

The Spectrum Of Preaching¹

PENULIS

R.T. Johnson Raih

INSTITUSI

Langham Preaching India

E-MAIL

johnsonraih@gmail.com

HALAMAN

142-168

ABSTRACT

When the question is asked, “What is Preaching?” various responses are possible. While some may try to describe its essential contents, others may describe the various methods of sermonic construction and the various genres in preaching. However, the aim of this article is to discuss the four viewpoints of preaching and then categorise them in a spectrum. To achieve that, it engages with the philosophy, nature, theology and practice of preaching.

Keywords: Preaching, Viewpoints, Authority

¹This article is modified from the book by R.T Johnson Raih, *Expository Preaching in a World of Spiritual Nominalism* (Carlisle Cumbria: Langham Monographs, 2021). (Appendix 1) (Used by permission).

INTRODUCTION

Preaching was a vibrant topic for discussion in the past as well as in the present times. Any attempt to define preaching is an almost impossible task, because of the existence of various schools of thought, favouring different approaches and methods of preaching in different contexts.² This article discusses the viewpoints of preaching and then categorises them in a spectrum.³

I will survey the views of various homileticians and theologians of preaching and after all the viewpoints are discussed, I will locate myself under one of them. The primary question in focus here is “What is preaching?”⁴ Although this topic could be taxonomised under various groups, the present survey will be done under the following headings: Preaching is— Individual experience-driven communication; Text-driven communication; Context-driven communication; and Contextually-applied theodrama. In each of the viewpoints, the theological position of two representative homileticians or theologians of preaching will be analysed and then evaluated by discussing its critics and defenders, before presenting the author’s view. The main purpose is to understand the various homileticians’ diverse perceptions on what is preaching. I will conclude by providing seven reasons on why the view of Contextually-applied theodrama should be preferred.

While all the other three viewpoints individually look like single threads without much strength, the fourth viewpoint interweaves them together, thus creating a strong homiletical cord and synergy—in terms of theology and practice. Homileticians and preachers who are called to answer the question, “What is Preaching?” would do well to critically consider the advantages of the fourth viewpoint.

²G. Isaiah has compiled various definitions on preaching. Cf. G. Isaiah, *Preach the Word* (Tiruvalla: Christava Sahitya Samithi, 2004), 20-21.

³The figure below highlights the spectrum of preaching; a spectrum provides more flexibility, over against a taxonomical arrangement which is more rigid.

⁴There is a project called “Homiletical Theology Project” at the Boston University School of Theology under David Schnasa Jacobsen PhD. Albeit its usefulness to the field of homiletics addressing various “theological intersections,” it does not directly relate to my work, as mine surveys the spectrum (viewpoints) of preaching answering the question, “what is preaching?” “Homiletical Theology Project.” *Boston University School of Theology*. Accessed 28 January 2020. <https://www.bu.edu/homiletical-theology-project/>; Paul Windsor also asked this question in his article, “What is Preaching?” In the article, he essentially identifies the five ingredients of what contributes to biblical preaching, which he calls “The Five Corners”: The Scriptures (The written Word); The Society; The Believer (Listener); The Preacher; The Christ (The living Word). While his work sought to engage with “a fuller description of preaching,” the current article deals with a fuller spectrum of preaching. See, Paul Windsor, “What is Preaching?” in *Text Messages: Preaching God’s Word in a Smartphone World*, ed. John Tucker (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2017), 1–17.

A SPECTRUM OF THEOLOGY OF PREACHING

Preaching is. . .	Individual experience-driven communication	Text-driven communication	Context-driven dialogical monologue	Contextually applied theodrama
Background philosophy	Liberal Modernism (Revelation as individual experiential expressivism)	Conservative Modernism (Revelation as information)	Post-Modernism (Community experience as the source of ideas for preaching)	Critically-postmodern (Revelation as information and sensitive to experience)
Preaching is seen as a . . . Style	Individual human event Experiential	Divine event Deductive	Human community event Inductive/ Dialogical/ Narrative (New Homiletic)	Divine-human event Expository
Locus of Authority in Preaching	Universal individual experience as the supreme authority in preaching	Revelation as the supreme authority in preaching	Human Context/ Life situation as the supreme authority in preaching	Revelation as the supreme authority in preaching and context is relevant
Nature of the Preaching Event	Human communication focused on universal morals	Divine communication (Exegesis with no or little application)	Mainly human communication on life situation	Divine-human communication that is contextually applied
	Names of Theologians of Preaching Johann Lorenz Mosheim (1693–1755) Hugh Blair (1718–1800) Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) Paul Tillich (1886–1965) Phillips Brooks (1835) Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976)	Names of Theologians of Preaching Karl Barth (1886–1968) Graeme Goldsworthy (1934–) John F. MacArthur Jr. (1939–) John Piper (1946–) Peter Adam (1946–) Phillip D. Jensen (c. 1946–)	Names of Theologians of Preaching Harry Emerson Fosdick (1878–1969) H. Grady Davis (1890–1960) R.E.C. Browne (c.1906-c.1965) David G. Buttrick (1927–2017) Fred Craddock (1928–2015) Eugene Lowry (1933–) Thomas Long (1946–) Abraham Kuruville (c. 1955–)	Names of Theologians of Preaching Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892) John Stott (1921–2011) Sydney Greidanus (1935–) Michael Quicke (1950–) Gaddala Isaiah (c. 1940–2010) Timothy Keller (1950–) Ramesh Richard (c. 1952–) Kevin Vanhooser (1957–)

PREACHING AS INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCE-DRIVEN COMMUNICATION

Before further discussion on the first view, *Preaching as individual experience-driven communication*, a brief background study of the Enlightenment era will illuminate it and those which follow. The Enlightenment ideology prided itself on the supremacy of reason above faith and questioned the rationale of the “ultimate reality.”⁵ Rationalists like Immanuel Kant believed that

Enlightenment is mankind’s exit from its self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to make use of one’s own understanding without the guidance of another. Self- incurred is this inability if its cause lies not in the lack of understanding but rather in the lack of the resolution and the courage to use it without the guidance of another.⁶

This period dealt a devastating blow to the authority of the church, as the scriptural truth which is “eternal, unchanging, and authoritative” was questioned, as though “Christian truth was ... something which could be subject to critical investigation as if it were a work of art.”⁷ As far as preaching is concerned, it is argued that “any part of the Scripture that presented problems ... original sin, eternal punishment, or predestination” was avoided, citing the problem of “authenticity.”⁸ It was also revealed that most of the sermons in

this school took to “moral preaching.” Sometimes they changed the language of the Bible in order to make it more rational. For conversion or regeneration, they spoke of amendment of life; for justification of forgiveness on condition of repentance; for the Holy Spirit, of the exercise of the higher reason; for the atonement of Christ, of the spirit of sacrifice which He has taught us by His example, and so on.⁹

Although preaching in this era was against Christian orthodoxy, not all Protestant preachers were complicit.¹⁰ There were two ways Christians reacted to the onslaught of the Enlightenment ideology—the liberal modernist and conservative modernist viewpoints. While liberal modernists adjusted their theological position against the assault of the enlightenment ideology, conservative modernists reacted against the adjusted theological

⁵David Larsen, *The Company of the Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998), 346.

