

Preaching in a Liturgical Context

Enoh Šeba

University Center for Protestant Theology Matthias Flacius Illyricus – University of Zagreb
enoh.seba@tfmvi.hr

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Abstract

Preaching or service of the Word represents a significant part of every liturgy or worship which is why this liturgical context is worth closer examination. In this paper, this issue is addressed through an overview of other contexts that, together with liturgy, shape the dynamics of preaching: historical, pastoral, and theological contexts. What follows is an analysis of four models of worship structure that differ in the way preaching relates to other elements of worship – Word and table as complementary (Roman Catholic perspective), Word and table as complementary (Protestant perspective), Word as the center of worship, and Word as a catalyst. The account of each model presents the key arguments used to support this particular understanding of preaching, the crucial features of the proclamation of the Word, its most significant hallmarks, as well as its main advantages and disadvantages. Toward the end of the paper, the author suggests an additional model, partly endorsed by the findings of his empirical research. According to this model, preaching can be perceived as a space of freedom, surprise, deliverance, and change within the wider liturgical environment as a space of security, stability, order, and identity affirmation. In conclusion, it is suggested that our understanding of preaching is enriched every time we manage to lift our eyes above the limitations of our church traditions and personal experiences, and that study of the liturgical context serves as a good choice for the beginning of such research.

Keywords: *preaching, sermon, homily, liturgy, worship*

Introduction

It is of course possible to approach the practice of preaching in its most general sense from many different points of view. If we devote some time to the perspective of interpersonal communication, we will immediately observe several seemingly simple, but far-reaching facts. First, just like any other act of communication among human beings, preaching never takes place in a vacuum. In other words, no sermon takes shape independently of numerous other (un)known factors that to some degree, more or less visibly, affect the process of its creation, the act of its preaching, and the reception and reaction of its audience. Also, the sermon contains a pronounced verbal dimension but still represents a verbal-nonverbal communication act. Furthermore, it is unmistakably an acoustic event, and it is impossible to overlook the fact that the sermon is also defined by its social component. Based on all this, we can conclude that it is correct to argue that preaching is always modified by a series of contexts. If this is so, then we can say that every one of those contexts “bears responsibility” for the communication effect of some specific sermon. Moreover, we will not be able to completely understand the very nature and dynamic of preaching if we do not consider contexts that actively determine the preaching act or fail to discern the mechanisms of their action.

After attempting to provide a very brief overview of the remaining contexts,¹ in this paper I will pay special attention to the liturgical context of preaching. The reason behind this decision is twofold. On one hand, a sermon usually takes place in the framework of worship and its length depends on and is restricted by other elements of worship so it is not difficult to agree that the liturgical context is the natural environment of preaching. On the other hand, there is a “contextual” reason, if you will allow my pun. Namely, it is customary in Reformation heritage churches (one of which I, myself, am a member) to see the sermon as the central, most important part of every worship meeting. Leaving aside the theological analysis of this practice, such focus on preaching as the decisive element that makes or breaks a “real” or complete worship service (i.e., gathering of God’s people to worship God) represents a danger – namely, one could lose sight of the big picture. If other components of worship play only a peripheral role, and that only indirectly, in the sense that they serve either as a preparation for the sermon or a response to its invitation, then it will be no wonder if eventually, the exact character of their interaction with preaching falls into the background. To achieve some balance concerning such a way of thinking, this text will mostly deal with the liturgical context. Carol M. Norén and her four models of the relationship between preaching and other liturgical elements of worship will prove to be of great assistance (Norén, 1992). The conclusion will contain another, alternative

1 We will use the classification done by Fred B. Craddock, one of the most important homiletics of the 20th century, as our frame (Craddock 2009, 32–54).

model of understanding the liturgical context, partially supported by my empirical research findings.

1. Sermon in Different Contexts

1.1. The Historical Context

Although at first, it might seem that the experience of listening to any sermon is unique, irreproducible, and isolated in the sense that believers who listen to it can only hear what the actual preacher is saying in that place and time, Craddock rightfully reminds us that such thinking is not entirely true. Every preached sermon is being “filtered” through many sermons that were preached from that or some similar pulpit. Every listener that has spent years or decades of his or her life hearing sermons will inevitably “sift” every new sermon through his or her memories and remembrances. This process usually does not happen consciously nor do listeners make a deliberate decision to intentionally compare the sermon they are hearing at the moment to some other sermon (or preacher) they heard before. Rather, the experience of hearing a new sermon inevitably creates echoes, evokes other voices, and brings to mind memories that were originally caused by listening to previous sermons. We can conclude that the believer, although physically present at the moment, never listens only to the sermon here and now, but always hears more than one. Most often this is a collage made of different pieces and influences from countless sermons, and probably of many preachers (Craddock 2009, 35–36).

It is important to be aware of this reality for several reasons. For example, the historical context described in this way is one of the reasons why the preacher cannot rely on the fact that the sermon he preached is identical to that which was heard by his listeners. Also, every sermon is woven into the history of listening, and the listener hears it at the moment in a specific and unique way precisely because he was previously shaped by all earlier sermons – everything to that moment had been preparing him to be the listener he momentarily is. In that sense, what comes to the forefront is the importance of continuous preaching ministry. Individual sermons achieve their potential mostly thanks to the long-term listeners’ involvement in the act of listening, and that can mean that preachers should take the historical context more seriously when they plan sermons in their communities.

