded as a ‘mediating bridge’ between East and West. Baillie had a strongly independent mind and an irenic spirit which preferred to discover underlying unities rather than sharpen theological distinctions into conflicts. Whilst he himself favoured a liberal brand of Evangelicalism, Baillie did welcome Barthian insights as a salutary corrective to the liberal theologies of the 1930s but always kept his distance from it (Cheyne, 1993:34). John Baillie and his brother Donald were highly committed ecumenists who participated in the work of the World Council of Churches. Their writings drew upon the richness and diversity of the theological traditions of the worldwide Church (Fergusson, 1997:1-10). Niles was also deeply indebted to C.F Andrews, E. Stanley Jones and E.C. Dewick for their accent on the immanence of God, and to Paul David Devanandan and M.M. Thomas for the commitment to the societal application of the gospel. This is what Niles himself wrote:

Hendrik Kraemer and Paul Devanandan are the two men to whom I am most indebted for the way in which I have learned to study other religions and to be in normal converse with adherents of these religions. Kraemer taught me to approach other faiths and enter into them as a Christian; Devanandan taught me to see and understand the Christian faith from the vantage ground of other faiths (Niles, 1967:10).
According to Lacy, there were other more subtle and indirect influences. He writes of the influences of the “worship in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, the hymns of Charles Wesley, the mysticism and devotion of Hindu *jnana marga* and *bhakti marga*” (Lacy, 1984:175). Perhaps we get closest to the true Niles in the words of Niles’ close friend Bishop Kulandran, who wrote that Niles’ theology was rooted in his own study of the Bible. He does not appear to have been a slave to any one theological system.

In his doctrine of God, Niles’ thinking appears to have been the fruit of his own intensive study of the Book of Revelation, Genesis as well as the total witness of the Bible (Furtado, 1978:120). For Niles, the central truth of the Bible was the sovereignty of God as affirmed in the Apostles’ Creed. According to Niles, it is the affirmation of God’s sovereignty that is maintained over against, and in spite of, all seeming contradictions of it in human experience and history. Niles himself wrote:

> God’s declaration, ‘I am God almighty’ is for the Christian both the beginning and the ending of all that he believes, of all that he hopes for, and of all that by which he is sustained (Niles, 1965:149).

Niles desired that the church should once again discover this original doctrine of her faith and thus recover “a mood of exhilaration, of challenge and high adventure, of expectant hope and triumphant deed” (Niles, 1947:143-144). For Niles, the doctrine of the sovereignty of God does not mean the autocracy of a despotic being. Rather, it is the certainty of the fulfilment of the will and purpose of God for his creation. As Niles understood it:

> God remains God even when and even while His purposes struggle for fulfilment. His is the almightiness not of instant power but of all-encompassing rule (Niles & Niles, 1972:24).

Niles is aware that God’s will is challenged by a rebellious humanity and by demonic forces, but God’s sovereignty means that God’s will will finally be fulfilled and consummated. According to Niles, one needs to understand the nature of the Biblical record itself in order to understand the meaning of God’s sovereign rule over nature and history.
Niles was also committed to the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. His words at Yale were unequivocal:

> The Christian faith is no simple Jesus-religion; it is faith in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, one God in three persons, Trinity in unity and unity in Trinity. But there is no way to the largeness of this faith except through faith in Jesus Christ (Niles, 1958:15).

Perhaps for Niles, the Trinity does not involve a distinction within the Godhead. Rather, he seems to have preferred to understand the Trinity as representing a significant distinction for the work of salvation (Niles, 1962:65). For Niles, it was insufficient to ask converts if they believed in Jesus Christ or whether they had received the Holy Spirit. According to Niles, while Jesus establishes a reconciliation between God and humanity, “it is only the Holy Spirit who is able to maintain us therein” (Niles, 1967:93). As Niles saw it, the “Holy Spirit is the missionary of the gospel. It is he who makes the gospel explosive in men’s lives and in human affairs” (Niles, 1967:95).

Niles’ doctrine of revelation and the nature of the Bible was undoubtedly influenced by the dialectical theology of Barth and Brunner. As we have seen, Niles had received his initial theological training in a setting of Western theological liberalism. In his more mature thought, Niles saw the Bible as primarily a book about God. He wrote: “God is the hero of the Bible, and ... the Bible is concerned with His deeds, His ideas, His plans” (Niles, 1958:19). Niles is not oblivious to the fact that the Bible is full of human stories with human heroes, of human events and human accomplishments. It contains ideas about God and gives record of increasing human understanding of God. Yet, Niles would insist that the central theme of the Bible is God. According to Niles, the biblical writers saw God as the “primary reality” (Niles, 1955:20). Thus all other reality of every other thing is derived from it. For this reason, Niles holds that the Bible nowhere attempts to prove the existence of God. In fact, for Niles this is the premise of the whole biblical faith (Niles, 1958:13).
But this does not mean that Niles accepted the fundamentalist perspective on the Bible. He was suspicious of literalism and plenary inspiration. His was a modern and open approach to the Scriptures, where truth did not have to be taken literally. For him, Genesis was written “by a group of men belonging to the priestly families of Israel at that time in exile in Babylon with their people” (Niles, 1958:18). At Yale he said that “the Genesis account of man’s sin is an account which seeks to make plain the nature of sin and not its origin” (Niles, 1958:44). Earlier, in 1955, Niles had written:

Some people treat every word in the Bible as equally true and inspired, and do not ask why and when it was spoken. This may lead to very wrong ideas about God (Niles, 1955:54).

Niles’ anthropology was generally orthodox. For Niles, humankind cannot be explained or understood in themselves. Rather, he held, human beings can only be understood in their relationships (Niles, 1958:17). Man is always ‘man in relation’ (Niles & Niles, 1972:17). For Niles, human beings can be defined in relation to nature or in relation to the fellow human beings. But humankind’s true nature, according to Niles, cannot be sufficiently described except in their relationship to God who is “life’s final cause” (Niles, 1967: 32,35). Thus, when Genesis describes humankind as made in the image of God, Niles interprets this not as a ‘replica’ of God but a reflection of deity (Niles, 1967:54). “Man is man because he reflects God, and only when he does so” (Niles, 1958:37-38). Therefore it is only in responsive obedience to God’s gracious love that man is able to find his true identity.

In his hamartiology, Niles did not believe that Genesis gives an account of the origin of sin, but only an account of humankind’s sin and its nature. But Niles did believe in the concept of sin. He refused to understand it as mere ignorance, imperfection or a disease. Instead Niles saw sin as “an offence against God’s sovereignty”, “an essential wrongness in man which only God’s power and love can make right” (Niles, 1967: 70, 72). For Niles, sin is bred when a human person attempts to live outside his or her ‘image relation’ with God. Thus sin at its root is rebellion (Niles, 1958: 29), humankind’s attempt to be human apart from God (Niles, 1967: 49, 70, 72-75). Although Niles admitted that the Bible is silent concerning the
origin of sin, he held that it teaches that sin is objective and that it is original to the human situation (Niles, 1967:72).

Niles’ soteriology appears to have been influenced by his tremendous burden for mission and evangelism. Those who knew him inform us that at heart, Niles was an evangelist. He had tremendous interest in mission because he had a tremendous interest in the Kingdom of God and in the salvation of his fellow human beings. He repeatedly asserted that salvation is in the one name of Jesus Christ, and was cautious about substituting renunciation for real righteousness, piety for practice. He was explicit in his warning that there “is a difference between offering beauty to God in his worship and worshiping beauty in the guise of worshipping God” (Niles, 1966:71). To the charge that Niles was a universalist, his friend Newbigin writes that it “was a cruel irony that he was charged with teaching a false universalism by men whose experience of the love of God was too thin for them to understand Niles’ spirit. Just because his sense of the vastness of God’s grace was so deep, he could welcome with joy every evidence of that love working in men of other faiths” (Newbigin, 1970:329).

Niles was also careful to emphasise the importance of the Christian community for the life of the Christian disciple. He does not seem to have made church membership a condition for salvation, although he did write that the “object of evangelism is conversion, conversion to Christ and personal discipleship to him. But involved also in this conversion are conversion to the Christian community and conversion to Christian ideas and ideals” (Niles, 1951:82). Nevertheless, he saw church membership as a condition for authentic Christian discipleship. “I believe fully that a decision to follow Jesus Christ is inextricably linked with the decision to become a member of the Christian Church” (Niles, 1968:14).
In his ecclesiology, Niles was strongly committed to the place of the local church in the
divine economy. He himself was a pastor of a local congregation in Ceylon in addition to his
other commitments. But Niles refused to mistake the institutional church for the body of
Christ. “Men can only be loved into God’s kingdom, they cannot be organised into it”, he
wrote (Niles, 1968:42). As an ecumenist, it is not surprising that Niles was opposed to
denominationalism and separateness. For him, the finality of Jesus Christ meant the
necessity for Christian unity. And to him, the true mark of an authentic Church is its
faithfulness to Jesus Christ. This faithfulness must be revealed in its activity in the world. The
call of Jesus Christ is the call to radical discipleship. This is a calling to participate with God in
His world, to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Thus it is safe to say that
Niles had a high view of the doctrine of the Church. “The answer to the problems of our
world is not Jesus Christ. The answer to the problems of the world is the answer that Jesus
Christ provided, which is the Church” (Niles, 1966: 50).

Related to his doctrine of the church was his understanding of the church’s mission. Niles’
contribution to the study of the relationship between Christianity and other faiths is not
insignificant. Hendrik Kraemer had argued that there is no revelation in the non-Christian
religions, and Niles came under Kraemer’s influence at Tambaram (Kraemer, 1938:70-80).
But Niles refused to follow Kraemer uncritically. Having grown up in a society where
Christianity was a minority, Niles believed that it was legitimate to be engaged in the work
of dialogue with people of other faiths. Although he was clear that there “is no Saviour but
Jesus and they who are saved are always saved by him. That is true without qualification”
(Niles, 1958:29), he was slow or reluctant to pronounce decisively against the damnation of
the non-Christian. “There is no salvation except in Jesus Christ, but who shall decide how
and in what guise Jesus comes to men and claims their acceptance!”, he asked (Niles,
1967:100-101). Lacy sees in this aspect of Niles’ theology a merging of the influence of Asian
colleagues and Asian cultures with Niles’ Biblical, originally neo-orthodox theology (Lacy,
Niles’ passion for mission as God’s missionary enterprise meant that his words to the Church were often perceptive, prophetic and sometimes scorching. It was perceptiveness that caused him to write that there “is a world of difference between the missionary who comes to proclaim the truth of the Gospel and the missionary who comes to care for a people with the care of Jesus Christ” (Niles, 1959:135). The prophetic voice sounded from Niles when he said that a missionary is primarily “a person sent to a world and not to a church... not so much a person sent by a church as by its Lord” (Niles, 1962:266). To a church grown cold and complacent, he thundered: “There is a tendency for missionary agencies to be concerned exclusively with the Church in the missionary land rather than with the land itself” (Niles, 1951:75).

2.5 Niles – The Theology of Preaching

It has been admitted by those close to him and most familiar with his works that Niles was not chiefly a systematic theologian (Niles, 1977:8). Although he seems to have preferred theology to ethics, and his works are mostly the fruits of his own study of the Bible, Niles eschewed doctrinal debates. This might partly be explained by his Asian background. But it was also because his approach was distinctly empirical and he often chose a pragmatic stance in dealing with issues; Lacy calls this an “action/reflection model” (Lacy, 1998:175). In seeking to explore Niles’ theory of preaching, our present method will be especially descriptive, to examine his trilogy on preaching. Osmer identifies four core tasks in practical theology: descriptive, interpretative, normative and pragmatic (Osmer, 2008:9). The descriptive task asks ‘What is happening?’ and uses tools of thick description to answer this question. These tools could include case studies, questionnaires, appreciative inquiry, participant observation and the like. Since Niles himself and most of his original audience are no longer accessible to us, we have opted for case study. Here we have sought to gain descriptive insights by studying Niles’ original words, the reactions of his peers, those mentored by him, scholars who showed appreciation for his work regarding his impactful presence and the significance of his preaching theology.
According to Creighton Lacy, Niles’ trilogy on preaching are three of his most important books. But Lacy is also quick to observe that these books are “sermons rather than lectures; they defined the homiletical task by doing it, and by proclaiming the gospel in its relationship to the world and to various cultures. In this they were indistinguishable from other books produced for other audiences. Indeed, as Niles himself affirmed in Adelaide, ‘To us who have been waylaid by God’s call, preaching is power’” (Lacy, 1984:177).

Niles presented these three significant, international and prestigious lectures on preaching in Australia, the United States of America and in Scotland. The Bevan Lectures were given at Parkin (Congregational) College in Adelaide from 1927 to 1956 in memory of Llewelyn David Bevan, one of Australia’s great preachers who “for twenty-three years...was a leader of Protestant intellectual life in Melbourne” (Gunson, 1979). According to its terms of establishment, the Lyman Beecher lectures were to be delivered by lecturers who had been “markedly successful in the special work of the Christian ministry” (Library, 2013). Jones called its early lectures and lecturers ‘The Royalty of the Pulpit’ (Jones, 1951). The Warrack Lectures in preaching are delivered by invited lecturers in the ancient universities of Scotland. When these were later published into books, this is how Niles himself describes his trilogy on preaching:

In 1952 were delivered the Bevan Memorial Lectures at Adelaide in Australia. The title of these lectures was ‘Preaching the Gospel of the Resurrection’. The message which we preach has been committed to us. We are called to tell the story of what God has wrought for man in Jesus Christ. In 1957 were delivered the Lyman-Beecher Lectures at Yale in the United States of America. The title of these lectures was ‘The Preacher and the Stone of Stumbling’. The reason why we preach is determined for us. Men must be led into an acceptance of Jesus Christ as the Lord of their lives and as the Saviour of all men. Now in 1958, for these Warrack Lectures delivered in Scotland, the title is ‘The Preacher’s calling to be Servant’. The proof of what we preach is promised to us. There is no guarantee of the truth of our witness except that it is caught and held within the witness of the Holy Spirit to Jesus Christ and of Jesus Christ to himself (Niles, 1959:12).
It is difficult to know the immediate impact that these lectures had on their original audiences since there appears to be very little eyewitness account of them. But the following seems to be an authentic testimony of one who was present at Niles’ Lyman Beecher Lectures at Yale:

Daniel Thambyrajah Niles... speaks English superbly... He is heir to twenty centuries of Western Christianity only in that he is a great-grandson of Nathaniel Niles, who was baptised in 1821 as the first Jafna Tamil convert of missionaries sent out by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, and is a pastor, but not of a powerful church... Those who heard Dr. Niles’ brilliant lectures at the Yale Divinity school in April 1957, are not likely ever to forget them. They were not lectures in comparative religion, as the chapter headings might seem to indicate. Rather, as the lectures proceeded, both a vaster and a more precise picture of Christianity emerged: Christianity in its encounter with the other major religions of the world, but also Christianity in its essence and its uniqueness. And at the very centre of the stage of the world emerged the picture of Christ. Even in the Lyman Beecher Lectures, which have acquired in some circles the reputation of being a bit staid, Dr Niles succeeded in being an effective evangelist. Out of his unusual background and through his exceptional gifts he brought the Good News in a way that made it fresh and new for those who thought they had known it all the time” (Pope, 1958:9-10).

At least one response to Niles’ Warrack Lectures in Scotland is known. It is reported by Visser’T Hooft who was himself not present at these lectures:

When I asked a friend in Scotland who had heard Dr Niles deliver these Warrack Lectures what he thought about them, his first remark was: “These were not lectures, but sermons”. I think he was right and I have reason to believe that my friend D.T. Niles will not quarrel with that description. On the contrary! (Hooft, 1959:9)

When the lectures went into print, they became popular. The scholarly consensus appears to have been positive. Amos Traver reviewed Preaching the Gospel of the Resurrection and noticed that while he did not recall “the author’s use of the word grace more than twice, he sounds the grace note with no uncertain emphasis... Dr Niles’ theology is evangelical and there is no synergism in this series of lectures. His power lies in the use of words and phrases outside the trite vocabulary of average preaching” (Traver, 1954). Another reviewer
found *Preaching the Gospel of the Resurrection* to be strongly grounded in theology and recommended it to the “more theologically inclined Protestant clergymen” (Kirkus, 1954). Reviewing *The Preacher’s Calling to be a Servant*, Ian Fraser admits that the book may not appear to be about preaching at all. But he insists that Niles “does a most important thing. He puts preaching into its large content (sic). He sees it in the light of the ministry of Jesus Christ. He points to its place in the ministry of the whole Church (Fraser, 1960:109). For Fraser, once this approach is appreciated, Niles’ words would be continually illuminating as it leads to a deeper understanding of the rich and manifold nature of the Church’s ministry. Fraser concludes by thanking Niles for the “large compassion of his faith, for the constantly biblical character of his utterance”. For Fraser himself, the lectures may be better read than heard since they lend themselves to meditation, enriching all (Fraser, 1960:110). Ditmanson found in these lectures “illuminating excursions into exegetical and doctrinal matters”, recommending its “invigorating and ecumenical theology for all preachers” (Ditmanson, 1958). Coe saw in in the same “a fine book, original” (Coe, 1959). But the book’s approval went beyond Europe and North America; it was welcomed in Asia too (Van Dyck, 1958) as was Niles *The Preacher’s Calling to be Servant* (Anon, 1960).

There is another account of Niles’ presence and preaching which is worth recording in full, although it is from an occasion unrelated to his three series of lectures on preaching. It is from the pen of John Killinger and gives a portrait of Niles the preacher and his approach to preaching:

I remember the occasion when James Stewart of Scotland and D.T. Niles of Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) were both scheduled to preach for several days at Princeton University's anniversary celebration. I had never heard of Niles, but had read Stewart's books for years and eagerly awaited his coming. Donald Macleod, professor of preaching at Princeton Theological Seminary, introduced Stewart as "the man whose illustrations adorn all our sermons." It seemed an apt way to greet the great man from Edinburgh. Stewart climbed the pulpit steps, opened his manuscript, and began to read his sermon. He read well, and the sermon was a typical Stewart masterpiece, grounded in the Bible, clearly outlined, and memorably illustrated. I was impressed.
Out of curiosity, I returned to the chapel an hour later to hear Niles. He was a short, round-faced man with brown skin and a shock of black hair falling across his forehead. His suit was ill fitting and appeared to have been slept in. I suppose he was properly introduced, though I cannot now recall the introduction. I only remember feeling sorry for him as he climbed into the pulpit without a manuscript. "To have to follow James Stewart!" I thought, and knew I wouldn't wish to do it.

But something happened when Niles got into the pulpit. He acted as if it weren't there at all. He began talking to us so casually and conversationally that we weren't aware that he was preaching. Stories tumbled out, humorous remarks, stunning insights. Looking back, I realize the sermon had to have been written in advance, but the man made no effort to get every word precisely as it had been on paper. He knew what he wanted to say, but the important thing was the way he played the congregation. His timing was as perfect as a good comedian's. He knew when to be funny and when to be serious. He was as responsive to our reactions as if he had been a lumberjack at the other end of a crosscut saw, pulling at his end in perfect rhythm with the way we pulled at ours.

He did the same thing every time he preached. By the end of the week everyone idolized him. Stewart continued to preach his excellent manuscripts. But they seemed somehow artificial and literary beside the robust sermons of Niles. When Stewart preached, we were always conscious of listening to a great preacher. When Niles preached, we were enraptured, we saw new visions of life, we felt the presence of God.

I have never, in all the years since, felt justified in using a manuscript when I preach. Niles, I am convinced, was the ultimate. He made something special with the congregation. He didn't just make it in the study and then set it before the congregation. He made it with the people. Part of what went into his sermons was provided by the congregation. Ideally, we should all preach that way (Killinger, 1996:173-174).

Killinger's experience of Niles' preaching is confirmed by others. De Soysa write about Niles' preaching: “There was a special aura about him on that occasion which I have experienced only once before, when I listened to the great Studdart-Kennedy in Oxford in 1930... It was not only that he had made the message wholly his own by disciplined Bible study and wide reading, he had given himself to God by an ever-deepening surrender of himself and all his experience of life. And so his word, as his life, was full of power – the power of the Holy Spirit” (De Soysa, 1971:65).
2.5.1 Preaching the Gospel of the Resurrection – 1952

The first of Daniel Thambyrajah Niles’ trilogy on preaching is his Bevan Memorial Lectures delivered in Adelaide, Australia. When they were published, the book was entitled ‘Preaching the Gospel of the Resurrection’. Our lecturer opens his first address with a presentation entitled ‘The Signature of Hope’. Here, much of Niles’ emphasis is on the call of the preacher and the call to preach. He makes the point that the call to preach receives its significance from the nature of the response it demands. This response can be no more and no less than all that the preacher has and all that the preacher is; for Niles, this is the only bid that is adequate to such a task (Niles, 1953:18). Thus the calling of the preacher to preach is for Niles a call to self-immolation; becoming a preacher is an act of self-offering. This call shatters the self, it brings self to death and it establishes the self in obedience to a new task – that of proclamation (Niles, 1953:18). Niles acknowledges that a call to deeds would be more satisfying to the self. But for him, we who are called are sent to preach; we have been entrusted with the folly of preaching (Niles, 1953:18).

In dealing with the preacher’s calling to preach, Niles is emphatic on the place and piety of the preacher. But he repeatedly emphasises that the message itself is “not about any deeds of ours. I have nothing except His word which found me. I am set as a signpost to point to God. No man’s deeds but God’s are decisive”. Using John 5:17 he argues that God is a working God (Niles, 1953:19).

According to Niles, the called preacher can be confident in expecting results from his preaching; our author is clear that God is awake over His word to perform it. Quoting Jeremiah 1:11-12, Niles maintains that this is the charter of Christian preaching: that “to us is committed God’s word and that God is awake over His word to perform it. Our preaching is an activity within the activity of God. It points to Him, and it announces that His is the deed by which man’s peace is established and we are invited to share in the victory that God has already won rather than to seek to win victories of our own” (Niles, 1953:19).
Repeatedly Niles warns preachers that their calling is different from that of others in their varying employments. Referring to Mark 14:62 and Luke 22:69, Niles teaches that Jesus rules and Jesus comes. The preacher’s standing ground is different from that of his contemporaries in that they are seeking to make human history; on contrast, the preacher knows that he has been caught up in the divine activity. “The word has priority over the deed. The immediate word by which we are bound is the word by which we are called, each one by name” (Niles, 1953:20).

While emphasising the preacher’s calling, Niles is quick to remind his audience that preachers are messengers of that Word which is previous to the word which was the preacher’s call. For Niles, this previous Word is Jesus Christ (Niles, 1953:21). Thus the preaching ministry is a calling that points people to Jesus; it also stems from Him. And the Church’s preaching must point people back to Him (Niles, 1953:21). On the preached word he says: “Our deeds cannot take the place of our word because our word is greater than ourselves. It is a word about that Word by which we were constituted and on which we stand” (Niles, 1953:21). As he seeks to hold the line between the calling and the previousness of Jesus Christ, Niles makes clear that it is impossible to overemphasise this connection between Him who we proclaim, who is the Word, and the word by which He has called us to proclaim Him (Niles, 1953:21). For Niles, the preacher and his preaching must never become independent of God’s call. “The preacher’s call is always present tense, so that there is always a living relation between what the preacher preaches and what he does” (Niles, 1953:22). He then adds:

Let me put it like this: I speak the word of God as I have heard it and as I have understood it. But if any of you are listening to me should hear God’s word, it will not be because I have spoken God’s word, but because God has spoken it. I cannot speak God’s word. Only God can speak God’s word. The miracle however is that God in his grace takes human words and makes them his word.... The significant thing is not what I say but what God says with what I say. The significant thing is not what we do but what God does with what we do. Surely it is only because of this divine activity which supports our preaching that we continue in this ministry of preaching at all” (Niles, 1953:22).
Niles does not use here the language of the activity of the Holy Spirit in seeking to explain the mystery of preaching. Instead he prefers the language of the active operation of God. He asserts that preaching would be folly if it were not that preaching is simply the human contribution that is brought to the service of the active operation of the word of God (Niles, 1953:23). In language bordering on the sacramental, Niles goes on to say that “God takes the human word even as he takes man’s bread and makes them both the means of his visitation. Through them he enters into human life” (Niles, 1953:23). Later he adds that preaching is the mode by which personality is offered and received (Niles, 1953:23) before using the analogy of offering and worship.

But Niles is careful not to be misunderstood. He adds: “Let me say again that I am neither disregarding nor underestimating the importance and the necessity of living lives that will commend our words, but that I am seeking rather to emphasise the truth that the determining fact is not that our lives prove our word but that our word judges our lives. The truest testimony that my life can bring to the word I proclaim is not the life I live but what I think of the life I live” (Niles, 1953:23)

Whilst placing the accent on the content of preaching, Niles refuses to minimise the call of the preacher and the character that should shape that herald. He acknowledges that his insistence of the word that must be preached may sound like foolishness; but it is foolishness only to those who think that by their wisdom they have either known God or got rid of God. “To us, preaching is power. It is the human offering through which God’s power is mediated to man” (Niles, 1953:24). He encourages preachers by reminding them that Jesus was a preacher (Niles, 1953: 24). Niles then offers the example of Jonah. Jesus offered no sign to the Jews because the preaching of Jonah was enough for the people of Nineveh; they did not ask for sign or demand deeds. It was enough to Nineveh precisely because he who proclaims the message is Jonah. Jonah himself is the sign (Niles, 1953:26-27).
The word to be proclaimed to Nineveh is the word of judgement. But it is God’s mercy that he does not simply execute judgement but that, rather, he causes judgement to be proclaimed in order that men may repent. Like Jonah, Christian preachers today preach because God’s love has found them and because his love that found them is his love for others too (Niles, 1953:28). For Niles, preachers must and therefore they try. He then quickly adds: “But we can try only because we trust. His redeeming blood still redeems. Indeed, our preaching would be pure folly if it were not that he whom we preach both upholds the activity of preaching and accomplishes the end toward which the preaching is directed. Jesus who is proclaimed is himself the power unto salvation” (Niles, 1953:29).

Niles refuses to draw a sharp distinction between preaching as the message preached – the *kerygma* – and preaching as the actual act of proclamation. In his view, both belong together in one great divine activity (Niles, 1953:29). “The preaching of the gospel of the resurrection by risen men – this is God’s call to us and the call by which we are constituted preachers. But how do we respond to this call? And what is involved in the experience by which it becomes determinative for us? Nothing less and nothing more is involved than the discovery of the nature of God’s love” (Niles, 1953:30-31). For Niles, we enter into this love when we meet the Christ ourselves (Niles, 1953:32). It seems then, for Niles, the calling of the preacher is first and foremost the calling to be a follower of Christ.

In his second lecture, Niles speaks of ‘The Signature of Death’. Here Niles tackles the subject of death and explains how death is the final enemy for the Christian, and yet is the gateway to glory because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Niles reminds his audience that death is the consequence of sin. But death is also God’s provision for sinful man. And finally, death is already defeated by Jesus Christ (Niles, 1953:39-40).

With respect to preaching, Niles is clear that the Christian message is that death is the last reminder mankind receive of the fact that they are sinners (Niles, 1953:40). It is because of death that humankind learns to live by faith in the faithfulness of God. “Man who is girt about by death becomes aware of that grace of God which upholds him and over which alone death has no sway. Then, when at the last death comes, man makes his final act of faith, casting himself upon God’s grace who, beyond death, will receive with forgiveness the
human spirit” (Niles, 1953:40-41).

Niles holds that with the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, the life of heaven is now available to the Christian, available on earth as a foretaste and as a first instalment. Death is an enemy to be faced victoriously, and if it is a blessing, it is only because in death grace encounters sin (Niles, 1953:41). The Christian faith offers victory over death. “Christian sorrow is clean; it is not tainted either by bitterness or by despair” (Niles, 1953:42).

According to Niles, this is in contrast to both the Buddhist and the Muslim positions which give in to resignation in the face of death. The Hindu sees the finality and conquest of death in a person and mourns without restraint. But Christians are able to witness to the gospel of the resurrection (Niles, 1953:43). And the Christian is only able to do this if he or she has faced and experienced the true death which takes place when a human individual meets God in the experience of conversion. For Niles, there must be an inner collapse, the disillusionment with oneself and the discarding of one’s trust in oneself, to entrust oneself to God and to his rule. After that, “life becomes to live by faith, by commitment to Him who loved us and gave himself for us” (Niles, 1953:44).

According to Niles, the source and secret of the Christian life lies in the recognition of the basic truth that Christians are not simply persons under the obligation to love, but that they are persons who have been loved (Niles, 1953:45). This gives the Christian his identity. And the Christian must learn to live by this love with which he or she is loved. “Only in this way do we learn to live at all. For we live most deeply when we live in the passive voice” (Niles, 1958:45-46). As Niles sees it, the desperate illness of our time is not that we do not love God and love each other, but that we do not know how to receive love either from God or from others. That humankind should be loved with all our smallness and our sinfulness, with all our self-conceit and our self-centredness, that we should be loved even at the cost of death to Him who loved us, can anything else be more potent to break us down or build us up?, he asks (Niles, 1953:46).
Niles argues that for the Christian, physical death cannot touch him or her, since he or she is already dead and the Christian who lives in Christ is already living in Him who is death’s conqueror. To die then was not to die at all but to continue to live in Christ, gaining through physical death the enjoyment of the direct presence. Christians are already in heaven, blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. This situation should condition the Christian individual’s attitude to the business of daily living – with respect to work, existence and relationships (Niles, 1953:46-47).

With particular respect to preaching, Niles holds that such a Christian understanding of death reshapes the preacher’s approach to his ministry. First, in their working, preachers should be delivered from bondage to results. Preachers like to see the fruits of their labours, and Niles admits that they do see some of the fruits of their labour. But Niles is emphatic that the long-range consequences of all that preachers do are in God’s hands. “We sow the seed and go to sleep; He controls the harvest since He is the Architect of history. The desire to see results foreshortens vision and introduces into our planning a false perspective. It also introduces into our working a sense of strain. When the preacher has faced death in his encounter with God, that preacher’s ministry is marked by gladness” (Niles, 1953:48). For Niles, the preacher’s work must be dedicated to a future that is completely in God’s hands, and because it is so dedicated, preachers must find release from bondage to results, being able to do their work with gladness. The fact of death delivers the Christian in his work from bondage to results.

Secondly, for Niles, this fact of death teaches the preacher to live and removes from him the desire to simply exist. The death of Jesus Christ is precisely the basis of the preacher’s hope now. It is Christian faith to be “concerned purely and primarily with doing the work that God has entrusted to us, and to trust him for the rest” (Niles, 1953: 48-49).

Thirdly, according to Niles, the fact of death delivers Christians from bondage to themselves in their relationships. It teaches preachers as well as all Christians to hold their loved ones at God’s disposal (Niles, 1953:50). “In life as well as in death we are the Lord’s and those whom we love are the Lord’s also. We have no right of possession over them” (Niles, 1953:51). For the Christian, on earth or beyond the grave there is still true community, and community of
life between all of those who believe. For God is not the God of the dead but of the living. According to Niles, this conquest of death in the communion of saints is the result of God’s forgiveness of sins. The sting of death is sin; the source of life is forgiveness. This communion of saints which is a present reality is, however, only a foretaste of that which is to be. When death itself is no more, then it will be a new heaven as well as a new earth. It will be the risen life in its fullness and in its wholeness. “Death is, but death does not rule” (Niles, 1953:52-53). Niles concludes that it is in Him and unto Him that we live (Niles, 1953: 54).

Niles entitles his third lecture, ‘The Signature of Love’. According to him, the signature of death is written across the face of time. But, because of this very signature, eternal value is given to every passing moment and man is challenged to taste eternity in time (Niles, 1953:57). The human skeleton is the symbol of death’s victory; the cross is the symbol of death’s defeat. It is death turned into the means of life (Niles, 1953:61).

In this perspective, Christianity is unlike other faiths. From his experience in Ceylon and other parts of Asia, Niles understood that the Buddhist answer to death is to challenge it with non-attachment. But for Niles, by non-attachment death can be cheated of much of the anguish it brings, but it can be overcome by love alone. Love increases the anguish of parting that is involved in death, but it robs death of its victory. To love is to die as the grain of wheat dies in order that it may bring forth fruit. It is to lay down one’s life for one’s friends (Niles, 1953:61). Niles argues that it is the immortality of love that is the basis of the immortality of the soul. “We live because we are the objects of God’s love”. For Niles, the correlate of death is not birth except in the case of the race. The true correlate of death is immortal love (Niles, 1953:64). Here, it is important to note that Niles’ experience as a missionary and his helpful illustrations were appreciated by subsequent readers of this book (Kirkus, 1954).

As Niles sees it, the characteristics of that future life are life in the eternal present, life at God’s disposal and life in the fellowship. These constitute also the true characteristics of Christian life now. He exhorts that our relationship to each other must be such that death, instead of breaking the relationship, is broken by it (Niles, 1953:66). The Christian life is such that we put our hands into his hands and he takes us across, from resting place to resting place, until at last we are led into the very presence of the Father. Our earthly life is not an
examination to be passed; it is a journey to be begun (Niles, 1953:68).

In dealing with love, Niles has to face the issue of hell. According to him, hell is not God’s preparation; it is man’s nightmare. It is what happens to man when he steps out beyond death secure in his own competence, seeking to live the self—centred life in the company of the saints. To be in hell is to be shut into our own devices, and yet both to be left alone but to be troubled by the presence of God (Niles, 1953: 69). Niles is clear that there is hell because man is free to choose to be in hell; because man is free to refuse to love or to forgive or to be forgiven. But hell is hell because God refuses to stop loving even those who would be in hell. Perhaps aware of the intellectual challenges that the Christian faith faces here, Niles posits that we are not required to achieve logical consistency in what we say about hell. For Niles, hell is not a place about which we can speak objectively. “All that we are required to say is that hell is a real possibility, and that the choice of hell, when it is made, is always made without time limit. Existence in hell has always the quality of eternity” (Niles, 1953: 70).

In true Protestant tradition, Niles is clear that it is not possible to go to heaven by living such a life that is directed by the fear of going to hell. For Niles, such fear will eliminate moral significance from all action. The only significance of hell in Christian thinking is that it is a cause of real concern (Niles, 1953:70). As Niles exegetes the New Testament, Jesus made it plain that God’s judgement is always of persons and not simply of their actions. In a court of law, it is some deed which is being judged, some deed of which a person is held guilty or not guilty. But God judges the person himself. According to Matthew 25:37-40, what the believers had done was a true expression of themselves; it was unconscious fruit-bearing. For Niles, it was not their deeds that were significant but the fact that their deeds flowed from their true selves (Niles, 1953:71). It is precisely because God judges persons and not actions his judgement can never be understood as retributive in intention. In his judgement of persons God is simply concerned with the best way of loving them. Love alone is justice to persons. God is stern and uncompromising because he is Love (Niles, 1953:72).
In this chapter, Niles has been looking at the nature of life after death. It is a life of love in the presence of Love, in the fellowship of the saints’ love. But it is also judgement and hell in the presence of God’s unbreakable love (Niles, 1953:72). As Niles concludes, he argues that in this reign of God, the saints participate too. They are a royal priesthood called to share in the reign of the Crucified, to die with him and so to live with him, to endure and so to reign with him (Niles, 1953:72). Thus, death makes no difference to this occupation of the redeemed. They serve the reign of the Crucified here but they also serve the reign of the Crucified there. Their service is in his temple. The ministry of redeeming love which is the work of the Christian is a ministry undisturbed by death (Niles, 1953:73). As Niles sees it, in this way death is challenged at every step by love. Across the face of life is written the signature of death. But it is a signature that has been crossed out. And on the cross we see another signature, God’s signature of love (Niles, 1953:74).

Niles’ fourth lecture in the Bevan Memorial Lectures delivered at Stow Memorial Church in Adelaide, Australia in March 1952 was entitled ‘The Signature of Life’. Niles begins by positing that in the great hymn of life and death there are worked out the two themes that belong together: man’s dying because he is a sinner and he is living because he is loved by God. According to Niles, it is only as we understand these two themes as interpenetrating one another that we begin to understand the nature of man’s life. “There is salvation in the presence of death” (Niles, 1953:77).

Niles then turns his attention to the book of Acts. In Acts’ account of Paul, Silas and the Philippian jailer, the word of God is thrust into some inner prison and its insistence made fast in chains. The doors are locked, and life seems smooth and secure. Suddenly there is an earthquake, and there yawns before life the awful imminence of death. “How can safety be found again? It can be found only in Him with whom we are always safe whatever may overtake us” (Niles, 1953:78). For Niles, the account of the Philippian jailer also reveals that the insecurity which belongs to human life is not present merely on the edge of life but at its very centre. Niles observes that as human history progresses, the role of God in man’s life has been pushed farther and farther out until now God comes in only to answer the question of guilt and sin and death. But Niles contends that what we need to realise is that these questions are not properly asked unless they are asked as questions about the very
centre of human existence. Humankind does not become unsafe, he or she is always unsafe, and always there is present the question: What must I do to be safe? (Niles, 1953:80). Niles goes further to assert that humankind’s insecurity arises from God himself (Niles, 1953:80).

Having articulated the insecurity within human beings as an ever present possibility, Niles goes on to explain that only Jesus can keep humans safe when they come to a decisive meeting with God. Humankind in Jesus meets God in Jesus and that, for Niles, is safe meeting (Niles, 1953:81). But Niles reveals his sensitivity to this fact when he sees it from the other direction and holds that Jesus also keeps God safe for us. Life is difficult and riddled with problems, and there is always the possibility that the clouds of life will hide for us the face of the Father. Human beings lose God in the turbulence of life but for the person who has met God in Jesus, God is always safe (Niles, 1953: 81).

Niles then proceeds to address the question of faith and salvation: But what is it to believe? Niles explains it as the finding ourselves participating in God’s activity. God, who from the beginning of creation has been waging relentless war against the powers of darkness, has now launched his main attack. The strategic battle has begun. The strategic battle was won by Jesus, and evil has been cast down, though it is still alive and active and will be so until God’s V day comes (Niles, 1953:83). Seeking, as usual, his authority in the Bible, Niles takes his listeners to the Gospel according to Mark where, according to Niles, the enemy against whom God has declared war in Jesus is described in terms of five miracles which follow in quick succession. The Kingdom of God is God in effective conflict with evil in all its forms – in conflict with the devil, in conflict with sickness, in conflict with uncleanness, in conflict with sin, in conflict with impotence (Niles, 1953:83-84). The call then is to repent, to change the direction of one’s life, for life’s direction is set by this war which God is waging. One has to commit oneself to participation in this activity of God (Niles, 1953:84).

Since Christian salvation and discipleship is the engagement in conflict together with Jesus, the Christian needs focus and discipline. When a war is on, there is only one thing that needs to be safe, and that is the cause for which the war is being fought. If that is safe, all else that needs to be safe will be safe. When there is war, the concerns of the individual take second place, if any place at all. War means that a new direction is introduced into life in
which the direction of each individual life must swing into position (Niles, 1953:84). For Niles, this is what the New Testament means when it talks about God’s righteousness. God’s war with evil sets humankind their life’s direction. Henceforth humankind is called upon to live in alignment with God’s “right”. So that to be safe means no more and no less than to be a seeker of God’s righteousness. He who so seeks finds his salvation added unto him (Niles, 1953:84-85). Some may view Niles’ doctrine of salvation to be below the objective standards of the Protestant Reformation. But this would be myopic. Niles makes plain that the Christian calling to live is “not to try to make something of myself or for myself; rather, it is to share in God’s life, which is poured out for others” (Niles, 1953:85).

As Niles sees it, the definition and test of the Christian life is whether one is able to keep awake with Christ in Gethsemane. The demand is for constant readiness, for that persistent and consistent discipline of the athlete by which he keeps himself always fit. Christian living cannot be undertaken with serious obedience to the admonitions of Jesus Christ (Niles, 1953:86). Niles is then explicit in rebuking the professing Church when he writes that “We who are Christians are too flabby in our interests. We are hoping to seek and serve the Kingdom of God with spare money in spare time. It can’t be done. It is a war in which we are engaged, the war of the great King, and we have to be prepared to live the soldier’s life” (Niles, 1953:86). He goes on to argue that “Our powerlessness in preaching the gospel stems from our failure to realise that the Christian life is lived in Lent. Our lives are too much conformed to the life of the world; we have become indistinguishable. But, not only have we become indistinguishable; we have become isolated. We have lost contact with the world, combatant contact” (Niles, 1953:87).

As he seeks to conclude his Australian series of lectures, Niles weaves all the four themes together, for, he says, they belong together in the Christian life. According to Niles, hope sets life scanning the far horizons, while death gives it depth and cleanness of decision. Love lifts it above the sorrow by which it is surrounded, until it reaches the source of life itself by its single dedication to God. “We are those on whom the end of the ages has come. And we live already as those to whom belong the promise of the resurrection and the present foretaste of its power. But it is Jesus who is king of our world now. The sign of this Kingdom of Jesus is the cross. He rules from it” (Niles, 1953:88-89).
In his usual apologetic note, Niles then adds that the differentia of the Christian faith remains the announcement to human beings who are in the far country that they are children of God, each one known and loved by name. And he who makes this announcement is the risen Christ. It is an announcement made to humanity now, not simply an announcement made long ago about which we read (Niles, 1953:89). But what about those who have never heard this announcement, because no one has introduced them to the risen Christ? Or even those who, having heard it, have not accepted it? Also, what about those who lived before Jesus was born? The Christian faith affirms that Jesus is the judge of all human beings (Niles, 1953:90-91). Niles’ reply is that “it is a question for which we are neither required nor permitted to give an answer” (Niles, 1953:91). Thus it may appear that for all his teaching on hell, Niles himself appears to be weak or ambivalent on the doctrine of hell. Some may see in this the influence of Barth and his dialectical theology. Perhaps the more charitable view is to say that while Niles does not deny the reality of hell he pleads agnosticism on all the finer details of the eternal state of those who are presently ignorant of the name of Jesus. Niles concludes his Australian lectures on preaching by asserting again that the signature of life is written in blood (Niles, 1953:93).

As we have noted before, Niles’ thesis in these Australian lectures was that the content of the preacher’s message has been committed to him. The Kirkus reviewer is quite clear that Niles’ book stands in solid Protestant tradition and that its substance is in harmony with the Church’s Easter message. Niles’ lectures were deemed to be strongly grounded in theology, especially on the centrality of Jesus’ resurrection for the Christian Gospel. But they were also judged to be intellectually stimulating and contemporary enough “to shed a clearer light upon the ever present problem of death” (Kirkus, 1954). Furtado agrees with this; having examined Niles’ writings he explicates Niles’ critique of religion and concludes that for Niles, the Christian gospel was categorically different in its content and intent from all other religions (Furtado, 1978:180-184). More recently, Satyaranjan has sought to analyse Niles’ homiletical theory using the categories of classical rhetoric – logos, ethos and pathos (Satyaranjan, 2009:86-145). With respect to Niles’ Bevan lectures, Satyaranjan notes that for Niles, preaching is for the glory of God since it seeks to lead a sinful humanity to God's self-disclosure in His Son (Satyaranjan, 2009:31-35). In this seemingly human activity of preaching, God Himself is active, and therefore there is compulsion on preacher and hearers.
alike. The content is strictly on the gospel, God’s deed (Satyaranjan, 2009:58-59). Having surveyed and interviewed contemporary Indian pastors and preachers, Satyaranjan concedes that “pastors using the Old Testament passages do not always link them with the Gospels in the New Testament” (Satyaranjan, 2009:239). But he maintains that Niles’ emphasis on the gospel is correct and insists that “such transition is possible and should be attempted. If it is not attempted, not much help is provided in preaching the Gospel” (Satyaranjan, 2009:239). In the context of the Indian Church and its preaching, Satyaranjan discerns Niles’ description of the content of preaching to be accurate. He concludes that the “necessity to recognise every biblical passage as about Jesus Christ, and therefore rightly to constitute the core of the message under preparation, is one of the significant declarations of Niles” (Satyaranjan, 2009:238). We may add that what Satyaranjan sees to be true for the Indian Church is also true and necessary for the global church, both in the East and in the West. As Niles and his first reviewers held, Christian preaching is centred on the gospel, and its message is ‘Jesus Christ and Him crucified’. One challenge confronting the preacher in the face of Niles’ assertions is practical: whether to reflect and analyse the Gospel first with emphasis on its relevance towards the conclusion or allow the gospel preached to speak directly, so that the congregation finds relevance in their own search as God’s Word continues to confront them (Satyaranjan, 2009:239). Another challenge is the fear in some quarters that Niles’ emphasis on the centrality of Jesus Christ poses the danger of neglecting ‘the centrality of the church’. But our survey of Niles’ Australian lectures indicates that Niles does not ignore the role of the Church in the mission of God. As Satyaranjan judges, Niles’ demand to preach the gospel is a welcome corrective to Indian churches; it saves preachers in non-established churches from misusing their texts while simultaneously calling preachers in established church with rigid lectionaries to apply their texts to their contexts, since the presence of Christ is available in its contemporariness (Satyaranjan, 2009:241).
2.5.2 The Preacher’s Task and the Stone of Stumbling – 1957

The book that bears this title was initially Niles’ four Lyman Beecher Lectures on Preaching delivered at Yale in 1957. The Lyman Beecher Lectureship on Preaching at Yale Divinity School was established April 12, 1871 by a gift from Henry W. Sage in memory of Lyman Beecher (1775-1863), who had been a member of the Yale College class of 1797, and later a Presbyterian and Congregationalist minister who held pastorates in East Hampton, Long Island, New York, Litchfield, Connecticut, and Boston, Massachusetts (Library, 2013). Many, if not all, of the printed editions of Niles’ Yale lectures contain an additional chapter entitled ‘The Context of the Preacher’s Task’ which was not delivered at Yale but was the John Knox Memorial Lecture given at John Knox House in Geneva in 1956. John Knox House was conceived in 1953 by some American Presbyterians as a hostel cum study centre where transient visitors and resident students could exchange their travel experiences, share their meals and prayers, and study the Scriptures with professionals from the nearby World Council of Churches.

The Kirkus reviewer thought that Niles, in these Yale lectures, “presents Christianity in its essence and uniqueness as it encounters the other major religions of the world”. Niles' treatment of the Christian message was regarded as “something fresh and new”, concluding that all “Protestant missionaries ought to read and heed this book, but local pastors too will find their own preaching sharpened by Dr Niles' deep understanding of the heart of Christianity and the urgency with which he proclaims it” (Kirkus, 1958).

Niles opens his book with an Introduction where he is unequivocal that the content of preaching is the gospel of God in Jesus Christ which is “set for a sanctuary and men stumble over it. It is God’s deed” (Niles, 1958:13). This content is primary for Niles’ understanding of preaching for he is sure that “it is always the end which controls both the beginning and the process of preaching” (Niles, 1958:14). Niles then outlines his aim for the Yale Lectures by informing his audience that the lecturer seeks to share with them his understanding of the preacher’s task as a “result of many years of evangelistic contact with adherents of other faiths”. Niles cautions his audience by reminding them that in presenting the gospel to
others, the preacher himself is in danger of stumbling over the stone which is laid in Zion, thus making it a barrier between himself and his hearers (Niles, 1958:14).

Niles’ challenge to his audience is that the “only obedience that God asks of the preacher is that he does not attempt to change the shape of that stone in order to make it fit more easily. Jesus Christ is both the preacher’s message and his limitation” (Niles, 1958:15). According to Niles, the Apostle Paul announced the nature of the preacher’s task: we preach Christ crucified (I Corinthians 1:23). It is not a general preaching of God; no such preaching can lead to the Christian faith. The centre, for Niles, is exclusively Christological (Niles, 1958:15). Here we see the usefulness and importance of Niles’ trilogy on preaching for a globalised Christianity. Amidst an increasingly pluralistic society and world, Niles unashamedly maintains that in preaching Christian preachers preach the rock of offence and the stone of stumbling. Yet there is only one reason for Christian preaching, and that is, “lest they stumble” (Niles, 1958:16).

After the introductory remarks, Niles proceeds to deal with the Hindu Objection to the Christian message. Niles warns that any compromise of the gospel means that “we have to rewrite the gospel story in order to fit it in with our compromised narrative” (Niles, 1958:18). Niles may have been trained in Western theological liberalism and unbelief, but at Yale he makes it clear that he is not in complete sympathy with all the various forms of destructive biblical criticism. Whilst he is content to use modern scholarship, he is unwilling to do so uncritically. It is also plain that Niles is not syncretistic (Niles, 1958:19). The goal of preaching, for Niles, is the salvation of people/world (Niles, 1958:19-20).

When expanding on the content of preaching, Niles says that the preacher’s message is the contemporariness of Jesus. The preacher’s task is to have this message known and understood and accepted. “Jesus is in the world now and His ministry is the basis of the preacher’s task” (Niles, 1958:21). This ministry of Jesus, according to Niles, is through the church. But, for Niles, the preacher cannot leave it there. Preaching makes affirmations about Jesus even if it stiffens the refusals of others, especially Hindus. Jesus Christ is the Possessor (Niles, 1958:22-23). Therefore, men and women need to be called to a decision about Jesus Christ. While Jesus is always prior to the preacher in finding them, they may not
avoid the demand that He makes through the preacher to be recognised as He truly is. The live question for the preacher then is this: Who Jesus is (Niles, 1958:24).

In presenting this message, “the evangelistic demand is not only that people accept Jesus as their Saviour and Lord, but that they accept Him also as the Christ, the Son of the Living God” (Niles, 1958:25). In Niles’ understanding, to experience salvation is to belong to the army of the Lord of Hosts; salvation is obedience. For Niles, human beings enter into that salvation according to the measure of their obedience. Obedience is the way into Christian inheritance (Niles, 1958:26). With his emphasis on obedience on the part of human beings, some may see traces of Arminianism or Wesleyan tendencies in Niles (Niles, 1958:27-28). There is no doubt that as a Methodist, Niles’ theology was subject to these influences. But as we said before, those who knew him best indicate that Niles always went to the Bible in order to allow God to speak for Himself. It is therefore more charitable to assume that in stressing here the place of obedience, Niles is simply trying to present truth in all its fullness.

Niles the evangelist presents the purpose of preaching in a slightly unexpected way in this same chapter when he writes that preaching is purposed to build-up the church (Niles, 1958:28). This would seem to indicate that for Niles, preaching is both for the salvation of the lost and the edification of the saints. For Niles, the “members of the community of Christ are both recipients of and fellow workers with that grace of God which is active unto salvation” (Niles, 1958:30). But Niles is persuaded that “the issues of salvation and damnation lie within the ministry of the Christ Himself, while only the issue of salvation lies within the particular ministry and witness of the Church” (Niles, 1958:28). Thus the preacher’s task is to gather into Christ’s church those who are being saved since “there is no Saviour but Jesus and they who are saved are always saved by Him”. For Niles, this is true without qualification (Niles, 1958:29).

In dealing particularly with Hindus and Hinduism, Niles is explicit that he is not Hindu in his belief or approach (Niles, 1958:30-31). He outlines Hinduism’s objections to Christianity as twofold; first, Christianity rules out the salvation of all human persons and this is objectionable to the Hindu. Secondly, the Hindu objects that Christianity rules out salvation through other religions (Niles, 1958:31). Niles responds to this by arguing that Hinduism is
ahistorical. It sees human beings as souls rather than as persons. The Hindu cannot see that salvation is not simply a fellowship of souls but a kingdom – a new heaven, a new earth and a new humanity (Niles, 1958:31).

Niles warns that “we get the preacher’s task all out of focus when we set it in the context of the sovereign activity of God’s grace in redeeming persons for heaven”. However, says Niles, the preacher’s task is firmly set within the context of the activity of God’s redeeming face “as it seeks and finds and makes disciples for his work on earth”. In this way, Niles sets preaching within its Biblical context of the Great Commission (Niles, 1958: 35-36).

In his second lecture, Niles tackles the Muslim objection to Christianity under the title ‘Preaching the Crucified Christ’. Niles is perceptive enough to notice that men do tend to say ‘yes’ and ‘no’ to Jesus at the same time. The Christian preacher must avoid the desire to build his message of Jesus exclusively on the ‘yes’ (Niles, 1958: 40). Specifically, according to Niles, the Muslim response to Christianity is as follows: (I) Jesus is only a man, (II) Christianity is therefore a false faith, (III) God can teach, lead, guide, help but He cannot come and tabernacle among human beings. There is no Immanuel, God with us (Niles, 1958:40).

Niles notices that even in this attitude of refusal in the Muslims, there is the contradictory “yes”. The Muslim recognises Jesus as a prophet but he is not Jesus as set out in the Gospel record. For the Muslim, “God deals with sin by sending prophets to call men to repentance” (Niles, 1958:42). In preaching to Muslims, Niles sees the necessity for a more profound doctrine of sin (Niles, 1958:42). A low view of sin does not demand a deliverer; “not even a prophet is wanted”. All that is needed is to find for each sin its proper guise and so make it socially acceptable. But Niles argues that the Bible speaks about sin “in relation to the act and purpose of God in creation”. Humankind is a dependent being because in him or her there is God’s reflection. But humankind sought to break his relatedness to God, he or she sought independence from God. Thus, “out of the bid to live independently of God’s provision” for human beings has come human bondage to anxiety. Sin robs humankind of paradise (Niles, 1958:43). The only way of reconciliation and recovery is through Jesus Christ (Niles, 1958:47). For Niles, the presentation of the cross of Jesus Christ is the presentation of
God’s glory in saving humankind. There is the act of love (Niles, 1958:50-51). As in the Older Testament, “Jesus is the only way to salvation”, humankind’s “full heritage which now God has made available” (Niles, 1958:53).

Thus, preaching is not merely a proclamation about the nature of God; it is a confession about “what God had done” for humankind, and “therefore for me” (Niles, 1958:57). For Niles, if this is the message, then it should shape the messenger too. According to Niles, “a person who is unable to begin with the phrase ‘I live by faith in’ cannot begin to preach” (Niles, 1958:57). The Christian preacher does not preach himself. “He announces that he has become a servant because of Jesus Christ. If this announcement is missing either in life or in word, then preaching of Jesus Christ is simply the reciting of empty formulae” (Niles, 1958:57).

In his third lecture, D.T. Niles grapples with the Buddhist Objection to the claims of Christianity. If the central objection of the Muslim to the Christian faith is the Crucified One, then the main objection of the Buddhist is to the Resurrection of the Son of God. The title of this third lecture is therefore ‘Preaching the Risen Lord’. According to Niles, Buddhism’s purely ethical formulation of religion leaves an individual with a sense of frustration. Unsurprisingly, many Buddhists have found a release through worship expressed in their devotion to the Buddha himself. Niles concludes that worship means that the ultimate demand on humankind is not the demand of goodness but of devotion. For this reason, Niles extols the Risen Lord as the One who is worthy of worship and devotion.

Niles places the emphasis on the gospel in contra-distinction to other religions (Niles, 1958:60-62). He repeats his conviction that the Christian preacher has a two-fold task: (I) to enlist others in God’s army, (II) to teach soldiers to maintain discipline (Niles, 1958:63). But the danger for any Christian preacher is the temptation to preach religion instead of the gospel (Niles, 1958:63). Niles betrays no doubt in his belief that the gospel is exclusive; only Jesus is Lord and brings salvation (Niles, 1958:66). Thus the content of true Christian preaching is the gospel – the fact that the kingdom has come (Niles, 1958:68).
Niles then proceeds to show the connection between the law and the gospel, calling it the advent of Christ, “a new judgement” (Niles, 1958:68-69). Niles draws an important contrast between preaching the gospel and ‘talking about religion’ (Niles, 1958:70). Preaching is only preaching of the gospel if it is centred on the person and work of Jesus Christ (Niles, 1958:77). This being the case, the preacher cannot alter his message since it is God’s (Niles, 1958:73-74). The preacher’s burden is to make Jesus known; and Jesus Himself is active in the world because of His resurrection (Niles, 1958:77). Niles then changes his language slightly (but not his central assertion) when he writes that the preacher must proclaim the message of grace (Niles, 1958:78).

In his concluding lecture ‘When the Gospel is proclaimed’, Niles summarises his position. He makes it clear that the burden in his previous lectures had been to understand the nature of the preacher’s task and the content of the gospel he must proclaim (Niles, 1958:80). His method of approach has been to look at these questions in the light of the kind of reaction which the proclamation of the gospel evokes in the hearts and minds of those who belong to other faiths. Perhaps for fear of oversimplifying the mystery of preaching, Niles refuses to immediately clarify precisely how God or Jesus is involved in the act of preaching. Instead Niles sticks to the general assertion that Jesus must bring the peoples of this world into His fold. When the gospel is proclaimed, it is to this activity of the Christ that the proclamation bears witness, and it is with this activity that it seeks to cooperate. “God is busy with man” (Niles, 1958:91).

Finally, Niles seeks to ascertain the nature of the existence of the Christian message in a non-Christian world. He has asserted that Jesus already has claims over the entire world, that God is busy with humankind and is toward man, and that God is previous to the preacher in the life of the listener (Niles, 1958:90ff.). Now Niles goes on to outline the four activities of God when the Gospel is proclaimed. According to him, preachers find themselves involved and implicated in Jesus’ continuing ministry to and in the world. God is at work and preachers work with Him. The consequence of what preachers do is subordinate to the consequence of what He does. The preacher’s work is an offering to God and Jesus’ work is what fulfils God’s purposes (Niles, 1958:92).
In explicating the four activities of God when the gospel is preached, Niles is clear that God is, first, present in His activity of salvation. Humankind is engaged in flight from God or in search for God or in acceptance of God. According to Niles, all human beings are involved in all these three attitudes at the same time. This reveals that they are, in all these things, reacting to the action of God upon them in His work of salvation. According to Niles, this is both a preparation and hindrance to finding faith in Jesus Christ (Niles, 1958:92-93). But Niles is certain that the actual living process of men finding faith in Jesus is the work of the Holy Spirit, and is not one that can be described according to one pattern (Niles, 1958:94).

Secondly, God is present in His activity of revelation. Niles distinguishes this from the first activity of God in salvation by holding that God’s intention here is not to save but also to raise a people who would be the messengers of His salvation as the Jews were in the Old Testament church. Niles sees continuity between the ancient and the present church. “The church is continuous with Israel; it is the object and bearer of God’s revelation (Niles, 1958:95-97). The call is to the church to understand and acknowledge Jesus as Saviour and themselves as His people (Niles, 1958:95-96). Therefore if the purpose of preaching is to call participants into God’s work, the first qualification of such a worker is that he must be known as belonging to Jesus Christ and no one else. Niles links this with Christian baptism (Niles, 1958:96-97).

Thirdly, God is present in preaching in his activity of mission. According to Niles, one of the essential distinctive between the Christian faith and other faiths is that the Christian faith can be proclaimed; the other faiths can only be taught (Niles, 1958:98-100). Niles is uncompromising when he says that the Christian message cannot be grafted upon other beliefs or added to them. It can only be accepted by radical conversion to it. This is the new birth (Niles, 1958:99). For Niles, in order to be a Christian, one has to be an evangelist. Quoting Romans 1:1, Niles asserts that the only way to believe in the gospel is to witness to it (Niles, 1958:100).
Fourthly, God is present in preaching in his activity of fulfilment. Quoting Ephesians 1:21-23, Niles is convinced that this activity of God will find its fulfilment when God brings all things under the headship of Christ. For Niles, the activity of Christ will find its fulfilment when He has subdued all who contest His rule (I Corinthians 15:24-25), the mission of the Church will find its fulfilment when it has grown to its full maturity in love (Ephesians 4:14-16) and the ministry of the Holy Spirit will find its fulfilment when the witness of the Church to Christ is done (Acts 5:32). The world at present is in the process of fulfilment; thus preachers cannot describe the process in any simple way: “We see both the scaffolding and the building, both the work being done and the fruit of it” (Niles, 1958:100-101).

According to Niles himself, in the Lyman-Beecher Lectures, he wished to assert and defend his proposition that “the reason why we preach is determined for us”. Humanity “must be led into an acceptance of Jesus Christ as the Lord of their lives and as the Saviour of all” humankind. Hughes Oliphant Old has recently studied these Yale lectures of Niles. In the seventh volume of his magisterial The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church, Old writes admiringly of Niles and his insights. Old appreciates Niles’ grasp of the gospel, of Christian worship, of the place, motivation and realism of preaching. Old is also sensitive enough to agree with Niles that every culture seeks to domesticate the Christ of the Gospels. Old recognises some similarities between Niles and Barth in their understanding of preaching. But whilst Old does acknowledge that “the preacher’s task in Christian lands is quite the same as in non-Christian lands”, he repeatedly speaks of Niles lectures as geared towards evangelistic preaching (Old, 2010:589, 602). It is to be doubted if this is how Niles himself thought of his Yale lectures. It is admitted that the basic premise of Old’s study is that there are five genres of preaching – expository, evangelistic, catechetical, festal and prophetic (Old, 1998:8). Here Old appears to have been influenced by Dodd who posited two types of preaching in apostolic times (Dodd, 1936), a view that has more recently been repeated by Alikin (Alikin, 2010:169). But as we shall show in Chapter Five, Dodd’s position is not without difficulties and his arguments have been challenged by Ridderbos (Ridderbos, 1962:15; 1997:40-41).
Satyaranjan too has written that the “critical principle in understanding Niles is in his distinguishing between ‘Christians’ and ‘Non-Christians’, the latter as people who do not believe in Jesus Christ irrespective of who they are” (Satyaranjan, 2009:111). It is true that in his introduction to these Yale lectures, Niles speaks of his evangelistic contact with adherents of other religions; but he does not use the language of ‘evangelistic preaching’. In fact, he firmly roots himself in biblical theology (Niles, 1958:11), and seems to argue that his lectures are for all Christian preachers since the gospel is always an offence and stumbling block to every human person of whatever culture (Niles, 1958:11-17). As Niles wrote later, the purpose of his Yale lectures was to make clear that “the reason why we preach is determined for us. Men must be led into an acceptance of Jesus Christ as the Lord of their lives and as the Saviour of all men” (Niles, 1959:12). Perhaps the real difficulty is with homileticians’ attempt or system of classifying the various types of preaching. It may be that Old’s different genres of preaching actually have to do with different styles of preaching instead of different kinds of preaching. But it is just as possible that while Old’s observations may be accurate when examining historical data, they are less useful when applied to the biblical-theological data. For Niles, every act of preaching is the proclamation of the gospel; it is an exposition of the Bible since it is a declaration of God’s mighty works, prophetic in that it speaks to the prevailing culture, evangelistic in that it calls all humankind to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, catechetical and festal since it instructs the church and calls her to revel in the joy of her salvation. As Satyaranjan helpfully notes, Niles’ theory of preaching is focussed on both the church and the world. Satyaranjan calls this aspect of Niles’ theory ‘pathos’ and challenges Indian preachers to preach evangelistically to adherents of other faiths but also instructively so that Christians within Indian churches will not be neutral or ignorant in the issues facing God’s world and theirs (Satyaranjan, 2009:246-248).
2.5.3 The Preacher's Calling to be a Servant - 1958

These five lectures, published as ‘The Preacher’s calling to be a Servant’, were first delivered in Scotland as the Warrack Lectures for 1957-1958. In his introductory remarks, Niles reminds his audience that this is the third series of lectures that he has delivered on the work of a preacher. The preparation of these lectures, he says, has helped him constantly to remember the nature of the calling by which a preacher is called and the content of the Gospel which he must proclaim. The alarm is clear: “It is so easy for a preacher to preach, and even to preach well, without being faithful to his message. The voice that bids men prepare the way of the Lord is always and only God’s possibility, and the preacher cannot inherit it except by faith” (Niles, 1959:11). Niles then adds that the limitations which the gospel sets on the preacher because it is the gospel of Jesus Christ has been, in a sense, the controlling theme of Niles’ three series of lectures on preaching.

