

BARTH: THE FORGOTTEN PREACHER

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Karl Barth is perhaps the most controversial theologian of the contemporary age. A mixture of deep conviction and passion in a time of relative uniformity to the erroneous sets the stage for such men to rise to recognition. To many, Karl Barth is simultaneously villain and hero. He is a man who is quoted by conservative and liberal alike, and often rejected by the same. The Barthian view of revelation captures the ire of many an inerrantist, while the modernist laments his destruction of Schleiermacher and his disciples. The conservative gives him a passing glance for his profitability in the movement from classical liberalism, while the liberal exposes his inability to escape the existentialism¹ he so often chastises. Barth is truly a man without a company. Everyone is forced to deal with him, but few desire to claim him.

Perhaps this is because the peculiarities of a man such as Barth, and the revolution against liberalism which he sparked, are too brazenly honest and humble as they defy the general practice of divergent theologies. Indeed, it requires a brave theologian to champion a man who is avoided by opposing spectrums of theological inquiry. To agree with him on certain issues is to invite being labeled a Barthian. One of the reasons Barth “has exercised so little influence among preachers is that Barth is against almost everything we have been taught. We have not been given adequate

¹ Barth is well-known for his rejection of philosophy as it pertains to the development of theology. However, his doctrine of revelation is itself tainted by existential tendencies.

theological preparation to read him. Often Barth sounds difficult when he is just being different.”² Is it possible that Barth is far too easily dismissed? A serious theologian deserves serious inquiry; and the fact that everyone investigates Barth and his nine thousand page magnum opus³ demands that he be taken seriously.

Barth is best known for his errant view of the doctrine of revelation, causing him to be dismissed outright. David Allen says, “Barth’s dichotomy is also at the heart of the distinction between evangelical and non-evangelical preaching. If the written words of Scripture are not to be considered as God’s revelatory speech, then the preaching of the Bible in an expositional manner becomes less important.”⁴ Yet there is much more to him than his thoroughly considered, though misled view of revelation.

In his heart, Barth desires more the label of “preacher” than of “theologian.” His work was a work for the church. Failure to recognize this is failure to understand Barth. His audience was the people of God who gathered. His was not a call to theological battle as much as it is a call to ecclesiological inspection.⁵ Trained as a liberal, his theology would soon unravel as he dealt with the demands of an actual

²William H. Willimon, *Conversations with Barth on Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006), 2.

³*Church Dogmatics* serves as Barth’s fullest expression of theology. Barth took 35 years to write the thirteen volumes.

⁴David L. Allen, “A Tale of Two Roads: Homiletics and Biblical Authority,” *JETS*, 43 (September 2000): 496.

⁵Of course, his early days were filled with political battle as indicated by the drafting of the Barmen Declaration, but he continued to distance himself from political battles for the sake of focusing more on the life of the church. This led to criticism for him not opposing the Holocaust as much as he should.

pastorate.⁶

Liberalism held no eschatological promise for the hurting. There was no justification for the sinner and no sanctification for the justified. There was only the hope of a better society defined by a better humanity accomplished by a better anthropology void of a true theology. Liberalism left the pastor without a message and the people without a hope. Barth's discovery lamented this reality. Upon an opportunity to return to Safenwil as a guest, Barth confessed "I can see now that I did not preach the gospel clearly enough to you during the time when I was your pastor. Since then I have often thought with some trepidation of those who were perhaps led astray or scandalized by what I said at the time, or of the dead who have passed on and did not hear, at any rate from me, what by human reckoning they ought to have heard."⁷

Regardless of the legitimate criticisms leveled against Barth, and there are many, his contributions should not be dismissed entirely. Particularly, Barth's view and practice of preaching may well prove to be profitable today. In an era of preaching that has been tainted with various aspects of Postmodernity,⁸ examining Barth's view of preaching may well aid in moving today's preacher to a solidly conservative practice of preaching. The erring theologian of revelation should not be the forgotten preacher of

⁶Webster would say, "The ten years Barth spent as a pastor were a period of intensely concentrated development, and most accounts of his work (including those from Barth himself) make much of how the realities of pastoral work, which were brought home to him during this decade, led to his abandonment of theological liberalism and his adoption of a quite different set of commitments."

