

# THE PREACHING COMMUNITY

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A Practical Theological Analysis  
of the Role of Preaching within the  
Christian Brethren Church

by

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## SUMMARY

This dissertation studies the role of preaching in the Christian Brethren Church from a practical theological perspective. I commence by setting up a practical theological theory that draws from both revelatory and anthropological models to develop a preaching model that considers preaching as a Revelatory Covenantal Conversation involving divine revelation, community dialogue and intended response, and has ecclesiological focus and impact. In this dissertation I propose a theological theory on the role of preaching in the church which asserts that:

Preaching stands, in the line of the self revelation of God, as his continuing action to both reveal himself, and be present with his covenant people of promise. Therefore preaching within the church must conform to this revelation in: event – the covenantal conversation itself; message – the content of the preaching; interpretation/response – the preacher’s intended response by the hearers; the intention - the intended shaping of the community of faith through the preaching event.

Preaching is a continuing Revelatory Covenantal Conversation between God and his people to create, transform, and continue his community of faith – the preaching community.

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Following a discussion of the above preaching theory a Revelatory Covenantal Conversational preaching model is presented. An examination of the preaching praxis within the Christian Brethren denomination is then undertaken. The praxis study gives specific consideration to the place and role of preaching in the historical development of the Brethren, as well as within the current Christian Brethren praxis. In addition a qualitative analysis of the praxis within the local Christian Brethren church that I attend is considered.

According to Zerfass “practical theology has the task to lead in... [the] process of change in a way that is responsible from the perspective of both theology and the social sciences” (Heitink 1993: 113). To this end the final chapter suggests possible aspects of change, theological and practical, that can move the praxis forward toward an alternative praxis – to create a preaching community which incorporates the above theological theory and critical reflection on the praxis, and thereby participating fully in the Revelatory Covenantal Conversation.

### **Key Words**

Preaching, practical theology, preaching community, revelatory covenantal conversation, dialogue, covenant, encounter, revelational, anthropological, propositional, applicational, praxis, church, Brethren.

## DECLARATION

I declare that *The Preaching Community: A Practical Theological Analysis of the Role of Preaching within the Christian Brethren Church* is my own work and has not been previously submitted by me for a degree at this or any other institution.

\_\_\_\_\_  
David Andrew Smith

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The perceived role of preaching in the church today covers a spectrum as wide as Christendom itself. Preaching currently also incorporates a content range that would suggest God's Word encompasses everything. And the preaching act is carried out in diverse ways, suggestive of the fact that almost anything can pass as preaching.

As a theology student, church elder and leader, Pastor, and Principal of a Bible College these questions have grown from the observation of, and experience in, many churches in Australia and abroad. In many cases the above observations are seldom or perhaps never considered within the local church setting. Preaching often continues as it has before, being either uninformed by a conscious theology of preaching, or informed more by tradition than reflection. Others may adopt a more pragmatic "whatever works" approach to preaching, where preaching becomes a servant of the ecclesiology of the church or ideology of the leader. Still others who view preaching as having a directional and instructional role will wield preaching in heavy applicational tones designed to move people's beliefs and lives in particular directions.

The preaching in such churches often continues as before, with little or no consideration given to its role and effectiveness. The underlying theological

theory of preaching, which is normally implicit rather than explicit, also receives little or no attention. This problem is further compounded by the relatively small amount of published works that pursue the role of preaching from a theological perspective, compared to those works that offer advice from a purely pragmatic or practical perspective.

Today, before taking up preaching and moving into the place of being God's mouthpiece to take his Word to the world, any servant of Christ must consider the role of preaching and ask:

What constitutes preaching?

How should preaching be executed?

What is the purpose of preaching today?

Theologians also approach preaching from divergent points resulting in various outcomes for the role of preaching, compounding the problem. Preaching is event and response, action and reaction. Barth places the emphasis on the event; he requires preaching to remain an echo, a restatement only of the Word of God, in order to make present the revelation of God. Whereas, for Niebergall the focus should be placed on the response. The sermon he says "is the public address of a religious personality who has been called to the task, and who on the basis of his understanding of the gospel assists a religious community in finding an answer to their questions and needs and to find help" (Immink 2005: 222). Within the church worldwide one also finds that preaching is used to

achieve a range of purposes that fall between, Barth's heralding of the message, and Nierbergall's primary desire to meet the needs of the faith community.

Immink provides a further alternative suggesting that event and response must be viewed together. He believes "the concept of revelation points to the *a priori* of God's proclamation and action, while the concept of faith points to the acceptance and realisation within our human existence" (Immink 2005: 79). Like Barth priority is here given to the self-revelation of God, however, as with Nierbergall the response context of humanity as the place where revelation is directed with transformational purpose, is also taken seriously.

With such a diverse range of opinions and approaches, there exists a definite practical theological problem concerning the role preaching should play in the church. Having experienced a significant range of preaching contexts, I would suggest that only a very few emanate from a continuing practical theological reflection of the praxis and the existing theological theory of preaching held by the particular church. The situation is no different in my own denomination, "The Christian Brethren," nor in the local representation of this denomination which I attend.

## 1.1 Preaching & Practical Theology

Although “the earliest theologians regarded all theology as practical” (Heyns 1990: 85), practical theology, as the connection of theological interpretation to the experience of faith communities, was understood originally from an applicational perspective. “From Aquinas until the Enlightenment, practical theology was understood to be the application of the first principles of reason to experience” (Poling 1985: 10). According to Schleiermacher practical theology is the “theory of praxis” (Heitink 1993: 26), the critical analysis of actions within a praxis having a particular purpose. While modern practical theology has expanded and moved on from the work of Schleiermacher, the three constitutive elements of practical theology “actions,” “praxis,” and “purpose” remain and need definition and consideration to provide a methodological path forward.

### 1.1.1 Actions

Johannes van der Ven places the concept of action as a communicative activity. He describes practical theology as the study of “whether and how this communicative activity within the conditions of the church and other societal institutions occurs, whether and how it should and can be improved” (Immink 2005: 156). Heitink concurs, including and extending the element of improvement, stating the aim of such inquiry is normally born out of crisis and “constantly hovers between adaptation and renewal”

(Heitink 1993: 4). Fieret further expands the action definition by seeking to direct the action, framing practical theology as the study of human “communicative action in the service of the gospel” (Immink 2005: 24). This locates practical theology as the study of human action which advances the gospel.

However, Heyns and Pieterse seek to move the focus from merely a consideration of human action to include “communicative actions which mediate God’s coming to people in the world through God’s Word” (Heyns 1990: 51). The focus on ‘mediate’ here, places human action within the context of divine action, presenting a God-human communicative interaction. This shifts our perspective on the constitution of action entirely. Communicative actions within a faith praxis can not be considered as solely human actions. Nor can the meaning, purpose and intention of the actions remain locked within a human context. As actions which mediate the work of God, Heyns and Pieterse conclude that the “meaning of our communicative actions lies in the fact that God continues to speak through his Word and remains alive in the church through his Spirit. To this end God makes use of our actions” (Heyns 1990: 51).

The instrumental concept of “makes use,” can imply that we are only caught up in God’s movement at his discretion, ignoring the possibility of human free involvement in God’s action. Since God never moves to

enforce us to comply with his will, we should instead say that God in his freedom and by his grace invites people to be involved in his actions. At this point practical theology should be understood as follows:

Practical theology is the study concerning the improvement of human-divine interactive communicative actions involved in the service of the gospel.

This revision then places preaching as the human-divine interactive action of communicating God's Word within a particular praxis.

### 1.1.2 Praxis

Communicative actions are carried out within a particular context or praxis. The above definition refers broadly to the practical theological praxis as the place of "service of the gospel." One needs to define the praxis further both in practical theological terms and then, more specifically, for this paper's consideration of preaching. Practical theological praxis events (communicative actions within a specific praxis) need definition in two respects:

1. The Praxis Frame: Consideration of the actual context of the preaching event needs to be given. What is the operational field of the communicative action of preaching?

2. Praxis Reference Points: One must determine what aspects; both human and divine, contribute to the praxis event of preaching. Should priority be given to the God revelation aspect of preaching or the human receiving and responding aspect?

### **1.1.2.1 The Praxis Frame**

With regard to the praxis context, Schleiermacher (1768 – 1834), the father of practical theology, adopted a clerical context stating, “To the domain of practical theology belong all the rules of art that pertain to leadership activities” (Immink 2005: 149). He confined his study primarily to the interaction between pastors and their congregations. Schleiermacher’s clerical focus does not necessarily point toward him holding a narrow field of reference, but rather his focus being directed toward addressing the immediate need within the given context of the day. His successor in the field Carl Nietzsche (1847) widened the frame of reference, introducing the concept that “the church – and no longer just the clerical official... is the subject and agent of the different ecclesiastical practices” (Stadelmann 1998: 226). Theodore Leibner agrees with this ecclesial view of practical theology, himself focusing on the activities of the church community and “what the church itself does to itself” (Immink 2005: 5). Stadelmann describes it as the “science of the practice of the church” (Stadelmann 1998: 222). Later movements have expanded the praxis of study to include the wider aspects of society. Otto describes practical theology “as the



critical theory of religious actions in society" (Heyns 1990: 6). Similarly Heitink defines practical theology as a "theological theory of the mediation of the Christian faith in the praxis of modern society" (Heitink 1993: 6). Müller with others like Johannes van der Ven believe that "The task of the church is to trace and to think through the interactions or lack thereof between Christianity inside the church and that outside of it, as well as between religious and non-religious phenomena in society" (Immink 2005: 6).

All of these praxis categories have relevance and are appropriate arenas for the practice of practical theology. However, many of these approaches follow a human action dominated approach to practical theology, which leads to the praxis becoming the driving force behind the field of study. This has been and is dangerous. With practical theology operating in this way, the praxis frame moved from including clerical actions, to church actions, to the consideration of religion on wider society. Thus practical theology, while originally linked to the gospel at its core, has moved through the continual shifting and broadening of the praxis, from a Christian study to a religious pursuit. Today practical theology operates primarily within the three main praxis arenas of; individual faith, the church, and society.

Immink believes the appropriate praxis for practical theological study is the faith praxis. This would not only entail a study "concerned with knowledge

about human faith but also with the knowledge of the activity and presence of God" (Immink 2005: 188), within the faith praxis. Therefore, our consideration of communicative actions such as preaching, according to Immink, must include the aspect of impact on faith - the human perspective, together with the movement of God through speaking and acting that has brought about the possibility, indeed the gift of faith - the divine aspect. Heyns and Pieterse agree suggesting that "All communication between Christians in the congregational sphere occurs in faith.... It is in this context of faith, in the stress-field of God's active Word, that communicative actions for the promotion of the gospel are accomplished" (Heyns 1990: 49).

While the praxis is rightfully placed in the realm of faith, the praxis of faith needs further clarification between the individual faith praxis and the praxis of a faith community. The tendency in the church today, specifically in Western contexts is to succumb to the pressure to focus on individual faith creation, renewal and transformation, over the faith of the community. The Bible, and indeed much of Christian tradition reflects God in word and action seeking to create, communicate, and transform communities of faith, with lesser emphasis placed on the individual faith praxis. Poling and Miller support this view calling for "a practical theology that is not primarily a science about faith, but is the development of theological

understandings that are appropriate to the ongoing life of particular faith communities" (Poling 1985: 26).

This paper considers the role of preaching within the praxis of communities of faith that follow the Christian Brethren tradition.

### **1.1.3 Praxis Reference Points**

Practical theology today rests on the belief that "theory and praxis interact in a relationship of bi-polar tension" (Pieterse 1987: 3). This is a place where theory and praxis exist independently, yet also in "a tension-filled critical relation" (Heitink 1993: 153), with each open to the constant interaction of one with the other. According to Pieterse "We must reject any precedence of theory over praxis and any precedence of praxis over theory. Theory and praxis are bound together in a critical relationship and can evaluate, confirm or disprove one another" (Pieterse 1987: 5).

#### **1.1.3.1 Theory & Praxis**

"Over the ages theology has tended to give theory priority over praxis... For centuries theory determined practice without due regard to the latter" (Heyns 1990: 28-29). The work of Marheineke (1837) began the change. He "started with faith as a unity of knowledge and action.... As a disciple of Hegel, he formulated the goal of practical theology in a dialectical

manner, separating the things that are temporal from those that are eternal. As a result, the theory-praxis relation became the object of reflection, and practical theology received its own independent status" (Heitink 1993: 63).

Later "through the influence of dialectical theology, revelation became the central pursuit of theology" (Immink 2005: 9), suppressing the influence of the praxis on practical theology. "The only movement was a one-way deductive traffic from theory as the norm to praxis. Praxis was not given any say in theory formation nor did it serve as a corrective" (Heyns 1990: 89).

However, the development of a human action-praxis focus has influenced the foundational reference points of practical theology. "Because of the increasing influence of the social sciences in the domain of practical theology, theologians increasingly avoided doctrinal concepts. [Instead] practical theological studies made an increasing use of anthropological categories, with the result that the life of faith was no longer analysed by means of the theological criteria from the faith tradition" (Immink 2005: 9-10). This praxis focus has over time moved the key reference points of practical theology from "God to the human subject, away from revelation to experience, from the institutional church to the local community" (Immink 2005: 8).

According to Immink whose focus is the interactive faith praxis, the popular human action praxis oriented approach results in their being “no metaphysical or theoretical framework that describes faith in God as an interactive relationship between the divine and the human subjects. The reality of faith is understood and analysed from the standpoint of the human subject, and the element of the divine object remains a matter of perspective. There is no framework that allows for a presentation of God as a speaking and acting subject” (Immink 2005: 187). Heyns and Pieterse concur stating that “Those who seek to eliminate theory are applying an unacknowledged theory and an ideological praxis” (Heyns 1990: 28), as the starting point for their considerations. Continuing they state “This is an extremely dangerous situation, since an unacknowledged theory cannot be verified. As a result it is difficult to evaluate the praxis. Existing praxis becomes the final word on the matter...” (Heyns 1990: 28). A human centred approach therefore becomes the default point of departure in practical theological studies, and experience or pragmatics the goal.

Stadelmann concurs suggesting that because “practical theology seems to be developing into a merely ‘pragmatic theology’ dominated by social sciences, it is time to start remembering that basically it is and must be a theological discipline” (Stadelmann 1998: 219). Also supporting this position, Dingemans suggests that practical theology “is too much preoccupied with the social sciences and therefore tends to approach praxis too much

from the angle of action, while we should also pay attention to the underlying intentions and the theological frame of reference" (Immink 2005: 157). Having described practical theology and thus preaching specifically as a human-divine interactive communicative action, the progression of priority given today in practical theology to human action within the praxis needs to be reconsidered. Stadelmann believes "as long as practical theology is really theology, neither human ideals nor human traditions nor empirical human theories can be the norm, but only the revelation of God as given us in the Scriptures" (Stadelmann 1998: 225). This statement may provide a timely corrective, and a useful reflective norm for practical theology, as long as it doesn't return the entire endeavour into a theory only approach, excluding the valued input of the praxis again.

To avoid a theory or praxis only driven model, resulting in either revelation or anthropology determining the points of departure, one must allow the bi-polar tension of theory and praxis to define the contribution of both revelation and anthropology in any serious study of communicative actions. "This dialogical movement between concrete experience and abstract thinking is essential to the method of practical theology" (Poling 1985: 66). This confronting question for consideration now is "What aspects of revelation and anthropology are involved in the process of preaching?"

### 1.1.3.2 Revelatory View

Barth places a priority away from any anthropological reference point at all, believing that the initiative of God, his movement toward humanity as the initiator, provides the best point of departure for practical theology to follow. For Barth it is only through God's movement toward us, his revelatory action, through which we may know God. "God speaks; he claims; he promises; he acts; he is angry; he is gracious" (Barth 1957: 13). God is a subject who freely chooses to make himself present. "He becomes present in the act of his revelation, and he cannot be known apart from this act of grace" (Barth 1957: 23). And this movement toward us extends to the "notion of the Word of God. God enters the sphere and the reach of people by proclaiming his presence and by entering into a relationship with humans" (Immink 2005: 200).

This line of thinking elevates the work of revelation over any existential involvement, and moves preaching toward a reiteration only of the Word of God excluding the significance of engagement with the Word by the receivers. Thurneysen continues this line viewing "the Word of God as a living, concrete Word that enters our human existence. It is the repetition and renewal of the word of the first witnesses: their story is a continuing story that continues to come to us as a new word. Practical theology focuses on the *Akt dieses weiterlaufens des Zeugnisses* (act of this ongoing testimony)" (Immink 2005: 202). If one follows Thurneysen then "all sectors of the church's

praxis...are ultimately concerned with the proclamation of the Word of God" (Immink 2005: 202-203), and the praxis is concerned primarily with the act of testimony to the Word of God, the proclamation again of that which has occurred already in history. Repeating the Word then takes priority over and even excludes responding to or engaging with the people, to the point that preaching is just a matter of delivering a pre-existing and predetermined message.

Likewise, Barth places preaching as testimony to God's already revealed Word, stating: "proclamation is human speech in and by which God himself speaks like a king through the mouth of his herald, and which is meant to be heard and accepted as speech in and by which God Himself speaks, and therefore heard and accepted in faith as divine decision concerning life and death, as divine judgement and pardon, eternal Law and eternal Gospel both together" (Barth 1936: 52). Barth's use of the metaphor of the herald is derived from the work of Friedrich who "emphasises the fact that the sermon and the active presence of Christ belong together. A herald goes through the country and announces what the king has to say.... The message is not determined by the situation of the reader, nor by the knowledge of the preacher; it has been predetermined as the proclamation of the divine kingdom" (Immink 2005: 209). Barth like Thurneysen and those who follow this line of thinking believe the content of the message is supreme; "the person of the herald is of little importance in



the communication of the message, and...the herald has no reason to worry too much about the situation of the hearers; for what is at stake is the message, and both the messenger and the listeners play a subordinate role" (Immink 2005: 210).

Scharfenberg believes that such a view of proclamation "points to the declaration of something that is certain, unchangeable, objectively predetermined, something that one of the participants did not yet know, and that is transferred to the other in a coercive and authoritarian way" (Immink 2005: 204). If such an approach to practical theology is followed, the theory of the praxis would be unable to be impacted by the response and reaction of the hearers of the message. Indeed the hearers of the message are then viewed as mere passive receptors of a predetermined message, far from being afforded the place of being intrinsically involved in the formation of the message or process. Similarly the preacher is viewed as a mere conduit through which the Word of God passes on the way to its destination. The hearing of only a few sermons would dispel the notion that the person of the preacher has no impact on the message, and that the hearers are important for effectiveness and intentionality.

The benefit and attraction of a purely revelatory approach is that the *a priori* of God's Word over man's word is maintained. Being taken up with God's Word and speech one will refrain from putting "an equal sign

between our speaking of God and God's Words" (Immink 2005: 213).

Therefore, God and not man remain at the centre of the process. However, as Hübner notes, an approach which concentrates predominantly "on a theological ideal of the church" (Stadelmann 1998: 230), poses a number of problems:

1. This position creates an either/or approach with regard to whether a particular sermon is God's Word or only a human word. One needs to pursue the possibility that God's Words and human words can coexist in the same sermon.
2. The impact of context, and the response of the hearers upon the message is minimised due to the one directional flow of the message. Does this reflect the dynamic relationship between God and humankind that is evident in Scripture? Can the sermon take these aspects into consideration while remaining the Word of God?
3. There is a one-sided emphasis of the Christological and Pneumatological dimensions of preaching. The aspects of Christ as the incarnation of God's Word, and the Spirit as the one who makes Christ present through the Word receive attention. However, "the creaturely relationship between God and humans, where the human being (as creature) is the image of God – and thus was created and made suitable for communion... [and the] pneumatological relationship, in which humanity comes to a

community of renewal through the Spirit” (Immink 2005: 214), receive little attention.

Even if like Barth, one places an *a priori* position on revelation, ensuring the priority of God’s Word, the anthropological position cannot be ignored completely. The process must “begin and end in the richness of historical-lived experience and interaction” (Poling 1985: 65). One must not only be taken up with the message but also be concerned with the process of revelation reception. Faith denotes relationship. Although never the initiators in this process, those that receive are naturally intimately involved. For God’s Word, his revelation, that which comes from “the ‘outside’ can only be spoken of from the ‘inside’” (Immink 2005: 215). Therefore just as preaching is the vehicle for the revelatory message the person is the focus and designated receiver of the preaching event.

### **1.1.3.3 Anthropological View**

A purely revelatory approach is only concerned with the message content and not the outcome. If preaching, like God’s Word, is to include an intention component, the receiver and the response must form an integral and important part of the preaching praxis. As Immink says, the “cradle of the communication of faith” (Immink 2005: 215), is our immediate reality; we only “encounter God in our immediate experience” (Immink 2005: 216). The experience of and response to the revelatory message is located within

our personal experience of God, which those from the anthropological camp suggest must be taken seriously.

For those who begin practical theology with an anthropological point of departure “the speaker must not stop when he has read Scripture and provided a theological exegesis, but must shape the lives of his hearers” (Immink 2005: 223) also. For Buttrick preaching “confers identity...transforms identity... [and] renames the human world as a space for new humanity related to God” (Buttrick 1987: 17). This implies that the preacher is not merely a herald of a message, as Barth suggests, but is also involved in intentional transformation of the hearers and their view of reality.

Schleiermacher’s approach to practical theology arises out of human experience. He focuses on the ordering of response and experience. For Schleiermacher “The task of practical theology is to bring the emotions arising in response to events in the church into the order called for by deliberative activity” (Heitink 1993: 27). This model leads one to take seriously the involvement of the preacher and the hearers as social beings and includes the intention/response aspect of preaching which the revelatory model ignores. However, while the revelatory method has its problems as described above the anthropological model poses its own set of concerns:

1. The foundational reference point is “concentrated on the empirical church and the natural religiosity of man” (Stadelmann 1998: 230), rather than God and his self-revelation. This means that what is significant for us is “the meaning of religion and not so much the truth of God’s salvation” (Immink 2005: 236). Without God as an absolute referent, preaching from this approach moves one toward seeking a transcendence of self and an experience of God.
2. The emphasis on humanity inverts the communication process from God as initiator to humans as initiators, seeking, reaching out through our experience to find God. The preacher is therefore charged with the task of leading people in a search for God, rather than making God present with his people.

Such an approach leads to the locating of the source of faith within humanity. Therefore the preacher’s role is to lead the hearers to discover God within the psychosocial life of the church, where “God” experiences become the determinants of true reality rather than God himself.

An either or approach to the praxis which allows revelation, text, and institutional tradition to suffocate, or where practice, experience and context are allowed to dominate needs to be replaced. “The ideological temptation of institutional discourse is called ‘traditionalism’ and may be defined as the shrouding of experience. On the other hand, the ideological

temptation of experiential discourse is what one might call 'now-ism' and may be defined as the shrouding of tradition" (Viau 1999: xii). The goal is to place preaching within a faith praxis that allows priority to the initiating work of God through his words and action, and also takes seriously the covenantal community of faith as the receivers and responders to God, within God's will and purpose for his people.

#### **1.1.4 Purpose**

Communicative actions, such as preaching, involved in the service of the gospel, are never undertaken outside of purpose. The action is always intentional, designed to achieve a goal within the praxis. The concept of praxis itself suggests a dynamic that consists of "communicative actions in practical life with a view to change..." (Heyns 1990: 50).

For Schleiermacher the emphasis is on the individual within the church. The "purpose is the *Seelenleitung* (guidance of souls), within and by the church, with a view to an independent realisation of Christianity by the individual." (Heitink 1993: 28). Poling and Miller add an emphasis on community stating the purpose of practical theology is the "formation of persons and communities" (Poling 1985: 66). Others place importance on the impact on society, or in terms of world mission, for others the kingdom of God provides the ideal.

The issue at hand here for most practical theologians is a question of ecclesiology. Rudolph Bohren believes the purpose of practical theology is to search for an ecclesiological norm by asking the question, "Whether the church in its practice is the true or false church" (Poling 1985: 66). For Fendt this meant "the church practice intended by the New Testament" (Stadelmann 1998: 226). For those like Fendt this would render the ideal in terms of tradition.

Heyns & Pieterse suggest that the communicative actions undertaken within the praxis are designed to create a change "to a state of faith in Christ, and to the realisation and concretisation of the promises of the kingdom... in our personal lives, our church and our society.... This entails constant change in an attempt to hone our present reality... to the ideal of God's kingdom as understood by our theological tradition" (Heyns 1990: 50). The creation of a new reality of promise, the community of faith, in Christ, in God's kingdom "provides the goal of our communicative actions in that we act with a view to change in the direction of the situation of the kingdom" (Heyns 1990: 55). The task then is to bring the ideal praxis, the theory, into the reality of the existing praxis. The gap "between theory and praxis requires mediation" (Heitink 1993: 168). Such mediation through communicative actions needs to be facilitated by the leadership within the community of faith. The purpose is to "engage the community of faith in a process of interpretation and formation of its shared life and thought in

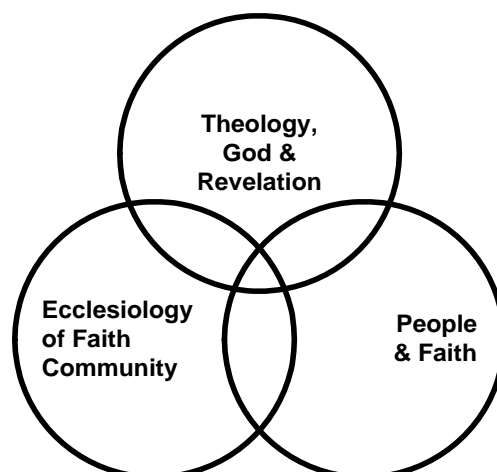
ways that express the vitality of the Christian tradition and lead to transformation of the world" (Poling 1985: 13), in light of the breaking in of the kingdom.

### 1.1.5 Summary

The above discussion highlights three primary domains that require attention within a practical theology enquiry. These domains are shown in the diagram below:

In considering the role of preaching the following domains and their interrelationships must be addressed:

- The Theological Domain: The initiative and *a priori* of God and



revelation.

- The Anthropological Domain: The importance of the faith relationship and the response of people.



- The Ecclesiological Domain: The intentional shaping and transforming of the faith community.

Reflecting on the enquiry at hand in terms of the previous discussion and the above domains, leads to the following preliminary statement regarding practical theology and the concepts which need addressing:

Practical theology is the study concerning the improvement of human-divine interactive communicative actions involved in the service of the gospel. Preaching then is the human-divine interactive action of communicating God's Word within a communal faith praxis that gives priority to the initiating work of God through his words and actions, and also takes seriously the covenantal community of faith as the receivers and responders to God - with the purpose of creating, changing, and continuing the community of faith within the new reality of promise in Christ.

## **1.2 Problem**

The problems within the arena of preaching in the local church share considerable common ground with the tensions that exist within the field of practical theology that have been considered above. Most of these problems however, stem from local churches employing the action of

preaching: without a solid, definite theological theory; having either an inadequate or undeveloped practical theological theory of preaching; or operating out of consideration for praxis only and ignoring the underlying theory out of which they operate. Such approaches tend to create either a loss of passion on one hand and loss of power on the other. "Without theological interpretation, Christian community loses its vitality and vision. Without community [the reality of the praxis], theology loses its locus and power" (Poling 1985: 13).

As a result, views differ on the interaction of the divine and human word, and the presence of the divine with the human action of preaching. Some tend to over emphasise either anthropology or revelation as outcome determinants. Preachers who place priority on revelation alone and "believe that the divine revelation is given in propositional form, will of course develop sermons that correspond to that view. Inspiration would consist of 'being given the right propositions' for use in the preaching occasion... you will not be greatly interested in homiletical acts of evocation. You will simply repeat what you believe God said and that's the end of the matter. Mystery no more; it is swallowed up by absolute knowledge" (Lowry 1997: 41). Believing that such preaching overlooks the task of addressing social structures Van Seters asks "Is this why some conservative, fundamentalistic preaching which, although enormously popular at present, makes little attempt to analyse the world in terms of

social structures?... Theologically, this means circumscribing God within a private sphere, viewing the church as a closed community, and putting a quest for certitude in place of authentic faith" (Van Seters 1988: 19).

Others choose to emphasise the human side over the necessary biblical and revelatory component, believing preaching is more about the experience of God or the elevation or renewal of self in a mystical way. Such preachers who tend to "engage only with their hearts, focusing on feeling and reducing everything to tidy applications, are in danger of becoming vacuously emotional" (Quicke 2003: 39). Finding and maintaining the revelatory and anthropological bi-polar tension is imperative. Revelatory, propositional preaching is often full of substance but lacks sustenance, like the desert, being substantial but dry and lacking in life. Emotive, human focused preaching on the other hand connects and inspires but lacks substance, like a mirage which promises life, but on closer reflection, disappoints. The task is to find the balance, an oasis that brings the reality of life in an otherwise hostile environment.

Many churches also act without an adequate consideration of the role and purpose of preaching within the praxis. Some sacrifice community subscribing to the buffet style of preaching which affirms the diversity and individuality of the congregation. Such preachers "outline a spectrum of positions but leave it to each listener to decide. Each pew sitter listens

isolated and alone. The congregation is an aggregate of religious consumers, just another voluntaristic association. In many denominations this option has become dominant. But this is not church. Such preaching is not an ecclesial act" (Van Seters 1991: 269). Viewing the congregation as religious consumers locates the preacher and the sermon, and thus God's Word and God himself, as the supplier, responsible for meeting the needs and expectations of the people. These needs and expectations must be considered but should they drive the preaching agenda?

Such problems also exist within my own denomination and local church community. A conscious practical theological theory of preaching does not exist. An underlying implicit theory tends toward a propositional and applicational approach to content and style. The intention is to educate the minds of people so as to improve one's spiritual life. However, this praxis summary must be read as a generalisation only. In our tradition many lay preachers from within the local church, and others from other local faith communities, are invited to take to the pulpit, each operating out of their own individual preaching paradigm. Not only does this vary the revelatory/anthropological approach within each sermon, the style, role, and intent of each delivery varies as well.

### **1.3 Presuppositions**

Reality is always perceived reality. Perceived reality is never devoid of a point of reference and the associated presuppositional problems.

Dingemans describes the problem as follows: "Every hermeneutical theory will start with stating that there is no 'Archimedic point' from which the world may be interpreted without bias or uncertainty" (Immink 2005: 191). I

must acknowledge my own view of preaching has predominantly been

shaped by two agents: firstly by the tradition of the Christian Brethren, of which I have been a part since birth, and several generations before me;

and secondly my training at Perth Bible College which has allowed me to view preaching from a much wider theological and practical perspective.

Included in the chapter on praxis review are sections relating to the history and the current situation of preaching within the Brethren denomination.

This section will provide a clearer picture of the environment which has shaped my development and given rise to many of the concerns. My

further training, pastoral experience and reflection, has brought me to this point of seeking through this study to address the issues in some way.

### **1.4 Goal of Study**

The problems within the field of preaching are many and evident. Through the approach of a practical theological study, this paper will seek to

address the role of preaching within the ecclesiastical community of faith.