Niles reminds his hearers that the task of preaching has a momentum apart from the preacher and that the preacher himself is carried by it (Niles, 1959:10). There is no doubt that preaching is a special calling, for while all Christians bear testimony to Jesus Christ, preachers are called also to proclaim the whole counsel of God (Niles, 1959:13). As always, Niles then makes one of his perceptive and critical distinctions when he says that the preacher’s calling is not just to preach, but to be a preacher. It is a person whom the call defines and not a task (Niles, 1959:17). In a broad sense, Niles suggests that every Christian is a preacher since each is called to give the reason for the hope within them (Niles, 1959:17). But Niles insists that a Christian can only “preach” when he or she wins a chance and right to do so. In contrast, those who are called to be preachers have no such difficulty since a minister of a church is usually assured of an audience. As Niles sees it, the temptation for the preacher is to see his calling as 'to preach' instead of being 'a preacher' (Niles, 1959:18).
In the exercise of preaching, Niles argues that preachers do not preach Christ in the abstract. He opines that somehow a true connection must be established between preacher and audience: “the preacher himself must belong to the world of his hearers and they to his”. “The preacher is not a performer”, Niles thunders (Niles, 1959:19). For Niles, the knowledge of God is always mediated knowledge, and quoting Romans 10:14-15 he asserts that preaching is about one person helping another and the medium of mediation is the one world to which both preacher and people belong (Niles, 1959:20). Perhaps in typical dialectical fashion, Niles is quick to add that the Holy Spirit is the only real witness to Christ: “the witness of Christians is but a witness to His witness” (Niles, 1959:22).

When tackling the purpose of preaching, Niles holds that it is to bring the wholeness which is in Christ, His shalom, which is that Jesus is Lord of all (Niles, 1959:22-26). Thus for Niles, the preacher must himself share in the laymen's work by living so to preach that his message illuminates what the layman is doing at work (Niles, 1959:23). In this way, says Niles, peace is determining the truth of the preacher's calling. First, it determines his message since there is peace by Jesus Christ. Secondly, it determines his status since he has to be an expression of the peace of Christ in the one body. Thirdly, it determines his duty since he has to find that peace to which Jesus calls him in the world to which he goes (Niles, 1959:26-27). Therefore, the central question of Niles’s third book on preaching may be summarised as follows: What does it mean for one's daily life in the world that one has dedicated oneself to the task of being a preacher? Niles’ short answer is this: In his daily life, the calling of a preacher is the calling to be a servant (Niles, 1959:27).

As Niles defines it, all true preaching is evangelistic preaching in the sense that it is “preaching both to the believer and to the unbeliever” since, according to Niles, both the “believer and the unbeliever are” often “the same person, whether one is preaching to Christians or non-Christians” (Niles, 1959:27). For Niles, this perspective sets preaching in the context of the world in which it is actually set (Niles, 1959:28). Preachers may therefore assume the ‘previousness of Jesus Christ’ in everything they do and in every activity of the church – worship, sacrament, fellowship and more (Niles, 1959:28-30).
When dealing with the authority and urgency of preaching, Niles speaks of preaching as disrupting other lives. For him, preaching is a sharing in the ministry of Jesus Christ. It is not chiefly obedience to the command of the Great Commission; nor is it primarily motivated by love for others especially the lost or even the need for growth within the life of the Christian community. Rather, for Niles, as Christian preachers, we have entered into the life of Christ (Niles, 1959:30-32). The compulsion to preach is the compulsion of the Holy Spirit.

As a Christian preacher from the Non-Western world, Niles is particularly sensitive to both the cultural and historical divides that must be crossed in the task of preaching. As a preacher trained by Western theologians and an ecumenist, Niles’ insights are particularly helpful to a globalised Christianity (Niles, 1959:30). Niles sees urgency to the preaching task. This urgency is not just because of the afterlife; rather it is the present life, the abundant life. As Niles sees it, the urgency is in the very message that is proclaimed. There was urgency for the apostles, and there is to be urgency in our obedience to the demands of the gospel (Niles, 1959:33-34). According to Niles, the urgency of the preacher's task is not in what he thinks about the nature of the task but in the task itself, since preaching is a calling to share in the continuing ministry of the risen and ascended Lord (Niles, 1959:36). Niles is clear that the task of preaching is to call all humankind and each man and woman to believe in Jesus Christ as Saviour and obey Him as Lord (Niles, 1959:33).

In his second Warrack lecture, Niles examines the testimony of the apostle Paul and reminds his hearers that Jesus Christ was the content of Paul's preaching (Niles, 1959:42). Like Paul, the contemporary preacher is not the servant of the Church or its people; instead he is the servant of God and of Jesus (Niles, 1959:44). The accent remains on the servant-hood for as Niles sees it preachers are servants because Jesus himself is the Servant of the Lord (Niles, 1959:45). For Niles, this is not just incarnational ministry; it is a continuing ministry (Niles, 1959:47).

When Niles seeks to explicate his concept of servant-hood, it becomes clear that he means by this the preacher’s obedience to his Master, Jesus Christ. As a servant, whatever good the preacher receives from his master is the result of pure grace; the servant has no rights and his labour earns him no rewards (Niles, 1959:48). It is sin that pays wages. This idea of
servant-hood is so precious to Niles that he holds it to be impossible for a preacher “to preach Jesus Christ as Lord unless the preacher” himself “can also witness to having been made a servant to others through Jesus” (Niles, 1959:50).

Referring to First Corinthians four, Niles argues that ‘Jesus with ourselves’ is inherent in true preaching and that the two belong together as parts of one theme (Niles, 1959:50). Thus, according to Niles, the preaching of the slave is the result of the joy from the event which his master purchased him, the event in which the slave found a Master in whom he would rejoice (Niles, 1959:51). In this servant-hood, the preacher cannot escape the reality of the cross (Niles, 1959:51). The preacher is not merely called to the service of preaching but rather to be servant to those to whom he preaches (Niles, 1959:52). Niles recognises that it is easy to serve or to be of service, but difficult to be a servant (Niles, 1959:53). Given his experience, he tells his audience that this is especially true of church institutions, where benefactors are bureaucrats who see themselves as bosses; they see themselves as servants of the institutions (Niles, 1959:54). For this reason, Niles is convinced that for the Christian minister, preaching must be linked to a pastorate (Niles, 1959:55).

Niles reiterates that the preacher is nothing other than God's under-shepherd. For this reason, the only question that Jesus Christ addresses to his servants is this: Do you love me? True preaching is maintained by the preacher’s love for his Master, and his Master’s love for His sheep. Niles, provocatively asserts that it is not primarily the love that the preacher bears to his people (Niles, 1959:56). Despite giving an important place to preaching in the Christian ministry, Niles is emphatic that the minister is not only a preacher. He is a servant, and as preacher he declares that Jesus Christ is Lord. Niles goes so far as to say that without this message, the ‘preacher’ becomes a social service agent in the community. The message that Jesus is Lord is central to Christian preaching (Niles, 1959:58). Niles holds that as part of his servant-hood, the preacher must live a life of ‘good works’ by involving himself in friendships and the life of the community that he is in. In Niles’ view, the ‘pure preacher’ who is not involved in any struggle to serve the world at some specific point of obedience can provide people with a theology about their faith but not with a theological understanding of their lives (Niles, 1959:60). Niles calls such ‘peddlers of God's Word’, when they are preachers but not servants (Niles, 1959:60). For Niles then, it is important for the
preacher to identify with his people. With his eye on the context of an emerging Asia, Niles is clear that the arrangements for the preacher’s income or stipend, if it is from overseas or a central office, must not destroy or distort preachers’ connection with those whom they are seeking to serve (Niles, 1959:62).

As he begins his third lecture in Scotland, Niles once again reminds his audience that his main purpose in the Warrack Lectures has to do “with the calling of preachers, the responsibilities of those who are ordained ministers of the gospel” (Niles, 1959:70). He has said before that preaching and ministry is within the context of the church, where love for each other and identification with the community of Christ is centred (Niles, 1959:70-71). Niles concedes that one purpose of preaching is the up building of the church, to ensure that each member of the fellowship will effectively fulfil his or her tasks in the world (Niles, 1959:71). But Niles is also astute enough to notice that preaching brings blessing to the preacher himself. For Niles, love for the brethren, “preaching of the gospel”, and “one’s own share in the gospel's blessing – all three belong together” (Niles, 1959:72).

Then, using the servant-parables of Jesus, Niles further develops his concept of servant-hood. According to Niles, there ought to be no rivalry or jealousy between servants since they are not all equal in their gifts. Although their rewards may be different, the commendation given to each is the same. The dangers facing servants are the dangers of fear, indolence and lack of servant-hood (Niles, 1959:73-74). It is therefore vital that servants regularly acknowledge that the vineyard belongs to the Master and that the time and method of work is also determined by Him (Niles, 1959:74-75). Niles posits that servants must give their complete commitment to their calling (Niles, 1959:76), and always recognise that they are unprofitable servants whatever their achievement may be. “There is never anything owing to us” (Niles, 1959:76-77). According to Niles, a slave does not change his status by being a good slave. The status of the slave is fundamentally a status in relation to his master and to no one else; their relative position to each other is irrelevant. Looking at this same idea from the other direction, Niles says that a servant's obedience is determined by what the master has done and is doing. The Master works and preachers find themselves inevitably involved in their Master’s ministry. Niles sees Jesus' emphasis on servant-hood and connects this with Jesus' theology of the kingdom of God (Niles, 1959:77-78).
For Niles, the Lordship of Jesus Christ is more than a message to be proclaimed; it required of the messenger a particular relationship both to his Lord as well as to his hearers (Niles, 1959:80). When Niles seeks to analyse and explicate the nature of the preacher's relationship with preaching and his Master, he asserts that two activities take place simultaneously in preaching. First, the servant bears witness to His Master and secondly, the Master bears witness to His servant (Niles, 1959:80-81). Thus we may say that for Niles, in preaching, Jesus goes with the preacher.

Although Niles is conscious of the nature of evangelism and evangelistic preaching, his context of preaching is set within the church's ministry. As we have said before, for Niles every Christian is at once a believer and an unbeliever. “The church is called to witness; that is why there are preachers” (Niles, 1959:81-82). For Niles, the preacher’s place of witness is within the Church's service and fellowship. In Niles' view, it is when the three aspects of service, preaching and fellowship come together that there is doxology (Niles, 1959:83-84).

As he concludes this lecture, Niles emphasises once again the place of servant-hood and service in the life of the Church. Service is the Church’s participation in the life of Jesus Christ in the world. Niles assumes that no one could be a servant except God make him and keep him; but the content of this service is “love thy neighbour” (Niles, 1959:84-85). There is therefore a place for personal kindness, for permanent relief of suffering and for a principled stand against sources or causes of evil (Niles, 1959:86-87). For Niles, such service is to be rendered in a spirit of genuine concern and love; it is not to be merely an instrument of evangelism, but a concern for the reordering of society (Niles, 1959:88).

As he begins his fourth lecture, like a good teacher, Niles summarises his central thesis in the previous lectures: “Throughout these lectures, our emphasis has been on the continuing work of Christ” (Niles, 1959:92). He then proceeds to explore the intercession of Christ for His church. “Nothing which preachers do can either have substance or result apart from this ministry of Christ” (Niles, 1959:92). This being the case, Niles argues that the preacher's greatest service is rendered through the ministry of prayer, particularly as Jesus’ prayer for His Church becomes the preacher’s prayer for them also (Niles, 1959:92-93).
But Niles’ understanding of prayer is not superficial. According to him, in prayer, preachers do not bring to God’s disposal all that they have done and seek His blessing. But prayer also teaches preachers what to do (Niles, 1959:93). The preacher’s prayer has certain features. First, the preacher prays in confidence because of the victory of Jesus Christ. Jesus “engages the enemy; we inherit His victory” (Niles, 1959:95). Secondly, the preacher begins by praying for himself as the one who is responsible for praying for others. Niles calls preachers to learn what it is to be loved and to live as those who are loved before they can love the people that they are called to preach to. In Niles’ opinion, the “crucial problem in Christian service lies not at the point where service is rendered but at the point where that service is received” (Niles, 1959:97).

Thirdly, for Niles, Christian witness happens not simply when the witness is heard but when the witness himself is recognised. Therefore the real prayer of a true preacher is that his hearers may know “God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent” (Niles, 1959:97-99). Fourthly, the preacher prays as Jesus prays for His disciple: He prays for the safety of their faith (Niles, 1959:100). The preacher prays that his hearers may live in obedience to God’s word and that there would be unity in God’s family. Truth has no saving power except as it becomes the means of sanctity, so that where truth becomes an excuse for strife, it becomes a weapon in the hands of the evil one (Niles, 1959:101). Fifthly, the preacher prays for those whom in the name of Jesus the preacher seeks to win to Jesus’ discipleship. The good towards which all preaching is set and all witness is given is the creation of missionary communities. Salvation of souls is God’s business; the business of preachers is to participate in His saving ministry and to win participants for it (Niles, 1959:101-102). Sixthly, like Jesus, the preacher prays that the church would remain in the world and not escape from it; that the Christian community would not settle down into soliloquy. All this is in full knowledge of the promise that Jesus through whom the word was spoken will remain committed to perform it both in the world and in them (Niles, 1959:102-103). Niles notices that five times Jesus prays to be recognised as having been sent by the Father and that the Father should be recognised as having sent Him. ‘Who do you say that I am’ - everything depends on the answer to that question. Niles notes that this witness to Jesus and the Father cannot be borne except preachers abide together as witnesses. True witness is the witness of the one fellowship (Niles, 1959:105). On the content of preaching, Niles is unequivocal as ever:
The whole aim of religious preaching is to make God relevant to men, to domesticate Him and make Him serve men’s needs. The aim of Gospel-preaching, on the other hand, is to make men relevant to God, and to win them for the service of God’s purposes. The ultimate concern of the preacher is not men and their needs, not even their religion; his concern is with Jesus Christ who asks that He be known and recognised as having come from the Father (Niles, 1959:105).

For Niles, the Holy Spirit was the answer to Jesus’ prayer; in all that the Spirit did, the apostolic witnesses saw the glory of the Son (Niles, 1959:108). On the question of Judas and his disobedience, Niles maintains that even in his lostness Judas is within the working of scripture. Nothing happens outside God, not even a man’s self-destruction. Human beings cannot cut ourselves away from God even by desperate sin (Niles, 1959:110). Niles draws this particular lecture to a conclusion by reiterating that his burden in these lectures is to tell his audience that the call to preaching is a gift from God. But all gifts, in order to be received, involve a sacrifice. In these lectures, Niles has set out what that sacrifice is and how it is to be made (Niles, 1959:112).

In his final lecture in Scotland, Niles quotes from Acts 3:26 that Jesus Christ was crucified, but God the Father raised Him from the dead and “sent him to you … to bless you in turning every one of you from your wickedness”. “The risen and ascended Lord is at work and preachers are called to work with him. Indeed, this work of Christ is the basis of the preacher’s calling” and also determines the nature of the preacher’s task and how he will do it (Niles, 1959:115). Within this context, Niles explains how the preacher will find Jesus and experience his fellowship. According to Niles, Jesus promised this presence in the worship, the witness and the service of the Church. He is referring here to the worship especially in the Eucharist, the witness of the Word and the church’s service to the poor (Niles, 1959:115). According to Niles, Christ is present in the world as its servant and present in the church as its Lord (Niles, 1959:116). His aim in his final lecture is to “meditate upon His work so that we meditate upon His work we ourselves may be led to meet Him, and in that meeting find our Master” (Niles, 1959:116).
In his typical evangelistic note, Niles remembers that the Hindu finds it easy to speak of Jesus as God incarnate but he will not accept Him as Saviour. The Buddhist is willing to speak of Jesus as Lord but is not willing to accept his grace. The Muslim is willing to speak of Jesus as prophet but will not accept his forgiveness (Niles, 1959:123). But the Christian preacher has only one message which he cannot change: Jesus Christ is Saviour and Lord.

Niles is clear about his thesis for his Warrack Lectures: “the proof of what we preach is promised to us”. For Niles, there is no guarantee of the truth of the preacher’s witness except that it is caught and held within the witness of the Holy Spirit to Jesus Christ and of Jesus Christ to himself. According to Furtado, in seeing the witness of preaching within the context of the divine activity, Niles’ theology is able to avoid “both the pitfalls of liberal-theological interpretation of history and the general lack of historicity attributed to Barth’s theology” (Furtado, 1978:150). In examining Niles’ emphasis on the calling of the preacher, Satyaranjan notices a tension in Indian Christian contexts. According to him, congregations in established churches “more often look to the message than the messenger” (Satyaranjan, 2009:242). Previous knowledge of the preacher does not condition the expectations of the congregation, especially in the case of historic churches who indirectly vouch for the preacher’s overall ethos as suitable to become a pastor or minister by the church’s appointment. According to Satyaranjan, the situation is different in non-established, independent churches where the ‘ethos expectation’ is high as they demand biblical standards in the life of the preacher (Satyaranjan, 2009:242). The latter expect the life of the preacher to be conformed to the gospel preached; the theological integrity of their message is not questioned if the preachers’ lives meet the ethical demands. As Satyaranjan notes, these two views have serious practical implications within the church (Satyaranjan, 2009:243-246). Those who argue against ethos considerations in preaching would hold that God speaks and the preacher is just an instrument for that divine communication. On the other hand, if one is truly confronted by the text of the Scriptures, it becomes difficult to preach since sin or failure in submitting to the gospel is overwhelming to the preacher. As we shall see in a later chapter, Bullinger appears to come close to the former view in his statements on preaching in the Second Helvetic Confession. While we appreciate Satyaranjan’s careful outlining of the practical consequences of these two seemingly opposing views, it would be simplistic to draw a complete dichotomy between these two
positions in relation to Niles’ homiletical theory. Whilst Niles insists on the preacher’s calling to be a servant, he has already insisted in his Bevan Lectures that the only true message of the Christian preacher is the gospel. Using Satyaranjan’s own categories of analysis, we may say that the *logos* and *ethos* are inseparable in Niles’ theory of preaching.

2.5.4 The Context of the Preacher’s Task - 1956

Although the address that is entitled ‘The Context of the Preacher’s Task’ is, in a strict sense, not part of Niles’ trilogy on preaching, it is an address that is included in the printed editions of Niles’ Lyman Beecher Lectures. For completeness sake, it would be prudent to take a brief overview of this lecture which Niles originally delivered as the John Knox Memorial Lecture at Geneva in 1956.

Niles begins this address by asserting that the task of preaching is to proclaim that God has wrought redemption for humankind; and that human beings live their lives in the face of God’s deed and respond to His work. “He who is confronted by a preacher is confronted with the necessity of decision” (Niles, 1958:103). In Niles’ view, the decision is unavoidable because in preaching, God works with the preacher’s witness. For Niles, the one is the context of the other: “We are preachers because God has made us such. We preach because something is happening and has happened to us” (Niles, 1958:104).

As always, Niles places importance on the conversion of the preacher when he writes: “Something has happened to the witness himself” (Niles, 1958:105). Thus in preaching, “The preached word is active in saving the preacher and the preacher knows it. The preacher also knows that it can save the hearer”.

Moreover, Niles argues that true preaching demands that “the preacher should always be part of” the congregation. The preacher “must always also be directing the word to himself. He must also be part of the evidence that his word is true. From the sparks that fly from” that process the message proclaimed “draws its fire”. But Niles does qualify his expectation by conceding that it is not necessary for the preacher to pinpoint a precise moment in his
life when he was converted. For Niles, it is essential that a Christian be able to say, ‘I am being saved’ (Niles, 1958:105).

As Niles sees it, the preacher cannot preach unless God be working in the preacher. Likewise, preachers cannot preach with effect unless God be working in their hearers too. But “previous to the preached word is the activity of the Word himself”. Quoting John 10:16, John 12:32 and Luke 11:23, Niles concludes that preachers work with God and not just for Him (Niles, 1958:107).

2.5.5 Niles’ Sermons

When we test our conclusions against some of Niles’ preached sermons, we find that Niles was a practitioner of the same homiletical theory which he professed in his lectures on preaching. We have chosen here two sermons of Niles, ‘Behold I make all things new’ and ‘Summons at Midnight’. They have been chosen because they are among Niles’ best known sermons. But they are useful also because in the first Niles makes a passing reference (Niles, 1968:326) to Jesus’ ministry in Nazareth’s synagogue (the subject of Chapter 5 of this thesis) and in the second sermon Niles deals with the work of evangelists and evangelism, giving much insight into his understanding of those who are called to share the gospel.

In his sermon at the opening of the WCC Assembly at Uppsala in 1968, he begins with the Biblical text from Revelation entitling his sermon, ‘Behold, I make all things new’. Throughout this sermon, he expounds on the word of God and applies it to the context of his listeners; as Visser ’T Hooft wrote of Niles’ sermons, they are “at the same time existential and full of the richness of the Biblical message” (Thompson, 1970). Jesus is the central content of Niles’ sermon: “Yes, we shall, because the victory is already promise and potency in Jesus Christ” (Niles, 1968:326). The calling of the Christian Church in general and the preacher in particular is clear: “The promise which we ponder points to all mankind, but it will carry no conviction until we have allowed it to become promise fulfilled in us”, adding “we must be able to say, ‘We know Him of whom we speak’” (Niles, 1968, pp. 328-329).
Thus we observe Niles’ emphasis especially on the inward calling of those who declare the gospel. As he develops his sermon, Niles, quite naturally and organically, introduces the two consequences that face the preacher, acceptance and rejection: “we do not know who will be wheat and who will be tares on the day of harvest. The possibility of conversion is the heart of the gospel” (Niles, 1968:331). Concerning the nature and character of preaching, Niles gives an insight. We are aware that in this sermon, Niles is addressing the Church and not preachers only; still his words are significant when he says: “Only as we watch can we serve a living God, can we be prepared to follow where God leads…. Oh for the eyes to see what God is doing and how He is doing it! Oh for the courage to move!” (Niles, 1968:332).

We see here Niles’ understanding of preaching as a human activity within the divine. The purpose of preaching for Niles, as always, is worship: “if we shall have established that here we worshipped because here God drew near to us and we to Him, then we shall have given proof that we did hear His promise and believed Him” (Niles, 1968:328).

But these themes are not new to Niles. They emerge and re-emerge in a sermon which Niles delivered at the evening service of the WCC Assembly at Evanston in 1954. In ‘Summons at Midnight’, Niles’ primary theme is evangelism and our preacher begins with Scripture in Luke 11:5-6. He immediately sets his sermon in its Biblical and his existential context before proceeding to make clear that “the man traveling at midnight either comes or refuses to come …Some others come just to shake their fists in the faces of those who keep a light burning but have no bread” (Niles, 1954:1037). Thus the dual consequences of the gospel and its preaching are set-out early in the sermon. As he warms up to his text, Niles is clear on the content of true preaching: The “task of the church is to proclaim God’s Son as the hope of the world. This means that Jesus is the hope of men in all the complexities of their relationships” (Niles, 1954:1038). But this message of the gospel is proclaimed within the context of love: “When the church ceases to be concerned with the world, then it ceases to hear God speak to it; for God’s conversation with the church is a conversation about the world”. As Niles touches on the calling of the church and its evangelists, his language is similar to what he has used to describe the calling of preachers, especially the inward calling. He calls evangelists to “expectant prayer asking God to help us find new friends for Jesus, when we take seriously the need of keeping watch over ourselves lest they who come
to us find no evidence of our friendship either with Jesus Christ or with them..” (Niles, 1954:1038). Later, Niles formulates this sense of calling as expectant love, a caring “sufficiently for people as people” (Niles, 1954:1038-1039). As he expounds on this essential love, Niles becomes increasingly profound and mystical as He speaks of the presence of Jesus and the working of the Holy Spirit in the activity of evangelism and proclamation. When the preacher is at his limits, “there is another Friend to whom we may go, one who has promised to provide us with bread whenever we ask... The answer to the prayer for the Holy Spirit is always Yes!”. For Niles, the failure of the church is the “refusing to be led by the Spirit into the wilderness, there to be tempted by the devil”. Too often the church, its evangelists and preachers “seem to prefer to go to the cross some other way” (Niles, 1954:1039). Thus we see in Niles’ practice the application of his own homiletical theory – that preaching demands the calling of the preacher, the content of true preaching is the gospel of God in Jesus Christ, the dual consequences of preaching, and the character of Christian preaching as a mystical human activity within the divine energised by the Holy Spirit. The impulse for preaching, according to Niles, comes from that fact that “The love of Christ controls us” (Niles, 1954:1039).

Our cursory survey of Niles’ sermonic practice may appear to some to be too brief to allow us to make an accurate assessment of Niles’ homiletical theory. But there are good reasons for the approach we have taken here. First, as we made clear at the beginning (see Section 1.2.1) , the limited aim of this thesis is to use Niles’ trilogy on preaching for the dialogue between Eastern and Western Christian homiletics. In deploying practical-theological methodology, we undertook a descriptive study on how Daniel T Niles viewed preaching by doing a literature-analysis of his trilogy of lectures on preaching. According to Osmer’s categories, the method was qualitative, especially of a case-study research (Osmer, 2008:32-34). A direct or deep analysis of Niles’ own sermons is therefore beyond the scope of our present undertaking. Secondly, as Old has made clear, Niles’ sermons to his fellow Ceylonese are not accessible to researchers since the preacher appears to have only used brief notes which were decipherable to him alone (Old, 2010:589). Thirdly, Satyaranjan has already analysed some of Niles’ sermonic material and reflected on them together with contemporary practitioners of preaching in India. The fruits of his research are now
available in English and his analyses and conclusions have been used in our study (Satyaranjan, 2009). Fourthly, Niles’ lectures on preaching were themselves sermons. As we quoted Visser’T Hooft above:

“When I asked a friend in Scotland who had heard Dr Niles deliver these Warrack Lectures what he thought about them, his first remark was: “These were not lectures, but sermons”. I think he was right and I have reason to believe that my friend D.T. Niles will not quarrel with that description. On the contrary! (Hooft, 1959:9)

Thus while our study may not have entered into a full or direct conversation with all of Niles’ preached sermons, we can be confident that our study of his trilogy on preaching has given us all his key convictions on preaching. It is also significant that in his analysis of Niles’ homiletical rhetoric, like us, Satyaranjan came to the conclusion that Niles’ sermonic materials showed his preaching to be Theo-centric, Christ-centric and Gospel-centric (Satyaranjan, 2009:146-262).

2.6 Summary

There can be little doubt that Niles’ theory of preaching is eminently suited for a dialogue between Christianity in the East and West. First, Niles was a theologian who was trained in the East and in the West. Secondly, he was a Biblical theologian whose thinking was chiefly rooted in and emanated from his study of the Bible. Thirdly, he was an independent and original thinker; as we have seen (see Section 2.4), though he came under the influence of liberal theology and dialectical theology at different times, he showed himself to be no slave of any one theological system. Fourthly, Niles was a global thinker who never abandoned his Asian roots and continued to serve his local and national churches while being involved in the wider, international ecumenical movement. In the words of Satyaranjan: “Niles was primarily a South Asian Christian with close affinity to India. He stood at the crossroads of the Asian church, Asian religions and cultures, and served as their representative before the Western church and cultures” (Satyaranjan, 2009:147). According to Thompson, Niles
“remained resolutely Asian ... D.T. was never completely at home in Europe or America. His European clothes never seemed to fit properly; he was more at home in white robes and sandals”. (Thompson, 1970). Kyaw Than described Niles as “this Asian man of God” (Kyaw Than, 1971). As we shall see later (see Section 7.3 below), many Indian theologians lack the international dimension that was the privilege of Niles, and many Indian preachers then lacked and today continue to lack the wide exposure, diverse training and deep theological friendships which Niles enjoyed. Fifthly, as an ecumenist, Niles believed in a global Christianity with unity amidst all the diversity. He was recognised as “among the greatest Christians Ceylon has ever produced, and he is certainly the greatest contribution which the Church in Ceylon has made to the World Church” (De Soysa, 1971:64). Sixthly and perhaps supremely, Niles saw himself chiefly as a Christian preacher. According to Visser’T Hooft, despite his various responsibilities, Niles’ “most important work was surely in preaching and pastoral care” (Visser’ T Hooft, 1971:121). De Soysa remarked: “how greatly he would have suffered if he could not preach as he had done all his life with that magnificent voice and in those resounding, majestic and unforgettable phrases” (De Soysa, 1971:65). All these factors then make Niles a suitable, even unique, facilitator for the dialogue between Eastern and Western Christian homiletics.

As to the salient features of Niles’ homiletical theory, we have shown that in true Protestant tradition, sermons must always be rooted in the authoritative Scriptures if there is to be true preaching. Niles is clear that the Christian preacher does not preach himself but declares the gospel as the Word of God. Niles also sees the message preached and the actual act of proclamation as belonging together in one great divine activity, and, according to at least one eyewitness who heard him preach, Killinger at Princeton (Killinger, 1996:173-174), Niles left his hearers under the impression that in authentic preaching they were in the presence of God. But while Niles openly insists on the preacher’s calling to be a servant and thus demands a personal fellowship with Jesus Christ, Bullinger appears to be more reticent on this. This is an area that we hope to explore in Chapter Four.
Meanwhile, our survey of Niles’ trilogy of preaching has given us his views on the calling to preach, the content of preaching, the context of the preaching act, the purpose of preaching, the authority for preaching and the way in which God is active in the act of human preaching. As mentioned afore and in Niles’ own words, the first of his trilogy focussed especially on the content of preaching, the second particularly on the purpose of preaching and the third especially on the calling and the proof of the preacher. It is clear that Niles did place much stress on the calling of the preacher to his preaching task. Although Niles does not centre his understanding of the preacher’s calling in terms of ecclesiology, Niles is in no doubt that there is such a concept as ‘calling’. In fact, he goes further by insisting that this call is a meeting with the risen Christ. Using the Hebrew prophets and their example, Niles argues that this call is personal. For Niles, the preacher’s calling is three-fold; it is first a calling to be a Christian, then to be a servant and only finally to be a preacher.

Niles is also emphatic that the content of true preaching is to be the work that God has done in Jesus Christ for a sinful humanity. For him, this message of the gospel is what distinguishes Christian preaching from all other religious teaching. With respect to the character and nature of Christian preaching, Niles tends to refer primarily to the previousness of God and the contemporaneous Jesus. But even in this reference to preaching as being an activity within God’s activity, Niles is mindful that preaching is often in the gathered assembly of the Church or in the scene of evangelism (Satyaranjan, 2009:48, 61).

Our study of Niles’ trilogy has shown that Niles is clear that preaching has a three-fold purpose; it is for the salvation of human beings, the upbuilding of the Church and the nourishment of the preacher himself. Niles was always the evangelist-preacher and he saw it as his duty to call men and women, boys and girls, to God’s deed for them in Jesus Christ. For this reason, Niles also saw preaching as witness. But Niles was not oblivious to the fact that preaching was necessary for the preacher himself and the word of preaching was the means for strengthening of the Church.
Niles roots the authority of Christian preaching in the three-fold history of the Hebrew prophets, the apostles of the New Testament and Jesus Christ himself. Niles places emphasis on the Great Commission and the witness of the Church to the ongoing ministry of the risen Christ. He conceptualises this in his ideas of the ‘previousness of God’ and the ‘contemporariness of Jesus Christ’.

When we seek to explore how, according to Niles, God is involved in the activity of preaching, we see that Niles does not neglect the role of the Holy Spirit. But Niles prefers to explain the fourfold activity of God in the human act of preaching in his own terms. First, God is present in preaching in His activity of salvation; the actual living process of men finding faith in Jesus is the work of the Holy Spirit. Secondly, God is present in His activity of revelation. God’s intention here is not to save but also to raise a people who would be the messengers of His salvation as the Jews were in the Old Testament church. Thirdly, God is present in preaching in His activity of mission. This means that the new birth makes a person a witness to the gospel. Fourthly, God is present in preaching in his activity of fulfilment. The world at present is in the process of fulfilment. When God is active in the act of human preaching, God will bring all things under the headship of Christ, the Church will grow to its full maturity in love and the Holy Spirit cause the witness of the Church to Christ to fructify.

As we seek to continue a Reformed dialogue with Niles’ theory of preaching, it is essential that we now turn to consider some theories of preaching that were influential at the time of the Protestant Reformation in Europe.
3.0 Reformation Theologies of Preaching

3.1 Introduction

Our overall aim is to bring Niles’ theology of preaching into a dialogue between Protestant Christianity in the East and the West, especially pertaining to the mutual elements underlying the view on God’s presence in the preaching event. It is therefore necessary to study the theories of preaching which were prevalent during the Protestant Reformation in Europe of the sixteenth century. This will also set the context for the next chapter where we shall investigate Bullinger’s famous statement that ‘the preaching of the word of God is the word of God’. This chapter is also fitting since Niles himself came from the Protestant tradition with his background and service in the Methodist Church (Furtado, 1978:8-10). We shall progress by visiting and examining the theories of preaching held by some of the key magisterial reformers; Zwingli, Luther and Calvin have been selected due to their accepted status as leaders of the reform movement, and the availability of their writings (Old, 2002:2-3). Erasmus will help us to put the age of reform into its proper context since he was the key forerunner of the reformers, although he himself refused to officially join them (Rummel, 2008).

3.2 Background and Historical Context

In focussing on the reformers in an age of reformation, it should not be concluded that there was no good preaching in the medieval church. As Old (Old, 2002) has exhaustively documented, there was a great deal of good preaching before the advent of the reformers. Indeed, Old argues that there was continuity between the preaching of the classical Protestant Reformation and the preaching which had gone before it (Old, 2002:1). As Edwards has recently outlined, the preaching of the medieval church was steeped in both learning and devotion, and its form was highly cultivated and richly endowed, even if it was too institutionalised (Edwards, 2010:179-205). But Old is probably correct in his judgement
that the coming of the Reformation led to new attention being paid to preaching – its authority, purpose and its place in Christian worship (Old, 2002:2-3).

It must also be clarified that in examining the magisterial reformers, we are not oblivious to the contributions of the ‘Radical Reformers’ (Williams, 2000). Luther often referred to them as ‘enthusiasts’ or ‘fanatics’ since he saw them as constant thorns in his side. In Luther’s experience, this group included Munzer, Karlstadt and others who were pushing for more radical changes in theology, ministry and worship (Packull & Dipple, 1999). But the stream of the ‘Radical Reformation’ is much broader and Verduin has robustly argued that these ‘radical reformers’ are best understood as the ‘stepchildren’ of the reformers (Verduin, 1964). This is not the place to settle the dispute between the reformers and their radical counterparts. But it would suffice to say that in studying Niles’ theory of preaching and seeking to engage in a Reformed dialogue with it, our focus has to be limited to the key figures of Erasmus, Luther, Zwingli and Calvin.

Cameron has recently highlighted the scholarly consensus that is aware of the dangers of seeing the Reformation as one uniform, homogenous, monolithic movement (Cameron, 2012). The Reformers came from diverse backgrounds and faced their own unique challenges and responded to these in their own ways. Thus in seeking the theology of preaching during the period of the Reformation, we are not necessarily seeking a uniform theological position. Instead, we ought to be prepared to meet theories of preaching which have different emphases placed upon them by the different reformers. But as Cameron also makes clear (Cameron, 2012:X), there was a theological “core” that united the Reformers and much of their differences may be due to their different personal temperaments, individual circumstances and vocabularies.
3.3 Desiderius Erasmus on Preaching

For a very long time, Erasmus was a forgotten hero of the Church, and his work on preaching, Ecclesiastes, remained one of his least studied writings. The scene has changed and we now live amidst a renaissance in Erasmian studies (Telle, 1982), with special interest on his Ecclesiastes (Weiss, 1974). Our present focus is on Erasmus’ theology of preaching especially as it is contained in his Ecclesiastes.

3.3.1 Erasmus the Man

Desiderius Erasmus was probably born in Rotterdam on 27 October 1466 (Huizinga, 2002:6) into a family that came from nearby Gouda (Dickens & Jones, 1994:22). He was almost certainly illegitimate (Huizinga, 2002:6), his father, Roger Gerard later becoming a priest. Despite this, his parents cared for the young child until their premature death in the plague in 1483. Erasmus was then given an education in a series of monastic and semi-monastic schools before being admitted into the priesthood in 1492. For over two decades, Erasmus was an Augustinian canon on indefinite leave as secretary to the Bishop of Cambrai. He never seems to have served as a priest (Dickens & Jones, 1994:20-26), for his ambition was to pursue academic theology.

After his consecration, Erasmus travelled to study at the University of Paris, then a chief learning centre and appears to have come under the influence of Italy’s renaissance culture (Dickens & Jones, 1994:29-32). From 1506 to 1509, he spent time in Italy, especially with the publishing house of Aldus Manutius in Venice, although according to Huizinga, his active association with Italian scholars was limited (Huizinga, 2002:62-68). From Italy, Erasmus appears to have moved to Louvain where he was criticised for his progressive work on

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literary and religious criticism. He saw such vehemence as persecution and sought refuge in Basel (Huizinga, 2002:89-90). Here under the safety of Swiss kindness, Erasmus became productive, surrounded by friends and the scholarly publishers Froben. Though he was offered many positions of honour and profit throughout Europe, Erasmus seems to have preferred to remain independent and concentrate on his scholarship (Huizinga, 2002:55-86).

It was during his visits and stays in England that Erasmus began to carefully examine the manuscripts of the New Testament with a view to preparing a new edition and Latin translation (Dickens & Jones, 1994:33-46; Huizinga, 2002:79-86). In 1516, this work of Erasmus was published by Froben of Basel and quickly became the standard upon which was based most of the scientific study of the Bible during the Reformation (Huizinga, 2002:82-83). It was the second edition of Erasmus’ New Testament that was used by the translators of the King James Version of the English Bible (Werrell, 2013:62-82), and later became known at the textus receptus. Erasmus’ was the first attempt by a competent scholar to ascertain what the writers of the New Testament actually said. It may be that this was Erasmus’ chief service to the cause of Christianity (Jenkins & Preston, 2007), for Martin Luther’s movement began in the year following the publication of Erasmus’ work.

Huizinga opines that Erasmus was irenic by nature (Huizinga, 2002:117-129). When the debate between Martin Luther and the Roman Church gathered pace, Erasmus was under pressure to choose between the two but found this difficult. Although he had criticised the follies of the Roman Catholic Church, Erasmus saw himself as a churchman. And although he had the greatest respect for Luther as a person and was in sympathy with the main points of Luther’s theology, Erasmus declined to commit himself to Luther’s cause. Erasmus believed that such commitment would put at risk his position as a leader in the movement for pure scholarship; this he saw as God’s purpose for his life. Erasmus seems to have been convinced that he could best influence the reform of religion by remaining an independent

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7 In England, Erasmus made lasting friendships with John Colet, Thomas More, Thomas Linacre and William Grocyn. He was even made the Lady Margaret’s Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, staying at Queen’s College in Cambridge, see Dickens and Jones, Erasmus, 33-46
Of course, Luther interpreted this as an avoidance of responsibility on the part of Erasmus and perceived Erasmus as lacking in courage and purpose. In their debate over the freedom and bondage of the human will, Luther went so far as to claim that Erasmus was not a Christian (Dickens & Jones, 1994:115-148). Perhaps, this was an over-reaction. The Roman Catholic party was certainly keen to maintain the services of Erasmus. But with time, they became disillusioned with his reluctance to take sides and began to suspect disloyalty (Dickens & Jones, 1994:267-286).

This is not to suggest that Erasmus had an inconsistent or incoherent attitude towards the Reformation (Dickens & Jones, 1994:267-287). Erasmus’ literary output was often critical of the practices of the medieval church, and sometimes challenged its doctrine and organisation. He believed that Europe needed to be freed from the shackles of formalism and he applied his learning to critiquing the administration of public affairs in Church and State. Although Erasmus was aloof from all entangling obligations of Church and State, he was committed to the true sense of the literary movement of his time. According to Dickens and Jones, the scholar in Erasmus was inherently averse to political and social upheavals and dislocations (Dickens & Jones, 1994:148-169). He appears to have sought a reformation through a long and slow regeneration by the use of learning and scholarship. Perhaps, Erasmus’ weakness was that he failed to offer any tangible method of applying his reforming principles to the existing church system. As the Reformation progressed, radicalism and revolt became increasingly common, and Erasmus was happy not to have thrown his lot in with the Protestants. In 1529, Basel was officially reformed. Soon we see Erasmus giving up his residence there and moving to Freiburg im Breisgau, the imperial town, where he thought he could maintain his neutrality under Roman Catholic conditions (Huizinga, 2002:170-178).
In 1535 Erasmus returned to the happiness of his home in Basel, and there on 12th July 1536, surrounded by his friends, he passed away (Huizinga, 2002:179-187). For as long as he lived, Erasmus was “never called to account for his opinions by the authorities of the Medieval Church. The attacks on him were from private individuals, whilst his protectors were always men of high standing” (Huizinga, 2002:185).

3.3.2 The Ecclesiastes of Erasmus

The Ecclesiastes or On the way to preach was one of Erasmus’ last major works before his death. It is a long book, an operis sylvam as the author himself calls it. Erasmus’ aim was to help produce effective preaching; hence the title, De ratione concionandi. The book was written after persistent requests, suggestions and encouragements from Erasmus’ friends and admirers (Huizinga, 2002:181). According to Bene, John Becar of Borselen was one of the earliest persons to make such a suggestion to Erasmus in 1519 (Bene, 1969:372-377). Perhaps the length of time intervening between 1519 and the production of the book in 1535 indicates the discomfort within Erasmus about writing the Ecclesiastes. It is possible that the man who had never served as a parish priest was diffident about writing on the matter of preaching for although Erasmus had studied the Church Fathers, he appears to have had very little preaching experience. Only two so-called sermons by Erasmus survive – the Concio de puero Jesu and the De magnitudine misericordiarum Domini concio. Both are adaptations of classical panegyric oratory. We cannot be certain if either of these sermons was ever preached by Erasmus. The former was in fact intended to be delivered by another – a puer. This being the case, it is arguable that apart from a few instances early in life, this great theorist never actually preached in public! To his credit, Erasmus himself appears to have been painfully aware of this limitation and expresses his discomfort with the subject matter of the Ecclesiastes in a letter to his friend John Lasky (Erasmus, 1928). Nevertheless, he laboured on the book throughout the years and it was finally published in Basel by

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8 The Latin text used here is from Desiderius Erasmus, Desiderii Erasmi Opera Omnia, ed. J. Leclerc, 10 vols. (Leiden, 1703-06), reprinted by Hildesheim in 1961. There is an edited and abbreviated English version; the one used here is Ecclesiastes or The Preacher: An Essay on the Duties of a Public Religious Instructor, Chiefly Taken from A Latin Treatise on This Subject by Erasmus, (London: Rivington, Faulter and Gardner, 1797).
Froben, the same year in which John Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion* was published by the Basel printer Thomas Platter (Huizinga, 2002:182).

Although Erasmus himself remained dissatisfied with the *Ecclesiastes*, many of his contemporaries held it in high regard. Wolfgang Capito of Strasbourg, for example, opined that he could not remember having read any book that was more fruitful for him or for his times, finding the books second only to Saint Paul in its ability to inspire and move him (Hartmann, 1942:375).

Commercially, the publication appears to have been successful for its circulation was wide and printings immense and repeated. In terms of the reform of preaching, it is difficult to gauge the influence of the *Ecclesiastes*. Erasmus did propose that the Church should institute a training programme for preachers, according to which bishops would train clergymen in the art of rhetoric (Erasmus, 1797:3-5) and the Council of Trent did refer to the *Ecclesiastes* while implementing reforms (Dickens & Jones, 1994:291-298).

As a book, the *Ecclesiastes* is divided into four sections. Erasmus clarifies that these four sections cover three themes. The first section is a discussion of the nature and primacy of the preaching office (Erasmus, 1797:8-9) and the qualities necessary for such an office (Erasmus, 1797:16-21). Preachers are the light of the world (Erasmus, 1797:8), messengers of the Lord of Hosts (Erasmus, 1797:9) and ambassadors of God (Erasmus, 1797:81-82). Erasmus is clear that preachers ought to be men with regenerate hearts (Erasmus, 1797:16-17), their characters marked by maturity (Erasmus, 1797:4), experience, purity (Erasmus, 1797:18-20), humility (Erasmus, 1797:21), deep spirituality, obedience, gentleness (Erasmus, 1797:28-42), faithfulness, love (Erasmus, 1797:24-26) and high intellectual competence (Erasmus, 1797:3-5; 58-59). The next two sections contain a summary of communication techniques that a good preacher ought to possess. It was Erasmus’ conviction that a

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9 The book went through four editions within the first year and nine editions, authorised or pirated, within a decade.
preacher ought to have a background in rhetoric and hermeneutics in order to accurately exegete scripture and craft a sermon (Erasmus, 1797:58-59). The fourth section provides a list of topics that, in Erasmus’ opinion, are worthy of sermons and scriptural references. This final section is also filled with practical examples and illustrations.

3.3.3 The Convictions of Erasmus

According to the Ecclesiastes, the duty of preachers is to “lay before their hearers the will and commands of the LORD and Sovereign of the world and exhort them to obedience” with the aim of promoting “the public peace, the welfare and happiness of society” (Erasmus, 1797:2). Thus, Erasmus assumes that the doctrines of Christ when preached can or will transform the lives of the hearers. This he implies will improve human behaviour and lead to a happy home and an orderly and peaceful society (Huizinga, 2002:182). This change is possible because the preacher learns a heavenly doctrine, then transfers it to his hearers thus enabling a right and peaceful relationship with God. In his hermeneutics, Erasmus urged preachers to combine historical and allegorical interpretations of the scripture since for him, the allegorical was simply the building upon of the historical biblical tradition. Stylistically, Erasmus encouraged preachers to learn from the tradition of classical rhetorics and to use this to improve their ability to deliver sermons (Erasmus, 1703-1706:769-770). In this Erasmus was probably following the footsteps of Augustine who in the fourth book of his De doctrina Christiana justifies the use of certain principles of classical rhetoric by the Christian preacher while arguing for a distinctively Christian rhetoric based on the text of scripture (Augustine & Robertson, 1958:ix-xxii). Before Augustine, probably from the time of Origen, the homily dominated Christian preaching. Origen’s preaching followed the exegetical practice of the grammaticus of the classical tradition and the homily was consequently a loose exposition of the text of scripture, often containing comments on the text verse by verse (Edwards, 1995:189). With time, a more topical approach appears to have emerged, but the biblical text remained the grounding of the discourse, even if interpretation oscillated between the literal and allegorical (Carroll, 1984). The technique was that of a schoolmaster teaching his class the text and an orator addressing an assembly
of citizens since the homily was an *explication de texte*. Thus, these patristic and monastic forms were literary rather than dialectical in method, affective rather than cerebral in vocabulary. Major change appears to have taken place in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries with the writings of Guibert of Nogent and Alan of Lille (Old, 1999:329-333) that dealt with exegesis, the importance of preaching and the spiritual condition of the preacher and his hearers. Alan produced a moralistic definition of preaching as “an open and public instruction in faith and morals” (Lille, 1981:16-17).\(^{10}\) This definition was adopted, adapted and commented upon during the next three centuries by the scholastics for whom preaching was central. They saw their task as three-fold: *legere, disputare, praedicare* – to lecture, to debate, to preach. By 1936, Charland had discovered about one hundred and fifty *Artes praedicandi* - textbooks on the method of preparing and preaching sermons - written during the scholastic period (Charland, et al., 1936). Although they showed some reverence for the patristic and monastic homily of the Church fathers (Charland, et al., 1936:344), the sermons of the scholastics had highly developed structures of theme, pro-theme, prayer for divine aid, repetition of theme, division and often three clearly delimited and related parts. These thematic sermons were animated by the technique of the dialectician in debate rather than the technique of the grammarian in the classroom (Dargan, 1905:290-309). A century later, in another development in preaching, the sacred *oratio* emerged, distinguished from the patristic and monastic *homilia* and the scholastic *sermo* (O’ Malley, 1979). In contrast to the long, rambling homily, the new form provided ‘holy speeches’, real speeches with exordia, perorations and all the other characteristics that good rhetoric prescribed. Its root probably lies with Pier Paolo Vergerio the Elder (McManamon, 1996) who in 1393 delivered a funeral oration for Francesco da Carrara il Vecchio using the principles of demonstrative oratory (Gouwens, 1999). With time, the principles of demonstrative oratory began to be applied to the central doctrines of the Christian Church.

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Thus it is fair to conclude that Erasmus lived in revolutionary times in terms of preaching theory and practice. According to O'Malley, the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries mark a transition from a scholastic to humanistic appreciation of the art of preaching (O'Malley, 1992). Traversagni of Italy wrote urging the new style of oratory then being developed in Renaissance Italy (Traversagni, 1986) and Johann Reuchlin wrote his Liber congestorum de arte praedicandi in 1504 introducing certain aspects of classical rhetoric and rejecting the dialectical basis and highly systematised structure of the Artes manuals. In 1519 and again in 1529 and 1535, Melanchthon contributed to this debate with his De officiis concionatoris. At about this time, Veit Dietrich a Lutheran wrote his Ratio brevis et docta piaque sacrarum concionum tractandarum. Both these works implicitly rejected the thematic sermon and bear little resemblance to the Artes. In 1529, Nicolaus Herborn published his Methodus praedicandi verbi divini, a sixty page humanist manifesto on preaching, calling the church to the Bible and the Church fathers. Erasmus was probably aware of these developments, and although he seemed to believe that there were forms of classical rhetoric that could and should be employed for the reform of preaching, Erasmus in his Ecclesiastes discloses doubts about the extent to which demonstrative oratory was the appropriate Christian adaptation of classical rhetoric for the pulpit (Erasmus, 1703-1706:769-770).

### 3.3.4 Erasmus’ Theology of Preaching

From the Ecclesiastes, it seems that Erasmus’ understanding of preaching might be called Trinitarian. For him, preaching is the free communication of God’s word to the flock of Christ, the declaring of the will of God to His people and the distributing among them of the treasures of heavenly wisdom (Erasmus, 1797:5-6). This exercise is important for the attainment of eternal salvation. It is God’s message and will that is declared. Erasmus agrees with the Apostle Paul that the excellency of the power of preaching is of God (Erasmus, 1797:23). The preacher is to place all his trust in God in the face of opposition to his message (Erasmus, 1797:25); for a good and faithful preacher is one who is gifted by God (Erasmus, 1797:43) and speaks as the oracle of God (Erasmus, 1797:35). At the same time, preaching is the exposition and communication of the Logos, Christ Jesus. Erasmus
emphasises that it is the Logos who quickens the dead and gives efficacy to the means of grace (Erasmus, 1797:10). A mind that is filled with Jesus “the Truth” and a heart saturated with the Holy Spirit, will produce a speech that is sound and nourishing for the people of God (Erasmus, 1797:9-14). After making clear that the preaching of “wicked men” is to be shunned because they feed poison, Erasmus goes on to write of the faithful preacher as one who speaks of heavenly things because in that preacher’s heart Christ dwells by His Spirit and his conversation is consequently innocent, holy and pure (Erasmus, 1797:15). Arguing for the role of the Holy Spirit in preaching, Erasmus holds that it is the Spirit that influences the soul of the preacher, communicates its power to the language which flows from it. The regeneration of the heart is a matter for God. The role of the preacher is to plant and water with diligence, earnestly beseeching God to give the increase (Erasmus, 1797:16). Faithfulness to Scripture must be accompanied by faithfulness to the Spirit of God. For Erasmus, there is in the preaching event the co-operation of the preacher with God. While God is sovereign and powerful, the preacher’s endeavours and exertions are just as important, for when the preacher’s talents are faithfully used, such use is met with divine assistance and the ministry becomes productive. Erasmus goes so far as to assert that the whole reason for failure is to be imputed to the preacher’s indolence, who has not been “workers together with God” (Erasmus, 1797:57). For Erasmus, when the preacher exerts his energy in study and preparation, the exercise of the preacher’s natural or acquired powers and talents will be strengthened and improved by the Holy Spirit. According to Erasmus, if God finds in preachers a healthy body, a pleasing utterance, a happy articulation, a quick understanding, a retentive memory; if He finds natural endowments, improved by the art of reasoning, the rules of rhetoric, or by the pursuits of philosophy - the Holy Spirit will turn them all to the further advancement of religion, and to the increase of God’s glory (Erasmus, 1797:58-59).

O’Malley describes this “an original and profound thought” from Erasmus. As we shall see below (see Sections 3.5 and 3.6), for all their learning, neither Luther nor Calvin appear to have been able to explain clearly the meeting of the divine and human elements in preaching. Luther seems to have assumed that where the Word is preached, there Christ is present with His people. Calvin gives primacy to the role of the Holy Spirit in preaching, but
fails to explain how the human word is used by the Spirit or transformed into God’s Word for His people. Erasmus leaves no such lacunae. He is clear that the Holy Spirit uses the gifts and diligence of the preacher in a mysterious way and in the preaching event there is a transubstantiation of the Word.

It must however be conceded that though such thoughts and passages are theologically profound, they are rare in the *Ecclesiastes*. Early in his study, Erasmus indicates that the preacher’s words will not accomplish their spiritual goal unless the Spirit of Christ dwells in the preacher, thus giving the human words “a hidden efficacy” since only God transforms hearts (Erasmus, 1703-1706:5:773). In this way, the preacher has a special relationship to the sermo dei or the verbum Dei, Christ Himself (Erasmus, 1703-1706:5:772). Unfortunately, as the work develops, Erasmus fails to formulate a comprehensive theology of preaching, a theology of the relationship between the divine word and the human minister of that word. He does not explain if or how or why the word of God has power and acts in a way that is different from the word of a merely human orator.

This limitation in the *Ecclesiastes* might be due to Erasmus’ epistemology. Although Erasmus did more than any other scholar to take the Church back to the Fathers and the Scriptures, he appears, as Huizinga concludes, to have been more a humanist than a theologian (Huizinga, 2002:188-194). His starting point in the *Ecclesiastes* is secular rather than scriptural (Shuger, 2014: 63-64). He begins his treatise by stating that the purpose of the sacred concio is “to explain to the promiscuous multitude the edicts, promises, and will of the supreme prince and to persuade the multitude to accept them” (Erasmus, 1703-1706:5:770). For Erasmus, the sacred appears to have been patterned after its secular counterpart. The genus deliberativum was the most politically oriented of the three genera, and according to O’Malley (O’ Malley, 1988), there are indications that Erasmus never fully liberated himself from that political model, concerned as it was with law, order, correct behaviour and obedience. He explicitly defines the concio as having to do with “duplex politia”, sacred and secular (Erasmus, 1703-1706:5:769-771). For Erasmus, the concio
addressed to a vulgar audience assumed ignorance, ill will and vice on the part of the hearers (Erasmus, 1703-1706:5:771,906,968-69,976-77,1046).

Significantly, Erasmus does make the distinction between the sacred and secular. When writing about the preacher’s calling, Erasmus is clear that a sense of calling is important, and as high standard is expected in the state and secular government, even so, high standards of character, conduct and competence must be demanded of men who claim to be called by God (Erasmus, 1797:3-5). Erasmus’ dominant and implied paradigm for preaching however emanates from more moralistic and political presuppositions. He places preaching in the class of the genus suasorium or deliberativum. In classical oratory, there is the judicial, deliberative or demonstrative genre. In Italy, sermons were invariably described as orationes and located as by Traversagni in the genus demonstrativum, the genre of ceremonial oratory, the art of praise and blame. Melanchthon analyses the matter and argues for a new genus, that of didascalicum or didacticum (Willimon & Lischer, 1995:328-330), seeing preaching as a teaching function of the church. For Melanchthon, exhortation was an integral part of good preaching, although it remained subordinate to the teaching of correct doctrine. He makes allowances for the genus demonstrativum but repudiates the way he thought it to be practiced in Italy (Wels, 2008). Like most other writers, Melanchthon minimises the use in the pulpit of the genus judicale, courtroom oratory in defence and indictment (Melanchthon, 1531:cols. 419-429). But when Erasmus entitled his work De ratione concionandi and consistently referred to sermons as conciones (contiones), he seems to have placed the sermon in the genre of deliberative oratory. In O’Malley’s view, this shift imbued preaching with a more didactic and moralising quality than that of the genus demonstrativum. The concio was a specific type of deliberative oratory in which a leader addressed a popular and perhaps unruly audience of ordinary people, and not sophisticated statesmen in the Senate (Erasmus, 1797:1-4). Until Erasmus, Christian writers appear to have rarely used the word ‘concio’ and even more rarely used it to refer to Christian preaching. The most important Christian text using the term was Jerome in his work on Ecclesiastes, where he equates the Hebrew Qoheleth with the Greek Ecclesiastes and the Latin Concionator. Remarkably, Erasmus frequently calls preaching the distributing

11 Traversagni, Margarita, 33, 84-85, 139-67
of heavenly wisdom (Erasmus, 1797:6) and the content of preaching as heavenly wisdom, which is the duty of preachers to impart to others (Erasmus, 1797:17).

Erasmus gives little justification for preferring to perceive preaching as a *genus deliberativum* or for calling the sermon *concio* (Erasmus, 1703-1706:5:857-859,877-887). With time, his influence meant that persuasion rather than the presentation of doctrine began to dominate preaching. Admittedly, Erasmus used the term *concio* broadly and he was so concerned for the preaching of true doctrine that in the fourth part of the *Ecclesiastes* he provides a sample listing doctrinal topics for use by preachers. But it seems that on balance, Erasmus was more concerned with inculcating and persuading good morals and ethically correct behaviour than he was to any other end (Chomarat, 1981:2:1128). His placing of preaching in the *genus suasorium* certainly tends to give this emphasis (O’ Malley, 1988). Erasmus does speak of preaching as ‘prophecy’, although he defines this as an ability to provide exposition of the mystical sense of scripture and a persuasive imparting of its wisdom (Erasmus, 1703-1706:5:798,818,825). It is probably for this reason that his homilies are far removed from the blunt proclamations of the Old Testament prophets. Perhaps, Erasmus was aware of and obedient to the prohibition of apocalyptic preaching by the Fifth Lateran Council of 1516 (Kiragu, 2011:143-144). And so it may be that it was not confrontation but the teaching of prescriptive and ethics-related wisdom that was the task of the Erasmian ‘prophet.’

This discussion on *genera* is important because the choice of *genus* subtly does influence the content, purpose, and mood of the sermon. Another shortcoming of Erasmus’ *Ecclesiastes* is that Erasmus fails to locate and examine preaching in its liturgical context. Preaching is part of Christian worship, but Erasmus does not provide any guide on his understanding of the relation between the two. Erasmus gives the impression that, for him, preaching is an address on a sacred subject to a popular audience (Erasmus, 1797:1-2). But surely it is more, especially when set in the context of Christian worship (Old, 2002:2). It is an address within a determined, and to some extent determining, setting. For this reason, it seems that the Italians were closer to the point when they regarded preaching as part of the
genre of demonstrative, ceremonial oratory. Another theological problem with the *Ecclesiastes* is that Erasmus fails to address adequately the issue of the relationship between rhetoric and the text-relatedness of preaching. In the history of Christian preaching, in the confrontation between rhetoric and exegesis, the latter has usually won (Old, 2002:2), with the classroom technique of exegesis incorporating into the sermon some stylistic and exegetical devices of secondary or literary rhetoric. But primary rhetoric or oratory was practically abandoned in the process. The classroom is not the marketplace; the teacher is not the politician-orator; the text is not an immediate crisis. The result was the homily or some variation of it.12

Erasmus’ *Ecclesiastes* is an original, learned and monumental work that stands proudly in the history of Christian preaching. It may be criticised for being too long, lacking practical guidelines or not answering all the questions (Hyperius, 1577:Folio 18-29). And although it does not provide a comprehensive theology of preaching, it remains a superb book that still repays careful study.

### 3.4 Huldrych Zwingli and His Theology of Preaching as expressed in *On The Preaching Office*

The second figure under discussion in this chapter is Huldrych Zwingli. The transition from Erasmus to Zwingli may appear abrupt, but this is not so. According to Goode, “Erasmus laid the egg of the reformation and Zwingli hatched it” (Goode, 1916:49).

The Reformation period brought to focus some extraordinary men. Luther issued his theological challenge to the Medieval Church. Calvin used his subtle mind to produce an influential theology. Melanchthon became the great systematiser and Bullinger earned his

reputation as an irenic synthesiser (Locher, 1981:280). One name tends to be relegated, even forgotten: Huldrych Zwingli of Zurich (Shaw, 1981:ix-xvi). This could be because Zwingli was somewhat unique in Reformation history, for he was the most important Swiss Protestant reformer whose movement did not evolve into a church tradition. In recent years, scholars have sought to correct this oversight.\(^{13}\) Our aim in this section is to survey briefly the life of this oft-neglected man and to examine his theology of preaching as found in his *On the Preaching Office*.

### 3.4.1 Zwingli - the Man

Huldrych Zwingli was born in 1484 in Switzerland into the family of a free peasant who also served as a village magistrate.\(^{14}\) Zwingli’s family had clerical connections; his mother Margaret Meili was the sister of the Abbot of Fischingen in Thurgau while his uncle Bartholomaeus Zwingli was the priest of Wildhaus, who later became dean of Wesen (Goode, 1916:32).\(^{15}\) Huldrych was educated at Wesen before moving on to Basel in 1494 and Berne in 1496 (Potter, 1976:8-10). In 1498, Huldrych went to university in Vienna and later moved to Basel in 1502 from where he graduated in 1504 (Potter, 1976:11-21).

