

Appendix 2

The Reformed View of Preaching

Let me remind you that though this Appendix is Reformed-specific, the ripples of what follows have travelled much wider than the out-and-out Reformed. Evangelicals, in general, have been greatly influenced by it, whether or not they realise it.

The Reformed have such a high regard for the monologue sermon that a great many of them look upon it as a virtual sacrament, even to the extent that they think of it in terms of ‘the real presence’ of Christ dispensing the very word of God to the hearers through the minister in the act of preaching.¹ Let me make good my claim. For the sake of space, I will only summarise the main points. The sources must be consulted for the full evidence.

With regard to Martin Luther, J.Mark Beach declared that his ‘conception of the presence of Christ in the [monologue] preaching of the gospel may be depicted in the following summary statements’:

[1] The word of God is the soul’s life source; there is no life apart from God’s word.

[2] The [monologue] preaching of the word of God is more profitable and useful than mere Bible reading.

[3] The outward work of grace is the voice of the minister in proclamation; the inward work of grace is the work of the Holy Spirit in imparting faith.

[4] The work of the cross is effectuated in or applied to believers through the [monologue] proclamation of the gospel; Christ imparts his accomplished work ‘through the word’.

¹ I cannot help wondering if some of those who dismiss the singing of hymns (man’s words) and demand exclusive psalm-singing (God’s words) might not come to latch onto the idea of ‘the real presence’ of Christ in the pulpit.

Appendix 2: The Reformed View of Preaching

[5] The word – faithfully [monologue] preached – is Christ’s word or voice, and an offering or presentation of Christ himself.

[6] [Monologue] preaching therefore is not a merely human enterprise; God is at work in [monologue] preaching.

[7] [Monologue] preaching of the word must be rooted and grounded in sacred Scripture.

[8] [Monologue] preaching that fails the test of fidelity to Scripture fails to qualify as [monologue] preaching and must be rejected as an imposter.

[9] Only those ordained to the [monologue] preaching office may rightly and authoritatively ‘minister the word’.

[10] [Monologue] preaching is a key of the kingdom and a source of the believer’s assurance of divine forgiveness, for that forgiveness is declared, in the way of faith, through biblical [monologue] preaching.

Numbers 2,3,4,5,6,9 and 10 give far too high a status to the monologue preacher and his sermon.

As for John Calvin, allowing for the Reformer’s usual use of ‘qualifiers’,² Beach set out his ‘summary statements regarding Calvin’s conception of the presence of Christ in the [monologue] preaching of the gospel’:

[1] In the [monologue] preaching of the gospel the sheep hear the Good Shepherd’s voice, not merely the voice of the pastor.

[2] God is pleased to accommodate himself to our human frailty and therefore he makes use of human instrumentality to declare his word.

[3] The sermon is a divine-human work in that the instrument or messenger is human; the word or message imparted is divine.

[4] [Monologue] preaching of the word must faithfully exposit and apply the Scriptures; in doing so it bears a derivative authority, but in just that way it also bears an immediate authority in our hearing of it.

[5] Christ is spiritually present in the [monologue] preaching of the gospel through the operation of the Holy Spirit; hence [monologue] preaching possesses a

² See my *Infant* pp48-51,109-110,226-231,269-270.

Appendix 2: The Reformed View of Preaching

sacramental character – an outward vehicle for an inward grace.

[6] [Monologue] preaching serves to impart an understanding of Scripture, and therefore it must be [monologue] preached in a manner adapted to and profitable for those who hear it.

[7] [Monologue] preaching occupies a place of importance above private or public Bible reading.

[8] [Monologue] preaching that is not faithful to Scripture is not [monologue] preaching.

[9] The Holy Spirit is the internal minister of the word who makes effectual the outward ministry of the word, and who communicates Christ to us in a way that is mystical, incomprehensible and spiritual.

[10] The [monologue] preaching of the word is the chief means of grace for producing faith in God's people and nurturing them in the way of faith.

[11] The proper function of the [monologue] preaching of the word is to heal and to bless unto the salvation of sinners.

[12] Believers can know the absolution of their sin in the [monologue] preaching of the gospel; the sermon is therefore a source of assurance since Christ himself speaks to us concerning our forgiveness and reconciliation through his blood.

[13] Believers may not despise the human instrument God employs to impart his word to us; rather, we must submit ourselves to their labours just as we would submit ourselves to God himself.

[14] [Monologue] preaching does not depend on the rhetorical skill of the [monologue] preacher for its efficacy, though [monologue] preachers ought to apply themselves in all respects to faithfully explicate and communicate God's word.