⁶Immanuel Kant, “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?” in *What is Enlightenment?: Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*, eds and trans., James Schmidt (Los Angeles: UC Press, 1996), 58 (emphasis original); It must also said here that the tradition of giving authority to reason started way back during the time of Spinoza and Descartes who “had ceased to presuppose revelation and had begun to depend on human reason alone.” See, O.C. Edwards Jr., “History of Preaching,” in *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, eds. William H. Willimon and Richard Lischer (Louisville, KY: WJK, 1995), 212. (Emphasis original.)

⁷James M. Byrne, *Religion and the Enlightenment: From Descartes to Kant* (Louisville, KY: WJK, 1996), x. Christian truth should be critically investigated, questioned, and deliberated. But it cannot be treated like an art piece crafted by an artist and critiqued with subjective opinions.

⁸James Schmidt (ed.) *What is Enlightenment? 7*; also see, Larsen, *The Company of the Preachers*, 328; Guntur Birstsch, “The Christian as Subject” in *The Transformation of Political Culture: England and Germany in the Late Eighteenth Century*, edited by Eckhart Hellmut (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 317–26.

⁹John Ker, *Lectures on the History of Preaching* (New York: Armstrong, 1889), 247.

¹⁰Preachers like Charles Simeon and Charles Spurgeon were some outstanding exceptions during this era.

position of the liberal modernists as well as against the enlightenment ideology. We begin with the liberal modernist viewpoint: preaching as individual experience-driven communication.

A theology of preaching that is “individual experience-driven” considers revelation as individual “experiential expressivism.”¹¹ In this viewpoint, preaching is seen as an individual human event where the preaching style leans towards humanistic affiliations. Its locus of authority in preaching is universal individual experience. Regarding the nature of the preaching event, it is human communication focused on universal morals. Below are two theologians of preaching we will engage with.

2.1 Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834)

Alister McGrath states that the liberal modernist period began when people like Friedrich Schleiermacher found the need to “relate Christian faith to the human situation ... amidst a growing realization that Christian faith and theology alike required reconstruction in the light of modern knowledge.”¹² So by “reacting against the aridity of reason,” people began to lean towards the “epistemological significance of human feelings and emotion.”¹³ For Schleiermacher, “feeling” is another name for religion; as he states, “feeling of absolute dependence, we call *aesthetic* Religion.”¹⁴ On preaching, he states that it is “chiefly the utterance and presentation which have a directly rousing effect,”¹⁵ awakening in a listener “the immediate religious self-consciousness.”¹⁶ Self-consciousness is at the centre point of Christianity, as he argues, “for as self-conscious individuals we can only have the God-consciousness.”¹⁷ On the role of the Holy Spirit in preaching he states more generally, “The Holy Spirit can never be inactive, and therefore can never be tied in its [sic] activities to definite times; rather it moves each believer to do whatever comes to hand” even “with religious influence and communication.”¹⁸ He also believes that preachers communicate “the Ministry of God’s Word” through “the attitude of spontaneity ... by self-communication” to the listeners who “maintain chiefly the attitude of receptivity.”¹⁹

Schleiermacher’s effort to defend the reasonableness of the Christian faith during the onslaught of the Enlightenment period is admirable. As human beings, made of flesh and blood, we cannot discount the importance of our experience and feelings, and Schleiermacher laboured hard to connect Christian theology and preaching with our existential experiences because he felt that that is the context in which we could truly understand God and his love.

¹¹This expression is credited to George Lindbeck. George Lindbeck, “George Lindbeck on Postliberal Approaches to Doctrine” in *The Christian Theology Reader*, ed., Alister McGrath, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 67.

¹²Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*. 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1997), 101; See also, P.T. Forsyth, *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980), 210.

¹³McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 96.

¹⁴Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, eds., H.R. Mackintosh and J.S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T and T, 1999), 42; Cf. C.W. Christian, *Friedrich Schleiermacher*, ed., Bob E. Patterson (Texas: Word Books Publisher, 1979), 29.

¹⁵Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, 87.

¹⁶Schleiermacher, 87.

¹⁷Schleiermacher, 719.

¹⁸Schleiermacher, 614.

¹⁹Schleiermacher, 611.

Although his contributions are widely accepted by many, the author differ with his viewpoints for several reasons.

Critiquing Schleiermacher, Daniel Blanche concedes that “it is terrifying” to see that Schleiermacher believes that the “preacher has a stronger consciousness of God than the other members of the congregation” given the fact that “the preacher and the congregants all stand on a continuum with Christ.”²⁰ Secondly, Blanche critiques Schleiermacher’s recommendation to preach the Bible and one’s “own inner experience”; that for him, “it is not the Christ recorded in the Bible who really matters; it is the Christ present in the preacher’s own heart that is important.”²¹

Evaluating Schleiermacher, first, although he acknowledges the role of the Holy Spirit in a believer’s life in general, he does not specify how the Holy Spirit causes the “rousing effect” while preaching. Moreover, although Schleiermacher says that preaching must aim at awakening in the congregants an “immediate religious self-consciousness,” he again does not clearly spell out the role of the Holy Spirit,²² which then makes preaching more of a human effort. Second, his understanding of preaching as aiming to achieve a “rousing effect” in the listeners seems too shallow and short-sighted, as emotions could be deceptive. Third, he projects preachers as more God-conscious than the listeners and the preaching task as the effort of human beings sharing their experiences,²³ not the word of God. This conviction poses the danger of canonising human experience, no matter how spiritual they may be, because ultimately, the source of revelation is not from human experience but the Scripture alone.

2.2 Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976)

Rudolf Bultmann served as the professor of New Testament (NT) at Marburg University. His contribution to the study of New Testament is epochal, especially with reference to the hermeneutical methods of “presupposition” and “demythologizing.” Jeffrey Jon Richards recommends that to understand Bultmann’s preaching better, an engagement with his hermeneutics will be helpful.²⁴ Here for our purpose, we will discuss an aspect of his hermeneutics—demythologising. Bultmann argues,

to de-mythologize is to reject not Scripture or the Christian message as a whole, but the world-view of Scripture, as the world-view of a past epoch ... retained in Christian dogmatics and in the preaching of the church. To de-

²⁰Daniel Blanche, “Schleiermacher and Preaching,” *Shiny Ginger Thoughts*, accessed on 17 April, 2018, <http://danielblanche.blogspot.in/2018/01/schleiermacher-and-preaching.html>.

²¹Blanche, “Schleiermacher and Preaching.”

²²There are two schools of thought with two extreme views about Schleiermacher’s view on the Holy Spirit. The first group is supported by people like B. Holm who argue that Schleiermacher depreciated the role and concept of the Holy Spirit. See, B. Holm, “The Work of the Spirit: The Reformation to the Present,” in *The Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church*, ed. P. Opsahl (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978) 100; The second group believed that Schleiermacher emphasised heavily on the concept of Holy Spirit, although not obviously. See, Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), 66.

²³Peter did share his experience on the Day of Pentecost and the disciples also did the same in Acts 15, but the difference is that while Peter and the disciples shared what they experienced in relation to the power they received through their relationship with God and his Holy Spirit, Schleiermacher’s focus is only on the human existential experience bereft of God’s power.