At university, Zwingli came under the influence of Thomas Wyttenbach (Goode, 1916:35-44)\(^{16}\) and began to appreciate the doctrines of the supremacy of Scripture and the sole Mediatorship of Christ. This fortified his opposition to indulgences and the papacy. After being ordained as a priest in 1506, Zwingli began his pastoral ministry in Glarus where he also studied Greek, Hebrew and the Church Fathers (Potter, 1976:22-28; Goode, 1916:43-44). At about this time, he started following the Renaissance movement, even becoming a correspondent of Erasmus (Potter, 1976:43-44). Zwingli also served as chaplain of the Swiss

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\(^{13}\) Locher, Pipkin, Furcha, Potter, and Stephens have done some of the best recent works on Zwingli, among others.


\(^{15}\) After debating methodology, Goode traces the people and places that influenced Zwingli. According to Goode, his uncle Bartholomew Zwingli was most formative for Zwingli’s theology, see Goode, *The Reformed Reformation*, 32

\(^{16}\) After Bartholomew Zwingli, Wyttenbach was most formative for Zwingli’s theology, Goode, *The Reformed Reformation*, 35-44
Army and opposed the use of mercenaries in warfare. This conviction led to controversy and hostility in Glarus, and in 1516, Zwingli moved to Einsiedeln (Potter, 1976:28-41). At this new place, Zwingli’s evangelical understanding of the Scriptures became prominent. According to Potter, it was in the quietness of Glarus that Zwingli’s “faith in God and the Christian revelation grew in intensity as reading and experience brought further reflection. His acceptance of the creeds was never in doubt, but now his mind turned even more to exploration of their full meaning and implications” (Potter, 1976:39). In 1518, despite some opposition, Zwingli was appointed *Leutpriester* at the Grossmunster at Zurich (Wandel, 1990:38). It is commonly thought that although the position was neither prestigious nor financially advantageous, it did offer Zwingli much scope for preaching. Scholars are unable to provide a satisfactory English rendering of the term *Leutpriester*. Elton holds that the term is “usually and rather inanely translated literally as ‘people’s priest’”. He prefers the term ‘common preacher’ (Elton, 1999:66). Potter argues that although this is what Zwingli later made of the office in Zurich, the duties were not primarily those of preaching so much as the ‘cure of souls’, including baptising, marrying, burying, giving extreme unction to the dying, hearing confessions and saying mass (Potter, 1976:40). According to Wandel, the *Leutpriester* was not the parish priest: he did not receive the tithes or all the oblations and customary payments. For Wandel, neither the term ‘Public preacher’ nor ‘lecturer’ conveys the impression of the pastoral duties expected (Wandel, 1990:38). Thus it may be that although Zurich did not offer Zwingli a primary preaching station, he turned it into one, using the pulpit to great influence. Jackson writes that for all his social reforms, Zwingli thought of himself first of all as a simple and plain preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Jackson, 1912:131).

Although little remains of the preaching of Zwingli, the evidence that is available suggests that he tended to preach series of expository sermons (Bromiley, 1953:90-91). He began his Zurich ministry with an orderly exposition of Matthew’s gospel. According to Wandel, Zwingli’s sermons were adeptly packed with lively applications (Wandel, 1990:38-39). Bullinger viewed Zwingli as a gifted, eloquent and effective preacher.\(^\text{17}\) Zwingli’s sermons

\(^{17}\) Heinrich Bullinger, *Reformationsgeschichte*, ed. J.J. Hottinger and H.H. Vogeli, (Frauenfeld, 1838/40), vol. 1, 12
were organised, well structured and highly attractive to the listeners. One person in his congregation on Pentecost 1518 was a man named Heido. Zwingli preached on the story of the paralytic from Luke 5:17-26. This was Heido’s verdict:

I was greatly charmed by a discourse of yours, so elegant, learned, weighty, fluent, incisive and evangelical, wholly such as recalled the energy of the old theologians…. That discourse, I say, so inflamed me that I began at once to feel a deep affection for Zwingli, to look up to and admire him (Goode, 1916:2-5).

If Zwingli’s preaching style was inspiring, the contents of his sermons tended to be deeply scriptural, strongly doctrinal and clearly evangelical. The Humanist, Beatus Rhenanus of Basel heard one of Zwingli’s sermons and wrote on 6th December 1518:

I know well that you and your companions support the pure doctrine of Christ, not according to the mutilation of the scholastics, but as shown in its truth and clearness by an Augustine, and Ambrose, a Cyprian and a Jerome, While the others bring forward their babbling about the power of the pope, of indulgences, of purgatory, of their invented miracles, of vows (of monkhood) or of hellish punishments. But you bring forth in your sermons the leading contents of the doctrine of Christ as if it were painted on a table, how Christ was sent by God to earth to teach us the will of the Father and to bring it about that the world with its riches, its honour, its dominion and power is despised and the heavenly Father is sought with a whole heart (Goode, 1916:53).

Unsurprisingly, the evangelical nature of Zwingli’s sermons proved provocative, and helped to stir revolts against fasting and clerical celibacy in Zurich (Potter, 1976:73). This was probably the spark for the Swiss Reformation that is usually dated to 1522 (Gordon, 2002). In January 1523 Zwingli held a disputation with the vicar general of Konstanz at Zurich’s Town Hall (Potter, 1976:128). In preparation, he had published his challenging 67 Artikel. Most clergy in his district accepted his main theses and thus clerical celibacy was increasingly disregarded and liturgical reform initiated. Part of the plan was to reconstitute the cathedral school as both a grammar school and a theological seminary to train Reformed pastors (Gabler, 1986:66-71). In October of that same year, there was a second

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18 Potter calls this the “first rift”, Potter, Zwingli, 74
disputation. This concerned the removing of images from the churches (Potter, 1976:131-133). Here Zwingli and his friend Leo Jud won the argument and steps were taken in 1524 and 1525 to remove images from places of worship, suppress organs, dissolve religious houses, replace the Mass with a simple communion service (Potter, 1976:133-150), reform the baptismal office, introduce bible readings or prophesying, reorganise the ministry (Potter, 1976:151-159) and prepare a translation of the Bible in the language of the people of Zurich, which Zurcher Bible appeared in 1529. Zwingli himself publicly married Anna Reinhard on 2nd April 1524. By this time, the Swiss Reformation was unstoppable. With the help of the Roman Catholic theologian Johann Eck the five forest cantons of Luzern, Zug, Schwyz, Uri and Unterwalden resisted the Reformation but strategic cities like Basel and Bern supported Zwingli (Potter, 1976:153-158).

While Zurich gave Zwingli the opportunity to carry his reformation message, it was also the place of many personal trials. There, Zwingli experienced the pain of the plague of 1519, his own illnesses and the loss of his brother in 1520. But the reformer remained faithful. In 1531, at the outbreak of the Second War of Kappel, Zwingli followed the Zurich forces as chaplain and was killed in battle. He was succeeded by Bullinger at Zurich on 9th December (Potter, 1976:413-416).

3.4.2 Zwingli’s On the Preaching Office

On the Preaching Office was written in June 1525 at a time when the church in Zurich was reforming and Zwingli’s radical opponents were insisting on the fullness of Christian liberty, the right and duty of every Christian to preach and read the Word of God even when untrained. But it was a time of conflicts all around. Internationally, Zwingli was in disagreement with Luther on the matter of the Lord’s Supper. Both agreed that the Eucharist is not a sacrifice and rejected the medieval notion of a change of substance in the sacrament. But Luther took the words “This is my body” seriously and appears to have held it as the real presence of Christ’s body and blood in the Lord’s Supper, although he believed that the real presence was not in place of but in, with and under the bread and wine.
Zwingli’s temperament could not countenance such subtle metaphysical distinctions. He was convinced that the word “is” meant ‘signifies’, and so “did not refer to a real presence but simply the divine presence of Christ or his presence to the believer by the power of the Holy Spirit as signified by the elements” (Potter, 1976:287-315). Zwingli’s position disturbed Luther and his followers and they refused to recognise the Swiss Reformation as a true evangelical movement (Potter, 1976:170). Despite the attempt at reconciliation in 1529 at the Colloquy of Marburg, the difference of opinion on the sacramental presence remained and Luther refused the hand of fellowship extended by Bucer and Zwingli (Gabler, 1986:131-138).

Within Zurich, especially from 1525 onwards, Zwingli was opposed by a radical group that rapidly became dissatisfied with his reform programme. This radical group was the Anabaptists who sought radical change with the abolition of tithes, a separation between church and state, the creation of a pure church of true believers and the ending of infant baptism (Potter, 1976:160-197; Estep, 1996). Conrad Grebel, Felix Manz and Balthasar Hubmaier rejected Zwingli’s reforms as insufficient and began to re-baptise and hold religious meetings in homes (Goertz, 1996). According to Kidd’s sources, on January 21, 1525 some Anabaptists gathered in the house of Felix Manz in Zurich. After prayer, “George Blaurock rose to ask Grebel” to baptise him. “Grebel complied with this request and then Blaurock proceeded” to baptise the rest. Soon they were leading prayer meetings in Zurich homes. Those who experienced regeneration were baptised by sprinkling. Having thus instituted believers’ baptism, they proceeded to celebrate their membership in the fellowship of Christ by a simple observance of the Lord’s Supper. A few weeks later, a case of immersion occurred, and after Easter, Hubmaier was baptised in Waldshut by Roubli (Kidd, 1911:454-455). Zwingli recognised that if the evangelical work in Zurich was to triumph, some order needed to be imposed. It is against this background that he wrote *On the Preaching Office*, to reject some of the demands of his opponents and to explain his teachings from scripture. We know little concerning the effect that this publication had in

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19 For an almost daily account of the Anabaptists, spirituals and other radicals at the edge of the Reformation, see George Huntson Williams, *Radical Reformation*, (Truman State University Press, 2000)
Zwingli’s time. Furcha opines that the Anabaptist case was not greatly affected by it (Furcha, 1984:149).

The style of *On the Preaching Office*[^20] is overtly polemical. The author defends his beliefs by referring to the Scriptures whilst openly quoting and criticising the principles and practices of his more radical opponents who Zwingli calls self-styled apostles. In his preface, Zwingli gives the motive for his writing:

> (S)everal people have been so bold as to go, without approval by a bishop or parish council to neighbouring parishes, running, ringing bells, preaching what they pleased, and rebaptizing, thereby causing great unrest and rebellion. On top of it all, they claim to do the right thing and to have been sent by God. To them I want to show in like coinage that they have not been sent by God and that such conduct must not be tolerated by any parish unless it be permitted by the unanimous decision of the entire parish (Zwingli, 1984:154-155).

Zwingli’s arguments in the treatise are based largely on “the teaching that was current at the time of the apostles” (Zwingli, 1984:155). He provides a study of Ephesians 4:11-14, systematically outlining the functions of Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Shepherds and Teachers. According to him, Apostles are messengers sent out “to preach the gospel”, teaching “the world to know God and itself” (Zwingli, 1984:156). For Zwingli, this is the highest of all such tasks; the Apostles were unique in that Christ sent them out “into the world without preparation or provisions for the road” (Zwingli, 1984:157). Interestingly, Zwingli appears to suggest that preachers are successors of the apostles. Like the Apostles, preachers too have a commission to teach, and consequently “all those who preach have no other office than the one the apostles had” (Zwingli, 1984:156-157). But Zwingli is clear that preachers today are different from apostles in that the apostles were the first group to be sent out into an alien, unbelieving world under much hardship, and they were given special authority to pronounce forgiveness of sins (Zwingli, 1984:157). Zwingli concludes his study of the Apostles by castigating the self-styled apostles of his own time who:

[^20]: The text used here is from *Selected Writings of Hukdrych Zwingli*, H. Wayne Pipkin (Trans.), H. Wayne Pipkin and Edward J Furcha (Eds.), Volume 2, (Penn: Pickwick Publications, 1984)
do not preach at all, yet want to be called apostles. They appear with a pomp, which exceeds that of the tyrants of this world. It is impossible for them to be apostles or messengers, for not only do they not follow the word, they do not even concern themselves with it. For this reason, those are not apostles either who preach the word, yet remain permanently in their parishes (Zwingli, 1984:157-158).

Next, Zwingli analyses the term ‘Prophets’. He insists that prophets were once people who predicted the future. But he holds that “with us” a prophet’s primary task is to “pluck up, tear down and destroy whatever is set up against God and that he build and plant, on the other hand, what God desires” (Zwingli, 1984:158). Zwingli then goes on to teach that during New Testament times, when the entire Biblical canon was as yet incomplete, those who “made known the meaning of Scripture to the entire church” (Zwingli, 1984:158) were designated ‘prophets’. The Scriptures at the time of the New Testament were largely the Old Testament, and so there was the necessity for interpretation and explanation to the Gentiles and the Diaspora who may have lost touch with Hebrew language and culture. For Zwingli then, a prophet has a twofold mission: He is to pluck down all that is ungodly whilst seeking to build up all that is good, and he is to interpret the Biblical languages and make Scripture meaningful to the Church.

The third group that Zwingli tackles from Ephesians 4 is ‘Evangelists’. For Zwingli, evangelists are “none other than the prophetic office, as long as ‘prophet’ is understood to be one who plucks up and plants. He is really none other than a bishop or pastor...from 2 Timothy 4:5...it follows, therefore, that evangelist and bishop is the same office” (Zwingli, 1984:161). Using this hermeneutic, Zwingli holds that in terms of teaching, the office of evangelists is no different from that of apostle. The only key difference is that while apostles were itinerant and had simple lifestyles, every bishop resides in the place in which he is bishop or pastor and is allowed to have a family and enjoy material possessions. Here Zwingli scores points over the dissenters at Zurich:

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21 This refers to translation from one language to another, see Zwingli, On the Preaching Office, 159
22 Zwingli calls this the task of interpreting the meaning of Scripture, foremost the Old Testament, Zwingli, On the Preaching Office, 161
Where in all this are those trouble makers who disturb the simple by saying, ‘Your pastor should not have his own house; he ought to be lodged with other people and (adding a bit later), if he has his own house, he is unable to speak the truth.’ Yet Paul says again in I Timothy 3:4, when speaking of the office of bishop, ‘A bishop ought to manage or master his house well and honourably’ (Zwingli, 1984:162).

For Zwingli, preachers are those “who preach the gospel ...those who teach and lead us by their good example” (Zwingli, 1984:164). Thus it suggests that the words of preachers are as important as their works. After this, Zwingli proceeds to “providing proofs that there were at the time of the apostles resident, benefited pastors, evangelists, prophets or bishops” (Zwingli, 1984:167-172).

Next, Zwingli deals with ‘Pastors and Teachers’. He defines pastors as guardians, and argues that the role of the pastor is connected “almost everywhere with that of the evangelist” (Zwingli, 1984:172). Zwingli makes extensive references to the teachings of Jesus and the apostles on the function of the pastor as a guardian who provides pastoral care for the people of God. Every congregation needs these guardians or overseers “so that the bold, reckless goats may be controlled by the authority of the church and not by that of the guardian” (Zwingli, 1984:181). The doctors of the church are “those who teach and who, in the other sense of that word, are prophets (as we have shown above), who teach everyone and of those who are being prepared to teach others in the languages or else, of all who are teachers, prophets and evangelists” (Zwingli, 1984:172). On the preaching office, Zwingli is clear:

Not all of us ought to be preachers, as Paul indicates in I Corinthians 12:29.... Therefore it is gross arrogance of these self-appointed preachers to appropriate all offices to themselves and despise whatever they themselves cannot do...There were several thousand believers in Jerusalem, but no more than twelve messengers. Here all of them are messengers. Whoever has gone to a German school and has learned how to spell gets up in front of the congregation and spells it out.... I know places where they were unable to read Scripture. They stuttered over it so that it became apparent that they were just learning it.... No good Christian would ever appropriate any of these offices to himself except he were either sent by God, chosen by the
church or the apostles (which is nothing other than a calling and commission) (Zwingli, 1984:174-175).

Hereafter, Zwingli develops from both the Old and New Testaments the idea of a calling from God and commissioning by the Church as the public attestation of a preacher (Zwingli, 1984:175-180). He writes of an ‘inner call’ where Christ calls people into the preaching office, makes them submissive and obedient to His word and endows them with a spirit and disposition of peace (Zwingli, 1984:179-180). As for the outward sign, Zwingli writes of a free, public election by a congregation, which is absent in the lives of Zwingli’s detractors. Moreover they do not seem to fit the categories of Ephesians 4. If they are said to be apostles, they “do not travel among unbelievers but steal among believers, confusing those who before were of one mind and peaceable” (Zwingli, 1984:180). If they are bishops, they are not chosen by a congregation. They are not prophets and teachers either. Zwingli concludes that they are “nothing but troublemakers” (Zwingli, 1984:180).

Towards the end of his writing, Zwingli meets possible objections to his arguments. The second of these is important for his theology of preaching. John 3 says, “The one whom God has sent speaks the words of God”. This seems to suggest that everyone who speaks God’s word is sent by God. Zwingli argues that this kind of understanding is simplistic. For him, the context of the words is important. In this passage, the reference is to the words of Christ (Zwingli, 1984:181). In any case, even if the words do secondarily refer to those sent by God, Zwingli argues that it could not refer to the “troublemakers” since they are not sent by God. Secondly, for Zwingli, to say that the one whom God has sent speaks God’s words “does not lead to ‘whoever speaks God’s word has been commissioned to the office of apostle or bishop’” (Zwingli, 1984:181).
Zwingli is clear that his theology of preaching and preachers is “only with regard to public teaching in the church. I know well that it is quite fitting for everyone to talk to anyone about God and to discuss matters with them” (Zwingli, 1984:181). In this way, it is admirable that Zwingli sets his theology of preaching in the liturgical context of worship. As he concludes his treatise, Zwingli urges his co-workers with his own translation of Paul’s words in Colossians 4:17:

Look to your office, which you have received from the Lord, that you do justice to it. God has sent you to be guardians and pastors in the churches. Be alert and take care that the wolves do not tear them apart nor that dissention arise among God’s flock…. take heed that your flock stays clean of and walks free of adultery, immodesty, drunkenness, pride, blasphemy and every excess. Build up the faith, fear of God and love of neighbour. Teach that there is no greater worship than to honor him in purity. Teach so that the eternal is not lost along with the temporal…. Fight as worthy foot soldiers; do not leave your places and office” (Zwingli, 1984:183).

3.4.3 Zwingli’s Theology of Preaching

Any attempt at producing Zwingli’s theology of preaching is fraught with difficulties. There is still no agreement among scholars on Zwingli and his general theology. The most recent summaries of Zwingli’s theology by Locher, Courvoisier, Neuser and Gestrich reveal wide disparities in understanding (Gabler, 1986:155-157). Zwingli himself was a complex figure who is open to various interpretations. Moreover, ‘Zwinglianism’ appears to have developed under Bullinger, and, as McLelland has argued, it is hard to know where Zwingli stopped and Bullinger took off (McLelland, 1985). To compound the problem for us today, Zwingli research is still in its infancy.

We must however try. Our study of On the Preaching Office reveals that Zwingli held preaching in high esteem. True preachers are people who have an inward call from God and confirmed by the outward commissioning of the church. Like the apostles they are leaders appointed to teach; and like prophets they build the church by unveiling God’s will to His

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23 Zwingli, On the Preaching Office, 181
people while simultaneously destroying the works of evil. Like the evangelists-pastors-teachers of old, preachers feed and guard God’s flock. This seems to indicate that Zwingli saw the preacher supremely as a teacher, and the preaching task as the opening up of God’s Word for the edification of believers. Although Zwingli sets preaching in its liturgical context, there is no suggestion at all in On the Preaching Office that preaching is God’s address to His people through the preacher. Zwingli does argue that preaching accomplishes the up building and the down bringing because the word has power. But he gives not a hint in the direction that in the act of preaching, the simple human word shares in the eternal presence of God’s Word. Stephens explains:

Zwingli’s characteristic emphasis is on God who gives the growth, yet he emphasizes the necessity of sowing (that is, the preaching of the word) without which God gives no fruit. God does everything and the one who waters and plants is nothing, though scripture sometimes – as Zwingli frequently pointed out – ascribes to us what belongs to God because of the close relationship between the head and the member (Stephens, 1986:170-171).

According to Stephens, Zwingli gave prominence to the sovereignty of God and the activity of His Spirit, and here there is no variation between the early and late Zwingli (Stephens, 1986:171). A cursory survey of Zwingli’s other writings seems to confirm Stephens’ thesis. Zwingli held the Scriptures to be the Word of God and believed that God’s power was inherent in them (Stephens, 1986:172). But he refused to concede that the outward word of preaching had power and could lead to faith. He resolutely maintained that there was no inherent power in preaching, even if it was faithful, except when that act was specially graced by the presence of God’s Spirit acting in His own unfathomable, sovereign will (Stephens, 1986:178-179).

While Zwingli’s views on divine sovereignty and power are important, it seems that Zwingli himself was aware that this heavy emphasis on illumination by the Holy Spirit is a potential backdoor to dangerous subjectivism, thereby allowing “that the worst of men may speak on Scripture” (Locher, 1981:285). If this analysis is correct, then, much of Zwingli’s hard work in On the Preaching Office is at risk of being proved useless; at the very least, his main
arguments are severely undermined. If the problem with the Zurich’s Anabaptists was their anti-establishment viewpoint and lack of official calling, would they become recognised preachers if they formed their own churches and received calls therefrom? Would they then become authorised preachers? But what is it that suddenly makes them preachers? The simple fact of an outward call from some newly-formed community of faith? Does it matter if their teaching is not in conformity with the teachings of the prophets and apostles? Is it not vital that they be called by the Universal Church and not some voluntary, separatist sect? Zwingli’s theology of preaching as found in On the Preaching Office provides no answers to these important questions. Indeed, Stephens asserts that history is clear that it was the fear of subjectivism that caused Luther to view Zwinglian theology with great suspicion (Stephens, 1986:178-179).

Zwingli and his theology, however, need to be understood in context. Doubtless, the reformer may have failed to produce a robust and coherent theology of preaching. But this might have been because Zwingli was one of the earlier reformers and his agenda was largely set for him by the teachings and practices of the medieval church. As a reformer, he was reacting to the abuses as he saw them. Secondly, Zwingli could have been reluctant to replace papal authority and infallibility with that of preaching and preachers. Thirdly, Zwingli’s opposition to idolatry and iconoclasm (Gabler, 1986:105-107) meant that he was not ready to make the preached word a representative of God Himself. Fourthly, it is possible that Zwingli’s view on the Lord’s Supper influenced his theology of preaching. Zwingli saw the Supper as a sign and could not see Christ as literally present at its celebration. Consequently, his theological framework would have struggled to see the ascended Christ as present in the act of preaching, addressing His people through a human preacher (Pipkin, 1985).
3.5. Martin Luther’s Theology of Preaching

Luther was a contemporary of both Erasmus and Zwingli. Since his life-story is well known and easily accessed, this section will seek to outline the current scholarship in Luther studies and use that context to examine Luther’s theology of preaching.

3.5.1. Seeking Luther’s Theology of Preaching

In 1930, the famous Luther scholar James Mackinnon observed that there is “no exhaustive treatise, even in German, on Luther’s preaching” (MacKinnon, 1930:4:318). Little appears to have changed since then. Despite a high level of interest in Luther and his theology, there is still no detailed study on Luther’s theology of preaching. Such a theology, of course, is not without hazards as recent Luther scholarship has revealed. Scholars have traditionally used one of two methods in attempting to study Luther and articulate his theology. The first is to attempt a systematisation producing a system of Luther’s doctrine. This route is useful since it seeks to give, where Luther himself did not, a comprehensive view as was done by Melanchthon in his later *Loci Praeipui Theologici* or by Calvin in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Such a systematic overall view can indicate the link between the various doctrines and the inner dynamic of Luther’s theology. But one major disadvantage with this method is the danger of too quickly constructing a systematic that is then simply assigned to Luther. In recent years²⁴, Althaus (Althaus, 1966), Gritsch (Gritsch, 1983; 2002) and McGrath (McGrath, 1985), in their attempts to interpret Luther’s theological thinking, have ultimately systematised Luther’s theology in terms that a person living in post-modern times can understand. In the process, the danger is that the real Luther tends to lose his footing in place, time, circumstance and intention.

The alternative historical method of study, on the other hand, is more likely to give a view of Luther within a much stricter context of his time and his debates. This is useful in providing a precise definition to the starting point of Luther’s theology. But here too there is danger. The study could become nothing more than a tracing of the development of the various controversies and sequence of topics in discussion. Oberman appears to have appreciated this methodological weakness. In his *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*, Oberman seeks to place Luther within the Reformer’s context while attempting to provide a theology for Luther (Oberman, 1989). In moving beyond Ebeling’s predominantly theological concentration (Ebeling, 1970), Oberman corrected the tendency in many biographers to make Luther, the young rebel, look more ‘modern’ than in fact he was, while avoiding the Freudian and Marxist reductionism that were fashionable until then.

Since there are disadvantages in exclusively pursuing either of these methods, the present study will seek to combine the best of both approaches. Using the historic methodology, we shall endeavour to allow Luther to speak with his own voice while ensuring that his words are set in the context within which he wrote them, paying particular attention to the various genre and dates. It will take seriously the works of Bornkamm (Bornkamm, 1983) and Brecht (Brecht, 1985; 1990) who have drawn attention to the importance of distinguishing the early Luther from the middle and later Luther. But we shall also attempt to systematise Luther’s theology of preaching. This approach, it is submitted, is defensible and would probably have had Luther’s own approval for Luther himself appears to come close to dogmatic positions in some of his writings. One example is his *On the Councils and the Church* (1539). Another is the strictly polemical 1541 treatise *Against Hanswurst* (Original German: *Wider Hans Wurst*) where Luther almost exhaustively treated specific points of doctrine.
3.5.2. The Need for Preaching

Luther understood preaching to be a sure sign of a true church. His own writings indicate that he held a very high view of preaching, classing it as an indispensable means of grace. In his opinion, it is supremely through the words of the preacher that the Word of God in the Scriptures is made alive in the present: “Now, wherever you hear or see this word preached, believed, professed and lived, do not doubt that the true ecclesia sancta catholica, “a Christian holy people” must be there, even though their number is very small (Luther, 1966:41, 150).

These words were written in 1539 in Luther’s On the Councils and the Church. They are taken from Part III of this work where Luther is dealing with the true marks of the church according to the Holy Scripture. Edwards has warned that the ‘Later Luther’ must be interpreted within the challenges and constraints posed by the changed personal, religious and political context of 1531-1546 (Edwards, 1983). But even he opines that this treatise was directed at a narrower audience than most of Luther’s later works (Edwards, 1983:93). Indeed, it is quite possible that this work is an elaboration of Luther’s earlier proposal at the Leipzig Debate in 1519 whereby the pope and council should be subject to the word of God. If this is correct, this document might represent Luther’s final judgement concerning the medieval church as well as laying the first broad foundation for a new doctrine of the church within nascent Lutheranism.

Luther’s strong statements however should not tempt us to conclude that preaching and its theology were unique to Luther and the Reformation. Thayer has recently argued, persuasively, that the late medieval Church was seeking to improve the quality and frequency of preaching and that the laity was, to some extent, avid listeners or readers of sermons. Indeed she goes on to assert that penitence and preaching played a role in the success of the Reformation (Thayer, 2002). Thayer is probably correct in her assertions, although this does not prove that all late medieval preaching was ‘faithful’ by Luther’s own
theological standards. However, his insistence that true and faithful preaching is a mark of a true church must be understood against this background.

Luther’s high view of preaching meant that he understood it as more than a mark; it is a Living Word. Luther is quoted by Wood as writing in his *Operationes in Psalmos*:

> The apostles wrote very little but they spoke a lot ... Notice: it says let their voices be heard, not let their books be read. The ministry of the New Testament is not engraved on dead tables of stone; rather it sounds in a living voice ... Through a living Word God accomplishes and fulfils his gospel (Wood, 1969:90).

According to Timothy George, for Luther, “since the advent of Christ, the gospel, which used to be hidden in the Scriptures, has become an oral preaching”. He therefore believed that “the New Testament and of the gospel must be preached and performed by word of mouth and a living voice”. Luther argued that Christ himself has not written anything, nor has he ordered anything to be written, but rather to be preached by word of mouth (George, 1988:91). For Luther, “God continues to speak to people through the preached Word. It is through this Word that he is present with his people and continues to meet” them salvifically. “Preaching must thereby observe the limit, which God has prescribed. For just as a man uses the tongue as a tool with which he produces and forms words, so God uses our words, whether gospel or prophetic books as tools with which he himself writes living words in our hearts” (Luther, 1974:212).

Luther made this point again in 1525 in his *The Bondage of the Will*, which is held to have been thought by Luther himself to be one of his two or three very best works. Luther wrote it to counter Erasmus’ criticism of his teaching published as *De libero arbitrio* in the previous year. Luther writes:

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25 Luther, *The First Lectures on the Psalms, Psalms 1-75, 1512-1515, LW 10, 212*
We have to argue in one way about God or the will of God as preached, revealed, offered, and worshipped, and in another way about God as he is not preached, not revealed, not offered, not worshipped. To the extent therefore, that God hides himself and wills to be unknown to us, it is no business of ours. For here the saying truly applies, ‘Things above us are no business of ours’… But we have something to do with him insofar as he is clothed and set forth in his Word through which he offers himself to us and which is the beauty and glory with which the psalmist celebrates him as being clothed (Luther, 1957:138-139).  

3.5.3. The Nature of Preaching

If preaching for Luther is the living word, what is it in preaching that makes it so? Luther appears to hold that true, faithful biblical, redemptive content is partly responsible for making preaching the Word of God. For Luther, “preaching must deal with Christ – incarnate, crucified, resurrected - for God has designated the place and person, showing where and how he can be found”. With audacity, Luther identified the Word of God as the gospel (Luther, 1957:346). Luther then goes on to teach that the Word of God comes to human beings in two forms, as law and as gospel, and teaches that Christ is the content of preaching, both as Saviour and Example.

Apart from the content, the context of preaching was just as important for Luther. He always conceived of preaching within its liturgical setting in Christian worship, and taught that although the spoken word is “the word of human being”, “it has been instituted by divine authority for salvation”. Luther ascribed “an almost sacramental quality” to the office of preaching “so that when the Word of God is preached, no one is exempted from its benefits” (George, 1988:91).

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26 Luther, The Bondage of the Will, 1525, LW 33, 138-139. See also Gerhard O. Forde, Theology for Proclamation, (Minneapolis: Fortress, Press, 1990)

27 In his Freedom of a Christian, commenting on Romans 1, Luther wrote: “The Word is the Gospel of God concerning his Son who was made flesh, suffered, rose from the dead and was glorified through the Spirit who sanctifies”, see LW 31, 346
Writing in his preface to the Epistles of James and Jude in either 1522 or 1546, Luther comments on why he does not regard the book of James as apostolic. But he considers it a good and canonical book since it does not set up any doctrines of men but vigorously teaches the law of God. He then adds: “The Word of God remains free to be heard even if it comes from the mouth of Judas, Annas, Pilate or Herod” (Luther, 1960:396).28

Luther makes this same point in his Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 15-20, delivered probably between 1538 and 1539. Commenting on Genesis 18:19, he writes:

In the first place, I follow the authority of Scripture, which says that God is speaking when either angels or saintly men speak as a result either of the command or of the revelation of God. On the second place, I hold that the testimony of the Letter to the Hebrews should not be disregarded. It states clearly that “some have entertained angels unawares” (13:2) …Abraham bestows divine honours on them …for he recognises God in them and listens to their words just as though God Himself were speaking. He is following the general rule that one should not consider who is speaking but what he is saying: for if it is the Word of God, how would God Himself not be present? (Luther, 1961:220)29

It would seem from the above that for Luther the office of the preacher or valid authority given by God as enshrined in Scripture ensures that faithful preaching in the context of worship is voice of God Himself.

28 Luther, Preface to the Epistles of St. James and St. Jude, 1546 (1522), LW 35, 396
29 Luther, Lectures on Genesis, 15-20, LW 3, 220; WA 43, 32. It is difficult to be certain about the dates of these lectures. In his lectures, Luther makes references to earthquakes and floods “this year” in Naples and Puteoli (page 295, note 64); the year is probably 1538. A little later, discussing the problems that must have gone through Abraham’s mind vis a vis Sodom and Gomorrah, Luther refers to his own anxiety concerning Melanchthon during the latter’s stay in Frankfurt (Page 303, Note 75). This would have been about April 1539, indicating that Luther’s lectures on Genesis 19 were delivered in March or April 1539.
3.5.6. The Paradox in Preaching

For Luther then, there are both the divine and human elements in preaching. As for the divine element, we know that according to Luther, faithful and biblical preaching is ordained by God and is a living Word. And since Luther’s God is the One who reveals Himself to humankind, it was Luther’s conclusion that true preaching is God’s own Word. In 1537 the parish pastor at Wittenberg, Johannes Bugenhagen (1485-1558) was called away. Luther substituted for him in the pulpit, and in the ‘Sermons on the Gospel of St. John Chapters 1-4’ Luther says that one must see the word of the preacher as God’s Word. He wrote:

Would to God that we could gradually train our hearts to believe that the preacher’s words are God’s Word and that the man addressing us is a scholar and a king …it is not an angel or a hundred thousand angels but the Divine Majesty Himself that is preaching there. To be sure, I do not hear this with my ears or see it with my eyes; all I hear is the voice of the preacher …and I behold only a man before me. But I view the picture correctly if I add that the voice and words of father or pastor are not his own words and doctrine but those of our Lord and God …it is He who declares that He is able to dispense the water of eternal life. If we could believe this, we would be content indeed. However, a fault, which is manifest throughout the world and also in us, is that we fail to recognise the gift and its Giver. I, too, am not at all perfect in this respect; my faith is not as profound and strong as I should like to have it (Luther, 1961:526). 30

At another time, Luther wrote that preachers should not ask for forgiveness of sins when they have preached the truth. In Against Hanswurst, he writes:

Here it is unnecessary, even bad, to pray for forgiveness of sins, as if one had not taught truly, for it is God’s word and not my word, and God ought not and cannot forgive it, but only confirm, praise and crown it, saying “You have taught truly, for I have spoken through you and the word is mine (Luther, 1966:216).

According to Luther, in the prophets “the term ‘voice’ applies without exception to the ‘voice of the Lord’, so that we must accept every word which is spoken as if the Lord himself were speaking, no matter by whom it is spoken and we must believe it, yield to it, and humbly subject our reason to it” (Luther, 1972:239-240).\textsuperscript{31} It is clear that unlike the Aristotelian God, Luther’s God is One who speaks with human beings in human language. “Hear, brother: God the creator of heaven and earth, speaks with you through his preachers...Those words of God are not of Plato or Aristotle but God himself is speaking”, said Luther (Buttrick, 2010:221). “God must be apprehended in human speech because God so graciously wills to meet us in it”. According to Meinhold, Luther saw human language as "a divine order in which human speech and the divine Spirit are brought together into a unity" (Meinhold, 1958:13). Commenting on Genesis 22:15 Luther is impressed that Abraham enters into conversation with God. He argues that this is unique and is unknown in the Gentile churches. He then writes:

(I)t is an absurd procedure on the part of all men to regard works with greater admiration than that with which they regard the Word of God, who is the Author and Producer of all marvellous and most difficult works. Nevertheless, we turn our eyes toward the works alone; but we suppose that the voice of God is the voice of human beings. For no difference is perceptible between the word of man and the Word of God when uttered by a human being; for the voice is the same, the sound and the pronunciation are the same, whether you utter divine or human words. For this reason we withdraw from the majesty of the Word and are not concerned about that “The Lord will be seen” or the appearance of God. We pay not attention to God when He speaks with us (Luther, 1968:140).\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{31} Luther, Lectures on Romans, c. 1516, LW 25, 239-240; WA 56, 253. Upon being appointed lecturer in Bible at Wittenberg, Luther taught from the Psalms from 1513-1515. After the Psalms, Luther chose to lecture on Romans. The quote in the paper is a corollary comment on Romans 3: 19-22

\textsuperscript{32} Luther, Lectures of Genesis, Chapter 21-25, LW 4, 140; WA 43, 236. Again, it is difficult to be certain about the chronology of these lectures. During the autumn of 1539, Wittenberg suffered one of its periodic plagues. One of the victims was Luther’s friend and faculty colleague, Dr Sebald Munsterer who was buried on October 26, 1539. From a marginal note, we learn that Luther began his lectures on Genesis 22 on the day after Munsterer’s burial.
Steinmetz has highlighted the tension in Luther’s theology where God is both hidden and revealed (Steinmetz, 2002:23-32). These two strands are certainly present in Luther, and Lohse has provided a survey of Luther’s often paradoxical theology (Lohse, 1999). While Luther appears to be aware of this tension, he is persuaded that “there abides a correspondence between God hiding in his humanity to reveal himself and God hiding in human language to communicate” with human beings. “God’s descent into human language is indeed God’s way of relating” to humankind, “not in a foreign language but in the day-to-day language of human beings. Henceforth when we hear God’s Word spoken, we should obey it wholeheartedly because God does everything through the ministry of human beings” (Luther, 1961:274).

Mark Edwards warns students of Luther concerning the danger of quoting exclusively from the later Luther. He sees changed nuances between the early, middle and late Luthers. Taking Edwards’ assertions seriously, we have quoted here some passages from Luther’s lectures on the Psalms and Romans. They are significant since they were written in Luther’s early days at Wittenberg (Edwards, 1983). The fact that Luther has a doctrine of the Word even in his early writings suggests that he had early formulated his theology of preaching and that the crises of attrition and contrition in his life did not precipitate a reworking of his position on this issue (Steinmetz, 2002:1-11). Lohse is persuasive in his thesis that in the different phases of his life, Luther’s thinking on the Christian ministry had various accents (Lohse, 1999:277-298). Bornkamm (Bornkamm, 1983) and Brecht (Brecht, 1985; 1990) have attempted to show in their own studies that Luther’s concrete theological concerns shifted with time, place, and circumstance. But in the matter of Luther’s theology of preaching, we detect little departure in the later Luther from the early Luther. Luther appears to have been one of the earliest theologians to have formulated a theology of the word of God. Perhaps, with age and time, his theology developed and was elaborated upon, but there appears to be no change to his basic view on preaching which was established early in his career. On October 22, 1512, Martin Luther was received as a colleague by the

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33 Luther, Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 15-20, c.1538, LW 3, 274; WA 43, 71
34 Bornkamm’s Luther in Mid-Career is a classic biography of the later Luther. Unfortunately, the book was left unfinished and is not well translated into English.
faculty senate of Wittenberg University and immediately begun his preparations for lectures on the Psalms. Commenting on Psalm 45:1 he wrote: “The Word of God comes to us only in the spoken form because here on earth God cannot be seen but only heard. God speaks and reveals himself through the external word and tongue addressed to human ears” (Luther, 1974:220).35

Luther was sensitive to the human element in preaching for he teaches that “God has chosen selected elements of his created order, which are intrinsically good, to effect his saving will. In speaking through the created order, God employs the words of the finite human beings to communicate” with His people. This means that for Luther preachers “must assume the right to speak though not the power to accomplish” (Luther, 1959:76). In his Lectures on Genesis, Luther spoke of the Word as “the instrument, which God employs to accomplish his work of creation” (Kolb, 1999:358). The phrase ‘God said’ for Luther means “not only the utterance of God but also the action and deed of God. God’s Word is causative efficaciously. God’s word acts and accomplishes his will. God’s Word is his instrument of power, which takes created forms”. Luther was convinced that it was the Holy Spirit that made the preached Word to become a personal word. In The Magnificat, 1521, he explained: “No one can correctly understand God or his Word unless he has received such understanding immediately from the Holy Spirit...outside of which nothing is learned but empty words and prattle” (Luther, 1968:299).36

“The Spirit creates faith in Christ. Faith, a gift of the Spirit, is justifying faith – faith in the incarnate and crucified Christ, which believes against reason and all appearances. Thus the Word and the Spirit are closely related like the voice and breath in speaking” (Luther, 1968:299-300). “One cannot separate the voice from the breath. Whoever refuses to hear the voice gets nothing out of the breath either” (Althaus, 1966:38). According to Luther’s homiletical theory, God who comes by the way of the cross deals with humankind in a two-fold manner: first ‘outwardly’, then ‘inwardly’. Outwardly God deals with humankind through the oral word of the gospel and the material signs of baptism and the sacraments.

35 Luther, The First Lectures on the Psalms, Psalms 1-75, 1512-1515, LW 10, 220
36 Luther, The Magnificat, 1521, LW 21, 299; WA 7, 546
Inwardly He deals with them through the Holy Spirit. Still, for Luther, whichever method or order God chooses to employ, the outward factors should and must precede since the order of salvation in Luther’s theology appears to begin with the Word addressing humans, outside of them, through the preaching of what Christ has done for humanity, followed by the Word being heard and believed.

3.5.7. Reconciling Luther’s Paradox in Preaching

Luther’s paradoxical theology of preaching is potentially controversial and problematic. Does Luther’s idea of preaching as the word of God mean that Luther saw the preacher as inspired as the biblical writers? Did he mean that preaching has equal status to Holy Scripture? Did Luther expect his words to be interpreted literally? Or were they typical Reformation hyperboles, merely reactive to the thought and practice of the Roman Catholic Church?

Luther appears to have been aware of these tensions in his theology. Concerning the first problem, Luther concedes that the term ‘Word of God’ needs to be used judiciously since, according to him, it has various meanings. But this does not restrain him from believing that preaching is one of these meanings. In one of his ‘Table Talks’ given between August 7 and 24, 1540, we read:

Somebody asked, “Doctor, is the Word that Christ spoke when he was on earth the same in fact and in effect as the Word preached by a minister?”


Then the inquirer asked, “Doctor, isn’t there a difference between the Word that became flesh (John 1:14) and the Word that is proclaimed by Christ or by the minister?”

When asked if there was a difference between the Word that became flesh and the Word that is proclaimed by Christ or by a minister, Luther replied: “By all means! The former is the incarnate Word, who was true God from the beginning, and the latter
is the Word that’s proclaimed. The former Word is in substance God; the latter Word is in its effect the power of God, but isn’t God in substance; for it has a man’s nature, whether it’s spoken by Christ or by a minister” (Luther, 1967:394-395).

A very high view of preaching as the Word of God may cause some to object that we are beginning to treat human explanations and ideas as God’s words. Luther’s theology though is carefully qualified: only preaching that is faithful to God’s own revelation in Holy Scripture and in Christ can be said to be the Word of God. It would seem that for Luther the status of the word of God does not make a particular preacher or his sermon inerrant or infallible, unless that preacher and his sermon stand in constant, humble submission to the Word of God and the Spirit of Jesus. Thus the hearer should not believe his/her minister but respond only in so far as the minister leads them to the true Teacher and Master, God’s Son (Luther, 1959:388). But Luther was also realistic. He admits that many did and would find it hard to understand the word of a human preacher as the Word of God. This does not, though, cause him to doubt his own theology of preaching. Instead, the Reformer asserts that it is the lack of faith that makes it impossible for human beings to recognise divine input in the seemingly intra-human event of preaching. In the same sermon on John, Luther continues:

“Who is speaking?” The pastor? By no means! You do not hear the pastor. Of course, the voice is his, but the words he employs are really spoken by my God. Therefore I must hold the Word of God in high esteem that I may become an apt pupil of the Word. If we looked upon it as the Word of God, we would be glad to go to church, to listen to the sermon, and to pay attention to the precious Word …If you look more at the pastor than at God; if you do not see God’s person but merely gape to see whether the pastor is learned and skilled, whether he has good diction and articulates distinctly –then you have already become half a Jacob (Luther, 1957:528).
3.6 John Calvin's Theology of Preaching

After studying the history of preaching from the Old Testament to the modern era, David Larsen concluded that John Calvin was probably the best exegete among the Reformers (Larsen, 1998:161-169). But because his doctrine of preaching is difficult to systematise, there is little scholarly agreement on Calvin as a preacher or his theology of preaching (Davis, 2011:79-126). This section will attempt to study Calvin’s view on preaching by first looking at his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* before augmenting this with his other writings and sermons. Finally, it will attempt to identify certain themes in Calvin’s theology of preaching. Again, as Calvin’s life is well known and much written about, we shall only outline this where necessary to set the context for his writing.

3.6.1 Studying Calvin

Over the years, scholars have employed different approaches to study Calvin’s theology. Some have limited themselves to his *Institutes*, while others have preferred to examine Calvin’s commentaries and sermons. The erudite Ronald Wallace used the *Institutes* as well as Calvin’s sermons and commentaries in producing his magnificent study of Calvin’s doctrine of the word and sacrament. Wallace sought to study Calvin by revealing what the reformer actually said in order that misconceptions about his teaching may be cleared away. For this reason, his is not a critical study but a copious and sympathetic expression of Calvin’s teaching (Wallace, 1957). Whilst Wallace’s work may not adequately place Calvin in his historical setting, Steinmetz’s introductory volume seeks to place Calvin’s thought “in the context of the theological and exegetical traditions – ancient, medieval and contemporary – which formed and contributed to its particular texture” (Steinmetz, 1995). Another Calvin scholar, T.H.L. Parker provides a fine study on Calvin’s preaching. But its value is limited because the author limits his work to five series of Calvin’s sermons, assuming that they will be representative of the whole Calvin corpus (Parker, 1992:ix).
Zachman has recently used a unique method. He adopts a holistic approach instead of focussing on one aspect of Calvin’s thought or a limited selection of his writings. Zachman “gives a brief biography and (then) considers Calvin’s own understanding of his ministry as a teacher and pastor”. He surveys Calvin’s writings and argues that “in contrast to Luther, Calvin sought to balance the verbal proclamation of the word with an emphasis on the visible manifestation of God in creation and in Christ” (Zachmann, 2006:175-190). Taking such scholarship seriously, we shall attempt to study Calvin’s theology of preaching by briefly examining the final 1559 edition of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Calvin, 1960) as well as his sermons and commentaries, while seeking to be sensitive to his particular historical context.

### 3.6.2 Calvin’s *Institutes*

When Calvin produced the first edition of his *Institutes* in 1536, he was in all probability a man with little preaching experience. It is often forgotten that Calvin’s desire was the solitude of scholarship and it was only the force of circumstances that made him a preacher. At the start of his labours in Geneva in the summer of 1536, Calvin was mainly a teacher, albeit a noted teacher. His task was to reform Geneva, especially to reorganise the Church there according to the Word of God, and defend its autonomy against encroachment from the civil power. Part of his challenge was “to change the people’s mindset concerning both doctrine and its effects upon morals and the Christian life”. According to Philip Hughes, before long Calvin was compelled “by circumstances of controversy in the city...to add to his teaching commitments the responsibility of public preaching” (Hughes, 1966:5). Thus the scholar became known as preacher and pastor, and worked hard with Farel and Viret to reform Geneva’s Church and city. For much of his Genevan ministry, Calvin preached twice on Sundays, preached every day on alternate weeks and lectured nearly every weekday at the Genevan Academy.
Though Calvin may have been an inexperienced preacher when the first edition of his *Institutes* was issued, he was a first rate theologian. The *Institutes of the Christian Religion* is one of the most systematic theological works written during the Reformation.\(^{37}\) Its initial aim was to teach ordinary Christians (Calvin, 1960:xxxvi). But this was later broadened, and Calvin’s 1559 revision was written to lead aspiring theologians to read the Scriptures for themselves (Calvin, 1960:4). As such it is a superb compendium of Calvin’s theology. Before he properly tackles the Preaching Office within the Church in Book 4 of the *Institutes*, Calvin lays the foundation by expounding on the Holy Scripture and the knowledge of God the Creator in Book 1, the knowledge of God the Redeemer in Christ in Book 2 and “the way in which we receive the grace of Christ” in Book 3. This order and development of the *Institutes* appear to reveal that for Calvin, a true doctrine of preaching is one that is founded upon and intimately connected to the doctrines of the Word and of the Church.

In Book 1, Calvin teaches that “God has given the Holy Scriptures, which he not only uses as teacher to educate the Church but also as his own most holy mouth” (Calvin, 1960:70, Book I, VI:1). Calvin likens the Word to a pair of spectacles; with the aid of the Scriptures humankind is able to truly see the beauty of the universe and appreciate it as God’s clear handwriting (Calvin, 1960: 68, Book I, V:14). And Calvin argues that Scripture bases its authority on the fact that God is speaking (Calvin, 1960:78, Book I, VII:4).

This self-authenticating nature means that in the Scripture we are confronted by mystery (Calvin, 1960: 80, Book I, VII:5). But quoting Matthew 13:11, Calvin insists that none can understand the mysteries of God save those to whom it is given by the inward teaching of the Holy Spirit. This voice of God in Scripture can be life giving or death dealing when separated from the grace of Christ (Calvin, 1960: 95, Book I, IX:3).\(^{38}\)

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\(^{37}\) Luther produced no equivalent systematic theology. We turn to Melanchthon for such a formulation; see Karin Maag, *Melanchthon in Europe: His Work and Influence Beyond Wittenberg*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999)

\(^{38}\) Cf: II Corinthians 3:6
In Book IV, Calvin moves on to “the external means by which God invites his people into the Society of Christ and keeps them in it” (Calvin, 1960:XVI). While union with Christ is effected by the secret inward working of the Holy Spirit (Calvin, 1960:1016, Book IV, I:3), this Spirit uses earthly means such as the ordinary words spoken by human tongues; water; bread and wine (Calvin, 1960:1012, Book IV, I:1). Followers of Christ are called by the preaching of the gospel (Calvin, 1960:1019, Book IV, I:5), sealed by baptism (Calvin, 1960:1303, Book IV, XV:1), nurtured by the Lord’s Supper (Calvin, 1960:1360, Book IV, XVII:1) and thus brought into and kept in the Church (Calvin, 1960:1021, Book IV, I:7). For Calvin, the Church is a body that is united with its Head, Christ Himself (Calvin, 1960:1015, Book IV, I:3). This means that it is the presence of Christ as the Head of the body that makes the body into the Church. And Christ, according to Calvin, is present with the Church by his Word, since Christ is the Word of God (Calvin, 1960:1017, Book IV, I:5).

After establishing his doctrine of Holy Scripture and doctrine of the Church, Calvin progresses to develop his theology of preaching in the Institutes. In Book 4, Chapter III Calvin enters into his discussion of ‘The Doctors and Ministers of the Church, their Election and Office’ (Calvin, 1960:1053, Book IV, III:1). He lays emphasis on the ministry as a tool wielded by the hand of the Lord. It is the Lord who alone rules and reigns over the Church, exercising his rule only by the Word. But since he is not present visibly with his people, he makes use of the ministry of men as a ‘vicarious activity’, God using a tool like a workman (Calvin, 1960:1053, Book IV, III:1). Calvin again hints that God himself is present in the preaching event: “An inestimable treasure is given us in earthen vessels (II Cor 4:7), God Himself appears in our midst, and, as Author of this order, would have men recognise him as present in his institution” (Calvin, 1960:1017, Book IV, I:5).

Thus, when the gospel is preached, it is not a human declaration concerning an absent subject. Rather, for Calvin, the subject himself is present as the good news and its efficacy. This is to say that Christ’s presence is realised in the earthly form of the proclamation. Calvin concedes that God could do this work directly, without human tools, or he could use angels to do it (Calvin, 1960:1053, Book IV, III:1), but God has chosen to use human ministry, thus
showing his benevolence in so honouring humankind (Calvin, 1960:1054, Book IV, III:1) and accommodating Himself to human weaknesses by “preferring to address us in human fashion through interpreters in order to draw us to himself, rather than to thunder at us and drive us away” (Calvin, 1960:1017-1018, Book IV, I:5-6). Where the preaching ministry is rejected, in that place there is a “blotting out of the face of God which shines upon us in teaching” (Calvin, 1960:1017-1018, Book IV, I:5-6). Calvin asserts:

Believers were bidden of old to seek the face of God in the sanctuary...for no other reason than that for them the teaching of the law and the exhortations of the prophets were a living image of God just as Paul asserts that in his preaching the glory of God shines in the face of Christ (Calvin, 1960:1018-1019, Book IV, I:5-6).

Writing on the meaning and limits of the ministry, Calvin argues that faithful preachers are given “the working of the Spirit in order that their teaching might not be unprofitable”. Thus preachers, for Calvin, are not only co-workers of God but have a function themselves of imparting salvation (Calvin, 1960:1020-1021, Book IV, I:6). But nothing is left to the preachers themselves, and Calvin quotes I Corinthians 3:7 showing that it is God who gives the increase despite every human effort (Calvin, 1960:1020-1021, Book IV, I:6). Here is revealed the tension within Calvin’s theology of preaching: sometimes he speaks of preachers as mere interpreters of God’s Word while at other times he perceives them to be God’s mouthpieces: “As he was of old not content with the law alone, but added priests as interpreters from whose lips the people might ask its true meaning, so today he not only desires us to be attentive to its reading, but also appoints instructors to help us by their effort” (Calvin, 1960:1017-1018, Book IV, I:5-6).

Yet in the very next sentence, Calvin asserts that through preachers and preaching, God “proves our obedience by a very good test when we hear his ministers speaking just as if he himself spoke” (Calvin, 1960:1018, Book IV, I:5-6). The Reformer is evidently struggling to balance his high view of preaching with its appearance of being a purely human event. It may be useful to see if and how Calvin deals with this difficulty in his sermons and commentaries.
3.6.3. Beyond The Institutes

Although the Institutes is central to the understanding of Calvin’s thought, Imbart de la Tour probably overstated his case when he asserted that the “whole of Calvinism is in the Institutes ...” (de la Tour, 1935:55). Rodolphe holds that it is in his commentaries and sermons that Calvin shows himself to be an exegete (Rodolphe, 1972; 1975). Brian Abshire has written that it is in his sermons that Calvin comes over as a preacher-theologian (Abshire, 1999:8-9). Stauffer has recently argued that Calvin’s sermons and commentaries “supplement” the theology of his Institutes. He opines that the former show an aspect of Calvin’s thought and personality that historians have frequently neglected (Stauffer, 1978). Pitkin goes further and suggests that there may have been some evolution in Calvin’s theology over time. In her specific study of Calvin’s doctrine of faith, Pitkin argues that Calvin’s mature view exhibits a two-fold “character - saving faith and providential faith” – corresponding to the two-fold aspect of its object – “Christ as both the Incarnate and Eternal Son of God” (Pitkin, 1999). It is certainly true that certain subjects that are treated in Calvin’s academic theology are untouched in his popular preaching or if brought up, are given a different emphasis.39 But it seems better to understand these other works of Calvin as complementing rather than supplementing the teaching of his Institutes.

The sermons and commentaries are largely the product of Calvin’s work in Geneva where his practice was to preach from the New Testament on Sundays, usually continuing from the same book of the Bible morning and evening. On weekday mornings, he preached from the Old Testament (Old, 2002:90-133). In this way, he preached through the books of Genesis, Deuteronomy, Job, Judges, I and II Samuel, I and II Kings, all the major and minor prophets including Isaiah and Ezekiel, all four gospels, Acts, I and II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, I and II Thessalonians, I and II Timothy, Titus and Hebrews. Calvin’s method was to work through his text phrase by phrase and he worked through a Bible book verse by verse (Cottrett, 2000:288-308). “His sermons generally lasted from forty minutes to one hour and

39 Stauffer has found Calvin’s sermons to be a significant supplement to the theology of the Institutes and a corrective to the traditional as well as Barthian interpretations of Calvin, Richard Stauffer, Dieu, la creation et la providence de Calvin, (Bern: Peter Lang, 1978), 10
were delivered extemporaneously. He took no notes or manuscript into the pulpit” and appears to have “preached directly from the Greek or Hebrew text, giving his own translation of the Hebrew and Greek as he preached. He usually had no introduction but simply began his sermons with the words” ‘We have seen’ or something similar to that (Parker, 1992:59-64). Having stopped preaching on Easter Day 1538, Calvin picked up his series from where he had left, when he restarted in September 1541, returning to Geneva after nearly four years in Strasbourg. Calvin began his first sermon with the words, “As I was saying…” (Calvin, 1863-1900:11:365-366) as though he had not been away at all.

There is still little consensus on Calvin’s stylistic elegance as a preacher (Ford, 2001:65-88). In his magisterial work on preaching, Dargan concludes: “The defects of Calvin’s character showed themselves in his work as a preacher. There is a lack of sympathy and charm, deficiency of imagination, sparing use of illustration, no poetic turn, no moving appeal, no soaring elegance” (Dargan, 1974:448). D’Aubigne wrote that Calvin’s sermons “are considered by many persons the weakest of his productions, and it is hardly thought worthwhile even to glance at them” (Calvin, 1973:v-vi). But others disagree. Beza was of the view that Calvin’s preaching was weighty, filled with warmth, passion and love of God (Beza, 1844). According to Elsie Ann McKee, Calvin was a caring preacher, pastor and spiritual leader (McKee, 2001). Some others contend that Calvin’s preaching style was unemotional, yet moving, simple and straightforward. Lester De Koster has written that Calvin’s preaching was a proclamation that transformed civic life (DeKoster, 2004). In his tribute to Calvin delivered at Saint Peter’s Church in Geneva on the occasion of the four hundredth anniversary of Calvin’s birth, Emile Doumercque said: “That is the Calvin who seems to me to be the real and authentic Calvin, the one who explains all the others: Calvin the preacher of Geneva, moulding by his words the spirit of the Reformed of the sixteenth century” (Nixon, 1950:38).
Whatever the strengths and weaknesses of Calvin’s preaching, his sermons appear to have been doctrinal as well as practical, where the preacher was in touch with his audience (Dyrness, 2004:49-89). According to Nixon, Calvin once paused in the middle of a sermon on Sunday morning and said: “Those three drunkards back there might just as well have stayed in the tavern, for all the good they are getting from listening to the Word of God”. On another occasion he said: “How can a man profit from the Word when his belly is so full of wine and meat that it takes all of his effort just to stay awake?” (Nixon, 1950:65-66).

In Calvin’s sermons and commentaries, three motives for preaching are discernible: “in order that God may be better honoured among us” (Calvin, 1863-1900:26:226), “in order that our life may be reformed” (Calvin, 1863-1900:26:241), and “to bear witness to truth whilst presenting salvation” (Calvin, 1863-1900:53:67). The preacher is, first, a teacher (Calvin, 1863-1900:53:234) who is called not to invent anything of his own but declare only what has been revealed and recorded in Scripture. Accordingly the preacher should both understand and believe the message as expressed in Scripture and be able to repeat that message in contemporary language and idiom (Calvin, 1863-1900:35:43-44). For Calvin, the contemporary Church are secondary recipients of the original message whenever the message is understood and faithfully handed on by the preacher, who himself is assumed to have submitted to the authority⁴⁰ of the Word in humility⁴¹ and obedience (Calvin, 1863-1900:26:304). Calvin then goes on to introduce a second image that suggests that his understanding of preaching and preachers was sophisticated. With Paul, he calls preachers “ambassadors,” contending that God’s servants occasionally fail to distinguish their words and actions from that of God because of their personal commissioning and the charge given to them. On Deuteronomy 3:12-22 Calvin says:

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⁴⁰ For Calvin, authority in preaching does not rest on the preacher as a person. Rather, authority resides in the message of the preacher, so long as that message is consistent with the message of Scripture, see for example Sermon X on Deuteronomy (1:43), Calvin, *Corpus Reformatorum*, 25.713-714

⁴¹ In Sermon XI on Micah, Calvin demands submission to the Word from preachers when he says: “We must consider whether what is said to us conforms with what God has left for us in writing. For what ought sermons and all teaching to be but exposition of what is contained there?” Supplementa Calviniana, Sermons Inedits. Neukirche, (1936), V.89-90
When a man is the envoy of his prince and has complete authority to do what is committed to his charge, he will so to say borrow the prince’s name. He will say, ‘We are doing this; we instruct; we have commanded; we want that done’. Now, when he speaks like this, he is not intending to take anything from his master. So it is with God’s servants. They know that God has ordained them as instruments and that he employs them in his service in such a way that they do nothing by their own power; it is the Master who leads them...in the preaching of the Word of God we see the same. It is said that the ministers are sent to enlighten the blind, to deliver the captives, to forgive sins, to convert hearts. What! These are things which belong to God alone.... Now, nevertheless it is the case that he imparts all these qualifications to those who he appoints to convey his Word and declares to them that he does not separate himself from them, but rather shows that he uses them as his hands and his instruments (Calvin, 1863-1900:26:66-67).

There was for Calvin then a supernatural dimension in preaching which he attributed to the power of God’s Word and the working of the Holy Spirit (Calvin, 1863-1900:55:49-50). In opposition to those who dissolved the mystery of God’s activity in preaching into a purely internal subjective effect in the hearts of the hearers, Calvin argues:

I indeed admit that the power does not proceed from the tongue of man, nor exists in mere sound, but that the whole power is to be ascribed altogether to the Holy Spirit; there is however nothing to hinder the Spirit from putting forth His power in the word preached...The wickedness and depravity of men do not make the Word to lose its own nature (Calvin, 1863-1900:45:364). 42

The Spirit is used by God to illuminate with sound knowledge (sana intelligencia) and then render us docile by his secret influence (Calvin, 1863-1900:32:270). This illumination and this docility often appear to be identical with the confirmation of Scripture. In these instances, the work of the Holy Spirit is that of convincing and persuading. Thus Calvin joins external preaching and the internal efficacy of the Holy Spirit as the way in which the Lord teaches us (Calvin, 1609:564-565). Indeed, Calvin sometimes speaks of the preaching event in theophanic terms. In Sermon XXV on Ephesians (Eph 4:11-12), he suggests that Christ Himself, as the Word, is near in the faithful proclamation of the Word: “If our Lord gives us this blessing of his Gospel being preached to us, we have a sure and infallible mark that he is

42 Commentary on Matthew 13:19

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Commentary on Matthew 13:19
near us and procures our salvation, and that he calls us to him as if he had his mouth open and we saw him there in person” (Calvin, 1863-1900:51:559).

It seems that the “preaching of the Word by a minister is the gracious form behind which God in coming near to men”, veiling Himself because humankind cannot bear to behold Him directly. Thus Christ “uses the preached word as a means of revelation and self-communication in much the same way as he uses the other signs of His presence and grace in His historic acts of revelation” (Calvin, 1863-1900:37:191). But is it significant that Calvin qualifies his cardinal statements on God’s activity and nearness in preaching with “as if” and “as though”. He comments on Haggai:

The message of the prophet obtained as much power as though God descended from heaven, and had given manifest tokens of His presence...we conclude that the glory of God so shines in His Word that we ought to be so much affected by it, whenever He speaks by His servants, as though He were nigh to us, face to face (Calvin, 1863-1900:44:95).