⁷Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, trans. John Bowden (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1976), 64.

⁸Brian D. McLaren, *Reinventing your Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 177-96.

Scripture.

Barth and Postmodernity

Before proceeding with Barth as a preacher, it is necessary to determine whether or not Barth is actually responsible for Postmodernity within theology as has been argued.⁹ Though Ward identifies some of Barth's statements with later Postmodernity, he fails to show Barth's responsibility for the development of Postmodernity. Barth's antagonist was Modernity, against which he argued. He may have left some gaps within his argument that allowed Postmodernity to peak through, but that is quite different from him being the cause of theological Postmodernity.

An examination of one who embraces Postmodernity within theology will show that, though Barth as the dialectical theologian was not a preventative of Postmodern thought in the church, his function as a preacher indicates that he was not instrumental in its genesis. The seed of Postmodernity seldom manifested itself in the fruit of Barth as a preacher. Rather, Barth's writings as they pertain to the act of proclamation indicate that he was an ardent opponent of Postmodernity, and would not embrace Postmodern thought in the pulpit today.

Arguably, the most recognizable preacher to interact with Postmodernity is Brian McLaren. McLaren begins his argument by an examination of postmodern man and moves to how Scripture can be used to engage that which is discovered.¹⁰ Therefore, postmodern ministry becomes subservient to anthropological discoveries instead of being

⁹Graham Ward, *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 274-95.

¹⁰McLaren, *Reinventing*, 165-96.

subservient to revelation from God.

McLaren further argues for a more experiential approach to faith over and against a substantial approach.¹¹ For McLaren, the experience to be sought is not the experience of having been born again, which is normative for salvation, or even the phenomenal experiences of the Charismatic movement, but something different. The experience that should be sought for the postmodern Christian is the experience that is “honest, unforced, and unhyped.”¹² By this he means sharing more on the level of the distress that is present “in the absence of God as well as his presence, about anger as well as affections, failures as well as victories, disappointments as well as miracles.”¹³

This approach is problematic because it builds relationships based primarily on shared experiences, thereby, human relationships become the goal, experience becomes the authority, and the emotive becomes the means. Without clearly articulating the redemptive act of Christ, the subjective is void of an objective, thus the message becomes conversation about a problem with no proposition for a solution.

At the heart of McLaren’s propositions is that one cannot know for sure the objective truth of the nature, person, or character of God. Being human fundamentally is to be on a quest for truth, a quest that is never fully realized.¹⁴ Evangelism’s goal then is

¹¹Ibid., 183.

¹²Ibid., 184.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴McLaren argues, "If we can present ourselves to our postmodern neighbors not as an exclusive inner circle of 'in the know' finders but rather as seekers ourselves - people on the path, folks who don't have all the answers but who feel they are genuinely onto something - if we can do that, then the seekers around us will feel a kinship with us and many will join us on the path. They will very likely become part of our community

to recruit others to engage in this quest together; a quest that really never arrives at its destination.

The problem with this approach is that it leaves God to be an object of man's subjective seeking. Thus the problem is no longer that sin blinds humanity's eyes, but is that God hides from humanity's honest seeking. This view is errant because the effects of both sin and revelation become weak, and man's inherent goodness is the only agent strong enough to bring the journey to completion. That is to say, sin has not blinded man, but only weakened his eyesight. Further, this view is errant because God's revelation would not be adequate for the certainty of understanding apart from man's interpretive experience.