²⁴Jeffrey Jon Richards, “Hermeneutics and Homiletics of Rudolf Bultmann and Dietrich Bonhoeffer in the American Discussion” (PhD diss., Philipps-University Marburg, Marburg 2008), 35.

mythologize is to deny that the message of the Scripture and of the Church is bound to an ancient world-view which is obsolete.²⁵

Bultmann rejects as corrupted the cosmological three-storied worldview of the Bible (earth, heaven, and hell) and argues that preaching based on it is scandalous and unscientific, and therefore objectionable to modern listeners.²⁶ He argues that preaching about miracles is unacceptable because reason cannot explain its phenomenon. Simply put, he argues that the Bible operates with the “ancient world-view” which is “mythological,” whereas, modern man is directed by a “scientific” temperament.²⁷ Bultmann explains that demythologising is simply separating the kernel of God’s word from the husk of mythology, influenced by a “by-gone world-view.”²⁸ He also clarifies that demythologizing is not “rationalising the Christian message” for the “incomprehensibility of God lies not in the sphere of theoretical thought but in the sphere of personal experience.”²⁹ Elaborating his existential argument, Bultmann says that God must be understood not in “what God is in himself, but how he acts with men,” as in a human relationship with friends where the experience of “love and faithfulness” is experienced. It is this mystery, says Bultmann, in which “faith is interested” and preaching must address.³⁰

On faith, Bultmann says that it is “both the demand of and the gift offered by preaching. Faith is the answer to the message.”³¹ On preaching, Bultmann says that it is a “personal address. It is authoritative address, the address of the Word of God,”³² and “true Christian preaching is ... the call of God through the mouth of man” that “demands belief. It is its characteristic paradox that in it we meet God’s call in human words.”³³ Ronald E. Sleeth also says that for Bultmann, “the salvation-occurrence was in the act of preaching and only there.”³⁴

Sleeth elucidates, “Bultmann’s understanding of preaching as God’s Word spoken in the mouth of the preacher is followed naturally by what is now called Word-Event theology.” That, when the word of God is preached, an “Event” is created, “not about the Christian faith, but the Christian faith itself. That is, preaching is not talking about the Gospel, it is the Gospel.”³⁵ As such, for Bultmann, “preaching is not the simple communication of facts ...

²⁵Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1958), 35.

²⁶Rudolf Bultmann, “New Testament and Mythology,” in *Kerygma and Myth*, ed., Hans Werner Bartsch (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), 3; Cf. Bultmann, *Jesus Christ*, 36.

²⁷Bultmann, *Jesus Christ*, 37-38.

²⁸Bultmann, 43.

²⁹Bultmann, 43.

³⁰Bultmann, 42-43.

³¹Bultmann, 40-41.

³²Rudolf Bultmann, “General Truths and Christian Proclamation,” in *History and Hermeneutics*, Robert Walter Funk, ed., vol. 1, trans., Schubert M. Ogden (Minnesota: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1967).

³³Rudolf Bultmann, “Preaching: Genuine and Secularized,” in *Religion and Culture: Essays in Honor of Paul Tillich*, trans., Harold O. J. Brown, ed., Walter Leibrecht (New York: Harper & Bros. 1959), 237; As the idea of spectrum suggests flexibility, Bultmann leans towards “Divine-human” event in preaching. More of this concept will be discussed in the fourth category.

³⁴Ronald E. Sleeth, “Bultmann and the Proclamation of the World,” in *PSB*, vol. 2.2, Donald Macleod, ed. (Princeton: Princeton Theological Seminary, 1979), 154; See also Franz Peerlinck, *Rudolf Bultmann als Prediger* (Hamburg: H. Reich Evangelischer Verlag, 1970), n.p.

³⁵Sleeth, “Bultmann,” 155.

reporting of a discovery,” not “teaching or instruction,”³⁶ not doctrinal enlightenment, nor ethical and therapeutic treatment.³⁷ Rather, “Preaching means a declaration which speaks directly to the hearer and challenges him to a specific reaction.” Christian preaching then is a declaration of the “*kerygma*, the heralding or evangelion, the message ... *the call of God*”³⁸ for the people to respond in obedience based on their existential reality.³⁹

Then Bultmann asks, what “content” does the message “consist” of? He asks, if “true Christian preaching would be the *communication of a historical fact*?”⁴⁰ He avers that simply preaching the “story of Jesus’ life and deeds” would be just giving a “historical report.” But “a genuine preaching preaches, ‘Jesus Christ is Lord,’ ... It means not basing one’s life on what is temporary”⁴¹ but eternal, and placing before the listener the choice to respond.⁴²

On the role of the Holy Spirit in preaching, Bultmann says that he is the “Spirit in whose working Jesus’ revelation is continued,” that a preacher proclaims in his power.⁴³

Bultmann’s contribution to the Church and preaching is immense. He is held in great esteem by many because of his effort to make the biblical truth palatable to modern readers and in making theology focus on existential realities. However, he is not without his detractors. Below are some critiques of his hermeneutics that directly influences his theology of preaching.

Bultmann is critiqued by Clark Pinnock for “twisting the Scriptures to bring them into line with his own extrabiblical presuppositions.” Kerygma is forced “to become what his secular worldview requires it to be,” without first accepting it as “factual and true independently.” Pinnock also argues that one cannot interpret and preach the New Testament “purely” in an “existentialist manner.”⁴⁴ Miller and Grenz also critique Bultmann that instead of “proclaiming” Christ’s accomplishment in biblical history “in the ministry, cross, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Bultmann defined it in terms of what individuals experience in their own personal confrontation with existence,” which in reality has no substance.⁴⁵ On the historical Jesus, D.A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris argue that Bultmann has peeled off much of the mysterious and supernatural elements which are incomprehensible to the human mind from the NT “until there was almost nothing left.”⁴⁶

³⁶Bultmann, “Preaching,” 236.

³⁷Bultmann, “Preaching,” 240.

³⁸Bultmann, 236; See also, Rudolf Bultmann, *Existence and Faith*, trans., Schubert Ogden (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1960), 168; George E. Ladd, “What Does Bultmann Understand by the Acts of God?” *JETS* 5 (Summer 1962): 91.

³⁹Bultmann, “Preaching,” 238.

⁴⁰Bultmann, 240.

⁴¹Bultmann, 241; See also, Morris Ashcraft, *Rudolf Bultmann* (Texas: Word Books Publishers, 1972), 44-45.

⁴²Bultmann, “Preaching,” 242.

⁴³Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans., G.R. Beasley-Murray (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1971), 560.

⁴⁴Clark H. Pinnock, *Tracking the Maze* (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1990), 115.

⁴⁵E. L. Miller and Stanley J. Grenz, *Introduction to Contemporary Theologies* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 51-52.

⁴⁶D.A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 51; Cf. Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids: Wm.

Bultmann's understanding of the word of God and the role of the Holy Spirit in preaching is laudable, although a deeper clarification on the role of the Holy Spirit in what he does in the listeners and the spoken Word is needed. Along with positive contributions, there are areas where Bultmann's hermeneutics is problematic. First, although Bultmann clearly issues a disclaimer that demythologising is not rationalising the Christian message and doing away with the mystery element in Christian faith, he leaves room for doubt by his view that modern man does not accept miracles and anything that does not fall in line with reason and science. Second, Bultmann prioritises the need to engage with human experience above the claims of the historicity of the word of God, a sequence that should have been reversed, given that Scripture is a revelation from God. Third, although he does not say that Jesus never existed in history, his unwillingness to link the Christ of faith to the Jesus of history and his effort to demythologise the historicity of Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection by calling them myths sinks the very basis of his preaching, because one cannot have the fruits of faith, love, and salvation without the roots of incarnation, Christ's gruesome atoning death, and his miraculous resurrection.

