

# Preaching in the Reformed Tradition

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# introduction

“Seeing that Christ Jesus is he whom God the Father hath commanded onely to bee heard and followed of his sheepe, wee judge it necessary that his Gospell be truely and openly preached in every Church and Assembly of this realme, and that all doctrine repugnant to the same, be utterly repressed as damnable to mans salvation”

*The First Book of Discipline (1560), I*

# initial observations

- the true and public preaching of the Gospel *matters*
- this led to various practical arrangements for preaching ...
- ... but all of these form part of a larger framework
- there is a need for *theological* thinking about preaching

# the route ahead

introduction

section I - the place of preaching in the Reformed churches

section II - the event of preaching

... the event of preaching and the Word

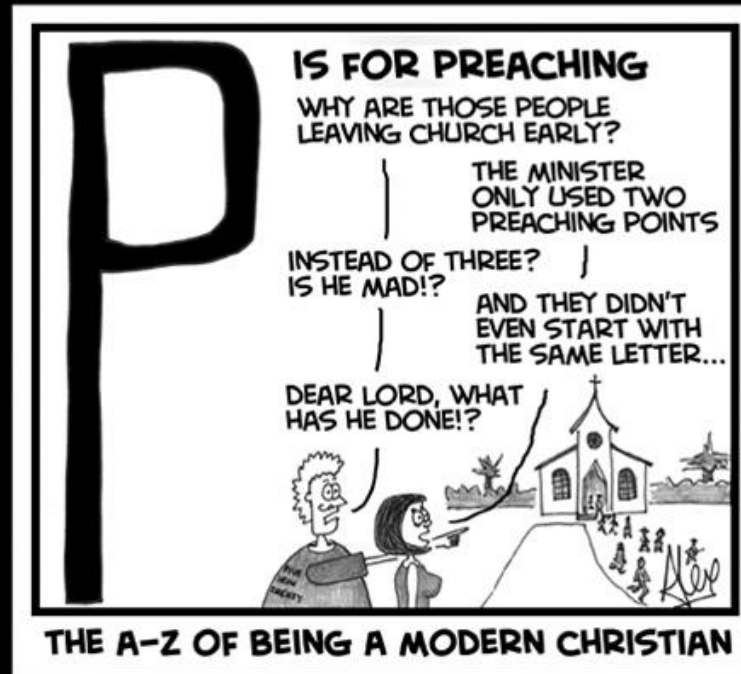
... the event of preaching and the Spirit

conclusion

# I - the place of preaching in the Reformed churches

## CAKE OR DEATH

by alex baker



# the notes or marks of the church

- the true preaching of the Word of God
- the right administration of the sacraments
- [church discipline]

“In the first degree of necessity is the pure preaching and profession of the word, since without it the church cannot exist”

F. Turretin, *Institutes*, III.18.xii.VII, 78

# the primacy of preaching (i)

- practical ramifications

traditional Reformed church liturgy “is structured around the Word, preparing to hear it, listening to it, entering into its exposition either through listening and thought, or by more active participation, and then preparing to live it in the world”

David Cornick, *Letting God be God*, 56

# the primacy of preaching (ii)

- theological ramifications

“it was a fundamental principle of the Reformation that there is no people without the proclamation of the Gospel;  
it follows that where the gospel is not proclaimed, even a packed sanctuary is not a church”

