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THE WORD OF GOD IN THE WORD OF THE CHURCH

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Preaching today is a pressing problem—or perhaps it has always been a problem, and only today are we becoming aware of the true nature of the problem. Religious sociologists, analysing the causes of the dechristianization of France, fasten the heaviest responsibility upon the inadequacy of preaching: preaching which lacked both the realism and the force of the Gospel. Their research has placed its finger on a crisis: a lack of confidence in the Word of God as an instrument for the coming of the Kingdom.[1] The faithful are deceived and bored by it; the priests seem to be afraid of it or neglect it, and the question is heard: "Why preach? Nobody listens."

But if religious sociologists have made us aware of the urgency of the crisis, theologians today are looking in a new direction for its solution. Until recently, the institution of preaching has been taken for granted. Because it has been with the Church from the beginning, it was presumed that it corresponded to a need or necessity. But the only thing that men of the past have tried to do with it was to adapt it, to rejuvenate it, to make it more interesting or at least not too boring

[1]Yves-Bernard Tremel, "Serviteurs de la Parole," *Lumière et Vie* 9 (1960), 8.

for the hearer and not too onerous for the preacher. The crisis of preaching proves that this method has been unsatisfactory.[2] That preaching could be a theological problem in itself hardly occurred to anyone, and it is to be noted that in the great theological encyclopedias, such as the *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, not a single article was dedicated to "Preaching."

Today theologians have become aware that like the Church and the Sacraments, preaching is a true and proper *mysterium*; that it is not just another form of human rhetoric; that it has a unique and irreplaceable function in the economy of salvation willed by the Father, revealed in Christ and realized in the Church through the Spirit. Certainly, psychological and pedagogical insights as well as oratorical skills are of use and value. But "the crisis of preaching is a theological crisis" which "will not be resolved as long as we do not have a clear view concerning the place of the Word of God in the divine plan."[3] "We need above all a 'theology of preaching'."[4]

In order to make preaching the force it should be in the Church's life, theological reflection must clarify the nature and essence of preaching: its structure, value, efficacy, laws, content and criterion. It must spell out the role of the preacher, the principles of adaptation, the dispositions demanded of the hearers of the Word. H. Schlier insists that the crisis of preaching has not arisen primarily from external difficulties, nor from personal or methodical deficiencies, but above all from the fact that we are no longer conscious of what actually occurs in preaching, and in the "Word" that is proclaimed in the liturgical gatherings.[5] This is due to a lack of a theology of the Word alongside of and integrated with the theology of the Church

[2]Pierre Charles, "Réflexions sur la théologie du sermon," *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 69 (1947), 581.

[3]Jérome Hamer, *La Revue Nouvelle* 29 (1959), 137-147.

[4]Paul Hitz, "Die Theologie der Predigt," *Anima* 10 (1955), 377.

[5]Heinrich Schlier, *Wort Gottes*, 2nd ed. (Wurzburg: Werkbund Verlag, 1962), 7.

and the Sacraments. It stems from the failure to give more than a notional assent to the truth that the Sacraments *and the Word* are the means God has entrusted to the Church for building up the Kingdom in Jesus Christ through the Spirit. Karl Rahner has complained: "Ah, to think that there is no theology of the Word! Why has no one, like an Ezechiel, attempted to gather together the limbs scattered upon the fields of philosophy and theology and—to speak the word of the spirit over them, in order that a living body might rise up?"[6]

Theologians have set to work on this necessary task, but in reality only a beginning has been made. Certainly, elements of a theology of preaching can be gleaned from the passing remarks and references made by the great mediaeval theologians.[7] But they must be "gleaned" and they call for complementation and development. This article is meant to be an introduction to contemporary theological reflection concerning the Word of God in the Church.

WHAT IS PREACHING?

Preaching is the public proclamation and communication of the Word of God by the consecrated and authorized minister of the Church for the purpose of assembling and preparing the people of God for the *parousia* of the Lord. This proclamation is not merely the communication of knowledge which can be known independently of the proclamation, nor is it merely theoretical moral instruction. Rather, it is the proclamation of the "Mystery" announced by Paul, the hidden salvific plan of God, whose execution and fulfillment occur in the very proclamation. The proclamation concerning the self-communication of God to man in Jesus Christ through the Spirit itself effects this self-communication of God. It accomplishes this in so far as the proclaimed word is the Word of God, God's dynamic Word which

[6]Karl Rahner, *Schriften zur Theologie* III (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1956), 349-350 (author's own translation).