PREACHING AS TEXT-DRIVEN COMMUNICATION

Theology of preaching in this section is the other response against the Enlightenment and one that counters the liberal modernist viewpoint. A preaching theology that puts revelation or the word of God as the authority in preaching and gives little or no attention to the context would come under the conservative modernist category. Below is a brief background.

This category's philosophical background would consider "revelation as information." Harold Lindsell, one of the voices of this theological framework argues that God has revealed himself completely through the Bible and that it is the "sourcebook" of all "information."⁴⁷ In this category, preaching would be seen as a divine event where the preaching style would lean towards being more deductive and text driven, and the locus of authority in preaching being revelation. As far as the nature of the preaching event is concerned, in this category, preaching is viewed as a divine communication, where exegesis plays a prominent role without, or with little emphasis on, application. Two homileticians who would fit under this category are outlined below.

3.1 Karl Barth (1886–1968)

Knowing Karl Barth's context, where he lived, and how he theologised will be helpful in analysing his theology of preaching. Barth learned his theology under the great liberal theologians—Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Hermann—but later became the leading voice against them.⁴⁸

B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 33; Peter Toon, *The End of Liberal Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1995), 192.

⁴⁷Harold Lindsell, *The Incomparable Word* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1977), 130-132.

⁴⁸Jack Rogers and Donald K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999), 406.

Barth was antagonistic to the Enlightenment ideology and the liberal modernist theology that truncated orthodox Christian theology. Moreover, he was against Hitler and his ideology. Barth saw Hitler as the product of a liberal church which no longer had the capacity to oppose evil.⁴⁹ And so Barth's theology in general and his theology of preaching in particular is a welcome correction to the liberal theological position.

For Barth, the locus of authority in preaching is divine revelation. Richard Lischer further states that "the centrality of revelation in Barth's theology means that preaching is a divine activity."⁵⁰ Barth says, "Preaching must conform to revelation." This means that "in preaching we do not repeat or transmit the revelation of God by what we do" because "the event of preaching is God's own speaking."⁵¹ Further, he argues,

when the gospel is preached, God speaks: there is no question of the preacher revealing anything or of a revelation being conveyed through him ... Revelation is a closed system in which God is the subject, the object and the middle term ... if Christ deigns to be present when we are speaking, it is precisely because the action is God's, not ours.⁵²

Further, he says that preaching is not to "expound or present the truth of God aesthetically in the form of a picture, an impression, or an aesthetic evocation of Jesus Christ ... If God himself wills to speak his truth, preachers are forbidden to interfere with any science or art of their own."⁵³ He also argues, "Preaching is not a neutral activity, nor yet a joint action by two collaborators. It is the exercise of sovereign power on the part of God and obedience on the part of man."⁵⁴ Further, Barth says that "Preaching is the Word of God which he himself has spoken" and that "when a man preaches ... We are carried beyond human thinking to God, who utters the first and the last word. God cannot be enclosed in any human concept... God will make himself heard; he it is who speaks, not man."⁵⁵ Clearly disregarding human personality, he says that if a preacher gives the "congregation a clever conceptual picture, even though it be arrived at by serious and intensive exegesis, it will not be Scripture itself that speaks."⁵⁶ On the role of the Holy Spirit in preaching, Barth clearly expounds, "Living preaching is preaching which is awakened and activated by the witness of the Holy Spirit, challenging from within the community which has heard His witness, and summoning the community itself to a fresh hearing of His witness."⁵⁷

Karl Barth must be appreciated for his theology of preaching that revelation or the word of God is the supreme authority in preaching. His belief that preaching is primarily God's event is valuable because without that high view of preaching, preaching could descend into another form of human-based communication. Therefore, Barth's effort to minimise the role

⁴⁹Timothy J. Gorringer, *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 121.

⁵⁰Richard Lischer, *Theories of Preaching: Selected Readings in the Homiletical Tradition* (Durham, North Carolina: The Labyrinth Press, 1987), 338.

⁵¹Barth, *Homiletics*, 47.

⁵²Karl Barth, *The Preaching of the Gospel*, trans., B.E. Hooke (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1963), 12-14.

⁵³Barth, *Homiletics*, 47-48.

⁵⁴Barth, *The Preaching*, 16.

⁵⁵Barth, 9-10.

⁵⁶Barth, *Homiletics*, 49.

⁵⁷Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, vol. 4.2, G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (eds.), trans., G.W. Bromiley (London: T&T International, 2004), 127.

of the preacher was an intentional effort to move away from the liberal modernist theology, which elevated the human element to disproportionate heights. And in so doing, he was trying to maximise who God is and what God can do. Moreover, Barth's recognition of the Holy Spirit working both in the preacher and the listener during preaching is commendable. However, his viewpoints are not without detractors. Other voices will first be heard before the author gives his thoughts.

Clement Welsh⁵⁸ contends that this "high" view of revelation in Barth "is haunted by the ghosts of many unanswered questions concerning the authority of scriptures" and so "it raises worrisome questions about mistaking man's voice for God's voice."⁵⁹ Welsh suggests that a preacher "must give to the creation (i.e. to the phenomena of human life) the same exegetical care that he would give a passage of Scripture."⁶⁰ Endorsing this comment, John Stott maintains that a preaching that is insensitive to the context is the "*ex cathedra*" type of "preaching which is divorced from worldly reality, answers the wrong questions, and discourages responsible thinking in the congregation."⁶¹

While elevating the authority of Scripture, we find that Karl Barth's position undermines the human role in preaching. It minimises the role of human intelligence in the sermon preparation—designing and structuring of the sermon. He also depreciates the role of imagination and creativity in preaching. Further, he confuses and belittles the preacher's role in the preaching event.

3.2 John F. MacArthur Jr. (1939-)

There are homileticians like Graeme Goldsworthy who consider preaching to be "essentially the practice of explaining the meaning of a passage of Scripture."⁶² His view is well represented by John F. MacArthur Jr. Arguing from the perspective of Scripture's inerrancy, he states, "The message began as a true word from God and was given as truth because God's purpose was to transmit truth. It was ordered by God as truth and was delivered by God's Spirit in cooperation with holy men who received it..."⁶³ Then, on the nature of the sermon to communicate this truth, MacArthur asks, "if God's message began true and if it is to be delivered as received, what interpretative processes necessitated by changes of language, culture, and time will ensure its purity when currently preached? The answer is that only an

⁵⁸He was once the "Director of Studies and Warden of the American College of Preachers in Washington DC." See, John Stott, *I Believe in Preaching* (Mumbai: GLS Publishing, 2014), 61.

⁵⁹Clement Welsh, *Preaching in a New Key: Studies in the Psychology of Thinking and Listening* (Pilgrim Press, 1974), 102-03; Alister McGrath points out that Paul Tillich critiqued Karl Barth's theology on the ground that Barth is attempting to "drive a wedge between theology and culture." McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 103.

⁶⁰Welsh, *Preaching in a New Key*, 109-10. *Contra*, we are aware of Barth's famous statement that a preacher must in his preaching connect "between the problem of human life on the one hand, and the content of the Bible on the other"; See also, Michael D. Bush, "Preaching," in *The Westminster Handbook to Karl Barth*, ed., Richard E. Burnett (Louisville, KY: WJK, 2013), 168. Divergent opinions about Karl Barth demonstrate the complexity of the Barth brand even in homiletics.

⁶¹Stott, *I Believe in Preaching*, 62. For more discussion, see Lischer, *The Company of Preachers*, 395.

⁶²Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 120.

