

## BARTH, BONHOEFFER AND LUTHER: PREACHING AS PRAYER

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In the summer of 1935, Dietrich Bonhoeffer agreed to become director of one of the five “illegal” seminaries established by the Confessing Church in Germany.<sup>331</sup> The “preacher’s seminaries” had as their primary purpose the training and formation of pastors for parish ministry. They were independent of state control and support, funded only by free will offerings and donations. The decision to become a member of the seminary community directed by Bonhoeffer in the remote region of Finkenwalde on the Baltic coast, was not easily made. In addition to having illegal status according to the laws of the Nazi state and Reich Church, Bonhoeffer’s pastoral candidates lived under constant threat of interrogation, imprisonment, and both physical and psychological punishment. Students entered the community at Finkenwalde without any guarantee of pastoral position or support, fully aware they could be removed or prevented from, serving in pastoral ministry.<sup>332</sup>

Aligning themselves with Bonhoeffer situated the seminarians within the radical wing of the Confessing Church in relation to its more moderate members, as well as identifying them as the primary opposition to the German Christian movement. Theological education at Finkenwalde was not a care-free affair; every aspect of the community’s daily life and work together was tempered by Bonhoeffer’s conviction that Christianity and Nazism were absolutely incompatible. Preaching without enemies was theologically impossible for a church constituted by confessing the truth of the gospel.<sup>333</sup>

Bonhoeffer believed the church struggle in Germany, and thus his work at Finkenwalde, was not merely for its own sake, but was being conducted vicariously for the ecumenical church. The heart of the matter was the proclamation of the gospel, which requires confessing against its external enemies. Bonhoeffer defined the nature of church communion in light of the proclamation of Christ, emphasizing the necessity of public confession and decision, not merely theological dialog or tolerance. “Believers group themselves around confessions, not around

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<sup>331</sup> On this period in Bonhoeffer’s life see Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, rev. and ed. Victoria J. Barnett (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000) 419 - 586; Ferdinand Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Martyr, Thinker, Man of Resistance 1906 - 1945* trans. Isabel Best (London and New York: T & T Clark, 2010) 177 - 209; Charles Marsh, *Strange Glory: A Life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014) 227 - 262.

Bethge’s account is significant, since he was a member of the Finkenwalde community.

<sup>332</sup> See here Victoria Barnett, *For the Soul of the Nation: Protestant Protest against Hitler* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) 47 - 134. “At the end of the early period of the Third Reich, the Confessing Church was not a unified block of resistance to Nazism, but a scattering of individuals and parishes whose common creed was a Christianity undefiled by Nazism. How they practiced their Christianity was affected not just by conflicts they had with the state but with each other. What continued to divide these Christians was an essential question of individual and institutional identity; to what, in their confession of faith, were they committing themselves and their church?” 71. This was the question continually raised by Bonhoeffer.

<sup>333</sup> Here I am indebted to Stanley Hauerwas, “No Enemy, No Christianity; Preaching Between Worlds” in Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them with Truth: Holiness Exemplified* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998) 191 - 200. “Indeed, the whole point of Christianity is to produce the right kind of enemies. We have been beguiled by our established status to forget that to be a Christian is to be made part of an army against armies ... When Caesar becomes a member of the church the enemy becomes internalized ... [We] need to have a sense of where the battle is, what the stakes are, and what the long term strategy may be. Yet this is exactly what most preaching does not do.” 196.

theologies. One must carefully guard against mistaking the one for the other here. Although theology does indeed supply the entire army with weapons that can be engaged anywhere at any time, the external battle is engaged with the confession, not with theology.”<sup>334</sup>

Bonhoeffer was concerned the timeless “legalism” of orthodoxy and theological abstraction had replaced the decision of faith and confession in concrete, contingent witness.<sup>335</sup> The preacher’s seminary at Finkenwalde was established to address the urgent need for congregations whose life was constituted by publically confessing the truth of Christ. Approximately thirty young theologians had initially come together for this purpose, “betting their entire future solely on the cause of Christ ... We depend on only one thing, in the word and the help of God, and our strongest weapon remains our daily prayer.”<sup>336</sup>