Numbers 1,3,5,7,9,12 and 13 give far too high a status to the monologue preacher and his sermon.

What is more, there is a very important thread running through the above: preaching as a sacramental act. Calvin had a sacramental view of preaching, akin to his sense of

Appendix 2: The Reformed View of Preaching

‘the real presence of Christ’ in the Lord’s supper.³ This plays into talk of ‘the means of grace’; that is, when believers attend ‘the means of grace’ in ‘the house of God’ under the ministry of a ‘proper’ minister engaged in preaching and such like, God conveys grace to them though the action they take part in or watch or listen to.⁴

Louis Berkhof pulled no punches when setting out his highly sacramental view of ‘the means of grace’:

Strictly speaking, only the word and the sacraments can be regarded as means of grace, that is, as objective channels which Christ has instituted in the church, and to which he ordinarily binds himself in the communication of his grace...

The Heidelberg Catechism asks in Question 65: ‘Since, then, we are made partakers of Christ and all his benefits by faith only, whence comes this faith?’ And the answer is: ‘From the Holy Spirit, who works it in our hearts by the preaching of the holy gospel, and confirms it by the use of the holy sacraments’.

They are the official means of the church of Jesus Christ. The preaching of the word (or, the word preached) and the administration of the sacraments (or, the sacraments administered) are the means officially instituted in the church, by which the Holy Spirit works and confirms faith in the hearts of men...

Strictly speaking, it is the word as it is preached in the name of God and in virtue of a divine commission, that is considered as a means of grace in the technical sense of the word, alongside... the sacraments which are administered in the name of God. Naturally, the word of God can also be considered as a means of grace in a more general sense. It may be a real blessing as it is brought to man in many additional ways: as it is read in the home, is taught in the school, or is circulated in tracts. As the official means of grace, placed at the disposal of the church, both the word and the sacraments can only be administered by the lawful and properly qualified officers of the church. But in distinction from the sacraments the word can also be carried

³ See my *Infant* pp220-226.

⁴ See Appendix 3 for more on ‘the means of grace’.

Appendix 2: The Reformed View of Preaching

out into the world by all believers and operate in many different ways.⁵

Of the many comments I would like to make – and which ought to be made – let me point out how Berkhof has diminished the new-covenant doctrine of ‘the priesthood of all believers’ into ‘the priesthood of a very few, special, believers’, ‘the lawful and properly qualified officers of the church’. What is more, the priesthood he has allowed to every believer has been reduced to witnessing to unbelievers – those outside the church. Berkhof evidently saw no teaching ministry for every believer within the *ekklēsia*. And yet he clearly enforced the notion of the sacramental priesthood of the few within the church in the form of ‘the minister’. How sad! How serious! He has encouraged sacramentalism and eliminated the all-body ministry. Quite a catastrophic feat in short compass.

R.C.Sproul also had a highly sacramental view of ‘the means of grace’:

In his grace and in his wisdom, God has provided ways by which we can regularly have our faith in his promises fortified. Historically, we have referred to these ways of strengthening our faith as the ordinary means of grace. Prayer, the preaching of the word, and the sacraments are not elaborate or fancy methods of giving us what we need to confirm our trust in Christ. To an outside observer, they do not seem special at all. After all, they make use of rather common things such as human speech, bread, wine and water. But by faith and the work of the Spirit, these common elements are used to do an uncommon work – the confirmation of our trust in Jesus and the strengthening of our wills to flee from sin and rest in Christ alone.

Preaching is not a powerless human explanation of the biblical text, for the Spirit accompanies it so that God’s word achieves its purposes... Prayer is more than empty words; it establishes communion between us and the Creator, thereby empowering us for belief and faithful, effective service... Baptism and the Lord’s supper are not

⁵ Louis Berkhof: ‘The Means of Grace in General’.

Appendix 2: The Reformed View of Preaching

mere memorials that we do simply because Jesus tells us to do them; rather, we participate mysteriously in Christ himself when by faith we take part in these ordinances.⁶

One comment must suffice. Sproul was wide of the mark when he said: ‘Baptism and the Lord’s supper are not mere memorials that we do simply because Jesus tells us to do them; rather, we participate mysteriously in Christ himself when by faith we take part in these ordinances’. Note his pejorative ‘mere’. He was casting an aspersion on Christ who expressly commanded his disciples to keep the supper ‘in remembrance of’ himself (Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24-25) – not to experience his real presence. Sproul was disastrously wrong. We do not ‘participate mysteriously in Christ himself’ when we are baptised and take the supper. Both are ordinances, and both are symbols, signs, memorials. And there is nothing ‘mere’ about *that!* The biblical principle is set out in Israel’s experience in the old covenant recorded in Joshua 4:1-9,20-24. I quote the relevant words. God told Israel that the stones taken from the Jordan were:

...to serve as a sign among you... These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever.