[7]Cf. Augustine Rock, *Unless They Be Sent* (Dubuque: W.C. Brown, 1953).

effects what it announces.[8] To comprehend this, we must reflect on the meaning of "Word of God."

IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

In the Old Testament, the "Word of God" designates the act of God addressing Himself to men, the essential mode whereby God intervenes in the world. The "word" (*dabar*) for the Hebrew was not merely the spoken expression of a thought; it was a dynamic reality which contained the power of the speaker and effected his will. *Dabar* was applied to the spoken word and to the thing (action or reality) signified by the word. Its basic concept, therefore, is the word-thing, for the power of the word posits the reality that it signifies. Furthermore, because the speaker puts himself into the word, the word is an extension of his personality. The speaker reveals himself in his word and is encountered there.[9]

In the Old Testament, the spoken word, the written word, historical events, and natural phenomena are all called *dabar Jahwe*, for the same Word of God addressed men personally in historical events, in phenomena of nature, in the experience of the prophet and in the spoken and written words of the prophet. The revelatory-dynamic Word of God, therefore, came to Israel in revelation-events, which were the incarnation of God's saving Will for His people, and in revelation-words spoken by the prophets which unveil and interpret the revelation-events as the personal communication of God to the whole people. The revelation-event and the revelation-word are the two sides of the unique Word of God to men. The prophetic word is

[8]Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler, *Kleines Theologisches Wörterbuch* (Freiburg: Herder, 1961), 299; Viktor Schurr, "Predigt," in *Lexikon fur Theologie und Kirche* VIII (Freiburg: Herder, 1963), col. 714.

[9]John McKenzie, "The Word of God in the Old Testament," *Theological Studies* 21 (1960), 191, 200, 205.

based on the revelatory act of God in history, and the revelatory act of God in history culminates in the prophetic word; finally the prophetic word itself contains God's creative power which effects God's will in history. Thus the whole history of salvation, of which scripture is the witness, is the Word which God "speaks" to man.

This Word of God, precisely because it is Jahwe's Word and therefore, in the eyes of the Hebrews, a mode or extension of His being, is pregnant with an immense dynamism. For the Hebrew, the power or force of a word is the power or force of the person who speaks it. Because Jahwe's Word contains the power of Jahwe, it infallibly effects what it says and realizes the purpose for which Jahwe speaks it. "For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and returns not thither without having watered the earth and made it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my Word be that goes out of my mouth—it shall not return to me fruitless, without having done the thing that I pleased, and accomplishing the purpose for which I sent it" (Is. 55:10-11). This Word of Jahwe enters history with explosive power. It is itself living and creates life, just as it creates history and effects the realization of the Will of God that it announces.[10]

Thus the Word of God in the Old Testament is both noetic and dynamic. It reveals to man the saving will of Jahwe and it accomplishes the will of Jahwe that it reveals. "For the bible, therefore, the Word of God which is both an element of knowledge and an element of power creates on the one hand a relationship of truth, and on the other a current of energy between God and the world ... between Him who speaks and him who hears. This double aspect of the Word of God is found throughout the biblical revelation."[11]

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[10]Edward H. Schillebeeckx, "Parole et Sacrament," *Lumière et Vie* 9 (1960), 25-26 (all translations from this source are the author's own).

[11]J.-Ph. Ramseyer, "Word," in *A Companion to the Bible*, ed. Jean Jacques von Allmen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 461.

THE WORD OF GOD AS WORD OF CHRIST

The Old Testament conception of the Word of God as the dynamic reality in which the power of Jahwe is present, revealing His Person and effecting His Will, finds its perfect fulfillment in Jesus Christ, the Word of God in human form. In Him, God personally addresses man in human actions and human words. In His Person and saving actions, Jesus Christ is the revelation as reality and as event. But, as in the Old Testament, this revelation-event had to be illuminated by the spoken word in order that its full significance might be understood by all. Thus the words of Jesus, interpreting the significance of His Person and saving actions, are an essential element at the interior of the total revelation that is Christ.