⁶³John F. MacArthur Jr. (eds.), "The Mandate of Biblical Inerrancy: Expository Preaching," in *Preaching: How to Preach Biblically* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2013), 21.

exegetical approach is acceptable for accurate exposition.”⁶⁴ He reiterates by saying, “I assert that expository preaching is really exegetical preaching and not so much the homiletical form of the message.”⁶⁵ MacArthur is here re-defining his own understanding of exposition of the Scripture where the homiletical feature of listener-sensitivity is undermined.

The viewpoint of MacArthur honours written revelation (the word of God) as inerrant and the supreme authority in preaching, which must be appreciated. Preaching which does not find its source in the living water will wither and crumble. However, his viewpoint is also not without difficulties. Below are some voices that critique his viewpoint.

In MacArthur’s zeal to present a high view of the Scripture by primarily focusing on what the Bible says, there are people like Ben E. Awbrey and R. Keith Willhite who observe that he does not give equal and adequate emphasis to the listeners’ situation—on how people will appropriate the sermonic truths in their real life experiences.⁶⁶ As such, MacArthur’s position undermines the contemporary hearing of the word of God, the liveliness of Scripture, and its multiple connections to different ages in the preaching event. Although MacArthur lives far away from the conservative modernist period, his text-driven approach in preaching brings him under this viewpoint.

Critiquing the homileticians in this viewpoint, Buttrick argues, “Perhaps, biblical preaching has been paralysed by Barthian fears of cultural accommodations” and therefore has been confined to just reciting “Scripture to churchly faith.” This has led “biblical preaching” to tell a “biblical story replete with oodles of biblical background, a ‘holy history,’ but has not permitted God to step out of the biblical world into human history.”⁶⁷ Further he argues, “The God of the biblical preaching has been a past-tense God of past-tense God-events whose past-tense truth (‘original meaning’) may be *applied* to the world, while God remains hidden within a gilt-edged book.”⁶⁸ So, without allowing God and his Word to engage and speak to the contemporary issues of society and the world at large, Buttrick calls it “simply unbiblical.”⁶⁹ In the same way, Craddock argues that a sermon can become an “unbiblical” sermon even when it “buries itself in the text, moves through it phrase by phrase” but “never comes up for air” because then “it fails to achieve what the text achieves,”⁷⁰ that is, meeting the needs of the listeners.

The author believes that a sermon that only buries itself in the air-tight chamber of exegesis will suffocate in it. As much as it must walk in the streets of Scripture,⁷¹ it must also

⁶⁴MacArthur Jr. (eds.), “The Mandate,” 21.

⁶⁵MacArthur Jr. (eds.), “The Mandate,” 22.

⁶⁶Ben E. Awbrey, “A Critical Examination of the Theory and Practice of John F. MacArthur’s Expository Preaching” (ThD dissertation, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1990), 17; See also R. Keith Willhite, “Audience Relevance and Rhetorical Argumentation in Expository Preaching: A Historical-Critical Comparative Analysis of Selected Sermons of John F. MacArthur Jr., and Charles R. Swindoll, 1970-1990” (PhD Dissertation, Purdue University, 1990).

⁶⁷Buttrick, *Homiletics*, 18.

⁶⁸Buttrick, 18.

⁶⁹Buttrick, 18.

⁷⁰Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1985), 28.

⁷¹This idea is attributed to Gardner Taylor. See, Zan Holmes, “Enabling the Word to Happen” in *Power in the Pulpit: How America’s Most Effective Black Preachers Prepare Their Sermons*, ed., Cleophus J. LaRue (Louisville, KY: WJK, 2002), 77.

walk in the streets of the real world where people live and try to make sense of their lives. God's word for people then must be made relevant for God's people now; otherwise, preaching will lose its meaning. In the light of this, I find this viewpoint too rigid. Although this category faithfully defends the orthodox Christian truth, I will not identify with it because it is deficient in sermonic application and imagination, and undermines the role of the human preacher.

PREACHING AS CONTEXT-DRIVEN DIALOGICAL MONOLOGUE

A preaching theology that is context-driven, with the conviction that listeners must also participate in the preaching event through an inductive, dialogical, and narrative approach falls in the New Homiletic school of thought, which could be associated with the post-modern period. In this viewpoint, the effort to preach is mostly of human origin. The role of the preacher is to engineer a preacher-listener collaboration, in order to make sermons engaging and appealing to the listeners. Although one could trace the roots of this school of thought to the modernist liberal approach in preaching that elevates human experience, this school is more complex in its makeup and the divergent branches of New Homiletic make it difficult to pinpoint one method to represent it. As a result, the general term "context-driven dialogical monologue" will represent this school of thought. While it emphasises human experience, it accepts the post-modern critique of liberal modernism by emphasising particular rather than universal experiences. This is a key feature of postmodernity—a rejection of grand narratives and universals and a celebration of particulars and diversity. We will now examine the preaching theology of two forerunners of this viewpoint.

4.1 Fred Craddock (1928–2015)

Fred Craddock argues that preaching should emphasise the work aspect of preaching,⁷² the listener-centric dimension of preaching. He argues, "in them is some deserved judgment against a church that gives recitations, lifeless words cut off from the hearts and minds of those who speak and those who listen."⁷³ About the text, Craddock states,

In this encounter with the text, the Word of God is not simply the content of the tradition, nor an application of that content to present issues, but rather the Word of God is the address of God to the hearer who sits before the text open to its becoming the Word of God. Most importantly, God's Word is *God's Word* to the readers/listeners, not a word about God gleaned from the documents.⁷⁴

Craddock's primary interest focuses on the "mode of proclamation that is relevant to the present speaker-hearer relationship."⁷⁵ Thus, to address the "fundamental weakness in traditional preaching, its monological character," Craddock says that an alternative method, the dialogical method is in place because it increases preaching's impact because of the interaction between the preacher and the listener "in the proclamation of the Word."⁷⁶ He

⁷²Craddock, *As One*, 6.

⁷³Craddock, 6.

⁷⁴Craddock, 114.

⁷⁵Craddock, 17.

⁷⁶Craddock, 18.

argues, “embracing the dialogical principle requires a radical assessment of one’s role as a preacher . . . effective preaching calls for a method consistent with one’s theology because the method is message; form and content are of a piece.”⁷⁷ Craddock also disapproves of a sermon that has “logical development, clear argument, thorough, and conclusive treatment,” but rather prefers an organic sermon that goes along with the listeners.⁷⁸

Craddock’s call for a change in the method of preaching that moves towards spontaneity and the sermon as a journey rather than a fixed and written manuscript⁷⁹ deserves appreciation, for humans dislike monotonous and painfully predictable sermons. Nonetheless, there are some voices that disagree with his position. Critiquing this viewpoint, Charles L. Campbell laments that the outcome of robust New Homiletic activity has not impacted and sparked life in the mainline protestant churches in America. Rather, he says that it is during this period of homiletical “resurgence” that they felt something still “lacking in their preaching.”⁸⁰ Campbell observes that “new theories” brought nothing new to the life of the church. Though there may have been some serious concern with the health of the church, pastors recognised that life-giving vitality was missing in their preaching. Campbell argues, “[The pastors] tried inductive preaching, story preaching, dialogue sermons, and homiletical plots” but these “new methods” have not changed the status quo.⁸¹ Further, he says that “amid the myriad books, articles, and conferences,” many preachers have not articulated what the problem is, nor have they understood the “direction for the future.”⁸²

4.2 David G. Buttrick (1927–2017)

David G. Buttrick is another important homiletician in this category. For him, “sermons happen in consciousness,” and so his approach to homiletics is known as a phenomenological approach.⁸³ He advocated the concept of sermonic “moves,”⁸⁴ and “plot” as against the traditional approach in propositional preaching which is guided by logical and analytical outlines.⁸⁵ He says, “sermons are a movement of language from one idea to another, each idea being shaped in a bundle of words. Thus, when we preach, we speak in formed modules of language arranged in some patterned sequence. These modules of language we will call ‘moves.’”⁸⁶ Moreover, he endorses the importance of rhetoric in making sermonic moves effective.⁸⁷ Speaking out against the traditional method of preaching in point form, he argues that “the word ‘point’ is peculiar; it implies a rational, at-a-distance pointing at things, some kind of objectification” and the idea that there are “fixed truths.”⁸⁸ However he says, “good

⁷⁷Craddock, 18.