This will give specific consideration to the following four aspects of the role of preaching:

What framework should guide the message being preached?

What shape should the event of preaching take?

What is the purpose of preaching within the church?

What should the anticipated response to the preaching be?

In many churches, including my own, these problems stated above exist primarily because the operating praxis has been isolated from or is devoid of an adequate explicit underlying theological theory that addresses these areas. Further, even where a theory driven praxis exists, the ongoing review of theory and praxis is neglected, which results in little or no movement forward. With these issues in mind, and through developing a practical theological theory of preaching that takes into account the prior practical theological discussion, I will endeavour to shed light on this untenable situation.

Practical theology is a theory not only of the praxis but as in the work of Zeffass (1974), a vehicle to facilitate improvement “between practice and practice” (Stadelmann 1998: 222). With this intention I will adopt the practical theological methodology of Zeffass, which like the approach of Stadelmann consists of three major methodological requirements: the

development of a theory of the ideal praxis, an investigation of the existing praxis, and the construction of a change model to “start the process of a cautious and wise transformation of the latter in the direction of the former” (Stadelmann 1998: 229). Following this framework, the remaining chapters of the study will be presented as follows:

**Chapter 2 – Revelatory Covenantal Conversation** I commence by setting up a practical theological theory that draws from both the revelatory and the anthropological models to develop a preaching model that considers preaching as a Revelatory Covenantal Conversation involving divine revelation and intended community response. The conversational practical theological theory seeks to conform preaching to a revelational model which diverges from Barth by also including the dynamic of personal and community interpretation and reaction, in an ongoing conversation of initiation and response. In this dissertation I propose a theological theory on the role of preaching in the church which asserts that:

Preaching stands, in the line of the self revelation of God, as his continuing action to both reveal himself, and be present with his covenant people of promise. Therefore preaching within the church must conform to this revelation in: event – the covenantal conversation itself; message – the content of the

preaching; interpretation/response – the preacher’s intended response by the hearers; the intention - the intended shaping of the community of faith through the preaching event.

Preaching is a continuing Revelatory Covenantal Conversation between God and his people to create, transform, and continue his community of faith.

The message proclaimed is the words and actions of God, and the intended response is a faith relationship that we call communion with God, carried on within a continuing covenantal conversation between God and his people. Thus we are considering ‘The Preaching Community’.

### **Chapter 3 - Praxis Research – The Christian Brethren Church:** Next I

proceed to describe the existing preaching praxis, with specific reference to the role of preaching within my denomination, the Christian Brethren. My denomination, Brethren, Open Brethren or Christian Brethren, should not be confused with the Exclusive Brethren which formed over time from a breakaway group in the 1840’s. I consider the place and role of preaching, in the historical development of the Brethren, the current situation within the Brethren, and then with specific reference to my local church through interview feedback.



#### **Chapter 4 The Preaching Community – Towards a New Praxis:**

According to Zerfass “practical theology has the task to lead in this process of change in a way that is responsible from the perspective of both theology and the social sciences” (Heitink 1993: 113). To this end I will finally consider possible aspects of change that can move toward an alternative praxis which incorporates the above theological theory and praxis reflection.

## 2. REVELATORY COVENANTAL CONVERSATION

We have said that preaching must stand in line with the self-revelation of God being part of the continuing divine “Revelatory Covenantal Conversation” of God with his people. Preaching is revelatory because it seeks to reveal God through the proclamation of the Word, and by the Spirit encounter the people with the very presence of the Word, Christ. Preaching is covenantal because it is an including Word of promise and fulfilment, a Word of the covenant that creates, sustains and continues the covenantal community of God. Preaching is also a conversation, because it is a movement between two parties, a dialogue between God and his people, moments of initiation and response, on a journey toward the fulfilment of God’s purposes. As we continue our investigation of preaching through the lens of God’s self revelation we commence from the stand point that preaching participates in the divine movement of God with his people that can be best seen as a divine Revelatory Covenantal Conversation.

The preaching event now is the contextualised revelation of God to human kind today - the continuation of this conversation. As Craddock put it - preaching is “understood as making present and appropriate to the hearers the revelation of God. ... In other words, from the transaction we call revelation we understand and implement the transaction we call

preaching. That is the way of God's Word in the world is the way of the sermon in the world" (Craddock 1985: 52). Similarly Barth emphatically announces "Preaching must conform to revelation" (Barth 1991: 47). This being so, our task is to trace the way of God in and through revelation so as to understand what the current role and purpose of preaching in the world should be. Therefore our starting point in the development of an ideal theological preaching theory is the construction of a meta-theoretical understanding of God and his Word as a model for preaching. In this regard we consider the dynamic of God's self revelation toward his people to be the basis for our understanding of the preaching event today.

This preaching event, the Revelatory Covenantal Conversation has a number of embedded elements that need our consideration. Firstly we say that the content or message of the preaching event, the revelation of God takes place, or is given within the context of the covenant relationship of promise. That is to say that God's Word to us creates relationship - his "revelation is relational" (Metzger 2005: 21). God has promised to be a covenant keeping God with the ultimate fulfilment found in intimate communion with him. In keeping with his promise God has always revealed to constitute relationship, shape the relationship or to in some way serve the continuing purposes and promises of that relationship. The message of the Revelatory Covenantal Conversation then follows this theme of relationship creation and movement within and toward God's relational goal.

Secondly flowing from the triune dynamic of desire for relationship and the context of promise which anticipates fulfilment, God entered into a free dialogue, a covenantal relationship and conversation in which God encounters his people with purpose. The Revelatory Covenantal Conversation has intent. The conversation is focused on the people of God being created, changed and continuing on toward the fulfilment goal of the initiating God.

Thirdly this purpose, although made in strict covenantal terms, was not merely a matter of God revealing himself and his purposes and forcing compliance upon his people – it was a dialogue. God’s purpose committed God to journey with his people, in a dialogue which encompassed and addressed the culture, context, situation, and the varying responses and reactions of the people. The dynamic that is salvation history records this divine drama. The drama of a God who initiates and a people who respond, creating a divine covenantal conversation. “God addresses people and people turn toward God” (Immink 2005: 239). Scripture is intent on recording both the acting and the responding. The Bible records God’s self revelation not as a monologue - a God administering from afar, but as a conversation, with God encountering his people through a dynamic covenantal relationship, conversing with them where they are, seeking communion with himself,

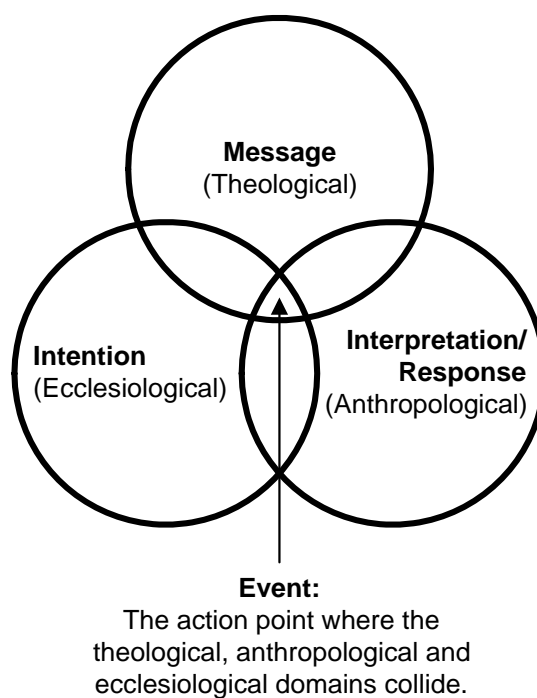
and moving them on toward the future goal. God is the initiator and the subject of the conversation in which his Word moves to reveal and encounter his people in grace. And humans are the receivers of this divine initiative the free interpreters and faith responders to the divine Word, of which God himself is the ever present subject in this covenantal communion.

“The revelation model assigns logical priority to God: God makes himself known; God initiates the encounter and realises the communion” (Immink 2005: 238). There is first an intentional initiatory movement of God toward relationship with his people. But precisely because communication takes place in relationship, and precisely because the members of the community of God are called to stand in a certain, particular, relationship with God and each other, there exists not only a revelatory aspect but also an anthropological, faith response aspect to the praxis. And because people are called to stand together as a people, there exists an ecclesiastical dimension which calls the people to be a peculiar, holy, faith community of God. Our practical theology cannot therefore be restricted to one model or departure point alone but must allow the dimensions of theology and revelation, anthropology and faith, and the ecclesiology of the faith community to inform the aspects of the praxis and the resultant formulation of a praxis theory. “This means that, as we pursue practical theological reflection, we must consider both the human and the divine

subject in our analysis of the praxis..." (Immink 2005: 10). of preaching within the church, together with the ecclesiological will of God. Therefore divine revelation, human reception, response, and the form of our relationship together with God, constitute important focal points in the praxis of faith. We concur with Immink and Barth that the *a priori* in this conversation is always with the initiation of God. However, it finds substance through the Word of God "in our intellectual functions and in our praxis of life" (Immink 2005: 271).

Following Immink's lead we state that "Preaching today is a human form of address in which God himself continues his Revelatory Covenantal Conversation with us." This statement regarding the communicative event of preaching, places us at the very intersection of the theological, anthropological, and ecclesiological domains, previously mentioned. Within this statement there are to be found the four distinct elements of operation which are also present in God's revelatory actions toward humankind. Firstly there is the "Event" of preaching, the Revelatory Covenantal Conversation itself, the definite address action, which presupposes the preacher, the hearers, and the context of the event and its participants. Secondly, there is the revelatory content of the address which is God speaking to us, which we will call the "Message". Thirdly, there is the continuing covenantal communal, "with us" aspect of the address, the "Intention," which focuses on how the event is designed to

shape the community of faith. And finally there is the conversation element which contains the reaction from the hearers, which we will call the "Interpretation/Response", the engagement of the people with the preaching. These four preaching elements can broadly be associated with the domains that concern us as follows:



In developing our meta-theory for preaching, through tracing the self-revelation of God throughout salvation history we will divide this history into two main spheres: the Revelatory Covenantal Conversation of God and his people that leads toward Christ; and the Revelatory Covenantal Conversation that moves from Christ. Within the first sphere our starting point is the conversation within the triune God. This is followed by an examination of the God who speaks, and his involvement with humankind

culminating in the incarnation of the Word in Jesus Christ. Within the second sphere we trace the proclamation of the Word by the apostles, the living Word of God and then consider the extended action of the church which perpetuates the revelation of God through continued witness and proclamation. In following the progression of God's revelatory action in salvation history in the two spheres ("Toward Christ" and "From Christ") we also consider each of the elements of operation identified: Event, Message, Intention, Interpretation/Response.

## **2.1 Revelatory Covenantal Conversation – Toward Christ**

### **2.1.1 Event – How has God encountered his people?**

#### **2.1.1.1 The Trinitarian Covenantal Conversation**

Our starting point is the assertion that God is a triune God, a God of love, of relational movement, one toward the other. According to Rudolf Bohren, "God exists as a Trinity in conversation" (Pieterse 1987: 22). Jürgen Moltmann states "The triune God is a social God, rich in internal and external relationships. ... 'God is Love' because love is never alone" (Moltmann 1999: 4). In summarising his theology of the Trinity, Grenz states that "above all it suggests that God is himself relational" (Grenz 1994: 76). The implication of such a relational reality is that God exists of and for relationship, in a dynamic life of self initiation and response that overflows in a love conversation toward his creation. God exists in and for relationship,



acting and speaking to create, sustain and continue relationship with all that he created.

The triune God exists in a continuing relational call and response conversation. Scott Horrell says "Could the Holy Trinity eternally experience within its own inner life the call-to-do simultaneous with the doing-response, the giving with the receiving, all in ordered unity and profoundly mutual trust" (Horrell 2004: 420-421)? And he goes on to suggest that "The call-response is experienced together in the Trinity, yet with different roles, as each person freely exercises his innate character and desires. Each loves, each is self-rendering, each serves, but within a harmonious order reflective of the dispositions of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Horrell 2004: 421). This conversational dynamic is therefore not subsidiary to, but rather lies at the very core of what defines the Trinity. For even in God there can be "no relationship without a response..." (Holmes 2006: 28). Each person of the Godhead is mutually self-giving and responsive toward the other in love. Such a relational view of the Trinity prohibits a static view of God and instead leads one to view God from the standpoint of a dynamic intentional relational trinitarian Godhead. This relational love dialogue is never a movement to crush or absorb or overcome, but within the Trinity, each person involved is a significant and valued member of the conversation, of the relationship, given to mutual self-giving and love. "As each person within the Trinity gives and receives, there is an ongoing

‘becoming’ at the heart of the Godhead” (Holmes 2006: 28). Such a becoming, a continuous relational giving by the same unchangeable One, a constant, yet moving conversation of love, is then intent upon creating, strengthening and continuing the life of the other and the relationship. The movement of the revelatory Word of the triune God toward humanity takes its place within and proceeds from this trinitarian dialogue –seeking to create, strengthen and continue the covenantal relationship.

#### **2.1.1.2 God’s Revelatory Covenantal Conversation**

God has acted in accordance with who he is and yet external to himself, to create, to enter into a covenant relationship, to pursue, to reconcile, to adopt, to transform, and to make complete his purposes with his people. His external actions do not originate from anything external to God, but find their source in the internal perfection of God himself. His actions are external because they are actions of a free God whose actions do not satisfy any internal need, but bring to life a creation that thereby expresses the internal heart of a perfect and gracious God who acts in holy love.

God reveals himself in community. God’s movement toward humanity, in Word and action, finds its origin in the trinitarian conversation, as an expression of the triune God of love. God comes as the initiating speaking God. “Scripture portrays God as the grand orator... whose majesty and imagination speak creation into existence...” (Labberton 2000: 32), and

whose love proclaims the covenant. His Word brings a message that contains his presence, for his Word, his message, creates relationship. "The Bible portrays God as a speaking and acting subject who initiates communion" (Immink 2005: 269). God desires to communicate in order to reveal himself and to be in relationship with, in covenant with, his created beings. "When someone begins to speak, it is with the intention of creating communion. This explains why the Word-revelation is accompanied by the notion of the covenant" (Immink 2005: 167). God moves toward, "people in order to reveal true life, and this revelation is an event, in which the communion with God develops" (Immink 2005: 78). God moves and speaks to create covenantal communion. Covenantal relationship exists because revelation occurs. Revelation occurs because God freely chooses relationship.

God does not speak an idle Word but an intentional purposeful Word. God speaks his Word, and his Word creates the world, the covenant, a separate people, a covenant people. His speech is an active, free, purposeful, creating speech. It is an event full of intention, full of promise. "According to the Bible the revelation of God is always a combination of Word and deed. Words accompany deeds, to interpret them as deeds of God..." (Pieterse 1987: 10). His Word not only comes to impart information but to confront us with intention – the intention of relationship, of holy community. We are through his Word confronted with his presence. "God's speaking represents his real presence" (Immink 2005: 168), his holy

communal trinitarian presence, made real to his people in history, intent on fulfilling his holy will – creating a holy people.

God also gives himself in his Word. God is not only through his Word the community making God, but the communally present God. God is the present God, present through revelation. Through revelation, his Word, the incarnation of Christ, and the Spirit, God seeks to create relationship and be present among and with his creation. Kraemer believes that “communication is the most fundamental divine fact: by this I mean that God is in essence the God of communion. God makes himself known in his creation and in his revelation as the one who brings us in communion with him. Since biblical revelation implies that God makes himself known to us, in our inability to know God as he truly is, communication belongs to the very essence of revelation” (Immink 2005: 122). The communion process with God can be viewed as similar to the communication and communion event between people: “God is a speaking God who enters into communion with us by speaking and hearing” (Immink 2005: 123). Through history he has encountered his people through being present through his Word, through Christ, through the word of the apostles, and through Scripture. And he calls the people by faith to receive, understand, trust, and respond to God’s Words and his involvement in their reality as being the revelation of God. Continually through history God initiates a conversation that creates and sustains communion with his covenant

people, through his Word and his presence, which is laden with the continuing active intention of holy revelatory relationship.

God cannot speak a Word that emanates from outside his perfect holy character. He speaks his character, his heart, his purpose, nature and will, he cannot speak another word, or a different word. He is his Word. His Word is not only a message, something that can be dealt with in isolation. God's Word always encounters people in such a way that his spoken Word must be dealt with as if he were present behind the voice. When God speaks what is paramount is the one behind the voice. For Barth, the notion of the Word of God means that "What God speaks is never known or true anywhere in abstraction from God Himself. It is known and true in and through the fact that it is he Himself who says it, that he is present in person in and with what is said by Him" (Barth 1936: 137). Moses' encounter of the voice in the burning bush meant more than an encounter with the message.

"Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God. (Ex 3:5-6)

The voice and the message led Moses to react to the moment as if God were present to the extent that he hid his face so as not to look upon the person of God. For Samuel, the final recognition that it was God and not Eli speaking changed the reception and response framework for the prophet. Who it is that speaks, determines the impact of the message and the response of the hearer.

For Jeremiah as for the other prophets the hearing of God's Word produced a compulsion to speak the Word. Amidst protests to the contrary the Lord said:

"You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you." (Jr 1:7)

And as if to leave no room for confusion the Lord touched Jeremiah's mouth and said:

"Now, I have put my words in your mouth." (Jr 1:9)

In the appointment of the prophet Jeremiah the giving of the Word acts as both the commissioning of Jeremiah as a representative, an agent of the Word, and also as a carrier of God's Word. Jeremiah was an authorised bearer of God's Word to the people. While there was intrinsic authority in

the words spoken, it is the one who stands behind the words that provides the purpose, reason, and authority for Jeremiah to speak. Jeremiah stands in God's place, representing God's presence and will, encountering God's people, where they are, on God's behalf, to reveal his will and move his people toward repentance, transformation and holiness. Through his chosen servants God continued to speak and act to reveal, to encounter, to call, and seek obedient loving response.

### **2.1.1.3 The Incarnate Revelatory Covenantal Conversation**

God has employed a number of agents to carry and communicate his Word to his people:

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways. (Heb 1:1)

While these words from God through his servants to his people was God's Word, and effectively communicated his character and intent they were mediated words, until he spoke his final Word in and through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

"...but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son." (Heb 1:2)

Jesus was the fulfilment of all that was promised. He came in line with the prophets as a representative of God and a proclaimer of God's Words. But Jesus came not just to bring God's Word, he is the full and complete Word of God in himself. He was the Word present and the Word given. "The Word of God does not just come to us through the man Jesus of Nazareth, as though we could later have heard it and known it in itself and apart from him. The Word of God is this man as man, and always and inescapably it is spoken to us as the reality of this man and not otherwise" (Kimmel 1991: 153). Van der Meiden takes "Christ's incarnation to be God's will to communicate, expressed in human form and in human terms. His incarnation is the figure of what God wants to do, and can do, with people" (Pieterse 1987: 21). Jesus came as the final Word of God, the one who reveals within himself, God's Word, his will, and the very heart and nature of God.

Jesus Christ is the Word of God:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (Jn 1:1)

Jesus' entrance into history is the fulfilment of the promise, and the personalisation of the promiser, it is God speaking himself into history. He represents the centre of the salvation historical intention of the triune God.



“Jesus stands in the centre as fulfilment and origin. The prophetic witness leads to Jesus and the apostolic witness issues from him. He is the personification of the promise and... in him the Word has become complete human reality, and the communion between God and man has been fully realized” (Immink 2005: 170). Through Christ’s actions and words, Christ communicates very God to us, because he himself is very God. As the living Word of God – Christ reveals God’s complete Word to his people; not only to reveal God but to be present as God with his people.

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.” (Jn 1:14)

“To say...that the Word dwelt among us is to say that the Word chooses as target the heart of the common life of the people of God. The Word...lives in the midst of the cultural context of God’s people” (Wardlaw 1988: 68). This, to dwell, or to tabernacle, implies a special desire and commitment by God to continually encounter and seek to be present in the midst of the various cultural and social settings of his people throughout history.

Jesus also came to speak the Word, himself, God. Jesus also came as a preacher sent from God to proclaim that which he was, the complete revelation of God. As well as presenting Jesus as the Son of God, the synoptic writers present Jesus as a revealer, a preacher of the Word of God:

“From that time on Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.’ ” (Mt 4:17)

“Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God.” (Mk 1:14)

“He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.” (Lk 4:15)

Jesus was a preacher of all that he was within himself, the very incarnate Word of God. The people of the day not only encountered Jesus as the Son of God but as a preacher and teacher with God’s authority. The Gospel writers whose own words are “preached sermons before they are Scriptures, pile image upon image to draw out the full meaning of Jesus’ preaching ministry. He is the human voice of God, the bringer of good news, the long awaited proclaimer of the kingdom, the eschatological Prophet whose preaching is authenticated by the miracles that attend it” (Dunn-Wilson 2005: 23). Jesus is presented as a preacher in many settings. He preaches and teaches in the synagogues (Mk 6:2), to large open-air crowds (Mt 5:1-2), in homes (Mk 2:2), in private with his disciples (Jn 16:1), and personally to individuals (John 3). Throughout his ministry on earth Jesus was preaching and teaching the good news of salvation and his instruction regarding discipleship. Dunn-Wilson confirms this stating “when Jesus speaks he preaches (κηρυσσο) and he also teaches (διδασκω) what God has given him to proclaim (ευαγγελιζω)” (Dunn-Wilson 2005:142 ).

Christ is also God's final encounter with his people. "The relationship between God and man is rooted in the promises of the covenant" (Immink 2005: 241). God initiates the promise of grace in history with Abram, but it is embedded in Christ prior to creation (Eph 1:4). Christ then "embodies the salvation God has promised" (Immink 2005: 243). In Christ's death we are met, judged, and reconciled by the initiating God and placed in Christ. Here we see the ultimate encounter of God and his people. The encounter is Christ completely given to God in a loving humble sacrifice in accordance to his will, for us. We see our ultimate response to God in Christ – rebellion. Yet God encounters us as the God of holy love, destroying sin, justifying us – placing us in Christ – God's intention.

God's goal for his people - 'living in Christ,' brings us back to the concept of trinitarian life. God's people are now included in the love of the trinitarian life of God.

"God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him." (1 Jn 4:16)

As well as communicating his Word directly, vicariously, or through Christ he was also present via that which his Word created or directed. The tabernacle, temple, and finally the Incarnation were events originating

from God's desire to not only give his Word but to encounter and be present and in a covenantal relationship with his people. God and his Word of promise demands relationship, and through salvation history is always given to personally encountering the covenantal community, to be present with the community, and to reveal the message of promise and the person of the promiser. God calls his people to interpret God's continuing encounters and respond in either obedience/rebellion. God continually pursues his people from the place where he finds them with the intention of transforming them toward his covenantal goal – and finally placing them in Christ.

These encounters were also holy encounters. When the people of God met the God of the covenant they meet the holy, other, God. The tabernacle and temple encounters while relational were not complete but rather intent on a transformation that would allow a full, complete, holy, intimate communal encounter of the triune God with his people. This, achieved in Christ, awaits future fulfilment following Christ.

### **2.1.2 Message – What is the content of God's message to his people?**

God has revealed himself as the triune God of relationship. God has continued to reveal himself through his presence and through his Word as the promising covenantal God. God's message to his people is given to and placed within the community of promise the covenant people of God.

Luther says “Where we find the Word... we find the God who promises...” (Immink 2005: 171). And “God has never entered into a relationship with people – and this is still the case – other than through the Word of promise” (Immink 2005: 171-172). The Word of promise carries with it a frame of reference, grounded in two events. A promise is made and is then ultimately kept. There are many aspects which make up the message of God to his people, however, all aspects are communicated to the people either as an inclusive Word, calling people into the faith community of God, or as a covenantal Word given directly to the people of the promise.

For the ancient people of God the Word of promise was placed between the creation of the covenant promise of God, and the fulfilment in the Incarnation of God in Christ. For them God’s Word was always embedded in the promise and fulfilment of the covenant:

“I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.”  
(Gen 17:7)

The covenantal promise is a promise of relationship, of God giving himself to and for his people. The message of the covenant bears more than the words of a promise – it carries within it, the revelation of the person and

character of God, the creation of a relationship, the actual terms of the relationship, and the anticipated future for the parties to the agreement.

The Old Testament people of God were always a people on the way with God. They were called out to be a special people, to occupy a special land, and to worship a God who moved with them in eschatological hope toward their future fulfilment. The prophets, speaking the Word of God, sound the call to obey, to repent, to be holy, to return, not as a static call. The message is also an encounter by God who meets them where they are and seeks to show them a new future of hope with God.

"The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. (Jr 31:31-33)

Although God dealt with his people as they were, and gave them a message dealing with the place they were at, calling them to repent and

be holy, he also through his Word, dealt with them as they would become, reorienting them toward their future – I will be your God, and you will be my people.

Throughout salvation history God reveals himself as this covenant keeping, future creating God, a God of love - a God whose love is so pure that it demands righteous perfection, and yet so self-effacing that it gives everything for the other. In the covenant we see the free movement of God to create a relationship with a special people to be his own. The covenant reveals God's requirement for holiness, in order for the people to stand in this relationship. Yet it also reveals God's covenant commitment of perfect love, displayed through his determination for an intimate relationship with his people, and the pursuit of his people toward holiness – even to the point of the giving of himself in his Son, Jesus Christ, on their behalf.

The promise message then is a message of God and his love forever committed to a covenant relationship with his people. This relationship message also carries with it a demand for a response of holiness from God's people, to live oriented toward the future anticipation of being fully God's people, the fulfilment of which came in Christ, the covenant keeper. The promise message of covenantal love, holy response and of redemption "becomes concrete in the coming of the Messiah, who is the resurrection

and the life. God's coming in his proclamation and action provides humans..." (Immink 2005: 78), with a promise and a fulfilment in history, in reality, in the person of Christ.

### **2.1.3 Intention - What is God's future for his people?**

God has acted to create mankind to be a 'People of God', "an expression of God's freedom...elected for fellowship and therefore summoned into God's presence" (Webster 2005: 80). This is the core of the covenant and the intention of the conversation between God and his people. God calls his creatures into a triune relationship. The people of God, it may be said, came into existence when his Word came to Abram, calling him and making a covenant with him.

Throughout salvation history from Abraham, God chose, blessed, disciplined, abandoned and even judged, yet restored, longed for and loved his people. Scripture records God meeting his people in every aspect of life and, encouraging, exhorting, disciplining, enjoying, and responding to them with specific intention. God appears engaged, involved, on the way with his people in a covenantal relationship that is characterised by the ongoing Revelatory Covenantal Conversation that leads his people of faith toward holy communion, in Christ. "Like God's original creative Word, his final Word in Christ binds and commits him to his creation....To that



spoken Word, humanity is created to respond and recreated to respond in love" (Lischer 1981: 74).

God's Word to his people also gives them identity, purpose, shape, and future. For the ancient people of the covenant the 'Word of God' conferred a state of being, it represented a reality. "The Christian 'Word of God' (*o logos tou theou*) retains the dynamic and performative qualities of the Hebrew *dabar*. ... [W]e may say that for the Semite, 'Word of God' connotes a creating and shaping of eternal reality. What God says goes" (Lischer 1981: 70-71). God's Word is an active reality shaping Word that constitutes and moves his people on with purpose. In the Old Testament we are given a picture of the "people of God gathered by the Word of God under the Word of God, created, sustained and shaped by the sovereign Word as God makes" (Ash 2007: 23) and continues his covenant with them. God's constant intention is to journey with his people, as the ever present God, in a conversation that is committed to forming, shaping and completing a people for himself through Christ.

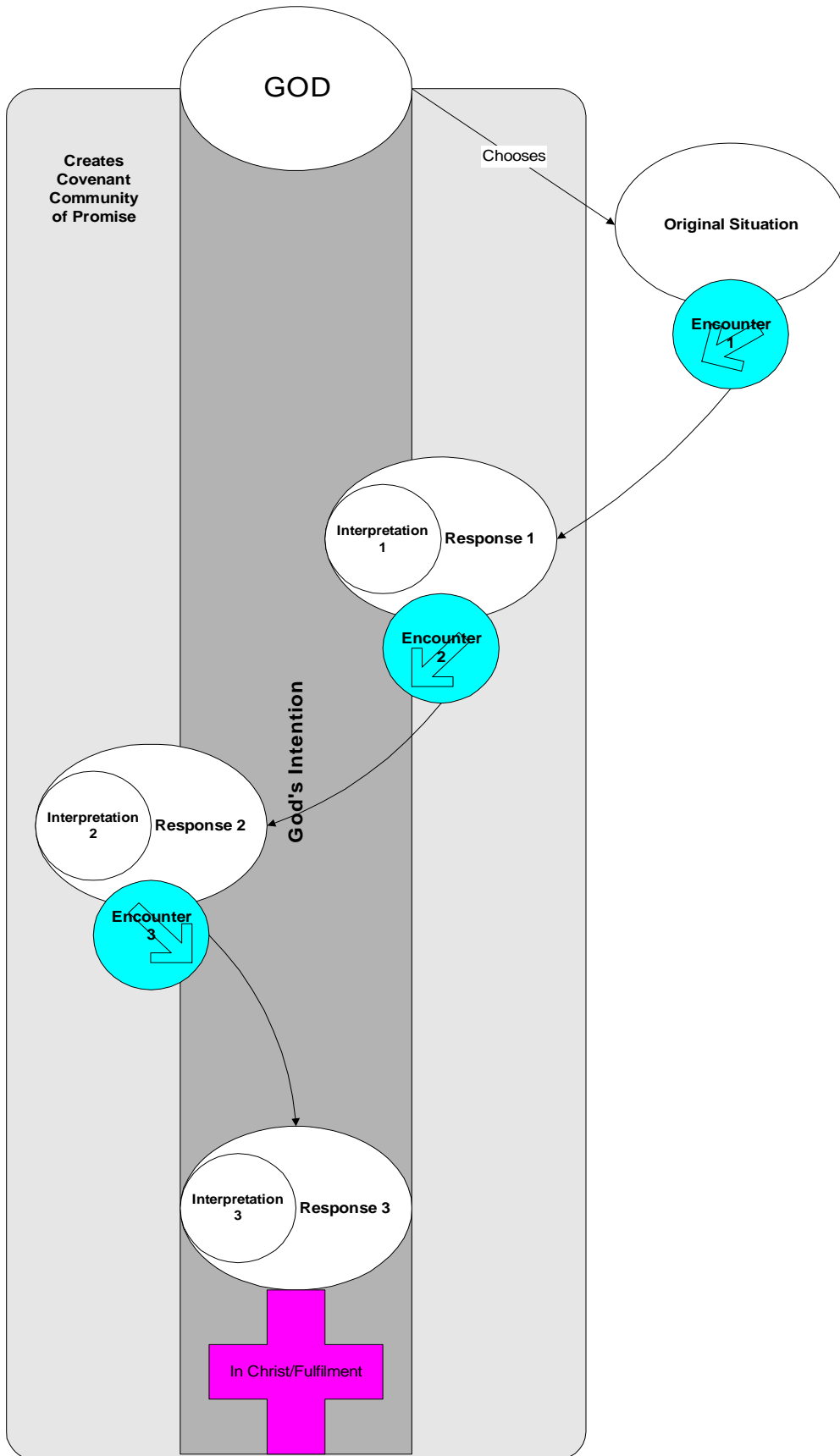
#### **2.1.4 Interpretation/Response – How do God's people respond?**

Throughout this journey Scripture records a dialogue between God and his people, which displays a God who is anguished, jealous, rejoicing, and in constant covenantal pursuit of his people. The people upon encountering the initiation of God interpret the encounter event with either faith or

rebellion and respond with, worship or idolatry, obedience or disobedience, blaspheming or praising, following or rejecting their God. The God encounter and human interpretation/response, form an ongoing conversation which is embedded within God's covenant relationship with his people, which ultimately moves toward God's sovereign eschatological goal. God encounters his people with purpose – to reveal himself and to create a holy people for himself – his eschatological goal.