Even from a human point of view, the human word is an essential element of the human spirit's incarnation and presence in the world,[12] for the human word is a mode of man's presence in the world as a person. "To come into the world is to begin to speak,"[13] and furthermore, as Ferdinand Ebner was among the first to realise,[14] the ultimate meaning of the word is the revelation of the "I" to the "Thou" in personal encounter. If then, for every man, the word is essential to the revelation of the human person, all the more will the human word be the principal means of revealing the Person of the Incarnate Word to the world. In the revelatory words of Christ, the revelation-reality of His Person will be unveiled, and the revelation-event of His saving actions will be completed. Thus, in the New Testament as well as in the Old, revelation as event and revelation as human word make up the two complementary sides of the one Word of God to man.

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[12]Schillebeeckx, "Parole et Sacrament," 29.

[13]Georges Gusdorf, *La Parole* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1953), 8 (author's own translation).

[14]Ferdinand Ebner, *Das Wort und die geistigen Realitäten* (Regensburg: Verlag Pustet, 1921), 43.

However, the spoken word of Christ must be examined more in detail. What is the nature of the spoken word of the incarnate Son; what is its power and dynamism? Here the analysis of human speech by K. Buehler can aid our understanding.[15]

Buehler distinguishes three elements in all human speech. Speech is first of all a communication of a content, a presentation of something to another in the form of a content of consciousness. Second, to speak is to address oneself to someone in order to provoke a response. It is, therefore, an interpellation, a call or appeal for a reaction in order that dialogue may develop. This invitation, like the reaction, can take many forms. It may only be an appeal for attention, or it could be a command calling for obedience, or a promise calling for trust; finally, and most important for our investigation, it could be witness or testimony calling for faith—the invitation to believe. Third, speech is the revelation of the person who speaks, the unveiling of his interior attitudes, the opening of his personal mystery.

The word of Jesus contains these elements in the highest degree. His word is the revelation of the mystery of His Person in the form of testimony, as an invitation to believe in Him. But this word calling for faith is not a merely human invitation to human faith, and therefore limited in its influence and efficacy. This invitation to believe is the incarnation of a divine invitation, which can penetrate to the very heart of our freedom and open it to His divine action. Christ's human word of witness to the Father can cause the response of faith because it is filled with the dynamism of the divine action and power. Saint Thomas calls this divine invitation the very essence of the light of faith—an interior impulse of God who invites by a strong attraction.[16] This is communicated to man in and through the human word of Christ, which is the incarnation of the grace inviting to faith. The word of Christ, therefore, was not merely the external proposition of the object of faith.

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[15]Karl Bühler, *Sprachtheorie* (Jena: G. Fischer, 1934), 28-33.

[16]*Summa Theologica*, IIa-IIae, Q. 2, a. 9, ad 3.

The human word of Christ was impregnated with the divine force and dynamism; it was the efficacious action and power of God manifesting itself in human form. Thus the word of Christ was a noetic *and dynamic* reality, the union of an exterior word and a divine impulse—the active presence of God in the human word. In 1 Jn. 2:18-28, the word of Christ, interiorly illuminated by the Holy Spirit, is the oil of anointing that the Christians have received in faith.[17] This is the "Word filled with power"[18] that has caused faith in the Christians, and which remains in them. Thus, Schillebeeckx is justified in concluding: "The invitation to faith as an interior aspect of the word of Christ is the inviting force of a divine grace in a human manifestation. In this sense, the word of Christ has as much sacramental value as his saving actions. The word is no less an act of salvation than the bodily contact that cured the sick. In the two cases, there was question of an efficacious act of God manifesting itself humanly."[19]

THE WORD OF GOD AS THE WORD OF THE CHURCH

This dynamic reality, the Word of God in the word of Christ, continued to resound in the world in the word of the apostles. Paul confidently informs the Corinthians that "God exhorts through us" (2 Cor. 5:20) and that "Christ speaks in me" (2 Cor. 13:3). Acts 4:29f. states that the apostles "spoke the Word of God with confidence." Paul congratulates the Thessalonians for having welcomed his preaching of the good news concerning Christ, "not as the word of men, but as it truly is, the Word of God" (1 Thess. 2:13). Schlier insists that these texts do not merely mean that God is the "cause" of the word, but

[17]I. de la Potterie, "L'onction du chrétien par la foi," *Biblica* 40 (1959), 30-47.

[18]Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* II (London: SCM Press, 1958), 59.

[19]Schillebeeckx, "Parole et Sacrament," 32.

that God is the one who speaks the word, the one whose word this word is.[20] In 1 Thess. 2:13, quoted above, just as the "word of men" means the word that men speak, so "word of God" means the word that God speaks. Schlier finds a confirmation of this in Rom. 10:14, where Paul says: "How are they to believe Him, whom they have not heard?" God Himself is heard in the preaching of the Gospel.