Confessing the gospel was central to the formation of young pastoral theologians. Bonhoeffer acknowledged there were moderate teachers and pastors in the Reich Church whose theology was more Christian and biblical than others. However, the words and actions of its responsible leaders had clearly proved the Reich Church no longer served Christ but was serving the Anti - Christ. Obedience to Christ as the only Lord continued to be co - ordinated with National Socialism and subordinated towards worldly masters and powers. Bonhoeffer saw the situation in German as illumined by Luther’s struggle for late medieval church to be reformed by the gospel. “Our disruption from the Reich Church would be spurious and godless indeed if ours were not the same strong faith which Martin Luther’s once was.”<sup>337</sup>

The synod of Barmen had rejected the teaching of the German Christians as false, while the synod of Dahlem had declared that, by its actions, the Reich Church government had separated itself from the Christian Church.<sup>338</sup> In both cases, confessional decisions, based on the proclamation of the gospel, acknowledged actions that had already taken place.<sup>339</sup> “There after the Confession Church accepted responsibility and commission of being the one, true church of Jesus Christ in Germany. This is a fact of church history.”<sup>340</sup> Bonhoeffer insisted the boundaries

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<sup>334</sup> *Theological Education at Finkenwalde: 1935 - 1937* eds. H. Gaylon Barker and Mark S. Brocker, trans. Douglas W. Stott Vol. 14 in Dietrich Bonhoeffer Words (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013) 657. Hereafter DBWE 14. It is interesting that the writings Bonhoeffer produced from the Finkenwalde period are his most popular. *Discipleship*, *Life Together*, and *Prayerbook of the Bible* are typically read as devotional “classics” oriented to individual spirituality. Given the conditions in Germany, these books might be better read as works of resistance. When Bonhoeffer published these books in the years immediately following the shuttering of Finkenwald, their intended audience was not only seminarians, pastors and congregations of a Confessing Church fighting for its life; it also included the wider ecumenical church for which Bonhoeffer hoped Finkenwalde would serve as a model in a time for confessing. See “Editor’s Introduction” in *Life Together, Prayerbook of the Bible*, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelly, trans. Daniel W. Bloesch and James H. Burtness, Vol. 5 in Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Works (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996) 3 - 24. The following chapter will discuss the writings produced from the Finkenwalde years.

<sup>335</sup> DBWE 14: 657.

<sup>336</sup> DBWE 14: 257.

<sup>337</sup> DBWE 14: 72 - 73.

<sup>338</sup> See Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 51 - 71.

<sup>339</sup> For a good discussion of Bonhoeffer, confessing the gospel, and the Confessing Church see Robert W. Bertram, *A Time for Confessing*, ed. Michael Hoy (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008) 65 - 95. Bertram argues that Bonhoeffer saw the fundamental matter as evangelical freedom and not the exclusive confessional orthodoxy embraced by some members of the Confessing Church and Finkenwalde community. “The church [Bonhoeffer] argued, was now having boundaries set for her, ‘drawn against her from outside,’ for instance, when seminarians were pressured by ‘outsiders’ to withdraw from the Finkenwalde community. Once that happened, must not these ‘outsiders’ self - imposed boundaries be recognized as the real boundaries they become, for those outsiders? Then the self - imposed boundaries become barriers not to membership in some human organization, but to the body of Christ, barriers to Christ himself?” 79 - 80.

<sup>340</sup> DBWE 14: 667.

of the church are not set by political legalities or theological disputes, but are the boundaries of salvation which exceed exclusive national and racial loyalties. “Whoever knowingly separates himself from the Confessing Church in Germany separates himself from salvation.”<sup>341</sup> One outcome of this confession was that proclaiming the gospel affirmed as the central mission of the whole church. From Finkenwalde Bonhoeffer continued working for ecumenical unity in confessing against the “new religion” of National Socialism, a decision for speaking concretely the “No” and “Yes” of the gospel as God’s judgment and mercy.<sup>342</sup>

Bonhoeffer confided to his longtime friend, Ervin Sutz, that, although National Socialism had brought about the end of the German church, this situation should be seen as a reason for gratitude. He viewed the church struggle as a transitional phase which would lead to a very different kind of opposition, a struggle that would mean “resisting to the point of shedding blood” by a people who would be capable of “simply suffering through in faith.” Then, perhaps, “God will acknowledge the church with his word, but until then a great deal must be believed, prayed, and suffered.”<sup>343</sup>