#### **2.1.5 Revelatory Covenantal Conversation Model – Toward Christ**

Following is a diagram which depicts the Revelatory Covenantal Conversation between God and his people, throughout Old Testament history, culminating in Christ.



God initiates. God freely moves in grace to encounter a people who are outside his will and purposes (Original Situation). He chooses to enter into a covenant relationship of promise with his people. God encounters his people (Encounter 1) to be present with them, to reveal himself to them, and to shape his community in a particular direction. The encounter is intended to both create a people for himself and set them on a path toward intimate communion and holiness (God's Intention).

These God encounters are interpreted by the people of God and result in a response (Interpretation/Response 1) that is often at odds with the intention of the encounter. Or the interpretation/response doesn't go all the way to full alignment of the people with God's will. God then encounters his people again (Encounters 2 & 3) not from the original position, as if there had been no response at all, but from the new position of the people – the response position. God moves to meet his people where they are at and encounters them again there. The next encounter begins with where the people are, and is again designed to move them toward his goal. The people interpret and respond (Interpretation/Response 2 & 3), God encounters, and so it goes on with God pursuing his people toward his covenantal goal – to be his perfect holy people – which is fulfilled in Christ (In Christ/Fulfilment).

## **2.2 Revelatory Covenantal Conversation – From Christ**

The conversation continues on from Christ. God's covenantal Word given to Abram gave the people of the covenant the unique identity of being the chosen people of God. It is the pursuit of God throughout history and finally through the Word of God in Christ that brings clarity to the continued calling of his people, both Jew and Gentile, to be one holy people belonging to God. The work of the Spirit to create, transform, and continue the people of God, through the proclamation of the apostles, and through the living and active Word of God, and the proclamation of it down through history, continues the Revelatory Covenantal Conversation of God with his community of faith, the church, today.

### **2.2.1 Event – How has God continued to encounter his people?**

#### **2.2.1.1 The Apostles Speak**

The incarnate Word of God ascended and the apostles were sent as Christ was sent by the Spirit to be his witnesses, commanded to preach Christ to all. The presence of God with his people did not stop with the ascension of Christ. Rather it continues via the Spirit and the proclamation by witnesses of the revelation of God in Christ. God continued beyond Christ's ascension to encounter his people through the presence of the Spirit of Christ and through the Spirit's revelation of God through the proclamation of the living Word of God by his servants.

Not only did Jesus come as the Word incarnate and the proclaimer of God's Word, but he also trained, authorised and sent his disciples out to be preachers in their own right. The authority of the disciples did not come from themselves or their inherent or learned ability. Rather the

“preachers’ authentication arises solely from the fact that, during his earthly ministry, Jesus bestows his own prophetic authority upon his appointed heralds (Mt 10:1; Mk 6:7; Lk 9:1; 10:1) and commissions the disciples and the apostolic band to preach throughout the world (Mt 28:19-20; Mk 16:19; Lk 24:47; Ac 1:8). It follows that when the apostles speak, Jesus himself is speaking through them (Mt 10:20; Mk 16:16-17; Lk 24:47), and preachers who stand in the apostolic line also must be heard with respect for they utter divine words” (Dunn-Wilson 2005: 24).

Pieterse believes that “Paul sees his preaching as conduct through which God himself appeals to those who hear” (Pieterse 1987: 9). As Paul states:

“We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.” (2 Cor 5:20)

Together with the presence of the proclaimer, Malherbe explains that “Letters, according to ancient epistolary theory, are substitutes for their writers ‘presence’” (Dunn-Wilson 2005: 12), and so by means of letters, “preachers may continue to visit their congregations.” (Dunn-Wilson 2005: 12). Certainly Paul intended his letters to be viewed in this way. They were often to be read publicly in the churches (1 Th 5:27), received as if he were present (Col 1:7; 2:5), and speaking, and like preaching intended to transform the recipients. Greidanus says that these written sermons are “long distance preaching. They were like preaching not only because they addressed specific needs in early churches but also because they were primarily oral communications” (Greidanus 1993: 738). And since Paul “was unable to be present in person, his letters were a direct substitute, and were to be accorded weight equal to Paul’s physical presence” (Greidanus 1993: 737). For Paul these written letters were intended to be equivalent to a personal message, being an oral presentation regarded as carrying equal authority.

Thus the early church received God’s Word, personally or via written forms, as if God himself were present with the apostle or original preacher.

Preaching was a community event that contained presence, God and preacher, as well as content, God’s Word. And via the presence of the preacher and the Spirit presence of God, the community of faith so gathered anticipated and received the present Word of God.

The New Testament apostles carried forth the message of revelation encountering the people with the Word of God that they had received, seen in Christ and experienced. Thus through the apostles preaching the revelatory conversation continued with the New Testament communities of faith.

### **2.2.1.2 The Living Word Speaks**

The apostles and early witnesses preached of what they had seen and heard concerning Christ and then recorded the events and the proclamation of the events. Speaking of the Apostles work, Luther puts it like this, "Before they wrote, they first of all preached to the people by word of mouth and converted them, and this was their real apostolic and New Testament work" (Lischer 1981: 25). The New Testament then came into being from witness accounts of the life of Christ together with the recorded words of the preaching of the early eye witnesses. "The New Testament is then the result of the preaching of the apostles and is also a form of preaching itself. The content of the gospels was drawn from the material preached by the early church..." (Pieterse 1987: 5).

God's Word to us today comes via the canon of Scripture. In Scripture the Old Testament words move toward and anticipate the coming of Christ and the New Testament speaks clearly of him. Jesus is the first and final Word that Scripture brings to the church today. What type of word then is



Scripture, the Word given to the church to proclaim? For Stott “The Bible is God’s Word written, God’s Word through men’s words, spoken through human mouths and written through human hands” (Stott 1982: 97 ).

However, we must move on from this statement to also affirm that this Word, although God’s Word, is not static but that God still speaks through this Word. Otherwise we consign God to silence today. But on the contrary we affirm that God’s Word is “a living Word to living people from the living God, a contemporary message for the contemporary world” (Stott 1982: 100). Scripture in its original setting was a relevant contemporary living message to the original hearers, and while “what he has spoken has been written down and remains a permanent record... he is continuing to speak what he once spoke” (Stott 1982: 101). Further we must affirm that this living Word is not a passive voice that can be ignored, “for in his Words, speech and action are combined. He created the universe by his Word: ‘he spoke and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood forth’ (Ps 33:9). And now through the same Word he recreates and saves” (Stott 1982: 105).

According to Rossouw Scripture also conveys the presence of the living Lord. “The truth of the Word is Jesus Christ, the crucified but resurrected and therefore living Lord. Jesus Christ is himself the original figure of the canonical truth of salvation – not as a metaphysical principle, but as the living Lord who meets humankind in the present in his living Word” (Pieterse

1987: 5). For Webster, using the visual in Revelation, of Jesus walking among the churches, he conceives of Scripture in the following terms:

“At his glorification to the Father’s right hand, Jesus Christ does not resign his office of self-communication, handing it over to the texts of Scripture which are henceforth in and of themselves his voice in the world. Rather in the texts of Holy Scripture, the living One himself speaks: Scripture is his prophet and his apostle. Holy Scripture is ‘holy’ because it is sanctified: that is, it is set apart by God for the service of his self-announcement. Scripture is the elect, consecrated auxiliary through which the living One walks among the churches and makes known his presence. For this reason, Scripture is a transcendent moment in the life of the church” (Webster 2005: 109-110).

Thus the *viva vox dei* is not just a word that comes to us via proclamation, but is the living Word of God, Jesus Christ, and he gives himself to be present with us, his people, through Scripture by the Spirit. “This is to say that the church assembles around the revelatory self-presence of God in Christ through the Spirit, borne to the community of saints by the writings of the prophets and apostles” (Webster 2005: 110). The Word of God “touches us as a presence-of-God, as a Word that comes uniquely to us from God and penetrates our inner selves, our consciousness.... The Spirit of God pronounces it in our minds so that our minds will consciously focus on it. We

are united with Christ, and thus God's Word of grace turns into a known and lived reality. Forgiveness, love, hope, and all benevolent things that belong to God become part of our lives" (Immink 2005: 286). This illumination of the gospel of Christ in all its fullness comes through the Spirit. Christ comes as the complete Word given to us for all time. The Spirit is then given to take the Word, Christ, and make it, him, known to us.

"But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you." (Jn 16:13-15)

### **2.2.1.3 The Church Speaks**

Today the conversation continues in the church, the body of Christ, as it takes up the Word of God by the Spirit. Rogers states that "The theological foundation of Christian preaching is the freedom and good pleasure of God. That is to say, the preaching of the church has its origin, its anchor, and its life in God's decision to be Emmanuel – God with us" (Rogers 1991: 241). God has revealed and made himself present among his people throughout history. He has made himself present through his Son, the Word, and God has now given himself to his people by his Spirit to be present and

revealed to us through his proclaimed Word within the community of faith. "It is not the privilege only of the apostles to proclaim this message: on the strength of their testimony those who accept the testimony can proclaim it further" (Pieterse 1987: 5). For Stott "...Christianity is, in its very essence, a religion of the Word of God.... His self-revelation has been given by the most straightforward means of communication known to us, namely by a word and words; [and] he calls upon those who have heard his Word to speak it to others" (Stott 1982: 15). Barth concurs stating that "In succession to the apostles, as ministers of the second rank, preachers do in their spheres, i.e., in specific congregations, what the apostles did for the whole church" (Barth 1991: 67).

"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched-- this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ." (1 Jn 1:1-3)

The apostle's testimony "came to be owned by the church and the church has kept and preached this testimony through the ages to the present

day” (Pieterse 1987: 6). Through this testimony the church is formed by the Spirit, and formed to also bear testimony further to that by which it was formed - Word and Spirit.

Today through the work of the Spirit and the Word, preaching plays an important role in: our participation in the promise - our being placed in Christ, in the transformation of God’s people-toward Christ likeness, and in continuing the journey of his people toward fulfilment. Pieterse states that in preaching we:

“confess that we can only hear the living Word in preaching through the work of the Holy Spirit. The inspiration of the Word in its coming into being is followed by the enlightenment of the Spirit, working through the Word in the lives of the preacher and the congregation. Word and Spirit therefore form a unity. God does not give his Spirit without the Word. When the Word is proclaimed, the Spirit accompanies the Word. The Spirit does not work apart from the Word, but in close conjunction with the Word. There is thus a close connection between the Bible the Holy Spirit and preaching. In the work of the Spirit the power and the relevance of the Word of God in the sermon is made possible by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit puts us in touch with Jesus Christ and, by enlightening us in the proclamation of

the Word, provides the way by which the Lord comes to us and speaks to us in preaching" (Pieterse 1987: 15).

Through the unity of Word and Spirit the Word is illuminated by the Spirit. Thus God is revealed in the Word. And because of the presence of the Spirit, the Word, God, is present with us, to speak to us through the Word. Under the control of the Spirit, "Christ, canon and church – the three forms of the Word of God – constitute the relational dynamic of revelation..." (Metzger 2005: 21) today. This relational dynamic involves both God and his people, both revelation and humankind in the covenantal dialogue. "The Spirit preserves this dynamic in two ways. First, the Spirit shapes Scripture to reveal Christ..." (Metzger 2005: 21), thus revealing the possibility of relationship in Christ by faith. "Second, the Spirit enacts new encounters with the living Word through the interface of the church's proclamation with the witness of Scripture" (Metzger 2005: 21).

God, his revelation, the community of the Word, and the proclamation of the Word are indissolubly linked. Luther comments "God's Word cannot be without God's people and God's people cannot be without God's Word" (Barth 1991: ). God has acted to create a people of God. God has spoken to his people to reveal his action and purpose to us. First God spoke the world into being, then directly to Adam and Eve. Following the advent of sin, God chose prophets to reveal him and to interpret his involvement in history,

commanding them to communicate to his people through words, oral and written. At the right time he then spoke personally through his Son – “Word become flesh”. He then spoke via the Spirit, who empowered the words of the apostles, and now speaks through Scripture and his successive servants of the gospel to us today. “This trinitarian statement of a speaking Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and so of a Word of God that is Scriptural, incarnate and contemporary, is fundamental to the Christian religion. And it is God’s speech which makes our speech necessary. We must speak what he has spoken. Hence the paramount obligation to preach” (Stott 1982: 15). The church then speaks not from and of itself, but because “it has been spoken to. Only because there is a Word from this Son of Man – only that is, because there is a Word of God – is there a word to be uttered by the church. And this word of the church is nothing other than witness to the Word of God” (Webster 2005: 109), which conforms to the revelation of the triune covenantal God.

In considering what it means that preaching, as the word of the church, must witness to and conform to revelation, Barth suggests that:

“Our initial point is that God himself wills to reveal himself. He himself wills to attest his revelation. He himself – not we – has done this and wills to do it. Preaching, then takes place in listening to the self-revealing will of God. Preachers are drawn into this event. It is of

concern to them. They are called by this event. The event becomes a constituent part of their existence. Because God has revealed himself and wills to reveal himself, and because preachers are confronted by this event, their preaching – if they are commissioned to preach – is necessarily governed by it in both content and form, in the logical content of what is said and in their relation to the fact that God has revealed himself and will reveal himself” (Barth 1991: 50).

Barth sees the double movement of revelation in Christ and the anticipation of his coming as that to which preaching is called to follow. Preachers are called to reveal God’s revelation, culminating in Christ, through proclamation, because he has revealed himself. And they are to continue to proclaim his self revelation, because he will reveal himself again. “The church is the form of common human life and action which is generated by the gospel to bear witness to the perfect Word and work of the triune God” (Webster 2005: 96).

The church must therefore not only live in reference to the revealed will, purpose, and nature of the triune community of the Godhead, it must proclaim the revelation of God also. The church is constituted by the Word and commissioned to be witnesses of the Word through proclamation - the call, and through incarnational representation - the response. The church is



called to take up this living Word that responds to and witnesses to that which has first been willed by the Father, taken place in and through the Son and is being completed by the Spirit. The church is to speak God's Word in such a way as to reveal that which God has already accomplished in history. And secondly, the church is to represent Christ, through the creation, transformation, and continuation of the holy faith community, being a sign of that which God has already done in Christ. In speaking the Word of God we speak that which has already been spoken, we proclaim that which has been revealed, we call the community of faith to become what it already is in Christ. As the Father sent the Son to reveal and be present among his people, so the apostles and hence the church has been commissioned with the same task – to reveal and make Christ present through the revealing proclamation of God's Word and be a community of Spirit filled witnesses.

Through preaching, the proclamation encounter of the Word, and the regenerative work of the Spirit, a visible community of the Word is created which evidences that which is already willed by the Father and created in Christ – a people of God. The preacher proclaims the living and active Word which continues to encounter and transform the community of faith by the work of the Spirit through the washing of the Word into that which it already is – the perfected body of Christ, the eschatological bride. The preacher also sustains the life of the community through constant witness to

the eternal life that is present by the Spirit because of the continuing salvific work of Christ within the preaching community until the day of final fulfilment.

### **2.2.2 Message – What is the content of God’s message to his people?**

According to Immink “the sermon is restricted to the *Woher* (from where?) and the *Wohin* (where to?) of the message, it cannot be an open exchange about all kinds of themes” (Immink 2005: 211). The “from where” and “where to” is for the church located between what has been promised and is already in Christ, and the consummation of all upon his return. Thus for the church, preaching is placed within the continuing covenant relationship now held in Christ - between the ‘already’ of the work of Christ, and the eschatological hope of the fulfilment and consummation of all that has been promised.

This Spirit of Christ now confronts his people with a call to respond in faith and stand in a covenant relationship with Christ, in Christ. The Spirit reveals God’s eternal commitment toward his people in Christ, and also his requirement that they are transformed to become like Christ, holy as he is holy. The Spirit also points toward a day of hope and anticipation of perfect holy communion.

“I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.” (Jn 14:3)

As the Spirit of Christ takes up the work of Christ, the work of the Word, to create, change, and point toward the day of fulfilment, so preaching takes up the communication of this same Spirit, Word, this living message.

Preaching takes up the charge to proclaim the continuing covenantal

Word of Christ:

- To proclaim the call of the covenant promise, to life in Christ, so as to create a worshipping faith community that represents him.
- To proclaim the Spirit call to be transformed to be like Christ, God's heart and will for the world.
- And to proclaim the hope of the consummation of all, as the faith community journeys toward eternal covenantal communion with him.

According to Pieterse the message of the promise contains two elements, the indicative message of the covenant and the call to respond – the imperative. “In order to be faithful to the origin of faith and to preach the content of the Scriptures, preaching must consist of exposition and application. This is the basic structure of all scriptural preaching” (Pieterse 1987: 9). The task of the proclaiming church therefore is to ensure the faithful proclamation of the above message and to also ensure that the

message is delivered in such a manner that the response of the ecclesial community accords with the intention of the message.

### **2.2.3 Intention - What is God's future for his people?**

God's revelatory covenantal encounters which express his message of promise not only created a people to be his people, but were encounters and words of specific design and intent. God continued with his people, to transform them into a holy people, which he accomplished in Christ. And now through his Spirit he continues to call the community of faith toward the eschatological hope of being fully with him, as his holy covenant people, the ultimate goal.

The people of God exist as such because they are called or summoned to be "a people of God". The people of God today, the church, also finds its existence from within the purpose and call of God. "The church is the creation of God by his Word" (Stott 1982: 109). The church is the outworking of the divine freedom of God to create a people for himself. Therefore the character and nature of God's people is "derived solely from and is wholly dependant upon the gospel's manifestation of God's sovereign purpose for his creatures. The church is because God is and acts thus" (Webster 2005: 76). Similarly, it was through the apostolic preaching of God's Word in the power of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost that the people of God became the Spirit-filled body of Christ. Preaching is less instruction about

community than community formation in action: “the Holy Spirit constituting the assembled community as the body of Christ in and through the proclamation of the Word and celebration of the sacrament....The sermon can be less an object than it is an action of divine encounter by which a relationship...” (Wilson 1995: 23) is created, renewed and continued.

Man has encountered God’s Word in the past, through the prophets and finally in Christ, and now through the proclamation of the Word. As this Word is proclaimed it takes root, and in the community of faith, the natural faith response is to become a community which expresses the encountered Word through love, in word and deed to the world. The preached Word to the faith community becomes the preached Word to include others into the community. Barth states that “Only because the call of revelation goes out and people hear it does the church come into being” (Barth 1991: 57). The Word is a community forming and including Word. He believes that the very existence of the church is rooted in the apostolic Word. For Webster it is important to understand “not only that the church is a necessary implicate of the gospel but also that the gospel and church exist in a strict and irreversible order, one in which the gospel precedes and the church follows” (Webster 2005: 76). As the church came from the gospel message of Christ, the faith community today rests within the continued proclamation of that same Word. Luther concurs suggesting that “The church owes its life to the Word of promise, and is nourished and

preserved by this same Word – the promises of God make the Church, not the Church the promises of God” (Stott 1982: 24). For Luther then the church’s source of all existence comes from the Word.

Barth comments on Fezer’s definition of preaching observing that for Fezer “The concern of preaching is solely with God himself, who gives himself to us in Scripture, from election to redemption. He himself is at work in us by the Holy Spirit. ... God creates the hearing congregation by the Holy Spirit. In it there takes place a human effort whose aim is that God himself will act and be present. In this divine act human speech merely assists” (Barth 1991: 38). Fezer embeds within his definition of preaching the event of God giving himself in and through the proclamation of the Word. Preaching then is not just the giving of a constitutional message, but a constitutional event comprising message and presence. Barth continues stating “the church is never a given factor. It has to be repeatedly founded anew by an apostolic word. It can exist only in the event of the speaking and hearing of this apostolic word as God’s Word. ... In the church we are always on the way to the event of the church” (Barth 1991: 70). According to Barth the church once formed does not take on an intrinsic life of its own part from the message. It can never be the complete giver of the message for it needs to continually return to the Word to be continually constituted by it. “The church is a place where we are chosen by the voice of revelation” (Barth 1991: 62). Wherever the voice of revelation is preached, and Christ is

present by the Holy Spirit, there is the church, the preaching community.

Wilson emphatically states that without preaching “the church would cease to exist” (Wilson 1995: 12). The proclaimed message under the work of the Spirit then constitutes the very life of the church – the church by nature is the preaching community.

We have already claimed that the Word of God is both given, through the act of preaching, and present in that which is given, in such a way as to create and sustain the life of the ecclesia. Webster goes on to state, “To speak of the church as the “community of the Word” involves a good deal more than routine affirmations of the authority of the Bible and the importance of preaching in the church. It rests upon some primary Christological affirmations which affect a recharacterisation of the church as the community which witnesses to the prevenient presence of the Word of God” (Webster 2005: 108). Preaching is then more than message, it involves a community forming presence that creates a present witnessing community - a community that manifests the message, Christ.

Our attention shifts from the covenant intention of community creation, to the covenant intention to shape the created community. The Biblical and anthropological concept of the *imago Dei* provides a useful motif for the development of God’s transformative intention for his community.

The creation account describes a God who “creates a world external to God’s being and then places humankind within that creation as a creaturely representation of the transcendent deity” (Grenz 2005: 88) – as the *imago Dei*. According to Grenz the omission of the ‘how’ to be such divine image beings, and the open ended nature of Genesis 1:26-27 leads one beyond this text to the scope of salvation history, which “clears the way for a move from a creatiocentric to a Christocentric anthropology” (Grenz 2005: 89).

The New Testament and Paul specifically, link Christ with the *imago Dei* motif. Christ is presented as: the one who radiates the glory of God (2 Cor 4:4-6); the exact representation of God, the supreme one from whom creation and the new creation find their place (Col 1:15-20). Coming and dwelling among us (Jn 1:14), “Jesus Christ fully reveals God, and thereby is the *imago Dei*” (Grenz 2005: 90), fulfilling the Genesis account and providing a divine ‘image being’ prototype.

However, God’s intention was for mankind to be the image of God. The salvation historical climax of his people redeemed through Christ, becoming the new creation that is placed in Christ, represents God’s purpose for his people as the *imago Dei*. “God’s goal is that as the Son, Jesus Christ be pre-eminent within a new humanity stamped with the divine image. Consequently, humankind created in the *imago Dei* is none other



than the new humanity conformed to the *imago Christi*, and the *telos* toward which the Old Testament creation narrative points is the eschatological community of glorified saints" (Grenz 2005: 91).

The transformative intention of the *imago Dei* does not rest with the people of God being a new creation in Christ. The ethical dimension of the *imago Dei* in the New Testament goes further commanding that "Those who are destined to be the new humanity, and therefore are already in the process of being transformed into the divine image, are to live out that reality in the present" (Grenz 2005: 92) by the work of the Spirit of Christ within the faith community.

Being placed in Christ results in the creation of a new community of new creations patterned on the trinitarian image. Thus the transformative dimensions of the *imago Dei* are best viewed not from an individual standpoint, but as the "prolepsis of the future reality... the community of reconciled people in fellowship with God through Christ" (Grenz 2005: 94). Therefore the people of God now, are being transformed by the Spirit into the ecclesial *imago Dei* which the faith community already is in Christ. As Grenz states "being-in-relationship with the triune God not only inherently includes, but is even comprised by, being-in-relationship with those who participate together in the Jesus-narrative and thereby are the ecclesial

new humanity as the *imago Dei* after the pattern of the *perichoretic* life of the triune God..." (Grenz 2005: 98).

God was not finished with his people in the Old Testament. Upon constituting them and leading them toward holiness and divine relationship, fulfilment was still to come in Christ. The church, formed by the Spirit in Christ, and constantly transformed by the Spirit to be like Christ, is still continuing, and awaiting complete fulfilment upon Christ's return. God not only calls his people to be his people here, but also continues with his people until we are completely, fully, his there, in Christ, with the triune One - his ecclesiological goal. In other words God continues the covenantal conversation of hope with his people until the final consummation. God's final words regarding his people and the completion of the covenantal goal are recorded by John in Revelation:

"Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God." (Rv 21:1-3)

This depicts the goal of the eschatological community of faith – holy, in Christ, with God, with God as God, forever.

Today “God initiates relationship and restores identity through preaching....We begin to conceive of the sermon as an intimate and personal event in a communal context with community-shaping power. It is God’s salvation breaking into the world” (Wilson 1995: 23), first to create a people, secondly to shape them, and thirdly to continue them onward. Preaching is called to be part of the continuing Revelatory Covenantal Conversation of God:

- To reveal the present God, through the proclamation today of the contemporary living Word, made active through the presence of the revealer, the Spirit of the Christ.
- To evoke faith and through the including Word call people to be that which they are already in Christ – a covenant community of God.
- To shape the people of faith to become that which they are called to be, and indeed are in Christ, the *imago dei*, and to continue toward that which is the fulfilment of all that is promised - the eschatological covenantal community of the triune God.

#### **2.2.4 Interpretation/Response – How do God’s people respond?**

Preaching, as the role of communicating the promise, the covenant, the good news of God in Christ, sets up a conversation of initiatory speech together with the anticipation of responsive listening. This activity combines the movement of revelation in and through the preached Word together

with the existential nature of the response. Immink suggests “The promise comes to us in the structure of the discourse, that is, in the interaction of speaking and listening. The Word of promise is by definition existential: the Word of God is human-directed... [therefore] it would be incorrect to define preaching as one sided – only a message coming from God. For it is also ‘the word that becomes history,’ which comes to human existence and touches it in its roots...” (Immink 2005: 244). While the message proclaimed finds its priority with Christ and revelation, for Christ is the focus of the promise, preaching never remains just a statement about divine action. “For when that central act of God is proclaimed, it touches our existence, and the Word enters our life... thus Christ and human existence is connected” (Immink 2005: 244).

If Christ is present in and through his Word to the church by the Spirit, then what is called for is a rethinking of our approach to Scripture. The preaching of Scripture then is not an event whereby a further illumination, clarification, or completion is brought to the Word. The preacher first announces the perfect Word of God given to the church, the preacher announces Christ, and then the faith community must then move to receive, recognise, and accept the Word. “In making that movement, in fear and trembling, falling at the feet of the Son of Man, the church receives its appointment to a specific task: it is summoned to speech” (Webster 2005: 111). All such speech is a response to that which has

already been received. It surpasses a mere intellectual affirmation of the truth, authority and inspiration of Scripture. The response must so arrest the life of the church and transform it so that the Word which is present and has been encountered becomes evident within the life and speech of the community of the Word on earth.

The proclamation of the Word of God through the event of preaching has within it the intention to be heard aright and produce an anticipated response. "While a specific sermon may be designed to meet specific goals, one goal remains constant in preaching: we want the congregation to be encountered by God such that their lives issue in faithful action" (Wilson 1995: 186). Here the Word which creates community also carries within it the desire to transform and continue the community on toward the goal. Preaching touches not only our minds but impacts our lives.

"The Word of God touches us in our concrete existence; it is understood and receives its meaning in daily life; it is a Word that offers orientation and provides direction. The human self absorbs the Word, and this has influence on the praxis of life. This impact on our lives is not something secondary. The Word of God aims for that relationship – the communion. This focus on human beings and the intention of not only being understood but also of awakening

consent and response, is a unique characteristic of the Word”

(Immink 2005: 267).

Preaching therefore seeks to direct the church through the process of right listening and right responding bringing the world of revelation and reality into one.

The proclamation of the Word of God, together with the active presence of the Spirit within both speaker and hearer, provides each new culture and time with its Christian foundation. The preaching of Scripture makes the past social world present to act as the current social basis, for the formation, shaping and continuance of the community of faith. “In the preaching moment the social world of the past and the social world of the present come together in the proclamation of the Word of God” (Van Seters 1988: 22). Preaching seeks the alignment of our world today with the will of God revealed through the social context of biblical history. At the intersection of these social worlds the preacher sends out meaning to the faith community, which “is continually engaged in a wilful act of production of meaning” (Brueggemann 1988: 128). While the act of preaching seeks to present a foundational social text, appropriate response and alignment is not a given. The listening community of faith, with the Spirit of Christ present in the midst, engages in “a constructive act of construal, of choosing, discerning, and shaping the text through the way

the community chooses to listen. The text thus construed may or may not be the text that is the one offered by the speaker. That is, the text heard may be quite different from the one proclaimed" (Brueggemann 1988: 128). Here an ongoing dialogue between hearer and preacher and the Word is essential to ensure the correct hearing of the text occurs, and a movement toward alignment, a merging of worlds is taking place. The preacher who never assumes the hearers interpret, align, and respond as intended will take care to constantly review the reception, integration and movement in the lives of the hearers. It is also here that Barth's heralding of the text breaks down due to a lack of consideration of the interpretation, alignment and response aspects of the preaching event. Brueggemann states, "It is in the sermon that the church has done its decisive, faith determining interpretation. The sermon is not an act of reporting on an old text, but it is an act of making a new text visible and available" (Brueggemann 1988: 128), relevant and present for contemporary response.

These acts of interpretation and speech by the preacher and interpretation and response by the hearer are all done within the context of the community of faith. The preacher listens to past communities through tradition, commentary, experience, and the Word, and interprets by faith God's Word for the people of today. The hearers listen as a community

now, believing they will hear, and discern by faith, the Word of God for them now, in their world.

Revelation and response, like Word and worship, “belong indissolubly to each other. All worship is an intelligent and loving response to the revelation of God, because it is the adoration of his Name. Therefore acceptable worship is impossible without preaching. For preaching is making known the name of the Lord, and worship is praising the name of the Lord made known” (Stott 1982: 82). Preaching is the call to know God while worship is then our appropriate holy response to God encountered through the Word. Preaching and worship combine to continue the covenantal conversation that God initiated with his people and will continue through to the consummation.