Similarly, when Paul speaks of the "word of the Lord" or the "word of Christ" (1 Thess. 1:8; 2 Thess. 3:1; Col. 3:16, etc.) the phrase means primarily the word which the Lord, or Christ, speaks. This is proven from Paul's explanation in Rom. 15:18: "I do not make bold to mention anything but what Christ has wrought through me to bring about the obedience of the Gentiles, by word and deed, with mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Holy Spirit." This is perhaps expressed even more clearly in 2 Cor. 13:3 where Paul speaks of "Christ who speaks in me, who is not weak in your regard, but right among you exhibits His power."

Paul's manner of speaking forces us to conclude that the Word of God and the word of the apostle, the word of the apostle and the Word of Christ coincide and mutually compenetrate in such a way that where the word of the apostle is heard, there is heard, at the same time, the Word of God or Christ. God and Christ speak in a human word, with it and under it, and man—the apostle—speaks the Word of God and the Word of Christ. The word of the apostle is the Word of God and the Word of Christ in the mouth of man.[21]

Both Paul and the Acts of the Apostles find the foundation for this incredible identification of the divine and human word in the mission which the risen Christ gave to the Twelve and Paul to be the witnesses of His resurrection, and in the communication of power and the Spirit for the fulfillment of this "service of the Word." Because they have been sent by Christ as "ministers of the Word" (Lk. 1:2; Acts 1:8, 6:2),

[20]Schlier, *Wort Gottes*, 10.

[21]Schlier, *Wort Gottes*, 13-14, 21.

and because they have received the power of the Spirit (Acts 1:8, 2:1f.), the apostles proclaim the Word "on behalf of Christ" and "acting as His ambassadors" (2 Cor. 5:20), not as though merely substituting for Christ who is absent, but with Christ present speaking in and through them (2 Cor. 5:20, 13:3). Christ is in them through His Spirit, for the Spirit is the revealing power of Christ Himself, the concrete vivifying and illuminating power of God revealing Himself in Christ. It is this Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, in whom God the Father reveals Himself in Jesus Christ, who empowers the human word of the apostle to be the Word of God and the Word of Christ.[22] "For I do not make bold to mention anything but what Christ has wrought through me ... in word and work ... *in the power of the Spirit*" (Rom. 15:18).

Because God in Christ through the Spirit speaks in the word of the apostle, the preached Word manifests itself as a living force and power. Through the preaching of the Good News, God calls for and causes the obedience of faith. In Eph. 1:13, Paul calls the preached Word "the Good News of your salvation," in view of the effect that it produces in the hearers. Schlier insists that these words do not mean the Good News which announces your salvation, as in Acts 13:26. Rather, they mean that it is the Gospel which has saved you, for as Paul explicitly stated in Rom. 1:16, "the preached Good News is a power of God for the salvation of those who believe."[23] Thus the Word of God in the word of the apostle is a dynamic reality which demands and causes faith, and by causing faith contains and gives peace (Eph. 6:15), works rebirth and gives a new life (1 Cor. 4:15).[24]

Here the question must be asked whether this dynamic presence of the Word of God in the word of the church ceased with the passing

[22]Schlier, *Wort Gottes*, 22-23.

[23]Heinrich Schlier, *Der Brief an die Epheser*, 2nd ed. (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1958), 69 (author's own translation).

[24]Gerhard Friedrich, "Euaggelizomai," in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* II, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1935), 717-718.

of the primitive church of the apostles. From a series of direct and indirect testimonies in the New Testament, the answer must be that the dynamic presence of the Word of God in the word of man continues to exist in the preaching of the church today.[25] Thus the word of the church, which is the personal Word of God in Christ *in forma ecclesiae*, in its ecclesial expression, also possesses an intrinsic efficacy. Like the Word of Christ, it is an external word that contains and incarnates the efficacious power of God. The analogy with the sacraments is clear. The revelation of God as revelation-reality and revelation-word remains present with men in the Church, the Sacrament of Christ. The revelation-reality is Christ, the self-communication of God to men, present to men in the sacraments. The revelation-word as the Word of Christ remains present to men in the word of the church—the ministry of the word. The sacraments of the church and the word of the church are a unity prolonging the total revelation of God to the world in Christ, and efficaciously causing that which they proclaim: the self-communication of God to men. The word of the church, therefore, is the ecclesial form of the Word of the God-man, and this is why the ministry of the word is intrinsically efficacious. Grace is not given merely on the occasion of the proclamation of the word, but by this proclamation itself.