B.A. Gerrish, *Christian Faith*, 212



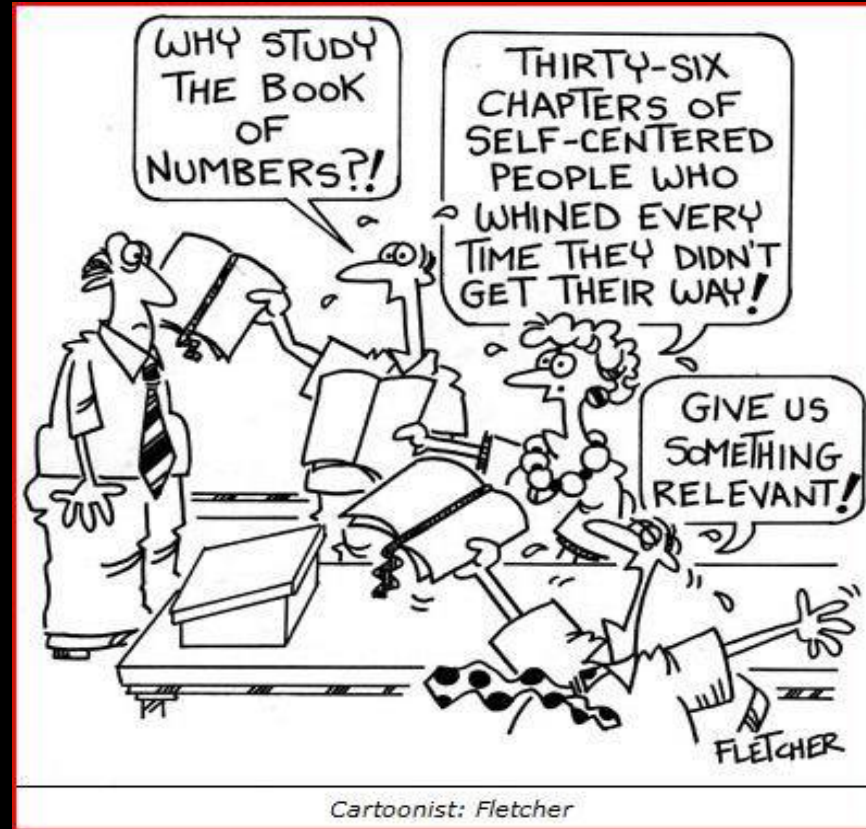
## II - the event of preaching



# the event of preaching

- to consider this event from two perspectives:
  - the event of preaching and the Word
  - the event of preaching and the Spirit
- a focus on this theme in the Reformed tradition ...
- ... but (hopefully!) with ecumenical resonances

## II.1 - the event of preaching and the Word



# the Word of God as beyond us (i)

- the Word of God as *external* to us
- preaching as 'ec-centric'

“all the ministers of the church must beware, that they follow not herein their own affections ... [and thereby] set forth to the church their own inventions, and not the [W]ord of God”

Heinrich Bullinger, *Decades*, I.iii.74

# the Word of God as beyond us (ii)

- the Word of God as *Word of God*
- a Word to which we can only seek to point
- a Word for whose presence we can only pray

“Preaching cannot claim to convey the truth of God”

Karl Barth, *Prayer and Preaching*, 67

# the Word of God as beyond us (iii)

- the Word of God in *Scripture*
- the concrete external form of the Word of God

“the ... faithful ministers of the church of Christ ... must have a diligent regard to keep the scriptures sound and perfect, and to teach the people of Christ the word of God sincerely”

Heinrich Bullinger, *Decades*, I.iii.75

# the Word of God as beyond us (iv)

- the Word of God in *Jesus Christ*
- the Word of God is not exhausted by Scripture

Jesus Christ is not trapped in a book, however esteemed that book might be; rather Jesus Christ lives and reigns in the world even today, creating and sustaining Christian faith and nurturing and guiding the Christian church

# the accommodation of the Word of God

- the Word of God in human words
- an *apocalyptic* event – God enters our time and space

“The proclaimed Word is itself a ‘form’ of the one Word of God ... [It] is therefore neither mere communication nor an action borne by men. Rather, it is an inherent part of the salvation-event”