Is it possible that what is being denied here is not the presence or the activity of God, but the visible or audible perception of that presence or activity? Calvin fails to elaborate on these details. It is just as possible that despite his exalted view of preaching and preachers, Calvin was careful to constantly make the sharp distinction between that which is divine and that which is human in preaching: “We must set the Lord on one side and the minister on the other. We must view the minister as one that is a servant, not a master – an instrument, not the hand; and in short as man, not God” (Calvin, 1863-1900:49:350).

Consequently it would seem that in Calvin’s view, preaching may fail to be the Word of God. The act may remain on a merely human level throughout, in which case the preacher with all his eloquence and skill and fervour will accomplish nothing. On Paul calling himself a minister of the Spirit, Calvin offers the following:

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43 Commentary on Isaiah 49:2
44 Commentary on 1 Corinthians 3:7; cf. sermon on Luke 1:16-18 (CR 46.39); also 2 Corinthians 10:8, Corpus Reformatorum, 50.118
He does not mean by this that the grace of the Holy Spirit and His influence were tied to his preaching so that he could whenever he pleased breathe forth the Spirit along with the utterance of the voice...It is one thing for Christ to connect His influence with a man’s doctrine and quite another for the man’s doctrine to have such efficacy of itself. We are then, ministers of the Spirit, not as if we held Him enclosed within us, or as it were captive, not as if we could at our pleasure confer His grace upon all (Calvin, 1863-1900:50:40).

Accordingly “God sometimes connects Himself with His servants and sometimes separates Himself from them...He never resigns to them His own office” (Calvin, 1863-1900:44:497). “When God separates Himself from His ministers, nothing remains in them” (Calvin, 1863-1900:44:497).

3.6.4. Calvin’s Theology of Preaching

This brief study indicates that Calvin was aware of the mystery that is preaching. He recognised it as a simultaneously divine and human event. But how do the divine and human operate and co-operate in practice? What conceptual framework can we use to understand this part of Calvin’s theology of preaching?

In his Institutes, Calvin writes of preaching not so much as the voice of God as it is the sign of God’s presence and the instrument of Christ’s rule: “Words are nothing else but signs” (Calvin, 1949:4:14:26). He approvingly quotes Augustine who wrote of words being signs, and argues that in preaching “the Holy Spirit uses the words of the preacher as an occasion for the presence of God in grace and mercy” (Calvin, 1960:1302-1303, 4:14.26). For Stauffer, this idea of ‘signs’ suggests that Calvin understood preaching to be a sacrament of the saving presence of Christ and is thus “not merely a moment of worship; not only a task of the church, but something of a divine epiphany” (Stauffer, 1965). Old (Old, 1992), and

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44 Commentary on 2 Corinthians 3:6
45 Commentary on Malachi 4:6
46 Commentary on Malachi 4:6; cf. Institutes 4.1.6
47 cf. Commentary on Genesis 9:12 where Calvin speaks of Word and sacrament together as a ‘vocal sign’.
others (Van der Walt, et al., 1986:346) have suggested that for Calvin, the actual words of the sermon may be likened to the element in the sacraments. As Calvin himself believed, “the Word in preaching accomplishes nothing apart from the work of the Holy Spirit, who illuminates the mind” (Calvin, 1960:78-79, 1:7.4). “The power of preaching as the Word of God does not reside in the sound of the words themselves or even in their meaning. Rather, the power is the act of the Holy Spirit that makes the words, their sound and their meaning, the occasion of the voice of God”.49 As DeVries has noted, Calvin was careful to distance himself from the Roman Catholic position of equating the efficacy of the sacraments with its performance and the Zwinglians’ separation of the signs of the sacraments from the grace, which they symbolise (DeVries, 2004:106-124).

Thus there appears to be a sacramental union between the preacher’s human speech and God’s word in preaching. When God graciously comes to give His presence and power along with the human word, there is the closest identity between the divine and human actions. “The Word of God is not distinguished from the words of the prophet” (Calvin, 1863-1900:44:94).50 “He is not separated from the minister” (Calvin, 1863-1900:49:351).51 “God Himself who is the author is conjoined with the instrument, and the Spirit’s influence with man’s labour” (Calvin, 1863-1900:49:438).52 So close is this identity that the preacher can actually be called a minister of the Spirit and his work spoken of in the most exalted terms (Calvin, 1863-1900:49:350).53 It is indeed possible to say that it is the preacher who effects what is really effected by God: “The Word goeth out of the mouth of God in such a manner that it likewise goeth out of the mouth of men; for God does not speak openly from heaven but employs men as his instruments” (Calvin, 1863-1900:37:291).54

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49 “If the same sermon is preached, say to a hundred people, twenty receive it with ready obedience of faith, while the rest hold it valueless, or laugh, or hiss, or loathe it”, Institutes, 3.24.12
50 Commentary on Haggai 1:12
51 Commentary on 1 Corinthians 3:7
52 Commentary on 1 Corinthians 9:1
53 Commentary on 1 Corinthians 3:7
54 Commentary on Isaiah 55:11
Despite this and given Calvin’s richness and caution, it might be better to understand Calvin’s theology of preaching as instrumental rather than sacramental view – that the preached word is a sign which the Holy Spirit ordinarily uses as a tool to dispense grace. For Calvin, preaching is a great event when the whole drama of salvation unfolded as the gathered people listened to the sermon. Christ is expected to come and “give His presence where the gospel is preached and cause men to hear His voice through the voice of the minister” (Calvin, 1863-1900:47:237,55:29). Yet, at the human level, preaching demands fidelity to scripture and hard labour - the skill of the syntax and rhetoric and the liveliness of the delivery are all fundamentally important and cannot be minimised. Thus we arrive at a characteristic perspective that pervades all of Calvin’s theology. On the one hand there is an emphasis on the majesty and transcendence of God, refusing to identify it with any finite and determinant object. On the other hand there is the stress on the immanence of God in creation and in the means of grace. With his instrumental view, Calvin succeeds in uniting the work of God and the work of man in preaching without separation, change or confusion.

3.7 Niles and the Reformers – An Initial Dialogue Between East and West

The aim of this thesis is to study Niles’ theology of preaching by bringing it into dialogue with the theologies of preaching in Western Protestantism. Here, it seems appropriate, to engage in an initial dialogue between Niles’ ideas on preaching and the theology of the Protestant Reformers previously examined in this chapter.

3.7.1 Calling of the Preacher

As we have seen before (see Section 2.6), Niles placed emphasis on the calling of the preacher to be a servant before he is to preach. Erasmus too did touch briefly on the issue of the preacher’s calling. For Erasmus, a good and faithful preacher is one who is gifted by God (Erasmus, 1797:43) and speaks as the oracles of God (Erasmus, 1797:35). Like Niles’
authentic servant, Erasmus argued that only a preacher’s mind filled with Jesus “the Truth” and a heart saturated with the Holy Spirit, will produce sound and nourishing speech for the people of God (Erasmus, 1797:9-14). Erasmus went so far as to explicate that the preaching of “wicked men” is to be shunned because they feed poison.

Zwingli too held preaching in high esteem and stressed the place of the calling. For him, true preachers are people who have an inward call from God confirmed by the outward commissioning of the church. Like Niles who insisted on the preacher being a servant first, Zwingli insisted that preachers “must teach and lead us by their good example” (Zwingli, 1984:164). This was the trajectory of Luther’s thought also. As Edwards shows (Edwards, 2010:248-254), Luther believed in the priesthood of all believers, and therefore was of the view that all Christians should preach. According to Edwards, Luther was even open to the preaching of women if no suitable man could be found. It also extended to teachers, schoolmasters, chaplains, parents and all those in positions of responsibility and authority. But for the preservation of good order, Luther believed that in the public assembly of the church, preachers should be men who are called to preach and ordained into the preaching office. As Edwards notes, Luther’s concept of preaching was broad and not always limited to the official worship of the church; the same could be said of Niles. For Luther, the call to preaching is done by God and His church. Those called are expected to be able and competent, not for their own sakes but for the welfare of the Church. Luther expects the called person to have a good voice, good memory, good eloquence and other natural gifts. Education is indispensable if the preacher is to be skilled in the scriptures so that he may be able to defend the church. But education alone was insufficient. Luther expected a preacher to be sure of his own call and to be faithful to the Word of God. The preacher ought not to be intimidated by his hearers, even if they be highly educated; “Think of yourself as the most learned man when you are in the pulpit” was his instruction to preachers. Luther had no doubt that the practice of the preacher’s life must be in agreement with his preaching. Since the preacher is called to preach against sin and call for faith in Christ, only the godly preacher can do this, according to Luther. Finally, Luther is realistic when he concedes that the fruit of preaching is not in the preacher’s hands or in preaching itself; it is God’s doing (Edwards, 2010). Thus Niles stands in good Protestant tradition when he writes that the first
calling of the preacher is to be a servant of Jesus Christ, and it is as servant that he is truly
qualified to preach. Unlike Luther, Niles does not explicitly mention the outward calling of
the Church, but given his background in the Methodism of the nineteenth and early
twentieth centuries, we may safely assume that this was his accepted paradigm. Again, in
his lectures, Niles speaks of preachers and does not limit this role to men at the expense of
women. Perhaps, like Luther, Niles would have been open to the ministry of women,
although, for the sake of good order, not necessarily in the public worship of the Church. It
is important to note that the context of preaching was important for Luther. Although he
believed in the priesthood of all believers, he especially conceived of preaching within its
liturgical setting in Christian worship, and taught that although the spoken word is “the
word of human being”, it has been instituted by divine authority for salvation. Luther
ascribed “an almost sacramental quality” to the office of preaching so that when the Word
of God is preached, no one is exempted from its benefits (George, 1988:91). Like Luther
then, Niles too had a broad view of preaching, but always seeing it as central to Christian
worship.

Our investigation reveals that Niles and Calvin gave prominence to the preacher’s own
spiritual health. Niles called this the preacher’s calling to be a servant. Calvin offered the
same insight reminding preachers that since they speak, voila God, the least they can do is
to have God’s teaching imprinted within them and “let it take root there and then that our
mouth would bear witness of what we know”. In brief, we need to have been taught by God
before we can be masters or doctors (Calvin, 1863-1900:35:43-45).

Thus in this dialogue between Niles of the East and some of the Protestant Reformers of the
West, we see that, theoretically at least, both appear to emphasise the necessity of being
called to the office of preaching. Such a call is both divine and ecclesiastical. A true preacher
is one who is in himself and in his life a servant of the God whose message he bears. But,
ordinarily, this inward calling must be confirmed by the outward calling of the Christian
Church. As Satyaranjan noted in the previous chapter concerning the variation in Indian
Churches, it may be argued that the Church in the West today together with its mainstream
counterparts in the East tends to emphasise the outward calling at the expense of the inward one. On the other hand, independent churches in the East tend to place most of the emphasis on the preacher’s inward calling – his piety, spirituality etc. – at the expense of the outward ecclesiastical calling. A balanced theology of preaching must emphasise both.

3.7.2 Character and Purpose of Preaching

According to our study, Erasmus’ understanding of preaching might be called Trinitarian. Here, Niles with his strongly trinitarian theology would have agreed with him. Like Erasmus, Niles could see preaching as the free communication of God’s word to the flock of Christ, the declaring of the will of God to His people and distributing among them treasures of heavenly wisdom. And like Erasmus, Niles was clear that such preaching was important for the attainment of eternal salvation. Perhaps, one serious weakness of Erasmus’ *Ecclesiastes* is that its author fails to set and study preaching in its liturgical context. Our study of Erasmus’ understanding of the genus of preaching suggests that for Erasmus, preaching is an address on a sacred subject to a popular audience more than it is worship (Erasmus, 1797:1-2). Niles’ understanding of the context of preaching is probably clearer and better since for Niles preaching is worship, given that it is set within the context of God’s work in history and the previousness of Jesus Christ in the world.

Zwingli saw the purpose of preaching as to build the church by unveiling God’s will to His people while simultaneously destroying the works of evil; preachers were to feed and guard God’s flock. Niles too saw these purposes in Christian preaching. But perhaps more than Zwingli, Niles saw the importance of evangelism in the preaching task. For Niles, the gospel is a call to humanity to recognise the kingship of God in Jesus Christ. But the difference in emphasis might be explained by the difference in their historical and social contexts; Niles lived in a society of religious pluralism while Zwingli ministered in a Europe under the sway of Christendom.
Zwingli’s contemporary, Martin Luther in Germany, held to the unity of Spirit and Word, declaring: “The Word, I say, and only the Word is the vehicle of God’s grace”. Perhaps, the Lutheran view failed to safeguard the freedom of the Spirit. But Zwingli’s separation of Spirit and Word made it impossible for him to enunciate a satisfactory theology of preaching. It was left to Bullinger, Zwingli’s successor at Zurich, to produce a more succinct and definitive theology of preaching in his *Helvetica posterior* when he wrote: *Praedicatio verbi Dei est verbum Dei*.

Pelikan has observed that for Luther, “The Word of God was the speech of God, and the God who speaks would be an appropriate way to summarise Luther’s picture of God” (Pelikan, 1959:50). Thus for Luther, the Word of God spoken is itself the Word of God in preaching or God’s own speech to His people. Consequently preaching has a dual aspect: it is divine activity and human activity; it is both God’s Word and human speech. Such a theology of preaching is vital for Luther’s own theology of God. Luther’s God is self-revealing and is One who is present with His people. In any less theology of preaching, there is the temptation to “slip into the idea that preaching is only speech about God. Such a slip once made gradually alters the picture of God, so that he becomes the far-off deistic God who is remote from the preached word and is only spoken about as we speak about someone who is absent” (Wingren, 1960:19). For Martin Luther then, the efficacy of preaching does not rest in human power or techniques, but rather in God’s power (Althaus, 1966:41). Preaching is indeed the minister’s activity; but it is also God’s activity. The voice may be the minister’s, but the faithful words he uses are really spoken by God. God meets human beings through the agency of human voice. Preaching is God’s Word speaking to us, not a rehashing of the old stories.

Calvin shared in this high view of preaching. Although Niles does not directly or explicitly use either the sacramental or instrumental language of Calvin, like the Reformer, Niles believed that preaching is a human activity within the divine activity. For Calvin, there was God’s two-fold accomplishment in the preaching of the Word by God’s ministers. First, Christ gives His sacramental presence in the midst of His church, imparting to men the grace, which the
Word promises. The preaching of the Word by a minister is the gracious form behind which God in coming near to humankind veils Himself from the glory which humankind cannot bear to behold directly. He consults our weakness in being pleased to address us through an interpreter, that he may thus allure us to Himself, instead of driving us away by His thunder (Calvin, 1949:4.1.5). Secondly, through preaching Christ “establishes His kingdom over the hearts of His hearers” and “in a hidden way directs the whole course of history and creates the disturbance amongst the nations that is to bring about the consummation of His eternal purpose”. Preaching is not only the sceptre by which Christ rules within His church but also the sword in the hand of the church by which secretly and unknown even to itself the church rules or brings judgement amongst the nations (Calvin, 1863-1900:32:440).

In Calvin, we discern three motives for preaching: “in order that God may be better honoured among us” (Calvin, 1863-1900:26:226), “in order that our life may be reformed” (Calvin, 1863-1900:26:241), and to bear witness to truth whilst presenting salvation (Calvin, 1863-1900:53:67). Niles too saw preaching as necessary for the building of the Church and the evangelisation of the lost. Although he does not say this explicitly, it seems reasonable to assume that Niles’ lectures saw preaching to be for God’s glory.

Thus the Church in the East and West has had and should continue to have a high view of preaching. At a theoretical level, both seem to understand true preaching as a divine and simultaneously human activity; it is the voice of God through the voice of a human being. Both see the purpose of preaching as building the Church and also for the repentance of sinners. As we shall show later (see Section 6.3), it is possible to argue that preaching is not held in as high a regard in many parts of the contemporary global church as it was in the Church of the Reformers. It may be that the contemporary church can recover the theological heritage of the Reformers and learn to see the transcendent divine context within which true preaching operates.

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55 Commentary on Isaiah 11:10, 56 Commentary on Psalm 149:9
3.7.3 Content of Preaching

As previously noted (see Section 2.6), Niles’ content for preaching was strongly Christocentric. Whilst Erasmus does not use the same language and his emphasis on the content of preaching is probably more ethical than Christological, he did hold that preaching is the exposition and communication of the Logos, Christ Jesus. For Erasmus, it is the Logos who quickens the dead and gives efficacy to the means of grace. Zwingli too expected the content of the preacher’s sermons to be the gospel. He defines preachers as those “who preach the gospel” (Zwingli, 1984:164). We must assume that Zwingli’s ideas on preaching were set within the liturgical context since this was where most preaching took place in the age of reform. But one area where Niles and Zwingli might part company is regarding the place of preaching in the Christian experience. Zwingli held the Scriptures to be the Word of God and believed that God’s power was inherent in them (Stephens, 1986:172). But he refused to concede that the outward word of preaching had power and could lead to faith. He resolutely maintained that there was no inherent power in preaching, even if it was faithful, except when that act was specially graced by the presence of God’s Spirit acting in His own unfathomable, sovereign will (Stephens, 1986:178-179). As we have said, the explanation for this could be innocuous; Zwingli could have been reluctant to replace papal authority and infallibility with that of preaching and preachers. Moreover, Zwingli’s opposition to idolatry and iconoclasm (Gabler, 1986:105-107) meant that he was not ready to make the preached word a representative of God Himself. Thirdly, it is possible that Zwingli’s view on the Lord’s Supper influenced his theology of preaching. Zwingli saw the Supper as a sign and could not see Christ as literally present at its celebration. Consequently, his theological framework would have struggled to see the ascended Christ as present in the act of preaching, addressing His people through a human preacher (Pipkin, 1985). Four hundred and twenty years after Zwingli’s death, in an Asia clamouring for independence, influenced by the dialectical theology of the Barth and the existential writings of Bultmann, Niles had no such inhibitions.
For Luther the limit of preaching is its content, that is, the gospel. In Luther’s view, it is the true, faithful biblical, redemptive content that is partly responsible for making preaching the Word of God. For Luther, preaching must deal with Christ – incarnate, crucified, resurrected - for God has designated the place and person, showing where and how he can be found. With audacity, Luther identified the Word of God as the gospel (Luther, 1957:346). As we have said repeatedly, the gospel and the finality of Jesus Christ was the central content in Niles’ understanding of preaching. Still, both Luther and Niles were clear that preachers must assume the right to speak though not the power to accomplish (Luther, 1959:76). In his Lectures on Genesis, Luther spoke of the Word as the instrument, which God employs to accomplish his work of creation (Kolb, 1999:358). The phrase ‘God said’ for Luther means not only the utterance of God but also the action and deed of God. God’s Word is causative efficaciously. God’s word acts and accomplishes his will. God’s Word is his instrument of power, which takes created forms. Luther was convinced that it was the Holy Spirit that made the preached Word to become a personal word. Calvin too gave an important place to the role of the Holy Spirit in preaching though Niles is not as thorough on this point as Calvin is. For Calvin, the content of preaching is always the gospel. He therefore calls preachers ‘teachers’ and ‘ambassadors’ like Paul does. According to Calvin, no one can understand the mysteries of God unless it is given to them by the inward teaching of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, like Calvin, Niles believed that the fruit that flows from preaching is in the hands of God. Calvin is clear that the gospel is preached not only by Christ’s command but by His authority and direction; in short, we are only in his hand, and He alone is the author of the work (Calvin, 1863-1900:45:369). In Niles’ vocabulary, God watches over His own word to fulfill it.

Commentary on Matthew 13:37. Calvin makes this same point in his Institutes where he writes that “among the many noble endowments with which God has adorned the human race, one of the most remarkable is, that He deigns to consecrate the mouths and tongues of men to His service, making His own voice to be heard in them”, John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian religion: a new translation by Henry Beveridge, (London: James Clarke, 1949), 4.1.5.
The Church in the East and West has mainly stressed that the content of true preaching ought to be the gospel. It therefore centres on what God has done in the person of Jesus Christ. This Christocentric theme was present in the Reformers. And it is also very apparent in the writings of Niles. Thus, there is no other message for any Christian preacher to preach, whether in the East or in the West.

3.7.4 Consequences of Preaching

Niles was clear that the harvest of preaching is not in the hands of the preacher but in the Lord of the harvest; the preacher serves in response to grace. Likewise, Erasmus taught that it is the Spirit that influences the soul of the preacher, communicates its power to the language, which flows from it. The regeneration of the heart is a matter for God. The role of the preacher is to plant and water with diligence, earnestly beseeching God to give the increase (Erasmus, 1797:16). Again, like Niles, the true preacher is to be a true servant; for Erasmus, faithfulness to Scripture must be accompanied by faithfulness to the Spirit of God. In fact, the preacher’s failure, according to Erasmus, is linked to the preacher’s failure to be a servant of Jesus Christ. For him the whole reason for failure is to be imputed to the preachers’ indolence, who have not been “workers together with God” (Erasmus, 1797:57). For Erasmus, when the preacher exerts his energy in study and preparation, the exercise of the preacher’s natural or acquired powers and talents will be strengthened and improved by the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit uses the gifts and diligence of the preacher in a mysterious way and there is in the preaching event a transubstantiation of the Word. It is unclear if Niles would have approved of transubstantative imagery or language.

For Luther, preaching is an indispensable means of grace, and it is supremely through the words of the preacher that the Word of God in the Scriptures is made alive in the present. According to him, preaching is not only a mark of a true Church; it is a Living Word. Like Luther, Niles seems to have believed that the importance of preaching is given in the finality of the gospel in Jesus Christ. For Luther, the gospel, which used to be hidden in the Scriptures, has become an oral preaching. He therefore believed that the New Testament
and of the gospel must be preached and performed by word of mouth and a living voice. Luther argued that Christ himself has not written anything, nor has he ordered anything to be written, but rather to be preached by word of mouth (George, 1988:91). For Luther, God continues to speak to people through the preached Word. It is through this Word that he is present with his people and continues to meet them salvifically. Preaching must thereby observe the limit, which God has prescribed. But one insight that is always explicit in Niles but is usually implicit in the writings of the Reformers is the offensive nature of preaching. The Reformers knew that the preaching of the gospel often leads to persecution and they experienced it themselves. Niles calls this the ‘stone of stumbling and the rock of offence’.

The implication of this section of the dialogue is that theologians in the East and West are clear that positive and ‘negative’ consequences flow from authentic preaching. Positively, there is repentance unto salvation and repentance that produces sanctification. Negatively, it leads to resistance and offence. Niles is especially explicit about the offence of preaching, perhaps due to his background in a pluralistic society. It is possible that Eastern theologians are more acutely aware of the offensiveness of the gospel than their Western counterparts. But as the West becomes increasingly pagan, Western preachers need to be reminded of the scandalous nature of both the method and message of true preaching. Moreover, as the Church in the West finds itself in a post-Christian milieu, in the midst of societies that have moved away from the Christendom of the Reformation age, the Church and its preachers will have to deepen their understanding of preaching in order to see preaching as both edification and evangelism.
3.8 Summary

The Reformers lived in revolutionary times. Our examination has revealed that there were slightly different emphases because of their different circumstances. Erasmus was doubtless cognisant of this too, but Zwingli, Luther and Calvin were aware that there are many within and without the Church who devalued preaching, thinking that they might be able to obtain equal value from private study, devotion and meditation at the expense of the public assembly of the Church (Calvin, 1960:1016, Book IV, I:4-5). But for the Reformers, preaching is, as Calvin put it, “necessary” and “highly approved” (Calvin, 1960:1017-1018, Book IV, I:5-6), a ministry given in order that the Church of Christ might be educated and built up. The Reformers had concluded that in every age the prophets and godly teachers have had a difficult struggle with the ungodly, who in their stubbornness can never submit to the yoke of being taught by human word and ministry.

Despite these pressures, the Reformers refused to elevate preaching to equality with Scripture. In their views, Scripture is definitive and sovereign; true preaching always remains derivative of and subordinate to this. Whilst Scripture does not have to conform to preaching, the latter must conform to the former. Thus it is this humble position of preaching as derivative and subordinate that is precisely its glory. Therefore, in so far as the Reformers were concerned God’s Word, for them meant, that which is spoken by God; not simply in its first giving but in its every repetition. Repetition does not make it less than what it was – the Word of God. But it is the duty of the hearers to always ask themselves whether the word which they hear has indeed been spoken by God. If the teaching is faithful to Scripture, then it is God who is speaking, irrespective of the purveyor of the teaching. These Reformation thoughts on preaching were best summarised by the next generation especially in the words of Heinrich Bullinger in his Second Helvetic Confession to which we turn in the next chapter.
For now, we may conclude that the many common strands between Niles’ theology of preaching and that of the Reformers augurs well for a global, ecumenical Christianity. While the objective emphases of the Reformers is vital — concerning the preacher’s calling, the content of preaching being the gospel and the work of the Holy Spirit in true preaching — Niles supplements and enriches these grand insights with the subjectivity and accent on spirituality that today seems to be more rooted in the East (Parachin, 2007); we see this in Niles’ call for servanthood before preaching and his consistent attempt to place preaching within the context of the Kingdom of God. Thus Niles repeatedly speaks of the previousness and finality of Jesus Christ.
4.0 Bullinger and the *Second Helvetic Confession* on Preaching

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to interpret Niles’ theory of preaching in the context of his own Non-Western background and the bibliographical sources from the Protestant Reformation regarding the essence of preaching especially as it is expressed in the *Second Helvetic Confession*. According to Osmer, the question asked in the interpretative process is this: Why is this going on? Our approach follows on from the previously engaged descriptive-empirical task which sought to answer the question, What is going on? (Osmer, 2008:4). Thus our objective here is to analyse and interpret the past patterns and contemporary processes of theological contextualisation and construction employed by Christians from Western and Non-Western Churches in the appropriation and re-shaping of the theology of preaching in diverse socio-political and religious contexts.

For a very long time, history appears to have forgotten Heinrich Bullinger of Zurich. Such was the amnesia that one scholar described Bullinger as being perceived among the “Reformers in the wings” (Steinmetz, 2001:93-99). More recently, there has been a reversal of this situation and a flourish of studies on the man and his writings. Still, little attention has been given to Bullinger’s theology of preaching (Gordon & Campi, 2004:135-157). We will first seek to set Bullinger in his historical and theological context before attempting to examine his theology of preaching as represented chiefly in his famous statement on preaching in the *Second Helvetic Confession*.
4.2 Heinrich Bullinger - The Man and His Context

Historians have noticed that although much is known of the magisterial Protestant reformer Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531), much less is understood of Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575), Zwingli's pupil, friend and successor in Zurich (Euler, 2006:1-9). Historically, Zwingli was a pioneering Reformer in Switzerland whose work was completed by Bullinger, Calvin and others. As indicated above, Zwingli died in battle at the zenith of his life (see Section 3.4.1).

Various explanations have been given for the diminishing of Bullinger’s name and influence in contrast to the relative fame of Zwingli. According to Gordon, Bullinger’s influence waned considerably in the seventeenth century, even though he was a first rank reformer in the sixteenth century. Gordon ascribes this to such factors as the increasing provincialism of the Swiss institutions of higher learning and the Remonstrants’ appeal to Bullinger’s view in the debate about the doctrine of predestination at the Synod of Dort in 1618-1619 (Gordon, 2004:17-34). Strohm gives another perspective, positing that Zwingli tended to overshadow Bullinger in traditional historical studies because Zwingli’s theology was more amenable to the Enlightenment assumptions of the historians of doctrine of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Strohm, 2004:159-167).

Heinrich Bullinger was born on 18th July 1504, the youngest of five sons to a parish priest in Bremgarten, near Zurich (Gordon, 2002:170-183). Bullinger’s father Heinrich like many priests then, disregarded the laws of celibacy and lived in regular wedlock. Thus the child Heinrich was born into a home which although not officially sanctioned had all the stability of marriage. It is noteworthy that in 1529 through the influence of his son, Heinrich Senior became a Protestant and immediately legitimised this ‘union’ by entering into marriage (Gordon, 2002).  

The young Bullinger began his education at Cleves before moving on to Cologne in Germany where he became interested in the works of Chrysostom and Augustine. The study of the church fathers led him to study the Scriptures. At about this time, the spirit of Reformation provoked by Luther was beginning to influence Bullinger. At the end of his studies in Germany in 1522, Bullinger returned to Switzerland and began to teach the new theology at the Cloister School linked to the monastery in Cappel. Subsequently, he appears to have spent some time in Zurich listening to Zwingli, perfecting his Greek and learning Hebrew. In 1529, Bullinger was called to succeed his father as minister at Bremgarten. In 1531 when Zwingli was killed in the battle of Cappel, Bullinger was chosen to be Zwingli’s successor as chief pastor of Zurich at the Grossmunster (McEnhill & Newlands, 2004:234-239). He remained there until his death in 1575, initially preaching six or seven times a week, but latterly only on Fridays and Sundays (Steinmetz, 2001:97).

As noted afore, previous scholarship had assumed that all was darkness and death in the late Medieval Church (Cameron, 1991) and that preaching was a recovery or discovery made by the reformers. Coulton (Coulton, 1959:58-71), Owst (Owst, 1926) and others (Oakley, 1985) have now produced studies arguing that there was good preaching in Europe even before Luther’s theological breakthrough. But with the unfolding of the Reformation, it was quickly recognised that preaching is the primary task of the ministry. Indeed, the currents of Reformation meant that the entire office of the ministry became defined by the act of preaching. Reformation pastors came to be designated simply as “Minister of the Word” or “Preacher of the Gospel” (Pauck, 1956:116). Thus the Reformation church was grounded in preaching and preaching was regarded as the primary means whereby God edifies saints, nurtures faith, saves sinners, and calls the unsaved to flee from the wrath to come. It was into this social and theological world, one upholding a high view of preaching, that Heinrich Bullinger entered as a preacher.

Bullinger’s ministry in Zurich was for forty-four years (1531-1575, thus including in it the whole thirty years of Calvin's active Protestant life (1534-1564). Throughout these years, according to Campi, Bullinger ranked easily with Calvin as a leader of the maturing Reformation, due both to the eminence of his position in the strong Zurich Church and his prolific writings (Campi, 2014:57-82). Bullinger outlived Calvin by eleven years and was respected by other leaders of the Reformation and by third generation scholars like Beza and Ursinus (co-author of The Heidelberg Catechism). Though less controversial than Luther or Calvin, Bullinger is being increasingly recognised as one of the most influential theologians of the Protestant Reformation (Gordon, 2004:17-34). Venema goes so far as to argue that Bullinger deserves respect as a significant theologian of the Reformation, and that his writings are sophisticated enough to be compared favourably with Calvin’s Institutes (Venema, 2002:89).

Bullinger appears to have possessed the qualifications needed for the responsibilities in Zurich. His preaching was said to be lucid and enriching; his writings were in demand internationally and one of his associates spoke of him as “a divine, enriched by unmeasured gifts of God” (McNeill, 1967:69). It is also said that Bullinger’s live was exemplary of all that was best in the Reformation. According to Gordon, the Reformation continued in Switzerland largely “due to the faithfulness of Bullinger, who was determined to fight by the Word rather than the sword, that Zwingli’s work at Zurich was preserved and restored” (Gordon, 2002:146-189).

As a theologian, Bullinger appears to have been irenic, although he disagreed with the Lutherans over the Lord’s Supper, with Calvin over the decrees of God, and with the Radical Reformation over various issues (Goertz, 2008). As a Christian, Bullinger was truly Catholic in his disposition and was in friendly correspondence with Calvin, Bucer, Melancthon, Beza, Cranmer, Hooper, Lady Jane Grey and many of the leading Protestant divines of England (Collinson, 1985:197-224). According to Pestalozzi, it appears that the imprisoned Bishop Hooper who spent a brief exile in Zurich with Bullinger, saw Bullinger as 'his revered father and guide' and best friend (Pestalozzi, 1858:441-447). With respect to his influence in
England, which surpassed that of Calvin, Cunningham wrote: “the actual theological views adopted by Cranmer and embodied in the Thirty Nine articles, more nearly resembled in point of fact, the opinions of Bullinger than those of any other eminent man of the period” (Cunningham, 1979:190).

Bullinger was a prolific author who wrote more than one hundred and fifty published and unpublished works. He was one of the authors of the First Helvetic Confession of 1536, the author of the Second Helvetic Confession and his Decades (as we shall see below) are a series of fifty sermons summarizing Reformed theology and ethics. As MacCulloch acknowledges, these were found to be of such value that they were made compulsory reading for the less educated clergy of the Elizabethan Church of England (MacCulloch, 2006:176-179).

4.3 The Second Helvetic Confession

4.3.1 The Second Helvetic Confession - Context

The First Helvetic Confession originated in 1536 with a desire to harmonise and solidify Reformation teaching by providing a common Swiss confession. The term ‘Helvetii’ was a Latin designation for the people of East Gaul, now called Switzerland (Beeke & Ferguson, 1999:x). But this First Confession did not gain wide approval due to disagreements over the ‘real presence’ of Christ at the Lord’s Supper.

The Second Helvetic Confession (Latin: Confessio Helvetica posterior) was initially a personal confession and testimony written down by Heinrich Bullinger in 1561/1562. Facing what he perceived to be his own mortality during the plague of 1564, Bullinger appears to have revised this Confession (Ella, 2007). In the event, Bullinger survived the plague though his wife and three daughters did not. After the plague, Bullinger was asked by Frederick III, Elector of Palatinate, to provide an exposition of the Reformed Faith. Bullinger gave his
improved piece of work to Frederick who had it translated into German. Following some more revision at a conference in Zurich, this confession was agreed to and accepted by Berne, Biel, Geneva, the Grisons, Muhlhausen, Schaffhausen, and St. Gall.\(^6\) In addition to the Swiss Cantons in whose name it was first issued in 1566, the Reformed Churches of Scotland (1566), Hungary (1567), France (1571) and Poland (1571) gave it their sanction. It was also well received in Holland and England. Given that it was written against the background of the definitive edition of Calvin’s *Institutes* (1559) as well as the Counter-Reformation assembly at Trent (1545-1563), the *Second Helvetic Confession* may be considered a mature statement of Reformed theology in thirty chapters.

It must be conceded that some Bullinger scholars have recently questioned the primary importance of the *Second Helvetic Confession* for our understanding of Bullinger’s theology. Dowey has surveyed the three types of Bullinger’s theological writings – biblical commentary, thematic and polemical treatises, and comprehensive presentations of Christian doctrine as a whole – and argues that Bullinger’s theology exhibits several dominant motifs and is most significantly set forth in his *Decades* (Dowey, 2004:35-66). Dowey is of the view that Bullinger is most himself in his *Decades*, more truly than in any other of his major writings (Dowey, 2004:6). According to Opitz, the *Decades* are Bullinger’s most important theological work (Opitz, 2004a:101-116). On the other hand, Benedict (Benedict, 2002:118) and Venema (Venema, 2002:90) have given importance to the *Second Helvetic Confession*. It must however be recognised that Dowey and Opitz were writing against the historical background of Ernst Koch who had treated the *Second Helvetic Confession* as Bullinger’s principal theological writing (Koch, 1968). Moreover, Koch and others had argued that Bullinger was unlike Calvin and that he was the author of ‘the other Reformed tradition’. It is probable that Dowey and Opitz were seeking to moderate the assertions of Koch. Whilst Dowey and Opitz are persuasive in their theses, and we shall seek

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\(^6\) Heinrich Bullinger, *Confessio Helvetica Posteriors in English, A confession of faith, made by common consent of divers reformed churches beyond the seas With an exhortation to the reformation of the church. Perused and allowed, according to the Queenses majesties injunctions, A briefe, and plaine confession and declaration of true Christian Religion*, [The Second Helvetic Confession of 1566], (London: Henry Bynneman for Lucas Harison, 1571)
to compare our study of the *Second Helvetic Confession* with parts of Bullinger’s *Decades*, we maintain that an examination of Bullinger’s *Second Helvetic Confession* is useful and even necessary for a Reformed understanding of preaching since Bullinger is its sole author and this document has been widely accepted in the Reformed Churches. Moreover, it seems that although the *Decades* may present the mature theological reflections of Bullinger, their seeds are already in the *Second Helvetic Confession* and there appears to be no evident contradiction between the two in their theories of preaching.\(^{61}\)

Cochrane informs us that the *Second Helvetic Confession* remains the official statement in most of the Reformed Churches of Eastern Europe and in the Hungarian Reformed Church in America (Cochrane, 2003:220-301). According to Schaff, next to the *Heidelberg Catechism*, the *Second Helvetic Confession* is the most generally recognised confession of the Reformed Church (Schaff, 2007:233). Principal Macleod of Scotland, in his magisterial study of Scottish Theology, writes thus of the General Assembly’s acceptance of the *Second Helvetic Confession* and the show of unity that was to be found among the Reformed Churches in various lands at this time:

> It was little wonder then, that when they were content to take and keep their place at the footstool of their Lord as He speaks by His Spirit in His Word they should see eye to eye and be willing to make joint confession to the truth of the gospel which they had learned in His school (Macleod, 1974:101).

In the United States of America, Charles Hodge of Princeton wrote that “*The Second Helvetic Confession* is on some accounts to be regarded as the most authoritative symbol of the Reformed Church, as it was more generally received than any other” (Hodge, 1960:634-635). More recently, Andreas Mühling has challenged the older assumptions regarding the pre-eminence of Geneva and Calvin to the history of the Reformation of the sixteenth century (Mühling, 2004:94-105). Mühling details the myriad facets of Bullinger’s labour as

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\(^{61}\) Fesko takes another, although not dissimilar, route when he relies on *The Decades, The Second Helvetic Confession* with assistance from Bullinger’s *Compendium*, see John Fesko, *Beyond Calvin: Union with Christ and Justification in Early Modern Reformed Theology (1517-1700)*, Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012:177
Antistes in Zürich and argues that Zürich under Bullinger’s leadership rivalled Geneva in importance as a theological and church-political centre. For Mühling, Zurich and Bullinger were important centres in the development of Reformation Theology. If Mühling’s assertion is correct, then the Second Helvetic Confession especially is a mature statement of Reformed theology which was also widely accepted by Reformed Churches in different parts of Europe. This gives it a certain catholicity and theological gravitas.

4.3.2 The Second Helvetic Confession – Text

The Second Helvetic Confession begins with an opening chapter on ‘The Holy Scripture being the True Word of God’. Within this chapter and in its fourth article, it says thus:

THE PREACHING OF THE WORD OF GOD IS THE WORD OF GOD. Wherefore when this Word of God is now preached in the church by preachers lawfully called, we believe that the very Word of God is proclaimed, and received by the faithful; and that neither any other Word of God is to be invented nor is to be expected from heaven: and that now the Word itself which is preached is to be regarded, not the minister that preaches; for even if he be evil and a sinner, nevertheless the Word of God remains still true and good.

Neither do we think that therefore the outward preaching is to be thought as fruitless because the instruction in true religion depends on the inward illumination of the Spirit, or because it is written "And no longer shall each man teach his neighbour..., for they shall all know me" (Jer. 31:34), And "Neither he who plants nor he that waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth" (I Cor. 3:7). For although "No one can come to Christ unless he be drawn by the Father" (John 6:44), and unless the Holy Spirit inwardly illumines him, yet we know that it is surely the will of God that his Word should be preached outwardly also. God could indeed, by his Holy Spirit, or by the ministry of an angel, without the ministry of St. Peter, have taught Cornelius in the Acts; but, nevertheless, he refers him to Peter, of whom the angel speaking says, "He shall tell you what you ought to do (Schaff, 2007:832).
The Latin text of this section begins thus:

Proinde cum hodie hoc Dei verbum per prædicatores legitime vocatos annuniciatur in Ecclesia, credimus ipsum Dei verbum annuncii et a fidelibus recipi, neque aliud Dei verbum vel fingendum, vel coelitus esse exspectandum: atque in præsenti spectandum esse ipsum verbum, quod annunciatur, non annunciantem ministrum, qui, etsi sit malus et peccator, verum tamen et bonum manet nihilominus verbum Dei (Schaff, 2007:237-238).

Reformation scholars have neatly summarised Bullinger’s central thesis on preaching in Latin as: Praedicato verbi Dei est verbum Dei (Dowey, 1994:5-18). The original title given to this document was ‘Confession et Expositio Simplex Orthodoxae Fidei’ (Schaff, 2007:233).62

It must be immediately acknowledged that the statement ‘The preaching of the Word of God is God’s Word’ is not to be found in Schaff’s Latin text or his English translation. But the Second Helvetic Confession was also published in German and French, and Dowey who uses the standard Latin text found in Wilhelm Niesel’s edition accepts that the statement is present as a “dramatic and widely quoted marginal heading” (Dowey, 1994:9). This view is further supported by Karle who has recently offered a careful assessment of Bullinger’s theology of preaching as it is given in Bullinger’s own oft-quoted formulae. Karle warns against a superficial reading of this formulae, which would separate the event of preaching from its context in the church and the hearing of the congregation, or would diminish the preacher’s responsibility to speak for God in conformity to the Scriptures (Karle, 2004:140-147).

62 The whole text of the Confession is to be found in Schaff's Creeds of Christendom, Volume III, Appendix I, in Cochrane’s Reformed Confessions of the 16th Century, and in Leith’s Creed’s of the Churches (Leith, 1982).
We, therefore, have good reason to conclude that while the statement itself might be marginal, its authenticity is neither suspicious nor its content outrageous. The doctrine of preaching was a true lifelong occupation of Bullinger and he wrote about this extensively in his *Decades* and other works. According to Locher’s extensive research, Bullinger had great interest in the doctrine of the word of God especially in the oral and audible passing along with the gospel from Adam to Moses (Locher, 1954).

4.3.3 The *Second Helvetic Confession* – Structure and Statement

The *Second Helvetic Confession* substantially follows the same order of topics as the *First Helvetic Confession*, but is an improvement on the latter both in form and substance. According to Schaff, “It is Scriptural and catholic, wise and judicious, full and elaborate, yet simple and clear, uncompromising towards the errors of Rome, and moderate in its dissent from Lutheran dogmas” (Schaff, 2007:394). A detailed analysis of the *Confession* is beyond our scope here, but some general observations may be helpful before a detailed examination of its teaching on preaching. The following outline indicates the matters covered:

Preface

Chapters 1 and 2: The Scriptures and their interpretation.

Chapters 3 to 11: The Doctrine of God; Idols, Images and Saints; The One Mediator; Providence; Creation; The Fall; Free Will and Man’s Ability; Predestination and Election; Jesus Christ, True God and Man.

Chapters 12 to 16: The Law of God; The Gospel; Repentance and Conversion; Justification; Faith and Good Works.

Chapters 17 to 30: The Church and its only Head; The Ministry; The Sacraments; Ecclesiastical Assemblies; Prayers and Singing; Feasts and Fasts; Catechising and Visiting the Sick; Burial, Purgatory and Apparition of Spirits; Rites and Ceremonies; Celibacy, Marriage and Domestic Affairs; The Civil Magistrate.
Central to the *Second Helvetic Confession* is the doctrine of Christ. Chapter Eleven gives “the most complete official deliverance on the Reformed position with respect to the doctrine of Christ” (Berkhof, 1978:116). Here Bullinger states the positive truth concerning the person of Christ but also refutes the unorthodox views of Arius, Ebion, Marcion and Nestorius (Schaff, 2007:850-854).

Chapter twenty-one deals with ‘the Holy Supper of the Lord' and indicates development from Zwingli’s ‘memorial view’ when Bullinger states that for the faithful coming to the Lord's Table there is a corporeal eating, a spiritual eating and a sacramental eating of the bread and wine:

> The body of Christ is in the heavens, at the right hand of His Father, and therefore our hearts are to be lifted up on high and not to be fixed on the bread, neither is the Lord to be worshipped in the bread. Yet the Lord is not absent from His Church when she celebrates the Lord's Supper .... Whereupon it follows that we have an unbloody and mystical supper, even as all antiquity called it’ (Schaff, 2007:894-895).

This position on the Lord’s Supper would seem to suggest that Bullinger was influenced by Calvin to some extent and was attempting to take a mediating line between Luther and Zwingli. Bullinger uses the concluding chapters of the *Second Helvetic Confession*’s to cover practical subjects involving Christians and the church. There is instruction given on various matters including decency, humility and modesty in ecclesiastical meetings, fasting and the choice of food, instructing young people and the visitation of the sick, the proper use of the Church’s possessions, relationships for single people, within marriage and family life with children and servants, relating to civil government and even engagement in warfare in God’s name! Throughout, Bullinger incorporates Scripture to support his teaching (Schaff, 2007:897-909).

Throughout the *Confession*, Bullinger’s emphasis is on the practical historical concerns of the Church. As we have seen, the age of ferment meant that radical questions were being asked about the church, its ministry and even of preaching itself. Preaching and the true function of the ministry were under attack both from the practices of the Medieval Church
and the Radical Reformers. This question is dealt with in Chapter 1 and is headed 'Of the Holy Scriptures being the True Word of God'. There, a statement on outward proclamation is interweaved with an assertion on inward illumination.

4.3.4 The Second Helvetic Confession – Theology of Preaching

In seeking to examine the Second Helvetic Confession’s teaching on preaching, it is necessary to investigate its teaching on Holy Scripture as the Word of God, the calling and discipline of the preacher, the act of preaching itself, the context of preaching in the Church and the role of the Holy Spirit in the preaching task.

4.3.4.1 The Word of God

The Second Helvetic Confession begins with the doctrine of the Word of God. As Dowey notes, this is unlike many other Reformed documents which tend to open with statements on the doctrine of revelation in creation. Bullinger begins by speaking of revelation and he immediately refers to the Holy Scriptures in their written form. He does not give a list of the canonical books and no reference is made, as in the Westminster Confession of Faith for example, to the providential preservation of the word of God although Dowey notes that there might be a passing reference to this (Dowey, 1994:6). There is also an absence of a detailed explication of the doctrine of inspiration of the written word. Bullinger is clear that the authority of the Scriptures does not rest on the approval of the church but is authenticated by God Himself. In this way, there is an independence and objectivity of biblical authority as God’s word.
According to Dowey, in his *Decades* and *Summa*, Bullinger does give reasons for believing the Holy Scriptures to be the word of God making reference to the worldwide reputations of the men who wrote the Bible, the fulfillment of prophecies, the accomplishment of miracles and signs, the honour shown to the book by numerous translations and the punishment that has come to its enemies (Dowey, 1994:7). It is true that Bullinger does not here seem to make any explicit reference to the inner illumination of the Holy Spirit in the application of Holy Scripture, but he does make what appears to be a rough transition in Chapter 1 of the *Confession* when after speaking about the doctrine of the sufficiency of Holy Scripture, he moves immediately to speak of the Word of preaching and the “inner illumination” of the Holy Spirit. This latter appears as a component of hearing and believing the preached word too.

So what did Bullinger mean when he wrote that the canonical scriptures are the word of God? And what does he mean when he indicates that the preaching of the word of God is the word of God? And what is the place of the inner illumination to the Word as written and preached? Three times in Chapter 1, Bullinger makes the point that the canonical writings are the Word of God. This is also common in Bullinger’s other writings. But according to Dowey, this is not one to one correspondence. Rather, using examples from the *Summa*, the *Decades* and the *First Helvetic Confession*, Dowey argues that the Word is a reference to saving faith and that the content is always soteriological. Dowey quotes Bullinger in the *Summa*:

> We know very well that the Scripture is not called the word of God because of the human voice, the ink and paper, or the printed letters (which can be comprehended by the flesh or destroyed by the flesh), but because the meaning, which speaks through the human voice or is written with pen and ink on paper, is not originally from men, but is God’s word, will and meaning (Dowey, 1994:8).

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63 *Summa* I. iv
Thus, according to Dowey, Bullinger made a distinction between Word as “word, will and meaning” and Word as sound in the air or ink on paper. Dowey argues that Bullinger makes this same distinction in his Decades although Dowey does concede that even here, there is for Bullinger a close identity of that which is spoken and written (Dowey, 1994:8). Dowey therefore contends that for Bullinger, the Bible is called the Word of God because of that which it reveals, “not in an exclusive and unique sense, but in a sense transferable to another instrument carrying out the same function” (Dowey, 1968:204-205). For Dowey this is confirmed by the First Helvetic Confession. To the question what is the purpose of Holy Scripture, the First Helvetic Confession states in Chapter One and refines in Chapter Five that pointing emphatically to the soteriological content “alone”. 64 Again in chapters Twelve and Thirteen, this First Confession states that the purpose of evangelical teaching is the same soteriological content. The Word is not left as a formally defined canon (as in the Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 1) nor is faith presented wholly in the context of justification to the detriment of its noetic content. Dowey acknowledges that the term ‘scopus’ (meaning purpose) drops away in the Second Helvetic Confession. But Dowey maintains that the relationship to which it pointed remains although less forthrightly expressed. He holds that it is found in the close adherence of the Second Helvetic Confession throughout its length to the soteriological centre not only in Chapters Eleven to Sixteen where it might be expected, but also in Chapter One’s emphasis on preaching and saving faith and with particular clarity in Chapters Five and Ten.

We agree with Dowey that Bullinger does place a high emphasis on the soteriological content of both Scripture and preaching. As already mentioned, the doctrine of Christ as found in the Second Helvetic Confession has been highly regarded by theologians. Still, Dowey seems to go too far by placing all or most of the accent on the content and little or nothing on the form. Bullinger himself stresses both the outward and the inward forms of God’s word, and this is even found in Chapter I itself. In writing against the heresies of Artemon, the Manichaeans, the Valentinians, of Cerdon and the Marcionites, he condemns them for not receiving the written Scriptures as delivered to us from God and proceeding from the Holy Spirit (Schaff, 2007:833). Moreover, in Chapter Two when he writes

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64 The word “alone” is repeated three times in Chapter Five
concerning the interpretation of Scripture, he mentions that the grammar and language of the texts in their particular historical contexts must be taken seriously and joined with the rule of charity and faith, and the desire for the glory of God and the salvation of humankind. It is notable also that when Bullinger writes of the content of preaching, he always refers to this as the doctrine of the gospel. When defining this doctrine of the gospel, he is led to “the history set down by the four evangelists declaring how these things were done or fulfilled in Christ (Schaff, 2007:857). In this way, the written Scriptures seem to be foundational and indispensable in Bullinger’s thinking.

Thus while we can agree with Dowey that Bullinger places much emphasis on the words, will and meaning of the Holy Scriptures when he refers to the word of God, it seems better to understand Bullinger in the Second Helvetic Confession as stating that the written Word is itself the Word of God. Of course, it needs to be rightly interpreted and understood, for otherwise it is not the Word of God. But we must insist that in opening the Confession with a chapter on the Holy Scriptures, Bullinger was making clear that he was referring to the canonical texts and their content as fully expressed in the doctrine of the gospel of Jesus. This is the conclusion reached recently by Peter Opitz whose research has highlighted Bullinger’s indebtedness to Luther regarding the Christological focus of Scripture (Opitz, 2004c:106-115).

4.3.4.2 The Calling and Discipline of Preachers

For Bullinger, to be “lawfully called” is for a minister not to usurp for himself the office or to use dishonest methods to gain the position of Minister. In order to be lawfully called, the preacher must be properly chosen by the church, he must possess the necessary qualities and be of good report. Bullinger condemns all those who ‘unlawfully’ take these offices upon themselves (Schaff, 2007:878).
With the exalted place that Bullinger gives to preaching, it is easy to misunderstand him and accuse him of not taking the personal sanctification of the preacher seriously enough. This is certainly not the case. Bullinger places a premium on holiness in the life of all Christian people (Schaff, 2007:861). We cannot doubt that Bullinger expected the same of the church’s preachers. In fact, in the Second Helvetic Confession, he expressly declares that the Minister must be one who fears God, prays diligently, does much reading of the Scriptures, is always watchful and sets an example of holy living (Schaff, 2007:883).

But Bullinger’s view of the preacher’s calling and discipline must be understood within his own historical and theological context. Bullinger was aware of the teachings of the Donatists who sought to separate themselves from Ministers whom they deemed unholy (Quash, 2007:81-90). According to Bullinger, the sacrament is sanctified by its institution and the words of Christ and its efficacy is not dependent on the spiritual well-being of the dispensing Minister. This would appear to be Bullinger’s argument too in relation to preaching. So long as the preacher is lawfully called and the content of his preaching is consistent with the doctrine of the gospel given in the Holy Scriptures, then in that place there is the Word of God (Schaff, 2007:883). Thus, Bullinger’s position was in direct contrast to the teachings of some of the Radical Reformers (Verduin, 1964). These Radical Reformers were teaching the priesthood of all believers and directly and vehemently opposing the place of the Christian Ministry. Against the clamour of these teachers who decried the office of ministers and preachers, Bullinger makes a distinction between the priesthood of the saints and the particular calling of the Christian ministry. Bullinger acknowledges that the sovereign God does not need to work through human preachers but teaches that God has chosen to do so ordinarily. Whilst maintaining the freedom of God, Bullinger argues that preaching is the ordinary means through which God seeks the salvation of people. He quotes Romans 10:14, 17 and John 13:20 asking, how shall they hear if they have no preachers? And the Master calls them through his voice and the sheep recognise his voice (Schaff, 2007:875). In this way, Bullinger refuses to allow the Radical Reformers to void the ecclesiastical ministry.
But Bullinger avoids the opposite extreme and warns that preachers and ministers cannot be overexalted. Glory must be given to God alone (Schaff, 2007:876). Both the outward and the inward means are important, and it is God who is at work in both.

### 4.3.4.3 The Context of Preaching

The place where preaching is done is not specifically mentioned by Bullinger in Chapter One. The *Second Helvetic Confession* simply says that it is “in the Church”. This may indicate that Bullinger had the public worship of God in the church in mind. But in another place in the *Second Helvetic Confession*, he refers to confessions taking place in church or “other holy meetings” (Schaff, 2007:860). This might suggest that preaching is not limited to public worship or to the gathering of the church on the Lord’s day, but also at other holy meetings. One wonders if this is to include pastoral visitations and catechising efforts of the pastors also. But, as mentioned above, we must take seriously Karle’s warning against a superficial reading of Bullinger’s famous formulae, and must resist every temptation to separate the event of preaching from its context in the church and the hearing of the congregation (Karle, 2004:140-147). Bullinger himself is careful to use the words ‘catechise’ and ‘comfort and confirm’ instead of ‘preach’ in Chapter Twenty Five when he refers to the Minister’s duty to teach the young and visit the sick (Schaff, 2007:901-902).

When true preaching takes place, its effects are powerful. According to Bullinger, where there is true preaching, a holy assembly of God’s people is gathered together, unity is likely to prevail, the faithful are built up in the truth, the unlearned are taught in the faith and urged to go forward in the way of the Lord, the weak and fainthearted are comforted and strengthened for the assaults of Satan, the straying are brought back into the fold, the fallen are raised, the gainsayers are convinced, the wolf is driven away from the Lord’s flock, the wicked are rebuked, and the service of the Word is sealed with the sacraments (Schaff, 2007:882-883).
4.3.4.4 The Act of Preaching

In the Second Helvetic Confession, it is especially in relation to preaching that we arrive at the oft-quoted and dramatic marginal heading, “The preaching of the Word of God is God’s Word”. Scholars have confirmed that this reflects a true theological preoccupation of Bullinger with the viva vox, whether the viva vox Domini to patriarchs, prophets and apostles or the oral and audible passing along of the gospel from Adam to Moses or the living preaching which even “today” is the usual means of announcing the gospel (Locher, 1954:47-57). It is the latter alone that appears in the Second Helvetic Confession, forming a close link between Chapters One and Two and Chapters Sixteen to Eighteen.

In Article 1:3, quoting I Thessalonians 2:13 and Matthew 10:20, Bullinger comes close to affirming that if the preacher today preaches in agreement with holy scripture then it may be said that that preacher today serves in the same capacity as the prophets and the apostles, and has in fact uttered the Word of God. The caveat comes in Article 1:4 where Bullinger insists that the preacher ought to be lawfully called into the ministry:

Wherefore when this Word of God is now preached in the church by preachers lawfully called, we believe that the very Word of God is preached, and received of the faithful; and that neither any other Word of God is to be feigned, nor to be expected from heaven: and that now the Word itself which is preached is to be regarded, not the minister that preaches; who, although he be evil and a sinner, nevertheless the Word of God abides true and good (Schaff, 2007:832).

Therefore, if a minister should live a life that is unfaithful to Scripture, on the face of it, it seems not to matter, for it is his preaching that brings forth the word of God. Later, in Chapter Seventeen, Bullinger insists that “there ought to be a discipline among the ministers – for there should be intelligent inquiry in the synods touching the life and doctrine of ministers” (Schaff, 2007:884). Thus, Bullinger does not neglect the place of discipline in the lives of preachers and there is always the possibility of correction, rebuke or even deposition.

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65 Decades 1.i
In Chapter One of the *Second Helvetic Confession*, Bullinger does not appear to directly explain *how* preaching may be rightly called the word of God. Here he does not seem to expressly clarify if only the actual quotes from Scripture are the word of God or whether it includes the words of explanation and exhortation ‘added’ by the preacher. From this opening article of the *Second Helvetic Confession*, one may conclude that for Bullinger, the preacher’s words of exegesis and exposition (Stotz, 2008) are valid if they are from God. Thus, unless the preaching is in contrast to the Scriptures, it may be said that the congregation has heard the word of God. Consequently, the pew has a duty to test the word from the pulpit. But could the ‘Word of God’ in this article refer to Scripture? Or is Bullinger referring to the voice of God addressing His people in a moment of covenant renewal? Locher argues that Bullinger was only successfully mediating the complete openness to divine inspiration characteristic of Zwingli and the complete restriction of Scriptural interpretation favoured by Luther and Lutheran scholastics (Locher, 1954:55). But the setting of Article 1:4 under the rubric of Holy Scripture appears to suggest that for Bullinger, faithful preaching *is* the word of God when it is congruent with the message of Scripture, and will be used by God to nourish his people. Given his own not insignificant contribution to covenant theology (Bullinger, 1534), so that he has sometimes been regarded as the first covenant theologian of the Reformation (McCoy & Baker, 1991), Bullinger may reveal a sophisticated covenant concept of worship, which would allow him to understand preaching as God’s suzerain address to His assembled people as it was the case in ancient Israel (Hillers, 1969:25-45). We note that this view of Bullinger as a covenant theologian has been questioned by Opitz (Opitz, 2004b). Still, the fact remains that Bullinger links preaching with Scripture, and was constantly careful to maintain the high view of Scripture that was typical of the Reformation period (Diethelm, 2004:135-158).

Later in the *Confession*, Bullinger makes plain that through contemporary preaching, the very Word of God is communicated (Schaff, 2007:832), the power of the keys is exercised (Schaff, 2007:860), and sins are forgiven (Schaff, 2007:861) “as if God himself should exhort people” (Schaff, 2007:860). This is equivalent to the use of *Deus ipse* concerning Scripture in

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66 It is interesting that Matthew 23 deals with this same issue and uses almost the same words as the *Second Helvetic Confession*. 
Chapter One. But we must note that it is not now the mere reading or recitation of Scripture that Bullinger is referring to but the exposition and application of the Word that Bullinger exalts. Bullinger defines preaching as the task of expounding the written Scriptures in true interpretation and applying it to the hearers (Schaff, 2007:882).

In Chapter Two of the *Confession*, Bullinger writes concerning ‘Interpreting the Holy Scriptures; and of the Fathers, Councils, and Traditions’. There he excludes a Roman Catholic hermeneutic and insists on “true and natural interpretation of the Scriptures” (Schaff, 2007:833). He holds that Scriptures itself must interpret Scripture and that the text must be expounded according to the rule of faith and charity, motivated only by the desire for God’s glory and humankind’s salvation (Schaff, 2007:833-834).

Of course, preaching can be abused by the preaching of error and Bullinger admits this (Schaff, 2007:834). This is the falsification of the truth of the Word by departing from the norm of Scripture. But this is no longer preaching the Word. This particular area of error and departure from Scripture is protected by Bullinger’s caveat that preachers must be lawfully called, which he elaborates upon in Chapter Eighteen. Bullinger rules-out private interpretations and seems to undermine the Anabaptists in Chapters One and Eighteen. In asserting that the preacher’s word is the word of God, independent of the preacher’s moral condition, there is clearly at least a veiled attack on Donatistic and Anabaptistic expressions during his time. For Bullinger, preaching is to be judged by its content, which to him means the ‘doctrine of the gospel’.

Here Bullinger proceeds to give detailed principles of true interpretation of the Holy Scriptures. This makes a superb link with the place of Scripture and the role of the preacher in the Christian Church. Careful exegesis and interpretation is necessary with an ancient text like the Bible. The task of interpretation is the process of discovering the truth of Scripture and of leading the reader not away from but back to the Scriptures and the words of the Apostles. This includes grammatical, literary and historical observations as well as disclosing
the sense of a passage and showing its place in the discourse of the writer. Exposition is to be accompanied by application to the context of the hearers. Bullinger thus opposes the hermeneutical approach of both the Roman Catholics and the Radical Reformers (Schaff, 2007:833-834).

4.3.4.5 The Authority of Preaching

In the *Second Helvetic Confession*, Bullinger gives a very succinct history of preaching as he understood it. He holds that preaching began at the time of the patriarchs of the Old Testament whom he calls prophets to their generation. They were succeeded by Moses and later by the prophets of Israel. These were succeeded by the arrival of Jesus Christ as the final revelation. Then Christ sent out his apostles to preach. But this office ceased with the foundation and establishment of the New Testament Churches. In their place, the Lord Jesus has set over his church pastors and teachers (Schaff, 2007:876-877).

Since for Bullinger, preaching gains its legitimacy in the institution and the word of Christ, history and the divine command are both important; but so is the word of Christ. Thus the minister and preacher are not to please themselves but are to do God’s bidding (Schaff, 2007:879) as they are stewards of God’s mysteries and they are His ambassadors (Schaff, 2007:880-881).

This sense of history and word of divine command is significant because for Bullinger, the Lord’s Supper gains its authority from the fact that it was instituted by the Lord Himself and was commanded by Him. If preaching too finds its authority in Jesus Christ, it is because it is the God-ordained means of communicating the gospel, with history and command attached to it. It is also for this reason that the personal holiness of the preacher is secondary (though not unimportant), and why Bullinger and other Reformers believed and gloried in the preaching task.
4.3.4.6 The Role of the Holy Spirit in Preaching

In Article 1:5, Bullinger emphasises the need for an inward illumination by the Holy Spirit (Bullinger, 1571) and teaches that God can minister without a human agent or an external ministry. But in Article 1:6, he defends the preaching task, recognising that this task was part of Jesus’ commandment to His disciples, and that it is also the example of the Apostles.