EFFICACY OF THE WORD OF THE CHURCH

But how are we to describe this efficacy of the Word of God in the church, and what is its relation to the efficacy of the sacraments? On this subject Catholic theologians are by no means in agreement, for they are faced with a real difficulty. On the one hand, scripture appears to attribute to the Word of God proclaimed by man an efficacious power for salvation. On the other hand, the teaching authority of the church seems to attach the communication of divine grace and justification exclusively to the sacraments. The Council of Trent

[25]Schlier, *Wort Gottes*, 49ff.

taught that "through the sacraments all true justice either begins, or once begun, is increased, or when lost, is restored."[26] This difficulty cannot be overcome by making preaching an eighth sacrament, for even though preaching is a visible action which symbolizes an invisible action of God, even though it was established by Christ for the life of the church (Mt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 5:19), and even though scripture attributes to it an efficacious action, still Trent has formally decreed that there are no more and no less than seven sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance, Anointing of the Sick, Orders and Matrimony.[27]

Some, fearful of making preaching equivalent to an eighth sacrament, and following Bonaventure and Thomas, hold that preaching is merely an occasion and not a cause of grace and salvation. Certainly the positive contribution of this point of view must be maintained. The proclamation of the content of the Good News does exercise a moral influence on the spirit and will of man disposing and preparing him for God's communication of Himself in holiness and justification. But does this exhaust the meaning of the statements of the New Testament concerning the Word of God in the church? If it is true, as Schelkle and Schlier maintain,[28] that the expressions "Word of Life," "Word of grace," "Word of reconciliation," and "Word of salvation" do not only mean that the proclaimed word is a word *about* life, grace, reconciliation and salvation, but that the proclamation of the word communicates life, grace, reconciliation and salvation, this explanation does not do justice to the New Testament data. "The proclamation of the Word, which occurs 'in the Name', i.e., by the command and authority of Christ ... is the 'Logos of the Kyrios', the Word which the Lord transfigured by

[26]Heinrich Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum* (Barcinone: Herder, 1963) 843a (author's own translation).

[27]Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, 844.

[28]Karl Hermann Schelkle, "Das Wort in der Kirche," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 133 (1953), 282; Schlier, *Wort Gottes*, 41ff.

the Spirit himself speaks (Acts 8:25, 12:24, cf. 19:20). Yes, it is Christ Himself who appears and works in the Kerygma, as it were in word and in person (Acts 10:36-38, 20:32). Therefore it is truly God's Word (1 Thess. 2:13) and for those who believe and are saved, God's power (1 Cor. 1:18; Rom. 1:16)."[29]

Others suggest the compromise of calling preaching a sacramental, in order to show that preaching is not a sacrament, but like a sacrament. But as Davis has pointed out,[30] sacramentals are instituted by the church while preaching was instituted by Christ; sacramentals can be changed or abolished by the church while preaching remains an essential element in the economy of salvation and in the structure of the church; sacramentals derive their efficacy from the prayer of the church while the efficacy of preaching is due to the objective power of the word when mediated by a divinely appointed minister.

Haensli[31] would distinguish preaching from the sacraments by saying that the sacraments confer sanctifying grace, while preaching is the cause of actual graces which enlighten, stimulate to good, and help to carry out good resolutions. But, as we shall see, this classification is too broad if it means that preaching causes actual graces of all kinds, and too narrow if it is true that as a result of preaching it can happen that a person is justified without, and previous to, the reception of a sacrament.[32]

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[29]Viktor Warnach, "Wort und Sakrament im Aufbau der christlichen Existenz," in *Liturgie und Monchtum, Laacher Hefte* 20 (Freiburg: Maria Laach, 1957), 74 (author's own translation).

[30]Charles Davis, "The Theology of Preaching," in *The Study of Theology* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1962), 64-65.

[31]Ernst Haensli, "Verkundigung Heute aus lebendigen theologischen Einsichten," in *Fragen der Theologie Heute*, eds. Johannes Feiner, Josef Trütsch and Franz Böckle (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1957), 480.