This call and response theme can be found throughout the history of God’s dealing with his people: the call of Abram and the response of faith; the call of Moses and his response to deliver; the call of the Israelites and the response of following to the promised land; the call through the prophets for repentance by the people; the call from exile to return to the land; the call by Christ to faith, salvation and worship; the call by the apostles to believe and follow. And today the preachers call the people to encounter this same God who calls them through the sermon to deliverance, to obedience, to salvation, to worship, and to proclamation, to entreat the



people to leave their world and enter the world of Christ by faith. Pieterse puts it this way:

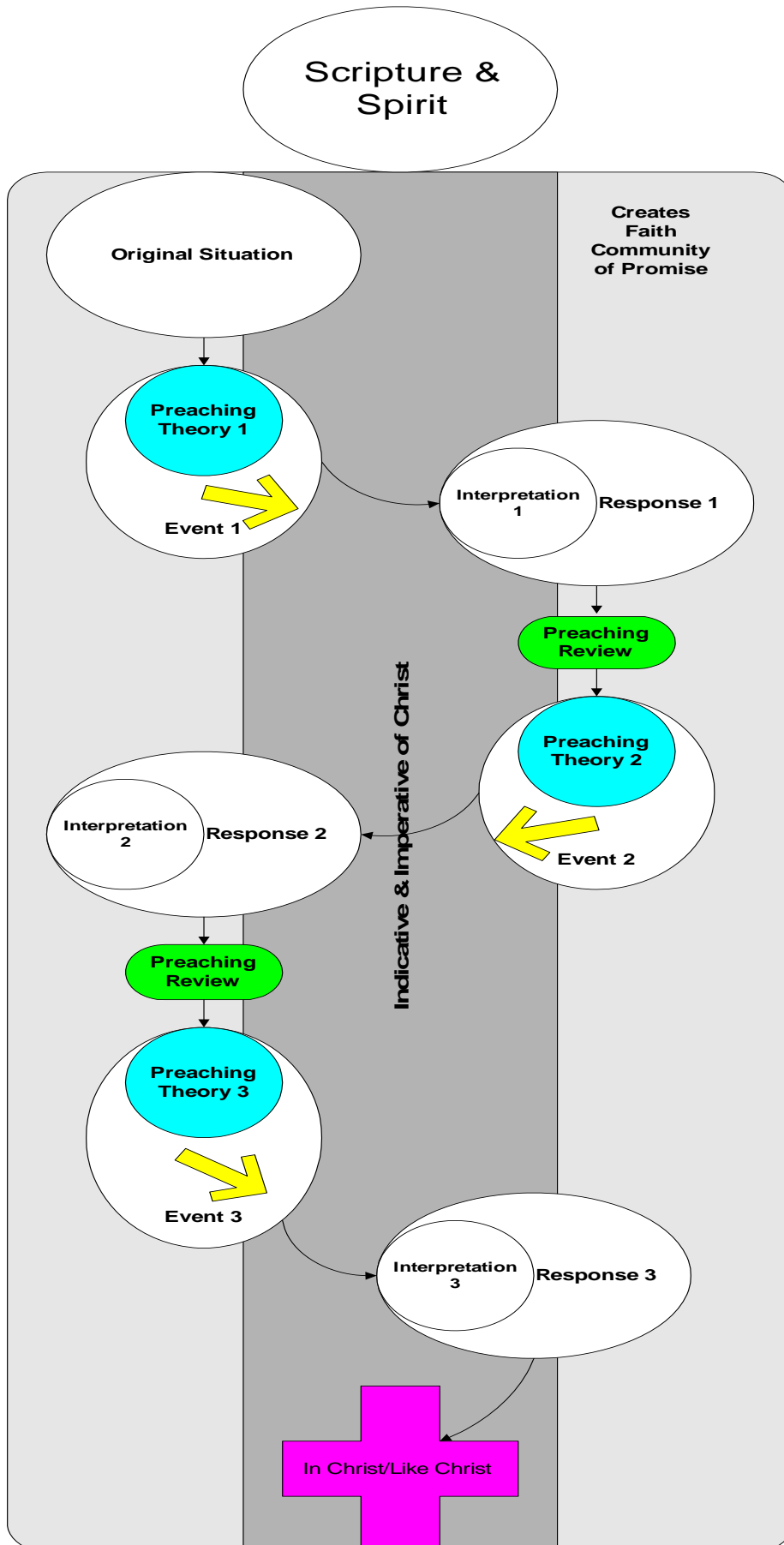
“The Bible contains the proclamation which was made. The text has about it an urgency to be proclaimed again and again, as it is a message for all times. In the Word we find the dynamic events character which moves the text to proclamation. It is a living Word which, because it is pneumatic, moves the Word of Scripture into oral proclamation. In this event God uses the preacher with his equipment as an instrument and he is taken up in the movement of the speaking Word and used as a servant to translate the Word of God and to let it speak in the act of proclaiming it. The speaking Word of God closes the gap between then and now. When the Word of God addresses us we come to understanding, we hear God’s Word and are changed by it” (Pieterse 1987: 15).

#### **2.2.5 Revelatory Covenantal Conversation Model – From Christ**

“God’s revelation to humankind is presented in Scripture as a dialogue, in the sense that the biblical books originated in a dialogue situation between God and human beings. God’s actions (praxis) in our time still occur dialogically through the Word and the Spirit” (Heyns 1990: 54-55). God encountered and initiated a revelatory covenantal dialogue with his people, and today the conversation continues by the work of the Spirit and

The Preaching Community Revelatory Covenantal Conversation

through the proclamation of his Word. The model below illustrates the Revelatory Covenantal Conversation from Christ that continues today through preaching:



In preaching we represent that which has been revealed to us by God and finally in Christ. We by the Spirit, preach from Scripture (Scripture & Spirit), representing God and Christ as revealed in the Bible in such a way that God is revealed and encounters us today through his presence and his Word. Through preaching (Event 1) we are to meet the people of God in their immediate situation and confront them with such a relevant contemporary including encounter.

The community of God is called to respond to the indicative of being in Christ as his people - the community of faith (Creates faith community of promise). They are likewise called to the imperative of being who they are already in Christ – to be transformed to be like Christ, shaped by holy love (Indicative and Imperative of Christ). As his people they are also to live out of the call of hope - of being on the way to Christ. The community encounters God through the preaching event, interprets the event in their world of reality, with faith or rebellion and responds with worship or idolatry, obedience or disobedience (Interpretation/Response 1).

After the event and the interpretation/response of the people, the preacher must pause to review and evaluate the event (Preaching Review). Unlike God who has a holy and perfect will, having full knowledge, understanding fully the situation, the response, and the heart of his people, preachers need to pause and reflect. Each preaching event is theory

laden. The preacher will deliver a message based on their underlying theory of preaching. In light of the encounter and the associated interpretation/response the preacher must evaluate such things as ones: preaching goals and intentions, theology of preaching, understanding of the faith community, sermon delivery, and content and style. In short, preachers must review their theories which underpin the message, event, intentions, and expected interpretation/response of the hearers to their preaching.

Following the review, the preacher, much like God must encounter the people again at the point of response – the place of the people.

Successive encounters (Event 2 & 3) are made with the intention of evoking renewed responses (Interpretation/Response 2 & 3) that move the people toward alignment with the imperative and indicative of Christ. Thus like God who acted to reveal himself and to bring Christ to us that we might be finally like him, preaching seeks the same end (In Christ/Like Christ). For the “preaching of the gospel is nothing other than Christ coming to us or us being brought to Him” (Immink 2005: 243). When this takes place the eschatological goal of God and of preaching will be realised – when their world and God’s world coincide, when promise gives way to reality, when God’s people are brought into his very presence, standing perfect in Christ to participate in the triune covenantal love of God.

Preaching is to bring the revelation and presence of God in history close, so close that it touches our life, and shapes the faith community. God is present by his Spirit through the proclamation of his Word, to reveal God and the message of promise - the theological domain, to bring about faith and holy life - the anthropological domain, with the intention to transform the community of God - the ecclesiological domain. In this way, the Revelatory Covenantal Conversation, which finds its source in the life of the triune God, continues through preaching to create, change and continue the church – the preaching community of God.

### **3. PRAXIS RESEARCH - THE CHRISTIAN BRETHREN CHURCH**

#### **3.1 Brethren History**

The Brethren movement, which began in Britain and Ireland in the early 1800's, was not an original movement, but a product of past movements and reactions to the surrounding churches and the environment of the day. The movement carried with it shades: of Puritanism in its insistence on the absolute authority of the Bible; of the Quaker movement with its zeal for missions and social service work; and of Methodism with its emphasis on extempore preaching and its desire for purity. In addition many aspects of the movement were shaped through a reaction against the Anglican Church - its clergy/laity division, its lifeless form and structure, its perceived apostasy and lack of evangelism. The Brethren also reacted to the clericalism and social separation, which the dissenting churches in England were creating. It was within this environment of renewal culture, sectarianism and apostasy that the Brethren movement took root and grew in the hearts of men and women who believed that God and Scripture called them to something different.

##### **3.1.1 Theological Distinctives**

The distinctive theological emphases of the Assemblies (another name the Brethren have used) grew out of the background, context and historical

events outlined above. The Brethren movement's focus on unity germinated in the environment of sectarianism, and it sought demonstration around the Lord's Supper rather than through conformity to structure or creed. The established churches' increased authority within the community saw the Brethren turn to the Bible as their only authority. They emphasised the importance of evangelism, sacrificial living, biblical and evangelistic preaching in the face of a complacent established church. Discipline and purity emerged as important due to the apparent apostasy in the church. The power of the Holy Spirit was sought through spontaneity, for they could not find his work within the form and rigidity of the current establishment. The encouragement of each to express their gifts, and a determination of no clergy/laity structure, was a reaction against traditional structures and ministry practices, which were seen to restrict body life and the work of the Holy Spirit.

In the early years of the movement several important theological themes emerged which have influenced the development of the movement – these are:

1. The unity of all believers in Christ.
2. The authority of Scripture alone.
3. The expression of gifts by all.
4. The Holy Spirit edifies from among them.



5. The call to sacrificial living.

A review of each of these themes is not possible here, nor relevant to the issue at hand. However, aspects of points 2, 3, and 4 relate directly to the foundational theology and practice of preaching and shall be considered briefly in turn.

**3.1.1.1 Authority of Scripture Alone**

The authority of Scripture alone became a foundational principle of the Brethren movement. This stance is not surprising considering the authority that the established church, The Church of England, took for itself, often over and against Scripture. The thought that a system of tradition or church structure could in anyway determine the mind of God apart from Scripture was to the early Brethren, evil itself. And so like many reformers before them, the Brethren sought to find the solution for church renewal within a Biblical basis alone.

This principle is indeed commendable, important and correct. The church and indeed all things must bow to the authority of Scripture alone.

However, this principle comes with presuppositional problems. All Scripture needs interpretation, and this presents among others, two main problems. Each interpretation contains personal presuppositions, and each

interpretation is made within a specific immediate cultural and personal context.

Scripture for the Brethren was used prescriptively and often in a reactionary context to provide a comment on the state of the church. This was done to such an extent that Brethren interpretation then could now be construed on many points as an over reaction to specific contextual situations. For example, their belief that structure and planning produces evil and obstructs the Holy Spirit, was an interpretation arrived at only because those features were a part of a church that they believed was apostate. But today we can pose the question; was it structure and system that produced these problems or were they a result of other problems? In many cases biblical warrants can be found for much of the practice of the established church although not condoning its condition.

One must also be aware that as soon as one interprets Scripture in a way which outlines a specific process of conducting church to the exclusion of the others, you yourself become open to being accused of creating a system from Scripture. This system must then stand condemned alongside the system you wish to react to or replace. This was just the trap that the Brethren often found themselves in. Coad remarks of the original Brethren that where they "deliberately differed from earlier interpreters, it was often to impose upon Scripture their own system of interpretation, which rapidly

hardened into as rigid a tradition as any other” (Coad 1968: 250). The very thing that the Brethren movement sought to escape – the authority of tradition and church structure over the Bible – became the very thing that was created. However, Craik describes a spirit which “characterised the more tolerant among the leaders, when, in an address in 1863, he exhorted his hearers to first get rid of everything that superseded the authority of Scripture, and then with Scripture as the one standard of judgement, to make allowance for diversity of judgment” (Coad 1968: 256). But this spirit which obviously existed among the first Brethren seems to have somewhat disappeared. The openness of which Craik exhorted has in many places, over time, been replaced by a calcification of tradition and uncontested interpretation. Therefore, one must wonder whether the Brethren believe in the authority of Scripture over the church or whether they mean the authority of an interpretation of Scripture over the church. Nathan Smith describes the situation this way:

“All truth became nonnegotiable. There was no ambiguity in the Word of God, so although sincere and godly believers could differ, one must be wrong. This heritage permeated later generations with devastating results. The tendency was to separate rather than to compromise and division became a commonplace trait. ... The tendency then becomes to congregate around those of like values, both spiritually and economically” (Smith 1986: 90).

Thus the bowing to the authority of Scripture has been replaced by bowing to an interpretation of it. The result of such a focus has led to arrogance in the belief that “we have the truth” and to a closed system of Biblical interpretation and prescriptive propositional proclamation - a system which does not allow beliefs and presuppositions to be confronted from within or from the outside. “I am inclined to think we have a spiritual problem more than any doctrinal problem. Our problem is spiritual pride. It is seen in an attitude that says we do not have anything to learn. It is seen in an attitude that is suspicious of anything that is new. It is seen in the attitude that insists that everyone must agree on every doctrine. It is seen in the attitude where we cannot tolerate differences” (Smith 1986: 64).

This attitude and approach has served to undermine both the witness of Scripture among the Brethren and led to a narrow prescriptive role of preaching which focuses mainly on the propositional imperative ethic of right doctrine and right living. The Word of God in the history of the Brethren has been viewed chiefly as a tool to present an authoritative rational prescriptive rule for life and learning, shifting the focus off the indicative of God and onto our right understanding and action before him.

### 3.1.1.2 Expression of Gifts

The axiom underlying this principle is that God gifts all believers and all should therefore be free to exercise those gifts to benefit the church body. Few would disagree with this axiom. However, over time this principle became distorted. The initial movement in this direction was a movement toward freedom away from form and restriction. The original members of the Brethren movement were highly educated, many of them trained as church clergy in the Church of England system. They felt that the established church restricted the work of the Holy Spirit through the clergy system. By restricting those who could minister in the church, especially with regard to preaching, to clergy only, the Brethren felt that the work of the Spirit in the church was being stifled. The early founders sought a freedom of expression of gifts within the church.

The initial and main focus for the expression of the gifts became the open worship time around the Lord's Supper. This provided a place for all believers to be priests before God and approach him around the Lord's table. Thus the term 'priesthood of all believers' became an important term for the Brethren. However, the expression of gifts by all in this forum, was actually limited to the expression only of those with teaching and exhortation gifts, to lead the church from the Scriptures. So while seeking the expression of all gifts, the movement only ever emphasised the expression of some gifts. "Problems developed when the concept of the

believer priesthood was blurred with the public ministry gifts so that it was determined that every male church member should have his turn on the platform preaching or ministering at the Lord's Supper. This distorted all the gifts. The verbal and high visibility gifts were valued above all the others" (Smith 1986: 92). An over emphasis on freedom and the teaching and exhortation gifts led to a belief that all men should be able to preach and teach the Word of God in the church.

This problem was further exacerbated by the tendency to confuse one's spirituality with the expression of the more public gifts. "The more one exercised public gifts at either the ministry meeting or the breaking of the bread meeting, the more spiritual they were thought to be" (Smith 1986: 92). Thus the freedom of exercising ones gift within the Brethren movement moved from the right to exercise to the compulsion to display your spirituality through participation in the public meetings of the church. Where this is true, one could say that in a very real way the so-called exercising of ones gift is reduced to a display of ones spirituality.

Preaching within this context is presented with two possible problems. Firstly, for some, preaching may shift from being a serious act of communicating God's Word, to a communication event carried out under compulsion. And secondly preaching is moved from an action to be undertaken by

those gifted and set apart by God to speak on his behalf, to an action undertaken by many whether gifted, called, or able.

### **3.1.1.3 The Holy Spirit and Edification**

Together with the desire to allow all gifts to be exercised among them, the Brethren movement also felt that the Holy Spirit should be their teacher rather than the clergy of the established church. The thought was that any system is man made and therefore replaces the work of the Holy Spirit. Therefore the true work of the Holy Spirit among them was seen to be in the spontaneous exhortations by members from within the midst of those gathered. The Holy Spirit would edify his people as he saw fit to exercise the gifts among his people. The Brethren movement endeavoured to lay aside all form of structure or planning for this was felt to be a hindrance to and foreign to the work of the Holy Spirit among them. "Any prearrangement and advanced preparation was considered a practical denial of the Holy Spirit's leading" (Smith 1986: 92). The Brethren would then gather in the name of the Lord and wait upon the Holy Spirit to lead them and edify them spontaneously as he saw fit, from among those gathered there.

Initially this was the pattern for any meeting that the Brethren held.

Eventually this pattern was dropped from other meetings but remained the central theme of practice in the Lord's Supper meeting. This approach was seen to be the answer to the formal and lifeless services of the established

church, where the life of the Holy Spirit could scarcely be found. In the context in which the Brethren movement began, this approach provided immense freedom and gave much needed life to the church. But this view is not without its problems.

Such a view of the work of the Holy Spirit also precluded any seeking after pastoral training or further biblical education. Such a pursuit was seen as a denial of the work of the Spirit and therefore only as the work of man. "The ironic fact is that almost all the early Brethren leaders had been trained ... some as top-rated scholars" (Smith 1986: 92), and that it would most likely be their theological training which gave rise to the founders being able to discern a new path for the church. This stance against training had little effect on the biblical teaching within the church during the lifetime of the founders. However, although other factors have compounded the problem, over generations the result of this anti-education stance has taken its toll on the biblical scholarship and the preaching of the movement.

One must ask has the Brethren movement created a theology of the work of the Holy Spirit within a particular context, which has produced a biased experiential theology? Did the founders experience a church, dead through structure and planning, which led them to believe that the Holy Spirit cannot use structure and planning? Or was it the particular use of



structure and planning and the people involved that produced the deadness rather than the functions of structure and planning themselves? The Brethren theology would lead one to conclude that the Holy Spirit cannot use any form of structure and planning. However, this very statement provides a structure within which the Holy Spirit must work, that is in the field of spontaneity. While the established Anglican Church limited the work of the Holy Spirit within structure and thereby reduced the freedom of ministry, the Brethren have precluded the Spirit's work in those same areas, thereby also confining his work.

The tendency with this theology is to attach a spiritual aspect to spontaneous urges to exhort or preach, which come upon people when gathered together. To say that when one speaks that they have been led "without question" by an urge of the Holy Spirit is very dangerous. This places within a person who speaks the phrase "I was led by the Holy Spirit" an area of spiritual action, which cannot be challenged regarding any sinful motive or content. It also automatically attributes any activity done within this sphere of theology as automatically being attributed to and therefore indicative of the work of the Holy Spirit. However, all our actions are marred in some way by the sinfulness of our beings. Therefore in a very real sense the urges and activities of mankind can actually serve to shape our interpretation of the work of the Holy Spirit. For this reason Barth states: "none of the external and internal 'urges' of our existence, as creatures

that we know of, can be taken by us in themselves as they are, as already the Creator's Word" (Barth 1993: 9).

Therefore we cannot say that all spontaneous activity is the work of the Spirit, for it may be the work of the flesh, or marred by it. Also one may speculate that it was hindrances by mankind against the work of the Spirit acting within the structure of the established church that the Brethren actually reacted against. To be sure where the Spirit is there is freedom (2 Cor 3:17), freedom of relationship with God for all, but this freedom does not preclude any order. 1 Corinthians 14:26-40, which is taken by the Brethren as a blueprint for spontaneous edification, also provides a mandate for a fitting order. There is no biblical warrant for the exclusion of planning and structure, just as there is no biblical warrant for the insistence upon it. What is abundantly clear is that the Holy Spirit works through all people, in diverse ways, using the gifts that he has given them to build and edify the church (Eph 4:16).

An insistence upon spontaneity as the Holy Spirit's realm is no more than an insistence on another form, like clergy structure, which can just as easily be marred by sinful people, and taken to be used for their own ends. One cannot prescribe the boundaries of the work of the Spirit, beyond that of saying that he chooses to work through his people as he has gifted them. A correct emphasis on the gifts rather than any prescribed arena of

operation will allow the work of the Holy Spirit to be further facilitated by the Brethren in the church.

### **3.1.2 The Historical Praxis**

Flowing out of the distinctive theological bases of the Brethren are many equally distinctive practices, which embody the movement's foundational theology. There is not room to consider them all here. However, it is necessary that the practice of worship in the Lord's Supper meeting be considered, for it is here that one meets the incorporation of much of the theology of the Brethren movement, in the praxis.

This gathering of the Lord's people around the Lord's Table each Sunday, which became the custom of the Brethren Assemblies, comprises three essential elements. Firstly an open time where there is opportunity for those led by the Spirit, to exhort, teach and lead the congregation in short segments of worship and sharing from God's Word. Secondly there is the partaking of the Lord's Supper. Finally there is a longer time of preaching from any one person who 'feels led by the Spirit' to expound the Word of God more extensively. From the earliest days these three elements formed the central core of the corporate expression of that which was important to the Brethren. The first and last elements are relevant to this study.

### 3.1.2.1 The Open Time

“We meet around the Lord at his table on the first day of the week, and at this meeting allow open ministry to any who appear to be led of the Spirit. The utmost simplicity of form is aimed at” (Bergin 1913: 77). The ‘open time’ of worship became the place where the priesthood of all believers through the expression of believer’s gifts to edify all was expressed most clearly. The Brethren in seeking freedom from any structure and form felt that meeting without such hindrances meant that the Holy Spirit became present as they gathered, and edified them from within their midst through the gifts that he had given those so gathered. “The Brethren... believe that the Lord is, in a real sense, present in the midst of the congregation during this time of worship” (Webber 1994: 11). Therefore this time became not only the place of gift expression, but also the place for the Holy Spirit to teach them through his spontaneous exercising of the gifts of those present.

From the commencement of the movement the “original Brethren had excitedly involved themselves in new forms of worship – writing new music to fit new experiences and experimenting with new forms within the worship service. Some services at this time were prearranged, while others were more open, giving them a sense of flexibility and freedom” (Smith 1986: 88). This flexibility, however, was soon removed and the format became fixed in the manner described above. The main reason for this was the theology of Darby, which forbade any organisation originating with man to be part of

the services of the church. This pattern, which Darby insisted upon, became the tradition of worship for the Brethren. What was originally an expression of freedom, once insisted upon, became for many just another form of tradition equal to that which the movement had reacted against. The Brethren were accused of exchanging a principle of freedom, which gave life, for a practice, which took it away. Church life began to be stifled, until finally a non-written method of worship evolved which turned out to be often more inhibiting and more predictable than prearranged services.

The importance placed on this service as the place where one expressed their gifts, served to suggest that all should participate whether they were gifted in exhortation or teaching or not. This together with the emphasis on not preparing beforehand has led to a reduced standard of teaching and preaching over time, and a "constant and extremely wearisome recurrence of favourite ideas" (Neatby 1901: 92). Edification among the Brethren, which began at an exceptional standard, due to the calibre and training of the founders, became diluted over the years in many places through the opposition to consistent training and forethought.

### **3.1.2.2 Teaching**

Following the communion time, a time of preaching was common. This preaching time was often not planned. Someone from among them, who felt led by the Spirit to teach, would do so. The original spontaneous

preaching practised in the church initially functioned fairly well. However, when the strong leaders of the movement departed from the Assemblies this tradition posed a problem. Firstly, because of the spontaneous nature all were seen to be able to teach and preach irrespective of gifting. Secondly, without any training or planned preaching program a well balanced diet of teaching was unlikely to be achieved.

### **3.1.3 Recent Changes**

An acknowledgement of these problems over time has meant changes to many aspects of preaching and teaching.

While the spontaneous nature of exhorting in the open time is still widely practiced the spontaneous nature of the main preaching event has given way to a more structured approach. The acknowledgement that the preaching event was at times taken on by those who were ill equipped, or even those who were pushing agendas not conducive of edification and church unity, forced the Brethren to move "to balance the twin beliefs of openness to the Spirit and the need for spiritual control" (Newton 1990: 107). As a result, today most local assemblies arrange the preacher before time, and in some places structured teaching programs are used. However, most of the Brethren Assemblies retain the practice of involving many in the preaching of the Word, many still untrained. The belief that most should be

involved in the teaching ministry often still dominates over a desire to equip and appoint only those gifted to the task.

In an attempt to counter the deterioration of the preaching over a number of generations the Assemblies employed a number of approaches: small groups, Bible reading services, short term Bible training classes, all with minimal impact. In some parts Bible Colleges were seen as offering a solution to improving the quality of Bible teaching. While of value, specifically to mission work, the anti-training culture together with the continued reluctance of many churches to employ those so trained, has resulted in this approach being largely not supported. This has at times compounded the problem, resulting in many key leaders and preachers who have grown up in Brethren churches, leaving to join other denominations upon graduating.

The preaching and teaching of the Brethren was once the strength of the movement. "Sadly, the more frequent pattern is for individuals to leave the Open Brethren because of the perceived lack of Bible teaching. It may be that expectations have risen fuelled by the impact of Evangelical expository preachers.... [Brethren] lay preachers, with limited time for preparation, could rarely hope to provide expository ministry of such depth..." (Grass 2006: 444). Or perhaps the stand against any formal Bible

training over many generations is now showing as a real weakness within the movement.

### **3.2 Qualitative Research**

To progress the praxis investigation further an empirical analysis of the current praxis needs to be pursued. There exists generally three phases to empirical analysis within any area of practical theological investigation. The first phase employs a "descriptive approach," the objective is to "describe and explain things as they are..." (Ven 1998: 78). In this phase studies can be either quantitative or qualitative. With regard to the first "the registration, grouping, counting and calculation are carried out according to objective criteria, whereas the second is based more or less on subjective perceptions and evaluations." (Ven 1998: 80). Research of the first type can be "carried out with the help of a pre-coded questionnaire" (Ven 1998: 80) designed to give objective quantifiable results. The quantitative method is used generally in a situation where a broad knowledge of the praxis has already been established. The second "on the other hand, may be based on notes made by the researcher after completion of a depth interview..., recording his personal impressions" (Ven 1998: 80). This approach is often employed in the early stages of praxis investigation where only a limited knowledge of the praxis is at hand, in order to grow that body of knowledge.



The second phase employs an explanation approach, seeking to discover relationships and explain the connection and "direction of the relationships" (Ven 1998: 80) involved in the praxis. Descriptive research is concerned with ascertaining and describing "categories of facts and their mutual relationships. Explanatory research requires theories that logically substantiate the direction of the relationships and the relationships between the facts with the help of the concepts of causality" (Ven 1998: 82). Once the first two phases have been carried out the third is focussed on hypothesis testing and change.

In this current study, because the available body of knowledge relating to the praxis theory in operation is relatively limited, and the goal at this time is to ascertain the nature of the existing praxis, the analysis of the praxis will follow the "what is happening in the practice" (Heyns 1990: 76) question. Therefore since we are seeking to develop knowledge about the praxis, rather than test its operation, define and explain relationships, or change the praxis, we need to employ a qualitative "exploratory-descriptive" (Ven 1998: 126) research plan. This entails using a survey method which "consists in establishing a descriptive... inventory by systematically questioning people about one or more issues" (Ven 1998: 127).

While the previous historical discussion gives us a picture of the preaching landscape it does not provide any definitive praxis theory that is in operation in the Brethren churches. Thus our investigative starting point is to describe the current praxis situation and ascertain the operating praxis theory.

The survey analysis of the praxis is confronted with a number of variables that need to be considered including the implicit rather than explicit nature of the theology of preaching in operation in the praxis. The ones that need consideration here are:

- The sex of the individual, since the preaching is all carried out by men.
- The individual's position in the church – leader or member.
- The individual's underlying theology of preaching
- The resulting attitudes to and expectations of preaching.

The above variables can be mapped in the following way, using van der Ven's method (Ven 1998: 132-133), to show the role they play in determining the research outcomes:

Background	Intervening	Dependant
Variables	Variables	Variable



Sex of Individual ⇒ Praxis ⇒ Attitudes &

Position in Church ⇒ Theory ⇒ Expectations

There are two important background variables which are fixed. With regard to sex being "male" or "female", and with regard to position each being either "leader" or "member". The "Sex" variable is important due to the fact that in most local congregations it is only the men who will be involved in preaching. And the "Position" variable determines the input into shaping the praxis that each has. It is really only the leaders who have direct impact on determining the operating preaching praxis. The major intervening variable is the praxis theory held by each individual. Because the theology of preaching in the praxis is not explicit each individual will potentially hold a different implicit "Praxis Theory" which will lead to a different "Attitudes and Expectations" (the dependant variable) when responding to the analysis of the existing praxis.

Following the exploratory-descriptive approach I have undertaken a qualitative descriptive analysis using a survey containing a number of standard open questions (see Appendix A). The questions have been based on both the prior historical knowledge of the praxis and the theory developed in Chapter 2. In considering the variables above, and the breadth of the possible population to be analysed, I have chosen to concentrate my effort on surveying only those who have direct influence

on the operating praxis of the church. While it would also be valuable to canvass the opinions of those who only receive the preaching rather than participate in delivering and directing it, I have limited my focus, not only due to time and resources, but also because focussing only on the decision makers should give a clearer picture of the underlying operational praxis theory of preaching in the particular church. Therefore I have surveyed only males, and only those who are the key leaders from within the local representation of the Brethren movement that I attend. The following table gives a breakdown of those surveyed:

<b>Gender/Age</b>	<b>Number Surveyed</b>
Males 30-40	1
Males 41-50	3
Males 51-60	1
Total Males	5
Total Females	0

Each Christian Brethren Church is autonomous in nature with no governing body to answer to. Thus those questioned are the people who have the responsibility for shaping and or delivering much of the preaching in the local church.

The questions posed have been focussed on the four elements considered in the development of the theory: Event, Message, Intention, Interpretation/Response. These findings will enable us to then present a picture of the praxis of the local Brethren Church I attend, in regard to these elements, which will provide a basis for comparison to the Revelatory Covenantal Conversation theory put forward (See Chapter 4).

For each of the four elements I will do the following:

1. State the questions asked.
2. Provide a sample of the responses.
3. Summarise the local praxis situation in regard to the questions.
4. Conclude by providing a summary of each praxis element.

A full transcript of the survey can be found in Appendix A.

### **3.2.1 Event**

#### **3.2.1.1 God's Word and Preacher's Words - Question & Sample Responses**

Do you consider the words of the sermon to be just the preacher's words, or the Words of God?

*"I would say it would be God speaking through them..."*

*"I consider them as coming from God."*

*"I think you're looking to hear the words of God. That's where you'd start. I think if there are things that you kind of have a little question mark in your mind, I think you would tend to push them to saying they could be the words of the speaker until I investigate it further."*

a. What authority do you give the preacher then?

*"...depends on one Sunday to the next."*

*"I give the authority to the preacher in terms of what I know of them before they preach"*

b. How does this affect your response to the message?

*"I give more to the Word of God than the preacher"*

*"You expect the preacher to be speaking God's words, but you're also aware that you need to test those words against your own understanding of the interpretation"*

c. How does God use the preacher's words to convey his message?