Bonhoeffer believed Christianity in Europe was so thoroughly westernized, permeated by “civilized” behavior and values, that it had been lost. He also confessed his doubts regarding the strength and conviction of the Confessing Church to withstand the great temptation to compromise.<sup>344</sup> The supporters of the opposition were a cause for more fear than the German Christians; many who opposed Nazi ideology were still concerned about appearing unpatriotic as citizens of Germany. “Many people ... still seem incapable of realizing or believing that we are really here purely as Christians ... Only the complete truth and complete truthfulness can help us now.”<sup>345</sup> Bonhoeffer shared how his views had changed on the matter of preparing pastors for leading the church to become a visible manifestation of Christ in the world.<sup>346</sup>

I no longer believe in the university, in fact I never really believed in it. The next generation of pastors, these days, ought to be trained entirely in church - monastic schools, where the pure doctrine, the Sermon on the Mount, and worship are taken seriously - which for all three of these things is simply not the case at the university and under present circumstances is impossible. It is also time for a final break with our theologically - grounded reserve about whatever is being done by the state - which really comes down to fear. ‘Speak out for those who cannot speak’ (Prov. 31: 8). - Who in the church today still remembers that this is the very least the Bible asks of us in such times as these? And then there is the matter of military service, etc., etc.<sup>347</sup>

The restoration of the church required training pastors within a monastic community of uncompromising discipleship. This would entail following Christ according to the Sermon on the Mount, a way of life consisting of speaking and standing publically for “peace and social justice without compromise, and for Christ himself.”<sup>348</sup>

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<sup>341</sup> DBWE 14: 676.

<sup>342</sup> See the insightful discussion by Dean G. Stroud, in “Editor’s Introduction,” *Preaching in Hitler’s Shadow: Sermons of Resistance in the Third Reich* ed. Stroud (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013) 3 - 50.

<sup>343</sup> *London, 1933- 1935* ed. Keith Clements, trans. Isabel Best, Vol. 13 in Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007) 135. Hereafter DBWE 13.

<sup>344</sup> DBWE 13: 152.

<sup>345</sup> DBWE 13: 191.

<sup>346</sup> See the discussion in Marsh, *Strange Glory*, 220 - 226.

<sup>347</sup> DBWE 13: 217.

<sup>348</sup> *Berlin: 1932 - 1933* ed. Larry I. Rasmussen trans. Isabel Best and David Higgins, Vol. 12 in Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009) 284 - 285. Hereafter DBWE 12.

Bonhoeffer's last seminar as a lecturer in the University of Berlin, during the summer semester 1933, was on the subject of Christology.<sup>349</sup> The lectures articulated a robust theological vision that would guide his work at Finkenwalde. Given the substantial background "noise" of Nazi propaganda and German Christian zeal, Bonhoeffer was heard by many as offering a strong challenge to idolatrous definitions of Christ. Bonhoeffer began by announcing the doxological nature of Christian doctrine; "orthodoxy" is not only right confession, it is prayer and praise evoked by wonder in beholding the glory of Christ.

The silence of the church is silence before the Word. In proclaiming Christ, the church falls on its knees in silence before the inexpressible ... To speak of Christ is to be silent, and to be silent about Christ is to speak. That is obedient affirmation of God's revelation, which takes place through the Word. The church's speech through silence is the right way to proclaim Christ.<sup>350</sup>

Bonhoeffer clarified the meaning of silence. "To pray is to keep silent and at the same time is to cry out, before God in both cases, in the light of God's Word." Because proclaiming Christ is an act of worship, Christology, speaking of Christ, is from and to a person who is the transcendent. "The fact that the logos became flesh, a human being, is the prerequisite, not the proof." Because Christology is the center of the church's knowledge, proclamation begins by asking "Who?" rather than "How?" The question of being, "Who are you, Jesus Christ?" calls human beings into question and reveals who they truly are in the encounter with Christ. Neither an ideal nor a super-human, Christ is the God-human person, humiliated by his suffering and death on the cross, exalted by his resurrection from the dead.<sup>351</sup>

Bonhoeffer's work with seminarians focused on mystery of Christ as confessed in the Christology lectures. He introduced students to the paradoxical nature of preaching, as an act and event which is dependent upon God who is pleased to speak the Word, the person of Christ, in the spoken word of preaching. This is eloquently stated in the Christology lectures.