The stones accomplished nothing. But that did not make them ‘mere’. They served as invaluable teaching signs and reminders, memorials for Israel of their miraculous deliverance by the hand of God. What is more, God links the entrance into the land with the first part of Israel’s deliverance from Egypt – the passover (Ex. 12:25-27). I quote from my *The Hinge in Romans 1 – 8: A critique of N.T.Wright’s view of Baptism and Conversion*:

Notice the two questions, questions which would be asked in years to come by the children (and later descendants) of those who actually experienced the first passover and those who crossed the Jordan: ‘What do you mean by this service?’ and ‘What do you mean by these stones?’ That’s the first link. Now look at the dates. The passover lamb had

⁶ R.C.Sproul: ‘Means of Grace’.

Appendix 2: The Reformed View of Preaching

to be selected for the passover sacrifice at the start of the process of deliverance, on the tenth day of the first month: ‘This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year. Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household’ (Ex. 12:2-3). And what about the crossing of the Jordan – that is, the completion of the deliverance? ‘On the tenth day of the first month the people went up from the Jordan and camped at Gilgal on the eastern border of Jericho’ (Josh. 4:19), the tenth day of the first month in both cases. Remarkable! None of this was an accident. By the memorials, by the questions and by the dates, God was teaching the Israelites that their leaving Egypt and their entering Canaan were one and the same event in his eyes.

Now think about the new-covenant equivalent of all this. The sinner has to be brought out of Adam and brought into Christ; out of the flesh, into the Spirit; out of Satan’s domain, into Christ’s kingdom (Col. 1:13); out of bondage, into liberty; out of slavery, into rest. Notice how, in Romans 6:3-4, Paul telescopes the two events – the ‘out of’ and the ‘into’ – into one, speaking of believers in their dying with Christ and their rising with Christ.⁷

So let us have no more of the ‘mere’ when talking about God-ordained memorials.

Furthermore, do not miss Sproul’s ‘mysteriously’. As I will explain, while sacramentalists may pontificate about their sacramentalism, they don’t have a clue how their pet scheme works!⁸

Finally, do not forget that Sproul has included preaching (monologue preaching by ‘the minister’, it must be understood) in all this sacramentalism.

Francis R. Beattie also took a sacramental view of preaching:

The reading and preaching of the word, the observance of the sacraments, and the exercise of prayer, are the usual and external means by which Christ and the benefits of grace

⁷ My *Hinge* pp20-21.

⁸ See also Appendix 3.

Appendix 2: The Reformed View of Preaching

are conveyed to the believer, so that his spiritual life is purified and expanded thereby.⁹

As did Ian Stackhouse. He spoke of the ‘lamentable’ loss brought about by:

...the [contemporary] general attack upon preaching... more generally from those who just cannot take more than ten minutes of sustained monologue... [This loss] is of what the Reformers understood as one of the prime sacraments of the Church – the sacrament of the word... Preaching is not just a word *about* Christ; it is the word *of* Christ. Thus the Reformers understood the preaching ministry of the Church... It has often been said, somewhat sarcastically, that such a view of preaching sounds dangerously sacramental – the means of grace in the church... And yet... that is precisely what the Reformers were arguing for... Gospel preaching is not just *about* the power of God, information about what he has done through Christ and the Spirit for our salvation. Gospel preaching done in the power of the Spirit is actually *in itself* the power of God unto salvation. It actually delivers Christ in the congregation week after week.¹⁰

Do not miss the ‘actually’: ‘Gospel preaching done in the power of the Spirit is *actually* in itself the power of God unto salvation. It *actually* delivers Christ in the congregation week after week’. Wow! This is what is meant by a sacramental view of preaching and the preacher delivering a monologue as a means of grace.

Geoff Thomas, who, as he freely acknowledged, drew heavily on Edward Donnelly, sailed close to the wind. Both men did. Commenting on ‘the preacher’ of Romans 10, Thomas declared:

[The] authority of the preacher is increased by the person he represents – described in verse 12 as ‘Lord of all’. He is

⁹ Francis R. Beattie: ‘The Presbyterian Standards’.