The concept of “inner illumination” is not uncommon in Reformed writings. For Bullinger, this appears to be more true of preaching than the self-authenticating Written Word. In Chapter Sixteen, faith is the truth of God presented in the Scriptures and in the Apostolic Creed. This is the most comprehensive object of the Spirit’s work in faith. But in Chapter One, for the first time in the Confession, Bullinger links the illumination of the Holy Spirit as a component of hearing and believing the Word of God in preaching. For Bullinger, the task of true preaching is sanctified by its institution and the words of Christ.

The two-fold illumination of the Holy Spirit is in the “outer words” (either written or spoken) and the inner illumination of persuasion. The latter are elements of saving faith, the redemptive work of the Spirit. This role of the Spirit needs to be balanced with the freedom of the Sovereign God. But normally, when God is pleased to own the “outer words”, these outer elements are the means or instruments, usually referred to with per (meaning ‘through’) a preposition of agency.

In Chapter One, Bullinger admits that God’s action can be without external ministry. But in Chapter Sixteen, he writes that God’s freedom in election is presented precisely by means of preaching. Although God is not limited to the external means, God prefers to use the “outer words”. This same idea is found in Bulliner’s Decades.67 The “outer word” is thus the means to the end which is the inner word.

67 See below.
In Chapters Thirteen and Fourteen, Bullinger notes that the preaching of the gospel is in the New Testament called the “ministry of the Spirit” (II Cor 3:18) because it lives and works through faith in the ears and hearts of the faithful by the illumination of the Holy Spirit. False preaching is also the preaching of the gospel but it is corrupted by the mingling of the law with the gospel by false teachers (Schaff, 2007:858). For Bullinger, repentance is stirred in the hearts of people by the preaching of the gospel through the Holy Spirit and received by a true faith. This is the saving work and preaching, ordinarily, has a central place in this (Schaff, 2007:859).

4.3.4.7 The Second Helvetic Confession on Preaching – A Summary

From this brief survey, we see that for Bullinger, the preaching of the Word of God is indeed the Word of God to His people, if its message is in concert with the true gospel, is proclaimed by preachers lawfully called and subject to ecclesiastical discipline, and the Holy Spirit illuminates it to a people who are ready to receive it by faith.

4.4 Bullinger’s Decades and its Theology of Preaching

Given the emphasis that Bullinger scholars have placed on the importance of Bullinger’s Decades to the understanding of Bullinger’s theological reflections, it would be imprudent not to pause for a brief insight to ascertain what Bullinger wrote about preaching in his Decades. This will also help us to compare his thoughts in the Second Helvetic Confession with his key later writings.

In his important work on Bullinger’s Decade (Opitz, 2004b), Opitz has presented a thorough exposition of the context, intention and composition of The Decades. In his introduction, Opitz calls for a new consideration of the Decades as the most important of Bullinger’s theological writings (Opitz, 2004b:149). As noted earlier, Dowey too has designated the Decades as the most significant source for any evaluation of Bullinger’s theological system.
Opitz argues that because the *Decades* are a collection of Bullinger’s sermons, which were presented to the pastors of Zürich in their *prophezei*, previous studies have tended to treat them in an unsystematic manner. According to Opitz, Bullinger’s presentation of his theology in the form of sermons, which are often pastoral in character, has often led interpreters to treat Bullinger as an unsophisticated thinker.

One of the strengths of Opitz’ study is his argument that the form of Bullinger’s theology does not compromise its theological integrity or complexity. According to Opitz, though Bullinger presents his theology in a homiletical form, this is in keeping with his convictions about the nature of the pastoral office as a ministry of the Word of God in the church of Jesus Christ. Theology must serve the pastoral and preaching ministry. And so Bullinger casts his theology in a form that serves this purpose. However, as Opitz properly argues, the *Decades* are not simply sermons to be preached, but rather extended exegetical and theological expositions of the principal points of traditional, catholic Christian theology. Opitz has also produced the first critical edition of Bullinger’s *Sermonum decades quinque* (Opitz, 2008).

### 4.4.1 The *Decades*

The *Decades of Heinrich Bullinger* is a collection of fifty sermons divided into ten sermons per section and is still highly regarded today (Dowey, 2004:62). They were published between 1549 and 1551. Geerhardus Vos of Princeton saw Bullinger’s *Decades* as "structured entirely by the covenant idea" (Vos, 1980:236). This has been the recent view of Opitz too (Opitz, 2008), despite his earlier reservations of 2004.

Current scholarly consensus holds that printed sermons may have served at least two functions during the Reformation. First, they would have been useful in popularising Reformed theology among the educated laity. Secondly, they would have been read and perhaps used by ministers who were themselves not qualified to prepare effective sermons.
It is quite possible that Bullinger himself had these purposes in mind when he published his *Decades*. He wrote about this to Oswald Myconius (Hollweg, 1956:24) and to John Calvin on 15th March 1550, confirming that he had completed “this work for the profit of students and ministers of the Word” (Baum, et al., 1863-1900:XIII, 546). Unlike Luther who was wary of the dangers of allowing preachers to rely on printed sermons, Bullinger was optimistic:

> I do not pay much attention to the fast accusations of those who say that my ministerial brothers will become lazy through such sermons, as it happened in times past when the sermons of Discipulus and Pelbartus were read. I have on my side the example of the most distinguished teachers and bishops in the parish, who have themselves, and that not without great advantage, written sermons and homilies” (Bullinger, 1849:557)

Bullinger’s sermons in the *Decades* are topical and not expository or confined to a single text. But Cruel alerts us to a distinction that may have been made in Germany during the Middle Ages, where ‘homily’ always refers to a sermon, which essentially is an exposition of a text, while a ‘sermon’ discusses a certain topic with or without an accompanying text (Cruel, 1879:2). Whatever the style, Hollweg is convinced that Bullinger’s sermons in the *Decades* reveal his love for the Word and bear all the hallmarks of evangelical preaching (Hollweg, 1956:54-56).

The setting or settings in which Bullinger’s *Decades* were preached remains mysterious (Opitz, 2004a:104). Indeed we cannot be absolutely certain that these sermons were ever preached at all. Egli (Egli, 1904) has published the diary of Bullinger and according to him, there is no conclusive evidence that the sermons of the *Decades* were actually preached in Zurich. Biel too has recently tended to this conclusion (Biel, 1990:100). It is quite possible that this was indeed the case. However, we note that the *Decades* themselves contain many literary devices suggesting that these were preached sermons. For example, Bullinger speaks of his ‘audience’ in personal terms as “the attentive and faithful hearers” (Bullinger,

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68 Luther criticised “quite a few lazy ministers and preachers who rely on this or other good books from which they can pull their sermons. They don’t pray, they don’t study, they don’t read, they don’t endeavour to write, as if they don’t have to read the Bible because they have the *postils*.” see WA 53:218
and sometimes, especially towards the close of some of his sermon, he makes reference to the length of his address indicating that they were at some point delivered to a ‘live’ audience. In an early sermon, Bullinger begins thus: “Now I am come again and by God’s favour and the help of your prayers, I will declare unto you, beloved, to whom and to what end, the word of God is revealed” (Bullinger, 1849:57).

It is admitted that there is no point at which Bullinger make any explicit address as if to a congregation. Perhaps, Hollweg is correct in his hypothesis that at least some of the sermons now contained in Bullinger’s Decades were initially prepared for and delivered as Prophezei to preachers and/or theologians who met daily at Zurich Cathedral at Eight o’clock in the morning except on Fridays and Saturdays, to study exegetical, theological and practical concerns (Hollweg, 1956:48).

Upon publication, the Decades were widely well received and proved useful. This is the judgement of Patrick Collinson, an expert on the Elizabethan Age:

If we were to identify one author and one book which represented the centre of theological gravity of the Elizabethan Church it would not be Calvin’s Institutes but the Common Places of Peter Martyr, described by his translator, Anthony Marten, as ‘a verie Apostle’. And at least equally influential was Bullinger” (Collinson, 1985:214-218).

This statement is significant because Martyr had served in England for a number of years, while Bullinger had never ever set foot there. But Bullinger’s fame and influence in England is not surprising. Many exiles from the persecutions of Cardinal Wolsey and the Six Articles of Henry VIII found sanctuary in Switzerland, and some, like John Hooper, lodged in Bullinger’s own house. It appears that these refugees were attracted by the character and teaching of Bullinger (Robinson, 1846-1847:33-114). Bullinger’s influence in England was enduring as it was extensive. As mentioned above, in 1586 when the Archbishop of Canterbury, John Whitgift, drew up instructions for those called to the ministry, Orders for the better increase of learning in the inferior Ministers, he urged junior ministers and those wishing to be licensed as public preachers but who did not have any theological education, to obtain a copy of the Bible, a copy of Bullinger’s Decades and an unused exercise book on which to make notes (Cardwell, 1842:2:562).
4.4.2 Preaching in the First Decade

Bullinger addresses the matter of preaching early in his *Decades* when he deals with the doctrine of the Word of God in the first three sermons of the *First Decade*. In the First Sermon, he begins by outlining the various definitions of the term ‘Word’, making clear that the ‘Word of God’ in biblical theology refers to “what thing so ever a man will” (Bullinger, 1849:37) and “doth signify the virtue and power of God” (Bullinger, 1849:37). He goes on to add that for his purposes, the Word of God signifies the speech of God and the revealing of God’s will. This Word of God was first spoken by Christ, the prophets and the apostles and then reduced into writing as the divine scriptures. For Bullinger, the Word of God “doth shew the mind of him out of whom it cometh; therefore the word of God doth make declaration of God” (Bullinger, 1849:37).

Later in the same sermon, Bullinger admits that God used angels and even the mouths of human beings to communicate his word and will, tracing this from the beginning of the world (Bullinger, 1849:38-39). Speaking of Moses and his writings, Bullinger says, “Moses was furnished and as it were consecrated by God” (Bullinger, 1849:45). Referring to God’s appearance before his people at Mount Sinai, Bullinger holds that God himself was preaching to the congregation. The people found this too intimidating, and so God allows Moses to be God’s “interpreter” to them.

Bullinger often uses the term “interpreter” and the verb “interpret” to describe preaching. For him, preaching is the act of interpreting and applying Scripture to the congregation. Thus a preacher is a human interpreter of Holy Scripture, and his task is to explain and apply the principles therein. This would imply that there is no authority other than the fact that the text is sacred.
In Sermon Two of the First Decade, Bullinger teaches how the preaching of God’s word is to be heard. After outlining his doctrine of revelation, he continues:

The word of God be heard with great reverence, which of right is due to God himself and godly things. Let it be heard very attentively; with continual prayers between, and earnest requests. Let it be heard soberly to our profit, that by it we may become the better, that God by us may be glorified, and not that we go curiously about to search out the hidden counsels of God or desire to be counted skilful and expert in many matters. Let true faith, the glory of God, and our salvation be appointed as the measure and certain end of our hearing and reading (Bullinger, 1849:64).

In the same sermon, Bullinger proceeds to write of the role of faith and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, which are vital for God to “work to stir inwardly in our hearts” (Bullinger, 1849:66). For Bullinger, faith is needed in the hearing of the Word to make that word useful to the hearers, and the Holy Spirit is there to work and stir the human heart. This seems to suggest that the preacher’s word is inherently powerless. And it also introduces a subjective element into preaching since it is only within the individual heart that the Holy Spirit works and stirs (Bullinger, 1849:66-67). Bullinger summarises his position thus:

If therefore that the word of God do sound in our ears, and therewithal the Spirit of God do shew forth his power in our hearts, and that we in faith do truly receive the word of God, then hath the word of God a mighty force and wonderful effect in us. For it driveth away the misty darkness of errors, it openeth our eyes, it converteth and enlighteneth our minds, and instructeth us most fully and absolutely in truth and godliness (Bullinger, 1849:67).

In Bullinger’s Third Sermon in the First Decade, he attempts to bring some balance and detail to his theory of preaching and goes on to teach the correct method of interpreting Scripture. He begins by outlining two extreme positions prevalent at that time.

For some ...the scriptures, that is, the very word of God, is of itself so dark, that it cannot be read with any profit at all. And again some other affirm, that the word plainly delivered by God to humankind doth stand in need of no exposition. And therefore say they, that the scriptures ought indeed to be read of all men, but so that every man may lawfully invent and choose to himself such a sense as everyone shall be persuaded in himself to be the most convenient (Bullinger, 1849:70).
Against this, Bullinger argues cogently that God’s will is to have his word understood by humankind and that God himself spoke to His servants in “a most common kind of speech, wherewithal even the very idiots were acquainted” (Bullinger, 1849:71). He concedes that there are difficult portions of Holy Scripture, but contends that these dark passages may be understood by study, diligence and faith. Quoting II Corinthians 4:3-4, Bullinger is clear that “scripture is difficult or obscure to the unlearned, unskilful, unexercised and malicious or corrupted wills, and not to the zealous and godly readers or hearers thereof” (Bullinger, 1849:71). He concludes that the doubtful and uncertain aspects of Scripture are made manifest by those parts that are more certain, sure and evident, and therefore Scripture, it is agreed by all, is the final judge in all controversies. Thus Scripture is “evident, plain and most assuredly certain” (Bullinger, 1849:72).

Against those who were at the other extreme and insisted that scripture was so clear that it needed no exposition by a preacher, Bullinger asserts that though Scripture is manifest and the word of God evident, “yet notwithstanding, it refuseth not a godly or holy exposition” (Bullinger, 1849:72). He teaches that such an exposition “doth give a setting out to the word of God, and bringeth forth much fruit in the godly hearer” (Bullinger, 1849:72). Bullinger then proceeds to prove by numerous examples how preaching is the Biblical and God-ordained mode of communicating God’s good news. He begins with God addressing Israel through Moses, moves on to Ezra, then to the example of Jesus especially at the Synagogue in Nazareth, before calling on the preaching of the apostles.

At this point, Bullinger is aware that he has already used the words ‘sermon’, ‘exposition’, ‘expound’, ‘interpret’ and ‘teach the people of Christ the word of God sincerely’ to refer to the preaching task (Bullinger, 1849:73-75). Now in the middle of this third sermon, Bullinger comes closest to defining preaching when he writes that the task of the minister is “to declare the scriptures in open and solemn audience…to apply them to the places, times, states and persons” all the time seeking the honour that is due to God (Bullinger, 1849:74). We see from this that there are at least four aspects to Bullinger’s theory of preaching. First, preaching is an act of declaring the Scriptures. Secondly, the context is that of an open and solemn audience – presumably the ecclesia. Thirdly, the sermon contains application of
truth to the places, times, states and people gathered in the assembly. Fourthly, the task is to be done with the singular aim of glorifying God and honouring His name in the midst of His people, this presumably guaranteeing the presence of the Holy Spirit. For Bullinger, those who clamoured for the reading of scripture without any addition or explanation or application seek to “cast behind them the law of God, to tread under foot all discipline and rebuking of sin, and so to offend freely without punishment; which sort of men the righteous Lord will in his appointed time punish so much the more grievously, as they do more boldly rebel against their God” (Bullinger, 1849:74).

4.4.3 Preaching in the Fifth Decade

In his Decades, Bullinger handles the subject of preaching again in the Fifth Decade when he writes about the doctrine of the Church and its ministry. In the First Sermon here, Bullinger deals with the ‘Holy Catholic Church’ before proceeding in the next sermon to write on the ‘Unity of the Church’ and handling the ‘Ministry and the Ministers of God’s Word’ in the Third Sermon. For Bullinger, “the church of God is builded and preserved by the word of God; and that, through ministers appointed for that purpose by the Lord” (Bullinger, 1849:93). The ecclesiastical ministry is described by Bullinger as “extended both to stir up and also to maintain public prayers and the administration of the sacraments, and especially it is occupied in preaching the word of God”. Bullinger then focuses particularly on the ministry of the word.

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69 In Zurich, under Zwingli’s influence, preachers were thought of as having a dual function. They are the watchman over the city, its communal piety and morals. And they are pastors protecting the flock, see Zwingli, On the Office of the Preacher, Page 399 in Huldreich Zwinglis samtliche Werke, (Emil Egli, et al. editors), volume IV Berlin/Leipzig/Zurich: 1915, 370-433
70 Intriguingly, Bullinger sometimes seems to defend preaching on the basis of tradition, as “the order received of the churches, whereby the minister of the church doth expound the scriptures to the congregation”, see Heinrich Bullinger, The Decades of Heinrich Bullinger, Edited for Parker Society by Thomas Harding, (Cambridge: University Press, 1849), 70
Bullinger is clear that God in instructing humankind uses the aid or ministry of human beings. As Bullinger sees it, God covets to pour himself wholly into His people. God furthers their salvation very diligently in all things, lest there should be anything wanting to true doctrine. For this reason, God “Himself cometh forth to instruct men. But such is our weakness and corruption through sin, we cannot abide the meeting of his eternal and wonderful majesty” (Bullinger, 1849:93-94). Citing the story of Israel at Sinai, Bullinger argues that after this manner of teaching humankind, which humankind have chosen for themselves, God will continue to speak to His people so as when he sent his Son into the world, he clothed him with flesh so that he might after that manner speak unto His people by Him (Bullinger, 1849:94).

This is the clearest statement by Bullinger that God Himself is at least spiritually present when His Word is truly preached by Ministers lawfully called. This spiritual presence is because Bullinger makes clear in other places that the physical presence of Jesus is now in the heavens.

As he does in the Second Helvetic Confession, Bullinger accepts that God’s secret illumination of his Spirit, without human ministry (as his power is tied to no creature), regenerates the whole world and governs the church itself. But because God does not despise his creatures, nor destroys the work of his own hands, and does all things in order, even so from the first beginning, he spoke to the world through the patriarchs, then prophets, and afterwards by apostles (Bullinger, 1849:94). For Bullinger, God continues to give the world pastors and teachers. To refuse this provision is to tempt God, that is, not to look for a secret inspiration with the heretics Enthusiastae. The correct approach is to acknowledge a just order, and that God himself speaks unto us by people, of whom he would have us to learn religion.

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71 Bullinger probably refers to a sect of the Anabaptists called Enthusiasts, see Bullinger, adv. Anabapt. Lib,II, cap 1.
Producing Biblical examples, Bullinger maintains that because God has chosen to speak through properly called and faithful Ministers, these ministers are called saviours, they are said to convert people, their word is called, not the word of man, but the word of God, and those who despise the human Minister are said to despise God himself. True and faithful ministers are therefore said to bind and loose, and retain and forgive sins (Bullinger, 1849:95).

But Bullinger is quick to add that some, wresting these places of the Holy Scripture against the natural sense, do give the ministers an equal power in a manner with Christ. They do so in order that the ministry should not wax vile and become of no estimation among profane men. Others speak of the inward drawing of the Spirit that they seem as it were to make superfluous or to take clean away, the outward ministry, and to attribute nothing at all unto it (Bullinger, 1849:96). Bullinger is awake to this dangerous approach and makes clear that the ministry must be limited within the bounds of Holy Scripture lest it be drawn hither and thither with the affections and lusts of men, and either too much or too little be attributed to it (Bullinger, 1849:96-97). Bullinger calls for the ministry “indeed to be beautified and kept in authority, but let it be done without the dishonouring of God”. He then warns solemnly:

Neither indeed becometh it us, under the pretence of the ministry, to attribute that to man’s labour which is only God’s office, on whom all men ought to depend, and unto whom as the only well-spring and giver of all godliness, they ought to have respect. Therefore the faithful ministers of the Lord Jesus ought only to have regard hereunto, that they may keep the glory and authority of Christ unblemished, and his priesthood sound unto himself in every point. For the Lord Jesus Christ sits at the right hand of the Father in the true tabernacle and remains the only high priest of his church forever, executing as yet all the duties of a priest in the church. For he as the only teacher and master in the church, teaches his disciples, that is, the church or congregation of the faithful, enduing them with the Holy Ghost, regenerating and drawing them. This glory and power he has not given to any other, neither doth any minister, unless he be blinded with devilish pride, take that unto himself, as though he did work these works that are proper unto Christ, either for Christ or in Christ’s stead or together with Christ.
Even the apostles of the New Testament did not give the Holy Spirit, did not draw men’s hearts; they themselves did not deliver men from sin, death, the devil and hell; for all these things be the works of God which he hath not communicated to any (Bullinger, 1849:96-97).

Having warned of the dangers of the two extreme positions, Bullinger continues to affirm that the ministry of the church is needful. Christ the Son of God is the greatest, the best and the chief high priest of his church working inwardly and in the minds of his people. But it is the very same Christ who outwardly declares and testifies by his ministers whom the scriptures call witnesses, ambassadors or messengers.

With respect to the content of preaching, Bullinger quotes the apostolic authority and holds that the gospel is both a testimony and preaching of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore when ministers bear witness of the Son of God, and out of his word promise life everlasting, their word is not called a human word but the word of God; and they are said to save, and to release from sin; for they are the true messengers and heralds of the King, who is the deliverer, who hath sent them to publish remission of sins; whereupon also they attribute all the means of life, salvation and delivery, to the only deliverer Christ. In preaching this gospel, ministers are “fellow-labourers” with God and are the sowers, gardeners, planters to whom God has committed the outward manuring, reserving the inward working to Jesus Christ. It is God who gives the increase. Bullinger then quotes extensively from Augustine to buttress his position. According to Augustine, nothing should be diminished from the glory of God, which inwardly moves and teaches the Church; and yet in the meantime the office of the ministry should not be taken away or despised as unprofitable. When Augustine speaks of the secret drawing of God and the outward ministry of human beings, he says that these are not human works, but God’s. Bullinger then goes on to cite Paul to clarify the difference between the work of the Spirit and the work of man or of the minister (Bullinger, 1849:100). The minister does not undertake the honour of God and the work of the Spirit but his own work, that is to say, the ministry. Paul preaches and writes with ink; but the Spirit of God moves the heart; and with his grace or anointing, he writes in the very heart. So Paul works together with God, Paul working his proper place, and the Spirit working his work. The apostles are preachers and ministers of the gospel, not of the letter but of the
Spirit. Not that they give the Holy Spirit, but because they are preachers of the gospel that is, of that which gives the Spirit of Christ, yea which pours it into the believers.

From Bullinger’s perspective, the fact that God uses the ministry of human beings reveals God’s love and esteem for human beings. Using Ephesians 4, Bullinger argues that when the Word of God is truly preached by a Minister who has been lawfully called, “all the members of the ecclesiastical body are wonderfully glued together by the ecclesiastical ministry; for this chiefly helps to make concord and continue unity, because we want mutual instruction” (Bullinger, 1849:101).

Bullinger is dogmatic that the ecclesiastical ministry, though it be executed by human beings, yet is it not of human origin. The true foundation of Christian ministry is from heaven and the author or institutor of it is God himself. For Bullinger preaching has its origin in God and God Himself was the first preacher. Again, Bullinger supports his position on this point by outlining his history of preaching. He maintains that the first preacher in paradise was God himself, yea, the Son of God himself; who by the ministry of the Holy Spirit always spoke to the fathers; even as afterwards, being incarnate, he was given of the Father to be a master and teacher to the whole world. From Bullinger’s perspective, God preached to Adam and Eve the remission of sins and repentance. God ordained and revealed a sacrifice, instead of a sacrament; wherein might be represented and ratified to them the price of redemption, promised by the seed to be paid in the fullness of time. According to Bullinger, when the Son of God governed the church He gave prophets and priests, even up to the time of John the Baptist and Jesus. Subsequently, Jesus Christ sent into the world his disciples who ordained for their successors bishops and doctors. God himself therefore is heard in the voice or doctrine of his ministers; so that the world is now commanded to give ear to the ministers, preaching the gospel, as to the very angels of God. Yea, says Bullinger, such attention and listening to gospel preaching is giving ear to the Lord himself.
According to Bullinger, the Lord our high priest speaks unto us even at this day by the ministers preaching his word (Bullinger, 1849:103). Christians have all things whatsoever the Lord spoke by the patriarchs, prophets and apostles, set out in the scriptures; it is this that the ministers of the church read and declare before the Church. As he reaches the climax of his argument, Bullinger asks with flourish:

Who therefore hereafter can despise the ministry and the faithful ministers of Christ, especially since our Lord and Saviour took upon him the ministry, and was made the apostle and minister of the church of the Jews? At this day, insomuch as they are the last times, wherein scoffers and epicures have their full range, the ministry of God’s word is of no value. But if you run over and weigh all the ages, even unto the beginning of the world, you shall find that the wisest, justest, and best men in the whole world had nothing in more reverence than the word of God, and the prophets, and the holy apostles of God (Bullinger, 1849:103).

Thus, it is God in general and Jesus Christ in particular who speaks to the Church in the true preaching of the Word.

Bullinger is aware of some of the arguments of the Radical Reformers that the place of preachers has now been removed, all Christians are now priests and there is no need for the ministry of the word of God in the Church. But Bullinger holds that the public ministry of the word of God is not superfluous. For him, it is God who has given public ministers to his church, and it is their office to teach openly or publicly in the church. Bullinger does clarify that this task is not permitted to all but only to those that are lawfully ordained. The danger otherwise, as Bullinger sees it, is that the people of God might be misled (Bullinger, 1849:104). He is clear that “our Lord ordained apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and doctors, by whose labour he meant to build, preserve, and govern the church” (Bullinger, 1849:105).

In the Fourth Sermon of his Fifth Decades, Bullinger deals with the ‘Calling unto the Ministry of the Word of God’. He seeks to explain the characteristics of a minister who should be ordained into the ministry and of the qualifications that make a person suitable for this office.
Bullinger begins by defining ‘Calling’ as a lawful appointing of a meet minister. The outward nature of this calling is often termed as both ordination and election. For Bullinger, election precedes ordination; we choose those we call. There are four kinds of calling, two lawful and two unlawful. The first kind is when ministers are called, neither by a group of human beings nor by a particular individual, but by God. For the most part, this calling is confirmed with signs or miracles and is called a heavenly and secret calling. The second kind of calling is initiated by God but is outwardly confirmed by the ordination of human beings, those who are the created or appointed ministers of the Church. This kind of calling is ordinary, public, and was common in Bullinger’s day. In this method, God calls a person, bestowing necessary gifts upon his minister, and appointing laws to those who elect; and they following those laws, do ordinarily elect him whom they by signs conjecture to be first called of God. By signs, Bullinger is referring to the gifts necessary for ministers (Bullinger, 1849:129).

The third kind of ‘calling’ comes from human beings but not from God. Here an unworthy person is ordained for favour and rewards. Here is sin committed by the person ordained and by those who bear rule in the ordination. It may be that the persons involved do not or will not understand, that they be very unfit and destitute of necessary gifts. It is just as possible that they sin in that they are sufficiently furnished with knowledge of the scriptures and other things, yet they respect not the glory of God but their own gain. It is therefore to be required of them that are to be ordained a testimony of their own conscience, and an evidence of a secret calling (Bullinger, 1849:129). There is no place in this office for ambition, for covetousness, for desire to feed the belly, nor of any other lewd affection. The sole motivation of the ordinand as well as those ordaining him must be the sincere fear and love of God, and of a desire to edify the church of God.

According to Bullinger, protection is afforded to the process of ordination in that the testimony of others of sound learning and skilfulness in these matters is also required. He is fully aware that the natural human heart seeks to please itself since it esteems itself to be worthy, to whom the government of the church may be committed. Alas, we deceive ourselves. Those who ordain others are in danger of not regarding what God’s laws have set-down and willed to be done, and what the state and safety of the church requires. They are sometimes attracted by carnal desires.
Bullinger defines unworthy persons as those who are unlearned, not very sound; they may be sufficiently learned, but not of good conversation; good Christians, but unfit and unskilful pastors. These are allured into the preaching ministry through favour or bribes. Bullinger warns that such are guilty of simony and provoke the heaviest wrath of Almighty God upon themselves, and make themselves partakers of all those sins. On the contrary, a true minister is chaste and lowly, so as in whatever place he is sent to, he purges with the uprightness of his own life. Such true ministers are ordained not with price, but with prayers; instead of harbouring a desire for promotion, such genuine ministers must be sought for by compulsion. And even then, according to Bullinger, a true minister ought to shun the desire for earthly riches and honour, and if he be entreated, he ought to fly away. Bullinger concludes with this solemn statement: “For truly he is unworthy of the ministry that is not ordained against his will” (Bullinger, 1849:130).

The fourth kind of ‘calling’ is when an individual thrusts himself into the ministry of his own private affection being neither ordained of God, nor by man. “I have not sent them and yet they ran”. Borrowing the language of Cyprian, Bullinger calls such “schismatics, who usurp unto them the office of a bishop, no man giving it them. And this kind of calling is unproperly called a calling” (Bullinger, 1849:131).

When it comes to the process and procedure of calling ministers, Bullinger is clear that in the church there must be a calling, public and lawful. This is to ensure that the ordinance of God is not neglected, that the discipline of the church be retained, that all people in the church may know who are preferred to the ecclesiastical ministry. In this way also, Paul, at the commandment of the Holy Spirit, is separated by the church of Antioch. In this same way also, many others were sent or called of God, and they too were ordained by men (Bullinger, 1849:131).

Referring to the second kind of calling mentioned above, and which is ordinarily common in the church, yet appointed by the Lord, Bullinger argues that there are three things that need to be considered: First, who is allowed to call a minister; secondly who is allowed to be ordained; thirdly, what is the method of ordaining those who have been called (Bullinger, 1849:131).
For Bullinger, the Lord has given to his church power and authority to elect and ordain fit ministers and the form or order the ancient church has been diligently observing for many years. According to this pattern, ministers are to be chosen in the presence of the common people, before the eyes of all people; in this way, they are tried to be worthy by public judgement and witness. In such a public assembly, Bullinger saw that either the vices of evil might be discovered, or the deserts of the good commended. It is only in this condition that it may be called a just and lawful ordaining, which shall be examined by the election and judgement of all (Bullinger, 1849:132-133). The practical method of choosing is itself left to the discretion of the “notable men”. It does not matter very much whether discreet people chosen of the church, or the whole church itself, do ordain fit ministers; and that either by voices, or by lots or after some certain necessary and holy manner for, according to Bullinger, in these things the judgement of godly people will not cause contention.

As to the qualifications of the men who are to be ordained, Bullinger gives this list: they are not to lust, they must be very sound in religion, furnished with all kind of sciences, exercised in the scriptures, cunning in the mystery of faith and religion, strong and constant, earnest, painful, diligent, faithful, watchful, modest, a holy and approved conversation (Bullinger, 1849:134-135). Later, Bullinger seeks men who are lowly, courteous, merciful, learned, instructed in the law of the Lord, if wary and careful in the sense and meaning of the scriptures, exercised in the opinions of the church; above all things, he teaches the grounds of faith with substantial words (Bullinger, 1849:136). Great judgement and diligence is necessary to ensure that all points of doctrine and life are examined in the ordination process for “this is not a matter of small weight; the whole safety of the church hangeth hereupon” (Bullinger, 1849:135). Where this fails, the whole church for the most part is neglected, led astray and overthrown. Bullinger seeks not a childlike and scholar-like examination; but a grave and strait and examination of knowledge in the scripture, the true interpretation, the charge of a pastor, of the mysteries of sound faith.

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72 As a historical note, Bullinger makes clear that at the time of St Augustine, the people gave a shout. In Bullinger’s own time, we are told that because the people made often tumults in the elections of pastors, the ordination was committed to chosen men of the pastors, magistrates and people. These were meant to be notable men (Bullinger, 1849:133).
As to the practice of ordination itself, Bullinger calls for fasting and prayer. The ordinand is called and set in the sight of the church. Those ordaining then lay their hands upon the heads of them that were ordained; in this way, they committed the churches to the ordinands. The service was simple and not sumptuous; it was only later that anointing oil and giving of the book of the gospels began to intrude into the church’s service of ordination.

Bullinger makes clear that the office of the ministers that are ordained in the church is to govern the church of God, or to feed the flock of Christ. In fact, he uses the terms ‘rule’ and ‘feed’ interchangeably. For Bullinger, pastors govern the church of God with God’s word or wholesome doctrine. Therefore the content of preaching requires thorough knowledge of the Word of God. This is knowledge concerning the kingdom of heaven. The preacher thus gives instruction concerning a blessed life, by what means we are made partakers thereof (Bullinger, 1849:146).

Bullinger reiterates in this sermon that the keys of the kingdom of heaven are nothing else but the ministry of preaching the gospel or the word of God, committed by God unto his ministers, so that everyone may be taught which way leads to heaven, and which way to hell. Bullinger leaves his readers in no doubt that unless one puts the proper and true key into the lock, one shall never open it. The true and right key is the pure word of God; the counterfeit and thievish key is the doctrine and tradition of man, estranged from the word of God (Bullinger, 1849:148-149).

According to Bullinger in The Decades, the preacher, like the prophets of old, is an interpreter of God’s Word, applying the same to the place, time, matters, and persons. Christ is the only teacher of religion and master of life, appointed unto the universal church by God the Father. To His church he himself sends teachers, and shows them what they should deliver. The preacher’s calling is to add nothing unto it, taking nothing from it; if any man speaks, let him talk as the words of God (Bullinger, 1849:151) for all “men are liars: God only is true” (Bullinger, 1849:152). Concerning the duty of a minister lawfully called, Bullinger writes:
It is the duty of a good pastor or shepherd to feed, and not to devour, the flock; minister, not to exercise dominion; seek the safety of his sheep, not his private gain: to seek out again the lost sheep, that is to say, to bring again such as cannot abide the truth, and wander in the darkness of errors, home to the church and unto the light of the truth; restore and bring back again the sheep that is driven or chased away, such as are separated from the fellowship of saints; to heal or to bind up such as are broken; for he meaneth the wounds of sins, to be short, strengthen the weak and feeble sheep, and not altogether to tread them under foot; to bridle such sheep as be strong, that is to say, men flourishing in virtues, lest they be proud and puffed up with the gifts of God, and so fall away. These things cannot be performed but through sound and continual teaching derived out of God’s word (Bullinger, 1849:153).

The minister’s teaching ministry is both public and private. Publicly, the pastor either catechises, that is to say, instructs, those who are infants in the faith or others who need special attention. He teaches them the chief point of the covenant, the Ten Commandments, the articles of faith of the Apostles’ Creed, the Lord’s Prayer and a brief exposition of the sacraments. Catechising was seen to be important because, according to Bullinger, no profit or fruit is to be looked for in the church of those hearers that are not perfectly instructed in the principles of religion by catechising. Thus this duty requires the greatest diligence. In public, the preacher must conduct expositions of the Holy Scriptures. For Bullinger, this meant not certain parcels of the canonical books, neither some chosen places out of them, but whole books of the New and Old Testaments. Moreover, its interpretation must not be the fantasy of the preacher. Rather, according to Bullinger, that exposition is best, which is not repugnant to faith and love, neither is wrested to defend and spread abroad the glory and covetousness of men (Bullinger, 1849:155). Where this does not take place, Bullinger is clear that the preaching (even if it is from the canonical books) shall be fruitless to the people (Bullinger, 1849:155).

Sound preaching, according to Bullinger, will also be useful to confute errors, repress heresies and defend sound doctrine. It is not enough simply to teach true religion, unless the teacher in the church, by often teaching, constantly urges, defends, and maintains the same. In such a work, it is necessary for ministers to be patient lest they lose hope or cause others to lose hope in the face of opposition. “The servants of the Lord must not strive; but
be gentle unto all men, suffering evil. The minister must be mild and quickening comfort: for many are troubled, being tried with divers temptations; whom unless you faithfully comfort, they are overcome of Satan” (Bullinger, 1849:156-157). Despite his emphasis on preaching, Bullinger argues that the minister ought to care for the poor. This is to be evident in the minister’s public preaching, whereby he may continually provoke the richer to show mercy and to share their resources with the poor. For Bullinger, the care of the poor pertains chiefly to the pastors, so that the poor are not neglected, but tenderly cherished, as the members of Christ.

The private kind of teaching that Bullinger has in mind is not different in essence from the public. It is called private in respect of the learners. Here the minister goes privately and instructs those who he knows may be more easily won to Christ than by public preaching. He privately admonishes and takes time with such people. The minister also visits sick persons and prisoners. Instead of neglecting them, he visits them so much the more diligently, as he perceives them more grievously tempted. A good pastor is always watchful over the whole flock of Christ. The minister resists the works of evil by prayer, admonitions, teaching, and exhortations.

As he approaches his sermon’s conclusion, Bullinger clarifies that unless a bishop teach after this manner, and exemplify such teaching in his own life, he is unworthy either of the name of a bishop, pastor, or doctor. The minister has a duty to gather together a holy assembly wherein he may preach, conceive prayer, and minister the sacraments. Pastors, not only in doctrine but also in holy life, do give light unto the church. When the church sees the preacher’s life to be agreeable to his doctrine, then the church too is moved to practise innocence of life (Bullinger, 1849:158). Bullinger acknowledges that people, seeing the corrupt life of the ministers of the church, begin somewhat to doubt the whole doctrine. Bullinger therefore calls ministers to be blameless, to live chastely in singlehood or marriage, to be marked by temperance, soberness, thriftiness and hospitality. He desires that preachers would be engaged in continual study, whereby he may more perfectly exhort and teach. He refers to Paul’s requirement of Timothy that even one who had been brought up in the knowledge of the scriptures from childhood should continue to study. “Let them be ashamed of leisure not bestowed in study”. Bullinger is of the view that preachers should
not be over-concerned about stipends, lest by deed or word, by apparel or company keeping, they give any just occasion of offence to the church. Judgement, honest behaviour, wisdom, modesty, humanity, humility ought to clothe a minister of the gospel (Bullinger, 1849:159-160). Bullinger takes great pains to maintain that the preacher’s authority is not acquired by the light and vain things of titles and ceremonies. Rather, it is obtained by the grace of God (Bullinger, 1849:160). It is God who touches the hearts of hearers; the preacher is merely God’s instrument.

Bullinger is alert to the history of the Donatists, or the Anabaptists of his own time who sometimes contended that the ministry of the word and sacraments, executed by a minister whose life is unclean becomes thereby of no value. For Bullinger, although a holy life is requisite in a minister, their ministry does not become of no value through the minister’s dishonest life, as long as the preacher’s doctrine is sound and perfect. Bullinger then quotes Jesus to say that the Lord in the gospel commands to hear those who teach in Moses’ chair but he forbids following their doings. Bullinger calls the enemies of the truth to cease to hope for the overthrow of the ministry and ministers of the word of God:

I will, saith the Lord in the gospel, be with you always, even unto the end of the world…. There shall be therefore ministers in the church and preachers... It is not in our power to frame or give such pastors. By the grace and goodness of God good pastors are given and the wicked are taken away. Let us all therefore call upon God, praying him to give us faithful and godly ministers (Bullinger, 1849:162-163).

4.5 Bullinger – Towards a Theology of Preaching

Our study of Bullinger’s key writings in the Second Helvetic Confession and The Decades has shown that Bullinger did indeed believe that the preaching of the Word of God is in fact the Word of God. In Bullinger’s theology of preaching, there are four requirements for such preaching of the Word of God to be indeed the Word of God. First, it has to be preaching. That is, its authority must be derived from the historical example of God and the command of Christ. Secondly, it must be the preaching of the Word of God. This means that its source must be the Holy Scriptures and its content must be the gospel of God as it is revealed in Jesus Christ. Thirdly, it must be preached by a Minister who is lawfully called. On the
surface, the personal holiness of the preacher appears to be secondary; the preacher’s true calling and his subjection to true ecclesiastical discipline appear to be primary. Fourthly, the context must be the Church, whether public or private. This means that the preacher’s desire must be for the glory of God and the salvation of souls and the assembly must be willing to receive the preached word in faith. Here then the Holy Spirit will be present to apply the Word to the hearts of God’s people. It is only within these boundaries that the preaching of the Word of God may be said to be itself the Word of God. When preaching is done within these limits, the Holy Spirit is present in the assembly, takes the words of the human plenipotentiary and applies it to the hearts of God’s people. In this, Jesus Christ Himself is addressing His Church. Despite allowing for pluriformity in secondary issues surrounding Christian worship (Schaff, 2007:904), Bullinger is clear that under the right conditions, the preaching of the Word of God is indeed the Word of God.

Thus like Niles and the Reformers (see Chapters 2 and 3), Bullinger stressed the importance of the preacher’s calling, emphasised that the content of true preaching has to be the gospel of Jesus Christ, that the context of preaching is especially the assembly of God’s people where the Holy Spirit applies the preached word, and the consequences of such preaching are not only the salvation of souls, the up-building of the saints but also judgement on the rebellious, and both to the glory of God.

However, we are cognisant that there are at least two scholarly approaches that have been taken in the search to understand Bullinger’s theology of preaching. The first is advocated by Dowey who holds that Bullinger saw both Holy Scripture and preaching as the Word of God. According to Dowey, Bullinger believed that Scripture alone is the sufficient and authoritative norm and it is this norm against which preaching must be tested. Dowey thus propounds the instrumental (not normative) equality of Scripture and preaching. This means that the transition in Chapter One of the Second Helvetic Confession, from Scripture to preaching is not as surprising as it might appear to be. Rather, it is consistent with the remainder of the Second Helvetic Confession and with Bullinger’s theology at large. Dowey concludes that we may say that the Word of God for Bullinger is normatively the Holy Scriptures. But we may also say that the Scripture and preaching instrumentally have
together as its purpose the saving word which is Christ Himself. The inner illumination of the Spirit is not the accreditation of the sacred canon nor is it a private mystical exaltation. Rather, it is the penetration by means of the outward instruments of the gospel to the heart.

Dowey’s attempt to make a distinction between the normative Word of God in the Scripture and the instrumental Word of God in preaching is helpful, especially in the realm of practical theology studied within the paradigm of Osmer (Osmer, 2008:4). The instrumental Word of God can relate to both the descriptive-empirical and the interpretative tasks by answering the questions, What is going on? and Why is this going on? The normative Word of God serves as the check since it asks, What ought to be going on? Certainly, the language of instrumentality is one that comes close to Bullinger’s own vocabulary. Still, we must remember that this is not a distinction that Bullinger himself actually makes. Though Bullinger does speak of the instrumental work of the Holy Spirit and of preachers as instruments in the hand of God, he does not speak of the preached word itself as the instrumental word of God. In fact, it is possible to argue that Bullinger, especially in his Decades, preferred to speak of the inward and the outward Word. There is therefore the danger that Dowey’s distinction whilst helpful could move too far from Bullinger’s own language and therefore his own stated position. Indeed, it could be argued that though Dowey’s categories of ‘normative’ and ‘instrumental’ are helpful, they fail to take us far enough, for in his Second Helvetic Confession Bullinger has gone quite far, even to the point of using sacramental language when writing about the preaching exercise.

The second approach to understanding Bullinger’s theology of preaching is that of Biel, who argues that Bullinger believed that “when the minister ascended the chancel to preach, his words acquired a power exceeding what they normally had. The minister as preacher functioned as a conduit for the word of God. His words were where heaven and earth met” (Biel, 1990:106). Similarly, Hollweg documents Bullinger’s practical attempts and apparent success in making the preached word the living voice of God and the Scriptures (Hollweg, 1956:18-23). Bullinger’s own writings indicate that he held a high view of preaching; but he
was careful not to oversimplify or unconditionally equate preaching with Scripture. For him, Scripture is primary. As noted, his historical context might have made him cautious on this point. But there may also be a theological reason, perhaps linked to Zurich, Zwingli and the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper (Stephens, 1986). Towards the end of the Third Sermon of the First Decade, Bullinger incidentally comments on the Lord’s Supper:

{(L)et us presently remember, that the articles of our faith do attribute to our Lord the very body of a man, which ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of the Father, from whence it shall come to judge the quick and the dead; and let us think, that the Lord, speaking of the sacrament, would have us to expound the words of the sacrament sacramentally, and not transubstantially” (Bullinger, 1849:76).

For Bullinger, Christ is ascended and at the right hand of the majesty on high (Rorem, 1989). Such a theology of the Lord’s Supper may be why Bullinger is reluctant to speak of the ascended Christ as being present to address His assembled people in the preaching of the church. It may be why he prefers to emphasise the role of the Holy Spirit in preaching, and the need for faith in the hearts of hearers. If this is correct, it may explain why there is in Bullinger no grand view of preaching as there is in Luther, and no sophisticated attempt like that of Calvin to suggest that God accommodates to His people, perhaps even in the act of preaching. Possibly, Bullinger was not a systematic theologian like Calvin, seeking to explain every question that arises in theology. Indeed, Bullinger himself warns believers and preachers against vain, over-curious conjectures (Bullinger, 1849:65). Or perchance, the Decades as sermons did not allow Bullinger to explore such technical questions. But it is more probable that Heinrich Bullinger was supremely a biblical theologian who limited himself to the text of Scripture (Stotz, 2008:138), and was loathed to speculate beyond it (Petersen, 1998:164).

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73 One way of understanding Bullinger’s theology is to start with Zwingli’s; Pamela Biel also recognises this, Pamela Biel, Doorkeepers at the House of Righteousness: Heinrich Bullinger and the Zurich Clergy 1535-1575, (Bern: Peter Lang, 1990), Page 73.

74 Dowey concedes that there is no scholarly consensus on how to understand the baffling variety of ways in which Bullinger did his work or the multiple forms in which he published and republished his theological ideas, see Edward Dowey, “Heinrich Bullinger as Theologian: Thematic, Comprehensive, and Schematic”, in Bruce Gordon and Emidio Campi (Eds.), Architect of Reformation: An Introduction to Heinrich Bullinger, 1504-1575, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), Page 35. It seems to me that Bullinger simply arranged and rearranged his ideas frequently to suit the purposes at hand. Biel writes of Bullinger’s “preoccupation with biblical exegesis”, see Pamela Biel, Doorkeepers at the House of Righteousness: Heinrich Bullinger and the Zurich Clergy 1535-1575, (Bern: Peter Lang, 1990), Page 85.
Whatever the explanation though, it is clear that Bullinger’s language on preaching is very close if not similar to his vocabulary concerning the Lord’ Supper. In Chapters Nineteen to Twenty One of the Second Helvetic Confession, Bullinger deals with “the sacraments of the Church of Christ” and is clear that the Lord is the author of the Church’s sacraments and that He continually works where they are rightly used (Schaff, 2007:885). The faithful receive the sacraments from the ministers knowing that the Lord Himself works in His own ordinance and therefore they receive them as from the hand of God. The substance of the sacraments is given to them by the Lord and the outward signs by the ministers of the Lord (Schaff, 2007:885). For Bullinger, the principal thing offered in the sacraments is Christ and this same Christ is the chief thing and substance in both sacraments (Schaff, 2007:886).

For their part, the congregation has a duty to receive the sacraments spiritually by faith and part of the purpose of these sacraments is to bind the receivers into the church and admonish them in their duty (Schaff, 2007:886). For Bullinger, this is possible because the Lord's Supper is ordained by God, consecrated by the Word and declared to be sanctified by Him who first ordained it (Schaff, 2007:887). But Bullinger is careful to clarify that the signs are not turned into the thing signified nor do they cease to be that which in their own nature they are. Still, the signs and the thing signified are sacramentally joined together, united by a mystical signification and by the purpose and will of Him who first instituted them (Schaff, 2007:887-888).

Bullinger is clear that he dislikes the doctrine of those who speak of the sacraments as common signs, not sanctified nor effectual (Schaff, 2007:888). He also condemns those who, because of the invisible things despise the visible and think the signs superfluous; such were the messalians (Schaff, 2007:888). He further mentions his disagreement with those who teach that grace and the things signified are to be so tied to and included in the signs that whosoever do outwardly receive the signs must also inwardly participate in the grace (Schaff, 2007:888) before adding:
God's word remains the true word of God; wherein not only the bare words are uttered when it is preached, but there without the things signified by the words are offered to God. Although the wicked and unbelievers hem and understand the words, yet enjoy not the things signified because they receive them not in true faith (Schaff, 2007:889).

Thus, the Lord is spiritually present in the Supper and the authenticity of the sacrament rests in the command of the Lord and his words of institution; the church’s faithful receive the elements in faith. Likewise, in preaching, for Bullinger, the preached Word is a means of grace. The preaching task is ordained by the Lord, and it is He who calls and commissions true preachers. The content of their preaching is also given by Him. The Church is the assembly of the faithful who receive the preached word in faith. So long as these true preachers declare His true message, then Jesus Christ is spiritually present and applies the preached word by his Holy Spirit. It seems that it is in this sacramental sense that the preaching of the Word of God is itself the Word of God. Perhaps, both approaches are not mutually exclusive. We may say that Dowey’s approach is that of a practical theologian while Biel’s is that of a historical theologian.

4.6 Niles and Bullinger – An Initial Dialogue on Preaching

Our study reveals that as a second generation Reformer, Bullinger was able to go into great conceptual and practical detail in his theology of preaching. It is clear that Bullinger’s explication of the nature of the preacher’s calling is akin to Niles’ call for a preacher to be a servant, although this does not mean that they are identical on every point and on their emphases. Niles and Bullinger both insist on the preacher’s spiritual formation. Niles defines this as the preacher’s calling to be a servant, while Bullinger assumes that a true preacher will have been truly called and be subject to the discipline of his presbytery or synod. All the time, Bullinger’s view seems to be shaped by the awareness of the extreme teachings of the Radical Reformers and the turbulent history of the Donatists. These insights have implications for the Western and Non-Western Church. With his Methodist background in

75 See Chapter 2, Section 2.5.3
Ceylon, Niles places the accent upon the inward calling and obedience of the preacher. This emphasis is not uncommon in the Non-Western Church (Lim, 2001) and it is important in order to appreciate the holy nature of the preacher’s calling. But this note of holy vocation is also explicit in Bullinger when he outlines four types of calling. Perhaps, the disciplinary process which Bullinger was familiar with in Reformation Europe and which still characterises many mainstream churches in the West, is not as deeprooted in the Non-Western Church without a direct history and heritage of the Reformation (Satyaranjan, 2009:231-262). Thus there is the danger that the external calling could be despised or neglected by the Non-Western Church (Old, 2010:171-174). On the other hand, churches in the West may blithely assume that an outward calling is automatic proof of an inward one, and thus precipitate spiritual decline (Old, 2010:1-2). The Non-Western Church (Surya Prakash, 1991) can be enriched by the theological depth and heritage of the Church in the West gained after years of debate, testing and theological ferment. Moreover, the Non-Western Church can also gain by recognising the important place which needs to be, ordinarily, given to ecclesiastical processes and the accountability of a public and lawful calling. The Church in the West for her part, will be enriched if she begins to understand the perspective of Niles that an outward call is not always proof of an inward one and that a preacher’s first calling is to be a servant of Jesus Christ. When this is done, the Church in the West will begin to discover that the distinction between true and false calling is not merely Non-Western but is rooted in the writings of Bullinger and the Reformers and is ultimately Biblical. But both the Western and Non-Western Church, need to hold the delicate balance that demands both an inward and outward calling in order to preach the Word of God.

On the character and nature of preaching, the setting of Bullinger’s theology, unlike Niles’, is largely ecclesiastical. Like the Reformers before him, Bullinger was operating within a dominant Christendom model (Biel, 1990). In contrast, Niles’ lectures on preaching are set within an evangelistic context where the Church’s calling is to declare the finality of Christ. This means that although he implicitly assumes the context of liturgy, he is prepared to move beyond the Church’s stated assembly for worship and give importance to evangelistic
preaching. At first glance, this note of evangelistic preaching may appear to be absent in Bullinger, but this is not so. The evangelistic imperative is not completely absent in Bullinger’s theology of preaching for, as he makes clear, part of the purpose of preaching is to declare the gospel and call humanity to repentance. In Bullinger’s Europe, many or most unconverted people were probably to be found within the church, hence Biel’s reference to Zurich’s clergy as “the doorkeepers of the House of Righteousness” (Biel, 1990). We must be clear that although both Bullinger and Niles take a high view with respect to the nature and character of Christian preaching, their perspectives are not identical and their emphases differentiated. Though they are broadly agreed on their understanding that the preaching of the word of God is the word of God, they approach the issue from different perspectives. The best probable explanation for this difference in emphasis is their varied historical and cultural contexts. Taking Bulliner and Niles in dialogue, the contemporary Church in the West will be enriched by the evangelistic accent of Niles’ understanding of preaching since much of Europe and North America may be beginning to lose its historical-cultural Christian moorings. But the Non-Western Church and many churches in the West too (Old, 2010:529-532) will similarly be enriched when they begin to appreciate Bullinger’s explication of the sacramental nature of the presence of Christ in the true preaching of his word by any preacher lawfully called.

On the content of preaching, Niles and Bullinger agree, broadly, that it has to be the gospel of Jesus Christ. Without this gospel, there can be no preaching. Although they are both agreed on the Christian content of preaching, Bullinger and Niles articulate this aspect of their theories of preaching distinctly. In his Second Helvetic Confession, Bullinger makes the doctrine of Christ and soteriology pivotal, while Niles speaks constantly of the previousness and finality of Jesus Christ. It may be argued that Bullinger’s approach to the content of preaching is more theological while Niles’ is more apologetic. But we must be clear that this is a difference not in content or substance but in approach and presentation; as we have said before (see Section 2.5), Bullinger was more a systematic theologian which Niles was not. This part of Niles’ dialogue with Bullinger is crucial because the gospel-centric content

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76 See Chapter 2, Section 2.5.2
77 See Chapter 2, Section 2.5.1
of Christian preaching often seems to be under attack (Jimenez, 2008:707) and is susceptible to traditionalism and nominalism; religion replaces the gospel (Greidanus, 1988:113-120). Niles and Bullinger are both aware of this ever present danger and therefore provide the wholesome content for true preaching, and the Western and Non-Western Church will do well to stay on the gospel which is Jesus Christ and Him crucified (Campbell, 2006).

On the consequence of preaching, Niles is under no illusion that the gospel and its Christ are a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence. Niles believes that the gospel possesses the power to save, but he is not unaware of its impediment. For his part, Bullinger may appear to be reticent on the consequences of preaching. He does refer to the salvation of souls and the upbuilding of the saints, but he appears to pass-over the rejection that comes with gospel preaching. Still, it would be overstating the case to say that Bullinger was unaware of this rejectionary element in preaching or completely silent on the matter. As a second generation Reformer, Bullinger had himself witnessed resistance to the gospel and its preaching, and would have known that rejection is one part of the consequences of preaching. But Niles’ cultural background as a minority Christian in a predominantly Buddhist or Hindu society made him particularly sensitive to the rejectionary consequence that is inevitable in authentic Christian preaching. Like Niles, the Non-Western Church is familiar with the offensiveness of the gospel and the reality of persecution; the Non-Western Church is also aware of the saving nature of authentic gospel preaching (Old, 2010:173-226). The Church in the West too knows, at least theoretically, that gospel preaching is God’s powerful means to save, but she needs to be reminded of this truth (Old, 2010:502-528). Moreover, the technological age with its move from the oral to the visual has the potential to cause the Church to underestimate the nature and power of preaching (Mitchell, 2000). And as Western societies become more multicultural and pluralistic, the Church in the West must be reconciled to the offensive nature of preaching (Campbell & Cilliers, 2012:153-180). For her part, the Non-Western Church can be enriched by Bullinger’s insight that preaching is the supreme divinely ordained method of communicating the gospel (Victor & Perumalla, 2013).

78 See Chapter 2, Section 2.5.2
The general agreement between Niles’ theology of preaching and that of Bullinger probably indicates that there is a nascent Protestant ecumenical theology of preaching which is waiting to be fully articulated for the benefit of the Global Church. By ‘general agreement’ we do not suggest that Niles and Bullinger are identical or indistinguishable in their theories of preaching. It is clear that their respective theologies of preaching vary in their historical perspectives and points of departure and they have distinctive theological and practical emphases. This though is unsurprising since they were different men, from different cultures, from different historical periods, seeking to be faithful to their own callings in their own generation. Nevertheless, in the core of their homiletical theology, Bullinger and Niles, together with the Reformers and Jesus, agree on the importance of the calling of preachers, the context, content and character of preaching and the consequences that follow such true preaching. Their historical situation probably caused the Reformers to develop their theologies of preaching in broad strokes. As a second generation Reformer, Bullinger was able to formulate in greater detail the nature of a preacher’s calling and the practical processeses surrounding this. It is interesting that the emphasis on the subjective spiritual wellbeing of the preacher in Bullinger’s theology is in concert with Nile’s own emphasis on the preacher’s calling to be a servant. For D.T. Niles, his lectures on preaching probably did not give him the time or opportunity to develop the ecclesiastical and procedural details that Bullinger had outlined. In any case, their different ecclesiastical backgrounds might have produced different procedures. But they both agree on the process of the preacher’s calling being both inward and outward and that this calling ought to be lawful.
4.7 Summary

This study of Bullinger’s thoughts in his *Second Helvetic Confession* and *The Decades* would seem to indicate that for Bullinger, the preaching of the Word of God was indeed the Word of God. It was the Word of God from an instrumental rather than normative perspective. The Holy Scripture is alone the Word of God in the normative sense. But preaching is the Word of God in the instrumental sense in that preaching is only the Word of God so long as its content is faithful to and consistent with the message of the Holy Scriptures, and it is proclaimed by one who is lawfully called to that office.

But when Bullinger’s teaching on the Lord’s Supper is combined with his teaching on preaching, it is possible to understand his theology of preaching as sacramental. The sacraments gain their legitimacy in that they are ordained by God and they contain the words of Christ. In the same way, for Bullinger, preaching obtains its legitimacy over the church because it is ordained by God and instituted by Christ Himself. For this, Bullinger traces the history of preaching from the time of the patriarchs until Christ and then to the pastors and evangelists who were committed to the New Testament Church. Moreover, the words of Christ constitute the sacrament and give it its efficacy. In the same way, if the preacher is lawfully called and preaches the Word of God particularly in its Christological and soteriological content, then the word of God is preached. The hearers themselves have a duty to listen and to receive the words of preaching in faith. It is then that the Holy Spirit efficaciously applies the Word of God to them individually.

The sacramental approach to preaching also means that while Bullinger places a high premium on the life and conduct of the church’s ministers, and emphasises the lawful calling into the ministry, he does not seem to think that moral condition is essential to make the preacher’s preaching of the gospel to be the Word of God. For Bullinger, a minister acts in his preaching office in God’s name, not his own; therefore he denies that the worthiness or unworthiness in the minister can add anything to or take away anything from the
integrity or effectiveness of the preached word as well as the sacraments. Our study has indicated that Niles and Bullinger agree at key points in their theologies of preaching – on the preacher’s calling, the nature and character, context, content and consequences of true preaching. The dialogue has revealed that there is a nascent ecumenical theology of preaching waiting to be articulated for a global church, and that both Western and Non-Western churches share much in common in their understanding of preaching and will be enriched by listening and learning from each other. But we must remember that according to Osmer, all descriptive-empirical and interpretative tasks must be tested against the normative. We therefore need to proceed and ask about the theology of preaching: What ought to be going on? It is for this reason that we turn in the next chapter to examine the preaching of Jesus at Nazareth’s synagogue as the normative part of this thesis.
5.0 Jesus’ and the New Testament’s Practice of Preaching

5.1 Introduction

No study of the Christian theology of preaching would be complete without reference to the preaching of Jesus of Nazareth. He was the founder of the New Testament Church and his instructions are normative for the Church and therefore essential for a dialogue between Protestant Christianity in the East and West. This chapter aims to investigate the ministry of Jesus in the Synagogue in Nazareth in order to formulate a normative theory on the nature of preaching and evaluate Niles’ theory in its correspondence with biblical perspectives on preaching and its potential as a global creed for a new ecumenical theology of preaching. We will do this by first outlining the state of New Testament scholarship on the worship and preaching of Jesus and the apostles. We shall then proceed to investigate Jesus’ involvement at the synagogue in Nazareth, widely claimed to be his inauguration sermon (Fitzmyer, 1982:434-438; Nolland, 1989:126-132; Geldenhuys, 1951:125-132). And then we shall attempt to compare this information with data from the apostle Paul before seeking to evaluate Niles’ theology of preaching against this background and reaching some conclusions.

5.2 Current Scholarship on New Testament Worship and Preaching

5.2.1 The Survey

The study of early Christian liturgy has changed over the course of history. First, there was the philological approach, which assumed that Jesus or His apostles would have left behind instructions that were then followed by the early church (Jasper, 1963:3-5; Jones, 1964). Second the structural approach led by Dix whose study assumed that there was one common source for early Christian liturgy although Dix himself concentrated on the shape of liturgy rather than the details (Dix, 1945). Third, the organic-comparative approach (Neale,
was common in nineteenth-century Germany and used natural scientific ideas to compare and study liturgy. It took an evolutionary perspective, assuming that liturgy moved from the simple to the complex. But each of these approaches has been criticised for its weaknesses. The philological approach demands that we have trustworthy texts of instructions, but this is not always easy with historical documents. Even if they should be available, we may not possess sufficient knowledge of those times to understand these texts and to apply them correctly. The difficulty with Dix’s approach is that it cannot always answer the awkward questions raised by modern research; more recent scholars have argued that the New Testament itself is pluriform in doctrine and practice and that more evidence is needed before we can be sure of early Christian liturgy. The third approach has been criticised for failing to distinguish between the natural and the cultural. It is argued that although nature is transmitted genetically, culture is transmitted socially. Thus Bradshaw opines that Baumstark’s ‘laws’ are too rigid, and that logical construction is not necessarily equivalent to historical reality (Bradshaw, 2002:11-14).

After surveying these historical development of liturgical studies of the early church, Bradshaw recommends a hermeneutic of suspicion (Bradshaw, 2002:14-20). According to him, the student of liturgy needs to ask: can we trust the text? What is the interpretive stratum? Is it a verbatim account of a liturgical act? This approach holds that authoritative sounding statements are not always genuinely authoritative and liturgical legislation is no proof of actual liturgical practice. Perhaps more fundamentally, even if the text is reliable and the interpretation plausible, there may be multiple explanations for the reality instead of one single truth. Thus, while an older scholarship supposed a unified origin of Christian liturgy, which time and space then varied, more recent liturgical study favours a multiple beginning, which then converged at certain points. While Dix had sought to find an original, pristine and apostolic core of Eucharistic liturgy (Dix, 1945), contemporary scholars like Kretschmar hold that “a plurality of possibilities is itself apostolic” (Kretschmar, 1995:33). This latter strand of liturgical scholarship holds that early Christian worship was diverse even in its biblical-apostolic origins, multi-linear rather than mono-linear in its development, and closely related to the several cultural, linguistic, geographical, and theological expressions and orientations of distinct churches throughout the early centuries of Christianity. For
Bradshaw, apart from some rather broad but significant commonalities throughout various churches in antiquity, the traditions of worship during the first three centuries were rather diverse in content and interpretation, depending on where individual practices are to be located; with the diversity of Christology and Ecclesiology, there was variety in liturgy. Thus, according to Bradshaw, the diversity is found both within the rites of worship themselves and in their theological interpretations (Bradshaw, 2002:21-72). John Fenwick concludes that this diversification was a product of the process of cross-fertilization when there was the attempt towards unification of rites during the formative fourth and fifth centuries (Fenwick, 1992). All this indicates that it is an enormously complex endeavour to ascertain the theology of worship and preaching of the early New Testament church.