*"personalising the message"*

### **3.2.1.2 God's Word and the Preacher's Words - Local Praxis Summary**

Within the Brethren church the Bible is given paramount place of authority. Yet from history and current practice although the words preached are attributed to God, it appears that the authority given to the Word of God

proclaimed resides with the one interpreting. Largely the hearer gives authority to the preacher and also decides on the authority to be given to the content of the message delivered. While believing that God's Word comes through the preacher it is normally qualified by the need to test and approve. Thus the individual's interpretive framework is often the final determinant of what is and what is not considered the Word of God. While acknowledging, testing and approving, as a biblical warrant, this testing and approving is more about alignment with already present beliefs rather than being open to challenge through a pursuit of robust theological investigation and dialogue.

### 3.2.1.3 Needs of Hearers - Question & Sample Responses

Are the needs and situations of the hearers sufficiently taken into account in the preaching in your church?

*"I really believe the greatest responsibility actually stands with the listener, to do something about it..."*

*"...we try to factor that in and where the church is at and what we want to have taught to them"*

*"No, I don't think it is – in general."*

a. Should they be considered at all? Leads to a "me" mentality?

*"I'm not sure whether people should try and identify needs."*

*"I don't think we would want to go there either, that we are very reactionary to what we read as people's needs, but I think*

*certainly there needs to be that balance where we want to teach consecutively all of the Word eventually, but would also have an eye out to see what are the current needs or issues that are relevant that people are asking about or wanting to know about"*  
*"Yes. I think the Lord actually did preach for the needs"*

b. How important is it that they are considered?

*"I think a Church has to take it into account."*

*"It is fairly important that they are considered."*

*"I think it's very important."*

c. What would happen if we ignored people's needs and situations completely?

*"People would leave the Church"*

*"Become irrelevant."*

*"There is a chance that your preaching then doesn't connect..."*

*It's best to know as much as you can and take that into consideration in your preparation."*

*"I think, what would happen is that people would end up knowing things, but yet not actually being able to apply it."*

*"God can over-rule, but it would be good for the preacher to be that caring about who he is going to speak to..."*



d. What changes would you make in this regard?

*"I think I would need to be out amongst the people more and to know where they're thinking and where they're at."*

#### **3.2.1.4 Needs of Hearers - Local Praxis Summary**

Generally on this issue most believe that preachers should take the hearers needs into consideration, especially through presenting relevant applications. Some however place the onus on the hearer, believing it is their responsibility to make the preaching relevant to their lives. Others also remove the responsibility away from the preachers, believing the Holy Spirit will overrule in the process. These views are often held because the extensive use of visiting speakers in the preaching program makes it difficult for the preacher to know the congregation's situation and specific needs beforehand. Thus rather than question the preaching program or process, the hearer is required to make the most of what is offered.

With regard to what is taught it is generally believed that needs based content must be balanced by teaching the whole council of God. That is, the needs of the people must not drive the whole preaching program.

### 3.2.2 Message

#### 3.2.2.1 World of Hope - Question & Sample Responses

Does the preaching in your church provide an alternate world of hope in contrast to the reality of the world around you?

*"I guess the world of hope it does provide is some sort of vision of heaven."*

a. Describe aspects of that world using an example.

*"So our dependence in Christ rather than in ourselves, offers hope that the world doesn't offer."*

*"I think, in lots of aspects, in the aspects of applying what we learn in the initial part of salvation and then also applying things in terms of dealing with issues in your life."*

*"Salvation. You can live a better life here with the Lord's help as a believer, without having to compromise with the world."*

*"Gives you sound theology in the salvation of the Lord Jesus."*

b. To what extent is it communicated, how often?

*"More often than not it is included in preaching."*

*"I wouldn't say that it's obviously regular..."*

c. Is more or less required to sustain people?

*"There has to be more..."*

*“Well, I guess it depends on your audience really, in a sense. If your audience is one that is seeking, then it needs to be offered a lot more. I think if it’s an audience that you’re building up in the faith, then those aspects don’t have to be touched as often I would have thought.”*

### **3.2.2.2 World of Hope - Local Praxis Summary**

There are varying views on whether preaching sufficiently conveys well a world of hope. The hope that is conveyed is seen in terms of aspects of hope, viewed either as an eternal hope that is to come or a salvific hope that is here in Christ. Although there is a general view that more preaching containing these aspects is desirable, it is clear that what is understood as the message of hope is not a world inaugurated in Christ but benefits acquired through salvation. The message is more utilitarian than worldview transforming.

### **3.2.2.3 Community Preaching - Question & Sample Responses**

To what extent does the preaching draw you into a feeling of being part of God’s family rather than an isolated Christian?

*“I’m not sure if the preaching does that”*

*“I think, generally anyway, it is stated as first a personal relationship with God.”*

*"I think you do want more body teaching. You want people to know that we're all in this together and when one hurts we all hurt."*

*"I don't know if the preaching itself brings it across as often as it should, being in the body of Christ... don't think it does."*

*"I really do feel that most of the preaching...pulls us into feeling a community together."*

#### **3.2.2.4 Community Preaching - Local Praxis Summary**

The majority view on this issue is that most preaching is either given or taken individually first and then perhaps a community context is considered.

Being in an individualistic society this concept by some has not even been considered. Yet most believe it would be desirable for more community focussed preaching to be added. These responses fall in line with the predominantly proposition and application style of preaching and the utilitarian approach to salvation that tends to be employed. Individual salvation and transformation holds priority over community identity, inclusion, formation, and destination.

#### **3.2.3 Intention**

##### **3.2.3.1 Preaching Intention - Question & Sample Responses**

What do you think preaching is intended to achieve?

*"To assist in our Christian maturity"*

*"...the role of the teacher is to take a subject and make it clear..."*

*"I like to think of it as a stimulant to make them say I want to change"*

*"It's for their encouragement, challenge, and at the same time showing who God is, and at that time what God wants to speak to them about, what God would want them to do."*

*"...preaching is about life transformation, to be like Christ."*

- a. What is the most important goal of preaching from your church's perspective?

*"...get to know God better and become spiritually mature..."*

*"...it's convicting and making people change."*

*"...we want people to know the Word and to know how the Word fits in their life."*

*"...mostly about life transformation..."*

### **3.2.3.2 Preaching Intention - Local Praxis Summary**

The preaching in practice does cover a wide area of topics and intentions. However, from the comments received the dominant view is that preaching should be and is focused on the imperative need for transformation and maturity of the hearer's life. This behavioural view of preaching is again the logical extension of the applicational style of preaching that is employed in the church. Preaching for a response to the indicative aspects of Scripture aside from the imperatives is rare. The

inclusion of imperatives, often unaccompanied by the indicatives, as the basis for life change, is the normal shape of the regular preaching event.

### 3.2.3.3 Preaching Importance - Question & Sample Responses

How important is preaching in the life of your church?

*"...probably rate it as very high."*

*"...I would say is very important, extremely important."*

*"I think it's got one of the highest priorities."*

- a. What impact would there be on the church if there was less importance placed on preaching?

*"...people would possibly go elsewhere."*

*"If instead of just the preacher, we not reduce the importance necessarily of the Word of God being proclaimed, but added to that a conversation that continues through the week by the preacher facilitating questions into the small groups and things like that, so that the whole Church is on that journey that may actually, to some extent, it might seem as though the up front preaching wasn't pride of place as much, but it lifts what we're doing at other times to fill that in."*

*"It would be to the detriment of people's growth and maturity."*

*"I don't think it would be as strong as it is now."*

*"I think it would be detrimental..."*

### 3.2.3.4 Preaching Importance - Local Praxis Summary

The Brethren church is known for its emphasis on biblical teaching. After all the authority of Scripture was one of the important principals upon which the denomination was founded. It is therefore not surprising that all responses rated preaching as important in the life of the church. Most believed that this importance on preaching needs to be maintained although some recognised that different methods of preaching or formats of bringing God's Word to the people could be employed without reducing the importance of communicating God's Word effectively in the church.

### 3.2.4 Interpretation/Response

#### 3.2.4.1 Desired Response - Question & Sample Responses

How would the desired response to the preaching in the church be evidenced?

*"... if you're seeing people going and becoming involved within the Church with more of a desire to serving..."*

*"...I don't think it's generally going too flash."*

*"I guess, make positive action steps towards applying it and putting it into practice."*

*"There'd be a real conviction of the Holy Spirit working in their lives and they'd be wanting to be obedient to whatever area God has spoken to them."*

*"Lives would change, but you wouldn't know that immediately - you would see that over a period of time."*

a. Would this be an individual and/or corporate response?

*"Individuals..."*

*"I would think that the preacher predominantly asks for personal change."*

*"An individual response."*

*"A balanced response..."*

b. Normally how long does it take to effect significant change through the preaching?

*"I think the experience is that it takes a long time. That's not necessarily how it could be, I think that has to do with the methods and time that we use. I guess we can almost get into this viewpoint that everything takes a long time to change and so maybe even our preaching and our whole methodology is governed by that assumption."*



*"I don't think the process is a fast one I think it's a slower one where we may have to learn the same lesson a few times over. I would say it's a slow process."*

*"I think it's more of a starting point and then a progression. Sometimes it is instant and you go, yeh, I'll sort it out and go before the Lord and humble yourself, or other times it's just more of an ongoing thing where the preaching helps you to be reminded of it and be an encouragement."*

*"I think it would take longer."*

- c. Does the preaching programme reflect this anticipated response time?

*"I don't think it's the preaching that necessarily is the reason for that I think it's our own flesh and how we respond to it."*

*"I always see it as an ongoing type programme rather than one that says we need to be at this point by the end of the year."*

*"I would view it as something like every month something comes up that we build on. We started at the beginning of the year and have that thread going through and hopefully at the end of the year we see our fellowship that is in that area at least, or aspects of it, understood it, have grown towards it and applied it more or been more equipped."*

### **3.2.4.2 Desired Response - Local Praxis Summary**

The anticipated response to the preaching in the current praxis is generally an individual life change response. If preaching is effective in achieving its desired response, individuals and the church by implication would grow and mature in life and service. At this stage it is quite obvious that initial corporate responses are not expected nor often pursued. Communal corporate changes and actions seem to be secondary to the importance of change in the individual.

While varied positions were stated regarding the time it takes for significant responses to preaching to be evident, generally the tendency was to assume a longer period of time is needed for significant change. The teaching program generally takes an annual thematic approach which acknowledges this longer period of time needed to effect and consolidate change. At the same time recognition was given to the fact that instant change can also at times be effected. Some feel that the onus on change is not with the preacher but remains with the response role of the individual.

An important observation was made that perhaps the anticipation of needing a longer period to effect change actually sets the praxis up to employ methodologies which are governed by this assumption. This is certainly worth further investigation given that response times in the Bible tend to present at both ends of the time spectrum.

### 3.2.4.3 Response Evidence & Motivation - Question & Sample Responses

Is the desired response normally made obvious in the sermon?

*"People would leave with a sense of this is the response..."*

*"I don't know that we do that enough. The message and content is generally always great, but it's not often summarized as well."*

*"It seems that we're fairly strong on presenting that this is how it applies in your life and this is the result of it."*

*"Sometimes it is, they actually do review the points or give a challenge on one major point, but other times it's not so obvious."*

*"I think they usually leave it up to the Holy Spirit"*

a. How would you describe the motivation that is used to illicit sermon responses?

*"The Bible has authority and is the main motivator."*

*"...obedience to the Lord..."*

*"I'd like to say motivation is love for Christ. That's what I wanted to focus on. I think probably other motivations have been conformity to a Christian community, but I don't say that's the right one."*

*"Challenge, encouragement, example from the Lord or from the Scriptures."*

- b. What is the general balance between entice/invite and push/compel motivations employed?

*"Probably more towards the entice side of it..."*

*"Generally we come from a point of saying, if you respond in this way we would be blessed and experience the benefits of being obedient to Christ in our daily living. But I think there's a third element to that though, I think there's a passive kind of speaking also, that says well, it'd be kind of nice if you did this, we probably are more on that line..."*

*"I think it's more the second."*

*"I think we do less of the challenge and more of the encouragement – at the moment."*

*"It leans to the loving, it's close to 50/50, but I get a bit nervous because it goes to a bit softer and I don't want to see that. I want people to understand that there is a cost..."*

- c. Would you like to see any changes in this area?

*"No"*

*"The excitement and passion because of what has happened."*

*"I'd like it strong on the first one. That we motivate people to a love for Christ and a relationship with him and as a result of that we're driven much stronger to do and obey."*

*“Want to make sure that the balance is kept pretty even, not moving just towards the inviting, encouraging side. Really you’re encouraging them if you tell them the truth.”*

#### **3.2.4.4 Response Evidence and Motivation - Local Praxis Summary**

Upon reflecting on the responses in this question area, one is struck with the diversity of the answers given. From the disagreement as to whether the expected responses are obvious in the preaching or should just be left to the Spirit, to the range of feelings on where the motivations of the sermon are along the entice/invite and push/compel spectrum. The only thing that seems to be clear here is that there is no clear theology of what motivations should be employed and how they should play out in the preaching event. It appears as if personal preference for motivation, “what motivates me”, is the underlying guide for the responses. And in a tradition that allows a selection of preachers to take to the pulpit, the end result is the motivations which are employed are those which the preacher of the day feels are most appropriate, which is likely to be that which appeals or works for them.

### **3.3 Summary of Praxis**

By bringing the history of the Brethren movement, recent developments in the Brethren, together with the analysis above of the local praxis, a

descriptive summary of the praxis can now be made. This summary will necessarily relate more particularly to Duncraig Christian Fellowship (the local church surveyed), but because of shared history, many of the findings can be extrapolated across the denomination as a whole.

### **3.3.1 Event**

In a tradition that values a plurality of preachers and resists any clergy laity approach to church the individual's interpretive framework is generally given priority in determining the "God's Word" content. This is understandable, in light of Brethren history, which encourages many to preach, gifted or not, and the belief that "we have the truth" which still permeates in places. The preacher is also released from needing to always bridge to gap to the hearers, with the hearer's being given responsibility for allowing the Holy Spirit to apply the preaching content to their own lives. The hearers are thereby given the responsibility of actively placing themselves under the Word of God as it is proclaimed to them, of actively extracting God's Word for them, and of responding accordingly. This responsibility shift is often attributed to the "priesthood of all" emphasis, which led to involving many, gifted or not, in the preaching. Perceived deficiencies in the event are then more often attributed to the attitude of the hearer, rather than on the delivery of the sermon or the direction of the teaching plan.

### **3.3.2 Message**

The general message presented is propositional and applicational. It fails to present a kingdom worldview that gives identity to the community of God's people and call them with purpose toward the hope both present and future that they have as part of God's salvation history and his eschatological program. The message communicated is normally utilitarian, and individualistic, rather than focussing on God's community forming, community changing and community continuing, will.

### **3.3.3 Intent**

The preaching praxis with regard to intent is heavily imperative and behaviour driven, focusing primarily on individual life transformation almost to the exclusion of community formation and transformation. This links in with the message content which is specifically applicational rather than holistic in nature.

While it is evident that a high regard is placed on preaching in the praxis, it is interesting here to compare the importance placed on the preaching as an event and the reluctance to give full authority to the preaching content as God's Word. It seems that while preaching as an event is important, the individual remains essentially the determinant of the value of the event in respect to their own life and also the life of the church.

### **3.3.4 Interpretation/Response**

In terms of interpretation, from the responses, it is quite evident that the responsibility lies with the hearer and with the authority that the individual's interpretive framework attributes to the message. For some the message must comply with the accepted form of truth to be given any authority. Pushed to its logical end the interpretation model used is one where largely the individual actually decides on the authority, content, and application of the message, due to the lack of a communal theology to underpin a more substantial interpretive frame of reference.

This lack of a communal theology is also evident in the predominant view that anticipated sermon responses will be individual, almost to the exclusion of expecting any corporate response except through any shift in combined individual thinking or behaviour.

Further the lack of a theology on response motivation has resulted in a praxis that is as varied as the number of preachers that are asked to preach. This has led to a response and motivational strategy that is based not on a biblical theology of revelation but on personal preference and style. However, one may be able to say that the response expectation is largely focussed on a behavioural life change, and the resultant motivation employed tends toward the imperative necessity of transformation rather



than a response that emanates out of the indicative of who God is, and what God has done, is doing, and will do into the future.

### **3.3.5 The Next Step**

Having now described the praxis in operation we now move in Chapter 4 to evaluate these findings in light of the practical theological theory set up in Chapter 2 – the “Revelatory Covenantal Conversation” and to also critique the theory in light of the praxis findings. In so doing we move towards suggesting a framework for a new praxis.

## 4. THE PREACHING COMMUNITY - TOWARDS A NEW PRAXIS

Having constructed a practical theological theory and analysed the current praxis, the aim now is to move toward a new praxis which integrates the theory and the findings on the praxis. "Only when both theory and praxis have been incorporated will the theory for praxis help to focus, improve, support and direct our praxis" (Heyns 1990: 81).

In the theory discussion (Chapter 2) it was stated that preaching stands in the line of the self revelation of God, as his continuing action to both reveal himself, and be present with his covenant people of promise. And further that preaching within the church must conform to this revelation in: event – the covenantal conversation itself; in message – the content of the preaching; in intention - the intended shaping of the community of faith through the preaching event; and in interpretation/response – the preacher's anticipated interpretive response by the hearers. Preaching within a local church context is therefore to be a continuing Revelatory Covenantal Conversation between God and his people to create, transform, and continue his community of faith.

In the praxis discussion (Chapter 3) a number of historical and current praxis aspects relating to each of the four major elements being considered were

evaluated. The aspects considered were not exhaustive enough to allow here a comprehensive analysis of the praxis against all of the components of the Revelatory Covenantal Conversation theory set out in Chapter 2. Given enough time and resources it would be beneficial to carry out such a study - to present the complete ramifications for the praxis assuming the implementation of the entire Revelatory Covenantal Conversation theory. However, I propose here to evaluate most of the aspects of the praxis covered by the qualitative analysis of each element, against the theory set up in Chapter 2. The aim is to suggest a pathway toward a new praxis, one that falls more in line with the theological theory underpinning the Revelatory Covenantal Conversation.

## **4.1 Event**

### **4.1.1 The Proclaimed Word**

The role of preaching is to reveal God through the continuing covenantal conversation, such that God's presence and his Word, his present Word, creates communities of faith, changes them to be like Christ, and continues the community of faith on by the Spirit towards the eschatological hope. Preaching continues the self revelation of God to his people - not as a new revelation but through being bound to the Word, preaching reveals God as the present living God. Through the preaching of God's Word, God

encounters his people, is revealed, and is present by the Spirit - being with his community.

Following the praxis feedback we need to address two questions which arise directly and indirectly from the praxis research on this element. Firstly, "How is the Word of God preached?" The praxis does not have a solid theological understanding of what constitutes the Word of God in preaching. This then leads to the second question of "How should the congregation receive the word that is preached?" The praxis tends to determine how the Word of God is to be discerned from that which is preached which affects the authority and receptivity of the Word among the people.

First to the problem in the praxis of the role of the preacher who takes mere words but claims to speak the "Word of God" through the event of preaching in the church. Based on ones understanding of the concept of the Word of God, individuals in the church studied employ various strategies to determine the authority or otherwise of the word preached, and therefore shape the receiving environment, to the point of determining for themselves what is and is not the Word of God.

For Stott the preacher and the sermon provide no ordinary communication event. "At least in the ideal this preaching person stands in the pulpit, divinely called, commissioned and empowered, a servant of God, an

ambassador of Christ, a Spirit-filled witness to Christ...The receivers...have gathered deliberately...to hear his most holy Word...The message is God's own Word. For the people have not gathered to hear a human being, but to meet with God" (Stott 1982: 81). If preachers are charged with communicating the Word of God then some consideration needs to be given to what exactly differentiates this Word of God from the words of the preacher, or how the two are to combine.

According to the Reformers "The preaching of the Word of God was the Word of God" (Pieterse 1987: 9). Calvin asserts that God's Word can come to us directly through human speech. "For among the many excellent gifts with which God has adorned the human race, it is a singular privilege that he deigns to consecrate to himself the mouths of men in order that his voice may resound in them" (Calvin IV.I.5). Similarly for Barth preaching is communicating the very Word of God. "For so far as proclamation really rests upon recollection of the revelation attested in the Bible and is therefore the obedient repetition of the biblical witness, it is no less the Word of God than the Bible" (Lischer 1981: 78). The prerequisite to speaking God's Word for Barth is that the preaching event does nothing other than obediently repeat the biblical witness. For Thurneysen there is "an unbridgeable gap between the Word of God and the word of the preacher. To be witnesses is a tremendous challenge, and only God is able to let his Word sound through the word of a human. Only the preacher who

realises that no human being may take God's Word in his mouth is allowed to do so. The witness, as he speaks of life, must die to everything that is human" (Immink 2005: 210).

However, it is obvious that not all that comes from the pulpit is the Word of God. As Wilson rightly states "Mere instrumentality does not exist in preaching" (Wilson 1995: 28). Pieterse believes the above position needs to be formulated as "The Word of God can be heard in preaching insofar as the message of Scripture is proclaimed. To the extent that the text functions and speaks in the sermon, the Word of God can be heard in it" (Pieterse 1987: 9). The function then of preaching is not mere repetition but allowing God's Word to be heard through the faithful proclamation of the message of the text. When the preacher speaks, albeit using human words, and faithfully presents the biblical message, God's Word is communicated. The foundational belief here is that God is active and present in the faithful proclamation of Scripture. Karl Fezer agrees with this line stating that "Preaching is the ministry, commanded to the church, of passing on to contemporaries the witness to revelation that is entrusted to it in Scripture, in obedience to the God who acts with us in this Word of Scripture and in faith that this God in his grace and faithfulness, in, with, and under its poor human word, will himself be present among us as the living God, and will use our human words to speak his own Word" (Barth 1991: 37). God

speaking his Word today is therefore reliant on the faithfulness of the preacher as witness of the Word and his conformity to Scripture.

Rather than starting with the text, an alternate approach is to view preaching, as has already been discussed, as an extension of God's continuing self-revelation. From this vantage point God continues to speak his Word in and through his covenant, and he chooses to do so through the continued proclamation by preachers. In this regard Buttrick asserts that "Preaching is the Word of God in that it participates in God's purpose, is initiated by Christ and is supported by the Spirit within community in the world" (Buttrick 1987: 456). Preaching then is an event whereby preaching participates in God's continued work in this world by his Spirit. To preach the Word of God is to be available to be used by the Word of God, Christ, and his Spirit. "Where priority is thus given to the divine will and work over a human will and work, they (the preachers) will stand obediently in God's service and authentic Christian preaching will take place" (Barth 1991: 69). But pursuing this path can lead to a conclusion that preaching is God's work only.

We cannot say that "the preacher is merely an empty vessel through which the Word and the Spirit are poured out to the congregation. That would be not only historically and culturally blind, but also contradictory to the approach of an Incarnational God" (Labberton 2000: 33). God speaks

through preachers. "The biblical warrant for this conviction is that God has consistently voiced the Word through human beings whose hearts, minds, souls, and strength are agents of such communication" (Labberton 2000: 33). We cannot also say that preaching is reliant only on the faithfulness of the work of preachers. Therefore "Preaching is both words and the Word" (Craddock 1985: 18). If one excludes the possibility of the presence of the Word, preaching has no authority in the church. "On the other hand, to identify one's own words with the Word of God is to assume for ourselves God's role in preaching" (Craddock 1985: 19). In the sermon the words of both preacher and God combine, "the preacher takes the words provided by the culture and tradition, selects from among them those that have the qualities of clarity, vitality, and appropriateness, arranges them so as to convey the truth and evoke interest, pronounces them according to the best accepted usage, and offers them to God in the sermon. It is God who fashions words into the Word" (Craddock 1985: 19). God's Word today always comes via and is given through human words. This has big implications for how preaching is perceived and received in the church. If people perceive the sermon and the words of the preacher as those of God and the preacher as the divine agent of the Word, then a particular response should ensue, if not, then a very different response would be given.



It is important to say “that the sermon should let Scripture speak in such a way that the Word of God can be heard, that the sermon will be bound to a text” (Pieterse 1987: 9), which is bound to Christ. “Christ, the living Word is revelation. Scripture, the written Word, is revelation’s primary witness. And the proclaimed word of the church is revelation’s secondary witness” (Metzger 2005: 22). Bloesch comments on Barth saying “There is something like a perichoresis in these three forms of the Word in that the revealed Word never comes to us apart from the written Word and the proclaimed Word, and the latter two are never the living Word unless they are united with the revealed Word” (Bloesch 1992: 190). Proclamation, text, and Christ are intrinsically bound in the continuing self revelation of God through the covenantal conversation of God with his people.

We must then concur with Webster in saying that “In its word, the church does not activate, demonstrate or justify the Word which has already been spoken; it simply attests that Word in its inherent clarity and self-demonstration, announcing what has already been announced with kingly power” (Webster 2005: 109). The word of the church and preacher is never a first word, it is a responding word. The word spoken is never a unique word, it is an attesting, a witnessing word. And second the role of proclaiming a witnessing word, while proceeding from the preacher, resides with the Spirit who encounters God’s people with God’s Word via the proclamation. “Our words become the Word of God to the extent that

they bear witness to the written Word, which bears witness to the living Word. The same Spirit through whom Christ was conceived and who discloses Christ as the revelation of the Father formed Scripture to reveal Christ and enacts new encounters with the living Word through the witness of Scripture in church proclamation" (Metzger 2005: 22).

As Buttrick and Barth point out, we are to always preach with the intention of speaking "God's Words" by grace, but live constantly with the possibility of our words ending up as just "Our Words." So as the church takes up the call to proclaim, the "church is called toward the eloquence of the provisional. Such speech declares the truth, all the while knowing the truth cannot be uttered" (Lowry 1997: 47). Preaching is never just words, but because of the work of the Spirit, words witnessing to the Word, become the Word through which God reveals himself and acts. And when it really happens that preaching conforms to Scripture, and thereby to the revelation of God in Christ "it is nothing but grace, it is solely the work of God" (Barth 1991: 56). Preaching is the work of God by the Spirit of truth, defined "not only by speaking but also by what is spoken. And since the basic content is not a creation of, but a gift to, the speaker, preaching is both learned and given. However, hardly anyone would accept the sum of activity plus content as an adequate description, for the active presence of the Spirit of God transforms the occasion into what biblical scholars have

referred to as an “event” (Craddock 1985: 17), an encounter, a meeting with God in the divine Revelatory Covenantal Conversation.

As discussed, through his continued self-giving Christ is present through our preaching by the Spirit. However, “We do not make Christ present by preaching” (Wilson 1995: 25). Christ is already present by his Spirit in the church. On the other hand we cannot presume upon Christ’s presence as if Christ were at our command. In the praxis by “holding in tension these two perspectives of continuing presence and continuing self giving, we begin to understand the precise nature of this event....Our task then, is not to bring Christ to the church, but to [proclaim] Christ there and to bring our people before God’s throne of judgement and grace” (Wilson 1995: 25).

On the second question of reception, we find in the praxis that the interpretive framework of the individual generally determines that which is to be considered the Word of God. The praxis seems to present an environment where individuals seek to discern God’s Word rather than be encountered by the self revealing God in their midst. This comes from a tradition that has developed a “this is what is to be believed” system of proposition teaching. And while the preaching today does not conform to this approach so tightly the mindset still remains. The danger here is that God becomes the God we receive, and he is incorporated into our lives,

rather than the God who encounters us, that is revealed to us, that incorporates us into his story.

Wilson concurs stating "The God who spoke in human history to the chosen people of Israel, and whose events of self revelation are recorded by the Scriptural witnesses, is the same God who speaks to us today through those same biblical texts and in our lives" (Wilson 1995: 18). "For this reason we claim that preaching is an event in which the congregation meets with the living God.... When we say that this is a divine event we acknowledge that through preaching, God chooses to be encountered" (Wilson 1995: 21). And as God encountered in the past so proclamation continues this encounter, to incorporate us into God's story. "God uses the sermon for self-revelation, for it is in the reading and correct interpretation of Scripture...that God chooses most to be revealed....Thus we may speak of the sermon as God's continuing self giving..." (Wilson 1995: 22), for that which is revealed through the sermon is none other than a revelatory encounter now, of the historical revelation of God. "Scripture and church proclamation bear witness to Christ's reality, mediating his presence in the present age through their identity descriptions" (Metzger 2005: 27). Through the proclamation of the Word now, and as we "abide in the text ... the Spirit enacts revelation anew, incorporating us into the meta narrative of salvation history" (Metzger 2005: 27).

Preaching as a self revelation of God event, creates the possibility for the Spirit to reveal and to make present Christ as presented in Scripture, among his people now. "Preaching both proclaims an event and participates in that event, both reports on revelation and participates in that revelation, bringing it home to the listeners not only in honest reporting but with the immediacy of a living voice addressed to these gathered here and now" (Craddock 1985: 47). This revelatory communal forming and transforming presence then becomes the point toward which the Spirit, working within the hearers, seeks to draw each person. Preaching therefore creates an event whereby God, through the Spirit of Christ, encounters us in relationship to reveal himself through the continuation of his covenantal conversation. As Wardlaw says "The Word of God happens; it becomes a proclamation event in the lives of the people experiencing the sermon" (Wilson 1995: 24).

In the praxis studied several changes are needed. With the use of various preachers, there is a need to develop a preaching theory whereby each preacher proclaims the Word as the Word already present, as the Word that encounters the community gathered in such a way that they are taken beyond themselves and are caught up in God's story. Also that the congregation meet with the constant expectation of being confronted by the living God through the proclamation of the Word, as the one who is already present by the Spirit among them. They need to recapture the

historical story whereby God incorporates them as participants in the grand story of salvation history, the initiator who calls them to respond, and participate, to be his covenant people, the preaching community. They need to leave behind the notion that God is a God who can be assimilated through their framework into their individual lives. The praxis needs to be transformed from one of defensive selective assimilation of God's Word, into one which lives in the anticipation of encountering the very living God, of being caught up into his world.

#### **4.1.2 The Hearers**

Our theory states that God always met the people in relationship, where they were, in their circumstances. Preaching must also conform to the event of revelation in this regard. Part of the role of the preacher in effectively continuing the covenantal conversation, and directing it well, is constantly being aware of the position of the community of faith, in their context and in their journey with God.

In the praxis, given again the spread of preachers used, there is a corresponding spread of consideration given to the hearer's needs and situations. These extend from much consideration given to no consideration, with many believing that the onus is on the hearers or the Holy Spirit, rather than the preacher, to make the message relevant and applicable to them.

According to our model each preacher must consider the current situation of the hearers and acknowledge that this, and not the sermon itself, is the starting point for the preaching event. "The listeners participate in the sermon before the preacher speaks to them; the minister listens before saying anything. Otherwise, the sermon is without a point of contact, whatever may be the general truth of its content" (Craddock 1985: 25). The starting point is not always where the sermon ended last week but rather where the people's response to sermons over time has placed them.

"When we preach, listeners do not hear a sermon; they hear sermons.... The memory of the church is a treasury..." (Craddock 1985: 35 ). It is therefore important for the preacher to be aware of how this treasury has shaped the people and how their collective responses have placed the community and the individuals prior to the next preaching event.