Carried to its end, McLaren leaves no other alternative than to judge the churches' effectiveness by man's response over and against their faithfulness. The means to achieving this success becomes pragmatic practices that engage man's emotion to the neglect of his intellect, which inevitably leaves the "converted" to be kept by continual engagement of the emotive. Thus God's judgment of the evangelist becomes based on man's response instead of the faithfulness to the message that is proclaimed. This leaves the church with no other alternative than to make "converts" at the expense of the Gospel. The Crucifixion then is no longer necessary, the Word is no longer static, and sin is no longer destructive. Anthropology precedes theology, experience precedes revelation, response replaces faithfulness, and the only thing that is certain is doubt.

Seeing similarities between Barth and Postmodernity has caused some to label

before they commit to our beliefs, and their conversions will often be so process-oriented that the moment of regeneration will be difficult or impossible to identify" (191).

Barth a postmodernist. This is often done because of Barth's errant view of revelation that places weakness in the revelation of Scripture instead of in the sinfulness of man. Barth's *locus operandi* of the Spirit is within the Scripture to make it the Word of God instead of within man to enable him to understand the Word of God. Yet, upon closer examination, it will be revealed that, errors notwithstanding, Barth's use of Scripture is higher than that of the postmodern preacher.

A Theological Definition of Preaching

Barth develops his theology of preaching from his theology of proclamation. Proclamation occurred in the church in two forms: the sacraments and the act of preaching. The sacraments were the visible Word proclaimed and preaching was the audible proclamation of the Word.¹⁵ His writing on preaching is extensive enough that it deserves its own treatment.

For Barth, preaching is an endeavor that is both human and divine. It is human because a preacher stained with sin stands in the pulpit. It is divine because it is commanded by God and demands the movement of God for its effect. "Preaching is an attempt undertaken with human means, which are, in all respects, inadequate. Here a man cannot rely on his own resources. But, in the eyes of God, who raises the dead and brings to life that which is not, this attempt is a 'good work' to which his promise and his blessing are attached."¹⁶

¹⁵Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* [CD], ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance, vol. 1, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, pt. 1 trans. G.T. Thomson (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), 61.

¹⁶Karl Barth, *The Preaching of the Gospel*, trans. B.E Hooke (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), 39-40.

Barth identifies four actions undertaken by the church that do not qualify as preaching.¹⁷ First, worship is not proclamation. Worship includes prayer, song, and confession. These are responses to God's movement, but are not in themselves God's word to the church. Second is social service. "Genuine Christian love with its all too human action would be shocked at the thought of giving itself out as the proclamation of the love of Christ."¹⁸ Community service may indeed be legitimate ministry, but to Barth, it is not proclamation of the gospel.

Third, the teaching of youth as preparation for them to receive proclamation is not proclamation. By this Barth means to show that the teaching activity of the church, though necessary, is not proclamation, and should not be confused. Finally, theological endeavor and systematics are not proclamation. Dogmatics is, like proclamation, "language about God to men," but it is a result of proclamation and not proclamation itself.

Having limited the activities of the church to a particular view of preaching, preaching needs definition. Preaching is language from God and to man. It is God's Word to man when it lives up to its command. In other words, when the Word of God is preached, God is preaching. Preaching does not dare to master the Word;¹⁹ it only serves the Word. Preaching, which is an impossible activity, is practiced because it has been

¹⁷Barth, *CD*, 1, pt.1: 55-56.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁹Barth is here using 'Word' in the case of 'event' developed from his three-fold view of the Word.

commanded.²⁰

Yet this proclamation has also been commissioned. That is, in obedience to the command, the preacher proclaims only that which he has been commissioned to proclaim, namely, Scripture. “Proclamation can only be considered proclamation when it is exposition of Scripture.”²¹ Anything short of the exposition of Scripture does not fit the commission that has been enjoined upon the church. Thus, to pursue the articulation of anything other than the Scripture is disobedience and subversion of the Lordship of Christ. “Preaching is not a neutral activity. It is not an action involving two equal partners. It can mean only Lordship on God’s side and obedience on ours.”²²

Barth leaves no doubt that sticking close to the text requires a significant amount of discipline.²³ The preacher will face the temptation to redefine preaching into such an activity that is understandable to humanity apart from faith. But where preaching does not begin with the revelation of God, grounded in the Word of God, utilizing the language of God, directed toward the people of God, it cannot be considered preaching and therefore is disobedience.