As for preaching itself, liturgical scholars have cast doubts on the long-standing hypothesis that the twofold ‘liturgy of the word’ and ‘liturgy of the Eucharist’ were derived from a fusion between the Jewish synagogue service and the Christian Eucharistic meal. While they admit that it is neither implausible nor impossible, they contend that we know little concerning the nature and contents of the synagogue service in the first century, especially before the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. They also argue that Christian worship and preaching could have been influenced by the practice of communal meals, whether Jewish, Greco-Roman, or early Christian, where religious or philosophical conversation and singing of hymns took place (Bradshaw, 2002:21-23). Brilioth too has concluded that the “sources for a history of preaching in the post-apostolic era are very scanty” (Brilioth, 1965:18).

The earliest post-New Testament evidence that we have for liturgy in Christian worship is Justin Martyr’s Chapter 67 in his First Apology. In his De anima 9:4, Tertullian seems to support Justin’s testimony. From this, Gordon Lathrop has deduced a seemingly ecumenical, transcultural and possibly early Christian order of worship (Lathrop, 1994:22; Lathrop, 1993). But it might be precarious to find from Justin’s skeletal description a normative pattern for what the church should do in its liturgical assemblies. Amidst the contemporary

79 See also Larry Hurtado, At the Origins of Christian Worship: The Context and Character of Earliest Christian Devotion, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999)
confusion on worship and preaching (York, 2003), the liturgical theologian Geoffrey
Wainwright has urged that “rather than present experience being allowed to hold sway over
the inherited tradition” we should let “the inherited tradition shape and govern present
experience” (Wainwright, 1997:156). He has warned that a “deeper replunging into its own
tradition will ... be necessary if the church is to survive in recognizable form, particularly in
western culture” (Wainwright, 1997:138). But the question that faces the student of liturgy
is whether we can now overcome the aforementioned historical problems and reach this
“inherited tradition”.

The difficulty that has been highlighted by the recent studies is not that there is no skeletal
pattern of liturgy but that there is too little information for us to ascertain the hows of the
liturgy and the theologies behind them. Scholars are prepared to concede that there was
some form of order of worship that the diverse churches of Christian antiquity did see as
providing a universal pattern of worship. They also concede that this form of order
determined the churches’ understanding of what constituted Christian worship and what
appeared to transcend local diversity. But there remains the diversity of how things were
done: how baptism was conducted, how Sunday and festival celebrations were structured
and how the meal together with its proclamation of the word was celebrated (Stewart-
Sykes, 2001). No one questions the very existence, structure and contents of Christian
worship; these are part of the inherited tradition. With respect to the Eucharist, according
to Kelly, it appears that the theology of the real presence of Christ (his body and blood) in
the bread and cup was universally accepted and nowhere contradicted, since Ignatius of
Antioch stated it as early as the first century AD (Kelly, 1977:440). But did the early
Christians also have such a sacramental view of preaching? It is precisely these issues that
we need to investigate especially with respect to Jesus’ praxis surrounding preaching as
described in the Gospels.

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80 Ignatius, Letter to the Romans 7:3 and Letter to the Smyrnaeans 6:2-7:1 (c. AD 110)
We may therefore conclude that the student of early Christian preaching faces three challenges. The first is on the historical level as outlined by Bradshaw above. The second is on the methodological level and the third is on the rhetorical-homiletical level, revolving around the issue of genres of preaching.

5.2.2 The Historical Challenge

With respect to the historical, we must take seriously the warning of Bradshaw concerning the older liturgical scholarship. But it is possible that Bradshaw himself might have gone too far in the opposite direction and his approach might reflect his own cultural milieu of postmodern suspicion and deconstructionism. When Bradshaw repeatedly undervalues the New Testament documents and gives them a later dating, his view is not unchallenged. Many years ago, F F Bruce made a strong case for the reliability of the New Testament documents (Bruce, 2003). Writing more recently on this same issue, NT Wright adds:

Bruce was writing, of course, to address the issue which is still a burning one today: can we trust the New Testament? Hasn't it all been disproved? Doesn't modern scholarship show that it was all made up much later, so that the supposedly historical foundations of Christianity are in fact a figment of the imagination? This sort of thing is said so often in the media, in some churches, and in public life in general that many people take it for granted that nothing can be said of the other side. But, as so often, this is where careful, accurate historical scholarship of the type in which Bruce excelled has a quiet, thorough, and complete answer. Yes, we can trust the New Testament (Wright, 2003).

Wright then goes on to summarise the reasons. According to him, the documents or manuscripts from which we get our knowledge of the New Testament are in far, far better shape than the manuscripts of any other work in the ancient world and by a very long way too. Our knowledge of the New Testament rests on a very large number of manuscripts, several hundred in fact, which go back as far, in some cases, as the early second century, less than a hundred years after the books were first written. But were the documents telling the truth? Can we trust them? Wright goes on to argue that biblical scholarship has done
much work since the time of Bruce. Wright concludes that Bruce’s work is far from being out of date (Wright, 2003).

Writing from a historical-archaeological perspective, with particular relevance to the Old Testament texts, Kenneth Kitchen has recently examined the many modern theories that hold that the Old Testament documents are unreliable and thus ahistorical. He concludes that these theories have no factual foundations and are often driven by the evolutionary bias of the age or their proposers. Instead, Kitchen encourages Old Testament scholarship to examine the ‘direct evidence’ from ancient Near Eastern texts, artefacts and Hebrew writings instead of resting on the “loud claims of ‘prophets’ new and old” (Kitchen, 2006:449). First, Kitchen reminds us that the “minimalist writers” of the past had argued that the Old Testament writings were exclusively the product of a group of Jewish literary romantics of the fourth-third centuries B.C., and thus truly a late Perso-Hellenistic product. At best, they taught, these Hebrew documents demonstrate nothing at all. Kitchen exposes their gratuitous assumptions, wilful evasion of very clear evidence, and their baseless slurs against the biblical data (Kitchen, 2006:451-453). Kitchen argues that down to “the present time, biblical studies journals still carry overmuch of these gossamer speculations (unsullied by objective data) that real professional scholars of Near Eastern texts and material cultures could easily dispense with” (Kitchen, 2006:459). Kitchen goes on to conclude:

In short, there is absolutely nothing to support the sweeping claims that ‘ancient Israel does not fit’ its screamingly obvious context, or that the biblical image cannot be reconciled with Palestine’s older history, or that the Hebrew Bible’s writings are of Hellenistic date. The content of the Hebrew Bible is not ‘invented history’ and never was. This is merely crude antibiblical (almost anti-Semitic) propaganda, and ultimately nothing more. Ancient Israel was no more ‘monstrous’ than any of its neighbours, its history is too closely tied to verifiable fact to be undiluted fantasy; and paraphrasing is an essential tool of all history writing. (Kitchen, 2006:461-462).81

Secondly, Kitchen tells us that the successor of this past scholarship are “present-day minimalists” and that they are simply more scathing and more extreme in their views that their predecessors (Kitchen, 2006:449). Analysing, for example, literary criticism of the Hebrew Bible, deconstructionists argue that the author’s intention is an illusion created by readers, the text is an interpretable entity independent of its author, language is infinitely unstable and meaning always deferrable, one must approach texts always with a hostile suspicion, against the grain, denying integrity where possible in favour of dissonance and a search for inner contradiction, all texts are incomplete as language is unbounded and structure is more important than context (Kitchen, 2006:470-471). Kitchen also cautions against social and practical theories for their outdated Darwinian bias (Kitchen, 2006:486). Thirdly, Kitchen assesses these radical theories against “today’s factual/practical state of knowledge” (Kitchen, 2006:486-497). Recognising the shortcomings of erstwhile scholarship, Kitchen finally proposes:

A genuinely radical approach, a proper paradigm shift, and clearing of a broad, free space in which we may all go forward to better things, to present the vast and splendid panorama of Near Eastern antiquity through the millennia (the biblical data included) for the enjoyment and benefit of all (Kitchen, 2006:450).

Accordingly Kitchen’s new paradigm would start afresh from real basics. It will be a new, essentially fact-governed, hence more solidly based paradigm. For Kitchen, “the old, simplistic, nineteenth-century ‘zero-to-infinity’ evolutionary scheme (purely theoretical!) has in effect collapsed in various disciplines, and the fact-based Near Eastern profiles …can now afford us a far more stable paradigm with which to work” (Kitchen, 2006:498). Under this new paradigm, the first aim should be to establish a fuller vision of a series of fact-based longues durees, based on working out more fully the profiles of the individual cultures and civilisations on the basis of formative, crystallisation and undulation phases in each case. Secondly, the biblical record must be dealt with in the same way, using what is possessed. For Kitchen, there is no need, ever again, to force the data artificially and arbitrarily into a bed of Procrustes, shuffling around prophets, covenantal collections and forms of worship to fit an alien scheme that finds no echo whatsoever in the overall history and culture of the biblical world. Kitchen beseeches his colleagues to agree to part quietly with imaginary and
outdated evolutionary schemes and give them a decent and final burial (Kitchen, 2006:499-500).

Whilst Kitchen’s trenchant criticisms may be directed particularly to Old Testament scholarship, they may have consequences for the study of the New Testament documents too. Alikin has recently argued that the “view that each and every element of the early Christian gathering could be derived from the synagogue service on the Sabbath began to lose ground during the last decade of the twentieth century” (Alikin, 2010:12), holding that “very little is known about worship in the synagogue before 70CE”. But the debate has entered the twenty first century and the previous scholarly consensus which treated the New Testament texts with suspicion appears to be breaking down and giving way to a more holistic approach. In 2008, Richard Bauckham made a strong case for regarding the gospels as eyewitness accounts (Bauckham, 2008). In 2008 also, Deeg called for a new paradigm in the study of Jewish and Christian preaching. According to him, while previous scholarship tended to see the link between Jewish and Christian preaching within a ‘mother-daughter paradigm’, Deeg calls for a new paradigm of ‘homiletical twins’ (Deeg, et al., 2008). Most recently in Adams’ study of the places of early Christian worship, the author uses the New Testament and other literary data, as well as archaeological and comparative evidence to show that explicit evidence for assembling in houses is not nearly as extensive as is usually thought. He also shows that there is literary and archaeological evidence for meeting in non-house settings (Adams, 2013). It thus appears that the ground is moving and the scholarly consensus shifting towards a more serious approach to the New Testament documents and the study of its Jewish synagoguical setting. We therefore stand on good ground when we seek to investigate Jesus’ theology of preaching by examining his actions at the Synagogue in Nazareth as given in the Gospel of Luke.
5.2.3 The Methodological Challenge

Bradshaw provides a very helpful summary of the various methods that have been used to study early Christian texts in order to ascertain details concerning early Christian worship. First, is the History of Religions approach. This method takes seriously the influence of paganism since it remembers that early Christianity did not emerge from a vacuum (Bousset, 1970). It gives consideration to the Hellenistic culture of that time and its analysis is centred on the evolutionary principle. The problem with this method is that it fails to take the New Testament or Old Testament texts seriously. And although this approach can be useful, its complete reliance on the evolutionary system is less than satisfactory. A second method used to study early Christian liturgical texts is the Source Theory. Zunz called this the scientific study of history (Bradshaw, 2002:25). This approach compares various texts and tries to find an ‘Urtext’. This method may be useful because it uses philology in addition to history. Unfortunately, most of its supporters emphasise the texts at the expense of any other evidence from history or archaeology. In terms of texts, these scholars tend to neglect both the Old Testament and New Testament. In any case, we must be cautious about imposing our Western and modern categories of thought on a bygone and Near Eastern cultural world.

The third approach is the Form Critical. Heinemann tried to use the forms of prayers within Judaism to ascertain their chronology (Heinemann, 1977). Others later extended this to the study of Jewish worship arguing that diversity leads over time to unity in Jewish worship. It is important to note that Heinemann studies prayers and not worship. Moreover, this method, by placing the accent on oral transmission, fails to take the Old Testament and New Testament texts seriously enough. As Vincent Taylor has reminded, the eyewitnesses behind the gospels “did not go into permanent retreat; for at least a generation they moved among the young Palestinian communities and through preaching and fellowship their recollections were at the disposal of those who sought information” (Taylor, 1935:41). Taylor’s caution has recently been repeated by Martin Hengel (Hengel, 2000:143).
The fourth method is Redaction Criticism. Jacob Neusner argued that the scribes used their creativity to edit and transmit documents (Neusner, 1976). If Form Criticism fails to take seriously the literary texts, then Redaction Criticism fails to take seriously the oral tradition behind the texts. In a seminal article, Bailey has challenged this way of understanding oral tradition and the Gospels (Bailey, 1991), while Dunn has concluded that “the paradigm of literary editing is confirmed as wholly inappropriate: in oral tradition one telling of a story is in no sense an editing of a previous telling” (Dunn, 2003:209).

This examination of methods in the investigation of Jesus’ theology of preaching is neither obscure nor irrelevant for our purposes. It is salutary to note that present-day scholars continue to work within these same theoretical and methodological assumptions (Moore-Jumonville, 2002). As indicated earlier, Alikin has recently argued for a “sociological approach” to the study of early Christian worship (Alikin, 2010:3) although it is difficult to distinguish his method from the broad thrust of the old History of Religions method. Alikin refuses to allow for Jewish or Synagogue influence in Christian worship, preferring to understand “the local early Christian community, as a socio-cultural phenomenon” functioning “as a voluntary religious association just like many other associations in the Graeco-Roman world of the first century” (Alikin, 2010:4). On preaching, Alikin concludes that “preaching among Christians originated in the context of their communal gathering. This gathering had its socio-cultural analogy in the banquet of various Hellenistic clubs, associations...” (Alikin, 2010:172). He is critical of scholars who have sought to trace the origin of the Christian sermon back to the worship of the Jewish synagogue, concluding that the “setting and content of Christian admonition and exhortation in no way resembled the study of the Law in the synagogue on the Sabbath” (Alikin, 2010:173). But the weakness of Alikin’s position is that he is too dogmatic and has failed to grapple with Old’s three-fold study of Old Testament worship and its possible influence upon intertestamental and New Testament synagogue worship. Old explicates the Torah, Prophetic and Wisdom schools’ positions on worship and spends over fifteen pages on the preaching and worship of the synagogues and rabbinical schools (Old, 1998:94-110). Old interacts with Elbogen (Old, 1998:98) who worked within the premise of the philological method of the Source Theory model (Elbogen, 1994) but appears to prefer the authority of Moore’s study (Moore, 1997)
although Neusner, following Porter, criticised Moore for failing to take into account *halakhic* evidence in Moore’s description of ‘Judaism’ (Neusner, 1980). We must thus conclude that while the Lukan scholar Fitzmyer is correct to defend the importance and usefulness of the historical-critical method in our study of Luke (Fitzmyer, 2008), it is just as important to receive, respect and study the Lukan text as it has been given to us. Thus while we shall take the critical issues seriously, our over-riding aim here will be to work within the grammatical-historical approach, putting emphasis on an analysis of the text itself and the relational structure of the New Testament texts as they are imbedded in Old Testament scriptures. As Brilioth has observed:

| The Christian preacher’s claim that he is a bearer of the Word of God and not merely an expositor, and the veneration for the spoken word which is an essential characteristic of the Christian life of worship, would hardly be imaginable without the pattern of prophecy (Brilioth, 1965:4). |

**5.2.4 The Rhetorical-Homiletical Challenge**

Concerning the third challenge, that of the genre of preaching, it must be noted that Alistair Stewart-Sykes (Stewart-Sykes, 2001) attempts to find out what a homily would have sounded like in early Christianity. His aim is “to write a prehistory of Christian preaching” culminating with the preaching of Origen.\(^2\) Stewart-Sykes goes on to state that in the past it has been considered axiomatic that the earliest Christians preached. Indeed, according to him, early form-criticism assumed that the sermon provided the rationale behind the shape of the New Testament documents. But Stewart-Sykes challenges the whole working assumption that the earliest Christians preached since, according to him, there is nothing extant from the first two centuries which is self-confessedly a homily preached in the synaxis. For Stewart Sykes, the discussion with regard to preaching in the period of the New Testament is confused by the number of activities which might be so described; in particular missionary preaching has been subsumed under the heading of preaching. But although both missionary preaching and preaching in the assembly are both forms of communicating

the Christian message they should, according to Stewart-Sykes, be distinguished carefully from one another since their audiences differ, as do their aims, and so the content of the messages is distinct to each” (Stewart-Sykes, 2001:3-4).

Edwards too takes this kind of position when he distinguishes between liturgical, catechetical and missionary preaching (Edwards, 1995:184-185). The first takes place within the assembly, the third outwith the Christian assembly and the second has the function of bridging the gap between those outside the Christian assembly and those within. For Edwards,

texts of missionary preaching have not survived from the early church, nor have catechetical sermons from before the great series of Cyril of Jerusalem and Ambrose in the late fourth century, the liturgical sermon is the only genre to be considered in the earliest Christian centuries. Such a sermon may be defined as a speech delivered by an authorised person applying some point of doctrine, usually drawn from a biblical passage, to the lives of the congregation with the purpose of moving them to accept that application and to act on the basis of it (Edwards, 1995:184-185).

For Edwards then there is little in the New Testament that can be identified according to these criteria as Christian preaching.

Olivar makes distinctions not dissimilar to Edwards’ and argues that there was in the early New Testament church preaching intended to convert, to catechise and to confirm the faithful in their practice (Olivar, 1991:35). As we have said in a previous chapter, Old too makes allowance for various genres of preaching, distinguishing between expository preaching, evangelistic preaching, catechetical preaching, festal preaching and prophetic preaching (Old, 1998:8). But Stewart-Sykes criticises Old’s approach. For Stewart-Sykes, Old’s definition of preaching is too scriptural and this is neither sufficient nor necessary. He argues that Old’s generic distinctions are capable of including virtually any spoken communication within Christianity (Stewart-Sykes, 2001:4). It is perhaps for this reason that
in his book, Kilgallen does not include Jesus’ ministry at Nazareth’s synagogue as a major event in his understanding of Luke’s gospel (Kilgallen, 2014).

As we said in our study of Erasmus’ theory of preaching, the question of *genera* is important for it reveals the purpose, method, aim and style of sermons. Old and others are quite correct to study the various extant sermons in Christian history in order to show how various people in different times understood preaching. But it remains unclear if the New Testament documents lend themselves to this analysis. In any case, Jesus’ actions in Nazareth’s synagogue was set within the context of worship. John Murray probably comes closest when he writes that sound preaching should contain all the different notes of the gospel; good preaching is a composite that must contain a word about the judgement of a Holy God, an invitation in the free offer of the gospel, a call to self-examination and a reminder of the high vocation of the Christian calling (Murray, 1976). This seems to imply that a good sermon is evangelistic as it is catechetical; it is for the Christian as well as the non-Christian.


When we come to Luke 4:16-30, the account of Jesus’ visit and ministry at the Synagogue in Nazareth, we are faced with some questions. Are we dealing here with a sermon of Jesus or with a literary construction of Luke? Luke has included a number of sermons by Peter, Stephen and Paul in the Acts of the Apostles, and it is often pointed out that this was considered appropriate for Greek historians to do (Dibelius, 1936:xv). It is said that Greeks tended to construct speeches for leading characters at crucial moments in history (Conzelmann, 1967:13). But there are reasons for regarding Luke’s record as a good reflection of the preaching of Jesus. C.H. Dodd has shown that the sermons recorded in Acts are quite reliable witnesses to the preaching of the earliest Christians (Dodd, 1936). Ridderbos has gone further. Examining Peter’s speeches in Acts, Ridderbos asserts that both the method and the message of the apostle were reliable and accurate to the message of
Jesus (Ridderbos, 1961). Against the charge that he might be guilty of disconnecting the speeches from their literary context in Act’s structure, Ridderbos defends himself by maintaining that “the speeches serve the writer as material to characterise and illustrate his account” (Ridderbos, 1961:5). Mounce mounts a robust defence of Luke as a historian when he reminds us of the marked dissimilarity of Luke’s speech-record to the imaginative speeches of the Greek historians, the fidelity of Luke to his gospel sources, the strong evidence for Aramaic sources and the notable lack of Paulinism in Luke-Acts (Mounce, 1960:73). More recently, Rothschild has argued that rhetorical-historiography is not always easily separable from theology (Rothschild, 2004).

On the question of Luke’s source for this narrative, New Testament scholars remain divided. Like Bultmann (Bultmann, 1963:31-32,386-387), many identify Mark as Luke’s source for this scene (Keck, 1995:104). Both accounts contain a question concerning Jesus’ origin and a proverb within Nazareth’s synagogue. Beyond this however, there is much that is not found in Mark. Tuckett (Tuckett, 1982:347-348) has therefore identified the use of the hypothetical Q-Source while Chilton has refused to rule-out other traditional material (Chilton, 1981:164). But the source-critical question should not distract us from the text itself which seeks to highlight the programmatic nature of this scene for Luke’s story of Jesus and His apostles.


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83 It is generally assumed by source critics that Mark was the first written gospel and that Matthew and Luke were dependent on Mark for their gospel accounts since they have material that is common to Mark. But scholars are also aware that there is common material found in Luke and in Matthew that is not found in Mark. The working hypothesis therefore is that Matthew and Luke, in addition to having Mark as a source for their information, had a second independent source that Mark did not use. This second independent source is called the "Q-source." The letter Q is used since it is the first letter of the German word ‘quelle’, which means ‘source’. Thus, Q is supposed to be a source that is unknown to us but known to Matthew and Luke.

Miesner (Miesner, 1978) and Tiede (Tiede, 1980:103-106) have noticed a chiastic structure to Luke 4:16-21, seeing at the very heart of the text the quotation from Isaiah 61:1-2 and Isaiah 58:6. Bailey holds that the text is rhetorically structured. According to him, the ideas of “in the synagogue”, “stood up”, “given the scroll” and “unscrolled the scroll” are later repeated in reverse order (Bailey, 2008:147-169). This appears to be a form of Old Testament method where ideas are often presented and then reversed, with a particular parable or metaphor in the centre (Bailey, 1992:17ff). Here the centre is filled with an Old Testament quotation. Paul also employs this rhetorical device in I Cor 6:13-20. For Bailey, this encasing of an Old Testament text within a series of ideas or actions is a distinctly Jewish rhetorical device and its appearance is evidence that the recorder of this scene was a Jew who had accepted Jesus as the Messiah. He or she wrote for Jewish readers who could appreciate the biblical artistry involved. In Bailey’s judgement, it may be that Luke did not compose this for Theophilus and other Gentile readers but used an extant source (Bailey, 2008). This line of rhetorical-literary thought has now been further developed by Spencer (Spencer, 2007:6; 63-70).

Concerning the hermeneutic of this narrative in the context of Luke’s writings, Pao and Schnabel argue that Luke understands Scripture as normatively directing the actions of people. Thus, they say, most of his quotations come from the Pentateuch. For them, Jesus’ ministry was from the beginning, a history that fulfilled the *nomos kyriou*, the “law of the Lord” (Pao & Schnabel, 2007:252). According to them also, Luke’s use of the Old Testament shows his conviction that Scripture prophetically announced Jesus’ life and ministry and that Scripture illustrates the story of Jesus’ ministry, rejection and death. Jesus’ ministry was thus seen to be divinely ordained.

Others have taken this same trajectory with respect to Luke’s hermeneutic with their own slight variations. Conzelmann (Conzelmann, 1967), Fitzmyer (Fitzmyer, 2007:287-301) and Lohse (Lohse, 1954) have argued for a prophecy-and-fulfillment pattern in Luke while Rese refuses to see any such linear-temporal movement and prefers to understand Luke’s use of the Old Testament as an explanation of events in the life of Jesus (Rese, 1969). Bock sees the Scripture fulfilled in Jesus in terms of the fulfillment of Hebrew prophecy and in terms of the re-introduction and fulfillment of Old Testament patterns that point to the presence of God’s saving work (Bock, 1987:274-277). In this way, for Luke, according to Bock, the Scriptures are the means to comprehend God’s acts of salvation in the past, present and future and a means of demonstrating the fulfillment of God’s promises given to Israel. This was the presence of God’s salvation in the ministry of Jesus. With respect to its theme, Keck finds in these verses, the motifs of “the anointing of the Spirit, the fulfillment of Scripture, the pattern of prophetic activities, the announcement of the gospel to the Jew first, acceptance and rejection and a dramatic reminder that the work of God that began in Galilee would extend to the ends of the earth” (Keck, 1995:105).

Despite their particular differences, it seems that all scholars agree that “Luke has carefully chosen and arranged elements of this account in order to tell the story in a particular way and convey certain understandings to the reader”. This also explains, at least partly, the modifications of his quotations. It is clear that the theological significance of this passage is not limited to Luke’s Gospel. Themes such as the rejection of the Jews in a synagogue

5.4 Luke 4:16-30 – Towards a Normative Theology of Preaching

We have posited that Jesus’ preaching is normative for the New Testament Church. But this should not be presumed upon or misunderstood. Brosend has recently argued that contemporary preachers can learn from the rhetorical strategy of Jesus (Brosend, 2010). Brosend’s study is part exegetical and part practical but his basic premise is that Jesus demonstrated four discrete rhetorical modes. The first is the dialogical nature of Jesus’ preaching. Second is proclamatory, where Jesus makes public assertions about the Kingdom of God. The third is Jesus’ occasionally self-referential rhetoric, where Brosend distinguishes between the Synoptics and "I Am" sayings of the Johannine Gospel. Fourth is figurative, where Jesus uses analogy, parable, and hyperbole (Brosend, 2010:3-4). While Brosend’s thesis on the normative nature of Jesus’ preaching is helpful, Bernard warned long ago that contemporary preachers can only imitate Jesus’ preaching up to a point (Bernard, 1864:127-149). According to Bernard in his *Bampton Lectures*, “Jesus came not only to preach the gospel but to accomplish it. He did not preach a different gospel but his place in those redemptive events put constraints on him that (other preachers) do not share. There was an element of secrecy in Jesus’ preaching, an intentional obscurity which simultaneously revealed and concealed both his identity and his mission”. Hence, according to Bernard, “Jesus’ reserve in speaking directly about himself in the Gospels”. For Bernard, “this reserve was shared by the apostles during the early stages of their ministry, when they were sent out to announce the kingdom but forbidden to tell anyone that Jesus was the Christ”. Bernard notices a marked change taking place in apostolic preaching in the book of Acts. For him, the essential difference is captured in the summary statement of Acts 5:42: “Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.” Thus, we are correct to speak of the
normative nature of Jesus’ preaching, but we must be careful to understand it within these theological limits.

Our aim in this section is not to give a thorough exegesis of this pericope. There is no space for this; in any case, our focus is on Jesus’ actions at the synagogue in Nazareth with a view of ascertaining, if possible, his theology of preaching. Moreover, as summarised above, some of the details of this narrative are still open to some debate depending on the presuppositions of the method of study.

5.4.1 The Preacher

The Nazareth sermon scene follows the introduction of Jesus’ identity through the heavenly voice in the baptismal event, his genealogy and temptations. Scholars agree that this passage continues to clarify the significance of Jesus’ ministry by situating it within its wider context in salvation history. According to Pao and Schnabel, Jesus’ ministry is further explicated by a block quotation from the text of Isaiah (Pao & Schnabel, 2007:287).

In verse 18, Jesus quotes from Isaiah 61:1-2 the words: πνεῦμα κυρίου ἐπ’ ἐμὲ ("The Spirit of the Lord is upon me"). The Hebrew text makes clear that the proclamation is to be performed by an individual who receives the special anointment of the Spirit. This anointment of the Spirit recalls Isaiah 42:1 and his being “sent” by the Lord with his Spirit points back to Isaiah 48:16. Thus Beuken understands Isaiah 61 as an interpretation of Isaiah 40-55 (Beuken, 1989). Pao and Schnabel call this anointed person “the prophet” (Pao & Schnabel, 2007:288). For Bailey, Jesus’ bold words “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me” is a clear reference to his baptism. Thus Jesus is announcing that he was the anointed one who was promised in the Hebrew text. According to Bailey, the Jews were looking into the future for the fulfillment of these words, while Jesus was fusing the old text with a new and present meaning; the promise was a present reality in Jesus (Bailey, 2008:156). Thus the
audience at Nazareth’s synagogue had to decide if Jesus was indeed the anointed one of God who was to be followed or a charlatan to be rejected.

On the words οὗ εἶνεκεν ἐχρισέν με (“because He has anointed me”), Nolland reminds us that some of the Qumran documents on Isaiah 61:1-2 refer to the prophets within the community (Nolland, 1989:196) but Pao and Schnabel have noted that other Qumran texts point to an eschatological understanding of these verses (Pao & Schnabel, 2007:288). According to them, the prophetic nature of the text is also confirmed by the Targum of Isaiah 61:1-2 where the speaker is explicitly identified as a prophet. Thus they conclude that the text is best understood in messianic terms. On the other hand, Fitzmyer, given his hermeneutic as outlined above, argues for an exclusively prophetic reading of the text (Fitzmyer, 1982:529-30). But Pao and Schnabel argue strongly and with good support that the reference to “anointment” may also have messianic connotations (Pao & Schnabel, 2007:290).

Commentators note that when Jesus speaks of the anointing of the Spirit, the first part of the quotation explains the significance of the Spirit at Jesus’ Baptism and serves as confirmation of Jesus’ authority when we read later of his activities in fulfillment of the four infinitives of verse 18. The text also informs us that Jesus preached because “the Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach the gospel” (Luke 4:18). Jesus was therefore conscious of His divine commission and authority and that His ministry was to be accomplished through the presence of the Holy Spirit (Warrington, 2009:70-83).

Jesus speaks of himself as one who has been sent, ἀπέσταλκέν με (“He sent me”). According to Keck, the phrase “he has sent me” can be taken either with the preceding line or with what follows. The threefold repetition of the pronoun “me” underscores the role of this passage as a description of Jesus’ ministry (Keck, 1995:105). This obviously follows from the anointing and the evident resting of the Spirit upon the sent one. The context would suggest that God Himself is the Sender, although this is not explicitly mentioned. Certainly, this
would have been assumed as implicit in the setting of Isaiah 61 and the Jewish expectations of Jesus’ time. But what is intriguing here is that the call is inward for Jesus since he appears to be aware of it himself. But was the call also outward? As indicated afore, Bailey points to the baptism at the Jordan as the outward sign of the outward calling. Keck too sees a connection between these verses and the baptism of Jesus, and sees in Luke 4:18-19 “the description of the work of God’s anointed prophet” which “serves as a positive counterpoint to the temptations. It does not signal a separate anointing” (Keck, 1995:105). If this perspective is correct, then we may say that there was both the inner and outward calling of Jesus for the preaching office, and that God was the Sender and Jesus the sent one. What makes Luke 4:16-30 interesting is that the visible Church appears to contradict this sense of calling. In fact, Jesus is rejected and treated like a blasphemer. Taking note of Bernard’s earlier caution about the differences between Jesus’ preaching and that of contemporary preachers, it is possible to gather from this that though the outward calling of the Church is important, the Church itself is not infallible. Indeed, as we shall see later, offence and rejection are one part of the consequence of faithful preaching.

In verse 18, Jesus declares that he has been sent to εὐαγγελίσασθαι (“to preach”). Old outlines three key words that New Testament writers, especially Mark, used to convey the idea of Christian communication. First, Old notes that the verb κηρύσσω refers to the “act of proclaiming after the manner of a herald with the suggestion of formality, gravity and an authority which must be listened to and obeyed”. It means also to publish or proclaim openly, with the hint that the message proclaimed is something which has been done. This word is commonly “used of the public proclamation of the gospel and matters pertaining to it, made by John the Baptist, Jesus, the apostles and other Christian teachers” (Old, 1998:123). The second common word for preaching is from the εὐαγγελίζω word group. This word refers to the bringing of good news, to the announcement of glad tidings. It is used in the Hebrew Scriptures of any kind of good news but especially of “joyful tidings of God’s kindness, of the Messianic blessings. In the New Testament, it is used of the glad tidings of the coming kingdom of God, the salvation to be obtained in it through Christ, and what relates to this salvation”. It may also be used for the instruction of human beings concerning the things that pertain to Christian salvation (Old, 1998:124-126). The third word
is διδάσκω meaning ‘to teach’. According to Old, ‘teach’ “tends to designate the ordinary ministry of the Word in its similarity to the ministry of the rabbis”. But Old concludes that the use of this word makes clear that the preaching ministry of Jesus had a strong teaching content. Sometimes the settings were informal, even by the seaside, but whatever the setting, the teaching content of Jesus’ sermons, according to Old, must have been strong (Old, 1998:127).

When in verse 18, Jesus identifies himself as one sent to preach, εὐαγγελίσασθαι, the word obviously refers to the proclamation of good news. According to Friedrich (Friedrich, 1964:707), in the Hebrew Scriptures, while the basic sense of רַשָּב (bāšar) might seem to be simply ‘to deliver a message’, “the stem itself contains the element of joy, so that announcing a victory is a common use and the messenger views himself as the bearer of good tidings (2 Sam. 4:10). The religious use may be seen in 2 Samuel 31:9 where the proclamation of victory in the land of the Philistines has a cultic character”.85 The term is especially significant in Isaiah 40 onwards where the messenger comes to Zion to proclaim the worldwide victory of God which initiates the age of salvation (Isaiah 52:7). Friedrich continues:

This declaration is not just human word and breath, for God himself speaks through it, bringing to pass what is said by his own creative word. Psalm 96:2ff. is to the same effect. Thus, the great eschatological hour has come, and the message of God’s acts of power goes out to the nations. Indeed the Gentiles themselves will proclaim it (Isaiah 60:6). The messenger takes on cultic significance with this effective proclamation of God’s royal dominion, and the prophet shares this significance as one who is anointed to bring good tidings to the afflicted in Isaiah 61:1. All these themes—eschatological expectation, the embracing of the Gentiles, and the links with salvation, righteousness, and peace86—thus point forward to the New Testament (Friedrich, 1964:707-709).

84 First Kings 1:42
85 Parallels are Psalm 68:11, where the women proclaim victory in a song that God himself has given, and Psalm 40:9, where deliverance is declared in the congregation.
86 Psalm 95:1; Psalm 40:9; Isaiah 52:7
Friedrich (Friedrich, 1964:710-712) further notes that for the ancient Greeks, this verb was used to denote the bringing of “news, especially of a victory or some other joyous event, in person or by letter”. It is also found in the “announcing in the royal palace the arrival of the divine man Apollonius. Thus the ideas of victory and liberation provide links with the New Testament” and in the Old and New Testaments, the term “has an actuality of pronouncement” that is not found in the secular sense of revealed promise. In the New Testament documents themselves, this verb along with its corresponding noun is especially common in Luke and Acts and fairly common in Paul, but it does not occur in the Johannine writings.  

In the New Testament, Jesus is seen as bringing the good news of the expected last time and the message carries within itself the fulfilment. The works of Jesus are presented as signs of the messianic age. Luke 8:1 sums up the entire ministry of Jesus when it calls him a herald and messenger of the kingdom. His whole life proclaims the gospel. His birth is good news, his coming, work, and death are the great proclamation of peace. But Jesus is not the only person engaged in εὐαγγελίσασθαι in the New Testament. All who are messengers of the gospel are seen as preaching, since it was Jesus himself who sent out the twelve to preach the gospel and then gives the task of evangelising (telling the good news about himself) to the Church. The message goes to both Jews and Gentiles, and Paul is especially called to be the evangelist to the Gentiles. In fact, Paul’s entire ministry is εὐαγγελίσασθαι. In this act, God himself speaks through the message and its action to all people. The content is the life, death and resurrection of Jesus himself. But we must note that εὐαγγελίσασθαι is not just speaking a message; rather it is the proclaiming with power of the gospel to the

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87 This might be because the primary concept in John is that of fulfilment. The verb is also absent in Mark, James, 2 Peter, or Jude, and occurs only once in Matthew, twice in Hebrews, and three times in 1 Peter (in a slightly varied form twice in Revelation).
88 Luke 2:10
89 Ephesians 2:14ff
90 Romans 10:15 refers to Isaiah 52:7. But the reference here does not appear to be to the Messiah, but to other messengers of the gospel, even though both the MT and LXX are in the singular.
91 Luke 9:1ff
92 Acts 5:42; Acts 8:12, 35, 40
93 Acts 11:20
94 Galatians 1:16; Romans 15:20; 1 Corinthians 15:1; 2 Corinthians 10:16; Acts 14:10; 17:18
95 1 Corinthians 1:17
96 Galatians 1:16; Acts 17:18; Acts 8:12
accompaniment of signs. It thus brings healing\textsuperscript{97}, joy\textsuperscript{98}, salvation\textsuperscript{99} and regeneration.\textsuperscript{100} Since it is the proclamation of the good news of God, it carries with it both the offer and the power of salvation (Friedrich, 1964:720-721).

In Luke 4:18, the author also uses the term κηρύξαι. This is usually translated as ‘preach’ or ‘proclaim’. As noted previously, according to Old, it specifically refers to what a herald does with an official announcement. He makes public a proclamation, announces the arrival of an official personage or publishes good news. As Frierich puts it, “the preaching of Jesus was a trumpet blast which awakened the whole land to a new reality. The doors of the prison were opened and the prisoners released”. As a result a new order came into existence, for the proclaimed word is a creative power and brings about what it announces (Friedrich, 1977:696-707). According to Old, the early Church saw this word as meaning to proclaim not only the kingdom was at hand but it also implied a call to repentance and an invitation to faith. The word thus referred to the proclamation of the whole of the Christian message, not just the initial announcement. For Old, preaching had to announce the kingdom of God to those who had never heard, who had no previous relation to the people of God. To preach is to announce the coming day of the Lord. According to Old, missionary preaching is at the heart of Christian preaching as Mark 16:15 makes it clear (Old, 1998:123).

\textsuperscript{97} Matthew 4:23
\textsuperscript{98} Acts 8:8
\textsuperscript{99} 1 Corinthians 15:1–2
\textsuperscript{100} 1 Peter 1:23ff.
Friedrich (Friedrich, 1966:696) notes that the noun *kérýx* is strangely unimportant in the New Testament since there are only three instances of the term. Given that the word might seem to be so suitable for the Christian preacher, this paucity of use, for Friedrich, is surely intentional. He gives two possible reasons for this. First, the focus of the New Testament is on the message rather than the messenger, or on God himself as the real messenger. Secondly, the Greek concept is too precisely defined; New Testament preachers are “not sacral personages who can claim inviolability. Rather, they are like sheep among wolves (Mt. 10:16), who will be persecuted as their Master was (Jn. 15:20), and are as it were dedicated to death (Rev. 12:11). Yet this does not prevent the message from taking its irresistible and victorious course through the world (2 Tim. 2:9; 2 Th. 3:1). The stress, then, falls on the verb *kerýssō*, not the noun *kérýx*” (Friedrich, 1966:688-689).

In the ancient world of the Greeks, the herald had high social standing, since he belonged to the court, carried the sceptre and was renowned for cleverness and wisdom. Yet he also performed menial tasks and ran very ordinary errands. It was expected that heralds had a strong and resonant voice with good diction. In order to restrict garrulity and exaggeration, it was important that heralds delivered news or pass on messages strictly as these are given to them. Friedrich also informs us that heralds had diplomatic immunity in the conduct of their duties and in the case of the heralds of the gods, they stood under the protection of their deities (Friedrich, 1966:688-692).

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101 Noah is a herald of righteousness in 2 Pet. 2:5 (cf. 1 Clem. 7.6; 9.4), and Paul is a herald and apostle (and teacher) in 1 Tim. 2:7 and 2 Tim. 1:11. (Some texts also have the word in Col. 1:23). In the LXX, *kérýx* occurs only four times. In Gen. 41:43 there is no Hebrew original. In Dan. 3:4 Nebuchadnezzar’s herald commands the people to worship. The use in 4 Macc. 6:4 is similar (the herald of Antiochus). Sir. 20:15 has the word in a comparison. That there is no true equivalent may, according to Kittel’s, suggest that the idea is an alien one. It is soon recovered in the Jewish rabbis where the herald is again prominent with the adoption of the loanword *kārôz*. The origin of this term is disputed (Greek? Persian?), but it finds frequent and varied use for town criers, court heralds, temple criers to awaken the priests, the announcers of rabbinic judgments, and God’s angelic or human heralds (e.g., Noah in the generation of the flood), see (Friedrich, 1964:696)
From the above information, we may conclude that the Biblical preacher is called to be a sacral character; he is called by God. And what constrains the Christian preacher to speak is not the wickedness of men, nor their wealth nor debauchery. Rather, it is the presence of God in Jesus Christ. And the content of the preacher’s message is good news for his content announces the arrival of the imperium of God and declares the forgiveness of sins thereby causing the seed of faith to grow. As Carroll has noted, Jesus’ vocational commission and authorisation is contained in his empowerment by the Spirit of God, the fulfillment of Scripture, His prophetic role and His ministry to the ‘poor’ (Carroll, 2012:108-116).

5.4.2 The Ministry

The first synagogue scene follows the reference to Jesus’ teaching in the synagogues of Galilee in the previous verse and therefore sets up the teaching that follows as typical of what Jesus was doing throughout Galilee (Pao & Schnabel, 2007:105). It is noted that Jesus stood to read as was customary and sat to teach. Pao and Schnabel are clear that although “we do not know exactly what transpired in the worship of a Jewish synagogue of that time, the following elements seem to have been present: the Shema, recitation of the Decalogue, the eighteen benedictions, the reading of Scripture, the Psalms, the exposition, and the blessing ….Luke reports only part of the event” (Pao & Schnabel, 2007:105). According to Bailey, in the Lucan account, Jesus appears abruptly in Nazareth and enters the worship of the Synagogue as was his custom. From Luke we learn that “it was customary for worship leaders to invite worthy persons in the congregation to read from the Scriptures and comment upon the reading” as in Acts 13:15. Luke tells us that Jesus “stood up to read” and then sat down. The book of Isaiah was given to him. Edwards seems to be in no doubt concerning the nature of Jesus’ ministry at Nazareth’s synagogue; he describes it as “the keynote address of his ministry”, a “prophetic proclamation of the word of God” (Edwards, 2015:132). As to the selection of Isaiah, Bailey is unsure if this was prearranged or if the synagogue was following a liturgical cycle. Jesus selected a particular text and read it to the congregation. This led to an interchange with the congregation. They opposed him when he
invoked two Old Testament heroes of faith. Finally, they attempted to kill him but failed (Bailey, 2008, 147-148).

Thus the context of Jesus’ preaching in Nazareth is undoubtedly that of worship. The text tells us that he went into the synagogue and this was on the Sabbath day. We are also told that “the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him” (Luke 4:20). Of course, we know that Jesus’ preaching was not limited to the synagogue. He often taught in the temple, and Old has made the case that such teaching was itself part of Jewish instruction and worship (Old, 1998, 117-122). Jesus taught on the mount and in the plains suggesting that his ministry was didactical, evangelical as well as liturgical.

In verse 21, when Jesus says to his audience, σήμερον πεπλήρωται ἡ γραφὴ αὕτη ἐν τοῖς ὠσὶν ὑμῶν (“This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears”), we notice a direct personal address from a living voice. As we have already noted, the herald was often (though perhaps not always or exclusively) an oral voice who gave a direct and immediate communication. It seems that this detail is not insignificant. In his own study on preaching, Farmer has argued vigorously that preaching has the “spontaneous directness of serious private conversation” (Farmer, 1974:39). In the same vein, Scherer believes that if the gospel is to be heard, it must be proclaimed with a sense of immediacy (Scherer, 1977:34). Thus, it is important to notice that Jesus preaches in the liturgical context of a Jewish congregation and that his communication to them is oral, personal, direct and immediate. The Reformers appear to have assumed this point. Bullinger’s statement on preaching implicitly assumes that preaching is oral, direct and immediate communication (see Chapter Four). As we saw in Chapter Two, Niles too, in his trilogy on preaching, bases his lectures on this same assumption (see Chapter Two).

In verse 23, when Jesus says to the assembly, καὶ ἐἶπεν πρὸς αὐτούς· πάντως ἐρεῖτέ μοι (“And He said to them, Ye will surely say to me...”), Old is of the view that the congregation was not completely passive or silent during the sermon. He calls it “the give-and-take” that is of the essence of public oratory” (Old, 1998:132). Old notices also that Jesus used
illustrations and concludes that early “Christian preaching was sensitive to the congregation”. For Old, the “sermon is thoroughly expository and yet at the same time takes up into it the concerns, capacities and interests of the congregation. It is an interpretation of Scripture and also an interpretation of the congregation” (Old, 1998:132-133). Elsewhere, Bailey seems to support this thesis when he observes that Eastern congregations can be vocal, even noisy, during worship (Bailey, 2011:409-418). As we shall suggest below, it seems best to understand the congregation’s response within the framework of a service of covenant renewal, where the speech was oral, personal and direct and a response was expected from the congregation (Noth, 1966:331-332; Chirichigno, 1987:460-461).

Be that as it may, we should be going too far if we confuse Jesus’ preaching in this liturgical context at Nazareth’s synagogue with the genus deliberativum of Erasmus and his sacred concio. As discussed in Chapter Three, Erasmus’ starting point in the Ecclesiastes appears to have been secular rather than scriptural. He begins his treatise by stating that the purpose of the sacred concio is “to explain to the promiscuous multitude the edicts, promises, and will of the supreme prince and to persuade the multitude to accept them” (Erasmus, 1703-1706:5:770). As O’Malley notes (O’ Malley, 1988), the genus deliberativum was the most politically oriented of the three genera, and Erasmus does not seem to have fully liberated himself from that political model, concerned as it was with law, order, correct behaviour and obedience. He explicitly defines the concio as having to do with “duplex politia”, sacred and secular (Erasmus, 1703-1706:5:769-771). For Erasmus, the concio addressed to a vulgar audience assumed ignorance, ill will and vice on the part of the hearers (Erasmus, 1703-1706:5:771,906,968-69,976-77,1046). When Erasmus entitled his work De ratione concionandi (more properly, contionandi) and consistently referred to sermons as conciones (contiones), he was placing the sermon in the genre of deliberative oratory. This shift imbued preaching with a more didactic and moralising quality than that of the genus demonstrativum. The concio was a specific type of deliberative oratory in which a leader addressed a popular and perhaps unruly audience of ordinary people, and not sophisticated statesmen in the Senate (Erasmus, 1797:1-4). Until Erasmus, Christian writers appear to have rarely used the word ‘concio’ and even more rarely used it to refer to Christian preaching. As we have seen, Erasmus gives little justification for preferring to perceive
preaching as a genus deliberativum or for calling the sermon concio (Erasmus, 1703-1706:5:857-859,877-887). With time, his influence meant that persuasion rather than the presentation of doctrine began to dominate preaching. While Erasmus’ theory of preaching was more concerned with inculcating and persuading good morals and ethically correct behaviour (Chomarat, 1981:2:1128), Jesus’ preaching was heraldic in that it was the “prophetic proclamation of the word of God” (Edwards, 2015:132).

5.4.3 The Message

According to Luke 4:17, Jesus was given the book of the prophecy of Isaiah and it is from here that he reads. In verse 21, he speaks of the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah. From verses 23 onwards, he explains and applies the Isaianic text. Thus, we may conclude, that Jesus preached from the Scriptures. He based his sermon on the Scripture, and then explained and applied it to the context of his audience (Mallen, 2008:102-117). It is for this reason that Bullinger was explicit that it is only the preaching of the Word of God that is the Word of God. Preaching is only preaching if it is preaching from the Scriptures.

In seeking Jesus’ hermeneutical method, Old notes that although Luke tells us nothing about the reading from the Law which it is assumed Jesus read, we do find that Jesus used two passages from the former prophets to interpret the lesson from Isaiah, Elijah’s visit to the widow of Zarephath and the healing of Naaman the Syrian. Old therefore calls Jesus an expository preacher (Old, 1998:132-133). But in saying this, Old reveals that Jesus’ sermon was an interpretation of the Scriptures and an interpretation of the congregation. Niles too takes this same line. In preaching the previousness and finality of Jesus, the preacher, according to Niles, preaches the offer of God’s love but also gives the hearer the opportunity of rejecting this overture of divine love. Hence, for Niles, Jesus and his gospel are offensive and humankind stumbles over them. The sermon is simultaneously an exegesis of the Scripture and the congregation.
On the source of Jesus’ sermons, Old is convinced that Isaiah 61 is one of the fundamental passages which Jesus interpreted and taught his disciples. For Old, it was not just a method of preaching which Jesus passed on; it was a message as well. This message was that Scripture will be fulfilled in what he did and what he preached was at the heart of his ministry (Old, 1998:133-134). For Bailey, the significance is in Jesus’ careful editing of quotes from the Old Testament. There are four key areas. First, he leaves out the words “to bind up the broken-hearted” in verse 18. Secondly, two lines later he brings in an entire phrase from Isaiah 58:6 into the end of verse 18. Thirdly, in verse 18, the word “to call” is strengthened into a word that means ‘to proclaim a good news’. Fourthly, verse 19 has been halved with the second part omitted. Both the selection of the text and the editorial efforts are significant. Why this text? And why these changes? Scholars often assume that Luke did the editing. But, according to Bailey, is it not possible that Jesus himself was responsible for the editing? Bailey produces evidence from Qumran scrolls to support his thesis that Jesus deliberately chose this text and made the necessary changes himself (Bailey, 2008:152-162).

With respect to the theme of Jesus’ sermon in Nazareth, Old argues that the text from Isaiah makes “the point that the Messiah is anointed to preach good news to the poor, release the captive, recover sight to the blind, and liberate the oppressed. The Greek text contains the rich words Christian theologians have always understood to speak of the essence of preaching: to proclaim the good news and to herald glad tidings” (Old, 1998:130-135). In fact, Jesus’ sermon is basically the announcement that the prophecy which he read had been fulfilled (verse 21).

On the substance of Jesus’ sermon, we may note that Luke’s use of the term poor in chapter 1 and beyond makes it clear that the reference is not exclusively socio-economic. But, at the same time, neither is class excluded from Jesus’ concerns. In Luke 1:50-53, the reference to "the humble" is surrounded by descriptions that indicate the spiritually sensitive character of the poor. Also, Luke 6:20-23, compares the trouble the poor face in this world to the experience the prophets of old faced. This hope extends only to the spiritually sensitive poor since they are responsive. The passage recognises that often it is the poor who respond to
God's message and embrace it with humility. They tend to sense their need and have no delusions of power, control and independence. As Bammel notes, they are what the Old Testament called "the pious poor" or "the afflicted" (Bammel, 1968:888). Luke loves to emphasise that a potential audience for this message can be found among the poor. His social concern expresses itself fully through the details of what Jesus said at the synagogue—details which the other Gospels lack (Keck, 1995:105). When Jesus reads and declares that he is sent to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, and to release the oppressed, it seems that the oppression in view here is mainly spiritual. Keck notes that the vocabulary of 'release' is used only for forgiveness of sins (Keck, 1995:105). "Restoration of sight is closely associated with the prophetic vision of the fulfillment of God's promises of salvation" (Keck, 1995:106). It might therefore seem that this social concern is especially or exclusively concerned with spiritual realities. Such a conclusion would be mistaken. Surely, it would be imprudent to exclude the ethical dimension from the theological. As Bailey argues, 'justice advocacy' is a real and persistent theme of God's revelation and it would be most surprising if this note is missing in Jesus' sermon at Nazareth (Bailey, 2008:156-166).

Jesus' statement that he liberates the oppressed makes it clear that he is more than a prophet; he effects salvation. The allusion here is to Isaiah 58:6. Isaiah 58 calls on Israel to respond to God by fasting with a life of ethical honor to God (esp. 58:13-14). The prophet rebukes the nation for having failed to live-up to the call of its Sabbath worship. What Jesus promises here is a release that will result in him providing the nation with what it had failed to provide. It is probably for this reason also that many of Jesus' healings take place on the Sabbath. When Jesus says that he has come to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, the allusion is to the jubilee, the year of cancellation of debts (Lev 25:8-17). Then, debts were cancelled and slaves were freed (Sloan, 1977:39-41). "Jesus builds on the picture of Isaiah's ministry, which also proclaimed such hope, and notes that what the prophet had proclaimed Jesus is fulfilling and thus ushering in the Kingdom of God" (Keck, 1995:106)

102 1 Corinthians 1:26-29; James 2:5
Thus we may conclude that the content of Jesus’ preaching was the gospel, and in a sense he was in his person and work the gospel. Old concludes that in Mark at least, ‘gospel’ meant simply the story of Jesus or even the message of Jesus (Guelich, 1989:16-35). This implies that the two are closely related; the gospel is the story of the Saviour, the culmination of this history of salvation. It is a message, a saving message. The gospel tells the story of redemption and teaches the way of life to be lived in the congregation of the New Covenant. Thus the word refers to the total content of the message. And this would be true of the gospel as it was preached both by Jesus and his disciples (Beers, 2015:103-104).

According to Old, the rabbis of the time taught the Scriptures, but Jesus preached the gospel. Teaching the Scriptures was evidently an important element in preaching the gospel, but preaching the gospel was more. What Jesus did was recount the promises of God and their fulfillment in himself. This recounting was a matter of teaching the Scriptures and announcing the good news - that the Scriptures were being fulfilled and this announcement demanded repentance and faith. True preaching of the gospel called its hearers to faith and to faithfulness (Old, 1998).

5.4.4 The Result

Bailey notes that Jesus' claim that "today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" places both listeners and readers in the position of having to make a choice. Jesus' teaching is not some ethical instruction detached from his person. He is the promise of God. As Bailey explains, the crowd does reflect on Jesus’ claim; they are amazed and perplexed simultaneously. Jesus responds by quoting the proverb that a prophet is not honored in his own hometown and recalls before them the history of Israel in the period of Elijah and Elisha (Kloppenborg & Verheyden, 2014:6-36). When Israel turned away from Yahweh and towards idolatry in unbelief, God rewarded the faith of Gentiles, as only a widow in Sidon and Naaman the Syrian experienced God’s mercy. Yahweh is not a tribal or territorial deity; He is sovereign over all the earth and it requires faith to grasp God’s promises Jesus calls Israel to such faith (Morlan, 2013:52-77); but the suggestion that faithful Gentiles might be
blessed while unbelieving Israel reaps nothing (Fuller, 2006:236-238) leaves the crowd angry\textsuperscript{104} (Bailey, 2008:164-167).

Since the gospel is both the message and the means of salvation, we can be sure that there will be those who will respond positively to this proclamation and will therefore be saved. Indeed, Jesus’ quotations from Isaiah carry the promise that the poor will receive good news, the brokenhearted will be healed, the captives liberated, the blind will see and the year of God’s favour will have arrived. Jesus saw these promises fulfilled in his own person and work. The developing story of Luke-Acts is that this gospel continues to bear fruit all over the world and humankind are saved and brought into the kingdom of God (Harrison, 1971:238-239); as Keck notices, the emphasis in this pericope is in the last word of verse 30 in the Greek text which implies a continuous action: “He was going on” (Keck, 1995:108). Indeed, the rest of Luke 4 makes plain that there were other people and places where Jesus could and did perform miracles and there was a welcome for him and his preaching.

But there is another consequence that comes with true preaching. Jesus is rejected at Nazareth’s synagogue for the people were filled with wrath and ready to kill him. In verse 28 to 30, Luke reminds his readers that this too is a consequence that flows from true preaching. As we have seen in Chapter Two, this is what Niles calls the stone of stumbling and the rock of offence (see pages 30-38). Jesus’ hearers are offended by his preaching and raise objections. Bailey has observed that the words of verse 22 could be adversive. Certainly verse 29 makes clear that they “rose up and thrust him out of the city and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built that they might cast him down headlong”. Here they reject him for the universality of his message and the different hermeneutic that he employed in the interpretation of Isaiah’s prophecy. But as Niles has taught us, these are not the only reasons for humankind to reject the gospel. Using his ministerial experience among Muslims, Buddhists and Hindus, Niles was clear that every individual has his or her prejudice and the gospel is offensive to every natural human heart.

\textsuperscript{104} Such displeasure at the accountability implicit in the gospel message is echoed in Acts; see Acts 7:51-59; 13:46, 50; 22:20-22
(see Chapter Two, pages 30-38). In his sermon at the WCC’s 1968 Assembly in Uppsala, Niles made a reference to Luke 4:25-27, postulating that despite being Gentiles and outside the promises to Israel, Naaman and the widow of Zarepath “were chosen by God to carry the Sign of His unfettered mercy... God chooses whom He wills” (Niles, 1968:326). Keck astutely observes that those “who would exclude others thereby exclude themselves” from the grace of God. They rejected the inclusiveness of the gospel. Others may be offended by other parts of the gospel (Keck, 1995:108).

5.4.5 Summary of Jesus’ Norm

Augustin George makes the point that the Gospel of Luke presents Jesus as the original minister of the Word, who prepares the disciples to continue his ministry (George, 1978:387-394). Bovon correctly notes that the contribution of George and French scholars like him have been much overlooked (Bovon, 2006:472). In Luke 10:16 when Jesus says, “He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me”, Old writes that even the most radical critics figure that these words may well go back to Jesus Himself. Thus, he concludes that in the preaching of Christian preachers, the congregation comes into close communion with Christ himself. Christ is present in the preaching of his Word. Once again, for Old, we have an intimation of the doctrine of the kerygmatic presence (Old, 1998:135). Jesus’ ministry in Nazareth’s synagogue reveals that if this spiritual divine presence is to be a fact in preaching, the preacher must be outwardly called and inwardly anointed by God, his preaching must proceed from God’s written word and centred on the gospel of Jesus Christ, the character and nature of such preaching is personal, oral and direct while the consequences are both saving and scandalous.
5.5 Towards a Normative Theology of Preaching – The Pauline Control

In seeking a normative model for preaching, some scholars have turned to Paul instead of Jesus of Nazareth. Since this chapter seeks to grasp the normative aspect of Biblical preaching, we must subject our analysis to further scrutiny and assess its concert with what has been discovered of Paul’s own theology of preaching. Paul is also important to our study because, in our search for a global theology of preaching to facilitate the dialogue between the Western and Non-Western Church, we find in Paul’s preaching of Jesus’ gospel to the Roman empire “a radically divergent but equally global theology” (Crossan & Reed, 2004:9).

In his recent study of Paul’s preaching, Thompson has concluded that in Paul’s own theology, the preached word is powerful because, for Paul, it is God’s word, applied by God’s Spirit (Thompson, 2000:51-53). Some years before Thompson, Litfin studied Paul’s theology of proclamation especially in First Corinthians Chapters One to Four (Litfin, 1994). According to Litfin, Paul’s view of preaching was in contrast to that of the Greco-Roman rhetoricians of the First Century (Litfin, 1994:21-135). First, Litfin asserts that like the rhetoricians, Paul acknowledged that language and ideas are powerful and find lodging in human beings. Secondly, according to Litfin, the ancient rhetorician tailored his efforts to achieve a result. We saw this in the study of genera in Erasmus. Litfin argues that Paul refused this approach. While admitting the presence and importance of his audience, Paul was of the view that persuasion was not his task, but that of the Holy Spirit. Thirdly, according to Litfin, Paul proclaimed the gospel and saw himself as a herald who announced the cross before his hearers. Fourthly, Paul does not seem to have completely disavowed every element of rhetorical technique. As Litfin sees it, in Paul’s “letters, and in the speeches in Acts (if they are accepted as representative of Paul rather than Luke’s writing ability), Paul does use various elements of rhetoric in order to communicate effectively”. In fact, for Litfin, the ancient study of rhetoric was descriptive more than prescriptive, it was determined by observation of what effective speakers did. But Litfin is convinced that Paul did not pursue the third step in persuasion. According to rhetorical analysis, persuasion
theorists break down the process into five steps: (1) Attention, (2) comprehension, (3) yielding, (4) retention, and (5) action. Rhetoric placed heavy emphasis on step 3, yielding. Paul aimed his presentation at step two, comprehension. Obviously, as people were persuaded by Paul’s preaching, an observer might credit him with the whole process. But in reality, Paul held back from any strategies that might induce a yielding in the hearts of his followers (Litfin, 1994:137-250).

On Paul’s theology of preaching (as distinguished from his rhetorical style), at the end of the 1950s, Chamberlin posited that Paul’s preaching ought to be the primary model of Christian preaching (Chamberlin, 1959). His argument was based on a study of Acts and Pauline documents, with emphasis on the word study of key Greek terms which Paul used for preaching. Chamberlin concluded that Paul’s preaching was evangelistic, Christological and Biblical with a content that centred on the gospel. The purpose of Paul’s preaching, according to Chamberlin, was to lift others “to the same level of vision where he himself stood... to know the fellowship of Christ, his Lord” (Chamberlin, 1959:65). On the heels of Chamberlin followed the work of renowned Pauline scholar Murphy-O’Connor whose stated aim was “to share St Paul’s insight into the structure of a key element in the life of the church, the proclamation of the word of God” (Murphy-O’Connor, 1963:xiii). Using exegetical and systematic studies of Pauline texts, Murphy-O’Connor finds that Paul’s preaching was aimed especially at the conversion of the non-believer. He further argues that the call to preach is modelled after the prophets of the Old Testament and believes that this was in the mind and vocabulary of the apostle too (Murphy-O’Connor, 1963:28-76). This was followed by the work of Bormann (Bormann, 1965) on Paul’s preaching. Bormann sees the ‘gospel’ as the key term for Paul, although he saw two aspects to this. First, its specific content was the work which God had done in and through Jesus for the salvation of a sinful humanity. Secondly, for Bormann, there was the necessity of proclamation since in preaching, the word is the sign of Christ’s presence. Reception of the gospel therefore is reception of Jesus Christ himself (Bormann, 1965:202).
Beaudean has done a study of Paul’s Theology of Preaching by examining key Pauline texts on preaching. Although Beaudean refuses to take Acts seriously, he acknowledges the high place that the apostle gave to preaching in his apostolic ministry. According to Beaudean, for Paul preaching is the mediating term between the word of God and the gospel (Beaudean, 1988:53-55). In Beaudean’s view, the word of God is seen as God’s creative power at work in the world, while the gospel is the word of God in a specific shape and form. Beaudean argues from First Thessalonians 1:9-13 that the creative word of God becomes the gospel in the mediating activity of preaching. For Beaudean, the gospel is an area in time and space in which there is refuge and refreshment from the hostile forces of the universe (Beaudean, 1988:51-55). Unsurprisingly, Beaudean calls this the “dynamic structure of word and gospel”. He therefore argues that preaching is the direct, vocal activity of the creative word of God in time and space (Beaudean, 1988:192). Beaudean sees the importance of the calling for the preaching task since a herald is one who speaks for a recognised authority. According to him, in Paul, preaching the gospel involves a personal gospel. The gospel of God lives within every authentic preacher. Thus preparation for preaching is not supremely the preparation of a sermon but the preparation of the preacher. Beaudean also notes that for Paul the character of the preacher is to be shaped by the dynamic of the gospel. Citing Second Corinthians 4:7-12, Beaudean argues that for Paul, preaching “is a service, and the paradigm of the preacher is that of servant” (Beaudean, 1988:195). As we have said in Chapter Two, Section 2.5.3, this too is Niles’ point of departure in the Warrack Lectures, and for Jesus, the preacher is one who is anointed and sent by the divine calling. On the content of Paul’s theology of preaching, Beaudean is clear that it is the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ since by declaring that the crucified Jesus has been raised from the dead to be Lord, the preacher establishes a new, redemptive world and lays down the terms and conditions of a new existence (Beaudean, 1988:193). Beaudean sees in Paul both the destructive and constructive consequences of preaching. He says that the preaching of the gospel is “definitively interpretive”. On the basis of the gospel, the preacher interprets life under God for himself and fellow believers. Negatively, this means exposing the sordid values, unworthy attitudes, and faulty presuppositions about life generated by the dominant culture which play upon the human vulnerability. This is the destructive application of the preaching task. Positively, preaching
interprets life by defining reality on the basis of the love and power of God (Beaudean, 1988:207). Beaudean is quite clear that for Paul there is no preaching without the gospel.