As previously discussed the preacher is also to move beyond being a herald only. We cannot "simply repeat our text in preaching: it may not be understood. We cannot be satisfied with a mere repetition of the text, because the text's message needs to be translated into contemporary terms" (Pieterse 1987: 14). The preacher that boldly goes beyond repeating God's Word and enters and continues the conversation of a dynamically involved God must also move further than the starting point and consider the complete context of the hearers.

God always delivered his covenantal Word into a specific context. “The story of the holy history of the people of God is cradled in community, shared in community, guarded and offered by the world by community....From Genesis to Revelation, God is revealed in an unfolding communal dialogue” (Wardlaw 1988: 76). Likewise preaching must be committed into a particular context. According to Barth “Preaching must be done in the context of the church, i.e., in concrete connection with the existence and mission of the church” (Barth 1991: 56).

Understanding fully the context of the preaching event is a significantly complex operation. For Craddock “The preaching moment occurs at the intersection of tradition, Scripture, the experience of the preacher, the needs of the particular group of listeners, and the condition of the world as it bears upon that time and place” (Craddock 1985: 85). Being such a complex intersection the preacher must ensure that preparation for the preaching event considers each and every contextual aspect in order to be able to effectively make God’s Word, his continuing self revelation, present within the midst of the life of the contemporary faith community. A specific tension for the preacher arises here. In preaching one must deal with the tension of the text and the context of the audience. These two points must be held in balance, in bipolar tension, giving significant attention to the right speaking of the text, and also the right communication of the message so that it is understood in the current



context. When the balance is not present the sermon will either become excessively Scripturally oriented: “with much to say about the text, speaking in the language and conceptual framework of the text and hardly touching the context of the congregation” (Pieterse 1987: 20); or situation oriented: “when a preacher thinks and speaks from his own [or the hearer’s] context, without doing justice to the message of the sermon text.” (Pieterse 1987: 26).

For Schleiermacher the preacher in searching for this balance has two points of reference – the text and the congregation:

“He goes back on the one hand to the context of his Scripture passage. But on the other hand he must also consider his congregation and what it is used to. Because he is moving in a free direction, he must be sensitive to the way in which the congregation customarily thinks about the matter. By its very nature the process is dialogical. There is dialogue with the text which the preacher questions and which replies to him, and also with his congregation” (Barth 1991: 24).

For the preacher this preparational dialogue is essential in discerning the starting point and the context into which they speak.

Obviously, then, the sermon has not only a revelational dimension but also an existential dimension; it meets us in our reality, here, now. The Word of God addresses us and touches us in the praxis of life. This brings the context of life into focus in the sermon and causes many to be concerned; afraid that the focus of preaching may move away from God to our experience of God. Such concerns lead some in the praxis to call for only the Word of God to be preached, and the life of the preacher and the hearers to be excluded. "But that approach lacks balance. The sermon is a public address, and the interaction between people plays an important role.... The sermon is embedded in a liturgical framework, in the setting of a specific congregation, and in a social context" (Immink 2005: 276). The sermon in order to, create, shape, and continue community life must be embedded in the life of the church. Just as God does not act outside of the covenantal relationship to which he has committed himself, the preacher and the preaching event cannot be removed from the ecclesiastical context into which the Word is given.

Further because preachers are to preach from within the context of the faith community, into which they preach, they are always personally engaged in the context and cannot preach as if removed from the context. This makes preaching inevitably personal. Also communicating orally requires commitment to the audience, for oral communication requires that "the speaker is willing to engage in some measure of self

revelation. In preaching, the stakes are even higher, for the words convey ultimate realities toward which the speaker may not remain disinterested" (Lischer 1981: 80). Rather the preacher is then speaking to himself as much as toward the community for he speaks of that which he is also caught up in and belongs to. "When the ministerial identity is anchored essentially in the pew, the preacher stands a better chance to offer an incisive Word from the pulpit... for they are at one and the same time preaching to themselves as well as from themselves" (Wardlaw 1988: 61). Such an approach ensures the preacher deals with the faith community in a knowing way, able to balance both the purpose and intention of the Word and the context and situation of the people.

Preaching cannot proceed without taking account of the current position and context of the congregation. A preacher, viewing themselves as being in and of the community, will ensure the preaching operates as an ongoing conversation that takes seriously the position of the hearers. "Preachers who understand that the Word seeks dialogue with the body of the faithful, even in the preparation and delivery of the sermon, will so restructure their sermon preparation regimen and alter their rhetorical strategies that they make room for the whole people of God in the pulpit" (Wardlaw 1988: 62). Preaching in this way is faithful to the encounter/response conversation that God employs, and serves to perpetuate the ongoing conversation as God moves his people forward.

The preacher being part of and not separate from the community is important not only to ensure the continuing conversation but also to personally direct its movement. Schleiermacher in his *Praktische Theologie* states that:

“The preacher is on the one side an organ of his church, on the other a representative of his congregation according to his position. As the organ of his church he must not be in contradiction with that which constitutes unity. As the representative of his congregation he must have the common impulse as his starting point. These two things alone are his limits. By means of influence of his living person he must guide the common impulse and give it a specific orientation.” (Barth 1991: 23).

The preacher then as an integrated living member of the church is at once able to understand the common impulse of the entire body and serve to give it divine direction. The preacher becomes a visible representation of the intended work of the Word of God. The preacher is to become the incarnate word present with the people, guiding them toward the eschatological goal.

Jesus said "Do you love me?" ... "Feed my sheep" (Jn 21:17). As the incarnate Word the call upon the preacher beyond being involved, is to love as Christ loved, giving himself up for all. The preacher is to be so "forgetful of self, the preacher holds nothing back and takes whatever risks necessary in order to insure the delivery of the Gospel. The power for this kind of commitment comes from no particular preaching model in the Bible,... but rather from God's own commitment in 'speaking' the Word made flesh, who then came and pitched his tent among us" (Lischer 1981: 80-81) (Jn 1:14). The preacher like God, and then Christ is to be a communicator within the covenant. Thus the preacher speaks to the covenant people from within, understanding their needs, representing the Word of God personally among them, and giving their all for the continuation of God's dialogue with his people by the Spirit.

The praxis must ensure that the preachers actively take on the serious incarnational responsibility and carefully balance the revelational and existential dimensions so that it is indeed God's present Word that is proclaimed, and that it is real lives that are encountered by the living Word. This responsibility cannot be left with the hearers or indeed even the Holy Spirit alone. God encounters his people through his Word in a living and active relationship. The preacher stands as an agent, representing God in the context of the church, presenting his Word within a living and active

relationship with the hearers, taking their reality seriously, and by the work of the Spirit moving their world into God's story and into alignment with his will.

Further the movement of God's Word into the lives of the hearers needs to move beyond a mere propositional and applicational model, which results in an assimilation of God and his Word into our world, to an integrated approach - an approach whereby our world is encountered by the Word, and integrated with, aligned with, the world of God's Word. The hearers are encountered where they are and invited to journey with and be caught up into salvation history, moving towards the hope of glory.

## **4.2 Message**

### **4.2.1 World of Hope**

In our discussion of the Revelatory Covenantal Conversation we have said that preaching takes up the charge to proclaim the continuing covenantal Word of God:

- To proclaim the call of the covenant promise to life in Christ, so as to create a worshipping faith community that represents him.
- To proclaim the Spirit call to be transformed to be like Christ, God's heart and will for the world.

- And to proclaim the hope of the consummation of all, as the faith community journeys toward eternal covenantal communion with him.

Preaching reveals God and his will such that we are incorporated into his kingdom community, becoming part of his grand story, being transformed, and moving towards the hope of heaven.

The praxis however, rather than presenting an integrated picture of God's covenantal world of promise, redemption and hope, presents a fragmented picture. Generally the emphasis is on a hope of eternal life for us because of the salvation that we have in Christ. This message is generally delivered in a utilitarian way, often expounding the benefits to our world now, rather than being a call to participate through the eyes of faith, both now and in the future, in another world inaugurated in Christ.

Preaching is called to create an interaction between the Word and the world of the hearers, not just a presentation of Word alone. "[The] process is, in fact, an interaction between Word and reality" (Pieterse 1987: 12). The goal of such an interaction through preaching according to Allen is that "Christian preaching seeks a world that is shaped by the gospel" (Allen 1988: 167).

Preaching proclaims the Word of God, but it also presents the world of God, the reality of life beyond the reality of the person, the divine reality of promise, fulfilment and hope. Preaching not only communicates a message but conveys a world through the message, a world of the message of God that seeks to incorporate our world into his. According to Buttrick "Preaching can rename the world "God's world" with metaphorical power, and can change identity by incorporating all our stories into 'God's Story.' Preaching constructs ... a 'faith-world' related to God" (Buttrick 1987: 11). "What happens in preaching is that our world is transformed. Our human stories are put within a story of God-with-us... By preaching, our lives and indeed our world constructs are located in a larger world, a world in God's consciousness of us. Preaching thus builds a new faith-world in which we may live" (Buttrick 1987: 261).

The praxis has moved to address some of the fragmentation via a structured preaching program. However, because of the propositional/applicational approach and due to the use of many preachers, a presentation of an overall message of a new world of hope in Christ that has encountered and overtaken us by grace is not very clear. As a result the overt message of promise and hope tends to be reduced to "What is its value to me now?" rather than "I now see I am part of something new, something other, something glorious?"



#### 4.2.2 Covenant Community

The question one must ask in considering the preaching in relation to the congregation is, "Do we have in mind a collection of individuals or a corporate body that we are dealing with?" Are we preaching to impact individually or corporately? Our theory places the revelation of God and his Word within and to his people, his covenant community. The Word is given to the community, anticipating communal responses, and then from within that context, individual responses.

The movement in the Western church, which is evidenced in the praxis considered, has generally been from the latter toward the former, to the individual, with a possible flow on effect to the community. While God deals with individuals, the call of his Word and his Spirit is always for individuals to be incorporated into the unified body of Christ. Van Seters also believes a communal first movement is essential. "To preach is to act ecclesially, to build on the supposition that this body of listeners intends to believe as baptised members. They are a corporate entity belonging to one another and to Christ" (Van Seters 1991: 270). Van Seters in his concept of communal preaching suggests moving against an "individualistic hearing toward a more corporate listening. The preacher addresses [not the individual] but the faith community as such. ... Such communal preaching will imply a higher degree of participation by the congregation in the sermon process than just listening together" (Van Seters 1991: 271). In

this context a community of faith is not only apprehended by the preaching of the Word, it is led corporately in its response. The Word not only confronts the faith community with the truth of Christ, but it shapes the community by the Spirit and calls the ecclesia in one united response - to express Christ now to the world through their lives. The community then becomes part of a living ecclesial conversation with the Word of God, they become a preaching community.

Preaching that takes the congregation seriously will also be preaching which is not only directed toward the congregation but is part of the continuing covenantal dialogue with God and will also represent the people to God. "If a minister takes seriously the role of listeners in preaching, there will be sermons expressing for the whole church, and with God as the primary audience, the faith, the doubt, the fear, the anger, the love, the joy, the gratitude that is in all of us" (Craddock 1985: 26-27). Such communal reflective preaching expresses the unexpressed on behalf of the church, much like Habakkuk did for Israel. Today such "Preaching brings the Scriptures forward as a living voice in the congregation. Biblical texts have a future as well as a past, and preaching seeks to fulfil that future by continuing the conversation of the text into the present" (Craddock 1985: 27).

Currently the praxis receives and responds individually, and the preaching is predominantly directed to the individual rather than seeking to develop a corporate identity or movement. To move toward becoming a preaching community, both the preachers and the hearers need to be counter cultural – becoming communally oriented in proclamation and response, seeking to take up the revelatory covenantal dialogue - hearing and responding as a people of God.

### **4.3 Intention**

#### **4.3.1 Preaching Goal**

Preaching is full of intention. The preacher has personal objectives. Each church has specific goals. The Spirit working through the proclamation of the Word also seeks the heart of God for his people. We cannot preach without it being an intentional event.

The concept of intention includes the notion of impact; the speaker wants a relationship through which the desired impact takes place. Searle comments that “Speakers and hearers meet in the communication process. In our speaking we express our intentions, hoping and expecting that others will understand us” (Immink 2005: 127). Immink states that:

“In preaching, we hope that the hearers will understand us, recognise our intention, and act accordingly. Thus, as soon as we speak we are already involved with the hearer. In our preparation we not only think about what we want to say, but we consider what our words may do in the lives of the hearers. We are dealing with things that have a high existential value: we are dealing with a reality that awakens emotions, determines the attitude of people, and puts a stamp on their lives” (Immink 2005: 275).

Speaking is always bound to intent and thereby to the hearer. “The sermon provides interpersonal communication in the form of a public address by which the preacher engages in contact with the congregation with the intention of being heard and understood, and with the desire to accomplish something” (Immink 2005: 274).

Just as God is involved in history, his actions bound together with his words, his words and actions are events that seek an intended goal. Likewise the preacher speaks with intent and intentionality. “When I speak, it is not just a matter of saying something with a clear intention. I am aiming at something, and am involved with my hearers in some special way which leads me to use a particular kind of language” (Immink 2005: 274). My use of genre and message will determine my intention and my intention will determine my genre and message selection. Preaching moves past having intention and speaking, to constructing the sermon in such a way as to

engage the people with effect. Here the preacher must be aware of and examine their intentions, always careful not to serve their own or even the church's goals.

Preaching is never to be a tool that a preacher wields in order to effect change in an individual, or on the community of faith. That which is preached holds life that comes not from the deliverer of the word, but from the God of the Word. "The Word of God work's according to God's own timetable and in God's own good way. Never – not at this point or at any point – does God's Word come under the control of the preacher or the church. Christian preaching not only originates in the freedom of God, it does its work as the instrument God employs and empowers at his good pleasure. God allows the church to bear, proclaim, interpret, and apply to the world the sure promise that is his Word. But promise is not fulfilment – that belongs to God alone, and there can be no confusion of God's fulfilment with some pastoral technique, church program, denominational emphasis, or mission strategy" (Rogers 1991: 250). The message we preach, we preach as one which has a hold on us, not one that we take hold of for any purpose that originates in mankind. For we have been given this treasure in earthen vessels (2 Cor 4:7). "The constant danger is that the vessels will seek to clothe the treasure of the gospel in their own transcendent power that belongs to another" (Rogers 1991: 250). Buttrick in the forward to Barth's 'Homiletics' remarks on this tension stating: "As any

preacher knows, preaching can easily become a “work” designed to garner “effect,” “conversion,” or “decision.” But for Barth the word we preach is ultimately God’s Word, and the work we do is done by grace alone” (Barth 1991: 8).

However, while preaching must never be something controlled by the church, it must always be informed by the church keeping it “focused on its norm – upon the universally and permanently valid truth of God’s act in Jesus Christ that the church cannot control, but must ever conform to in its life and preaching” (Rogers 1991: 252). Preaching is to be aligned with God’s covenantal revelatory goals, us in Christ, transformed by the Spirit to be like Christ, having the hope of one day being with Christ. This is the goal which the Spirit through the preached word takes up. The Spirit brings the Word of God to us. The Spirit having brought the Word to us seeks to create community and seeks to “evoke consent, change, renewal” (Immink 2005: 267), moving us toward the final goal.

Preaching is always undertaken between the two points of Christ having come and Christ coming. Barth comments “We walk by faith, i.e., in a double movement from Christ to Christ. Preaching must be a presentation of this walk by faith and not by sight” (Barth 1991: 54). Preaching presents the continuing journey of the faithful, grounded in salvation history, in what Christ has done, moving hopefully toward Christ’s return, representing him as Christ’s ones on the path between the two.

We mentioned before the praxis lack of an over all concept of the new kingdom breaking in to this reality, and of a communal focus. As a result the general intention of the preaching becomes an imperative of either belief transformation - having the right belief, or life transformation - living the right life now rather than being included through new life into a community of God, that is created, changed and continues on a journey with God, in hope, by his Word.

The text and therefore the preaching must call us into a life, a journey, a new reality, rather than seek to apply a fix to our reality here. The biblical text takes us back to a world that “may sometimes seem distant and strange, but the community described there is central to our faith heritage as a channel of revelation. The task of preaching is to elucidate the interface of that world and ours, to recover the past orality of the word as a sound that continues to ring with life” (Van Seters 1991: 272). The preacher presents the text to the community of faith as a call to participate in the covenant journey, to “continue the ancient pilgrimage of Israel and the early church. This is an osmosis in which listeners are encountered by God, led on by Jesus Christ” (Van Seters 1991: 275).

During the age of the apostles the focus of preaching was the proclamation of the gospel to the non-Christian world. They saw themselves

as witnesses to the person and work of Jesus Christ (Ac 1:8) and the proclaimers of a new community in Christ (Eph 2:11-22). Communication is more than a skill or technique, "It creates encounter and community, and it has to do with the ability to respond and to be accountable.

Communication implies the desire for community and the intention to unite what is divided" (Immink 2005: 121-122). Preaching as the continuation of the self revelation of God creates such encounters that create community and unite relationships, both interpersonal and with the divine.

As the gospel spread and local churches were established, preaching began to spread its focus to incorporate teaching to strengthen the believers. Commenting on this expansion Dunn-Wilson says that the "congregations are now so widely dispersed that the missionary preachers can no longer give them personal supervision" (Dunn-Wilson 2005: 12). To assist the process of teaching the preachers employed the use of "epistolary sermons" (Dunn-Wilson 2005: 12) – written sermons to be distributed and read within the local communities of faith focussed on the shaping of the community which had been created by the preaching of the Word of God. Speaking specifically about the letter to the Romans, Mille states that Paul's intention was to "shape a community of the new age" (Dunn-Wilson 2005: 14). And to shape the community such that the hearers "see themselves as part of the embryonic, perfect community of agape which Christ came to earth to establish" (Dunn-Wilson 2005: 14).



The community shaping and continuing work of Paul and the other preachers of the early church “revolves around two foci – Christology and ethics. The preachers are primarily concerned to instruct their hearers with basic beliefs and godly behaviour. Paul through his strengthening work encourages the church to continually focus on Christ” (Dunn-Wilson 2005: 19). While agreeing that Paul covered these two foci, I believe that ethics itself comes from a well informed Christology and therefore the central point of Paul is new life in Christ alone. However, from this single focus point Paul and the other preachers are concerned with three main aspects of intentional community building and world shaping centred around the Christological message, namely: revelation & apologetics - community belief, ecclesiology & ethics – community formation and shaping, and eschatology – community direction.

In the praxis then the preacher is called to present a message that encourages the hearer to live out of faith in the Jesus of history, the eschatological hope of his return, and the real present love of Christ on the journey. Therefore, the message is to be presented with such authority and with such integrity that God is trusted as the loving covenantal promiser and trusted to be the eschatological fulfiller of all that has been promised. The intention of the preacher then is to present God as the one who is his

Word and the complete fulfilment of it to his created, changing, and continuing covenant people.

As we have said before in the praxis, preaching is called to be part of the continuing Revelatory Covenantal Conversation of God:

- To reveal the present God, through the proclamation today of the contemporary living Word, made active through the presence of the revealer, the Spirit of the Christ.
- To evoke faith and through the including Word call people to be that which they are already in Christ – a covenant community of God.
- To shape the people of faith to become that which they are called to be, and indeed are in Christ, the *imago dei*, and to continue toward that which is the fulfilment of all that is promised - the eschatological covenantal community of the triune God.

Preaching calls the community to by faith be all they are in Christ, to be integrated into the promise and fulfilment of salvation history. Augustine called preaching “the *narratio* of God’s love, a story that endures so long as God’s plot from creation to Parousia continues” (Lischer 1981: 37), a plot that the community of God is called to participate in.

## 4.4 Interpretation/Response

### 4.4.1 Desired Responses

Preaching not only shapes people but also seeks to shape the very cultural structures and core cultural texts and beliefs that it encounters, in order to set up an alternative text for the community of faith to follow. Our preaching model suggests that the desired response from a preaching event is a closer alignment of the world of the hearers with the world of God's revelation – a movement toward the indicative and imperative fulfilment in Christ.

The praxis encountered however, generally sought responses in terms of individual life change, with little if any focus on journeying with God and alignment with the new world inaugurated in Christ, or on a community participation in God's plan.

Hearers create a world in which to live by faith from the text conveyed by the preacher who "is intentionally designated precisely to mediate a world that comes out of this text which endures through the generations. That world which the preacher mediates is one possible world out of many that could be offered. The offer of this world competes with other offers made by capitalism, by militarism, by psychology of various kinds, by health clubs, by automobiles, by beers and so on" (Brueggemann 1988: 143). To tell the

salvation story of a community is to “constitute (or reconstitute) the world view of the group, to renew its sense of identity and purpose, to reinforce its pattern of social life” (Allen 1988: 169). Preaching must tell not propositional or applicational aspects of the story of salvation history, but must interpret the story and evoke the story with the intention that people make the story constitutional and integral in their worldview, using it as a meta-narrative from which to draw a new world view of God and meaning and direction for life.

To hear and respond well to the preaching of this story the hearers must be made aware of both the world of reality in which they live and the distinctive holy world into which they are called. If the worlds are not clear or the tensions between the two are not heard or felt with biblical urgency then the reaction to the preaching will fall short or deviate from the intended response – communal and individual participation and alignment with the world of the triune God.

To move the praxis toward such alignment the Revelatory Covenantal Conversation must take hold on the life of the local church. Through the preaching God must be encountered as the initiating self revealing covenantal, people building, relational God, who through the conversation of encounter and response calls his people on from rebellion to faith, from

idolatry to worship, from disobedience to obedience, from promise to fulfilment.

#### **4.4.2 Responses & Motivations & the Role of Preaching**

The feedback from the praxis indicated one major problem in this area.

There appears to be no cohesive theology of the role of preaching in place to guide the preaching and therefore develop a cohesive response expectation. The use of numerous preachers and the lack of a guiding theology results in the preaching style, perceived role, and expected responses, being spread across a wide spectrum. I believe this situation has led to preaching that lacks a cohesive underlying framework and has generally moved to employ a situational propositional/applicational method which, while at times is indicative in style, tends mostly toward the imperative. And within this wide spectrum there are also those who believe that the preacher is to just preach and leave the response responsibility up to the hearers and the Holy Spirit. And there are also others who will employ emotional aspects to engender responses without much biblical content.

Whatever style or approach is employed, each will be chosen by the preacher because of their individual understanding of the role of preaching and their associated expectations of the preaching event.

For a moment we turn here to the old debates of the difference between teaching and preaching and the use of revelational and/or

anthropological elements in preaching, in order to clarify the expected responses and motivations that should be employed.

“The New Testament uses separate words for preaching (*kerugma*) and teaching (*didache*). *Kerugma* means to herald or proclaim the coming of God’s Realm in Jesus Christ. *Didache* is teaching about the consequences of Christ’s coming” (Wilson 1995: 25). Many hold that preaching and teaching stand apart serving different roles within the church. According to Wilson “one way we may make a distinction is to say that teaching may be about God, while preaching may be an encounter with God” (Wilson 1995: 27).

This distinction leads us back to the revelational and anthropological tension. Many prefer to align their sermons with the role of teaching about God so as to reveal truth and the nature of God, expecting people who have right beliefs to automatically live accordingly. Others seek through their communication events to focus on human life solutions or create an experience with God, believing experience of God leads to a kingdom life. However, on the whole isn’t teaching a part of preaching, and preaching integral to teaching? Can we separate the proclamation of God in Jesus Christ from instruction about what this means? Doesn’t the coming of God in Jesus bear within it the consequences of that coming?

Barth leans toward the former stating that:

“Preaching is the Word of God which he himself speaks, claiming for the purpose the exposition of a biblical text in free human words that are relevant to contemporaries by those who are called to do this in the church that is obedient to its commission. Preaching is the attempt enjoined upon the church to serve God’s own Word, through one who is called thereto, by expounding a biblical text in human words and making it relevant to contemporaries in intimation of what they have to hear from God himself” (Barth 1991: 44).

The role of the sermon for Barth is to reiterate God’s Word in contemporary language so that the hearers hear correctly the Word of God. The sermon is to contain no other intention.

“When the church undertakes to proclaim the Word of God, this is not because it seeks to fulfil a plan or to serve an abstract purpose. ... It is based on a commission, a command. ... The church is not a tool to uphold the world or to further its progress. It is not an instrument to serve either what is old or what is new. The church and preaching are not ambulances on the battlefield of life. Preaching must not attempt to set up an ideal community, whether of souls, or

heart or spirit. ... [T]he moment preaching makes these things its end, it becomes superfluous" (Barth 1991: 63).

Preaching has no plan save its commission. "The real need is not so much to get to the people as to come from Christ. Then one automatically gets to the people" (Barth 1991: 53). For Barth preaching stops short of having an intentional or motivational role among the people, the preacher must point to Christ alone. "First, God is the one who works, and second, we humans must try to point to what is said in Scripture. There is no third thing" (Barth 1991: 45).

In keeping with Barth's herald approach to delivering the Word of God Thurneysen makes the following four recommendations with regard to sermon delivery:

1. No rhetoric!
2. No attempt to address the needs of the hearers!
3. The sermon is not intended to put people at ease and build them up, but rather break them down!
4. No constant variation in preaching. (Immink 2005: 210)

The intention here is that the preachers not influence the message at all. However, this does not concur with God's continual mediating and



incarnating of his Word. The preacher and the message are integral for the message is always received via the preacher just as any musical instrument shapes the sound of the music played rather than just repeating the notes. While there is merit in Barth's caution on purpose, and expected responses, his reluctance to engage the people may also prove to be a reluctance to assist the hearers to encounter God as well as apprehend and respond to the truth about God.

Therefore the preacher must attend to the delivery style and motivation that is employed in preaching. The style itself can serve to communicate the message with integrity or misrepresent the intention of the text.

"A sermon that is delivered in a loud angry voice and punctuated by a closed fist banging down on the pulpit sanctions, at least by example, such behaviour as appropriate to the Christian community. On the other hand, to speak of reconciliation, and to stand before the congregation in an open and vulnerable way, is to embody the beginning of reconciliation. If the centre of the Christian worldview is a gracious and loving God, then the sermon will be delivered in a gracious and loving way. Grace and love can be expressed in tones that range from the passionate and strong to the quiet and gentle.... Ideally, the style of delivery should be consistent with the tone and content of the sermon" (Allen 1988: 184).

Further in this regard Allen is convinced that “the images we use to describe the sermon are critical. Different images lead to different ways of conceiving the sermon; they also lead to different relationships between speaker and hearer and to different social effects. When one conceives of the sermon as an “argument” (even a lover’s quarrel), it is quite different from the sermon seen as “therapy” The sermon as “exhortation” is not the same as the sermon as “story”. A congregation, which week after week is brow-beaten, soon begins to droop... A congregation that is nurtured in love and grace so begins to ask, “How can we respond to so great a gift” (Allen 1988: 170)?

Thomas Long summarises an ideal praxis approach with regard to style and motivation saying, “I try to be faithful to the content of the sermon, to let my voice and body be caught up in the spirit of the language that’s in the sermon itself...” (Long 1991: 136). To achieve this the preacher needs to employ a practical theological process of assessing whether the techniques employed in preaching represent Scripture well and whether the church community is responding as anticipated by the text.

Many, who move beyond the herald alone model of preaching, move to an exposition and application model. This model combines the revelatory indicative about God with the associated imperative consequences. “To

preach is to say after God what God has said, to bear witness to what God has done, to report what God has revealed, to announce, interpret, and apply to the world the rule of grace that God in Jesus Christ has inaugurated and established" (Rogers 1991: 246). Rogers suggests that the role of preaching is first to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, second to interpret it, and thirdly to apply the gospel to the world and to its own life in the world. "The preaching and teaching of the church always lives, therefore, in the tension between God's self-authenticating revelation in Jesus Christ and its own God-given ministry of interpretation" (Rogers 1991: 248). And then takes up the responsibility to apply confidently the message "to the world with genuine humility before the mystery of God who remains hidden even in [his] self-disclosure" (Rogers 1991: 249). The church therefore preaches within the arena of paradox: proclaiming with certainty the revelation of God in Christ, yet acknowledging the frailty of mankind in interpretation, acknowledging the mystery of the exhortation we are called to confidently give.

At times the balance between the both/and of exposition and application, moves toward an either exposition or application approach, which is detrimental to the holistic revelatory and anthropological aspects of preaching. Lee Strobel expresses this particular dichotomy in preaching like this: "On the one end are extremely vertical messages that emphasise doctrine or the nature of God but, unfortunately, lack application. These

sermons generally don't accomplish what I think the goal of preaching is, which is life change. But I also have trouble with the other side of the continuum, which emphasises application, but often just through human ideas. I'm suspicious of preaching that is not biblically based, but I'm also suspicious of preaching that is biblically confined. If one doesn't get out of the Bible and into people's lives, I think one has missed it. If a preacher tries to change people's lives without the Bible, I think he or she is something less than a Christian preacher" (Leadership 1995: 21).

Instead of employing a propositional/applicational model our theory along with others like Wilson believe that "the central purpose of preaching is the disclosure of God, an encounter with God through the Word, more than information about God" (Wilson 1995: 20), from the Word. For David Randolph "Preaching is understood not as the packaging of a product but as the evocation of an event" (Lowry 1997: 36). We with Lischer call preachers to lift the hearers to participate in and respond to the divine story. "Preachers who would be storytellers must remember, then, the chief function of the story is not to nail down a point, but to invite participation in the continuing story; not to illustrate the way things are, but to tell what they might become" (Lischer 1981: 38). Theodore Parker Ferris also wants to move us further again, beyond exhortation, into the realm of the revelation of God. "The purpose of a sermon, he urged is to declare, to disclose, to reveal, something. Too many sermons are written 'in the imperative mode',

whereas the religion of the Bible 'is written largely in the revealing language of the indicative mode'" (Stott 1982: 57). "A sermon is by its very nature a revelation, not an exhortation." (Stott 1982: 58). For Schleiermacher, "an effective sermon is an epiphany: an appearance of Christ in the community of faith" (de Vries 1995: 429). For Wingren "Preaching supplies the living Christ with both feet and a mouth: 'It is the Word that provides the feet on which Christ walks when he makes his approach to us and reaches us...Preaching has but one aim, that Christ may come to those who have assembled to listen.' Again 'preaching is not just talk about a Christ of the past, but is a mouth through which the Christ of the present offers us life today" (Stott 1982: 108). The goal here is to make God present to the hearers through the words of the sermon, and for his revealed presence to be the reason for response and the basis for motivation.

Whereas the exposition/application model is focussed on imparting information for life change, a right mind right heart approach, the idea of encounter combines the aspects of revelation and anthropology, information and person, in the apprehension of the presence of God with his people through the preaching event. "The creation of an experience in which both speaker and audience are co-participants in an event of understanding" (Lowry 1997: 20), an encounter with the present God is the goal. For Troeger preaching is calling the people into the presence of God. "The preacher's voice uses words and the physical properties of sound to

draw people beyond the message that is being articulated into the presence of God" (Lowry 1997: 117). For David Landry "The minister today is seen less exclusively as the one who brings God and more as one who helps discern God, already present" (Wardlaw 1988: 66).