¹⁰ Ian Stackhouse: ‘Negative Preaching and the Modern Mind: A Crisis in Evangelical Preaching’, *Evangelical Quarterly*, 2001, pp248-250, original emphasis.

Appendix 2: The Reformed View of Preaching

the one who sends every true preacher, and he is the one to whom all authority is given in heaven and on earth, the Almighty Son of God. This is emphasised again in verse 14, a point which our translations often miss. Most of them put in a preposition: ‘How are they to believe in him *of* whom they have never heard?’ Literally, however, the text reads: ‘How are they to believe him whom they never heard?’ It is not just that they have not heard *of* him. *They have not heard him.*¹¹ Professor Cranfield comments: ‘True Christian preaching is that through which Christ himself speaks’. Wasn’t this his promise to those whom he was sending into the world? ‘The one who hears you, hears me’ (Luke 10:16). The hymnist says: ‘I heard the voice of Jesus say, Come unto me and rest’.¹²

I will come back to Thomas, but since he acknowledged Donnelly as his source, let me continue with him. In the following, Donnelly played with fire:

God himself acts through the gospel minister. We can never consider the faithful preacher apart from the Lord whose representative he is. For God has chosen to mediate his ministry in the world through his people, to work through the body of Christ and, in a special way, through those we [that is, Christendom – DG] calls ministers. Their ministry is, in fact, his ministry.¹³

There is undoubted truth in this. Indeed, properly nuanced it could be excellent. But care is needed. What, precisely, did Donnelly mean? His words – ‘their ministry is, in fact, his [that is, Christ’s] ministry’ – are capable of two interpretations. To whom was Donnelly referring when he talked of ‘their ministry’? Was he speaking of ‘the body of Christ’ (the members of the *ekklēsia*), or ‘the ministers’ (the recognised preachers, the men in the pulpit)? An enormous amount hangs upon the answer. Donnelly needed to be

¹¹ My emphasis, throughout this extract.

¹² Geoff Thomas: ‘God Sends Preachers to Call Men to Believe’. See also Edward Donnelly in Philip H. Eveson (ed.): *The Gospel Ministry Today...*, Evangelical Press, Darlington, 2005, pp68-69.

¹³ Donnelly p17.

Appendix 2: The Reformed View of Preaching

explicit here, leaving no room for ambiguity. Alas, in this, he failed.

If he meant the former – ‘the body of Christ’ – he was effectively destroying any notion of sacramentalism in ‘the ministry’ of ‘the minister’: all the members are ‘the ministers’ of Christ, and have Christ’s ‘ministry’; there is no special ‘ministry’, reserved for ‘the ministers’ (in truth, the clergy), the men in the pulpit. But if Donnelly meant the latter – ‘the ministers’ – he was indeed promoting the specialness of the ministry of those whom Christendom calls ministers, and he was thereby encouraging a sacramental view of preaching: ‘their ministry’ – that is, the ministry of the ‘ministers’ – ‘is, in fact, his [that is, Christ’s] ministry’.

So which did Donnelly mean? I have no doubt myself: he was referring to ‘the ministers’ and their special ministry. And as such he was leaving the door wide open to a sacramental view of ‘the ministry’.

This comes over very strongly in the way Donnelly immediately went on – without a break – to speak of Moses and Joshua, and, without a pause, to move to ‘the gospel minister’.¹⁴ Like Moses, like Joshua:

...the task of the gospel minister is to bring the word of God and that only. He is God’s mouthpiece, God’s spokesman.¹⁵

After speaking of the prophets, quoting Deuteronomy 18:20 and Jeremiah 26:2, Donnelly concluded:

This means that God himself is speaking through gospel ministers. They are prophets, heralds, ambassadors. Ezekiel is commanded: ‘Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me’ (Ezek. 33:7).

¹⁴ I deliberately use repeated tautology in this paragraph to enforce the point.

¹⁵ Donnelly p18. Donnelly spoke of God as the Shepherd of Israel (Ps. 80:1; 100:3), making Moses and Joshua into the shepherds of Israel who brought the people out of Egypt (and into the promised land) (Ex. 3:8-10; Num. 27:16). Hence ‘their ministry is, in fact, his ministry’.