⁷⁸Craddock, *As One*, 27.

⁷⁹Craddock, 27.

⁸⁰Charles L. Campbell, *Preaching Jesus: New Directions for Homiletics in Hans Frei’s Postliberal Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), xi.

⁸¹Campbell, *Preaching Jesus*, xi.

⁸²Campbell, xii.

⁸³Buttrick, *Homiletic*, xii.

⁸⁴Buttrick, 23.

⁸⁵Buttrick, 15.

⁸⁶Buttrick, 23.

⁸⁷Buttrick, 28.

⁸⁸Buttrick, 23.

preaching involves the imaging of ideas—the shaping of every conceptual notion by metaphor and image and syntax.”⁸⁹

Although Buttrick endorses the authority of the Scripture in preaching, he recognises its authority only in the context of a preacher deriving “contemporary meaning” and not because it is “a text on a page of the Bible.”⁹⁰ For Buttrick, the Scripture is authoritative in terms of its “symbolic logic” and not because of the historicity of the events, including the resurrection of Christ.⁹¹ And so, he says, “such stories may not be preached in a here-is-what-actually-happened historical style.”⁹² For him, “the locus of authority” for preaching is “*faith-consciousness*” where one is repeatedly “brought before the cross of Christ by means of a remembered gospel message,” and not because the gospel is a “body of fixed objective truth.”⁹³ On the enterprise and theology of preaching, Buttrick considers human preaching as “*commissioned by the resurrection*” and “*a continuation of the preaching of Jesus Christ.*”⁹⁴ ⁹⁴ Second, “*In our preaching, Christ continues to speak to the church, and through the church to the world.*”⁹⁵ Third, “*The purpose of preaching is the purpose of God in Christ, namely the reconciliation of the world.*”⁹⁶ Fourth, “*Preaching evokes response: The response to preaching is a response to Christ, and is, properly, faith and response.*”⁹⁷ Fifth, “*Preaching is the ‘Word of God’ in that it participates in God’s purpose, is initiated by Christ, and is supported by the Spirit with community in the world.*” On the other hand, Buttrick avers that “Preaching must be described as a human activity that draws on human understanding and employs human homiletical skills that can be learned.”⁹⁸ On the relationship between preaching and Scripture, he makes the affirmation that “We must not say that preaching from Scripture is requisite for sermons to be the Word of God” for “it is possible to preach the Word of God without so much as mentioning Scripture.”⁹⁹ Further, on the role of the Holy Spirit, he claims, “the presence of the Spirit is not self-evident but is, indeed, an article of faith—of *homiletic* faith. Wherever there is faith in Jesus Christ, the Spirit is with community and with speakers to community.”¹⁰⁰

Buttrick’s approach and method of preaching has several advantages. First, it is true that a sermon moves “from one idea to another” by using language or words. A preacher who has a good grasp of language or rhetoric is, humanly speaking, more spontaneous and accessible to the listeners. Second, on the aspect of “imaging of ideas” in preaching, we appreciate Buttrick’s desire to simplify and engage the listener’s imagination in preaching and not remain only in the cerebral and abstract logical realm.

However, Buttrick’s approach is not without criticism. First, in his emphasis on bringing contemporary significance of the Scripture to the listeners, he denies the propositional and the

⁸⁹Buttrick, 27.

⁹⁰Buttrick, 376.

⁹¹Buttrick, 399-402.

⁹²Buttrick, 399.

⁹³Buttrick, 247.

⁹⁴Buttrick, 449 (emphasis original).

⁹⁵Buttrick, 451 (emphasis original).

⁹⁶Buttrick, 452 (emphasis original).

⁹⁷Buttrick, 453 (emphasis original).

⁹⁸Buttrick, 456 (emphasis original).

⁹⁹Buttrick, 458.

¹⁰⁰Buttrick, 457.

“fixed objective truth” of the revealed word of God. In doing so, he makes the word of God stoop down to human subjectivism by not maintaining an objective standard for all humanity. Second, for him the Scripture is authoritative in terms of its “symbolic logic,” thus compromising the historicity of the Christian faith and the revealed word of God. Third, on his theology of preaching, our preaching is commissioned by the resurrected Christ and not the event of resurrection alone. As a result, we do not continue to preach like Jesus Christ, rather we preach Jesus Christ himself. Fourth, it is true that preaching is “supported by the Spirit,” but how he supports the preacher and listeners is not clearly spelled out. Buttrick’s argument implies that it is not easily identifiable whether the Spirit is absent during a boring sermon or active during a lively and spontaneous sermon. Moreover, although Buttrick believes that preaching is an enterprise where Christ speaks to the church, his statement that it is “a human activity” questions the definitive role and function of the Holy Spirit. Fifth, in his effort to make sermons listener-centric and culturally relevant by putting other sources at par with the Scripture, Buttrick compromises the sufficiency and authority of the Scripture.

Assessing this viewpoint, under context-driven dialogical monologue, which is technically the New Homiletic, I agree with Scott M. Gibson that there are several advantages. For example, “Induction is arguably the way in which the parables and some sermons chronicled in the New Testament were preached.”¹⁰¹ Further, it must be acknowledged that New Homiletic draws our attention back to the importance of human experience and the use of language in engaging human imagination. It must be also noted here that effective preaching must ultimately lead people to encounter God, and experience him personally in their lives, thus bringing spiritual vitality.

However, I also have reservations strong enough to hesitate from joining this position. First, as Gibson points out, the advocates of New Homiletic “underplay the nonnarrative passages of Scripture ‘to narrow the communicational range of preaching to a single method’”¹⁰² which is untenable. Second, although experience is important, if the emphasis on the preacher-listener’s role in co-creating the “sermonic experience” is considered equivalent to written revelation (Scripture), we elevate the human factors to being equally authoritative to or even eclipsing the source of God’s word. Third, the role of the Holy Spirit is not clearly spelled out. Fourth, the authority of the word of God in preaching is under attack, because, in their effort to accommodate sources that engage with listeners, the sufficiency of the Scripture is minimised.

PREACHING AS CONTEXTUALLY APPLIED THEODRAMA

This viewpoint believes in the rootedness of preaching in the authority of the written revelation (Scripture), the responsibility of the human preacher, the need to make preaching engaging and attractive to the listeners, the indispensable role of the Holy Spirit, and sensitivity to the felt needs and life- situations of the listeners.

¹⁰¹Scott M. Gibson, “Critique of the New Homiletic: Examining the Link between the New Homiletic and the New Hermeneutic,” in *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching*, 480.

¹⁰²Gibson, “Critique,” 480.