All things taken into consideration, Barth’s view of preaching could be summarized as being done in obedience to the command of God to preach the Scripture, which is intentional God-language to one’s fellowmen for the purpose of bringing

²⁰Barth, *CD*, 1.pt. 1: 51-59.

²¹Barth, *CD*, 1, pt. 1: 65.

²²Karl Barth, *Homiletics*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Donald E. Daniels (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1991), 50.

²³Ibid., 48.

coherence to God's act of redemption in history. Thus it involves both human and divine activity, has Scriptural boundaries within which it must remain, and is addressed on behalf of God to the people of the Church.

The Role of the Bible in Preaching

As has already been acknowledged, Barth's doctrine of Scripture is hugely problematic in relationship to revelation. However, it may be argued that in spite of his erroneous conclusions, "Barth clings to scripture, guards scripture fiercely, and will allow no dilution of scripture's divine Word."²⁴ Though Barth's confession of Scripture is only one of a witness to revelation, his utilization of Scripture in preaching seems to be much more. Indeed, the very purpose of preaching is to "explain the scriptures."²⁵

In *Homiletics*, Barth demands the preaching of the Scriptures, and this over and against the preaching of theology. Barth warns student preachers to be confident, respectful, and attentive to the Scriptures. He teaches the student to be modest in their preaching and not to "push themselves into the limelight" based on charismatic personality or their own oratory skills.²⁶ Later, Barth offers some practical steps to the student including avoiding importing anything into the text by thoroughly accepting the "lordship of the text." The exegete must not "lecture on the text, but simply say what is there."²⁷ For Barth, the only sure word for the preacher is the Scripture as given by God.

²⁴"Introduction," in Barth, *Homiletics*, 9.

²⁵Barth, *The Preaching of the Gospel*, 42.

²⁶Barth, *Homiletics*, 75-77.

²⁷Ibid., 127-28.

The danger is for the preacher to inject himself into the text, either by personality or opinion. The Scriptures must stand as given by God for the sake of preaching.

Barth affirms the importance of exegetical preaching over topical preaching when he says, “For in preaching it is always better to be too close to the text than to be too thematic or too much in keeping with the times.”²⁸ The Bible will often cause a church to make counter-cultural statements that do not fit the mold of ordinary political correctness. “By taking our stand on the Bible, we dare to do what has to be done. These writings which lie before us are prior to our testimony, and our preaching must take into account what has already been given. We can no more liberate ourselves from the Bible than a child can liberate himself from his father.”²⁹

Regardless of Barth’s failure to properly place the locus of revelation in Scripture, he maintains a dogged commitment to the use of Scripture and its inseparability from the practice of the preaching ministry within a church. In his role as preacher, Barth will go so far as to use the designations of “Scripture” and “Word” interchangeably. He exhorts the preacher to be a man who diligently studies the Scriptures with discipline over and against what the “public or congregation or his own heart desires to hear.”³⁰

The confessional errors of Barth taken into account, he tends to hold to a higher function of the Scriptures in preaching than he is often given credit for. His practice of preaching involves a strict utilization of Scripture, which causes preaching to

²⁸Ibid., 117.

²⁹Barth, *The Preaching of the Gospel*, 28.