Naturally, there are consequences which flow from true preaching. For Beaudean, the authoritative preaching of the gospel creates the church. For the apostle, preaching the gospel was the “power of God for the salvation to every one who believes. That power shows up in the creation of the Christian community” (Beaudean, 1988:195-196). But Paul is aware that both the content and form of preaching are scandalous since the gospel proclaims universal salvation through one who was destroyed, and it is made available to human beings through the vulnerability of preaching (Beaudean, 1988:195). It is in his analysis of the context and nature of Paul’s theology of preaching that Beaudean is most creative and interesting. First, he maintains that Paul understood the nature and character of preaching to be universal. It is the medium of God in his saving work for all humankind. Preaching the gospel addresses all human beings at the same fundamental level. Secondly, he posits that preaching is the voice by which the word of God brings the gospel to exist and sustains it as a salvific territory (Beaudean, 1988:192-193). Thirdly, according to Beaudean, preaching for Paul had to be by nature oral, involving immediacy, directness of personal address. Since the gospel constitutes an authoritative, dynamic call from God, then it requires a living, personal agent. The preacher is therefore the personal, living voice of the gospel (Beaudean, 1988:194). According to him, Paul did not even regard his letters as a sufficient replacement for his own voice in the living present. For Beaudean, preaching is by its very commission a direct, dialogical form of address. Its orality means it has an immediacy which calls hearers into a living moment, a response. The personal, direct and oral nature of preaching means that the gospel becomes distinctive for each preacher and each congregation. In this way, Beaudean explains the strong personal pronouns in Paul’s writings (Beaudean, 1988:194-195). Thus the gospel becomes the mutual experience of preacher and congregation. Thus, as Beaudean sees it, for Paul, preaching is the mediating term between the word of God and the gospel. Preaching is an instrument of the creative activity of God, since it rehearses the historical saving activity of God in Christ and brings the sphere of God’s continuing saving activity (Beaudean, 1988:205).
But Beaudean refuses to understand Paul’s theology of preaching as normative for the Christian Church. According to him, Paul’s theology of preaching, despite its clarity, vitality, breadth and sense of direction (Beaudean, 1988:204) lacks the comprehensiveness that is necessary for a normative theology of preaching. For Beaudean, Paul is the first word on preaching not the last, since Paul’s theology of preaching provides a point of departure for the thinking and rethinking of the preaching task (Beaudean, 1988:204). But Beaudean refuses to say why Paul and not Jesus should be the first word on preaching. Should not the founder of a certain group have precedence even over its chief apostle? Beaudean does not answer this point. Moreover, his study is weakened by his refusal to admit the testimony of Acts. Thirdly, despite his emphasis on contextual, philological, historical and literary exegesis, it seems odd that Beaudean fails to grapple with the possible covenantal structure of the Scriptures and the covenantal underpinnings of Bullinger’s famous insight that ‘the preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God’. Whilst Beaudean’s insights into the personal, direct and oral nature of preaching are helpful, he might have been on better ground if he had established it upon the possible covenant structure of the canonical texts and the probable covenant nature of Biblical worship and preaching. In his study of Exodus 19, Gammie noted the direct language in Hebrew ceremonies of covenant-making and renewal (Gammie, 1989:16). But it is possible that Beaudean’s study approaches the issue of preaching from a linguistic perspective while the covenantal viewpoint is decidedly theological.

As suggested earlier, it seems better to understand Paul’s theology of preaching from within a possible covenantal framework of Jewish worship (Muilenburg, 1959), especially now since Kline has made a robust case for the covenantal structure of the New Testament canon (Kline, 1972:68-75). According to Kline’s thesis, the Gospels and Acts can be

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105 Beaudean argues that Paul does not concern himself with the questions facing contemporary homileticians, on the relationship of preaching to liturgy or to the sacraments.
traced back through the Old Testament historical narratives to the Pentateuchal records of the founding of the old covenant, with the Genesis prologue thereto, and thus back to the historical prologue section of the Mosaic treaties. The Gospels and Acts also perform the function of the treaty preambles by introducing the Messianic Lord of the covenant and identifying him through various witnesses as the divine King of Israel (Kline, 1972:72).

Thus for Kilne, the Gospels are not strictly biographies of Jesus but covenant record and covenant ratification record of the sacrificial death of Jesus, which is the gospel. Under this scheme, Acts is history which corresponds to the post-Sinai narratives of the Old Testament giving details of the effective founding of the covenant community and its mission. The Epistles, especially but not only of Paul’s (White, 1971), can be traced to the Hebrew Prophetic and Wisdom literature, containing both stipulations and sanctions as well as Yahweh’s covenant lawsuit against his people (Roetzel, 1969).

If the covenantal-canonical thesis is correct, then we must take seriously Mendenhall’s pathbreaking insights into ancient treaty arrangements (Mendenhall, 1955; McCarthy, 1978), now supported by Kitchen and others (Kitchen & Lawrence, 2012:xxiii-xxv). When we do so, we notice that the following was the basic form used in a Service of Covenant Renewal – Historical Prologue, Stipulations, Covenant Curses and Blessings, Ratification Ceremony, Calling of Witnesses, Depositon of Covenant Document in Sacred Place. Mendenhall adds to these elements the oath-taking (Mendenhall, 1954:60). Another Near Eastern scholar, Hillers, sees nine key points in these ancient treaty ceremonies from comparing Israel’s covenant ceremonies in Sinai and Shechem with other ancient Near Eastern documents. First, there was the status of the partners to the covenant; they were by no means equal in strength or status. Therefore ‘the word’ is not a mere edict. Neither party is purely passive, not even, Israel, the vassal. But the roles are very different. The treaty is not negotiated. The suzerain, God, simply offers his terms. The vassal’s (Israel’s) share is to decide whether this is for him. Second, there is prologue. In Exodus 20, it is “I am Yahweh your God”. It is briefer that the titulary of the Hittite kind, but not less impressive. Third, there is a historical recollection. “Who brought you out of the land of Egypt”. This is
history from a very particular point of view: the story of the relation of two parties, told to justify the treaty now proposed. Fourth, the Ten Words constitute an obvious parallel to the stipulations of the suzerainty treaty. As in other international treaties, to have one lord is the principal command. Not much is said of the conduct of affairs in the vassal’s own state. Thus the commandments are cast in negative form as noted by Mendenhall. Certain acts are intolerable if there is to be any covenant with God, or any life together as his people – murder, theft, adultery, perjury etc. But once these forbidden areas have been fenced-off, the rest of their affairs are for them to manage. Thus each Israelite has certain obligations toward other Israelites which stem from their common allegiance to God\textsuperscript{106}. We notice also that there is no formal obligation on Yahweh’s part, just as the Hittite king did not swear to perform anything in a treaty with a vassal. Yahweh’s goodwill is implicit; He is the one who has graciously brought them out of the house of bondage. He will continue to be loyal and kind since he is the “One who keeps faith unto thousands of generations with those who love me and keep my commandments”. But he swears to nothing. This covenant is mutual in the sense that there are two distinct parties who have a certain freedom and initiative in concluding it, but it is not mutual in the sense that an explicit \textit{quid pro quo} is involved.

Fifth, Hillers notes that in ancient covenant ceremonies, there are witnesses although there is nothing in Exodus 20 like the list of divine witnesses which is so prominent a part of the other international treaties. Later, Joshua used stones as witnesses at Shechem. Sixth, the blessing and curse commonly found in treaties is reflected in Exodus 20. The word ‘curse’ does not occur in the chapter, but the substance is there in the description of Yahweh as the jealous God who punishes sons for the fathers’ iniquity. Breach of this covenant involves divine punishment. Obedience brings blessings forever. Seventh, there is the oath. The oath is half the treaty, the feature that makes the terms binding on the vassal. There needs to be the voice of God and an ‘Amen’ from the people. Exodus 20 itself contains no oath on the part of the Israelites, but Exodus 24 gives the continuation of the narrative. In Exodus 24:3-8 we are told that Moses communicated God’s words to the people, they responded

\textsuperscript{106} For Hillers the apodictic formulation of Exodus 20 is relatively rare in Near Eastern law but is found in the terms of other treaties.
positively. Moses wrote down all the words of Yahweh and in the morning erected an altar at the foot of the mountain with twelve upright standing stones. Under his instructions, young men offered up whole burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings to Yahweh and Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the altar. He then took the text of the covenant and read it to the people in their hearing. They said: “All that Yahweh has spoken, we will do and obey”. Then Moses took the other half of the blood and sprinkled it on the people and said: Here is the blood of the covenant which God has cut with you on these terms.

Eight, in Exodus 24:9-11 we are told that Moses and the leaders of Israel looked at God and ate and drank. According to Hillers, this manner of speaking is that of making a league. They eat together ceremonially for this was the ancient way of covenant ratification. Nineth, there was the deposition of the text of the covenant in the Ark of the Covenant. The purpose of this was to ensure the tradition within Israel of frequent public reading of the covenant provisions (Hillers, 1969:46-70).

With particular reference to the place of the Word in these ceremonies of covenant making and covenant renewal, Hillers makes a five-fold assertion. First, the emphasis of the Shechem service is upon grace. Second, the sermon is a list and recollection of all that Yahweh has done to deliver His people. Third, because they have received everything from Yahweh, they are called to service and loyalty. If they serve, there is the promise of blessings; if they fail, they will be the subjects of the curse (Hillers, 1969:58-60). Fourth, the covenant was not made with states, society or rulers and governments. Instead, it was made with the head of each family (Hillers, 1969:62-63). Fifth, the covenant is offered freely, and there is freedom to the people to make their choice either for the covenant or against it. There is therefore the freedom of the human beings, and a true choice. The covenant is entered into willingly (Hillers, 1969:62-63).
This covenant structure is probably a better explanation for some of the significant details of the New Testament on preaching. Acts 13:44 appears to give a covenantal setting where people come to hear the word of the suzerain (Bruce, 1959:280-281). According to Hughes, the ambassador of Second Corinthians 5:20 is “one who acts and speaks not only on behalf of but also in place of the sovereign from whom he has received his commission. It is his duty to proclaim faithfully and precisely the message entrusted to him by his sovereign. Accordingly, there is a real sense in which the voice of the ambassador may be said to be the voice of the sovereign he represents. Here, therefore, Paul boldly urges this analogy: when Christ’s ambassador entreats it is equivalent to the voice of God entreating through him. His message, his authority, his power are all imparted to him by his Lord”.

Paul, however, is not proposing an analogy which only more or less fits the situation; what he says here is factual: Christ’s messengers are really His ambassadors; God does actually entreat through them (Hughes, 1962:209-210). For Hughes, “the message of reconciliation is not something which Christ’s ambassador announces with impersonal detachment. He has been entrusted with vital news for people in desperate need”. Plummer translates the ὡς here as “seeing that”, pointing out that ὡς with the genitive absolute may be used to express a view the correctness or otherwise of which is shown by the context (Plummer, 1915:184-185). The force then is: “We are ambassadors for Christ, seeing that God does in fact entreat through us”. For Plummer, the fact that ‘God is entreating by us’ is a momentous one, and the declaration of it is analogous to the formula of the Hebrew Prophet, ‘Thus saith the Lord.’ This has been the position of the fathers including Chrysostom (Chrysostom, 2004:334) and more recent commentators like Bernard (Bernard J., 1903:70). Indeed, as Keener notes Paul’s language and image here:

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107 Bruce notes the plausible variant reading that the crowd came to hear “the word of the Lord”.
108 In I Cor 4:18, I Peter 4:12 and Acts 27:30 the view expressed is the wrong one, and is fittingly introduced by the translation “as though”. In II Peter 1:3, however, a factual statement is made, hence “seeing that” (RV) is in this case an appropriate rendering of ὡς.
111 “We are therefore ambassadors of Christ,’ that is, instead of Christ; for we have succeeded to His functions.’ But if this appears to thee a great thing, hear also what follows wherein he shows that they do this not in His stead only, but also in stead of the Father. For therefore he also added, ‘As though God were entreating by us’...They that received Him were not reconciled, but even slew Him. Again, He sent other ambassaadors to beseech, and though these are sent, it is Himself that entreats”.

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fits ‘apostles’ as appointed messengers just as the Old Testament prophets had been (Ex 7:1). (The prophets frequently delivered messages in the form of a covenant lawsuit or in words to kings used by messengers of suzerain [supreme] kings to vassal [client] rulers.) In the context of a plea for reconciliation, Paul as an ambassador urges the Corinthians to make peace with God the King; emperors normally took action against unrepentant client states that had offended them, and no one took such warnings lightly (Keener, 1993).

On another key New Testament text on preaching, Second Thessalonians 2:17, Denney writes:

These verses complete the treatment of the subject with which this chapter opens.... When the message was brought to them, they accepted it, he says, not as the word of men, but as what it was in truth, the word of God. It is in this character that the gospel always presents itself. A word of men cannot address men with authority; it must submit itself to criticism; it must vindicate itself on grounds which man’s understanding approves. Now, the gospel is not irrational... But neither does it, on the other hand, come to us soliciting our approval; submitting itself, as a system of ideas, to our scrutiny, and courting approbation. It speaks with authority. It commands repentance; it preaches forgiveness on the ground of Christ’s death – a supreme gift of God which may be accepted or rejected, but is not proposed for discussion; it exhibits the law of Christ’s life as the law which is binding upon every human being, and calls upon all men to follow him. Its decisive appeal is made to the conscience and the will; and to respond to it is to give up will and conscience to God (Denney, 1892:83-86).

Whether we accept the covenantal language of Paul and the canonical structure of the New Testament or not, we may still say that according to Paul, the preacher is one called and sent out by Jesus Christ and his Church. The preacher’s message is the gospel of Jesus Christ, his purpose is to call sinners to repentance and to feed the flock of God. The consequences are that some respond to this message and are saved, while others reject the message because they are offended by the foolishness of the message and the method (i.e. preaching). In all these points, Paul’s theology of preaching would appear to be in concert with the normative nature of Jesus’ preaching.
5.6 Jesus and Niles in Homiletical Dialogue

As stated, our purpose in this chapter is to examine Jesus’ ministry in Nazareth’s synagogue in order to formulate a normative theory on the nature of preaching and to engage Niles’ homiletic theory in its correspondence with biblical perspectives on preaching and its potential as a global creed for an ecumenical theology of preaching. Our investigation has revealed that Jesus’ preaching is normative for the Christian Church both in the West and beyond. Although the vocabulary of Luke is not explicitly the language of call, content, character and consequences of preaching, it is clear that these ideas were in Luke and in Jesus Himself. Jesus identifies Himself as one sent, commissioned and authorised. The message of His sermon is scriptural content. The immediate fulfillment of prophecy in Jesus indicates Jesus’ understanding of the character of His preaching. And Luke’s narrative gives us ample knowledge of the consequences which followed Jesus’ preaching at Nazareth’s synagogue. Thus we may legitimately transfer our Nilesean categories of the call, content, character and nature and consequences of preaching in our analysis of Jesus’ ministry in Luke four. For Jesus, the preacher is one who is called and anointed by God, even if, for the moment, he is rejected by the visible church. In the face of such rejection, like the Hebrew prophets, the preacher and his message are authenticated by signs from God. When in his sermon in Luke 4:21 Jesus says, σήμερον πεπλήρωται ἡ γραφὴ αὐτῆ ἐν τοῖς ωσίν ὑμῶν, there is a strong indication that Beaudéan is correct in his observation of Paul’s theology of preaching that true preaching necessitates a personal, oral and direct appeal through a living human voice. As we have tried to show, this appears to have been the covenantal structure of ancient Hebrew worship (Wells, 2000:36-39). The anointing and sending of Jesus indicates Jesus’ obedience to the Father, but in this Jesus is unique in that he is sinless. Human preachers are sinful creatures, but Jesus’ norm and the infrequent use of the noun κηρυξ (κηρύχ) in the New Testament documents may suggest that the true power of preaching is not supremely in the spirituality or the holiness of the preacher, but in his calling, the content of his message and the fact that preaching is a command of Jesus Christ. In this, Bullinger’s statement that the preaching of the Word of God by a minister lawfully called is the Word of God is in concert with Jesus’ own example. Niles too places the accent on the preacher’s calling to be a servant. This calling, for Niles, assumes anointing and
sending, and it certainly gives prominence to the direct, personal and oral communication of the gospel. Here the details of Jesus’ preaching in Luke 4:16-30 enrich and clarify Niles’ understanding of the preacher’s calling to service.

According to Jesus’ norm, the source of the preacher’s message is the Scripture and the content of this message is the life and work of Jesus himself. In the Greek New Testament δύναμις “seems to relate to the content of the message, not the form. The goal of preaching therefore is the exhibition of Christ’s presence by the Spirit and therefore the exhibition of God’s saving power in Christ”\textsuperscript{112} (Grundmann, 1964). If Jesus’ sermon at Nazareth’s synagogue is understood within the context of ancient Hebrew covenant-making and renewal, we notice that the character of preaching is that of a public, formal, authoritative and solemn proclamation of a message by one who has been properly sent-out and one whose message is faithful to the demands of the Sender. The nature of preaching is that God as suzerain addresses his subjects, identifies himself, rehearses his history of salvation for them and finally calls them to a willing obedience to his authority. Thus its purpose is salvation and edification for the obedient but covenant lawsuit and judgement for the disobedient. Niles too is clear that one important purpose of preaching is the salvation of the world since all men “must be led into an acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord of their lives and as the Saviour of all men” (Niles, 1959:2). But Niles is clear too that another purpose of preaching is to edify and nourish the Church since the message is the whole counsel of God. Niles does not often involve himself with the covenant details of the Old Testament documents. But he is not silent either. Indeed, it is one of his theological foundations. For Niles, the imago dei is “God’s foundation-covenant with man” denoting both humanity’s obligation of responsiveness and their responsibility to God. In this way, God continues to participate in human life and history, and humanity reflects God’s image and remains human if he or she lives in responsive obedience to God’s gracious love (Niles, 1962:46). It must be borne in mind that the revival of interest in Near Eastern treaty documents and their import on the Old Testament were still nascent at the time of Niles’ lectures on preaching. In any case, Niles purpose was not to deleniate a comprehensive theology of worship but merely to challenge his audience on the character and nature of preaching.

\textsuperscript{112} It is by the same power that Paul is made a minister, Ephesians 3:7
especially to a world recovering from the traumas of the Second World War and a world of newly independent former colonies. Despite all this, Niles is consistently clear in his lectures that the content of preaching is in the person and work of Jesus Christ and that this is the fruit of God’s revelation in the Scriptures. For Niles, as for Jesus, true preaching is Biblical and Christocentric. There is little doubt that Niles saw preachers as servants of God who served as his plenipotentiaries. His concluding prayer to his introduction of *The Preacher’s Calling to be a Servant* is a quotation from Acts 4:24-31 where the apostles pray to their “Sovereign Lord” who is the maker of heaven, earth and sea. Their words contain a quotation from Psalm 2 with its messianic and kingdom overtones, before they implore the Lord to protect his servants and to grant them boldness to speak the word of their sovereign Lord. These details are unmistakably covenantal, and it is hard to imagine that Niles would have been oblivious to them (Niles, 1959:14). Thus Niles speaks of the special calling of preachers to “bear testimony to Jesus Christ, but also to proclaim ‘the whole counsel of God’ (Acts 20:27)” (Niles, 1959:13). For Niles, the character and nature of preaching is that of a sovereign’s herald, and there is no other guarantee of the truth of a preacher’s witness “except that it is caught and held within the witness of the Holy Spirit to Jesus Christ and of Jesus Christ to himself” (Niles, 1959:12).

Taking Jesus’ example at Nazareth’s synagogue as norm, we see that there are two consequences which follow authentic preaching. For some there is acceptance and salvation, while others reject the message and the messenger. Since the Israel at the time of Jesus is likely to have been familiar with covenant practices of the Ancient Near East, they do not appear to have rejected the method of communicating the message, preaching. It would seem that the character and nature of preaching are best understood within their original, Hebrew covenantal setting where the speech is that of the suzerain or his plenipotentiary. The supreme test of the preacher therefore is faithfulness to the original message of the sovereign. The hearers are free to respond to the message. Nevertheless, in a modern world so distant from the covenant practices of the ancient Near East, we must concede that preaching as a form of communication could be deemed offensive since such a method is deemed to be foolishness by the world. Niles is acutely aware of these challenges and the consequent difficulties for the Church in the East and the West. Hence in his Yale
lectures, Niles is explicit that the preaching of the gospel is a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence to all who resist Jesus (see Chapter Two:30-38). Niles is in no doubt that the message is offensive. But he also makes clear that the method and the messenger will be offensive to some hearers because ultimately it is God who has become their stone of stumbling and rock of offence (Niles, 1958:11). However, as a missionary preacher, Niles was also hopeful, and he expected God to watch over the divine word in order to fulfill it for the salvation of the world which God loved.

5.7 Summary

This study of Luke 4:16-39 has given us Jesus’ normative theology of preaching, articulating by his actions and words, where in the economy of God preaching originates, what it is, how it functions, what its nature and character are, and what it is supposed to accomplish. We have subjected our analysis of Jesus’ norm to the Pauline control of the New Testament. Our comparison of Niles’ theory of preaching with Jesus’ norm has shown that Niles’ views are in concert with that of Jesus in Luke 4:16-30, especially on the calling of the preacher, the character and nature of preaching, the content of preaching and the consequences that flow from true preaching. We have previously also found that Niles’ understanding of preaching is in accord with the theologies of preaching of Bullinger and the key Protestant Reformers. All this indicates that Niles’ theory of preaching in interaction with key Protestant Reformers and the biblical perspectives on the preaching of Jesus, can form the basis of and be used in service of a global creed for a new ecumenical theology of preaching between the Church in the East and in the West. It now remains for us to draw some practical conclusions from this study, which is our task in the next chapter. There we shall look at how the preacher and the Church should handle the matter of the preacher’s calling, how the preacher and the Church are to understand the nature and character of preaching, the true content of Christian preaching and the consequences of preaching in an increasingly globalised world.
6.0 Towards a New Theology of Preaching for Developing a Common Base for the Dialogue Between Western and Non-Western Homiletical Theology

6.1 Introduction

The purpose of this whole study is to develop an ecumenical theology of preaching that integrates the views of Niles and the implications of *The Second Helvetic Confession* for the dialogue between Western and Non-Western homiletical theory. Thus far, we have done, first, a descriptive study on how Daniel T Niles viewed preaching by doing a literature-analysis of his trilogy of lectures on preaching. According to Osmer's categories, the method was qualitative, especially of a case study research (Osmer, 2008:32-34). This descriptive-empirical task was to answer the question: What is going on? Secondly, we have also tried to interpret Niles' theory of preaching in the context of his own Non-Western background and the bibliographical sources from the Magisterial Protestant Reformation regarding the essence of preaching especially as it is expressed in the *Second Helvetic Confession*. This helped us to analyse and interpret the past patterns and contemporary processes of theological contextualisation and construction employed by Christians from Western and Non-Western Churches in their attempts to appropriate and reshape the faith within their diverse socio-political and religious contexts. Here we aimed at Osmer’s second question with respect to the interpretative task: Why is it going on? Thirdly, we sought to evaluate Niles’ theory of preaching in the context of a study of Jesus’ preaching in Nazareth in order to formulate a normative theory on the nature of preaching and assess Niles’ theory in its correspondence with biblical perspectives on preaching. This was to answer Osmer’s third question: What ought to be going on? In this way, we have explored the significance for contemporary religion and society of historic Christianities and the current global diaspora of Non-Western Christianities. Such a survey of theological reflection and practice from Western and Non-Western Christianity has been set in the context of a conversation that does not privilege a single area of the world or one particular historical period. Positively
this reflects the intention to contribute a theological reflection that is nourished by a variety of settings and practices.

In this chapter, we are now ready to engage in Osmer’s pragmatic task (Osmer, 2008:175-217) of answering the question: How might we respond? In Osmer’s practical theology, the objective of this strategic fourth step was to provide congregational leaders with guidance for leading congregations through the process of change. In this context, Osmer explores various aspects of leadership (e.g. task competence, transactional leadership, and transformational leadership), but frames the overall task as servant leadership. For our purposes, our goal here is to develop a base for a theology of preaching which will serve as a foundation for the dialogue between Western and Non-Western homiletical theology. This does not mean that Bullinger and Niles shared an identical theory of preaching or that they had no particular distinctives in their theologies of preaching. It is true that they agreed on the calling of the preacher, the character, nature, content and consequences of authentic preaching. But for historical, cultural and personal reasons, they had differing approaches, perspectives and emphases. Bullinger was born into and wrote from a Europe under the flag of Christendom while Niles belonged to a Christian minority in South Asia struggling against colonialism. Niles’ pluralistic background caused him to view his ministry from an evangelistic-apologetic perspective while Bullinger framed his thinking from within the ecclesiastical milieu of Zurich and Reformation Europe. Bullinger was a systematic thinker and his confession was meant to systematise Reformed beliefs; Niles was “not a theologian in the technical sense of that word” but a Biblical thinker and preacher (Visser’ T Hooft, 1971:120). But both were Catholic Christians who were generous towards others; Bullinger was influential throughout Europe while Niles, through the WCC, was influential in different parts of the world. Thus we need to be clear that our aim in this thesis is not to produce an artificial conflation of Niles’ and Bullinger’s theology of preaching or to synthesise their homiletical theories. Instead, our goal is to appreciate the overlapping core features in their theologies of preaching (without compromising their distinctives) and to use this to develop a common base for a dialogue for Western and Non-Western homiletical theories.
The central theoretical argument of this study has been that Daniel T Niles’ theory of preaching, when found to be broadly in concert with the understanding of the Reformers and the Biblical teaching on the nature of preaching, can be useful for a global theology of preaching in promoting the dialogue between Western and Non-Western Christianity. We have aimed to compare bibliographical sources from the Reformation – i.e. the essence of preaching especially as it is confessed in the *Second Helvetic Confession*, and evidence from the case study – i.e. how Niles’s preaching is appreciated and intended to use this comparison as an interactive dialogue to find common ground for global Christianity. We want to use Niles’ theory of preaching to develop an ecumenical theology of preaching in order to help the dialogue between Western and Non-Western Christianity on the essence of preaching – i.e. how the words of a human preacher are linked to the Word of God.

### 6.2 Niles and the *Second Helvetic Confession* in Dialogue

In seeking to engage Niles in a dialogue with Bullinger and the *Second Helvetic Confession*, we are mindful of Niles’ views on creeds and his settled opinion on the Protestant Reformation in Europe in the Sixteenth century. According to Satyaranjan, Niles accepts the Nicene Creed as the Church’s complete expression of faith in God (Satyaranjan, 2009:41). But, for Niles, the main purpose of such doctrines and dogmas was to strengthen the faith of those who are already found within the Church. As Niles saw it, creeds were human reflections on the nature of God. For Niles, what is necessary is this: “We must begin with the Gospel, for the Gospel is Theology’s true starting point. The deed of God is previous to our reflection about it.... God's deed must first be accepted as God's deed for me. It is God who witnesses to God. How could it be otherwise?” (Satyaranjan, 2009:41). As we have seen in a previous chapter (see Chapter 2, Section 2.4), this is Niles’ typical and consistent starting point. This is also in concert with the assertion of Niles’s son that his father was more a biblical theologian than a systematician (Niles, 1977:8). Thus in trying to find common ground between Niles’ theory of preaching and the homiletic theory of Bullinger’s *Second Helvetic Confession*, we bear in mind this reservation on the part of Niles with respect to creeds. This does not necessarily mean that Bullinger and Niles had different theological
starting points. As we have noted, Bullinger started with the Scriptures but with the intention of producing a systematic confession of his own faith (see Chapter 4, Section 4.3.1). Niles too starts with the Bible and uses the Old and New Testaments extensively. But his ministry (and temperament?) did not allow him to produce a systematic theology. Indeed, Niles, with his passion for ecumenism, could be scathing on partisan confessionalism even if it were Protestant, and he deplored all forms of denominationalism that were not rooted in the gospel but in history or culture (Niles, 1965:75-76).

In addition to Niles’ theological epistemology, we need to grasp Niles’ understanding of history and church history in particular. Niles’ appreciation of the Protestant Reformation was especially nuanced. According to Furtado, Niles was able to see the weaknesses of the Reformation:

In the history of Western civilization, this usurpation of the place of God by man was a gradual process. Before and during the medieval period, man’s frame of reference for the total life was the supernatural as embodied and interpreted by the Church. In the period of the Renaissance man freed himself from this frame of reference and set up his own criteria of judgement. The Reformation helped man go further in this direction, by releasing him from the necessity of God being mediated through an institution (Furtado, 1978:41).

With respect to the church, Niles saw her importance and bemoaned the spirit of denominationalism. Niles’ high view of the Church also meant that Niles was not automatically ashamed to be confessional (Furtado, 1978:47-51; Niles, 1965:75-76). Therefore it is within these contexts and with these caveats in mind that we dare to engage Niles in a dialogue with the Reformers and with Bullinger and the Second Helvetic Confession. Nevertheless, we do not overstep the mark when we seek to engage Niles in a dialogue with Bullinger. Niles’ background and entire ministry were ecumenical (Furtado, 1978: 9-10) and the Confessions of the Reformation age, including the Second Helvetic Confession, were produced, at least in part, with the ecumenical purpose of finding unity in the truth (Macleod, 1987:253).
6.3 The Challenge to Preaching in Christian Worship

Our study of the history and theology of preaching thus far has reminded us that the place of preaching in Christian worship has been repeatedly challenged. During the age of Reformation, some strands within the Radical Reformation appear to have discounted the preaching office and its function (see Chapter 3, Section 3.4.2). Aware of this kind of danger, Martin Bucer exhorted his readers to guard themselves against

the wholly pernicious error which despises the church’s ministry of word and sacrament as a superficial and unnecessary thing, and would have everything given and received from Christ in heaven without using the means which the Lord himself desires to employ. And they should oppose…with these words: ‘I wish to maintain the order of my Lord, who ordains in his church his appointed ministers, through whom it is his will to gather me into his kingdom, to pardon my sins, to give me new birth, to keep me, teach me and lead me to eternal life. I intend to listen to them and their word and work in this ministry as to the Lord himself, so long as they exercise their ministry according to the Lord’s appointment, not as their own word and work but as the word and work of my Lord Jesus Christ which they truly are … (Bucer, 2009:23-24).\footnote{Martin Bucer, Concerning the True Care of Souls, Translated by Peter Beale, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2009), 23-24, emphasis mine}

We note that Bucer is referring only to ministers who are faithful to their calling and the Word of God committed to them. This seems to imply that where there is no faithful exposition of God’s word, there is no authentic ministry of Christ.

A century later, in 1643, the Westminster divines appear to have come to the same conclusion. Commenting on Chapter 28 of the Westminster Confession of Faith David Dickson wrote:
Well then, do not the Enthusiasts, Libertines, Anabaptists, and other Sectaries err who (under pretext of being inspired by the Holy Ghost that teaches them all things) despise and contemn all reading of the Scripture and public hearing of the Word preached? Yes. …. Because Christ commanded his apostles, and in them all the ministers of the gospel, to whom he hath promised his presence to the end of the world, to teach all nations and to preach the gospel to every creature…. Because the public preaching of the Word by a minister send and called, and the hearing of it, is a means ordained and appointed by God, and according to the ordinary manner necessary for begetting faith, and therefore needful for salvation (Dickson, 2007:145-146).

Because the ordinances are perpetually necessary, by divine institution. Therefore the office of the ministry, to dispense these ordinances, is perpetually necessary by divine institution. For if God had only appointed the ordinances to continue in his church, then would preaching and administration of the sacraments fail; because that which is every man’s work is usually and effectually no man’s work. The Lord doth not immediately administer them himself, neither are angels employed for this work: but he hath committed this service to men who are stewards and dispensers of the mysteries of God. It is evidence that the preaching of the Word shall continue to the end of the World from Matthew 28:20 (Dickson, 2007:149).

But the challenge to preaching is not merely historical. In the contemporary church too, preaching is coming under critical scrutiny from at least three sources. First, critical biblical scholarship asserts that we can know little or nothing about preaching in the New Testament times because the records that we now have are historically unreliable (see Chapter 5, Section 5.2). They hold that there was probably a variety of practices in the early church, which were subsequently codified. Secondly, there are radical thinkers who are challenging Forsyth’s classic assertion that the “Christian preacher is not the successor of the Greek orator, but of the Hebrew prophet. The orator comes with but an inspiration, the prophet comes with a revelation” (Forsyth, 1907:3). Norrington (Norrington, 1996), Viola and Barna (Viola & Barna, 2008:85-104) have argued that preaching and the sermon reveal the influence of pagan thoughts and the practices of the Greek and Roman cultures upon the Christian Church. Thirdly, there is a strand within contemporary evangelicalism which is in danger of perceiving preaching as a mere human discourse in a religious setting (Greiser & King, 2003); according to Stott, the expectation that “as we read and expound Scripture God will speak with a living voice – is at a low ebb today” (Stott, 2005:28). In this view, the
emphasis is all on the preacher and his technique (Johnston, 2001). Preaching is therefore seen as the word of man that may or may not be used by God for the edification of His people (Trueman, 2011:197-199). But as we have seen, the Reformers’ position was that true preaching of the Word of God is truly the Word of God.

As the globalised world becomes increasingly dominated by the visual and less by the aural and oral, the place of preaching in Christian liturgy may seem precarious (Mitchell, 2000:13-26). Thompson has analysed this aspect and articulated it well:

The age of computerized communication, multimedia presentations, and distance learning raises sobering questions about the capacity for preaching to survive in the new marketplace of communications. If the distinguishing feature of the cultus for both Judaism and Christianity is the oral address, as Y. Brilioth noted, we must ask if preaching has a future in this changed climate. If preaching has a future at all, we must ask what form it may take. If the biblical faith is one of hearing rather than seeing, the place of preaching in the new era remains a question (Thompson, 2000:143).

Thompson himself is persuaded of the necessary and vital place of preaching in the contemporary church because he sees the sermon as a distinctive Christian speech which is under the captivity of the Word of God (Thompson, 2000:144). But surely, he is correct in his assertion that we must ask the fundamental question of the place of preaching in the contemporary church and be prepared for answers that differ from Thompson’s. There is some suggestion that preaching should be replaced by the dramatic. But our study of Paul’s theology of preaching has revealed that the personal and direct method of preaching is vital to Christian worship and discipleship. If Jesus is normative to the Christian Church, then his method of declaring the gospel must be taken seriously. And the practical implication of this is that if the preaching of the word of God is the word of God, then those who lead Western and Non-Western Churches, should make sure that preaching has the central place among the channels means God uses to make his nature and will known, and to achieve his purposes for the Church. There is a place for other channels, but nothing can compare with

\textsuperscript{114}Yngve Brilioth, \textit{A Brief History of Preaching}, Philadelphia:Fortress Press, 1965, Page 2
hearing the voice of God so that we may live. Such too was Niles’ confidence in the preached word: “in a time when so many doubted that evangelism by the spoken word could still find a response, he just went ahead and used every opportunity for the proclamation of the Gospel” (Visser’ T Hooft, 1971:117).

6.4 The Double Calling to Preach – A Dialogue

As we have noted, Bullinger’s Second Helvetic Confession emphasises both the inward and outward calling of the Christian preacher (see Chapter 4, Sections 4.3.4.2). In Luther’s terms, the inward calling might be classified as two-fold. First, there is the desire for the ministry of tending the flock of God. Secondly, there is a willingness to enter and prosecute this ministry even at the cost of worldly honour and material comfort. False ministers, according to Luther, are those who enter the ministry for filthy lucre or with no appetite and love for the work of caring for the flock of God (Luther, 1990:206-207). Bullinger clarifies the outward calling as a calling by the Church at the volitional election of its people, and the subjection of the preacher to the discipline of his ecclesiastical brethren (see Chapter 4, Section 4.4.3). This notion of double-calling is integral to Bullinger’s theology of the sacraments and preaching. For Bullinger, the Church’s sacraments are sanctified by the fact that they are ordained by God and sanctified by the word of Christ; likewise, the word of preaching gains its authority not from the moral well-being of the preacher but from the fact that it is God’s ordained method for nourishing His Church and it is done at the command of Christ. It is for this reason that Bullinger took pains to trace the history of preaching from the Garden of Eden (see Chapter 4, Section 4.4.2).

For his part, Niles is clear that the preacher is primarily a servant of Jesus Christ and is therefore called to preach. In his Warrack Lectures, Niles reminded his audience that in the course of preparing the lectures, he had been compelled to remember the nature of the calling by which a preacher is called and the content of the Gospel which he must proclaim. He warned his hearers that it “is so easy for a preacher to preach, and even to preach well,
without being faithful to his message. The voice that bids men prepare the way of the Lord is always and only God’s possibility, and the preacher cannot inherit it except by faith” (Niles, 1959:11). Niles is clear that the task of preaching has a momentum apart from the preacher and that the preacher himself is carried by it (Niles, 1959:10). For Niles, preaching is a special calling; while all Christians bear testimony to Jesus Christ, preachers are called also to proclaim the whole counsel of God (Niles, 1959:13). But as we noted (see Chapter 2, Section 2.5.3), Niles makes a most perceptive and critical distinction when he says that the preacher’s calling is not just to preach, but to be a preacher. It is a person whom the call defines and not a task (Niles, 1959:17). Niles therefore insists that a Christian can only ‘preach’ when he or she wins a chance and right to do so. In contrast, those who are called to be preachers have no such difficulty since a minister of a church is usually assured of an audience. As Niles sees it, the temptation then is to see one’s calling as ‘to preach’ instead of being ’a preacher’ (Niles, 1959:18).

Given the above, it may seem that Niles puts all his stress on the inward calling to the loss of the outward calling. But this would be to misread Niles. We acknowledge that Niles does not directly centre his understanding of the preacher’s calling in terms of ecclesiology. But there can be no doubt that, for Niles, there is such a concept as ‘calling’. In fact, he insists that the preacher’s call takes place in a meeting with the risen Christ. Using the Hebrew prophets and their example, Niles argues that the preacher’s call is personal. Therefore for Niles, the preacher’s calling is three-fold; it is first a calling to be a Christian, then to be a servant and only finally to be a preacher (See Chapter 2, Section 2.5.1). A careful study of this sequence will indicate that the notion of the inward and outward call is inherent in Niles and buried within his homiletical framework. For example, the notion of church discipline is unavoidable in Niles when he writes: “The Church cannot fulfil its role as the home of the human dialogue, the dialogue between man and man and between man and God, if it does not in its own life sustain that dialogue” (Satyaranjan, 2009:54). Niles is categorical in his affirmation that the faith-experience of a Christian is intrinsic and linked to God’s act in human history. He sees this act in the Christ event comprising the whole life of Jesus – His incarnation, death, resurrection and future hope. Thus church discipline is assumed when the preacher is not merely called to the service of preaching, but rather to be servant to
those he preaches. But servants are under necessity to obey the Lord just as they serve the people. Niles refers to St. Paul in Second Corinthians 4:5 and writes: We are your servants, but Jesus Christ is Lord, both your Lord and ours. It is to Him that we render our account. Thus the preacher has the duty to live as Christ would have him live in the world, and obedience is what the word ‘servant’ primarily suggests, even though to a modern ear it may suggest employment, wages, and contract (Satyaranjan, 2009:54-55). For Niles then, the preacher’s calling is not merely internal or subjective: “But God forbid that I should make my own experience either the reason for my preaching the Gospel, or the measure of its preaching” (Niles, 1938:43). Can one depend on one’s faith experience to proclaim what one believes? For Niles, there is a human element that becomes a particular point of reference in order that a person can proclaim what he believes, viz. something has not only happened in the world, but it has happened to me. The 'call' is therefore two dimensional—one who calls and the one who is called. It is in reply to 'called-ness' that the faith of a person lies, not in what a person thinks his/her call is (Satyaranjan, 2009:55).

Again, on the preacher’s need to be faithful to his Lord, Niles calls into question the demonstrableness of faith. The problem of faith is: “Not to receive Jesus into our life but to be received into his: to enter into his death, to enter into his resurrection, to enter into his ministry to save the world, and finally to enter into his glory” (Niles, 1958:20). He testifies that “I learnt that to live by faith in God was not to live by anything that one had to do, but to live in terms of what God had already done and always was” (Niles, 1965:54). Niles here stresses 'obedience' in apposition to faith and says, “We must somehow recover the world 'obedience' and make it a central word in our Christian vocabulary, along with such words as faith, hope, love, grace.” “Faith and obedience belong together, obedience is not after faith, faith is in obedience”. For Niles, there “is only one way of believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, and that is to obey, and to begin at some point – the point at which to start”. Referring to himself Niles says, “My Christian life is not concerned with the salvation of my soul; it is concerned with the obedience of my saved soul” (Satyaranjan, 2009:56-57). As Niles sees it, there is a living relationship between what a person preaches and what he or she does. The first and the foremost thing in the life of the preachers is that they themselves have experienced in this life what Christ experienced in his life. For Niles, calling implies sharing,
and sharing with Christ in his continuing ministry in the world. Therefore sharing implies that the preacher is called to love the world in the same manner as Jesus loved it with all that such loving implies. The preacher, while he shares in service with the Lord, stands in a dual relationship of 'belonging' and 'not belonging'. Therefore the world hates them. Preachers cannot say that their call is only to preach. They must conduct their preaching in the inclusive ministry of the whole body, a ministry that proceeds from peace to peace. He writes: “The Christian practice of death means nothing more and nothing less than allowing people to treat us as they treated Jesus himself” (Satyaranjan, 2009:61). Thus it is clear that while the classical rhetoricians taught that to persuade, the speaker should feel persuaded first (Augustine, 2004:594-595), Niles goes further to emphasise that the speaker should provide proof of his or her involvement with the subject of his speech, as the consequence of the gospel. In concert with the spirit of Augustine, Niles declared,”... the preacher loses his status as “servant” unless his lips proclaim that Jesus is Lord” (Niles, 1959:58).

Despite all this, an ecumenical theology of preaching must acknowledge that God’s ways are higher than ours and that there are exceptional cases where God’s calling of the preacher does not necessarily seem to fit the dominant paradigm. In Niles’ South Asian context, Sadhu Sundar Singh chose to forego ordination in the Anglican communion and become an independent preacher (Appasamy, 1966:34-36). In the Western Church, George Campbell Morgan was turned down for the Methodist ministry only to find his calling in the Congregational Church (Morgan, 1972:57-65). But we note that whilst both Sundar Singh and Morgan appear to have been ‘rejected’ or fallen short of their expected course, they still had an outward calling in that they were accepted as preachers in other branches of the visible Church of their time. Moreover, we must acknowledge that the Church itself is not infallible. Nevertheless, we maintain that these honourable exceptions are to be deemed to be exceptions to the general rule concerning the double calling of the Christian preacher and not the norm. In fact, we must assert that when we engage Niles and Bullinger in dialogue, we find that for both of them, the outward and inward calling are mutually necessary.

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115 When rejected after a trial sermon, Campbell Morgan wired to his father the one word. ‘Rejected’. Quickly came the reply: “Rejected on earth. Accepted in heaven. Dad.”, see Jill Morgan, page 60.
There are practical implications here for the Western and Non-Western Church. First, the Non-Western Indian Church may sometimes demand personal holiness from the preacher before they are willing to listen to or follow him. In Indian epistemology, *anubhava* has a high place, and as Surya Prakash has indicated, independent preachers are attractive to Indian hearers because they have a story of conversion to tell and a life to exemplify; this is not always possible within the institutional church in India (Surya Prakash, 1995:238). According to Estborn: “Christianity in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was essentially individualistic. The Church had not succeeded in creating a real *koinonia* or fellowship fit to receive the ostracised converts, fit to replace the caste system” (Estborn, 1965:69-70). This situation may have contributed to the growth of ‘Independent preachers’ who were determined to give new expression to their faith in forms different from those accepted by the missionaries. According to Surya Prakash, these independent preachers were motivated by “the zeal to adopt Indian forms to express Christian faith and practice. Christian preaching by independent preachers has become, since then, one of such indigenous forms among the Protestant churches” (Surya Prakash, 1991:2).

But Appasamy has given a good and helpful alternative epistemology for Indian theology that will prove useful to Non-Western Christians. According to Appasamy (Appasamy, 1971:13), Christian discipleship begins not with *anubhava* but with *Sruti*. Using the traditional categories of Hinduism, Appasamy asserted that for the Christian there are three *pramanas*, *Sruti* (Scripture), *Anubhava* (Experience) and *Anumana* (Reason). Appasamy was unhesitating in giving priority to Scripture; for him, it is “the standard of our faith. It is the first and foremost *Pramana*, the highest court of appeal for everyone” (Appasamy, 1971:13). Thus like Niles before him, Appasamy roots himself in the Biblical text and this means that the Bible’s normative preaching as confirmed by the history and creeds of the Reformation Church and its common base with Niles’ homiletical theory ought to be the true starting point of Non-Western theological reflection on preaching and preachers. This means that the Non-Western Church should be serious about both the outward and inward calling of the preacher. And understanding the covenant context of Biblical worship, they will begin to see that the authority of the preacher is not derived from his personal circumstances but from his office as herald of the Most High. Thus the true preaching of the
Word of God is the Word of God. For its part, the Western Church can learn from the challenges faced by her Non-Western counterpart. The Western Church’s Aristotelian heritage may present her with a subtle danger with its focus on the *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos* of rhetoric. According to Aristotle: “Persuasion is achieved by the speaker’s personal character when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible...his character may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion he possesses” (Kennedy, 1980:66). But as Niles has directed and as Appasamy has explained in his theological epistemology, true preaching begins with revelation and the outward and inward calling are both important.

Secondly, the Western Church has become insitutionalised by its long history and, in Europe especially, connected with the state. Thus it is possible to blithely assume that because a preacher is an officer of the Church, his sermon will be faithful and true to the Scriptures and therefore all preaching is the Word of God. But Bullinger and the Reformers had very clear views on Church discipline. These, for example, are the words of the *Scots Confession*, written in 1560 by six leaders of the Scottish Reformation and the first subordinate standard for the Reformation church in Scotland, concerning the marks of the true church:

> The notes of the true Kirk, therefore, we believe, confess, and avow to be: first, the true preaching of the word of God, in which God has revealed himself to us, as the writings of the prophets and apostles declare; secondly, the right administration of the sacraments of Christ Jesus, to which must be joined the word and promise of God to seal and confirm them in our hearts; and lastley, ecclesiastical discipline uprightly ministered, as God’s word prescribes, whereby vice is repressed and virtue nourished (Schaff & Schaff, 1983:461-462).

Even Jesus Christ started his sermon at Nazareth by quoting from and then proclaiming the Scriptures. It is therefore clear that only the preaching that is consistent with the Word of God is indeed the Word of God. But it is debatable if church discipline today is as common in all parts of the Western Church as it was conceived of by the Reformers. As Macleod has outlined, it is possible that church discipline has been at a low ebb in some parts of Western

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116 Modern translation is mine.
Christianity for some time (Macleod, 1988:7-9). Our dialogue between Niles and Bullinger should remind the Western Church that the preaching of the Word of God is no mere moralistic exhortation. Rather, it is a confrontation with the risen and regnant Christ in the gospel. It is therefore necessary for the Western Church to constantly and rigorously subject itself and its preachers to the test of the content of the gospel. Only the true preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God. For her part, the Non-Western Church should learn from her Western sister on the need for outward calling and the maintenance of ecclesiastical discipline.

Thirdly, our dialogue makes clear that if the preaching of the word of God is the word of God then preachers in both the Western and Non-Western Church should expect God’s voice to be heard in and through their preaching and their hearers ought to come with the expectation of hearing the voice of God. To come with no expectation or to expect less is to despise the promise of God and to dishonour His word and worship.

### 6.5 The Double Content of Preaching – A Dialogue

Both Bullinger and Niles were clear and in concert with Jesus and the Protestant Reformers that the only true content of authentic preaching is the gospel of Jesus Christ. As we have seen (see Chapter 5, Section 5.4.1), the good news is of a history-changing event in the past which continues to have implications for the present and into the future (see Chapter 5, Section 5.4.3). It was this good news that Jesus proclaimed at Nazareth’s synagogue. And it was this good news also that Bullinger stressed in his Second Helvetic Confession (see Chapter 4, Section 4.3.4.1). For Niles too, it was this good news, the centrality of Jesus Christ, that is at the heart of Christian preaching. For Niles, preaching is an activity that begins in God and ends in God’s address to humanity. The subject of preaching is Jesus Christ since the world is in need of re-direction; it is disorientated from the purpose for which it has been intended, namely, the glory of God. In Niles’s theology, the divine self-disclosure is complete when the Son of God appeared in human flesh. God is related to the
individual in particular and to humanity through Jesus Christ. According to Niles, the foundation of preaching is the universality of the gospel. Preaching is about life- the life God gives in Jesus, the life human beings are called to live with Jesus, and the life promised in Jesus that is available by faith in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, for God raised up Jesus from the dead. This act of God is the gospel. God acted decisively in history and changed its structure and the context of human living. People are expected to meet God in Jesus the Christ through an act of repentance, believing in the salvation he made available through his death and resurrection. Preaching is also concerned about the sinfulness of humanity, the disposition and description of the condition in which human beings exist and it shows people their need to acknowledge God's offer of forgiveness. Sin therefore is rejection of what God has to offer in the death of His Son Jesus for sin is not only acknowledging the human state but also refusing to accept what God has to offer to humanity in the death of Christ.

The content of the gospel for preaching is Christ, the crucified and risen Lord. Niles therefore describes Christ crucified as a stone of stumbling, a barrier and an offence to people because a person who is arrayed as crucified cannot be a saviour. Thus there is always the temptation for the preacher to change the content of the gospel to suit the expectations of people. Niles observes that humanity lacks faith in its essential dignity “being a part of the crowd, a cog in a machine, a unit in a mass”. Human beings are not free but under the control of 'man-made gods' who may be persons or things that control, who take possession of human beings and determine their lives. These idols could be riches, ideologies, religions or sexes which work toward compartmentalising more than integrating life. Because their loyalty to one or more of these controlling factors, human beings refuse to commit themselves to God. Consequently, Niles sees the humanising process as the task of the gospel.
But to say that the content of preaching is the gospel is not to separate the theological from the ethical. As we discussed earlier (see Chapter 4, Section 4.4.2), Bullinger addresses the matter of preaching early in his *Decades* when he deals with the doctrine of the Word of God in the first three sermons of the *First Decade*. In the First Sermon, he begins by outlining the various definitions of the term ‘Word’, making clear that the ‘Word of God’ in biblical theology refers to “what thing so ever a man will” (Bullinger, 1849:37) and “doth signify the virtue and power of God” (Bullinger, 1849:37). He goes on to add that for his purposes, the Word of God signifies the speech of God and the revealing of God’s will. This Word of God was first spoken by Christ, the prophets and the apostles and then reduced into writing as the divine scriptures. For Bullinger, the Word of God “doth shew the mind of him out of whom it cometh; therefore the word of God doth make declaration of God” (Bullinger, 1849:37). Thus the content of authentic preaching centres on Jesus Christ but it invariably and cogently leads to the ethical aspects of God’s revealed will.

Niles too takes this same position. He holds that what is repeatable is not final and what is of the past need not be continuously in the present. Niles interprets God as continuously present when he reveals himself in the Biblical testimony to Moses as “I AM”. Therefore, resurrection does not fit under these categories. The finite and the temporal are categories that apply to what is repeatable. The resurrection faith, however, is concerned with the eternity and universality of Jesus Christ Himself. To Niles’ mind, the New Testament also testifies to the finality of Jesus Christ who is continuously and identifiably present in this world and in this life. Thus the “I am with you always to the close of the age” (Matthew 28:20) and “Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). This presence of Christ is continuously the ongoing activity of God. The finality of Jesus Christ is the finality of the ongoing work. Niles submits that the Scriptures of other religions deal fundamentally with the 'interior of life' or 'life after death', and in the drama of life, whatever happens, only to the actors. In contrast, the Christian scriptures are concerned with present life in this world in “all its concreteness and its particularities.” Further God’s concern encompasses people in all categories from all regions, races, and generations of time.
This same position of the true content of preaching including the theological and ethical aspects of the Biblical revelation was more recently emphasised by Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Standing on the shoulders of the Reformers and Puritans, he wrote:

«It is very important that we should recognise these two sections in the message of the Bible. The first is what you may call the message of salvation, the kerygma, that is what determines evangelistic preaching. The second is the teaching aspect, the didache, that which builds up those who have already believed – the edification of the saints.

Evangelistic preaching worthy of the name starts with God and with a declaration concerning His being and power and glory. You find that everywhere in the New Testament. That was precisely what Paul did in Athens – ‘Him declare I unto you’. ‘Him’! Preaching about God, and contrasting Him with the idols, exposing the emptiness and the vacuity and uselessness of idols…. That, in turn, leads on to preaching the Law…the Law of God…All this is designed to bring people to a conviction of sin, and lead them to repentance. And that in turn should lead them to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as the One and only Saviour. That is the message of salvation, that is what is called evangelistic preaching.

But then there is the other side, which is teaching, the ‘building up of the saints’…. This, again, I would subdivide into two sections; that which is more primarily experimental, and that which is instructional” (Lloyd-Jones, 1971:61-63).

But this gospel-content could be facing challenges in both the Western and Non-Western Churches. In the Western Church, the dominant view even among ‘evangelicals’ is that preaching is communication centred on God (Adams, 2005:35). But Niles’s focus is even sharper when he stresses that the sermon is not merely God-talk, but at the centre of preaching is the work that God has done in Jesus Christ for a sinful humanity. For him, this message of the gospel is what distinguishes Christian preaching from all other religious teaching. Thus it is the duty of both the Western and Non-Western Church to ensure that all Christian preaching is rooted in Scripture and that its content is centred on the person and work of Jesus Christ while not neglecting to define the ethical implications of the imperium of Christ. The dialogue between Niles and Bullinger suggests that the Non-Western Church can learn from her Western counterpart that preaching is not only to be God-centred, it is especially Christ-centred. And in learning this, the Non-Western Church learns from one of her own sons, Daniel T Niles. But it seems that the chief challenge facing the Non-Western
Church, is the challenge to present the gospel and not simply engage in a process of apologetics or teaching moralism. According to Furtado, Christian preaching in India and Sri Lanka had been predominantly apologetical before the time of Niles (Furtado, 1978:40). Niles’ burden is that Jesus Christ must be proclaimed. The purpose of this preaching is the salvation of the world. For Niles, people would be content if one preached about God, but such preaching does not lead people to the Christian faith. They should find God at the place and in the person where God humbled Himself. In interpreting Romans 6:5-11, Niles argued that conversion or salvation is not a matter of receiving Jesus into one's life. Instead, it is to be received into Jesus' life. When a person is face to face with God, one feels already condemned and in this experience, God works reconciliation. No one understands God except through Jesus Christ. It is therefore necessary that humanity take Jesus seriously. Thus for Niles, no one can preach God unless one sees God active in Jesus Christ. The supremacy of God is established in the life and work of Jesus Christ in whom God's self-disclosure is complete. In Niles theology, Jesus is the deed of God. This means that when Jesus announced that the Kingdom of God is at hand and demanded of people that they repent, and believe in the Gospel, he was asking not for some general response to the requirements of religion or morality but for a specific commitment to a particular event and person. Thus for Niles, the gospel of Jesus Christ is the only true content of preaching. The Non-Western Church needs to take seriously Bullinger’s and Niles’ assertions that the primary content of preaching is not ethical but theological. In line with Biblical norm, the ethical flows from the theological. But the Western Church can learn from the history and challenges of the Non-Western Church too. As Keller has now delineated, in a globalised world, all churches and preachers are tempted by moralism (Keller & Clowney, 2002:55). It is imperative therefore for the global church to recover the centrality of the gospel of Jesus Christ in an ecumenical theology of preaching.

Another subsidiary practical implication of this facet of an ecumenical theology of preaching is that if the preaching of the word of God is the word of God, then those who are called to be preachers should labour in and serve the word of God, ensuring that their message is in concert with the content, tone, and purposes of the written word of God. This means that every sermon should be faithful not only to the passage being expounded but also to its
immediate literary and extended canonical context. And this is a call to preachers in both the Western and Non-Western Church.

6.6  The Character & Nature of Preaching

6.6.1  The Purpose of Preaching – A Dialogue

As we have seen (see Chapter 4, Section 4.4.2), in Bullinger’s Third Sermon in the First Decade, he attempts to bring some balance and detail to his theory of preaching and goes on to teach the correct method of interpreting Scripture. Bullinger is clear that the task of preaching is to be done with the singular aim of glorifying God and honouring His name in the midst of His people. Niles does not disagree with Bullinger. In fact, he goes further to explicate a three-fold purpose to preaching, the glory of God, the salvation of others, the nourishment of the preacher himself and his fellow Christians. Of course, these ideas are nascent in Bullinger in that the salvation of souls and the enriching of Christian people brings glory to God. But Niles explicitly emphasises that one of the chief goals of preaching is to call people to a decision about Jesus Christ. The preacher therefore has to see that the question of ‘who Jesus is’ is kept a live question, and that Jesus remains someone with whom people are preoccupied because He claims them and will not quit His claim. However, being sensitive to the weakness of the preacher as a human being who constitutes the context of God’s redeeming activity, Niles adds that the “preached word is active in saving the preacher, and the preacher knows it: the preacher also knows that it can save the hearer” (Niles, 1958:105). Zwingli, Luther and Calvin were aware that there are many inside and outside the Church who devalued preaching, thinking that they might be able to obtain equal value from private study, devotion and meditation at the expense of the public assembly of the Church (Calvin, 1960:1016, Book IV, I:4-5). But for the Reformers, preaching is, as Calvin put it, “necessary” and “highly approved” (Calvin, 1960:1017-1018, Book IV, I:5-6), a ministry is given in order that the Church of Christ might be educated and built up. The Reformers had concluded that in every age the prophets and godly teachers have had a difficult struggle with the ungodly, who in their stubbornness can never submit to the yoke.
of being taught by human word and ministry. Bucer articulated the task of the minister similarly when he wrote that the preacher is called to care for:

all the elect of God, whom the Father has given to him, our Lord Christ, but have not yet been brought into the church, that is, his sheep-pen and incorporated into our Lord. And those who have already been brought into the church and his communion are not only kept there, but also absolved from all their sins and led and encouraged in all that is good, that they might constantly increase in godliness and grow to a perfect man in Christ, so that both in understanding and in life no-one should be lacking. That is the purpose and goal of the pastoral office in the church.... Now all this is to be achieved and attained solely through teaching, exhorting, warning, disciplining, comforting, pardoning, and reconciling to the Lord and his church: in other words the proclaiming of the whole word of God (Bucer, 2009:33).

This aspect of Niles’ dialogue with Bullinger makes clear that all Christian preachers, whether in the Western or in the Non-Western Church, must be in no doubt that the primary purpose of preaching is the glory of God, and God is glorified when sinners are converted, saints are edified and the preacher himself is spiritually nourished. For the Indian Non-Western preacher, preaching is not primarily the time for exhibiting his anubhava, although in the act of preparing and preaching, the preacher himself ought to be spiritually nourished. Nor is preaching the prime occasion or the appropriate time for the Western preacher to exhibit his rhetorical powers of ethos, pathos and logos.

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117 Martin Bucer, Concerning the True Care of Souls, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2009), Tr. Peter Beale, 33
6.6.2 Presence in Preaching – A Dialogue

The preacher is an ambassador of Jesus Christ. If, as we have argued (see Chapter 5, Section 5.5), we use the covenant matrix to interpret the Bible, the preacher is one who speaks in the name of the suzerain. The ascension of Jesus Christ means that the sovereign now sends-out his ambassadors to proclaim the gospel. A grasp of the covenantal context of the biblical documents and the central place of the gospel will mean that preachers are acknowledged as the mouthpiece of the Most High so long as their message is faithful to the word of the sovereign himself. This was the kind of position taken by Martin Bucer the Strasbourg Reformer when he wrote:

(O)ur dear Lord Jesus is truly present in his church, ruling, leading, and feeding it himself. But he effects and carries out this his rule and the feeding of his lambs in such a way as to remain always in his heavenly nature, that is, in his divine and intangible state, because he has left this world. Therefore it has pleased him to exercise his rule, protection and care of us who are still in this world with and through the ministry of his word, which he does outwardly and tangibly through his ministers and instruments (Bucer, 2009:17).