[32]Karl Rahner, "Wort und Eucharistie," in Karl Rahner, *Schriften zur Theologie* IV (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1960), 333-334.

Haensli and others suggest a second distinguishing mark. The sacraments cause grace *ex opere operato*, i.e., the objective rite causes the union with Christ in grace independently of the understanding of the rite by the person who receives it. On the contrary, the causality of the preached word is dependent upon the hearer's understanding of the word in a meaningful and vital fashion; it therefore works *ex opere operantis*. Certainly this distinction contains an element of truth, but it does not seem adequate to distinguish the causality of the Word and the sacraments. First, as Rahner notes,[33] the phrase *ex opere operato* is not particularly illuminating. Second, since neither the merits of the preacher nor the merits of the hearer give preaching its divine power, we would be justified in attributing a certain *ex opere operato* efficacy even to preaching. Third, according to the Council of Trent, the *ex opere operato* efficacy of the sacraments is also conditioned by the preparation and cooperation of the recipients.

Consequently, Schmaus[34] is content to say merely that preaching is a communication of salvation, a mediation of the powers of grace, which partakes of the efficacy of the sacraments, but which may not be equated with the saving power of the sacraments, and which works in a different way than the sacraments. The latter work on the basis of the placing of a sign. In the sacramental sign, Christ is present and acting in a hidden manner, so that the union between human action and divine action is extraordinarily close. In preaching, Christ works through the word, but not in such a close union of the word of the church and Christ as there is in the sacrament. Schmaus feels that we are not able to describe the efficacy of the Spirit in the word precisely, but that the two extremes must be avoided: on the one hand to see in the word of the church an empty word, or a word with a merely natural, emotional power; on the other hand to understand the salvific efficacy of the church's proclamation of the word as a sacramental process. The union between Christ and the word of the church is more loose than

[33]Rahner, "Wort und Eucharistie," 334.

[34]Michael Schmaus, *Katholische Dogmatik* III (Munich: Hueber, 1958), 786f., 797.

in the sacraments, yet the word of the church is not an empty word which God uses merely as an occasion of giving grace. A heavenly force coming from God is active in the preached word. The natural word and its power is the instrument and container of a divine power. In the words of Söhngen, "preaching is witness that makes present that to which it witnesses. Christian preaching is ... witness of the Christ who ... bears witness to himself through his word."[35]

One may question whether this explanation advances our understanding of the data of scripture, but at least it remains faithful to that data. However, the distinction between sacraments and preaching as Christ working in a sign and Christ working through a word is neither adequate nor unequivocal, for despite the difference between word and sign, this difference is not so great that one could not understand the sign as a word and the word as a sign. But even more decisive is the fact that both sacraments and preaching actually contain both word and sign. Finally, Semmelroth has very convincingly explained preaching as the salvific sign which symbolizes the preaching of God Himself, the incarnation of His Son as the Word of God to man.[36]

Schillebeeckx has attempted to explain the problem of the efficacy of the word of the church in a more precise manner.[37] He begins with the objection of some that if we ascribe an internal efficacy to the preaching of the word, we place it on the same footing as the efficacy of the sacraments. Would not the preaching of the church then became an eighth sacrament, contrary to the teaching of the Council of Trent? Many theologians stumble over this objection and for this reason minimize the power of the ministry of the word. Schillebeeckx discovers the source of their error in a misunderstanding

[35]Gottlieb Sohngen, *Symbol und Wirklichkeit im Kultmysterium* (Bonn: P. Hanstein, 1937), 23 (author's own translation); quoted by Schmaus, *Katholische Dogmatik* III, 795.

[36]Otto Semmelroth, *Wirkendes Wort* (Frankfurt am Main: Knecht, 1962), 123, 223ff.

[37]Schillebeeckx, "Parole et Sacrament," 34ff.

of the sacramental structure of the *entire* church, which is, in its totality, grace become visible, because it is the prolongation of the presence of Christ on earth, and therefore the continued presence of God's self-communication in Christ. The church, therefore, in its entire structure is a great sacrament composed of numerous circles of sacramentality of varying intensity and concentration, all radiating from a center where the sacramentality is concentrated in its most intense form. This center is the Eucharist, the focus of the real and active presence of Christ among us. Around this center there is a first circle of radiation: the six sacraments. Outside this circle, the sacramentality of the church diffuses itself in all the activities of the church and of Christian life: preaching, teaching, working, praying, loving the brethren, consoling, exhorting, all forms of living the life of grace. In all these ways, grace becomes visible as an active force attracting men. This same sacramentality of the church radiates even further, but with less power, first in the sacramentals, then further in the reality of the human material and historical world, since nothing in this world escapes the influence and action of Christ the Lord and the incarnation.