His presence is present in the word of the church. His presence is, by nature, his existence as preaching ... If this were not so, the sermon would not have the exclusive status that the Reformation gives it. The sermon is the poverty and riches of our church. The sermon is the form of the present Christ to whom we are committed, whom we are to follow. If Christ is not wholly present in the sermon, the church breaks down ... Luther says, 'This is the human being to whom you should point and say; this is God!' We say, this is the human word to which you should point and say, this is God.<sup>352</sup>

Paradoxically, the human speaking of the Word requires silence. Such silence, which is a gift, is not merely the absence of words, but rather is a silence appropriate for the glory of revealed in the wonder of God's incarnation. Silence, then, is humble recognition of the Word, prayerful attentiveness that waits and listens before speaking. Right speech is therefore dependent upon right silence, and right silence is dependent upon right speech. Preaching is an act of faith in the Word, which, from beginning to end, is dependent upon the freedom and initiative of God.<sup>353</sup>

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<sup>349</sup> I am indebted to the excellent discussion of the Christology lectures in Andreas Pangritz, "Who is Jesus Christ, for us, today?" in *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer* ed. John W. de Gruchy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 134 - 153.

<sup>350</sup> DBWE 12: 300.

<sup>351</sup> DBWE 12: 301 - 302.

<sup>352</sup> DBWE 12: 317 - 318.

<sup>353</sup> DBWE 12: 366. See the discussion of Bonhoeffer's Christological orientation to reality in Philip G. Ziegler, "God, Christ, and Church in the DDR - Wolf Krotke as an Interpreter of Bonhoeffer's Theology" in *Engaging*

These Christological convictions guided Bonhoeffer's work of training preachers within a daily rhythm of silence and speech. Students' sermons were heard with respect and appropriate reverence for the Word of God without being picked apart by peers. Sermon study was practiced in groups or "circles" that prepared full sermons or sermon drafts which were read aloud and discussed in terms of both content and arrangement in faithfulness to Scripture. Those who listened would then attempt a sermon draft of their own, with Bonhoeffer concluding the exercise by presenting his prepared sermon draft. Students had ample opportunities for preaching through frequent visits with Confessing Church congregations, and in services of worship within the Finkenwalde community.<sup>354</sup> Yet a robust theological vision comprised the basis of all homiletical instruction. Preaching was not reduced to theory and application, as was the habit in university seminars, dividing theological substance and homiletical form. Preaching is a theological practice in all aspects, dimensions, and considerations.<sup>355</sup>

During the time Bonhoeffer was lecturing on Christology in Berlin, Karl Barth was conducting a seminar in homiletics, exercises in preaching, at the University of Bonn. Like Bonhoeffer, Barth was alarmed by the way "modern" forms of preaching had so easily become useful as tools, instruments, and weapons in support of the Nazi cause and "Positive Christianity." However, the turn to homiletics was an emergency move on his part, since the university faculty already included a professor of practical theology responsible for teaching homiletics. Barth, however, saw this task as essential to his work as a theologian, since preaching is a thoroughly theological matter.<sup>356</sup>

Barth's colleague in practical theology, Emil Pfennigsdorf, was widely known as a strong advocate for the "theme" preaching that conflated Christianity and Aryan identity. Blurring the distinction between faith and ideology, Pfennigsdorf was a conservative nationalist who joined Christianity with love of the Fatherland. He saw religion and politics in Germany as the work of God which would transform and unite the nation. To this end, "theme" preaching was directed to specific audiences and their particular concerns, which routinely categorized listeners and framed sermons specifically for them.<sup>357</sup> Barth viewed perceiving people in light of age, class, nationality, race, etc., as removing preaching from its ecclesial calling to speak the claims of Christ. Preaching had been subordinated to a utilitarian purpose for influencing the direction of German life and demonstrating the relevance and value of the church to the nation.<sup>358</sup>

Barth's lectures addressed the nature and purpose of preaching, as well as the criteria and content of sermons. After discussing the strengths and weaknesses of works by several Protestant homileticsians, he ventured to offer a new definition of preaching.

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*Bonhoeffer: The Impact and Influence of Bonhoeffer's Life and Thought*, ed. Matthew D. Kirkpatrick (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016) 201 - 220.

<sup>354</sup> DBWE 14: 84 - 85.

<sup>355</sup> See the illuminating summary of Bonhoeffer's integrative way of teaching as practical theology in "Editor's Afterword to the German Edition," DBWE 14: 971 - 1015. Richard Lischer describes this way of forming preachers as a theological grounded *habitus*, a quality of life uniting both theological understanding and spiritual wisdom. See Richard Lischer, *A Theology of Preaching: Dynamics of the Gospel*, rev. ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001) ix - x.