Pieterse wants to expand the encounter model further to include intentional aspects believing it is "clear that the preaching of the apostles and of everyone with them, as recorded in the New Testament, had one purpose, to bring people to faith in Jesus Christ.... The aim of preaching is concerned with the evoking of faith for one's whole life" (Pieterse 1987: 11). Runia concurs stating that "the action of preaching takes place to evoke and to strengthen faith in the triune God, Father, Son and Spirit" (Pieterse 1987: 11). The burden upon preaching is to continue the self revelation of God, to conform to God's revealing manner, and to present Christ, not just words about Christ, and not just an experience of Christ. Preaching then is to be an event where people encounter the present God that intends to move his people, through the revelatory covenantal encounter/response conversation, on with intention. Betters believes "...the point of preaching is to unveil him" (Betters 2004: 32). God unveiled is the goal and motivation and basis for response.

The role of preaching in the church is to conform to the purposes inherent in God's revelation of himself in history, through Scripture, and on through

the word of the sermon. God's revelation is always a call to be caught up in his purposes. Through preaching then, God by the Spirit is present with his community to reveal Christ to us now and to present his call to salvation, his call to be like him, his call to be with him, and his call to the future, toward the final shout. Preaching is an unveiling event, an encounter of God, not just for experience, and not just for revelation about God, but to be caught up into the world of God by faith and to participate in his faith community called to follow his purposes and have true life, revealed in Christ. Thus preaching feels the tension of revealing God, not just as information but as divine encounter, not for experience but for faith in Christ, and not just to shape the individual or perpetuate the church, but to incorporate, transform and call the faith community on in a new world of hope.

#### **4.5 Preaching Review**

God, who knows his people, his motives and intentions, his purposes and designs completely, is able to constantly deal with his people according to his divine will in a perfect way assuring the movement of his people toward the divine goal. Preachers, however, need to take time to reflect after each preaching event and perhaps more significantly after a series of preaching events, to capture the mind and heart of the people, to review the responses made, and to also examine their own intentions, motives,

and approaches regarding preaching. Specific praxis aspects which the preacher should regularly review are:

- The content & style of their preaching
- The response goal of their preaching
- Their understanding of the role of preaching
- The situation and context of the congregation

Ideally the preacher should be constantly thinking about these aspects from a practical theological perspective, comparing their praxis with their working theory of preaching. Does the content and style of the preaching reflect the message and style of God's revelation? Is the response goal of the preaching aligned with that of Scripture? Does the understanding of the role of preaching reflect the Revelatory Covenantal Conversational model of God dealing with his people? Is the situation of the people sufficiently known to ensure that the gospel speaks clearly to their world of reality?

The praxis considered does review their preaching program in an ad hoc manner. While any review is valuable, a more structured review in line with the above suggestions would produce a more fruitful outcome moving forward. As an example, in relation to expected responses the preachers/leaders should regularly, and at varying intervals review



responses, placing increased importance on communal responses. Both the actual response expected and the timing of the response would be reviewed. Further, having an eye for the progression of responses on a particular area the preachers/leaders may tailor the preaching program to cater for the progress of the response. Such a process also needs to be undertaken with the understanding that the work of actualising the response belongs to the Holy Spirit. As Lischer says "Perhaps it is fortunate that we cannot predict the workings of the Word and the drifts of the Spirit's influence, for then we should become manipulators of the Word instead of its servants, advertisers of our own success rather than stewards of the mysteries of God" (Lischer 1981: 81). Such an approach should develop humility in the process and such humility produces a heart of constant reflection and review and dependence on God for the next step forward.

#### **4.6 The Conversation in the Preaching Community**

The style of preaching used in any given communication event will indicate the approach the preacher has taken in engaging with the text and indeed what the underlying theology of preaching the preacher holds. And this in turn will influence the way God and his revelation throughout history is represented today. In addition to the above praxis elements touched on within the current praxis, there exist two key praxis aspects

regarding the representation of God's revelation to us through preaching which also need to be addressed:

1. The approach to Scripture.
2. Conversational preaching.

#### **4.6.1 Approach to Scripture**

An approach to the Bible which reduces Scripture into biblical facts, propositional truths which are intended to stand alone, on the side, supporting rather than being integral to the action of salvation history, can be likened to an admiration of musical notes rather than an appreciation of a music performance. A non-event, or forensic approach to Scripture and preaching "presumes that the sermon is fundamentally data about Scripture to be shared, truth as treasure buried in biblical soil waiting to be unearthed, delved into and offered to the hearers. Such a view of the function of Scripture in preaching makes no room for the dynamic of God's Word in Scripture. The Word of God, far from being solely the object of a preacher's analysis, is primarily the subject of revelation. The Word of God is fundamentally God's revealing activity, primarily act and event. The Word happens, does things, makes things happen" (Wardlaw 1988: 58). The living Word is an event that needs to be conveyed, replayed, and constantly apprehended, rather than discovered once for all time. The notes are not

appreciated alone; rather the music must be played, encountered and absorbed.

Owen Thomas agrees stating that:

“The theory of verbal inspiration and of revelation as the communication of propositional truths from God to humanity does not fit the facts of the Bible. It makes the words of the Bible the locus of revelation rather than the events described in the Bible. The words of the Bible are the record of events and the interpretation of them as events in which God is acting. Faith or the reception of revelation in the Bible is clearly not the acceptance of supernaturally communicated propositions but rather trust in and obedience to the living God who confronts humanity in the events of the Bible” (Wilson 1995: 40).

Such an approach, like that found in the current praxis, generally leads to a focus on the imperative of Scripture at the expense of the indicative, and the encounter. A focus on ‘what do we learn’ separated from the ‘who do we encounter’ in the Bible. Allen agrees believing that, “In the exhortatory sermon, the indicative and the imperative dimensions of the gospel may be out of balance. Theologically the indicative – the announcement of the grace of God as already given to the world – comes first. The imperative, the command to respond to the gospel in certain ways, follows from the

indicative, but in the exhortatory sermon the indicative is typically diminished or even forgotten. People are asked to do something or to believe something without being given an understanding of its basis" (Allen 1988: 180). The indicative 'who' and the imperative 'what' must stand together. Paul Scherer states that in preaching God "is not intent on sharing conceptual truth. It is not some saving measure of information he wants to impart; it is himself he wants to bestow" (Lowry 1997: 29). He wants to encounter his people, and be encountered by them.

#### **4.6.2 Conversational Preaching**

Preaching in the praxis in the main is monological in nature. The preacher tells the congregation. This approach however does not accord with the conversational nature of God's revelation. "Writers agree that the basic structure of God's revelation in the Bible is dialogic.... God speaks, man answers; God questions, man questions or raises objections; and in this interaction God reveals himself and his will. Jesus' ministry is filled with conversations in which he asks questions and elicits answers to questions. Jesus compels no one, but acts in such a way that he invites people to follow him" (Pieterse 1987: 7).

Following on from Jesus' style, New Testament proclamation was known as the *homilia*, which means a conversation or dialogue. "Paul's method of preaching was mainly, *dialegethai*, that is, an interaction in which

questions were asked by the hearers, discussion arose and even arguments could follow. We can therefore conclude, from the origin of Christian preaching that the foundation of preaching is one of dialogue" (Pieterse 1987: 7). Preaching is to create a conversational event with God. Such "Dialogic preaching aims to create a dialogue between the text and the congregation, in which the congregation experiences that God himself speaks to them and their situation" (Pieterse 1987: 8).

Dialogical preaching is also relational. "Sprinkling dialogue into sermons fosters relationship. It avoids an authoritarian tone by showing respect for listeners" (Arthurs 2002: 51). According to Wardlaw "the congregation, far from assuming a passive stance at the preaching moment, engages God's Word and is engaged by that Word as actively as the preacher" (Wardlaw 1988: 62). Craddock concurs stating: "Historically and theologically the community and the book belong together in a relationship of reciprocity. This means the church does not sit passively before the Scriptures but rigorously and honestly engages its texts" (Craddock 1985: 129), as the Word actively engages the church. The Word represents the heart of God - to engage us in relationship toward a glorious future together.

According to the historic communication model which is based on the work of Aristotle, communication has three main elements, the preacher, the message, and the listeners as the target of the communication event. Chartier, placing preaching within this model, states "The model suggests

that the archer's (preacher's) arrows carry God's Word (sermon) to the target (listener), with the effect of changing the listener's attitudes, beliefs or behaviours (conversion)" (Pieterse 1987: 25). This model however views communication as a one way action and the hearer as a passive receiver in the process. This model does not represent the earlier work of Socrates and Plato, and indeed Jesus and Paul, in which the hearers were active participants in the communication process.

Soren Kierkegaard resurrected the role of the audience and "included the receiver in the centre of the communication event and that on an equal footing with the sender. He sees the receiver as an active word" (Pieterse 1987: 25). He believes that communication has only taken place when the receiver has interpreted and understood the message. Van Schoor says it as follows: "Rather than functioning simply as the terminus for communication, the recipient's active participation in communication must be recognised. In terms of his personal involvement with the message, he must necessarily be willing and able to receive, decode and interpret the message" (Pieterse 1987: 29).

Our preaching model includes taking seriously the participation of the congregation in the preaching event. Like faith the preaching relationship involves a "receptive communion: there is always a bipolar situation – speaking and hearing" (Immink 2005: 11), the initiatory preaching event,

and the congregational response. Therefore “It is not only the preacher who needs to give his or her interpretation in the sermon; the members of the congregation can give theirs too through feed-back and dialogue...” (Pieterse 1987: 27).

In the Revelatory Covenantal Conversation model, God is involved with his people in an initiation response conversation within a covenantal relationship, bringing us into his world. A preaching praxis needs to consider how it is employing a conversational model of preaching which takes seriously the message and intention of Scripture and also meets the people in their context, and responds to their situation, all the while seeking to align their world with God and move them toward the eschatological goal.

It is here that preaching which ignores either the revelatory component or the anthropological component is shown to be lacking, resulting in a desert or a mirage. It is the oasis of conversational preaching that brings life, for it honours the life of the message and addresses and shapes the life of the faith community. It moves carefully to align the world of the people today with the kingdom world of Christ, known through God’s historical revelation.

Preaching is the ongoing communicative event of continuing God’s self revelation in the present culture of the community, grounded on past revelation as recorded in Scripture. Yahweh in the Old Testament set forth

the law and instituted the cult of Israel to surround his presence in their midst, and to be the covenantal basis for life and faith. The books of Moses together with God's tabernacle and temple presence became for the Israelites foundational in the formation of their cultural expression of their life and faith. God then established the Kingdom of God through Christ and the Word of Christ. Christ through his perfect life, death and resurrection fulfilled the law and established the new covenant of the Kingdom in himself. The revelation of Christ and the proclamation by Christ and the apostles of the new kingdom in Christ then became the foundation of a renewed culture, life, faith, and faith community.

The faith community is indebted to the Revelatory Covenantal Conversation of faith for its very existence. While communication of faith can occur in many ways, there is a primary communication of the basis of faith through the preaching of the Word to the community of faith. Vriezen sees the essence of revelation is "to bring about an interaction between God and the human being" (Immink 2005: 124). Such interaction requires two parties – the divine and his created beings in a communicative action. Vriezen says "It is a movement, it goes back and forth. God speaks and we respond. We speak and God responds" (Immink 2005: 124), in a revelatory covenantal dialogue as the preaching community is created, changed, and continued by the Word.



## 4.7 Summary

I commenced by setting up a practical theological theory that draws from both the revelatory and the anthropological models to develop a preaching model that considers preaching as a Revelatory Covenantal Conversation involving divine revelation, intended community response, and has ecclesiological impact. The conversational practical theological theory seeks to conform preaching to a revelational model which diverges from Barth by also including the dynamic of personal and community interpretation reaction and formation, in an ongoing conversation of initiation and response. In this dissertation I proposed a theological theory on the role of preaching in the church which asserts that:

Preaching stands, in the line of the self revelation of God, as his continuing action to both reveal himself, and be present with his covenant people of promise. Therefore preaching within the church must conform to this revelation in: event – the covenantal conversation itself; message – the content of the preaching; interpretation/response – the preacher’s intended response by the hearers; the intention - the intended shaping of the community of faith through the preaching event. Preaching is a continuing Revelatory Covenantal Conversation between God and his people to create, transform, and continue his community of faith.

The message proclaimed is the words and actions of God, and the intended response is a faith relationship that we call communion with God, carried on within a continuing covenantal conversation between God and his people – the preaching community.

However, in contrast to the above we found in the current praxis among other things a history of:

### **Event**

- preaching events that allow the interpretive framework of the individual to determine the authority and content of God's Word, rather than there being an anticipation of encountering the God who desires to reveal himself and be present among them through the proclamation of his Word.

### **Message**

- God's Word being presented in a propositional, applicational and utilitarian manner, focusing on what I can bring from the world of the text into my world, rather than calling a community of people to being encountered by a God of covenant, of promise, a God who calls them on in hope to the fulfilment of a new world inaugurated in Christ by the Spirit.

### **Intention**

- preaching for the right belief and right behaviour of individuals rather than an invitation to be caught up in God's story, to be his people in a covenant journey of identity, transformation and hope.

### **Response**

- a lack of a substantial communal and eschatological theology of preaching that calls people to respond to the indicative and imperative of Christ, a story beyond their own, and align their worlds with God's.

Moving forward the Christian Brethren must consider changes that would move the current preaching praxis into the Revelatory Covenantal Conversation becoming a 'Preaching Community' where the triune God is:

### **Revealed as Covenant Community - Event**

God revealed himself as a God of community, the Triune God, and as a God who desires and is for community, encountering his people as a covenant making God. Thus God's dealings with his people and his revelation to them is always carried out through an initiation/response covenantal conversation within the context of this gracious loving covenant relationship.

### **Revealed as the present and true Word - Message**

God has revealed himself as the Triune God. God has revealed himself through his presence and through his Word of promise. God has revealed himself, made himself present through his Son, the Word. God has now given himself by his Spirit to be present and revealed to us through his proclaimed Word within the community of faith.

### **Intentionally at work with his community - Intention**

Through his covenant he created a people to be his people. He continued with them to transform them into a holy people, which he accomplished in Christ. Through his Spirit he now continues to call the community of faith toward the eschatological hope of being fully with him, as his holy covenant people.

### **Desiring the fulfilment of the promise - Response**

Through the continuing Revelatory Covenantal Conversation God seeks to encounter the church through, the proclamation of his Word of promise and the right response of his people, bringing the worlds of revelation and reality into one – the fulfilment.

Preaching is to reveal God, to unveil him, in Christ, by the Spirit, through the continuing Revelational Covenantal Conversation, such that God's presence and his Word, his present Word, creates communities of faith and promise, changes them to be like Christ, and continues the community of faith toward fulfilment in the eschatological hope. Lowry says it like this: "I see myself as a stagehand who holds back the curtain so that some might be able to catch a glimpse of the divine play – sometimes – perhaps – if I can get it open enough. If we could just get a better handle on how to pull back the curtain" (Lowry 1997: 52).

As we move on may we move toward gaining a better handle on the curtain, to unveil the one who has revealed himself and encountered us, the one who has gripped us and drawn us into his Revelatory Covenantal Conversation, and has called us to be his preaching community, to continue the conversation of hope on until the culmination of the fulfilment of the promise in Christ.

## 5. APPENDIX A: Preaching Questionnaire

Appendix A includes the questions asked and a transcript of responses by those surveyed.

### Message

1. **Does the preaching in your church provide an alternate world of hope in contrast to the reality of the world around you?**

**BH** - I guess the world of hope it does provide is some sort of vision of heaven.

**DS** - Yes.

**WB** - Yeh, absolutely.

**PT** - Yes, I believe it does. Because it doesn't teach what the world teaches, but it tries to teach what the Bible teaches, or what God intended for us to teach and encourages us.

**JS** - Oh yeh, Yes, Very much so.

a. **Describe aspects of that world using an example.**

**BH** - Not so much world of hope in this world but in this life. The hope I get from what I hear in the preaching is the world to come.

**DS** - I think the content of our teaching pretty much every week, speaks about how a changed attitude and lifestyle as the Bible speaks about it. So our dependence in Christ rather

than in ourselves, offers hope that the world doesn't offer. It is different every week, there are always different aspects to teaching aren't there?

**WB** - Obviously the preaching offers a message that if applied to your life, there is a whole world of difference as to what is outside and what's inside. I think, in lots of aspects, in the aspects of applying what we learn in the initial part of salvation and then also applying things in terms of dealing with issues in your life. Whether it be things that are bad habits that you've held on to, all that kind of stuff, preaching offers a way or hope to overcome some of these through the power Christ has given .....

**PT** - Salvation. You can live a better life here with the Lord's help as a believer, without having to compromise with the world. Trying to equip that the leaders also, in living as Christians as a disciple. Recognizing what the influences of the world are, try to equip the believers into trying to ..... for Christ. Basically equipping and encouraging.

**JS** - Gives you sound theology in the salvation of the Lord Jesus. Gives you a great gospel message.

**b. To what extent is it communicated, how often?**

**BH** - It comes through very often. More, than not.

**DS** - More often than not it is included in preaching.

**WB** - I'd like to think it's regular, but I don't know that it's obviously regular. I wouldn't say that it's obviously regular, but I would say, if you dug down to each message you would find it in there.

**PT** - Most sermons do contain it, even though it might not contain for some people it may for others. Different situations and the like. The sermon might not speak to everybody, but it may speak to a certain number of people in the fellowship where they will get encouragement. Maybe, hopefully more, almost every week I'd say

**JS** - For me, I think the gospel message should be in every message, to make people realise that whatever you're preaching on to slide in that Jesus has actually died; this is the reason why we're teaching and doing things in this church, and has actually died for you. So I have to put that in every message. This happens here at Duncraig pretty close to 70-80% of the time.

**c. Is more or less required to sustain people?**

**BH** - There has to be more, and people outside of Christian circles have to hear it more. I don't think there is a great deal



of hope for this world, but there is a great deal of hope on the other side.

**DS** - I think sometimes, some people are able to summarize the message in a clearer way than others, so that people walk out of there on that Sunday and then they're reminded of those things during the week. And that's probably a skill that some have more than others. I think the level of the same message is there pretty much every week, but for some it may be more reliant upon the listener to systematically apply that either through note taking and then you know, review in the mind or whatever, others can get two or three points during the week.

**WB** - Well, I guess it depends on your audience really, in a sense. If your audience is one that is seeking, then it needs to be offered a lot more. I think if it's an audience that you're building up in the faith, then those aspects don't have to be touched as often I would have thought.

**JS** - Oh no, I think – more or less. It can always be more. I think they do it very good here.

**2. To what extent does the preaching draw you into a feeling of being part of God's family rather than an isolated Christian?**

**BH** - Yeh, I'm not sure if the preaching does that. I think when I see everyone working together for a common thing, and that is sharing

with others, to help others, that's what draws me into something that's where we're all working together.

**DS** - I think most times the references are always about the plurality of Christianity, although our relationship with Jesus is personal, we are automatically welcomed into a huge family at that point, and I think that message always comes across. I think that's the unique thing about, well I'm not sure whether it's a unique thing to be honest, I don't know too many other faiths or what they teach, but I guess, the strength of Christianity as opposed to secular world as we understand it, is that there is God in the individual and that's clear, it's a personal relationship, but we automatically welcome in brothers and sisters and the whole of the New Testament talks about the Church and the Old Testament talks about the family of God and children of Israel. I think, generally anyway, it is stated as first a personal relationship with God. But in all teaching I think it is often generalised in the sense of, you know, we, and even when the word you is spoken of by the speaker, I think that is up to the individual listener in many cases to say, Oh, this is me and how does it apply to me, and possibly in a general sense the first point is, this is us this is the Church. I mean, some speakers just clearly make it a personal thing, but think generally, it is understood that this is not an individual thing beyond the personal commitment.

**WB** - I think there are some that do speak like that. They are able to say we are in this together, we are going through this experiences together, we are learning together. There are others that would generally speak and you would feel that it's an isolation. I think you do want more body teaching. You want people to know that we're all in this together and when one hurts and we all hurt. Yeh, I think that's a very supportive way to teach, it's encouraging because people then don't think that the issues and problems that they're going through, their the only ones going them either.

**PT** - Never thought about that much. But, I think when the preacher preaches it does bring the fellowship together, and just by that act they identify themselves as part of the family. I don't know if the preaching itself brings it across as often as it should, being in the body of Christ and part of ..... I don't think it does. Many times I think it is something to be encouraged on a more regular basis. It's probably easier for an individual to receive the message than as part of a group and the encouragement comes from that. The community feeling comes more from the gathering rather than directly from the preacher. So it would be good to have more and encourage.

**JS** - Oh, yeh, it always does. I'm an emotional sort of guy so I listen to that message by a lot of different blokes talk and yeh, it's very

uniting, I really do feel that most of the preaching at Duncraig pulls us into feeling a community together.

## Event

### 3. Do you consider the words of the sermon to be just the preacher's words, or the Words of God?

**BH** - Oh no, when someone is preaching from the Bible you can generally see if they've given it thought, and good preparation. I would say it would be God speaking through them. As long as they're preaching from the Bible, and considering the whole Bible.

**DS** - I mean, looking at 52 weeks of the year, that's a very difficult question to answer. There are definitely times when I think it's just the personal thoughts. I would think, probably more often than not, we would hope for ..... you know, that's humanity in the flesh and our imperfection, but I think that generally through the Holy Spirit, often regardless of where the speaker is at, then I would say that probably generally they're in the Will of God, and they've prepared and the Holy Spirit blesses their work. But I think the most important thing with the Church, I believe is primarily for Christians that the application of that is to listen, ....responsibilities to listen, so sometimes even if the words were not necessarily being blessed by the Holy Spirit at the immediate time and it's just the person's view, even those words can

be for the listener and a challenged by the Holy Spirit convicting me. And probably a part of preparation, like going along and saying, more than a cliché, Lord what are you going to teach me today, and try to hang on to every phrase. And there are some speakers where you simply don't get tuned in, they don't do that for you. For me personally I would say definitely about 70% of our speakers I find very interesting to listen to and able to apply as the Lord challenges me personally. Then it's up to me to allow the Holy Spirit to change me or not.

**WB** - I think both. You could be smart that whenever I disagree they're the words of the preacher. I think you're looking to hear the words of God. That's where you'd start. I think if there are things that you kind of have a little question mark in your mind, I think you would tend to push them to saying they could be the words of the speaker until I investigate it further.

**PT** - I consider that when somebody.....speaks the words of God. I consider them as coming from God. Even if it doesn't, the speaker might be having an off day or whatever, you sometimes do get that, I still believe that God has something in that for me – always.

**JS** - Words of God.

**a. What authority do you give the preacher then?**

**BH** - I would say we'd get a good 50/50 preaching I hear regularly. I would say a lot of preaching occurred on television would be more to the man's side, his experiences, just a general life sort of a thing.

**DS** - Well, I think, even that, being honest with you, that depends on one Sunday to the next. But I think my general view on that would be most times I would always start out with the view that this person has spent a long time preparing something before the Lord and I need to listen to what this is. Now, depending on where I'm at, from one day to the next, depends on how well I do that. So in that sense, I think there is great authority given to the person speaking. I don't think it's just a given.... That a person stands up and speaks and deserves the authority, I don't think they have the position in that sense for that, but I think most times it's fairly obvious as to whether they've really prepared in a way that ..... yeh, this is what God wants to say through them and it will appeal to some listeners more than others because that's the message for that day that God's prepared.

**WB** - I give the authority to the preacher in terms of what I know of them before they preach, to be honest. It's not as soon as they stand up and preach that I immediately give them any different credits to what I would as a person. So,

what I see of them as a person in every day life is the same authority that I give them when they start to speak. God is able to speak through them so I guess..... I need to think that through a bit. I think I still do assess people prior to the speaking, but having said that I need to be open to God speaking through them whether I have a high or low opinion of them.

**PT** - Responsibility. I give more to the Word of God than the preacher, and he's responsible for that. The authority of the preaching is quite high. More responsibility then you're more accountable before God.

**JS** - Okay, yeh. I'll give you an example. I was a young boy, I was the oldest grandson, and they would come down and say to me Jeff you have to come in and have lunch. That's the youngest grandson telling me this, and I said don't tell me what to do I'm the oldest one. They would say Gran said, Gran said. So I'm saying to the preacher, if he listens and learns his Bible and listens to what God has to say to him through the Holy Spirit and he becomes less. The preacher has to be available, that's his job. The words are human words in the example stages, giving illustrations to make it relevant.

**b. How does this affect your response to the message?**

**PT** - Sometimes the speakers do say things that I think don't seem Scripturally right, so I don't under-ride his authority, I believe what the Word says to us, so I try and discern that part of it. If it is the Word of God then I believe it is God speaking to me rather than the speaker. You expect the preacher to be speaking God's words, but you're also aware that you need to test those words against your own understanding of the interpretation.

**c. How does God use the preacher's words to convey his message?**

**DS** - Well I think probably interpreting it personally in some respects you know, reading God's Word, studying it and applying that to maybe a practical subject. Then personalising the message, relevant to them maybe, and as that application relates to me then I see the application of that.

**WB** - I think God uses His Word through the opening of the text of what he is preaching on and then his comments around the text.

**PT** - The Holy Spirit convicts you of it. Sometimes some messages you don't get anything out of it, but that doesn't mean that the preacher hasn't preached properly, just means that my reception hasn't been right. And yet sometimes I get



things from the messages that others don't which God has spoken to me about, so it's always my openness and my reception of it and the way the preacher.....it's applicable and relevant.

**4. Are the needs and situations of the hearers sufficiently taken into account in the preaching in your church?**

**BH** - Yeh, I think so. There's been some good range of subjects that help relationships and other ....., been quite good subject matter.

**DS** - I think there's more than enough information given pretty much every Sunday to have an impact probably on every person listening. I really believe the greatest responsibility actually stands with the listener, to do something about it. It's like a two edged sword, the responsibility of the speaker, preacher, the teacher, is obvious right, that's also a given that they accept that responsibility, they have a direct responsibility before God to prepare in all aspects of that, but I think once they've done that and delivered the message, or in the process of delivering the message, then that responsibility becomes equally 100% of every listener as to what they do with it – good or bad. I think there is enough in each Sunday morning there would always be something that every individual can learn. I think it's a little bit different in being able to say do our speakers obviously have an understanding of where a variety of people are at within the

congregation. To be perfectly honest, I mean I'm not sure that we know where a lot of people are at from one Sunday to the next. I think we live in a community that is a fairly normal general Australian community. It would be different if we had a quite obviously different groups of people, in different cultured people – I think that would be a little bit easier to answer.

**WB** - In terms of setting out a programme for the year, we try to factor that in and where the church is at and what we want to have taught to them. But then I guess, it is up to the individuals that take the speaking dates and to have a word that actually reaches the people in their individual lives. There is thought taken about that, but there is also I guess staying on a programme.

**PT** - No, I don't think it is – in general. Because visiting preachers that we have, we give them a subject, we believe that's what God is asking the church to do. They don't like that, they like a subject that they know about. ...and by doing that God can use it, He's sovereign, but sometimes it's not very applicable for the situation of our church. Sometimes it's not. Very difficult you know, for visiting preachers, understandable for they might preach 15-20 messages a year and to prepare properly for that many at a 2-3 week searching, you won't be able to do it. They don't know the people, some of them may not have been here for 6 or 7 months, they don't know the behaviour of the people and where the church is at. Some of the

people may come once or twice a year and it's not enough to be able to know where the church is at. Like, someone from the fellowship is more sensitive to that.

**JS** - That's a really hard one, because that's not really up..... that's really hard to say, because people should really come to church ready to hear God speak to them. There's nothing that the preacher can do about that because if they don't do that at home its really, really hard. What I suggest the preacher does is to ask are they ready for that. And that doesn't happen and that's not a good or bad thing, it's just that the preacher probably doesn't think about, he's thinking about what he should be doing and not getting people ready to hear it. He should know where the church is at, We had one guy once ask that: What can I pray about to give this message that would affect your church where it's at. We had a church of all new converts, less than a year old. So that was very discerning. Throughout the year I'd say about 50% know the needs, because we have regular preachers that know the congregation and know the elders and know where the church is at, so I'd say 50% of the time.

**a. Should they be considered at all? Leads to a "me" mentality?**

**BH** - Some people need it. A lot of people work things out and they rely on God and pray about something and read their own Scriptures and sort things out for themselves, but other

people need to be told and guided, given other people's experiences and learn from other people.

**DS** - I think if there are needs that are known and the speaker feels a conviction by the Holy Spirit that this is what I should speak on, then I think that's appropriate. I'm not sure whether people should try and identify needs. I think if they're given a subject then they should search for it in their passage and study what God wants them to say. I think it often becomes really obvious where people try and speak a general message to a crowd, but it's really obvious to some people that they're actually trying to speak to a sub section. I think it's okay to say that this particular point is for those who are unmarried, or this particular point may be for those who are older, or youth or whatever. Again, I think our culture has so many issues whether it being in our Western culture, but I think a lot of those issues apply to most.

**WB** - I think there's a balance in between there, I think that's probably one extreme. I don't think we would want to go there either, that we are very reactionary to what we read as people's needs, but I think certainly there needs to be that balance where we want to teach consecutively all of the Word eventually, but would also have an eye out to see what

are the current needs or issues that are relevant that people are asking about or wanting to know about.

**PT** - I think the Lord actually did preach for the needs, He really did. Where they were at, He spoke in parables, He preached for the needs of the people, but also He also instructed in .... of the Father, the holiness of the Father and in all these other things and lifted up the Father to a point where the people were able to worship the Father. And have reverence for him, and they themselves were lifted up as well, you know.

**b. How important is it that they are considered?**

**BH** - I think a Church has to take it into account, whatever forum they wish to share with those sort of things with people is up to the individual Church. But preaching is one of those, through preaching from the platform is one of those vehicles. I think it is important and has to be considered. I don't necessarily think we have to touch on every subject, but to take the needs of the congregation into account whichever the best way of conveying that is.

**WB** - It is fairly important that they are considered.

**PT** - I think it's very important. Very important. All churches are different, and at different stages, different situations, different challenges, so I think that's an important; It would be great for

a preacher that's coming and asking where's the church at, are there any needs that we can meet, or are there any issues, or is it just a message where it edifies the Lord, whatever it is. For us to be able to understand who God is, rather than a mere message. It is fairly important that they are considered. So it would be great if we could do that.

**c. What would happen if we ignored people's needs and situations completely?**

**BH** - People would leave the Church. People get disillusioned with Christianity. Other things would fill their lives. I'm not saying preaching is the only way to deal with the needs of people, but if there is none at all then I think they would move on and go elsewhere.

**DS** - Become irrelevant.

**WB** - Well there is a chance that your preaching then doesn't connect. There's a chance that you are operating and speaking without your audience being with you and following you. That's one side of it, but the other side is that it can open up a whole raft of things that because the speaker doesn't know, and if he truly was at the feet of the Lord, and saying Lord what is it that you want me to say, that the Lord uses the speaker to address needs that he doesn't know are in the

people but the people have their needs met. There's kind of that difficulty in a sense, that if you try to predict what issues or needs of people are going through and want to speak to those, you're kind of missing half the story. It's best to know as much as you can and take that into consideration in your preparation.