³⁰Ibid., 59.

be confrontational, counter-cultural, and expositional. Indeed, where there is no use of Scripture, there is no preaching. To speak of God, or man, or creation, without the systematic utilization of the Scriptures is to take part in self-deception. It is self-deception because it is something other than God's Word to His people; it is man's word to God's people, which does not qualify as preaching.³¹

The Function of Preaching

Of utmost importance to Barth's view of preaching is that it demands the activity of God. To have preaching void of God's activity is nothing more than mere human speech, which is necessary, though not profitable.³² The act of preaching is what every other activity of the church moves toward, including theology itself. "The normal and central fact with which dogmatics has to do is, very simply, the Church's Sunday sermon of yesterday and to-morrow, and so it will continue to be. The Church stands or falls by this function which is enjoined upon her. She has every cause to take dogmatics seriously, as the criticism and revision of this her decisive function."³³ Thus preaching is the irreducible minimum in the life of a church. Barth will develop at least three things that the church's proclamation will accomplish.

Preaching as Critique

First, when the church preaches the Word of God, the church is critiqued to the point of demanding her own self-examination as to whether or not she remains a church

³¹Barth, *CD*, 1, pt. 2: 748.

³²Barth, *CD*, 1, pt.1:51.

³³*Ibid.*, 91.

in biblical terms. Preaching has to do with the “centre of the Church” in such a manner that “as, and while she proclaims, the Church herself generally is questioned from time to time by that critical authority, as to the truth of her existence as a Church.”³⁴ The preaching activity of the church as it is agreeable to God demands of the church her constant inspection as to the legitimacy of defining herself as a church. If she does not preach, she is not a church.

Preaching as Judgment

Secondly, the preaching of a church serves as warning of judgment to the world. As the Scriptures are openly proclaimed and as men are reconciled to God, there is a sound that goes forth to the world that says that God has spoken and demands man’s attention. Those who heed that preached Word are those who are brought into the church. But those who reject that Word are under the judgment of the refusal to hear God’s revelation. Preaching is to aim for coherence, not relevance.³⁵

Preaching as Center

Thirdly, preaching brings Christ to the center. In the act of proclamation, there is no greater service performed than that Christ is returned to the center of a church’s life. The church constantly faces the temptation to leave the clear explanation of the event of God’s grace extended from the cross and opt for something subordinate to that act. Political persuasion, psychological improvement, and cultural acceptance are constantly placing themselves before the church as worthy activities, but they remove Christ from

³⁴Ibid., 80.

³⁵Barth, *CD*, 1.pt. 2: 752.

the center. The proper preaching of Scripture keeps Christ central in the life of the church.³⁶

The Becoming of Barth

For Barth, preaching involves Biblical exposition, it is a matter of obedience, and it is the extension of salvation through God's revelation. What would Barth have to say to the act of preaching today? At least five things can be deduced.

Barth warns the church today of having a misplaced goal in the life of the individual during the act of proclaiming Scripture. Barth's view of sin is that it is so horrendous, and his view of the holiness of God so high, that he would give no place for the practice of preaching as therapeutic. This form of so-called preaching begins with man and not God. Man's greatest problem is not that he is in need of being psychologically refreshed, but that his death by sin demands an experience of being born again. Failure to summon men to repentance with a view towards bringing psychological health is an anthropological endeavor that neglects one's greatest need – salvation.

“The Church is not an institution intended to keep the world on the right path, nor is it dedicated to the service of progress. It is not an ambulance on the battlefields of life. On the other hand, it must not seek to establish an ideal community, whether of souls, hearts, or spirits.”³⁷ Preaching's main goal is not the betterment of society, the restoration of human relationships, or the psychological well-being of men. It is at all times and in all places the seeking of men who will be reconciled to God by faith. When

³⁶Ibid., 756.