<sup>356</sup> Karl Barth, *Homiletics*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Donald E. Daniels (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991). In this section I am indebted to excellent study of Barth's homiletic in Angela Dienhart Hancock, *Karl Barth's Emergency Homiletic, 1932 - 1933: A Summon to Prophetic Witness at the Dawn of the Third Reich* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013).

<sup>357</sup> Hancock, *Barth's Emergency Homiletic*, 171 - 173.

<sup>358</sup> Hancock, *Barth's Emergency Homiletic*, 183.

1. Preaching is the Word of God which he himself speaks, daring for the purpose the exposition of a biblical text in free human words that are relevant to contemporaries by those who are called to do this in the church that is obedient to its commission.

2. Preaching is the attempt enjoyed upon the church to serve God's own Word, through one who is called hereto, by expounding a biblical text in human words and making it relevant to contemporaries in intimation of what they have to hear from God himself.<sup>359</sup>

Barth expanded on this definition by discussing nine criteria of the sermon: Revelation; Church; Confession; Ministry; Herald; Scripture; Originality; Congregation; Spirituality.<sup>360</sup>

The primary task of preaching is proclaiming the past and future revelation of God; the epiphany and parousia of Jesus Christ. Preaching, as homiletical theology, is always on the "way" from yesterday to tomorrow, from the presence of Christ in the flesh to his coming again in glory to reign. "If preaching sounds this basic eschatological note, it conforms to revelation and is in right relation to the Word of God it is to proclaim." Preaching is thus oriented to baptism, as the sign of grace, and to the Lord's Supper, as the sign of hope, and to Scripture, as the trust that is the basis of the church. Preaching thus builds up and edifies the church by carrying out its commission as a response to what has been accomplished and what is yet to come.<sup>361</sup>

Barth located authority to preach in the divine calling to ministry for God's will and work. "Preaching is always a matter of calling." Preachers are justified in this calling by God who calls and speaks; it is to God whom preachers are primarily accountable. Preaching is also joined to holiness; the action of sinners which has its law and promise in the command and blessing of God. Preaching is "heralding," comprising the relation between God and humankind as the work of simple obedience. "A human being becomes a hearer of the Word."<sup>362</sup> Proclamation, then, is provisional, the act of "one sent in advance" of the coming Lord who claims and sanctifies preaching as a "good work."<sup>363</sup>

Preaching is also an exposition of Scripture, "following after" both the substance and movement of a biblical text. A sermon is "biblical" when both form and content, how and what, are congruent with the biblical witness. The originality or freshness of preaching is the fruit of repentance and gratitude, borne of the freedom realized in the worship and presence of God. Such preaching springs from reverent attentiveness to the testimony of Scripture in personal engagement with the text. "In other words, holy scripture first has to break through to them." The sermon, however, is not the goal of preaching. The end of preaching is the creation of a people who by hearing the word come to faith in Christ as the sole basis and hope of their lives. In preaching God personally addresses listeners on the "way" between Baptism and the Lord's Supper.<sup>364</sup>

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<sup>359</sup> Barth, *Homiletics*, 44.

<sup>360</sup> Barth, *Homiletics*, 47 - 90.

<sup>361</sup> Barth, *Homiletics*, 86 - 87.

<sup>362</sup> Nicholas Lash writes, "Our ability to listen, and to speak, and hence our duty to do both things well, form part, we might say, of the 'shape,' the form or nature, that we have, as human beings, over time acquired ... To be human is to be able to speak. But to be able to speak is to be 'answerable' 'responsible' to and for each other, and to the mystery of God." Nicholas Lash, *Holiness, Speech and Silence: Reflections on the Question of God* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishers, 2004) 57, 59.

<sup>363</sup> Barth, *Homiletics*, 88. Hancock describes Barth's homiletic as practical theology. "The notes that were left behind do not reveal some kind of timeless universal homiletical blueprint we might label as 'Barthian' and then discard. Instead, they offer a glimpse at a self - consciously contextual, dialectical, theological, and temporary homiletic forged in the midst of political and personal turmoil." Hancock, *Barth's Emergency Homiletic*, 327.

<sup>364</sup> Barth, *Homiletics*, 89.