A theology of preaching that is as sensitive to the experience and context of the listeners as it is convinced of the authority of the written word of God as supreme in the preaching event could be termed “contextually applied theodrama” and falls under the “critically post-modern category.”¹⁰³ Both Hans Urs Von Balthasar and Kevin J. Vanhoozer used this term “theodrama” to demonstrate God’s redemptive action and a person’s grateful response: a divine-human affair.¹⁰⁴ In this work, Vanhoozer’s perspective on “theodrama” will be employed. By “theodrama,” he means the “divine communication and the church’s communicative action.”¹⁰⁵ He also contends that “theology involves both what God has said and done for the world and what we must say and do in grateful response.”¹⁰⁶

In this viewpoint, preaching is a “divine-human event”¹⁰⁷ and expository preaching¹⁰⁸ is its preferred style of preaching. While its locus of authority is written revelation, the nature of the preaching is a divine-human communication that is contextually applied. It is a “divine-human event” because first, God is the initiator—both as the one who first revealed by speaking invisible things into existence and the one who still speaks into human situations. On the other hand, as God used human authors with their unique personalities and locations in history to write down what he revealed to them for his purpose (Scripture), God uses human preachers to collaborate with him to bring his living Word to the people. In this viewpoint, there is an intentional focus on the experiences and life-situation of the congregants, and therefore it attempts to build a bridge to contemporise the Scripture which was written in another context for the listeners today. Below are two homileticians who represent this viewpoint.

5.1 John R. W. Stott (1921–2011)

On preaching as a divine event, John Stott declares that the “locus of authority” in preaching “resides only in God ... and not at all in us who quote them [Scriptures] today.”¹⁰⁹ He also affirms that the origin of every sermon which the preacher preaches is from God and nowhere else. He argues that “in the ideal sermon it is the Word itself which speaks, or rather God in and through His Word.”¹¹⁰ On the other hand, Stott is very clear on the importance of the human role in preaching, which is therefore a human event as well:

Here, then, is the biblical case for biblical exposition. It consists of two fundamental convictions, namely that God has given us in Scripture a text which is both inspired (having a divine origin and authority) and to some

¹⁰³This category is named so because the homileticians who represent it are critical of post-modernism. They believe that the text has an objective meaning.

¹⁰⁴Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 1-6; Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: WJK Press, 2005), 37-38.

¹⁰⁵Vanhoozer, *The Drama*, 74; Cf. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?: The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998); Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture and Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002); Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority After Babel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016).

¹⁰⁶Vanhoozer, *The Drama*, 37-38.

¹⁰⁷Stott, *I Believe*, 60.

¹⁰⁸Stott also calls it biblical preaching. Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 116.

¹⁰⁹Stott, *I Believe*, 58.

¹¹⁰John Stott, *The Preacher’s Portrait: Five New Testament Word Studies*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017, 30.

degree closed (difficult to understand). Therefore, in addition to the text, he gives the church teachers to open up the text, explaining it and applying it to people's lives.¹¹¹

Elaborating on the human dimension in preaching, Stott raises the issue of a preacher's experience with God that will empower his preaching. He says, "by 'experience,' I do not mean experience of the preaching ministry or experience of life in general, necessary as these are to the preacher. I mean rather a personal experience of Jesus Christ Himself. This is the first and indispensable mark of the Christian witness (preacher)."¹¹²

He says that expository preaching cannot be stereotyped as "a verse-by-verse explanation of a lengthy passage of the Scripture," rather it points to "the content of the sermon (biblical truth)." He clarifies,

The expositor pries open what appears to be closed, makes plain what is obscure, unravels what is knotted and unfolds what is tightly packed ... Whether it is long or short, our responsibility as expositors is to open it up in such a way that it speaks its message clearly, plainly, accurately, relevantly, without addition, subtraction or falsification. In expository preaching, the biblical text is neither a conventional introduction to a sermon on a largely different theme, nor a convenient peg on which to hang a ragbag of miscellaneous thoughts, but a master which dictates and controls what is said.¹¹³

On the importance of context in preaching, Stott talks about bridge-building between the world of the text and the world of the listeners. Stott advises that a preacher must, before preaching, "seek to enter into the other person's world of thoughts and feeling" so that he may rightfully "contextualise the gospel."¹¹⁴ For this to happen, Stott says that "double listening" is vital. He then says preaching stands

between the Word and the world, with the consequent obligation to listen to both. We listen to the Word in order to discover ever more of the riches of Christ. And we listen to the world in order to discern which of Christ's riches are needed most and how to present them in their best light.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹John Stott, *The Contemporary Christian: An Urgent Plea for Double Listening* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 211-212.

¹¹²Stott, *Preacher's Portrait*, 70-71.

¹¹³John Stott, *Between Two Worlds* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 126. To learn more about the value of systematic exposition, see, Raih, *Expository Preaching*, 122-125; For further discussions on expository preaching see Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 57; Keller, *Preaching*, 32; Jonathan Lamb, *Dynamics of Biblical Preaching* (Carlisle: Langham Preaching Resources, 2016), 16; Geoffrey W. Bromiley, "Preface to Homiletics," in *Karl Barth*, trans., Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Donald E. Daniels (Louisville, KY: WJK, 1991), 14; Oliphant Hughes Old, *Reading, The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church: The Biblical Period*. vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 11; Ryan Fullerton, Jim Orrick, and Brian Payne, *Expository Preaching: Connecting God's People to God's Presence through God's Word* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2017), 19-34.

¹¹⁴Stott, *The Contemporary*, 110.

¹¹⁵Stott, 110-111.

On the role of the Holy Spirit, Stott says that a preacher must cultivate the “humility of dependence”¹¹⁶ and reveals that ineffectiveness in preaching happens due to pride.¹¹⁷ Human preachers are “finite, fallen, frail, and fallible creatures” and the “words we speak in human weakness the Holy Spirit carries home by his power to the mind, heart, conscience, and the will of the hearers.”¹¹⁸ It is not in the power of the human preacher to bring to life and transform the “spiritually and morally blind, deaf, dumb, lame, and even dead or imprisoned by Satan ... Only Jesus Christ through his Spirit can ... wake up the conscience, enlighten the mind, fire the heart, move the will, give life to the dead, and rescue slaves from Satan.”¹¹⁹

5.2 Timothy Keller (1950-2023)

According to Timothy Keller, preaching is “engaging with the authoritative text” and “not your opinion.”¹²⁰ He argues that when a preacher preaches the Scripture, he is speaking “the very words of God,”¹²¹ that, preaching biblically involves making “clear the meaning of the text in its context—both in its historical time and within the whole of Scripture.”¹²² Further, he declares,

Expository preaching grounds the message in the text so that all the sermon’s points are in the text, and it majors in the text’s major ideas. It aligns the interpretation of the text with the doctrinal truths of the rest of the Bible. And it always situates the passage within the Bible’s narrative, showing how Christ is the final fulfilment of the text’s theme.¹²³

Moreover, he says that “in the end, preaching has two basic objects in view: the Word and the human listener ... Sound preaching arises out of two loves—love of the Word of God and love of people.”¹²⁴ On the human dimension and effort in preaching Keller says,

Understanding the biblical text, distilling a clear outline and theme, developing a persuasive argument, enriching it with poignant illustrations, metaphors, and practical examples, incisively analysing heart motives and cultural assumptions, making specific application to real life—all of this takes extensive labor.¹²⁵

On the role of the Holy Spirit, Keller says, “the sermon’s differing impact on individuals was due to the work of God’s Spirit,”¹²⁶ that, the “difference between good preaching and great preaching lies mainly in the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of his listeners as well

¹¹⁶Stott, *I Believe*, 328.