In this entire system of circles in which the radiating sacramentality of the church diffuses itself, visible earthly realities are used by the living Lord with a great variety of concentration and efficacy to mediate the grace of God to men. This means that the grace of Christ does not only reach us and affect us interiorly. Grace comes to us visibly in all sorts of incarnations. This is a consequence of the Incarnation. Through the Incarnation of the Son of God, the entire world of man has been drawn into the encounter between God and man. The created world itself can now become a vehicle for the self-communication of God, a visible incarnation of an invisible grace. Among all the possible forms of this sensible manifestation of the Lord in and through the entire created world, the sacraments of the church and the Word of the church are the points of most brilliant light and of greatest efficacy.

Now the "Word" is the church itself in one of its essential activities—the communication of the Word of Christ. It is an essential form of the sacramental structure of the church. The Word, as well

as the sacrament, is a personal action of the living Lord present in the church. The peculiar efficacy of these two actions of Christ will be determined by the peculiar nature of the word and the peculiar nature of the sacraments, just as the mode of Christ's presence in the word and in the sacraments will differ according to the signification proper to the word and the sacraments.

Here is where the modern phenomenology of the word, as confirmed by the study of the word in the Old Testament, can help to clearer understanding. Both of these sources bring us to understand that the word cannot be separated from the person who speaks the word. The word is never something absolute in itself. It always connotes the person who speaks it. As we saw before, the word is a mode of being of the person who expresses himself in the word.

Now the word of Christ is a word of witness or testimony, and testimony is a word calling for faith. There is question here of the presence of Christ Himself as witness to the Father, as inviting men to faith in the Father and His saving will. The peculiar efficacy, therefore, of this dynamic word of Christ which can penetrate to the heart of man's freedom will be to cause the obedience of faith. Christ will be present in His word, in an active manner, according to the mode of a word that invites to faith. This invitation is a divine invitation, therefore, which gives the power and force to freely respond to the invitation in faith.

Thus the preaching of the church possesses an internal efficacy, but an internal efficacy which is completely different from the efficacy of the ritual sacrament, because it is an efficacy after the manner of a word of witness inviting to faith. The ritual sacrament *supposes* this faith, and possesses the efficacy which causes justice and sanctification.

The intrinsic efficacy of the word of the church is the very power of the person who speaks in and through this word: the power of Christ. This power of Christ, inviting and causing us to believe, is carried and contained in the word of the church. Certainly this intrinsic efficacy of the word of the church, this *dunamis* of Christ present in the word inviting to and effecting faith, is present in the various forms of the

church's preaching with varying degrees of intensity. But that does not alter the truth of the statement that the word of the church possesses an intrinsic efficacy from Christ to cause faith.

The relationship of preaching to the sacraments, the internal bond between the word and the sacraments, should now be apparent. The obedience of faith is the presupposition for every faithful reception of the sacrament—by its nature, a sacrament of faith. Without the efficacy of the word to cause faith, there would be no real efficacy of the sacrament. Thus the ministry of the word is essentially ordered to the ministry of the sacrament. Faith is the root and beginning of the salvation which is given to us fully in the sacrament. Faith, aroused and affirmed and deepened through the ministry of the word, is the vital atmosphere for the reception of the sacraments. That is the reason why Christ has confided to one unique ministry both the word and the sacrament. That is why the very structure of the Mass includes both the word and the sacrament.

Note that the ministry of the word does not merely cause faith in unbelievers. It also vitalizes, renews, reawakens, inflames and deepens the faith of believers. The life of faith is a life of constant conversion that has never been completed fully once and for all, for faith remains the faith of a sinner, to whom the very movement of life opens up daily new perspectives, new experiences, new temptations, and inundates his interior life with new elements to be christianized, or uncovers old habitudes that have never been christianized. Christian life in faith is a continual, gradual and painful movement to incarnate in the unity of the person the Christian vision of the world and the Christian attitude toward the world in the entirety of one's life. Christian preaching is the necessary cause of this relentlessly deepening and increasingly comprehensive surrender to the only Lord in faith.[38]