Barth believed the spirituality of the preacher is characterized by humility, “*as the prayer of those that realize that God himself must confess their human word if it is to be God’s Word.*” Preachers are incapable of this on their own, but are “caught up” by the mystery of grace which empowers the sermon as God’s gift. Barth concludes, “*Preaching, then, must become prayer.*” The preacher calls upon God to be God, acknowledging complete dependence upon God who hears and answers. Preaching is a liturgical activity from beginning to end, springing from and oriented by prayer: “*Our attitude, then, must be controlled from above; nothing from me, all things from God, no independent achievement, only dependence upon God’s grace and will.*”<sup>365</sup> [italics added]

### **Coming of Age in Dealing with Scripture**

According to student notes, Bonhoeffer’s homiletical lectures in Finkenwalde included discussion of Barth’s criteria for the sermon. There are many similarities between Barth and Bonhoeffer as homiletical theologians. Bonhoeffer, however, offered a few Lutheran qualifications, citing Luther as an advocate of preaching in accordance with the whole of Scripture which has the person of Christ as its core.<sup>366</sup> Following Luther, Bonhoeffer situated preaching within the union of Christology and ecclesiology, offering a remarkable theological vision of the “sacramental” nature of preaching.

1. The sermon derives from the incarnation of Jesus Christ and is determined by the incarnation of Jesus Christ.
2. In the incarnation, God the Son takes on human nature.
3. The word of the sermon is in fact this Christ who bears human nature.
4. Because the word by nature bears the new humanity, it is by nature always oriented to the church - community
5. The shape of the preached word is different from that of every other word.
6. The spoken word receives the promise that it will be able to take on people and to bear or sustain them.
7. Because the world was created and is maintained by the word, God can be recognized only through the word.<sup>367</sup>

Bonhoeffer’s stunning vision of preaching affirmed Christ present as the content, purpose and efficacy of the sermon. “[Christ] who walks through the church community.” As the incarnate Son of God, Christ is present in the act of proclamation, taking on human nature which has been adopted by God, “being fully flesh of the flesh Christ bore.” This is the body of Christ, united in the incarnation and established as the *communio sanctorum*. The word of the sermon is “the incarnate Lord who seeks to take up people to bear sinful human nature.” God does not coerce, teach, or improve people through Christ. Rather, as demonstrated by the cross, God speaks a word that takes on a body to create a community borne by Christ himself. The word has become

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<sup>365</sup> Barth, *Homiletics*, 89 - 90. Hancock concludes her study with the following comments. “Barth’s practical advice to his students in the summer of 1933 undermined just about everything they had learned from Professor Pfennigsdorf about how to prepare a sermon - a minority report in relation to the homiletic theory and practice on display all around them. As such it was an emergency homiletic, a return to theological basics even with regard to practical questions, at a time when theological basics were on short supply.” Hancock, *Karl Barth’s Emergency Homiletic*, 322.

<sup>366</sup> DBWE 14: 341 - 343.

<sup>367</sup> DBWE 14: 509 - 514. One of the first studies of Bonhoeffer’s as homiletical work is still available in Clyde E. Fant, *Bonhoeffer: Worldly Preaching* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1975).

incarnate, it desires to have a body, and thus inherently moves toward the church by its own initiative.<sup>368</sup>

As God's initiative and gift, the word does need to be implemented or applied, nor does it need to be shaped to fit the desires or self-interests of listeners. The preacher's calling is to follow after the free and gracious movement of the word in the scriptural witness to Christ. Preaching possesses a unique character; not as mediated truth, a word of expression, a form of communication, or the preacher's goal. The preached word needs no support or enhancement, but simply expresses itself, being what it is, rather than searching for something lying behind, above, or beyond the word. The word itself is the content; Christ himself bearing humanity; Christ addressing and challenging humanity; Christ taking up humanity; and humanity bearing Christ in the world. As the first and original word of God, "it supports and sustains the whole world and lays a foundation for a new world in the sermon." Proclamation, then, directs attention to the wonder of Christ made clear, audible, and comprehensible. Amazingly, "*In the proclaimed word, Christ steps into the congregation, which is waiting for and calling upon Christ, worshipping and celebrating Christ. In the proclaimed word, Christ takes up the congregation.*"<sup>369</sup>

Bonhoeffer shared Martin Luther's commitment to the oral, sacramental nature of the Word.<sup>370</sup> As a preacher Luther had devoted himself with single-minded purpose to breaking open the words of Scripture. He believed this was the means by which the gospel, the voice of God speaking through the risen Christ in the power of the Spirit, becomes a shout of praise in the church, penetrating the heart, mind, and soul of its listeners.<sup>371</sup> In a sermon from *The Gospel of John*, Luther articulated a profound vision of Christ present with the church assembled for prayer, praise, and proclamation.