¹¹⁷Stott, 329-330.

¹¹⁸Stott, 334.

¹¹⁹John R. W. Stott and Greg Scharf, *The Challenge of Preaching* (Carlisle: Langham Preaching Resources, 2011), 89.

¹²⁰Keller, *Preaching*, 20.

¹²¹Cf. 1 Pet 4:11.

¹²²Keller, *Preaching*, 20.

¹²³Keller, 32.

¹²⁴Keller, 14.

¹²⁵Keller, 11.

¹²⁶Keller, 10.

as the preacher.”¹²⁷ Keller says that this is so because the Holy Spirit ultimately holds the key to all the secrets of “God’s wise plans.”¹²⁸

5.3 Critiques and Rebuttals

As with others, this viewpoint is not without critics and defenders, which will be discussed below. Then I will provide seven reasons why I choose to locate myself under this viewpoint.

Calvin Miller says, “Many people secretly felt that this ‘expository’ style of preaching was boring, but nobody would say so out loud for fear of being branded as a liberal.”¹²⁹ According to Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, many accuse expository preaching of “dullness,”¹³⁰ “irrelevancy,” “monotony,” “spiritlessness,” “formlessness” and “detail overload.”¹³¹ They agree that people “dislike *poor* expository preaching,” though not expository preaching in itself.¹³²

It is true that some biblical sermons are boring when they major in exegesis without application. Such sermons are not only simplistic but unbiblical, because God’s words must address human problems. However, in the light of the theology of preaching under the “contextually applied theodrama” viewpoint, these accusations are not convincing because none of them are sufficiently serious as to abandon this contextually-applied theodramatic approach.

Below are the core theologies of preaching as formulated by the homiletical theologians of this viewpoint, neatly depicting and defending the accusations levelled against them.

First, Keller believes that the locus of authority for preaching is the written revelation of God, the Holy Scripture, not human-located experiences nor the human preacher with his dynamic personality and rhetoric. Although the authority is God, he also spelled out the responsibility of the preacher who had to do the exegesis, develop the sermon, and gauge the cultural situation of the listener to make the sermon relevant to the listeners. Moreover, a preacher must be consciously sensitive to the listeners’ situations and context, which is another strength that emerges from Keller’s understanding of preaching. Keller is particularly strong on the preacher’s responsibility to unravel the deep hidden social worldviews and cultural baggage in conflict with the truth of the gospel. Keller’s commitment to penetrate and challenge the otherwise invisible and culturally accepted worldviews aligns with the viewpoint of “contextually applied theodrama.” Looking at the various elements Keller has

¹²⁷Keller, 11.

¹²⁸Keller, 11.

¹²⁹Calvin Miller, *Preaching the Art of Narrative Exposition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), 20.

¹³⁰Vines and Shaddix, *Power*, 55; Charles agrees that many term expository preaching as “boring.” H.B. Charles Jr. *On Pastoring: A Short Guide to Living, Leading, and Ministering as a Pastor* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2016), n.p.

¹³¹Vines and Shaddix, *Power*, 55-58.

¹³²Vines and Shaddix, 53.

laid out, expository preaching is not “boring,” or “simplistic,” and cannot be called a “cheating” endeavour as some have claimed.

Second, Stott’s locus of authority in preaching is God (the revealed Scripture), not men. However, Stott clearly lays out the role of “church teachers” (pastors and preachers) who have experienced and accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour to unravel the slightly closed Scripture. Stott is very strong in his emphasis on “double-listening.” Far from prohibiting preachers from engaging with various sources in society to theologise and sermonise, as Barth is perceived by some as doing,¹³³ Stott strongly encourages preachers to be attentive to the cries, crisis, cultures, and climate of the society they live in and address their felt needs. Further, Stott neatly balances all the viewpoints—rationality, experience, orthodoxy, and listener-centredness, which is exemplary and therefore praiseworthy. Over and above all these, Stott is immovable in his belief that man, a finite and limited creature of God can never be a worthy dispenser of God’s word and be a transforming agent in the listeners’ lives, without first experiencing a personal encounter with Christ and the consuming presence and role of the Holy Spirit. Among others, Stott’s theology of preaching that seriously believes in “double-listening” rebuts the accusation of Buttrick that expository preaching chains God and his work to historical narratives.

EVALUATION: SEVEN ADVANTAGES OF THE CONTEXTUALLY APPLIED THEODRAMATIC VIEWPOINT

These seven points, representing the contextually applied theodramatic view, critically draw in the positive elements from all the other three viewpoints. My view on preaching falls under this viewpoint.

- i. The contextually applied theodramatic view properly pays attention to *what* preaching is (theology) before it turns its attention to *how* preaching is to be effective (methodology).
- ii. The contextually applied theodramatic view intentionally and correctly adopts God and his written Word as the primary locus of authority. God’s revelation is acknowledged as the crucial source of truth among all the human voices we encounter. God speaks. He is still the communicative God.
- iii. The contextually applied theodramatic view correctly identifies preaching as an event in which both God and humans act. It recognises the important place for human beings (preacher and listeners) in the event of preaching. It recognises the place for the unique personality of the preacher and the importance of his character which must be “like Jesus” (in his surrender to God’s will and the power of the Holy Spirit) if he is to speak “on behalf of God.” It also recognises the context of the listeners—their experiential needs and their locatedness in terms of their culture, language, place, etc., and consequently their choice for an expository, inductive,

¹³³Karl Barth, *Homiletics*, trans., Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Donald E. Daniels (Louisville, KY: WJK, 1991), 47-48.

narrative, apologetical approach in preaching.

- iv. The contextually applied theodramatic view recognises its primary goal as the systematic unpacking of a given scriptural text. However, it embraces the importance of connecting the world of the biblical text to that of contemporary listeners by the discipline of “double-listening.” As such, the dual goal of textual faithfulness and contextual sensitivity is accomplished.
- v. The contextually applied theodramatic view properly makes space for the necessity of the work of the Holy Spirit for a divine effect to happen in human lives. Nevertheless, it shows how some responsibility remains upon the preacher to make the preaching creative, lively, and engaging, so that preaching does not become “boring” to the listeners.
- vi. The contextually applied theodramatic view believes that the word of God is not merely the “springboard” but the “swimming pool” in which the preacher must remain for the whole duration of the sermonic period, with the main points of the sermon developing like a “rose from its bud.”¹³⁴ In this way, it maintains a sermonic unity and continuity—be it in a narrational form or an outline form.
- vii. The contextually applied theodramatic view is open to the inductive method of preaching (starting with the context) so long as the source of preaching’s authority is divine revelation.

CONCLUSION

The discussion in this article contrasted the four Preaching philosophies, events, locus of authority and nature of the preaching event. As mentioned in the evaluation, the fourth viewpoint with the seven advantages is not only inclusive but comprehensively answers the question, “What is Preaching?” While all the other three viewpoints individually look like single threads without much strength, the fourth viewpoint interweaves them together, thus creating a strong homiletical cord and synergy—in terms of theology and practice. Homileticians and preachers who are called to answer the question, “What is Preaching?” would do well to critically consider the advantages of the fourth viewpoint.

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¹³⁴Eugene L. Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon as Narrative Art Form* (Atlanta: Westminster John Knox Press, 1980), 8.

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