Appendix 2: The Reformed View of Preaching

It is God's warning that the prophet brings. As our Lord puts it in Luke 10:16: 'The one who hears you, hears me, and the one who rejects you, rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects the one who sent me'... Paul is very aware that Christ is active in his ministry.¹⁶

Pulling all this together, it is clear that Donnelly was setting out a very high view of 'the minister'. 'The minister' is decidedly in the line of Moses, Joshua, the prophets and the apostles. He must regard himself as such. His hearers must look upon him in that light. What a remarkable claim! Donnelly, however did not hesitate. Driving home his point, he asked:

Have preachers lost the awesomeness of this truth, that God is acting through us? Such is the authority with which we have been invested. Such is the dignity of our office. God is speaking through us, working through us.¹⁷

Later, he stated:

The preacher is the herald of Almighty God, and we are bringing our Master's words to humans. This is our authority... The authority of the preacher is increased by the person he represents... He is... the representative of the King of Kings, bringing a message from his Master... It is God's message that we bear... [We are] spokesmen of the Lord God... God's appointed spokesmen.¹⁸

This leap – from Christ, prophets and apostles to 'ministers' – needs far more care and precision. The truth is, Donnelly was elevating the man in the pulpit, giving him the same status as prophets, Christ and the apostles! If 'God [really] is speaking through us, working through us' in the way he did through Christ, prophets and apostles, then, of course, Donnelly was right to speak in terms of the 'awesomeness... authority... dignity... office' of 'the minister'. But if his premise was wrong, his words carry huge risk.

¹⁶ Donnelly p18.

¹⁷ Donnelly pp18-19.

¹⁸ Donnelly pp68-69.

Appendix 2: The Reformed View of Preaching

Donnelly, I am absolutely confident, would be horrified if his readers got the impression he was teaching a sacramental, real presence and ministerial power in the pulpit. Very well. In that case, I say the same as I said in the body of the book when referring to Lloyd-Jones. It is not only *what* men like Lloyd-Jones, Donnelly and Thomas say or write, it is what people *think* they are saying or writing, what they *think* they mean. Men need to be far more careful when making such swelling claims for the preacher and his monologue.

Before I leave this point, let me briefly probe Donnelly's textual claim. This is what he said:

Literally, however, the text [Romans 10:14] reads: 'How are they to believe him whom they never heard?'

Does it? He went further when he asserted that this is:

...a point which our translations often miss. Most of them put in a preposition: 'How are they to believe in him *of* whom they have never heard?'

Note the 'most', most translations. I wonder why, if Donnelly is right, 'most translations' use the words they do? Clearly, Donnelly was implying that the translators have unjustly added the preposition 'of', that the 'of' is not in the original Greek, and it should be removed from the translations. Is this far-reaching, and exceedingly serious – even reputation-damaging – accusation justified? Why would the translators do it? Why would so many of them do it – independently? Neither Donnelly or Thomas seemed to ask such questions.

Moreover, as Donnelly admitted, most translations do have the preposition (NIV, ESV, AV or KJV, NKJV, RAV, Holman Christian Standard, and so on) (and this must not be glossed over!), while, notably, the NASB does not, but have the translators unjustly added the 'of'?¹⁹ All the Greek versions I have consulted have the preposition. So, on what

¹⁹ The ESV has a footnote: 'or: him whom they have never heard'.

Appendix 2: The Reformed View of Preaching

grounds did Donnelly suggest that the translators in question unfairly inserted the ‘of’ into the text?

What is more, getting back to Thomas, was he quite as confident as he wanted to sound? Let me return to the earlier extract, and take it a little further. Notice how he watered down his claim from:

Literally, however, the text reads: ‘How are they to believe him whom they never heard?’ It is not just that they have not heard of him. They have not heard him. Professor Cranfield comments: ‘True Christian preaching is that through which Christ himself speaks’. Wasn’t this his promise to those whom he was sending into the world? ‘The one who hears you, hears me’ (Luke 10:16). The hymnist says: ‘I heard the voice of Jesus say, Come unto me and rest’.

To:

Of course he [that is, the hymnist] didn’t hear audibly Jesus’ own voice, but there are times in our lives when God deals with us, and speaks to us, and we know that we are in his presence, and, though the preacher is preaching to everyone, we *feel as though the Lord is speaking* through him just to us. When we don’t have such blessed feelings Christ is still speaking. We are dull of hearing.

What a change of tone!

There is, it goes without saying, a world of difference between – on the one hand – a preacher by the Spirit speaking for Christ, speaking in the name of Christ, speaking of Christ, and – on the other hand – Christ himself speaking, really, actually speaking through the man, speaking directly through the man’s voice. Indeed, the difference is vast, and carries immense ramifications. If Christ really is speaking through the man, then it surely must mean that the minister is a virtual pope. One wonders why it is that so little lasting fruit comes from such discourses, and how so many fail to discern the voice of Christ. What is more, how can Christ be speaking through both preacher A and preacher B, when the two preachers set out contradictory doctrines?