When Christ commands His apostles to proclaim His Word and carry on His work, we hear and see Him Himself, and thus also God the Father; for they publish and proclaim no other Word than that which they heard from His lips, and they point solely to Him ... the Word is handed down to us through the agency of true bishops, pastors, and preachers, who received it from the apostles. In this way all sermons delivered in Christendom must proceed from this one Christ ... For it is all from God, who condescends to enter the

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<sup>368</sup> DBWE 14: 510 - 511.

<sup>369</sup> DBWE 14: 512 - 513. [italics added] See here the excellent essay by Bruce D. Marshall, "The Church in the Gospel" *Pro Ecclesia* Vol. 1 No. 1. "The church is reformed in this view the same way the Protestant Reformers (among others) always said it is: by the gospel. The church's ongoing communal life is always subject to correction, at every point, by the gospel, but the church, precisely as the historically particular community on the way from Pentecost to the return of Christ, is itself part of the gospel in light of which its present speech and action are subject to reform. So the reform of the church's present belief and practice will very likely take a different concrete form if the church did not belong to the gospel, if in other words, the gospel could be spoken in abstraction from the church." 39 - 40.

<sup>370</sup> DBWE 14: 488. For an older but still helpful discussion of Luther on the Bible and the Word of God see Jaroslav Pelikan, *Luther the Expositor*, Companion Volume in Luther's Works (St. Louis: Concordia Press, 1959) 48 - 70.

<sup>371</sup> On Luther as exegete and preacher see David C. Steinmetz, "Luther and Formation in Faith" in ed. John Van Engen, *Educating People of Faith: Exploring the History of Jewish and Christian Communities* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) 252-62; Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*, trans. Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart (New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell, 1992); William H. Lazareth, *Christians in Society: Luther, the Bible, and Social Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001) 31 - 57; Oberman, "Preaching and the Word in the Reformation" *Theology Today*, Vol. XVIII, No. 1 (April, 1961) 16 - 29; John W. O'Malley, S.J. "Luther the Preacher" in ed. Gerhard Dunnhaupt, *The Martin Luther Quincentennial* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1985) 3 - 16; Stephen H. Webb, *The Divine Voice: Christian Proclamation and the Theology of Sound* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004) 141 - 6.



mouth of each Christian or preacher and says: “If you want to see Me or My work, look to Christ; if you want to hear Me; hear this Word” ... there you may say without hesitation: “Today I beheld God’s Word and work. Yes, I saw and heard God Himself preaching and baptizing.” To be sure, the tongue, the voice, the hands, etc., are those of a human being; but the Word and the ministry are really the Divine Majesty Himself.<sup>372</sup>

Preaching is situated within a liturgical context of hearing, speaking, and believing in God’s presence, *coram deo*. Preachers announce the “good report” which has been heard; the glad tidings of the risen Lord who rules in the midst of a battle between God and the Devil. Preaching is thus oriented to the action of God in Christ speaking through the whole scriptural witness to continue the work of creation and salvation.<sup>373</sup> Luther was confident the power of the gospel was capable of softening even the most hardened of hearts, thus affecting the Spirit’s joy in all who “*sing, thank and praise God, and are glad forever, if only they believe firmly and remain steadfast in faith.*”<sup>374</sup> [italics added]

Luther’s theological and pastoral wisdom demonstrate how Christian practices mediate God’s Word to form the church as a people who embody the confession of the gospel. As a “sacrament of salvation,” the church is where faith is born, nourished, and lived in communion with the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit. The church is a people in whom the Spirit makes Christ present through word and sacrament, thus constituting the community as the heart of evangelical witness.<sup>375</sup>

In addition to following Barth, Bonhoeffer’s vision for training pastors at Finkenwalde entailed a significant re - thinking of Luther’s life and work.<sup>376</sup> Luther’s influence is reflected in the practical and pastoral direction of Bonhoeffer’s instruction with seminarians. The community’s worship united the hermeneutical and homiletical tasks; an intensive form of prayerful, rigorous study which sought to interpret Scripture as a spoken summons to hear,

<sup>372</sup> Martin Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of John*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan. Vol. 22 in the Works of Martin Luther (St. Louis: Concordia House, 1957) 66 - 67.