³⁷Barth, *The Preaching of the Gospel*, 29.

the act of reconciliation is subverted by attempts to implement the therapeutic, there remains no justification for preaching.³⁸

A second encouragement that the church of today should receive from Barth is how she determines the success of preaching. For Barth, the standard of success was not in the realm of acceptance, but in the broader realm of effect. That is, preaching brings with it one of two results. The hearer will either fall under conviction, thus submitting to the Lordship of Christ, or he will be hardened, thus rejecting the Lordship of Christ with eyes wide open. “The only thing that counts is to make the Word of God heard. And it is not possible to know what happens at that point, because the effect produced by the Word depends on God. So we leave it in his hands, trusting in him and in what he has done.”³⁹

Barth argues that preachers should not determine their success based upon cultural acceptance, but on whether or not they have made God’s call heard through preaching.⁴⁰ To define success in terms of the acceptance of men is to remove the necessity of activity from God. This requires a determination to remain tethered to the Scripture and let God do as He will. “The insight that God is not a *Dues otiosus* (inactive God) but an active God, and that we must simply be obedient to our commission, but not engaged in an action of our own choosing, imposes upon us a demand for discipline.”⁴¹

The contemporary notion of measuring the success of preaching by the number of those who respond would be to make God a passive observer as opposed to a

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid., 37.

⁴⁰Barth, *Homiletics*, 70.

⁴¹Ibid., 48.

providential Lord. Bearing in mind that one of the results of preaching is to announce judgment, numerical success runs the risk of pursuing a standard that is other than faithfulness to the Scriptures. To place the responsibility of response into the hands of God “suggests that some of our sermonic ‘failures’ are due to God and not to us! Preaching is, for Barth, something that God does, [it is] a gift.”⁴² When the Scriptures are preached, men should not lament the failure of men to respond. Rather, they must trust the work of God to accomplish what He has promised. The preaching of the Bible and the movement of the Holy Spirit alone is able to accomplish salvation. Any ingenuity of man in the task of preaching runs the risk of subverting the sovereignty of God and cheapens the reception of grace.

One matter of preaching that disturbed Barth greatly was the overemphasis on relevance as determined by cultural acceptance. Barth maintains that preaching is a matter of simply explaining the text of Scripture, and therefore is not subject to the alterations of men for the sake of cultural acceptance. Barth begins with the presupposition that the Christian actually cares what the Bible has to say. The people of God are eschatological in their orientation to life, and therefore, it is natural for them to desire to hear the promises of God’s consummation of the ages. “If we do not understand this ultimate desire, if we do not take the people seriously at the point of their life perplexity, we need not wonder if a majority of them, without becoming enemies of the church, gradually learn to leave the church to itself and us to the kind-hearted and timid.”⁴³

⁴²Willimon, *Conversations*, 128.

⁴³Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, trans. Douglas Horton

For the preacher to fail to preach the eschatological promises of God as supreme above the challenges of an earthly life is for the preacher to misunderstand the basic anthropology of the saved. The danger is not that these will become the enemy of the church. It is that they will become lethargic toward the church, for the church does not meet their deepest longing. This longing for the Christian is not the promise of a life lived in ease, but is the promise of eternal life lived in worship. Barth argues that the Christian should be taken more seriously than to focus preaching on his temporary need.

If the church's continued pursuit of relevance functionally seeks to displace the power of God in that by "speaking to the people" the church is able to save the world, then there is a new Roman Catholicism being established in that the church has become the vehicle of salvation by her ability to bring completion to what God has begun.⁴⁴

The goal of preaching is not to make the message relevant, but is to make it apparent. It is more important for the recipient to understand the message than it is for the recipient to accept it. To say the message must be made relevant is to say that the message is irrelevant in itself; the message of salvation inherently becomes an irrelevant message. Pastors "must be marksmen who aim their guns beyond the hill of relevance."⁴⁵

This type of preaching requires courage. It is often the object of human scorn as opposed to human approval. For the later Barth, there was no place in the pulpit for the preacher who was more concerned with the applause of worldly men than with faithfulness to the text that was given by God to confront those men. To make relevance

(Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1978), 110.

⁴⁴Barth, *CD*, 1, pt. 1: 84.

⁴⁵Barth, *Homiletics*, 119.

the goal was to neglect the Word of God.