Otto Weber, *Foundations*, II.585



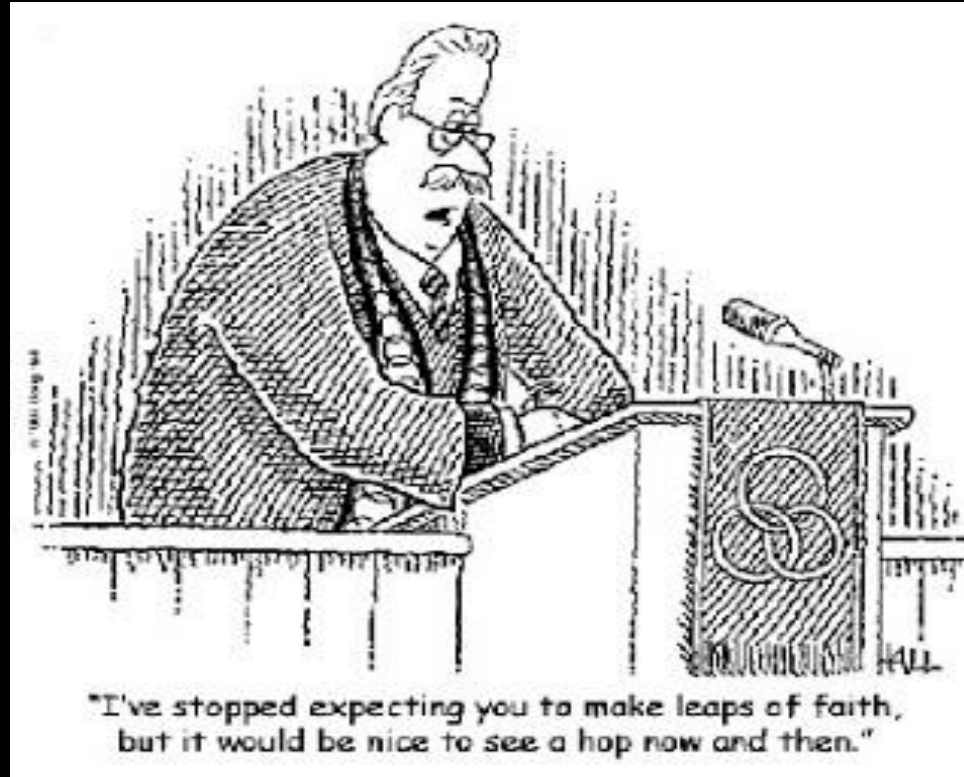
# the vocation of the Word of God

- the Word of God as Gospel and Law
- the liberating Word of grace is  
an empowering Word of responsibility

“God cannot draw us to [God] without involving us in responsibility”

Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/2, 511

## II.2 - the event of preaching and the Spirit



# the Spirit and the preacher (i)

- the event of preaching and inspiration

“human words, as the signs by which ... preaching points to the self-disclosure and self-testimony of the Word of God, only become operative when they are inspired and used ... by the Holy Spirit.”

Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/2,756

## the Spirit and the preacher (ii)

- the event of preaching and 'transparency'

what words of the preacher will not obstruct or occlude the Word of God but will best allow the light of that Word in the work of the Spirit to shine through? The preacher is, after all, a mere witness ...

# the Spirit and the preacher (iii)

- the event of preaching and concreteness

the dishonouring of God on the part of “those wh[o] cry out against the exposition of the scriptures, and would not have the ministers of the word and churches to declare the scriptures in open and solemn audience, neither to apply them to the places, times, states, and persons”

Heinrich Bullinger, *Decades*, I.iii.74

# the Spirit and the congregation (i)

- the event of preaching and inspiration

“Even if you hear the gospel of Jesus Christ from an apostle, you cannot act upon it unless the heavenly Father teach and draw you by the Spirit ... God reveals himself by his own Spirit, and we cannot learn of him without his Spirit”

Huldrych Zwingli, *On the Clarity ...*

# the Spirit and the congregation (ii)

- the event of preaching and concreteness

“[the] preaching of the Gospel is ... called by the apostle ‘the spirit’ and ‘the ministry of the spirit’ because by faith it becomes effectual and living in the ears, nay more, in the hearts of believers through the illumination of the Holy Spirit”

*Second Helvetic Confession (1566), XIII*

# the Spirit and the congregation (iii)

- the event of preaching as prayerful

“We must pray continually, that the bountiful and liberal Lord will vouchsafe to bestow on us his Spirit, that by it the seed of God’s word may be quickened in our hearts”

Heinrich Bullinger, *Decades*, I.ii.66



# conclusion

- challenges to preaching as most necessary mark of the church?
  - the challenge of the schedule
    - ... the marginalisation of preaching by the preacher
  - the challenge of the internet
    - ... the diminishment of the concreteness of preaching
  - the challenge of the eucharist
    - ... the decentring of the primacy of preaching



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