Appendix 2: The Reformed View of Preaching

As for the use of Luke 10:16, assuming that the commission of the seventy-two can be applied *carte-blanche* to ‘ministers’ today – and this is quite an assumption – this is best understood by the parallel place:

Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me (Matt. 10:40).²⁰

So, are we to believe that when a church welcomes a preacher it is, literally, really, welcoming Christ? Surely not! Jameson-Fausset-Brown set out Christ’s meaning:

As the treatment which an ambassador receives is understood and regarded as expressing the light in which he that sends him is viewed, so, says our Lord here.

The preacher represents Christ, speaks in his name, declares his word, but this is a far cry from saying that Christ is actually speaking in the pulpit, that he is really, personally, addressing the congregation as the man preaches, that the preacher speaks as a prophet or apostle, handing down (as it were, from on high) the infallible word of God.

But then we have Paul making this statement:

[Christ] came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near (Eph. 2:17).

Does this establish the sacramental?

Of course, Christ did preach – literally – while on earth, but almost entirely to Jews: ‘I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel’ (Matt. 15:24). So, what was Paul saying in Ephesians 2:17? When did he preach to the Gentiles?

And then we have this:

Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which he

²⁰ Of course, I agree with Calvin (commenting on Luke 10:16) that the Matthew passage speaks of persons and the Luke passage speaks of doctrine.

Appendix 2: The Reformed View of Preaching

went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water (1 Pet. 3:18-20).

As everybody admits, this reference to Christ preaching to the spirits in prison is not easy to interpret.

But the decision has to be made. Do these passages teach a sacramental, real presence of Christ in the preacher today?

As for Ephesians 2:17, John Gill said this speaks of Christ:

...coming by his Spirit in the ministry of his apostles, to whom he gave a commission after he had made peace and reconciliation by the blood of his cross, to go into all the world and preach the gospel to the Gentiles in the furthest parts of the earth.

But Paul also spoke of:

...the way you learned Christ! – assuming that you have heard about²¹ him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus (Eph. 4:20-21).

Gill:

If so be that you have heard him... [that is,] not heard him preach, but heard him preached; and that not merely externally, with the outward hearing of the ear – though oftentimes spiritual conviction and illumination, true faith in Christ, real comfort from him, and establishment and assurance of interest in him, come this way, as to these Ephesians... – but internally, so as to know him, understand his word, and distinguish his voice; so as to approve of him and love him, and believe in him; feel the power of his gospel, relish his truths, and obey his ordinances, and so bring forth fruit to his glory; as such do, who are quickened by him, whose ears are unstopped, and their hearts opened, and their understandings enlightened; and who have hearing ears, and understanding hearts given them, and have been taught by him: not personally, but by his Spirit and

²¹ The same issue arises with 'about' as 'of'.

Appendix 2: The Reformed View of Preaching

ministers; for Christ is not only the subject of the ministry of the word, and whom the Spirit of God teaches and directs souls to for righteousness, pardon, cleansing, and for every supply of grace... but he is the efficient cause of teaching; and there is none who teaches like him. And those who are taught by him, are taught as the truth is in Jesus; as the gospel is in him, as in its original and subject.

Of course, as Christ declared:

The sheep hear his [the Shepherd's; that is, Christ's] voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers... I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice... My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me (John 10:3-5,16,28).

But this extract has nothing to do with preaching *per se*. It certainly does not support a sacramental view of the man in the pulpit.

Above all, on Romans 10, above all – above all, I say, as always – the context is king. And the context could not be clearer. Paul is talking about the need for a human preacher (in the full new-covenant sense) to take the gospel to sinners, to preach Christ to them. There is no suggestion that the apostle was thinking of Christ actually addressing sinners – the necessity of the real presence of Christ – in the preacher, in the pulpit, and that without that real presence sinners cannot hear the gospel, believe and be saved. Of course, only Christ by his Spirit can make the preacher's preaching effectual, but the notion that Paul is setting out a sacramental doctrine of preaching is sheer invention. The NASB, which as I have acknowledged, leaves out the 'of' in Romans 10:14, makes the position crystal clear in its (marginal) rendering of Romans 10:17:

Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

Appendix 2: The Reformed View of Preaching

Or, as it has it in the margin:

Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word concerning Christ.

Precisely. It is the word ‘concerning’ Christ, not Christ’s own real presence, Christ himself speaking. It is just as the NIV has it:

Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.