<sup>373</sup> Johannes Schwanke, “Luther on Creation” in *Harvesting Martin Luther’s Reflections on Theology, Ethics, and the Church*, ed. Timothy J. Wengert (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) 78 - 98.

<sup>374</sup> Martin Luther, “Preface to the New Testament” in *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989) 113. Oswald Bayer writes of Luther’s practice of interpretation and preaching, “In this way, one is led deeply into the Bible - into the history between God and humanity witnesses by it and in turn formed by it. It is not only the history of Israel and the church - reflected in it, but reaching far beyond it - the whole history of nature and humanity - of the fallen creation, redeemed, and sighing for fulfillment.” Oswald Bayer, “Luther as Interpreter of Holy Scripture” in *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 79 - 80.

<sup>375</sup> Ola Tjorhom, “The Church as the Place of Salvation: On the Interrelation between Justification and Ecclesiology” *Pro Ecclesia* Vol. IX, No. 3 (Summer 2000) 294 - 96.

<sup>376</sup> In a discussion of Luther’s influence on Bonhoeffer throughout his career Wolf Krotke writes, “It would be impossible to understand how Bonhoeffer thought about God’s word, Jesus Christ, and all other themes central to Protestant theology apart from Luther’s insights, whether these played a direct or indirect role.” Wolf Krotke, “Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Luther” in *Bonhoeffer’s Intellectual Formation: Theology and Philosophy in his Thought*, ed. Peter Frick (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008) 79. Krotke also comments on the importance of Luther for Bonhoeffer during the time period that included Finkenwalde. “For Bonhoeffer, keeping and actualizing the foundation of the church was identical with keeping and actualizing Luther’s genuine understanding of the word of God in law and gospel, faith, and the church and Christian action ... Because Bonhoeffer was keen to reach his own conclusions on Luther’s theology on the basis of Luther’s writings, his in the 1930’s often collided - both within and outside the Confessing Church - with what was called Lutheranism and Lutheran.” 54 -55. See also the good summary of Bonhoeffer’s theology and work at Finkenwald with reference to Luther in H. Gaylon Barker, *The Cross of Reality: Luther’s Theologia Crucis and Bonhoeffer’s Christology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013) 277 - 302.

believe, and obey the gospel of Christ himself. Like Luther, Bonhoeffer began with the presupposition that Scripture is the living Word of God, an active voice whose enlivening power must be let loose in preaching. This requires a disposition of prayerful, attentive receptivity toward God who freely speaks the word of Christ. A preacher, then, is a disciple, one who “follows after” Christ in the word of Scripture. Exegesis is both a holy calling and a concrete act of obedience to the Word which is echoed in both the sermon and life of the church.<sup>377</sup> Luther’s strong desire for and devotion to God was nurtured by study centered on the Bible which was summarized in the *Constitutions of the Augustinian Order*. “A friar is to read the Sacred Scripture avidly, listen to it devoutly, and learn it fervently.” This practice produced a much more direct and prayerful way of reading, without added layers of intellectual categories; an *orational* rather than *rational* approach.<sup>378</sup> Becoming a preaching requires becoming a student of the Holy Spirit in learning the language of Scripture as a whole, its vocabulary and grammar. This is way of life that consists of reading, praying, and speaking the reality of God’s revelation as the truth of Christ. As the creation of the Word, the church lives by hearing God’s original testimony spoken in human words.<sup>379</sup>

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<sup>377</sup> John Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 78 - 85.

<sup>378</sup> Franz Posset, *The Real Luther: A Friar at Erfurt & Wittenberg* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2011) 64 - 69; Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil* (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 169 – 174; Timothy J. Wengert, *Reading the Bible with Martin Luther* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013) 8 – 24; See the insightful discussion of a liturgical hermeneutic/homiletic in F. Russell Mittman, *Worship in the Shape of Scripture* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2001) 23 - 29.

<sup>379</sup> Oberman, *Martin Luther*, 169 - 171; see the discussion of Luther’s attention to the “grammar” of Scripture as the language of the Spirit in Charles M. Wood, *An Invitation to Theological Study* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1994) 103 - 107.