**PT** - I think, what would happen is that people would end up knowing things, but yet not actually being able to apply it. They're going to have knowledge, but yet not able to fill that need that they have. ....one of those things and be able to live a life where they're supposed to be living. Some people might have a need but not recognize that they have it. And when someone speaks about it or preaches to them they might be able to relate to that and say, Oh yeh, that's why it happened, or that's why I struggled to do it, or that's why that's happened that way. .... Or I didn't deal with it the right way and they get a conviction of it. And I believe in the preaching, all of it. Doesn't have to be in the one message – the whole lot, but it should be a variation of it.

**JS** - Yeh, well it wouldn't. It would be disheartening if they did that, but more from their point of view than God. God can do anything he wants with the people He wants to deal with, and I would say that sometimes messages work for people that

man didn't even know anything about. God can over-rule, but it would be good for the preacher to be that caring about who he is going to speak to find out to pray about that.

**d. What changes would you make in this regard?**

**WB** - I think I would need to be out amongst the people more and to know where they're thinking and where they're at. That's how I could improve it. The other aspect I guess is that when you 're preparing your talks, that you prepare them with a mind on how you can address some of these things rather than staying strictly say to the subject or text that you have in mind.

**PT** - I think one of the hardest things in preaching is actually identification. What the message of the Lord has given you to do and relate that to the people that are there, to be able to identify with them either through illustrations, the Word, or stories or whatever if you can just speak and just give information. But the hardest thing I find when preparing, is actually trying to identify that message to give people where they're at now, in that fellowship. And not so much speaking to that person, but speaking to me; how would I want the Lord to explain this to me? What is the Lord explaining to me? Like a guy used to say, it's shovelling hay off the back of a truck,



you know just feeding them, with hay. They're getting all this information - so what - they know that God wants them to obey him, they know that God loves them, they know that God wants them to worship, they know that God wants them to witness, they know that God wants them to do all these things. I mean it's nothing new, but how do you.... identify that with every single group of people where they're at.

**JS** - I know who asked them, but I don't know what they've been asked. Like Wes & Paul would ask people to speak on certain topics sometimes. I don't know if they're privy, but as a rule I think the preaching is excellent and I think it hits the mark and sometimes not speaking to me, which is very rarely, but I think it is pretty good, in the high percentage.

## Intention

### 5. What do you think preaching is intended to achieve?

**BH** - To assist in our Christian maturity. To help us grow and to know the Bible and be able to use that knowledge to further His Kingdom.

**DS** - I think it's to present God's Word in a way that people of all different levels of understanding and maturity and knowledge and intelligence can understand and relate to, you know, God speaks then, they are gifted and the role of the teacher is to take a subject and make it clear, make it plain, and I think that's what it's all about.

**WB** - It's intended to spark a change, to question why they're where they're at today, it's to re-evaluate perhaps having been presented something that they've not heard before or applied before or whatever, or being reminded of again that they may have forgotten about, in order for them to say, Oh, I can understand and see, or want to work on that aspect of my life as a result of having heard God's Word, touching on that spot. I guess you want the change to happen out of their own arriving at with conclusion to, so preaching I like to think of it as a stimulant to make them say I want to change, rather than I'm enforced to change because I've been emotionally swept up in lots of things.

**PT** - I think preaching is for the body of Christ. It's for their encouragement, challenge, and at the same time showing who God is, and at that time what God wants to speak to them about, what God would want them to do. Whether it is to praise them, to keep going, or to challenge them and encourage them as well and show them more of who God is.

**JS** - Okay. A change. A change in a persons life and that's not graded by anything, how big or how small. They should change to be more like Christ. It might be one sentence in the whole message for them, another bloke might be the whole message. So preaching is about life transformation, to be like Christ.

**a. What is the most important goal of preaching from your church's perspective?**

**BH** - I think going back to the last question, the answer I gave I think we all grow spiritually and into Christian maturity, and I think it's a good opportunity to learn more and become more mature as Christians. I see preaching also as a starting point to people's own study. So you hear a half hour sermon and then take that away as a good starting point to their own further study. I don't think preaching is the be all and end all of study, there has to be more, and through the rest of that study the whole process of knowing the Bible better and get to know God better and become spiritually mature.

**DS** - Yeh, I think it's to take a subject or a passage of Scripture and make it plain. Make it plain in the sense that's it's not just that oh, that's what that means, but in a way that it's convicting and making people change. It's all about enabling us to mature and grow and develop – that's it's purpose.

**WB** - Obviously we want people to be fully equipped, we want people to know the Word and to know how the Word fits in their life. There's a sense in which we're also wanting to provide knowledge and information that is useful for them, it may not be immediately applicable, but it may be down the

track that having known that, they can apply the Word in that situation. So there's a sense in which you want it to meet a need that's relevant for them today, but you also want it to be a Word that is able to be stored and called on by the Holy Spirit when there's that particular or other issue that they're dealing with later on.

**PT** - I would like the preaching at Duncairg to be what God wants Duncairg to know and to do. I know that all different Churches have all different areas that we need to work in, and other areas that we need encouragement. So there's things that we do well - keep on doing those things well, and not deviate from what the Scriptures or what God wants us to do in that area, and yet the other areas that we don't do so well to do them better. Some things we don't do at all, then we need to start doing them. So it's basically..... But it's very difficult in preaching to do all those things, because you've only got about half an hour and all you do is just speaking it and living it ...depends upon the responsibility of the listeners to go away and actually do something about it.

**JS** - Changing a persons life that would be the most important goal. But if you're taught something it can only teach you to do what is taught as such, so it's up to the person how he

applies the topic to their life. So the preaching at Duncraig is mostly about life transformation.

**6. How important is preaching in the life of your church? Why?**

**BH** - My thoughts on it. Probably the main focus of our Sunday mornings, so I would rate it as fairly high, probably rate it as very high.

**DS** - That's an area that I would say is very important, extremely important. I think that we do lack, in the application of that though, in being able to actually work through that. One of the problems we face is that, we hear a brilliant message and so on, and then quickly move into the world we live. We don't actually go and talk about it afterwards, but the reality of it is, I think we all know is that we don't. I think it would be of value in a structure where we can review what we hear, much, much more than what we do. We have a huge amount of information, I mean really extremely well studied and prepared messages that we believe are from God and I don't know that we do as well with them as what we should. I would like to see speakers do that much more than what they do. I think that's a very simple thing that speakers – some are very good at it, I'm sure a lot of them are very good at it and don't do it. Like a dialogue type sermon, even ask questions, like very quickly answer their own questions. I think that if a person, of the calibre that we generally have, even halve their message and spent the last 10 or 15 minutes, or maybe 10 minutes in dialogue and reviewing what they wanted

the person to learn, and then summarized that again in the last 5 minutes. I actually believe people would learn much more. I would say that about today for instance.

**WB** - Oh, I think it's very important, and it's probably right up there with prayer. I think it's got one of the highest priorities.

**PT** - I think it is important at Duncraig, that's why so much time is put into choosing the right kind of preachers, making sure that the message is correct and we plan ahead for it. The ministry, to correlate with the theme for all the year. So we view it as an important part. I don't think we view it as more important than worship, but as a whole package .....there's a few non-negotiables, or..... Bible studies, the preaching, the worship, the women's Bible study, and all that, we view that as a whole package in the really important stuff.

**JS** - A good message, yeh, very important. It doesn't necessarily have to be long but has to be accurate and in the sense of the context that it's been taken from, accurate from the physical ..... and it's probably the most ineffective way to change somebody straight away. A tough question because I think one on one is another way to really challenge people, but it is important because you can talk over a message.....

**a. Is this the right emphasis?**

**BH** - I think it's the right if we're doing it well, in that we're preaching from the Bible and doing it strategically. You know, targeting what the Church needs, I think it's the right emphasis.

**WB** - Yeh, I think it's right.

**PT** - I think we get a bit complacent about it sometimes. We could do better I think in some areas, you know, making sure that there's fellowship. Others who come in from various churches they say it's fantastic fellowship, they always like the teaching part of it, because it's actual teaching, other than just a message of someone's ideas, and they appreciate that. The teaching still has an important emphasis on it. Yeh.....

**b. What impact would there be on the church if there was more importance placed on preaching?**

**BH** - Um! Probably wouldn't change that much.

**PT** - I think, there is a fair bit of importance placed on preaching, in our Church anyway. I don't know about the other Churches. And most people attend it, even with the second service being very long. So, it would be great to see the people take more part into it, you know, this is God speaking, rather than this is George who sits next to me every Sunday. More of, this is God speaking, and it's not the person up there, and whether the person is doing it right or not, or he

may be stumbling through it whether, it's still God speaking whether I like it or not.

**JS** - I don't think it would affect it too much. But I think the balance is very good at the moment. I think the balance is spot on. In our two services I think it's a very good balance. We have a good time, people enjoy church because of church and the way it is structured and because we usually get a very good message.

**c. What impact would there be on the church if there was less importance placed on preaching?**

**BH** - I think a lot of people come to our Church for the preaching. I think the comments I've heard from other people is that they enjoy the preaching and the teaching and I think if that wasn't as it is at DCF, people would possibly go elsewhere.

**DS** - I think that's a bit hard to answer because it would depend on what you replaced that with. If you just took preaching out and didn't replace it with something, then it would be pretty ordinary. If you took 40% of the teaching out and replace it with what we've just spoken about, then I think that could have a very positive influence. Which I guess is more of another model of preaching, so I guess what I'm think of here, is if the people in the church would see we've got,



worship service stuff, we've got prayer in the life of the church, we've got my interaction with the Bible as an individual, then we've got preaching in the church and we've got small groups, and preaching is probably up there as one of the primary ones, so if that came down and we shifted the priority of some others up, what impact would that have? I'm a bit cautious to answer that in the way that sort of considering .....because I've not really considered that question to be honest. So in thinking about it out loud, I really believe that if the teachers had opportunity, and I'm really repeating what I said earlier, to maybe work through a home group situation, and they obviously can't, because you can only do it with one home group, I think, so in a sense you may be lifting a little bit more of the priority of the home group. I mean if you take the example of Jesus, it seems to me, He spent a lot of time talking with communicating with His disciples. Now, obviously there are times when He would have just sat and talked, and probably for hours and hours. I can't imagine him not dialoguing with them, I can't imagine that. If instead of just the preacher, we not reduce the importance necessarily of the Word of God being proclaimed, but added to that a conversation that continues through the week by the preacher facilitating questions into the small groups and things like that,

so that the whole Church is on that journey that may actually, to some extent, it might seem as though the up front preaching wasn't pride of place as much, but it lifts what we're doing at other times to fill that in. Well I think just recently one of the things we spoke about which I feel very important, is that just to simply give a question a week, if nothing more, a question a week from the message of the previous Sunday for people to consider either in a home or in their home groups. Now whether that's set by the speaker or not, that really depends on the speaker and circumstances of the day, but I think we, you know, we would get far more value out of our messages if we didn't assume we're just going to add it to our CD collection. The reality is that very few people listen to their CD's.

**WB** - It would be to the detriment of people's growth and maturity. It would be I guess, probably a lot more, kind of like a friendship based organization rather than a place where you grow and learn as a church together. So it would become a probably still a nice place to be in fellowshiping, but it wouldn't actually walk you away with anything that equips you or enables you to kind of grow stronger.

**PT** - I don't think it would be as strong as it is now. I think it would be watered down and weaker for sure. It's the only

time when people can actually listen and hopefully understand that it's God speaking to us as a body, rather than as individuals by ourselves, from somebody who may have some gift towards it and obviously be able to explain God's mind or what He wants.

**JS** - Look, I think it would be detrimental to Duncraig, This church has quite intelligent people that really think about things that are said from the pulpit. Also there are people who really enjoy a message that God has spoken to them. So yeh, I've spoken to a lot of people that really, really enjoy a good message. Preaching is important for the life of the church.

**d. Can a church exist without preaching? Why/Why not?**

**BH** - No, I guess preaching can be in any form; it can be preaching in a Bible study or preaching in lots of different forms, but the formal standing out the front, I think that's what people come to expect and they want to hear it, they want to hear from people who have done the study, learned people, and people who ...yeh. done that. So I think people come to expect it .....

**DS** - I would personally say, that it is really clear, absolutely teaching, is an absolute priority of the Church. I initially took your question as can the Church exist without the hour or half

an hour every Sunday morning at 10 or 11 o'clock, maybe they could without that if they thought of something else. But it is clearly a principle and a gift, clearly something that Jesus practised.

**WB** - I wouldn't think so, no. No, I don't think a Church can survive without preaching.

**PT** - I don't know, I've never thought about that. Yeh, but it might not be the preaching out the front, as long as it's some other way of the Word coming through. It would have to be, I don't you can have it without God's Word being proclaimed some how. Whether it might be people getting together in the fellowship or someone standing up and say look this is what..... It might be for 10 minutes or whatever, how God has spoken to me and that's .....

**JS** - I don't think it can, because as I said it stimulates conversation and it makes people maybe that don't look into their Bibles often as they should, to do that. It stimulates them and it should do. I stood up there in the pulpit three or four times and I've seen people who are not interested and there's nothing you can do about that. I don't know what else you can do. About 97% of people I think, it wouldn't work without a message, it just wouldn't.

## Response

### 7. How would the desired response to the preaching in the church be evidenced?

**BH** - Oh, that's a hard one, without embarking on some sort of study to see if it's being effective. Probably generally not measured that well. Probably at DCF it's not measured very much. I guess the feedback you're getting; the change you see in people; the life of the Church. You know, if you're seeing people going and becoming involved within the Church with more of a desire to serving, think they can all be evidence of them responding to the preaching.

**DS** - I think in the earlier stages generally I'm more engrossed about what's happening in my own mind, but I think what happens, when it comes to the stage where I'm actually concerned about the rest of the crowd, to be honest, I don't think it's generally going too flash. The greatest trigger for me on that one is when I think the person's spoken what he had to speak and then it's just filling in the time. I'm a real critic of time keeping, I'm not saying I keep it well myself, but I think people who are gifted to teach, because again a lot of what I've just said earlier in relations, I think we don't fully appreciate that there's a very small percentage of people in our congregation that can absorb probably much more than 20 minutes, and that depends on how well it's presented. So I would say generally my concern, and obviously given my position which doesn't help unfortunately, is

that I've become concerned about whether they have stopped listening because they stop being challenged by new information and starting to become either overloaded with too much information, or it's become repetitive. And that's why I think the dialogue and the breaking it up and giving people a chance to almost assess and re-evaluate what they're hearing by asking questions or hearing other people asking questions.

**WB** - The response ideally would be that people are moved and broken down, if that's required. They be moved in a sense that they can suddenly see the Word, can see where it fits in their life so as a result they, I guess, make positive action steps towards applying it and putting it into practice. I wouldn't say the barometer of a church that is being affected by the preaching is one where you look at the number of people who talk to the preacher after the service. I guess that that in a sense this is a visible and a fairly easy way to look at whether a speaker's had an impact on some people's life. But I think there's a lot more people that are touched and moved by it and don't come up and do that. So that's not really a barometer.

**PT** - Maturity, growth – not numerically, talking about people themselves, humility, changing attitude, see people actually changing. Probably putting their hands forward to do something you wouldn't expect them to, or probably some things you won't know,

could be family life, or the work place, special gifts - people that don't use them as much as they should. Suppose unity - there'd be a growth of more of involvement of everybody in the Church. If the Church's changed it would be like the Church of the Acts, everybody was involved. Everybody was doing something. There'd be a real conviction of the Holy Spirit working in their lives and they'd be wanting to be obedient to whatever area God has spoken to them.

**JS** - Lives would change, but you wouldn't know that immediately - you would see that over a period of time. But directly, I mean, half an hour after a message you would come off the pulpit and people would come up to you and say to you, I really enjoyed that message. You ask them a question, what part did you enjoy or what part spoke to you, and why? So you find out if they're really serious about it, or just being complimentary. Because they would talk about a specific thing. It happens more often that I've noticed, and I've noticed a lot, they will refer to something that was said a month ago in the pulpit, remember David said that, Alistair said this, remember Carl was here, remember this, remember that. It is surprising what is remembered and what's kept.

**a. Would this be an individual and/or corporate response?**

**BH** - Individuals. Individuals affect individuals, so ultimately it could have a flow-on effect.

**DS** - I would think that the preacher predominantly asks for personal change. I think that automatically reflects on the life of the Church, but I would think predominantly we're talking about personal change.

**WB** - An individual response.

**PT** - I'd say it would be individual, more than just corporate. But I would hope that is you'd get an individual response as a corporate body we'd be working together towards those things. Primary individual, might follow into corporate change.

**JS** - Depends on the topic, depends on what it is. Something like a subject like evangelism, I think as a community it would change because then you would get individuals that would stimulate what was said but corporately it would be acted upon, so that acting would actually turn into something, turn into then learning being more involved in the message that started it. Individually I think that people who have a certain gift of what's being talked about, whatever the topic may be, would stimulate to do something about it. A balanced response.



**b. Normally how long does it take to effect significant change through the preaching?**

**BH** - If the subject matter is preached on over a period time, quite intensively over a period, you could see quite fast results. If it's just a one off ..... don't know. Results are hard to see individually.

**DS** - What I think and what the realities are could be quite different. I think the experience is that it takes a long time. That's not necessarily how it could be, I think that has to do with the methods and time that we use. I guess we can almost get into this viewpoint that everything takes a long time to change and so maybe even our preaching and our whole methodology is governed by that assumption. I guess the only thing that changes that is the power of conviction that comes through the Holy Spirit and I think we've experienced that on occasions and I think it's generally speeded up when you have maybe two or three people who've come from maybe a fairly different life, not a different culture or anything, but just not Christian family or whatever, they've been converted and they've become excited about their faith. I think that generally is a springboard in our society that makes a huge difference in the life of the church and we've experienced

that. Obviously in other parts of the world and that there's a whole range of things that can happen very quickly.

**WB** - I think change takes awhile, because it's one thing I guess to be impacted by the preaching and then it's another thing then to see the way in which the Lord uses the Word and then would remind us again of it. I don't think the process is a fast one I think it's a slower one where we may have to learn the same lesson a few times over. I would say it's a slow process.

**PT** - The response is short, instant, but as far as continuing towards that response and encouragement towards it, you know, that week might do it, but then the next week you might just slowly..... What I believe is that if....., what happens with me that, the Lord's speaking to me that week during the preaching and I respond to it, but sort of like other things will come in and sort of slowly go back, but then somebody else will say something else two weeks later and I think to myself that's right. And if God speaks to me He may speak to me through 3 or 4 different people over a period of 6 weeks. I think it's more of a starting point and then a progression. Sometimes it is instant and you go, yeh, I'll sort it out and go before the Lord and humble yourself, or other times it's just more of an ongoing thing where the preaching helps you to be reminded of it and be an encouragement.

**JS** - I think it would take longer.

**c. Does the preaching programme reflect this anticipated response time?**

**BH** - Yes, I think, sort of. Consideration has been given when they've been putting the programme together, and yes, I think that the programmes that we've had in the last couple of years they've been gearing towards fairly quick responses that we're talking about.

**DS** - Yes, probably it does. I think the onus on that primarily comes back to the listener though. I am absolutely certain if we apply probably just half of what we're challenged by on any given Sunday morning and we all went out and did that, the change would be enormous and the change would happen very quickly. I don't think it's the preaching that necessarily is the reason for that I think it's our own flesh and how we respond to it.

**WB** - I think the preaching programme is an ongoing programme. I don't think that we say that on the basis of the preaching programme this year we're going to be at this spot by the end of the year. I think it's an ongoing programme where we address a certain theme of all subjects through the year and then we do another series the following years and we

in a sense will loop back and come back on themes or topics probably over a 3 or 5 year period depending on how frequently you come back to them. I always see it as an ongoing type programme rather than one that says we need to be at this point by the end of the year.

**PT** - I would view it as something like every month something comes up that we build on. We started at the beginning of the year and have that thread going through and hopefully at the end of the year we see our fellowship that is in that area at least, or aspects of it, understood it, have grown towards it and applied it more or been more equipped. Short term response isn't going to be evident, but will take longer.

**JS** - Yes, because we do a lot of series, a lot of themes and so they really think about it, and think about what should be taught from the pulpit.

**8. Is the desired response normally made obvious in the sermon?**

**BH** - Mixed. Sometimes yes, sometimes no. Generally speaking I think so. Yeh, generally I think it is. People would leave with a sense of this is the response it should be or look like.

**DS** - I think some make it more obvious than others. I guess that would be something that I feel, again, I would like that very systematic, I'm not a teacher as you know, but I think that, I like everything that is sort of clear and crystallised and people walk out without an excuse and I think the summary of messages i.e. 3 points, story of application, I don't know that we do that enough. The message and content is generally always great, but it's not often summarized as well.

**WB** - I think it's probably pretty frequently to be honest. It seems that we're fairly strong on presenting that this is how it applies in your life and this is the result of it. I think the speakers do that fairly regularly.

**PT** - Sometimes it is, they actually do review the points or give a challenge on one major point, but other times it's not so obvious. At the end you need to make it clear what God is speaking to them about, God has given the preacher to speak to them about. It is very hard to contain everything into half an hour, unless you put it into a package, so people can understand the point and the message as explained to them..... Break that apart and open it up for them so they can understand it a bit more.

**JS** - No, I don't think they do. I think they're more mature than trying to do that. I think they usually leave it up to the Holy Spirit, and that's not a cop out. They try their very best to get their point across. There is nothing you can do about a response - in my book. You preach

the message that you believe God would have you to and what the elders have asked you to on and you do the very best of your ability – and that's it.

**a. How would you describe the motivation that is used to illicit sermon responses?**

**BH** - I do believe that we preach from the Bible at Duncraig and motivates people to adhere to what the Bible is saying. I think that's a big motivator that's used. The Bible has authority and is the main motivator. Abeyance to God's Word.

**DS** - The main motivation is if we know that we're a Christian and we're living in obedience to the Lord that the motivation would have to be that not only would it be pleasing to him but our life would just become so much more purposeful and so much of a greater blessing. I think that would be the motivation that speakers would have in their mind that they're wanting to present. I'm not so sure that that's always that clear. If we were as passionate and excited about things as we should be we would leave our audiences hopefully with them seeing how can you not be responsive to this. I think there is almost an assumption because of again the culture that we're in, that maybe it relates back to one of your other questions that this is going to be a bit of a hard slog but these

people are not going to move on as I would like them to as the preacher, because I know what it's like when I'm sitting in the pew next Sunday as the listener. It's a long hard road unless I completely hand my life over to Christ and allow him to..... It's the thing that I struggle with the most and that is dying to my own selfish ambition and allowing Christ to live through my life, and now if I could push a button and do that, make it happen, and if we could all push that same button the Church would change over night. It does happen, but we probably experienced it to that extent.

**WB** - I'd like to say motivation is love for Christ. That's what I wanted to focus on. I think probably other motivations have been conformity to a Christian community, but I don't say that's the right one. Motivation, as a sense of obedience. Ideally I'd like to say that the motivation that's presented is always a motivation of love for Christ. We respond this way because we're absolutely in love with him.

**PT** - Challenge, encouragement, example from the Lord or from the Scriptures. Go to the Scriptures.

- b. What is the general balance between entice/invite and push/compel motivations employed?**

**BH** - Probably more towards the entice side of it, I don't think... yeh, I think it is fairly generally done. Probably  $\frac{3}{4}$  of .....

**DS** - Generally we come from a point of saying, if you respond in this way we would be blessed and experience the benefits of being obedient to Christ in our daily living. I don't think it's hard pushed like the old saying..... feeling guilty; I wouldn't agree with that anyway, I don't think that's what Jesus did ever. So He didn't do it, He spoke always about this is the example of blessing and gave example of people who were hypocrites and who were doing completely the opposite and encouraged people to say if you respond this way you'll be blessed. So I don't think that's the right way to go so I'm answering in that sense. But I think there's a third element to that though, I think there's a passive kind of speaking also, that says well, it'd be kind of nice if you did this, we probably are more on that line, if only you could involve in that.....

**WB** - I think it's more the second.

**PT** - For me I respond to the challenge, although I do appreciate the encouragement. But I respond to the challenge, so even though it's more confrontational I respond to it more. I think we do less of the challenge and more of the encouragement – at the moment. 60-40%; 70-30% type of thing.



**JS** - God is loving, but there are no grey areas. If you are in touch with that in your sermon, there is a loving and inviting way to talk to people. He is asking you, He's waiting at the door. And He says but when you open the door and you decided you want to see him, He is going to say I want this, this and this from you, and so you have to have a balance. It leans to the loving, it's close to 50/50, but I get a bit nervous because it goes to a bit softer and I don't want to see that. I want people to understand that there is a cost, because Western Christianity so many fall away because they haven't counted the cost of what is to be a child of God in the first place.

**c. Would you like to see any changes in this area?**

**BH** - No.

**DS** - The excitement and passion because of what has happened. We probably lack that a little bit. One is because we have people more often than not from a lay perspective, they probably relate much more to what it's like to be average Joe in the pew, it's probably a little difficult for them to lift themselves, I don't mean falsely, at that level, that's one reason. The other reason I think is that we have a Church culture that is not charismatic. So it's been said before, you

struggle between wanting to be honest and genuine, but therefore we lack maybe that enthusiastic charismatic kind of passion. If it's genuine passion and genuine charisma from Christ's living in us, then that would be brilliant. I would hope that the speakers don't feel inhibited by that.

**WB** - I'd like it strong on the first one. That we motivate people to a love for Christ and a relationship with him and as a result of that we're driven much stronger to do and obey.

The preachers' responsible for the Word of God that he's speaking, so maybe that's the way the Lord wants it to be. I think we're too much in the comfort zone, especially in the country that we're in, it's very comfortable and there's no challenges as much, apart from maybe financial, but that's not really a challenge, you still have a roof over your head, food on your plate, there's no persecution or anything like that as such, so they are comfortable. By going into a fellowship and continuing the comfort zone, and I know that encouragement doesn't have to make you comfortable, but it could be encouraging you to move in that direction or a challenge. So I think there should be more emphasis on the challenge because we are comfortable, and if you tend to be comfortable you think ah, this is a good message, that's good. Some people respond to that, but I don't think most people

do. You challenge them and then encourage them to advance – basically.

**JS** - Want to make sure that the balance is kept pretty even, not moving just towards the inviting, encouraging side. Really you're encouraging them if you tell them the truth.

## Review

**9. Is there any form of preaching effectiveness review undertaken in your church, by the leaders, and by the congregation.**

**BH** - Well, I don't think there is of the congregation, but I've got no doubt that it's discussed with the eldership, or other people that are privy to that sort of detail.

**DS** - Formal one, I would say no. Not formal. Any form, I would say we assess that every time someone speaks. Both individual as leaders and generally most elders meetings. How they've gone, how they haven't gone, where they should've gone.

**WB** - No there isn't. I guess there is an informal way amongst the teaching committee. We informally will talk about individuals. But no, we kind of talked about this for a little bit. It would be probably good to implement something. There are some key people that we think are mature and respected to survey or at least give feedback on. The overall teaching of the programme is done informally with the eldership, not with even the teaching committee. It's done more

in a sense as elders meeting together saying did we meet our objectives. In terms of the theme and the direction set for that year, did the preaching programme meet those targets. Still only done in an informal sense, it's not done in any criteria or bench marking or whatever you like to say. I guess we could, either through pastoral care in asking people - "How did you find this year's teaching?"

**PT** - We always do review – every 3-4 months we come together and ask how's it been. I do get response from the fellowship, we get letters about the preaching, and we respond to those. We have a continual review of how the preaching is going, the congregation is involved in an ad hoc basis.

**JS** - I think the elders would review who speaks. Certain members in the church are asked "What do you think about that person?" We have some very talented and gifted people in our church that don't always speak as much as ....., so I think the review panel is larger than you think. The leaders do the review. Some of the congregation is involved, mature people. Not everyone.

**a. Would such a process be desirable?**

**BH** - There should be.

**DS** - Per year, we probably tend to say we review it in our mind and cast our attention back and say yep we think it's been very good. Preparation's been good, the messages are from

God and are practical so on and so forth..... If it was analysed more formally in the way maybe you are encouraging me to think at the moment, it could be of greater value. Maybe I would have said some of things to you tonight because I actually feel one of the things we did in our earlier years, was we used to have a sharing time every Sunday. Doing that as a Church for those 15-20 minutes, made that Church service very much I believe, at a level that was saying here we are as we are, just people as we are. That probably enabled the speaker to sit down and say this is where we're at. Occasionally I do that sheet that was in our bulletin, I think that helps us if we do that. If as elders we did that as a matter of course and not try to lose track of the personal application, but realise that on the person first here, that I need to be challenged as a person. I think if we did that that would be helpful because if we found that we were always struggling we can .....application or main point, or was it meeting the needs of the church, or are people actually speaking on the subject they've been given. Are we systematically doing what we set out to do?

**WB** - Yeh, I think so. I mean it's always the case, whenever you're asking a broader group other than just yourselves,

you're open then to some lighter opinions than perhaps our own narrow view of things. Yeh, it would be good.

**PT** - It would be good to get a response from the Church and say here's a questionnaire about the last 6 months or so. It would be good.

**JS** - Yep, because we have a real cross section. Daniel is 17 years of age, 4 or 5 times in his whole life he's really got into the message. So he's sat there for four years and so you think what language do we need to speak for you to understand that.

**b. Would you like to participate in such a process?**

**BH** - Yes.

**DS** - Yes

**WB** - Yes

**PT** - Yes, I would.

**JS** - Yeh, Yep.

**c. Does this reflect on the effectiveness of the preaching in any way?**

**BH** - Yeh, I think they, um.... I believe they sit down and consider it carefully, yeh, with perhaps ..... speaking, but I think what they do do, does have planning for the future.

**DS** - Definitely. The fact that I think it would be helpful would mean that I think it could have a positive outcome. Yep, for sure.

**WB** - It would improve it. It opens us up to thoughts that could be representative of a larger group in the church than we think are impacted or really supportive of a particular teacher or a particular subject. We might only be representing a small part of the opinions of the church, by opening it for all you end up having some other thoughts encompassing the needs and situations of so many other people. You want to represent different ages and all that kind of stuff and maturity levels of the church and we're kind of looking from a fairly narrow view I guess.

**PT** - I think it would make us more aware of where the fellowship is at. We've got 4 elders and you've got different elders all over the place and they're actually associated with different groups of people, so we'd hopefully cover most of the fellowship and then we come back and ..... I know what Aled likes to hear in the message, and know that there are some people who like to hear what Aled likes to hear, which is different from what I like to hear God speak to me in a way. I know what Wes and Dave respond to, because I know what Dave says - ah, it was a really good message because of this,

this and this. So I'm hoping that that way it's sort of covered, because I've thought about that. How do we know where the fellowship is at, we the speakers/preachers have chosen the themes and titles or whatever it is, so who knows where the fellowship is at. It's pretty difficult. A generic one would be applicable to every church, but maybe get one we can work from, or ask the questions that you're interested in at particular times.

**JS** - Yes it would.



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