Romans 10 has nothing – nothing whatsoever – to do with a sacramental view of preaching.

As Douglas J.Moo, commenting on Romans 10:14 and 17, declared:

[Sinners] cannot believe in [Christ] if they do not hear the word that proclaims Christ. And that word will not be heard unless someone preaches it. But the preacher is nothing more than a herald, a person entrusted by another with a message... The kind of hearing that can lead to faith can only happen if there is a definite salvific [saving] word from God that is proclaimed. That word, through which God is now proclaiming the availability of eschatological salvation, and which can awaken faith in those who hear it, is ‘the word of Christ’: [that is, it is] the message whose content is the lordship and resurrection of Christ (see Romans 10:8-9).

Moo added some notes. Commenting on the ‘of’, he declared:

The context (see verses 15, 16 and 17) seems to require a reference to the ‘word’, the gospel... ‘the word that proclaims Christ’.²²

So, I say again, Romans 10 has nothing – nothing whatsoever – to do with a sacramental view of preaching.

²² Douglas J.Moo: *The Epistle to the Romans*, William B.Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1996, pp663,666.

Appendix 2: The Reformed View of Preaching

The consequences of the sacramental approach to the preaching of ‘the minister’ are dire.²³ In a very important passage in his ‘Norrington Responds to Critics’,²⁴ Norrington tackled the principle, and showed the grim consequences that flow from it. While the entirety of Norrington’s observations should be read – including his endnotes – let me confine myself to quoting just one paragraph:

We are asked to believe that when the clergyman (our modern professional replacement for the plurality of elders in the New Testament church) in the dedicated church building (as opposed to ‘in homes’ as was the practice in New Testament times) mounts the pulpit (that elevated fixture introduced in the third century) and addresses a passive audience (who are not passive in the New Testament) or ‘laity’ (a designation added long after New Testament times) in the pews ([a] thirteenth-century addition) *via* the regular sermon (which did not exist in New Testament practice), then and only then is the event especially pleasing to God, who responds with a special, if not unique, channel of his grace. How can it be that such a radical departure is more pleasing to God than emulating clear New Testament patterns and practices? Does this mean that those first acts of obedience [that is, those in the *ekklesia* in the New Testament] are now offensive to God?²⁵

Well?

As I have said, Calvin really did have a sacramental view of monologue preaching:

²³ See my *Infant; No Sacerdotalism!*

²⁴ Norrington (Zens) pp201-206. It doesn’t take three guesses to work out the sort of critics who closed ranks against Norrington. The strongest objection to Norrington which I have seen was made by Stackhouse, who argued for ‘preaching’ as ‘the sacrament of the word’, and appealed for the recovery of ‘this high view of preaching’ as the answer to the present state of things (Stackhouse pp255-256). Norrington answered him.

²⁵ Norrington (Zens) pp202-203.

Appendix 2: The Reformed View of Preaching

We see that God, who might perfect his people in a moment, chooses not to bring them to manhood in any other way than by the education of the church. We see the mode of doing it expressed; the [monologue] preaching of celestial doctrine is committed to pastors. We see that all without exception are brought into the same order, that they may with meek and docile spirit allow themselves to be governed by teachers appointed for this purpose... Hence it follows, that all who reject the spiritual food of the soul divinely offered to them by the hands of the church, deserve to perish of hunger and famine... He [that is, God] by an admirable test proves our obedience when we listen to his ministers just as we would to himself.²⁶

We are now to speak of the order in which the Lord has been pleased that his church should be governed. For though it is right that he alone should rule and reign in the church, that he should preside and be conspicuous in it, and that its government should be exercised and administered solely by his word; yet as he does not dwell among us in visible presence, so as to declare his will to us by his own lips, he in this (as we have said) uses the ministry of men, by making them, as it were, his substitutes, not by transferring his right and honour to them, but only doing his own work by their lips, just as an artificer uses a tool for any purpose.²⁷

By these words he shows that the ministry of men, which God employs in governing the church, is a principal bond by which believers are kept together in one body. He also intimates that the church cannot be kept safe, unless supported by those guards to which the Lord has been pleased to commit its safety. Christ ‘ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things’ (Eph. 4:10). The mode of filling is this: By the ministers to whom he has committed this office, and given grace to discharge it, he dispenses and distributes his gifts to the church, and thus exhibits why he rather chooses to employ men. First, in this way he declares his condescension towards us, employing men to perform the function of his ambassadors in the

²⁶ Calvin: *Institutes* 4.1.5.

²⁷ Calvin: *Institutes* 4.3.1.