Quoting I Corinthians 3:5-7, Bucer urges his reader to note “that people come to faith through the ministers of Christ, although the work is certainly of God” (Bucer, 2009:19). Again, using II Corinthians 3:2-6, Bucer reminds his reader that “the Lord uses his ministers to inscribe himself upon people’s hearts, imparting to them not only the letter but the Spirit, and through them establishes ...the grace of eternal life” (Bucer, 2009:20). Bucer is clear that the “power and work of the church’s ministry belongs not to the ministers, but to Christ the Lord.... Of themselves they could not even think of doing such a thing, but God equips them for the ministry, to that end the Lord gives them his Spirit and understanding of the Scriptures, his Spirit speaks through them, it is his power, his Spirit and his work, it is he who gives success” (Bucer, 2009:22). Bucer is, of course, careful to distinguish his teaching from that of “those people... who teach that this ministry of the church is of no importance, a merely outward activity which does not contribute in any particular way to our salvation,

118 Martin Bucer, Concerning the True Care of Souls, Translated by Peter Beale, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2009), 17, emphasis is mine
and without which it is quite possible to become a Christian and receive God’s gifts”, calling this a harmful and pernicious error. Referring to the conversion and nourishment of the human soul, Bucer asserts that “the truth says that the Lord must indeed do and effect all this alone and by himself, and to only inwardly but also outwardly; because if the word and the sacrament which we outwardly hear and receive are not the word, sacrament and work of Christ, then they are the word, sacrament and work of the antichrist and Satan. There is no middle ground here” (Bucer, 2009:22).

In case we mistake that Bucer is only referring to the apostles personally appointed by Jesus, he reminds his reader that “the Lord simply wants to maintain this order whereby he performs the work of our conversion, redemption and the whole of salvation in us through his ministers. The first of those ministers he called himself, the others he calls, ordains and appoints through the ministry of his church” (Bucer, 2009:23). Bucer also speaks of ministers as instruments or organs through whom Christ speaks. Like Bullinger, he seems to suggest that faithful preaching is the word of God to God’s people. But it is clear that the Reformers refused to elevate preaching to equality with scripture. For them, Scripture is definitive and sovereign; preaching must be derivative and subordinate. Whilst Scripture does not have to conform to preaching, the latter must conform to the former. It is the humble position of preaching as derivative and subordinate that is precisely its glory. For the Reformers therefore, preaching borrows its status as the ‘word of God’ from Scripture. It is the Word of God inasmuch as it delivers the Biblical message, which is God’s message or Word. God’s Word, for them meant, that which is spoken by God; not simply in its first giving but in its every repetition. It does not somehow become weakened by repetition so as to become less and less God’s Word. But it is the duty of the hearers to always ask themselves whether it is God who has spoken or not. If the teaching is faithful to Scripture, then it is God who is speaking, and for that reason His teaching remains His teaching irrespective of the purveyor of the teaching. These Reformation thoughts on preaching were best summarised by the next generation, especially in the words of Heinrich Bullinger in his Second Helvetic Confession.
Bullinger’s theology of preaching in his *Second Helvetic Confession* and *The Decades* would seem to indicate that for Bullinger, the preaching of the Word of God was indeed the Word of God. It was the Word of God not in the normative sense, but in the instrumental. The Holy Scripture is alone the Word of God in the normative sense. But preaching is the Word of God in the instrumental sense in that preaching is only the Word of God so long as its content is faithful to and consistent with the message of the Holy Scriptures, and it is proclaimed by the one who is lawfully called to that office. But when Bullinger’s teaching on the Lord’s Supper is combined with his teaching on preaching, it is possible to understand his theology of preaching as sacramental. As the sacrament is a sign of an invisible presence, so in the true preaching of the Word, God Himself is present. But this presence is not eucharistic as it is in the Lord’s Supper; rather it is *kerygmatic*. The sacraments gain their legitimacy in that they are ordained by God and they contain the words of Christ. In the same way, for Bullinger, preaching obtains its legitimacy over the church because it is ordained by God and instituted by Christ Himself. For this, Bullinger traces the history of preaching from the time of the patriarchs until Christ and then to the pastors and evangelists who were committed to the New Testament Church. Moreover, the words of Christ constitute the sacrament and give its efficacy. In the same way, if the preacher is lawfully called and preaches the Word of God particularly in its Christological and soteriological content, then there the word of God is preached. The hearers themselves have a duty to listen and receive the words of preaching in faith. It is then that the Holy Spirit efficaciously applies the Word of God to them individually.

Niles too was unambiguous on the presence of God in preaching. He saw the message preached and the actual act of proclamation as belonging together in one great divine activity, and, according to at least one eyewitness who heard him preach (Killinger, 1996:173-174), Niles left his hearers under the impression that in authentic preaching they were in the presence of God. De Soysa is more specific when he writes of his sense of the power of the Holy Spirit in Niles’ preaching: “his word, as his life, was full of power – the power of the Holy Spirit” (De Soysa, 1971:65). When we seek to explore how, according to Niles, God is involved in the activity of preaching, we see that Niles does not neglect the role of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, in his Evanston sermon before the WCC in 1954, Niles identifies
the Holy Spirit as the power behind Christian evangelism and proclamation: “We cannot feed them on scraps. We love too truly to do that. But there is another Fried to whom we may go ... The answer to the prayer for the Holy Spirit is always Yes!” (Niles, 1954:1039). In his trilogy on preaching though, Niles explicates God’s presence in true preaching as a fourfold activity of God. First, God is present in preaching in His activity of salvation; the actual living process of men and women finding faith in Jesus is the work of the Holy Spirit. Secondly, God is present in His activity of revelation. God’s intention here is not only to save but also to raise a people who would be the messengers of His salvation as the Jews were in the Old Testament church. Thirdly, God is present in preaching in His activity of mission. This means that the new birth makes a person a witness to the gospel. Fourthly, God is present in preaching in his activity of fulfillment. The world at present is in the process of fulfillment. When God is active in the act of human preaching, God will bring all things under the headship of Christ, the Church will grow to its full maturity in love and the Holy Spirit cause the witness of the Church to Christ to fructify.

Thus we see that Bullinger’s sacramental language has its limits and here we see the advantage of Niles’ contribution to an ecumenical theology of preaching. The sacramental view, if used too rigorously, could limit preaching only to liturgical contexts. But as Bucer has shown above, this was not the view of the Reformers who saw preaching as both public and private. The dialogue between Niles and Bullinger thus reveals that Niles’ insights help us to gain a more comprehensive understanding of this aspect of an ecumenical theology of preaching while being consistent with the theology of Bullinger and the Reformers. There is a practical implication from this dialogue for the Western and Non-Western Church. If the preaching of the word of God is the word of God and God Himself is present in the preaching of His Word, then those who hear the word preached, whether in the Western or Non-Western Church, should take it as seriously as they would if God were speaking directly to them. Hearers should listen expectantly and soberly and do what God asks them to do.
6.6.3 The Nature of Preaching – A Dialogue

As we have noted above, Bullinger’s homiletical theory is best described as sacramental in the *kerygmatic* sense. The Holy Spirit is present in authentic preaching to apply the preached word to the hearts of the hearers. This appears to be consistent with Jesus’ own experience at Nazareth’s synagogue. Since the Jews at the time of Jesus are likely to have been familiar with covenant practices of the Ancient Near East, they do not appear to have rejected the method of communicating the message, preaching. It would seem that the character and nature of preaching are best understood within their original, Hebrew covenantal setting where the speech is that of the suzerain or his plenipotentiary. The supreme test of the preacher therefore is faithfulness to the original message of the sovereign. The hearers are free to respond to the message. Nevertheless, in a modern world so distant from the covenant practices of the ancient Near East, we must concede that preaching as a form of communication could be deemed offensive since such a method is deemed to be foolishness by the world. Niles is acutely aware of these challenges and the consequent difficulties for the Church in the East and the West. Hence in his Yale lectures, Niles is explicit that the preaching of the gospel is a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence to all who resist Jesus (see Chapter 2, Section 2.5.2). Niles is in no doubt that the message is offensive. But he also makes clear that the method and the messenger will be offensive to some hearers because ultimately it is God who has become their stone of stumbling and rock of offence (Niles, 1958:11). However, as a missionary preacher, Niles was also hopeful, and he expected God to watch over the divine word in order to fulfill it for the salvation of the world which God loved. Thus for Niles, Jesus himself is the one who is proclaimed, and the incidents are seen as pointers to his identity.

According to Niles, human preaching is an activity within the activity of God since it points to him. Preaching also is a “human contribution that is brought to the service of the active operation of the word of God” (Satyaranjan, 2009:34). The activity is that of God and human beings as they are means by which “God takes the human word even as he takes man’s bread and makes them both the means of his visitation. Through them he enters into
human life” (Satyaranjan, 2009:34). Thus for Niles, the message and the messenger in his or her act are inseparable. Like his predecessor at the Lyman Beecher Lectures P.T. Forsyth, Niles traces Jesus to the prophetic tradition in the calling to the servant’s role. God entrusts to human beings this task of proclamation and this act of God is “the charter of our preaching” (Satyaranjan, 2009:34-36). God upholds the activity of preaching and accomplishes the end towards which preaching is directed. “Jesus who is proclaimed is himself the power unto salvation. He is power to uphold the preacher as well as power to prove the truth of the preacher's message”. Preaching is thus a divine activity in which God participates in human efforts, making the message God’s message and human words God's words to witness to his Son as “the human offering through which God's power is mediated to man”. The core of the proclamation of the mission is this: “Jesus is humanity's Saviour”. The Christian faith is such that it can be proclaimed, whereas other faiths can be taught. While a Christian is concerned with winning obedience to Jesus Christ, other faiths look for acceptance of the truths taught. The gospel is the Logos. The kerygma is the proclamation of the gospel of God's saving event. It is the content of the Word of God and the activity of God from the beginning to eternity to call people to repentance (Satyaranjan, 2009:34-36).

In his understanding of preaching, Niles portrays context not as a description of a situation but as God in his activity in the world; for him, this makes preaching possible. God in Christ in his “previousness” and in “contemporariness” is active to make God's-self known and accepted. The task of the preacher and the church is to proclaim the love of God in Christ in all the modes and manners of life and to be a part of the people's native soil but subject only to God who transforms life to God's own image in Jesus Christ. Niles tries to explain the presence of Christ in relation to the activity of God as previousness in history and in the life of the humanity. The activity of God is such that it is “previous” to the preached word. He does not explain how this activity operates. The operation of the “previousness” of the WORD as the word of the Holy Spirit in the hearer is also significant in the context of preaching. He says, preaching does not become effective unless God is working in our hearers too. “Previous to the preached word is the activity of the WORD himself”. In explaining the operation of the Word, Niles uses the terminology of St. Paul viz., 'reaping and harvesting,' and alludes to the “previous” work done by God and others in preaching
the world as 'sowing the seed'. Niles' reference to 'previousness' need not necessarily mean God's operative presence understood as immanence, for that would take away the urgency Niles places on proclamation to make this God known. He writes that preaching is “set in the context of the accomplished work of Christ [as a past event] and His continuing ministry” (Satyaranjan, 2009:70-76).

This understanding of preaching as a divine-human encounter has been restated in the course of history. For John Owen,

This is that on which the whole ordinance of preaching is founded, which makes that which is derived out of the Word to have power, authority, and efficacy of the Word accompanying it.... Though it be the work and effect of the Word of God to quicken, regenerate, sanctify, and purify... all these effects are produced in, and by the preaching of the Word... because whatsoever is directly deduced, and delivered according to the mind and appointment of God from the Word, is the Word of God (Porteous, 1999:177).

More recently, according to Lloyd-Jones:

Any true definition of preaching must say that that man is there to deliver the message of God, a message from God to those people. If you prefer the language of Paul, he is ‘an ambassador for Christ’. That is what he is. He has been sent, he is a commissioned person, and he is standing there as the mouthpiece of God and of Christ to address these people. In other words he is not there merely to talk to them, he is not there to entertain them. He is there- and I want to emphasise this- to do something to those people; he is there to produce results of various kinds, he is there to influence people. He is not merely to influence a part of them; he is not only to influence their minds, or only their emotions, or merely to bring pressure to bear upon their wills and to induce them to some kind of activity. He is there to deal with the whole person; and his preaching is meant to affect the whole person at the very centre of life. Preaching should make such a difference to a man who is listening that he is never the same again.... Preaching is that which deals with the total person, the hearer becomes involved and knows that he has been dealt with and addressed by God through this preacher. Something has taken place in him and in his experience, and it is going to affect the whole of his life.... The way in which the Apostle Paul puts that is, ‘I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received.’ That is what
determines the message or the sermon as such; it is that which the preacher has received. The other term used by Paul – ‘ambassador’- brings it out very clearly. An ambassador is not a man who voices his own thoughts or his own opinions or views, or his own desires. The very essence of the position of the ambassador is that he is a man who has been ‘sent’ to speak for somebody else…. He is not a man who speculates and gives his own views and ideas. He the bearer of a message, he is commissioned to do this, he is sent to do this; and that is what he must do (Lloyd-Jones, 1971:53-61).

True preaching, after all, is God acting. It is not just a man uttering words; it is God using him. He is being used of God. He is under the influence of the Holy Spirit; it is what Paul calls in I Corinthians 2 ‘preaching in demonstration of the Spirit of power’. Or as he puts it in I Thessalonians 1:5: ‘Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance (Lloyd-Jones, 1971:91).

There are two important practical implications which arise out of this dialogue between Niles and Bullinger’s Second Helvetic Confession as we seek to formulate an ecumenical theology of preaching. Both Bullinger and Niles exalt the preaching office and the task of preaching since the office and its task are at the behest of the heavenly Sovereign. Thus the Western and Non-Western Church need to take the preaching task and the preaching office seriously. As Kuiper wrote:

In the absence of the minister, a ruling elder may well read a sermon to the congregation or even deliver a discourse of his own making, but the precise name for such activity is exhorting, not preaching. Likewise deacons should remind the distressed of the consolations of the Holy Scripture, but by so doing they do not become ministers. The minister, on the other hand, is not only a teaching elder but also a ruling elder. He, and he alone of the special officers in the church, holds two offices .... (The minister’s) central task is to teach men the Word of God. He must teach the Word, not only publicly in the pulpit, but also privately in pastoral counseling. He must teach the Word, not just in the abstract, but by way of practical application to concrete situations, and he must apply the Word not merely to personal difficulties but also to communal problems. He must teach the Word both constructively and controversially; that is to say, he must set forth the truth positively, to be sure, but also contrast it with error, particularly with

119 Lloyd-Jones, Preaching and Preachers, 61
120 Lloyd-Jones, Preaching and Preachers, 95
contemporaneous error. He must declare all the counsel of God (Kuiper, 1966:138-139).

This being the case, the definition of successful preaching is not to be identified with the preacher’s popularity or big attendances or enormous church budgets. Rather authentic success in preaching occurs when the preached word triumphs in the hearts of the congregation and God’s kingdom comes. It was this conviction which freed Paul from relying on rhetorical skills or becoming enslaved to visible or material prosperity. The growing global Church will do well to note this.

6.7 The Double Consequences of Preaching – A Dialogue

As we have seen (see Chapter 5, Section 5.4.4), there are two seemingly opposite consequences to preaching. Some reject the message and therefore enter into judgement with the sovereign. They are exposed to the covenant curses and the wrath of the suzerain whose covenant terms they have rebelled against. On the other hand, there are those who receive the message and submit to its terms. It is important to note here that the purpose of preaching is more than conversion; it is a call to live under the imperium of God. This means that the theological content of the preached word must be accompanied by practical, ethical content. As Gericke helpfully reminds us, wisdom to the Hebrew mind was never abstract or merely intellectual; it is especially practical (Gericke, 2011:513).

For Niles, preaching the gospel is likely to be a stone of offence and a rock of stumbling. It certainly was the case with Jesus at the Synagogue in Nazareth. In our examination of Jesus’ normative preaching, we saw that Jesus’ claim that “today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21) places both listeners and readers in the position of having to make a choice. Jesus’ teaching is not some ethical instruction detached from his person. He is the promise of God. Either he brings God’s promise or he does not. The crowd does reflect on the claim; they are amazed and perplexed simultaneously. Jesus’ quotation of the proverb
that a prophet is not honored in his home reveals Jesus' understanding of Old Testament history as one where God's heralds are repeatedly rejected. The proverb also serves as a prediction that for many in Israel Jesus' ministry will fit into this tragic mould. But Jesus’ words were also a warning that when a people reject God’s word, then God may move his works of mercy to others. Since the gospel is both the message and the means of salvation, we can be sure that there will be those who will respond positively to this proclamation and will therefore be saved. Indeed, Jesus’ quotations from Isaiah carry the promise that the poor will receive good news, the brokenhearted will be healed, the captives will be liberated, the blind will see and the year of God’s favour will arrive. Jesus saw these promises fulfilled in his own person and work. The developing story of Luke-Acts is that this gospel continues to bear fruit all over the world and humankind are saved and brought into the kingdom of God.

But there is another consequence that comes with true preaching. Jesus is rejected at Nazareth’s synagogue and the people were filled with wrath and ready to kill him. In verses 28 to 30, Luke reminds his readers that this too is a consequence that flows from true preaching. As we have seen in Chapter Two, this is what Niles calls the stone of stumbling and the rock of offence (see Chapter 2, Section 2.5.2). Jesus’ hearers are offended by his preaching and raise objections. At Nazareth, they rejected him for the universality of his message and the different hermeneutic employed in the interpretation of Isaiah’s prophecy. But as Niles has taught us, these are not the only reasons for humankind to reject the gospel. Using his ministerial experience among Muslims, Buddhists and Hindus, Niles was clear that every individual has his or her prejudice and the gospel is offensive to every natural human heart (see Chapter Two, pages 30-38). As Keck astutely observes of Jesus’ ministry at Nazareth’s synagogue, those “who would exclude others thereby exclude themselves” from the grace of God. They rejected the inclusiveness of the gospel. Others may be offended by other parts of the gospel (Keck, 1995:108).
This dialogue between Niles, Bullinger and the normative example of Jesus points towards an ecumenical theology of preaching when the preacher rises to preach in any church, whether in the West or in the non-West, he must expect transformations and conversions. This is because the preacher, if he is truly called and faithful to his suzerain, preaches God’s word and God Himself watches over His word to fulfill it. The preacher must assume and believe that God’s word will go to work in those who hear it as such. The dialogue between Niles and Bullinger has revealed their common understanding that God’s word is living and active, the force of the teaching, correction, and rebuking it undertakes are God’s work through the preacher, not merely the preacher’s work to achieve God’s purposes. Thus the preacher will preach in hope. On the other hand, the preacher should also expect rejection of his message and ministry. But he ought not to take this rejection too personally, since, as Bullinger wrote, the (faithful) preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God.

6.8 Summary

In our quest to bring Niles into a dialogue with Bullinger with the aim of finding a common base for developing an ecumenical theology of preaching for the Western and Non-Western Church, we became aware that Niles’ aim in his trilogy on preaching was not chiefly to provide a comprehensive homiletical theory. Rather, his focus was to exhort preachers on the calling, content and purpose of preaching. But his trilogy lends itself to analysis; and Niles himself was raised, lived and worked within an ecumenical background. This makes his homiletical theory appropriate for our study. For his part, Heinrich Bullinger crafted his Confession initially for his personal use, but when it became public, he sought to make it catholic and ecumenical for Protestants. As Macleod has noted, the purpose of Confessions during the Reformation was to give a sense of truth and unity (Macleod, 1987:253). It is because of their congruence on these points that we have engaged Niles and Bullinger in dialogue. They agree on the calling, character and nature, purpose, content and consequences of preaching. In the final analysis, the preacher, for them, is a sacral figure.
7.0 Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

The central focus of this thesis was to determine to what extent Daniel T Niles’ theory of preaching corresponds with Reformed and Biblical perspectives and can help in the dialogue between Western and Non-Western Christianity. Niles and Bullinger were chosen because they were both theologians and preachers. Both were Protestant and renowned, and their writings continue to be appreciated and studied. Though similar in many ways, their theories of preaching are not indistinguishable. It is true that they share a common core of convictions concerning the calling of the preacher, and the character, nature, content and consequences of preaching. But their personal, cultural and historical particularities gave their theories of preaching different (but not contradictory) perspectives and accents.

The methodology pursued in this thesis was from a framework that is Biblical, historical and contemporary. In an effort to ensure that the formulated results of the study are not subject to accusations of undue prejudice, due recognition was given to the works of those whose theological sympathies do not necessarily lie within its remit. Specifically, the methodology adopted in this study reflects the four tasks for practical theological interpretation as formulated by Osmer (2008:4) – the descriptive-empirical, the interpretative, the normative and the pragmatic.

7.2 Towards a Dialogue on Preaching

In attempting to draw this thesis to a conclusion, it is necessary to give an overview and summary of how the distinctive tasks of practical theology were executed in the course of the present study. First, in pursuing the descriptive-empirical task, we sought to answer the question: What is going on? According to Osmer’s categories, the method was qualitative, especially of a case study research (Osmer, 2008:32-34). Here we introduced Niles and
embarked on a descriptive study of how Niles viewed preaching by doing a literature-analysis of his trilogy of lectures on preaching and by reckoning with the evaluation of Niles’s peers regarding the ecumenical potential of his preaching. This was done in order to ascertain his theory of preaching (see Chapter 2). Secondly, we engaged in the interpretative task in seeking to answer the question: Why is it going on? Here we presented Reformation perspectives on preaching (see Chapter 3) and the Second Helvetic Confession’s statement on preaching (see Chapter 4) in comparison and in dialogue with non-Western ideas on the essence of preaching especially in D T Niles. Thus we attempted to interpret Niles’ theory of preaching in the context of his own Non-Western background and the bibliographical sources from the Magisterial Protestant Reformation regarding the essence of preaching especially as it is expressed in the Second Helvetic Confession. This enabled us to analyse and interpret the past patterns and contemporary processes of theological contextualisation and construction employed by Christians in and from Western and Non-Western Churches in the appropriation and re-shaping of the faith in diverse socio-political and religious contexts.

Thirdly, we undertook the normative task in seeking to answer the question: What ought to be going on? Here, Niles’ theory was evaluated in the light of biblical perspectives on preaching and placed in dialogue with reformation theories of preaching (see Chapter 5). More particularly, we evaluated Niles’ theory of preaching in the context of a study of Jesus’ preaching in Nazareth and the preaching of the New Testament apostles in order to formulate a normative theory on the nature of preaching and assess Niles’ theory in its correspondence with biblical perspectives on preaching. Fourthly, we followed Osmer’s model by engaging in the pragmatic or strategic task in answering the question: How might we respond? Here, we began to move towards a theology of preaching for developing a common base for the dialogue between Western and non-Western homiletical theology (see Chapter 6). Our survey of theological reflection and practice from Western and Non-Western Christianity was set in the context of a conversation that did not privilege a single area of the world or one particular historical period. Positively this reflects the intention to contribute to theological reflection that is nourished by a variety of settings and practices.
From the descriptive-empirical aspect of our study, we concluded that Niles’ theory of preaching is eminently suited for a dialogue between Christianity in the East and West. With Bullinger and the other Magisterial Reformers, Niles always rooted his thinking and theology on the authority of Scripture. Like them, he is clear that the Christian preacher does not preach himself but declares the gospel as the word of God. With them also, Niles sees the message preached and the actual act of proclamation as belonging together in one great divine activity, and, according to at least one eyewitness who heard him preach, Killinger at Princeton (Killinger, 1996:173-174), Niles left his hearers under the impression that in authentic preaching they were in the presence of God.

Our survey of Niles’ trilogy of preaching gave us his views on the calling to preach, the content of preaching, the character and nature of preaching, the purpose of preaching, the consequences of preaching, the authority for preaching and the way in which God is active in the act of human preaching. It was clear that in the first of his trilogy, Niles focussed especially on the content of preaching, while in the second he elucidated especially the purpose of preaching and in the third the calling of the preacher and the consequences of preaching. We found that Niles placed much stress on the calling of the preacher to his preaching task. Although Niles does not use the ecclesiological language of ‘inward calling’ and ‘outward calling’ to frame his ideas of the preacher’s calling to preach, he does implicitly acknowledge the place of ‘calling’. In fact, he goes further by insisting that the preacher’s calling to preach is a meeting with the risen Christ. Using the Hebrew prophets and their example, Niles argues that this call is personal. For Niles, the preacher’s calling is therefore three-fold; it is first a calling to be a Christian, then to be a servant and finally to be a preacher.

Niles is also emphatic that the content of true preaching is the work that God has accomplished in Jesus Christ for a sinful humanity. For him, this message of the gospel is what distinguishes Christian preaching from all other religious teaching. With respect to the character and nature of Christian preaching, Niles uses the language of ‘the previousness of God’ and ‘the contemporariness of Jesus’. Niles sees preaching as an activity within God’s
activity. Our examination of his trilogy has revealed that Niles saw a three-fold purpose in preaching; it is for the salvation of human beings, the upbuilding of the Church and the nourishment of the preacher himself. With respect to the authority of Christian preaching, Niles establishes this on the three-fold history of the Hebrew prophets, the apostles of the New Testament and Jesus Christ himself. Niles places emphasis on the Great Commission and the witness of the Church to the ongoing ministry of the risen Christ. It is in this way that he connects preaching with his ideas of the ‘previousness of God’ and the ‘contemporariness of Jesus Christ’.

When we sought to explore in greater detail as to how, according to Niles, God is involved in the activity of preaching, we saw that Niles outlined his view as the fourfold activity of God in the human act of preaching. First, God is present in preaching in His activity of salvation; the actual living process of humankind finding faith in Jesus is the work of the Holy Spirit. Secondly, God is present in His activity of revelation. God’s intention here is not only to save but also to raise a people who would be the messengers of His salvation as the Jews were in the Old Testament. Thirdly, God is present in preaching in His activity of mission. This means that the new birth makes a person a witness to the gospel. Fourthly, God is present in preaching in his activity of fulfillment. The world at present is in the process of fulfillment. When God is active in the act of human preaching, God will bring all things under the headship of Christ, the Church will grow to its full maturity in love and the Holy Spirit cause the witness of the Church to Christ to fructify.

In Chapters Two and Three of this thesis, we were directly engaged in Osmer’s interpretative task. Here we presented Reformation perspectives on preaching and the Second Helvetic Confession’s statement on preaching in comparison and in dialogue with non-Western ideas on the essence of preaching especially in D T Niles. Thus we attempted to interpret Niles’ theory of preaching in the context of his own Non-Western background and the bibliographical sources from the Magisterial Protestant Reformation regarding the essence of preaching especially as it is expressed in the Second Helvetic Confession. Our investigation of the Reformation age revealed that there were slightly different emphases
on preaching among the magisterial Reformers because of their different circumstances. Zwingli, Luther and Calvin especially were aware that many of their contemporaries devalued preaching, thinking that they could hear the voice of God from their own private study, devotion and meditation at the expense of the public assembly of the Church; but the Reformers disagreed with their detractors. The Reformers saw preaching as “necessary” and “highly approved”, a ministry given in order that the Church of Christ might be educated and built up. They concluded that in every age the prophets and godly teachers have had a difficult struggle with the ungodly, who in their stubbornness can never submit to the yoke of being taught by human word and ministry. But we noted with interest that despite these pressures, the Reformers refused to elevate preaching to equality with Scripture. For them, Scripture is definitive and sovereign; preaching must be derivative and subordinate. Whilst Scripture does not have to conform to preaching, the latter must conform to the former. It is the humble position of preaching as derivative and subordinate that is precisely its glory. Thus for the Reformers, preaching borrows its status as the ‘word of God’ from Scripture. It is the word of God inasmuch as it delivers the Biblical message, which is God’s message or word. God’s word meant ‘God’s spoken word’ – not simply in its first giving but in its every repetition. It does not somehow become weakened by repetition so as to become less and less God’s word. But it is the duty of the hearers to always ask themselves whether it is God who has spoken or not. If the teaching is faithful to Scripture, then it is God who is speaking, and for that reason His teaching remains His teaching irrespective of the purveyor of the teaching. These Reformation thoughts on preaching were best summarised by the next generation of Reformers especially in the words of Heinrich Bullinger in his Second Helvetic Confession that the preaching of the word of God by a Minister lawfully called is the word of God.

Thus we saw that the many common strands between Niles’ theology of preaching and that of the magisterial Reformers augured well for a global, ecumenical theology of preaching. It seemed that the objective emphases of the Reformers – concerning the preacher’s calling, the content of preaching being the gospel and the work of the Holy Spirit in true preaching – could be supplemented and enriched by Niles’ own grand insights and his Eastern accent on subjectivity and spirituality as it is rooted in experience.
Continuing this interpretative task, we then explored Bullinger’s theology of preaching by examining his famous words on preaching in the Second Helvetic Confession and probing this further in his Decades. Our study indicated that for Bullinger, the preaching of the word of God was indeed to be viewed as the word of God. We noted Dowey’s assertion that it was the word of God from an instrumental perspective rather than normative. Like the Reformers, for Bullinger, the Holy Scripture is alone the word of God in the normative sense. But preaching is the word of God in the instrumental sense in that preaching is only the word of God so long as its content is faithful to and consistent with the message of the Holy Scriptures, and it is proclaimed by the one who is lawfully called to the preaching office. But we saw that when Bullinger’s teaching on the Lord’s Supper is combined with his teaching on preaching, it is possible to understand his theology of preaching as sacramental; here we mean sacramental in the kerygmatic and not the eucharistic sense. As the sacraments gain their legitimacy in that they are ordained by God and contain the words of Christ, even so, for Bullinger, preaching obtains its legitimacy because it is ordained by God and instituted by Christ Himself. Bullinger shows this by tracing the history of preaching from the Garden to Eden and through the patriarchs until Christ and then to the pastors and evangelists who were committed to the New Testament Church. We also saw that, for Bullinger, the content of preaching is to be Christological and soteriological if it is to be deemed the word of God - such content demands the attention of its hearers and if they listen and receive the words of preaching in faith, then the Holy Spirit efficaciously applies the word of God to them individually.

We saw that Bullinger’s possible sacramental approach to preaching means that although he places a high premium on the life and conduct of the church’s ministers, and emphasises the lawful calling into the ministry, he does not seem to think that a good moral condition in the preacher is necessary before the preacher’s preaching of the gospel can be the word of God. For Bullinger, a minister acts in his preaching office in God’s name, not his own; therefore Bullinger denies that any worthiness or unworthiness in the minister can add anything to or take away anything from the integrity or effectiveness of the preached word as well as the sacraments. Whilst Niles does not seem to touch directly on this specific issue, our study has indicated sufficiently that Niles and Bullinger agree at key points in their
theologies of preaching – on the preacher’s calling, the nature and character, context, content and consequences of true preaching. The dialogue has revealed that there is a nascent ecumenical theology of preaching waiting to be articulated for a global church, both Western and Non-Western churches share much in common in their understanding of preaching and they will be enriched by listening and learning from each other.

In the third place, we embarked on the normative task. In Chapter Five, we briefly exegeted Luke 4:16-39 in order to ascertain Jesus’ normative theology of preaching. We examined Jesus’ actions and words to understand, within the economy of God, the origins of preaching, what it is, how it functions, what is its nature and character, and what it is supposed to accomplish. We then subjected our analysis of Jesus’ norm with the Pauline theory of preaching as found in the New Testament. Our comparison of Niles’ theory of preaching with Jesus’ norm has shown that Niles’ views are in concert with that of Jesus in Luke 4:16-30, especially on the calling of the preacher, the character and nature of preaching, the content of preaching and the double consequences that flow from true preaching. It therefore seemed clear to us that Niles’ theory of preaching in interaction with key Protestant Reformers and Jesus’ normative preaching can form the basis of and be used in the service of a global creed for an ecumenical theology of preaching.

Our fourth task was pragmatic. Therefore in Chapter Six, we attempted to develop a homiletic theory for an ecumenical view on the relationship between the words of the preacher and the word of God. In the dialogue between Niles and Bullinger’s Second Helvetic Confession, we concluded that the preacher is one who has a double calling – the inward and outward. This led to three practical implications. First, the Church should not depart from the Biblical norm as confirmed by the Protestant creeds. The Western Church must remember that her starting point is Scripture rather than her own Aristotelian heritage of rhetorical ethos, pathos and logos. The Non-Western Indian Church may sometimes demand personal holiness in the preacher before they are willing to listen to him since experience or anubhava has a high place in Indian epistemology. As Surya Prakash indicated, independent preachers are attractive to Indian hearers because they have a story of
conversion to tell and a life to exemplify; this is not always possible within the institutional church in India (see Chapter 6, Section 6.4). But Appasamy’s alternative Christian epistemology was considered to be more suitable since for him (see Chapter 6, Section 6.4), Christian discipleship begins not with *anubhava* but with *Sruti*. Thus like Niles before him, Appasamy roots himself in the Biblical text, and this allows the Bible’s normative preaching as confirmed by the history and creeds of the Reformation Church and Niles’ own homiletical theory, to be the true starting point of theological reflection on preaching. In this way, the Church in the West and Non-Western countries should be serious about both the outward and inward calling of the preacher. Given the covenant context of Biblical worship, it should be clear that the authority of the preacher does not derive from the preacher’s personal circumstances but from his office as herald of the Most High. Thus the true preaching of the word of God is the word of God.

The second practical implication of the double calling of the preacher is that institutionalised churches everywhere must not assume that because a preacher is an officer of the Church that his sermon will be faithful and true to the Scriptures and therefore all preaching is the word of God. For Niles, Bullinger and the Reformers the outward calling is only credible so long as there is the proper exercise of Church discipline. Thirdly, our dialogue makes clear that if the preaching of the word of God is the word of God then preachers in both the Western and Non-Western Church should expect God’s voice to be heard in and through their preaching and their hearers ought to come with the expectation of hearing the voice of God. To expect less is to yield to unbelief.

When we focussed on the content of preaching, we found that true preaching has a Christological *and* soteriological content. This means that preaching is not just God-talk or mere moralism; instead it is a message of what God has done for a sinful humanity in Jesus Christ. For Niles, this message of the gospel is what distinguishes Christian preaching from all other religious teaching. Thus all Christian preaching must be rooted in Scripture and its content is centred on the person and work of Jesus Christ. When this is done, the theological aspect of the gospel will naturally and logically lead to its ethical demands.
(Keller, 2013:65). Moreover, this means that since the preaching of the word of God is the word of God, then those who preach should be careful in preparation and reverential in the delivery of the sermon.

Given Bullinger’s emphasis on God’s glory in preaching and Niles’ delineation of the three-fold purpose to preaching, preachers in the West and Non-Western countries must be in no doubt that the primary purpose of preaching is the glory of God, and God is glorified when sinners are converted, saints are edified and the preacher himself is spiritually nourished. Preaching is not primarily the time for exhibiting the preacher’s *anubhava*, or his rhetorical powers of *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos*. With respect to the divine presence in preaching, the practical consequence of the dialogue between Niles and Bullinger is that if the preaching of the word of God is the word of God and God Himself is present in the preaching of His word, then those who hear the word preached should take it as seriously as if God were speaking directly to them. Hearers should listen expectantly, soberly and obediently since in preaching there is a divine-human encounter. The preacher too needs to take his office and responsibility seriously. But since God is present in true preaching and watches over His word to fulfill it, then the triumph of His word in its work in the listeners defines success in preaching, not how hearers rate the preacher.

Finally, when we examined the double consequences of preaching as emanating from the dialogue between Niles, Bullinger and the normative example of Jesus, it was clear that when the preacher rises to preach in any church he must expect transformations and conversions. This is because the preacher, if he is truly called and faithful to his Suzerain, preaches God’s word and God Himself watches over His word to fulfill it. The preacher must assume and believe that God’s word will go to work in those who hear it as such. Yet the preacher who preaches in hope will also be ready for rejection when it comes.
7.3 Towards an Ecumenical Theology of Preaching

While the summary given above shows how the final objective of this study was reached, we now need to clarify the extent to which the central theoretical argument of the study has been confirmed. As we have observed before (see Chapter 6, Section 6.3), there is a challenge to preaching and to the authority of the Church’s historical creeds in the contemporary global Church. According to Thomas, much of Indian Christian theology is driven by the premise that “Christ is an Oriental, and he can truly be understood in terms of Hindu concepts and worshipped from the inner springs of an Eastern mind and heart” and this has caused Indian theologians “to break away from the traditional doctrinal formulations, largely of the West, and to seek the bare fact of Christ found in the New Testament and understand Him from the point of view of Christian experience” (Thomas, 1969:88). In the Western Church too, creeds are now thought to be irrelevant (Trueman, 2012:21-50). But as we have noted, creeds were produced by the Catholic Church throughout her history in order to assert the truth and maintain unity within the Body of Christ. It is for this reason that we have engaged Niles in a dialogue with Bullinger’s Second Helvetic Confession. Our aim has been to formulate a base for the development of an ecumenical theology of preaching. While aware of Niles’ own guarded views on confessionalism and denominationalism, and cognisant of the fact that the Second Helvetic Confession was written within the historical circumstances of the Sixteenth Century during a Reforming age in Europe and therefore not always uniformly applicable to contemporary global churches, especially in Non-Western countries - it seems perilous to refuse to learn from history and to expose oneself to repeat the mistakes of the past.

7.3.1 The Double Calling to Preach

Our examination of Niles and the Bullinger’s Second Helvetic Confession has shown that there is a double calling to preach, the inward and outward calling. The inward calling is spiritual and personal to the individual called. But the preacher’s calling is only complete when this inward calling is confirmed by the Church in the form of an outward calling.
According to Bullinger, this involves the election of the people, the approval of the appropriate ecclesiastical authorities and the completion of due process. Thus it is only the preacher lawfully called and truly preaching the word of God who can claim to speak the word of God. Niles also is unequivocal on the importance of calling for the preacher. But it must be conceded that Niles appears to be more direct, clear and emphatic on the inward call than he is on the outward call. For his part, Bullinger seems to speak more of the outward call than on the internal one. This tension needs to be acknowledged and explained.

Like the Reformers, Bullinger was keen to avoid the heresy of Donatism. It is possible that this has influenced his Second Helvetic Confession where the stress is in the outwards more than the inward calling. Certainly, this would have been the greater need in an age of Reform. But as we have said, the notion of the inward calling is present in Bullinger’s writings and Bullinger gives much importance to ecclesiastical discipline in the life of a minister. This shows that Bullinger emphasised both the inward and outward calling. For his part, Niles is stronger on the inward than on the outward calling. Again, the context of his lectures might not have given Niles sufficient opportunity to explore the issue of outward calling. Moreover, we are aware that this emphasis on conversion and the inward calling is especially common in Non-Western Churches. Sadhu Sundar Singh, for example, believed that the Holy Spirit is the Inspirer of Scripture and that therefore the help of the Spirit is needed for the correct interpretation of the Bible: “The language of the word of God is spiritual; only he who is born of the Spirit can rightly and completely understand it, whether he is a scholar or a child” (Heiler, 1927:199). Some may see here a conflict between Bullinger’s and Niles’ homiletical theories, that they do not agree on the substance of the inward and outward calling. This is improbable since according to our study, in their own ways, Niles and Bullinger did believe in the place of the preacher’s calling and that this call was to be both inward and outward. Therefore it seems best to understand this as a tension rather than a conflict; not as a difference in substance but a difference in emphasis and this difference in emphasis was probably due to their different historical circumstances. It therefore seems best to approach this issue of the preacher’s calling and discipline from two different (but not contradictory) perspectives - the preacher’s and the Church’s. From the
preacher’s perspective, it is clear that God demands obedience from His servants since within the covenantal norm, God is the preacher’s Suzerain and preachers are His ambassadors. Rebellion against the sovereign is a serious offence which subjects the herald to the covenant curse. The preacher then is under obligation to preach faithfully and to live his life in such a way that he is an example to the flock of God (Luther, 1990:208-209). The warnings of Jesus Christ are to be taken seriously too, that unless the righteousness of the preacher exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, they shall not see the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:20). Writing on the marks of a true Church, Bullinger clarifies that by true preaching he means the “lawful and sincere" preaching of the word of God as it is left unto us in the writings of the prophets and the apostles, which do all seem to lead us unto Christ, who in the Gospel has said, ‘My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me...” (Bullinger, 2007:872). Niles is fully in agreement with these sentiments since for him, the calling of the preacher is first a calling to be a Christian, then a servant and finally a preacher.

But the Church’s perspective comes from another direction. As mentioned, the fear of Donatism probably made Bullinger cautious about rooting the preacher’s authority on the preacher’s own personal holiness. This means that church members and adherents should receive the preached word as the word of God so long as the sermon is faithful to the Scriptures. It is not their place to discount the means of grace or the preached word simply because they do not think that the preacher’s life is marked by ‘holiness’. The authority of the means of grace lies in the authority of God and His Christ (Bullinger, 2007:883-884), and if church people fail to respect this, they are in danger of being in rebellion against their Sovereign. On the other hand, as Bullinger is at pains to make clear, the Church as a body of ministers has a duty to teach and discipline its preachers. Bullinger assumes this, and it is clear that his whole premise that the preaching of the word of God is the word of God is based on this assumption. Bullinger takes such a high view of the Church and its means of grace that he goes so far as to say that excluding oneself ordinarily from the Church is to exclude oneself from Christ Himself (Bullinger, 2007:873).

\[121\] My emphasis
### 7.3.2 The Double Content of Preaching

Our study has indicated that if preaching is truly to be the word of God, then the content of that preaching must itself be the word of God. This means that the message of the preacher must emanate from the Holy Scriptures and its faithful interpretation, and from its Christological and soteriological contents. It is no longer the consensus among churches that preaching is integral to Christian worship and the content of preaching should be based on the Bible. In the Western Church, extreme biblical criticism, fragmentation and a desire for the visual in place of the oral and written (see Chapter 6, Section 6.3) has imperilled preaching. In the Non-Western Church, there is the danger of the Biblical content of preaching being replaced by *anubhava* and *pratyaksa*. According to Thomas, Indian theologians and Christians are seeking to understand Christ “from the view of Christian experience” (Thomas, 1969:88). Chenchiah\(^{122}\) desired ‘the raw fact of Christ’ since for him, this ‘raw fact of Christ’ was independent of both the word and the Sacrament, and in some way communicable by direct intuition or *pratyaksa*. If God speaks to us today, why hear His words through a book written about twenty centuries ago? (Boyd, 1973:151). But the Indian theologian Nehemiah Goreh who was trained in the Biblical criticism of his day and had carefully examined the Gospels concluded that the canonical New Testament documents were reliable and therefore prove beyond dispute the verity of the miracles and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Goreh saw the Bible as the ‘unquestionable authority’ (Goreh, 1862:42) the divine *sruti* given by God, comparing the work of the Church Fathers to the *smriti*. Chakkarai\(^{123}\) too took this position:

> My view is the downright Indian view which, I think, is also the older Protestant view, - that the Holy Scriptures are the only authority for the determination of the Christian Faith; it is the supreme *Pramana*... Indian Christians recognise the supreme and infallible authority of the *Sruti*, though theological schools and sects may wrangle about the interpretations (Chakkara, 1943).

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\(^{122}\) Pandipeddi Chenchiah (1886–1959)  
\(^{123}\) Vengal Chakkarai (1880-1958)
Niles followed this conservative approach to the Bible and its message but sharpened the focus of Christian preaching so as to be Christocentric, on all that God has done for humankind in Jesus Christ. Bullinger enriches this perspective with his stress on the soteriological. Hwa Yung has asserted that unlike his Indian contemporaries in theology, Niles has little to say about social issues or the merits of the social gospel, but instead Niles roots himself in the Gospel and God’s activity in salvation (Yung, 2009:149-150). Whilst this may be true of Niles in comparison with Indian theologians (Thomas, 1969:88), our study has provided ample evidence that both Niles and Bullinger were clear that the theological aspect of the gospel leads to the ethical, and so preaching is an invitation to live under the imperium of Christ. Moreover, Niles’ view here is not novel; Chakkarai called the establishment of God’s righteousness in the world as sanatana dharma – so giving a new and dynamic meaning to a traditional Hindu concept.

There is however no doubt that Niles’ and Bullinger’s hermeneutical methods and their classical Christological and soteriological content of preaching face challenges in the Western and Non-Western Church alike. Chenchiah asked: Why should a Hindu understand the complicated Pauline theology to follow Jesus?” (Chenchiah, 1947). According to Boyd, Chenchiah’s use of the Bible connects him with “the ‘Eastern tradition of the Church with its interest in creation, in the doctrine of the Person of Christ, in the Trinity and in the Holy Spirit” in contrast to the “Augustinian, atonement-centred type of Biblical exegesis” of the Western Church (Boyd, 1973:150). And Chenchiah is not a lone voice. In his study of the Fourth Gospel, Appasamy stressed the faith-union with Christ rather than the atonement (Appasamy, 1926:134). Chakkarai admits that India prefers the mystical to the logical meaning of the Biblical text; Indians favour the spiritual to the historical (Chakkarai, 1938:111), although Chakkarai himself roots his theology in the Bible, in careful exegesis, and made his mysticism cross-centred even giving his exposition of Saint Paul’s teaching on justification by faith in terms of bhakti (Chakkarai, 1932:238); his atonement theories leaned towards the Christus Victor model and the kenotic framework (Chakkarai, 1944). But Niles’ friend Bishop S Kulandran was closer to Niles’ own theological position on the Christological and soteriological content of preaching when he took the Pauline-Augustinian-Luther tradition in his exposition of the Pauline teaching on grace (Kulandran, 1964).
7.3.3 The Character and Nature of Preaching

Bullinger writes of preaching as an exercise done for the glory of God. Niles further elucidates this point by clarifying that in preaching God is glorified through the conversion of sinners, the edification of the saints and their equipping for ministry, and through the spiritual upbuilding of the preacher himself.

On the nature of the divine presence, Bullinger’s theology of preaching in his Second Helvetic Confession and The Decades would seem to indicate that the preaching of the word of God was indeed the word of God since there was the kerygmatic divine presence and the application of the preached word by the Holy Spirit. Niles too was unambiguous on the presence of God in preaching. He saw the message preached and the actual act of proclamation as belonging together in one great divine activity. As mentioned, he saw the fourfold activity of God in saving, revealing, evangelising and fulfilling. While accepting the divine presence in preaching and the role of the Holy Spirit in true preaching, we acknowledge the contributions which Non-Western theologians have sought to make to penumatology. For Chakkarai, Indian Christians, whose minds have not been conditioned by Western Trinitarian theories but have had a personal experience of Christ and submitted themselves to the New Testament, have generally felt that the Holy Spirit is, in fact, simply Christ at work within them as antaryamin. Thus he concludes: Jesus Christ is the Incarnation or Avatar of God; the Holy Spirit in human experience is the Incarnation of Jesus Christ” (Chakkarai, 1932:117). For Chakkarai, the resurrection of Jesus Christ demonstrates how the love or bhakti of the incarnate Christ is suddenly transformed into the vast spiritual power or sakti of the Spirit. Appasamy took also the place of the Holy Spirit seriously when in his hermeneutics he cautioned against an over-reliance on the word at the expense of the Spirit. He wrote:
The letter kills but the Spirit quickens. It is then the Spirit of the Scriptures which we should seek with all eagerness to understand and practise, and not the letter. To follow the letter of the Scripture at any cost is to go into slavery...The Holy Spirit, with whom we may directly commune, not only interprets the ancient Scriptures but leads us to unexplored realms of thought, enabling us to deal with new problems in new ways and opening up vistas of endless beauty (Appasamy, 1926:168-169).

Thus the idea of divine presence in preaching may not be objectionable to the global church, and the nature of this pneumatological presence in preaching is certainly not alien to them. Chakkarai’s language concerning Scripture is almost similar to Barth’s presence of the Living word in the written word since his own experience centred round the Holy Scriptures primarily, and secondarily round other helps (Boyd, 1973:154).

But is it possible that Bullinger’s and Niles’ theories of preaching were the product of their own times, that they were substantially different in their views on the nature and character of preaching, and our dialogue might have over-conflated them? As Lake has summarised (Lake, 2009) and as first outlined by Rose, recent Western church history has seen at least four significant approaches to preaching over the past two hundred years. The traditional homiletical paradigm was characterised by conceptual focus and unity, order and proportion, movement and climax and its purpose is supremely didactic. Here the focus tended to be on the central idea or theme of the sermon and a correct interpretation of the Biblical text; these sermons tended to be evangelical and expository (Rose, 1994:8-11). It is probable that historians are likely to place Bullinger within this homiletical model.

The second approach was called ‘kerygmatic preaching’ and was influential in the 1960s and 1970s. Whilst acknowledging and respecting the contributions of the traditional homiletic, the kerygmatic model emphasised the primitive and essential core of the gospel, the word of God as an active presence in preaching and the sermon as an event in which God speaks a saving word (Rose, 1994:72). This view probably has its roots in Dodd’s thesis that there was one essential message underlying all of the Christian Scriptures and this was the kerygma,
centering on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ within an eschatological setting. But it also borrows from Karl Barth who held that “preaching is the word of God” (Barth, 1991:44). Thus the preacher is seen as a herald who is under obligation to mediate the presence of God (Mounce, 1960:158). However, this position is not only limited to the ‘Western’ church since according to Mitchell, African-American preaching is kerygmatic too (Mitchell, 1979:28, 114, 197, 201). It is possible to argue that Niles’ homiletical theory was the fruit of this influence, especially since Niles did come under the influence of Barth and Niles’ trilogy on preaching was delivered during the heydays of ‘kerygmatic preaching’. It is, however just as possible, even more probable, that given our knowledge of Niles his views on preaching were shaped, supremely and primarily, by his own study of the Scriptures.

From the 1980s onwards, there was the third wave of homiletical theory within the Western Church called the ‘New Homiletic’. According to Rose, this is “a large umbrella under which stand a number of homiletical scholars whose views of preaching are not reducible to a unified theory” but whose views contain certain similarities that represent extensions of the shift away from traditional and kerygmatic homiletics (Rose, 1994:120). Craddock appears to the father of this school with his emphasis on inductive preaching. The accent here was on engaging the hearers in such a way that they will think their own thought and experience their own feelings in the light of the Gospel during the sermon (Craddock, 1979:157). In this way, there was a shift from the traditional deductive, pedagogical, propositional style to a focus on the experience of the listeners; the move away from the informational and persuasive to the evocative and experiential. Preaching was now seen as “the evocation of an event” (Randolph, 1969:19), moving away from questions of meaning to the experience of the personal identity of the hearer. In this postmodern homiletical approach, the “preacher uses language to provide the means for an individual to have an experience of meaning that centers or re-centers the life of faith” (Reid, 1998:170). Within this framework, sermons may be inductive, narrative or story-like. Finally, there is the fourth, ‘Post-Liberal Homiletic’ which “views the function of preaching as an engagement of the faithful in an expression of the solidarity already present between preacher and worshippers as they seek to accomplish the tasks of defining, maintaining, and reforming corporate identity and ordering social life in the storied identity of the God revealed in scripture” (Reid, 1998:172).
According to Reid, this approach to preaching is thoroughly Postmodern since it rejects foundationalist rationality (Reid, 1998:171). Here the preacher is no longer attempting to persuade his hearers; instead the preacher is a “model, performing the Christian story before a community whose members then enact that story as their own performance”. In this way, preaching becomes a “function of Christian formation in which the preacher uses language to engage the faithful community with an understanding of the implications of their redemption in Jesus Christ” (Reid, 1998:172).

Despite the anachronism of imposing Rose’s modern categories on Bullinger’s sixteenth-century homiletical theory, our study indicates that Bullinger’s homiletical and hermeneutical theory best fits the ‘traditional homiletic’ model since Bullinger emphasised propositional truth and the didactic nature of preaching. But our study has also shown that for Bullinger and the Reformers before him, there was a sense of gravitas to preaching because of the divine presence. The Holy Spirit applied the preached word and therefore the preaching of the word of God was itself the word of God. It is impossible therefore to limit Bullinger to the traditional homiletical model since he also strikes the note of kerygmatic presence. Even though Niless emphasised that the event of preaching was concerned with cognitive propositional truth, he also had a high view of Scripture and of the nature of language. Moreover, Niles like Bullinger was desirous to preach the ethical implications of the gospel for Christians living within the imperium of Christ. It seems safe therefore to conclude that despite the historical timespan that separates them, Niles and Bullinger defy easy homiletical systematising and that as original students of Scripture, they are worthy partners in a homiletical dialogue and that such an engagement has produced for us a common base for an ecumenical theology of preaching.
7.3.4 The Double Consequences of Preaching

Our study of Niles and Bullinger’s Second Helvetic Confession especially within the normative context of Jesus’ preaching and rejection at Nazareth’s synagogue has revealed that both were clear that there are two consequences to true preaching; there is the acceptance of the preached word which leads to salvation and there is the rejection of the message, which is often accompanied by the rejection of the messenger too. Hwa Yung has recently written of the “soft universalist position of Niles” (Yung, 2009:153). This suggests that Niles saw the consequence of preaching as uniformly saving, thus denying the possibility of the rejection of the preached word. But as we have shown, Niles himself speaks of the gospel as a stone of stumbling and rock of offence. While it may be true that Niles is reticent on the state of the unconverted it still seems to be going too far to speak of him as a ‘soft universalist’ or pluralist or syncretist. Although he was willing to enter in dialogue with non-Christians and sought to see things from their vantage, Niles was clear that there “is true and essential discontinuity, the Christian message cannot be grafted upon other beliefs or added to them” (Niles, 1958:99). But the fact that he was prepared to dialogue with non-Christians, and perhaps open to recognise the presence of God or Christ or the Spirit in the lives of other faiths does not automatically make Niles a relativist (Samartha, 1990:252). Niles was a passionate evangelist and was friendly with Kraemer who had vehemently argued at the International Missionary Council at Tambaram, India in 1938, that 'the point of contact' has to do only with the relationship between the Christian and other person, but not with other religions. Kraemer made a distinction between the monistic, naturalistic religions of self-realisation and the prophetic religions of revelation. He wrote, "The prophetic religion of biblical realism could not be mingled with naturalist and monistic religion” (Kraemer, 1937:210). Kraemer was convinced that only Christianity is based primarily on revelation; he believed that God has revealed the Way, the Life and the Truth in Jesus Christ and wills that this should be known through the entire world. According to Kraemer, if humanity is ever to know what true and divinely willed religion is, this is possible only through God's revelation in Jesus Christ and through nothing else (Kraemer, 1962:79). But it must be noted that at Tambaram, Kraemer was reacting to what had already been said in the previous International Missionary Council in Jerusalem in 1928.
That Council attempted to focus on the spiritual values of other religious traditions, calling for a joint struggle of Christians and other religions against secularism. Niles was Protestant in his theology and his thinking was influenced by Barth and Brunner. For Brunner, “Jesus Christ is both the Fulfillment of all religions and the Judgement of all religions. As the Fulfiler, He is the Truth, which these religions seek in vain. There is no phenomenon in the history of religion that does not point towards Him He is also the Judgement of all religions. Viewed in this light, all religious systems appear untrue, unbeliefing and indeed godless” (Brunner, 1947:270). For Barth, “the revelation of God in Jesus Christ attested in Holy Scripture is the only guiding principle to which every theological concern is subject” (Niles, 1969:10-11). We therefore stand on solid ground when we conclude that for Bullinger and for Niles, like Jesus before them, preaching has the double consequence of salvation for some and rejection for others.

7.4 Formulating an Ecumenical Theology of Preaching

In seeking to summarise and draw the main and final conclusions to this thesis, it is clear that we have obtained an adequate understanding of Niles’ homiletical theory from our examination of his lectures on preaching and our assessment of his views on preaching from the perspective of the Reformation and the Biblical example of Jesus, thus enabling us to develop a global theological base for the dialogue between Western and non-Western homiletic theory. Further, we have investigated Bullinger’s statement on preaching as found in the Second Helvetic Confession in its textual, literary, historical and theological contexts and evaluated it in the light of the works of other key Reformation figures including Erasmus, Zwingli, Luther and Calvin. We have also examined the preaching of Jesus in the Synagogue in Nazareth and evaluated Niles’ theory of preaching against the background of the Reformation and the pattern of Jesus in Nazareth. Finally, we have developed a theology

for preaching that integrates the views of Niles and the implications of the Second Helvetic
Confession for the dialogue between Western and Non-Western homiletic theory.

The central theoretical argument of this study was that Daniel T Niles’ theory of preaching,
when found to be broadly in concert with the understanding of the Reformers and the
Biblical teaching on the nature of preaching, can be useful for a global theology of preaching
in promoting the dialogue between Western and Non-Western Christianity. Our study has
examined different aspects of Niles’ theory of preaching, compared this with the teachings
of the Reformers and Bullinger’s Second Helvetic Confession, and subjected it to the
normative standards of Jesus’ experience at Nazareth’s synagogue and the apostolic
teaching of the New Testament. We have found that Niles’ theory of preaching is broadly
and specifically in concert with the Reformers and the Scriptures, and the enriching dialogue
between Niles and Bullinger has produced a consensus between the Western and Non-
Western Church paving the way for a common base for an ecumenical theology of
preaching. A brief summary of the common base of an ecumenical homiletical theology is
that the preaching of the word of God by a preacher lawfully called is the word of God. This
means that there is the double calling of the preacher, the inward call of conversion and a
burden for the ministry and the outward call that involves the Church, its processes and
discipline. The content of such true preaching is the word of God. This implies that true
preaching begins with and is centred upon Scripture, especially on the person and work of
Jesus Christ in salvation. The character and nature of the true preaching of the word of God
is that its primary purpose is to glorify God. This may be further clarified as preaching seeks
the salvation of people, the edification and equipment of the saints for ministry and the
spiritual nourishment of the preacher himself. Since preaching is a human activity within the
divine, God is present in the preaching event. The Holy Spirit applies the preached word to
the hearts of the hearers, and God is present as the Saviour, the Revealer, the Missioner and
the Fulfiller of His own word. But given that preaching is the heralding of the message of the
Divine Sovereign, there will be those who accept this gospel and others who reject it; hence
the double consequences that transpire when the preaching of the word of God is indeed
the word of God. Our dialogue has shown that the global Church needs to return to its
Biblical roots with respect to her understanding of the true nature and function of
preaching. When the Church does so, even with her own guides such as Niles and Bullinger, the Church will discover that authentic preaching is not mere human words about themes from the Bible, but actually a pneumatological event in which God speaks his word through the word of the human preacher.

The present thesis was undertaken because of the dearth of studies on the theology of preaching done from a non-Western perspective.\textsuperscript{125} In Old’s opinion, this is because the story of the non-Western church is today a fast-moving one (Old, 2010:565). Certainly, there is no scholarly assessment of Daniel T Niles’ theory of preaching. Surya Prakash has done a study of independent preaching in India, but his study is focussed on the historical and the practical issues of preaching rather than on the theology of preaching. Furtado’s work on Niles is general in that he sought to assess Niles’ contribution to the universal church as a leader and ecumenical statesman. Hwa Yung’s short chapter on Niles was a general assessment of Niles’ contribution to Asian Christian Theology (Yung, 2009:148-153). More recently, Satyaranjan has done a homiletical critique of Niles’ preaching but again the central focus of his study was on the sermonic form of Niles’ preaching and its relevance to the contemporary Church. Moreover, in Satyaranjan’s case, he worked within the Western framework of Aristotelian rhetoric with its emphases on \textit{ethos}, \textit{pathos} and \textit{logos}. The present study has sought to close the gap in the present academic literature at five levels. First, it has focussed on Niles’ theology of preaching and not just his technique or sermonic form. Secondly, it has sought, for the first time, to examine Niles’ Non-Western contribution to the theology of preaching by closely examining his own trilogy of preaching. Although once influential throughout Asia, the name of Daniel Niles is now becoming forgotten in the East and under-estimated in the Western Church (Kay, 2007:173-174). Thirdly, the starting point of the present study has been historical and Biblical, thus distinguishing it from the rhetorical contribution of Satyaranjan. Although the present study examines Niles’ homiletical theory and that of the Reformers and the Second Helvetic Confession, it takes as normative the preaching of Jesus at Nazareth’s synagogue and it seeks to engage with the

\textsuperscript{125} Most recent work has been exclusively Korean or Korean-American, see for example Jung Young Lee, \textit{Korean Preaching: An Interpretation}, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997). The exception is Eun Chul Kim, “Preaching in the Korean Protestant Church (1884-1945): A Study in the Light of John Calvin’s Understanding of word and Sacrament”, (Princeton: Princeton Theological Seminary, 2001), unpublished PhD thesis
Biblical text in a way that Satyaranjan and Surya Prakash do not. It is true that preaching has previously been studied from a biblical perspective, but these studies have centred on Paul’s theology of preaching (Beaudean, 1988). Yet, even here, the emphasis has been to compare Paul’s teaching with the prevailing Greco-Roman rhetoric (Litfin, 1994). The present study goes further back to Jesus Himself and it takes the Biblical data seriously because it assumes that a truly ecumenical theology of preaching is only possible if it is rooted in the accepted authority of Scripture. Fourthly, this thesis has sought to cover the gap in the study of the historic Protestant creeds from a Non-Western perspective. Many, if not all, of the studies on the Second Helvetic Confession have thus far been done by Western scholars from a Western perspective. This sometimes means that these creeds fail to be as Catholic as they were intended to be; it certainly means that they remain neglected in the Non-Western Church. The partial intent of this study is to help the Non-Western Church to understand and appreciate her Protestant heritage and enable her to appropriate the collective wisdom of the Church. Fifthly, this thesis has aimed to facilitate a dialogue between the Western and Non-Western Church on the divine presence in human preaching as an aspect of the theology of preaching. This dialogue, it is hoped, will enable the Western and Non-Western Churches to reflect and learn from each other. Too often, theological reflection is done at national, continental or spherical levels; the aim here is for a genuinely ecumenical theology of preaching. This is imperative when Christianity today is a polycentric faith whose adherents are now far more numerous in the majority world than in Europe or North America.

While this study has sought to be thorough, it is not an exhaustive examination of the theology of preaching; such a task was beyond the scope of this undertaking. Our especial focus has been on one aspect of the theology of preaching, namely the fact and nature of the divine presence in the act of human preaching. But the present study highlights the need for more Non-Western contributions to the theology of preaching. It is important that such studies should be biblical and exegetical especially in South Asia since, according to Boyd, the Bhasya appears to be the most effective approach to Indian theologising (Boyd, 1973). Niles was the forerunner; we need successors to him. Our study also highlights the need to examine more closely the nature of the divine presence in authentic Christian
preaching and the role of the Holy Spirit. Here, the insights of Appasamy and other Indian theologians on pneumatology are interesting and await further study within the context of preaching as does the recent creative output of Western scholars like Robert W. Jenson (Jenson, 1993). Old has recently written an excellent history of preaching in the Christian Church, but surely it is time to have an in-depth critical history of Indian and other Non-Western theologies of preaching in order to understand the past, to engage in further ecumenical dialogue for the good of the global Church in the present, and to be inspired together for the future. When the global Church recovers preaching and the true office of preachers, she will discover an old, Biblical truth: “Paul was a herald of the gospel. He blew on the gospel trumpet and saw the citadels of evil fall” (Clowney, 1988:134).
8.0 Bibliography


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