[38]René Girault, "La prédication est mystère," *La Maison Dieu* 39 (1954), 11-12. Among the other theologians (Davis, Rahner, etc.) who attribute to preaching a causal efficacy for salvation, Otto Semmelroth deserves a special mention because of his original explanation of that efficacy. According to Semmelroth,

Consequently, preaching is not *primarily* intended for the communication of unknown information concerning the faith, nor for instruction concerning what is already known because repetition is *mater studiorum.* Rather, the repeated proclamation of the word places the hearer in vital contact with the living Lord, who through this

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preaching does not merely cause faith, the beginning and root of all justification, but it communicates the grace of justification itself. He explains that this does not contradict the teaching of Trent because Trent did not say that all justice comes through the sacraments *alone.* Rather, preaching *and* the sacraments, as two poles in a structure of dialogue, are the unified ecclesial source of all justice and grace.

The basis for this explanation is the bi-polar mode in which the redemption was effected. The Father spoke His Word to man in the Incarnation, and Christ responded to the Father in the obedience which terminated on the cross. Thus the redemption was not effected solely by the sacrifice of the cross (tendency in the West after Anselm), nor solely by the Incarnation (tendency of some Eastern Fathers), but by the Incarnation and the sacrifice of the Cross in the bi-polar structure of dialogue as a unified compound cause.

But the church is the sign and symbol of God's self-communication to man in Christ, making present and active that which it signifies. As such its structure imitates and symbolizes the bi-polar structure of the redemptive event: Word-Answer, Incarnation-Cross. Preaching is the efficacious symbolic re-presentation of the Incarnation as the Word of God to man. The sacraments, each in their own way, are the efficacious symbolic re-presentation of the sacrifice of the Cross. As efficacious symbolic re-presentations of the Christ-event (Incarnation-Cross) that effected redemption, the preaching of the Word and the Sacraments are a unified total reality, just as the original reality they signify is a total-reality composed of two events in the structure of dialogue.

The preaching of the Word as the re-presentation of the Incarnation communicates no grace proper to itself *alone*, just as the sacramental re-presentation of the sacrifice of Christ (in all the sacraments) does not communicate a grace different from that given in the preaching of the Word. Rather, the ecclesial source from which the grace of God and justification of the individual member of the church flows is the preaching of the Word and the sacraments as *zweieinheitliche Gesamtquelle:* as a bi-polar total source. Cf. Semmelroth, *Wirkendes Wort,* 217-240.

encounter in the proclaimed word deepens and renews the personal surrender of faith.

CONCLUSION

What has been written has been proposed as an introduction to the theology of preaching from the point of view of preaching's divine efficacy. What has been said calls for complementation and completion from the point of view of the human subject of preaching, the content of preaching, the source of the content of preaching, viz., the Bible, the hearer of preaching, etc. Though it is impossible to treat of these elements in the present article, a final point will be noted concerning the human subject of preaching and the extent to which he influences and affects the efficacy of preaching. Here there is a marked difference between preaching and the sacraments, for unlike the sacraments, the efficacy of preaching can be blunted by the personal unfitness of the preacher. The preacher must personally construct his sermon and thereby the sign, the human word which causes grace, while the sign of the sacrament, and all that is necessary for its valid bestowal, is already exactly determined for the minister of the sacrament. How far the word of the preacher effectively communicates the Word of God depends on the preacher's diligence, learning, assimilation of the Word of God in scripture, and holiness. The preacher's activity, therefore, determines whether his word mirrors the Word of God fully, imperfectly, or not at all. The interior grace communicated in preaching illuminates the word which is outwardly presented. The attraction to faith is mediated in and through the sign. A defect in this sign limits the efficacy of the grace.[39]

Yet the fact remains that the proclamation of the Word of God is a direct cause of grace, divinely established to mediate the Father's Word in Christ to men of all times, and to effect and deepen faith as man's response to that Word of God. The essential efficacy and power of

[39]Davis, "The Theology of Preaching," 62-63.

the Word of God in the word of the church comes not from human learning and eloquence, but from the action of God in Christ through the power of His Spirit. The faithfulness and insight with which the preacher conveys the Word of God conditions the clarity with which his word reflects the Word of God. But when the sign, the preacher's word, faithfully reflects God's Word, the efficacy for calling forth the response of faith comes not from the human contribution, but from the power of Christ present in and under the human words inviting to faith. "For the proclaimed Good News is God's power for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Rom. 1:16).