Appendix 2: The Reformed View of Preaching

world, to be the interpreters of his secret will;²⁸ in short, to represent his own person.²⁹

We may therefore gather from these words that the church is not to be ruled by the outward preaching of the word, as though God had substituted men in his own place, and thus divested himself of his own office, but that he only speaks by their mouth. And this is the import of these words: ‘The people attended to the voice of Jehovah their God, and to the words of Haggai the prophet’. For the word of God is not distinguished from the words of the prophet, as though the prophet had added anything of his own. Haggai then ascribed these words to himself, not that he devised anything himself, so as to corrupt the pure doctrine which had been delivered to him by God, but that he only distinguished between God, the author of the doctrine, and his minister... God was heard when he spoke by the mouth of man... The voice of God is heard when the people embrace what they hear from the mouth of a prophet... Whosoever reject God’s prophets clearly show that they despise God himself... The message of the prophet obtained as much power as though God had descended from heaven, and had given manifest tokens of his presence. We may then conclude from these words that the glory of God so shines in his word, that we ought to be as much affected by it, whenever he speaks by his servants, as though he were nigh to us, face to face, as the Scripture says in another place.³⁰

Calvin’s words are right when applied to the prophets, Christ and the apostles, but they cannot be transferred to preachers today. Yet Calvin made that transfer to preachers. How will Acts 17:11 fit into *that*?

Calvin again:

Ministers... It is a great and lofty distinction that men are appointed over the church to represent the Son of God.³¹

²⁸ Do today’s preachers know the secret will of God? How do they know it?

²⁹ Calvin: *Institutes* 4.3.2.

³⁰ Commenting on Hag. 1:12.

³¹ Commenting on John 3:29.

Appendix 2: The Reformed View of Preaching

Rome talks of the Pope as the Vicar of Christ. Calvin (and through him, many of the Reformed) look upon ‘the minister’ as a virtual pope.

Calvin again:

The minister of the word is said in some way to save those whom he leads to the obedience of faith. So conducted indeed ought to be the ministry of our salvation, as that we may feel that the whole power and efficacy of it depends on God, and that we may give him his due praise: we ought at the same time to understand that preaching is an instrument for effecting the salvation of the faithful, and though it can do nothing without the Spirit of God, yet through his inward operation it produces the most powerful effects.³²

There can be no doubt that it is the ministry of the word, and the means that are required for the exercise of it, that he compares to a looking-glass. For God, who is otherwise invisible, has appointed these means for revealing himself³³ to us.³⁴

Of course, as so often with Calvin, he fell back into double-speak, counselling ministers against a domineering attitude in the church, and so on:

We are, then, ministers of the Spirit, not as if we held him enclosed within us, or as it were captive – not as if we could at our pleasure confer his grace upon all, or upon whom we pleased – but because Christ, through our instrumentality, illuminates the minds of men, renews their hearts, and, in short, regenerates them wholly.³⁵

But it is no use slamming the stable door (or trying to) when the horse has long disappeared over the hill, Calvin having given the unfortunate creature a good cut with the whip to give him a flying start!

One last quote:

³² Commenting on Rom. 11:14.

³³ Calvin had ‘discovering himself’.

³⁴ Commenting on 1 Cor. 13:12.

³⁵ Commenting on 2 Cor. 3:6.

Appendix 2: The Reformed View of Preaching

A commission has been given to the ministers of the gospel to communicate to us this grace... It is the part of ministers, therefore, to apply to us, so to speak, the fruit of Christ's death. Lest, however, anyone should dream of a magical application, such as papists contrive, we must carefully observe what he immediately subjoins – that it consists wholly in the preaching of the gospel... Hence the ministers of the gospel restore us to the favour of God in a right and orderly manner, when they bear testimony to us by means of the gospel as to the favour of God having been procured for us... I do not, indeed, deny, that the grace of Christ is applied to us in the sacraments, and that our reconciliation with God is then confirmed in our consciences; but, as the testimony of the gospel is engraven upon the sacraments, they are not to be judged of separately by themselves, but must be taken in connection with the gospel, of which they are appendages. *In fine* [in short], the ministers of the church are ambassadors, for testifying and proclaiming the benefit of reconciliation, only on this condition – that they speak from the gospel, as from an authentic register.³⁶

There is no doubt: the Reformed have developed a highly-sacramental view of monologue preaching by a duly ordained man. And, as I said, the ripples have spread far beyond the out-and-out Reformed.

³⁶ Commenting on 2 Cor. 5:19.