But woe to preachers who do not see first how relevant the Word of the Bible is to the people of today! Woe even more to preachers who do see the contingency and relevance of the biblical Word to the people of today but who are then fearful or unwilling to give offense and thus become deserters of the Word – the Word which seeks to seize and disturb and confront the people of today, and in this way to lead them truly to the rest of God, but which is buried by the cowardice and disobedience of the preachers, and thus prevented from doing its proper work! This is why proper application of the text demands a certain ordinary courage – the courage that simply wants to help the content of the Word to find expression in all circumstances vis-à-vis life's external relations, a courage, then, which in obedience to the text ventures an assault on the concrete situation of life, and which is spared any responsibility for the consequence of this assault that is launched in obedience to the Word of scripture. For in this case it is the Word of scripture alone that bears the responsibility.⁴⁶

Preaching is not the engaging of culture, but is the confrontation of culture for the purpose of creating “a new culture called church.”⁴⁷ To pursue a human contrived notion of relevance is to ignore the depravity of the preacher⁴⁸ and the power of the Scriptures.

A human contrivance of “relevance” is an attempt to correct the Word of God by anthropological systems of meaning and value. A sermon sounds different by design. It is God's Word to men. God-speech is different than man-speech by intention.

Fourth, Barth serves to warn against the practice of preaching through the lens of a theological system.⁴⁹ Theological systems are developed out of scriptural

⁴⁶Ibid., 115.

⁴⁷William H. Willimon, "Pastors Who Won't Be Preachers: A Polemic Against Homiletical Accommodation to the Culture of Contentment," *Journal for Preachers* (Pentecost 2006): 40.

⁴⁸It ignores the preacher's depravity because it pretends the preacher is able to add something to Scripture that is not inherently there. When the preacher remembers his own depravity, he remembers that it is quite impossible for him to improve upon Scripture. Seeking to improve upon Scripture is arrogance at its height.

⁴⁹Barth uses the term “Dogmatics.”

interpretation and therefore are not to be used for interpretation of Scripture. Calvin and Luther⁵⁰ are useful only to the degree that they have interpreted Scripture properly, and therefore can shed light on the meaning of a text. But any developed system serves inadequately as a tool for the interpretation of difficult texts. Barth argues that the preacher should simply preach the text as it has been given in its basic form and God will bear the responsibility of its going forth in effectiveness.⁵¹

Finally, Barth warns the preacher of topical preaching because it neglects Scripture at best and misuses it at worst. Barth first shows the necessity of Scripture to understand revelation, “The fact of holding closely to Scripture bears witness to the unique character – unique in time and method – of Revelation.”⁵² He also shows that the Scripture is the only legitimate means for accomplishing God’s desire through preaching, namely, the reconciliation of men. “Preaching, when it is true to what God has revealed to us, effects reconciliation; and wherever men receive this Word, there is the Church, the assembly of those who have been called by the Lord. Not general reflection on man and the cosmos, but Revelation is the only legitimate ground for preaching.”⁵³

In summary, an examination of Barth’s preaching shows that its goal is the salvation⁵⁴ of men, its demand is the confrontation of culture, its aim is understandability

⁵⁰These are Barth’s most oft quoted theologians. Yet Barth does not hesitate to critique them when he sees it is necessary.

⁵¹Barth, *CD*, 1, pt. 2: 751.

⁵²Barth, *The Preaching of the Gospel*, 27.

⁵³Ibid., 22.

⁵⁴Not simply justification, but salvation in all of its tenses.

and not relevance, its source is Scripture and not dogmatics, and its method is expositional and not topical. Though Barth's doctrine of Scripture must continue to be rejected, one should not ignore Barth altogether. For though his confession of revelation is lacking, his function of preaching is instructive. In other words, though he does not champion inerrancy, he demonstrates a dependence on Scripture's sufficiency in such a way that many who claim the inerrancy of Scripture by confession prove to have an insufficient view of Scripture by function. Barth could once again be instrumental in recovering from an anthropological center.

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