However, the historical context of preaching does not only affect listeners. A very similar dynamic is at work on the other side of the pulpit. No preacher, either regular (such as a priest or pastor) or occasional, cannot separate his preaching from the influences, positive or negative, of many preachers, professors, and other

speakers whom he has listened to in his past, and whose words and sermons have shaped him in a certain way. Here also we can say that there is not always a sufficient level of awareness about the existence and far-reaching scope of this influence. Craddock (2009, 34–36) advises preachers to make the effort to recognize and become aware of different influences that affect the way they prepare and deliver sermons, but not by trying to compare or compete with others.

This does not exhaust the historical context of preaching. For example, what Craddock calls “the memory of the Church” surpasses impressions and recollections of individuals, preachers, and listeners, and reaches back across the centuries. Preaching has its tradition and the Holy Scriptures are very vocal about it – prophetic voices echo through the Old Testament, Jesus Christ proclaims the Good News, New Testament shows the birth of Christian communities through bold preaching across the Roman Empire – and this tradition is then multiplied and developed in the following centuries of Church growth. Every time a preacher steps behind the pulpit, he joins and prolongs this tradition, but also confirms that it affects every preaching act because it makes an indispensable part of the overall memory of the Church (Craddock 2009, 36–37).

1.2. The Pastoral Context

In most cases, sermons take place in an environment characterized by pastoral work. Moreover, when the preacher and the church minister (pastor or priest) are conjoined in one person, then this pastoral context is even more pronounced, and sometimes even explicitly stated during the sermon. Nevertheless, the presence of the pastoral context can become a delicate matter in situations when the shepherd, or preacher, believes that the tasks of preaching and pastoral commitments are at odds. How does one preach on Sunday to those who need pastoral care during the week? How does one care spiritually for those who have yesterday been given a message of repentance? Is it possible to “wield the two-edged sword of the Word of God and also tend the flock” (Craddock 2009, 40)?

In Craddock’s view, it is possible to step out of this apparent dichotomy if one changes one’s view. “In fact, at every stage from conception to delivery and beyond, pastoral functions and relationships enter into the preaching ministry” (Craddock 2009, 41). Experienced that way, the sermon can become an irreplaceable expression of pastoral care, but that requires paying thoughtful attention to one’s listeners. It is important in sermon preparation not only to listen to the biblical text but also to the congregation with its problems, conditionalities, and specific issues.² Reducing believers to passive recipients of a ready-made message, with-

2 The so called “turn toward the listener” is a decisive characteristic of homiletics in the second half of the 20th c., especially in the Anglo-Saxon world. For a brief overview of the period, see Šeba 2020, 29–80. A good example is the homiletics expert Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, famous for

out considering their needs and real-life circumstances represents neglect of the pastoral context of preaching. On the other hand, awareness of this context will begin by listening to the listeners – moreover, a preacher must begin preparing for every sermon asking: “What is it like to be in the place of the listener?” However, the authentic pastoral concern will not stop there. It will attempt not only to consciously include listeners but to activate “the priesthood of all believers” so that the listeners “are given room to accept the responsibility for their believing and doing” (Craddock 2009, 41–42).³ Finally, pastoral context means that listening to the listeners should continue – not only during sermons but afterward as well. A truly valuable sermon lives on even after the words from the pulpit have fallen silent. If it was prepared out of sensitivity to the actual state and needs of the community, it will prove to be a useful resource for pastoral work in times between worship services. In this way, it will be much easier to prove that the quandary about the possible incompatibility between sincere preaching and consistent pastoral care is unfounded.

1.3. The Theological Context

Certainly, we cannot have a thorough conversation about the contexts of preaching if we fail to mention the theological context. Since in different church traditions and circles one can repeatedly encounter tendencies that belittle the value of theology for everyday life and the practical work of the congregation, it is not superfluous to point out that being aware of the theological context can productively benefit preaching. I intentionally emphasize being conscious of the theological context because those who advocate anti-intellectualism in the name of “pure” love (or Scriptures), juxtaposing it to knowledge that “puffs up,”⁴ usually do not say (intentionally or out of ignorance) that every talk of God or work in God’s name is inevitably guided by certain theological assumptions. Furthermore, such depreciation of theology accompanied by support for an alleged atheological

articulating the need to exegete not only the biblical text, but the congregation one is preaching (in) to (Tisdale 1997), as well as Joseph R. Jeter Jr. and Ronald J. Allen who point out challenges the preacher faces when his listeners are not a monolithic group with a uniform listener profile and affinities. According to them, there are six components that have a crucial impact on listeners, and they are: age, gender, personality type, multiculturality, belonging to marginal groups and theological orientation (Jeter and Allan 2002).

- 3 For the analysis of the doctrine of priesthood of all believers as a biblical and theological basis for redefinition of preaching as a practice in which listeners should have a more prominent role, see Šeba 2021, 225–229.
- 4 A good example would be a recent sermon by a popular Croatian preacher, in which reading the Bible with one’s mind is presented as an activity which creates (T)heologians, while reading with one’s heart is seen as an activity which turns its readers into Theophiles. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VNibG6BRN4>.

approach represents the promotion of theological tenets of *certain* groups at the expense of dialogue and theological discussion. In that case, *such* theology truly is dangerous and “puffs up.” Also, its hiddenness increases the possibility that some type of manipulation will be going on in the background. Still, let us consider how conscious use of theological dimensions can add to the value of preaching. Again, Craddock’s insights will be of great help to us there (Craddock 2009, 52–54).

Firstly, theology and preaching are in a relationship of mutuality. From its side, theology oversees the faithfulness of preaching by offering different means, methods, and modes of thinking and by ruminating on the Scriptures and tradition so that it would not go astray under the pressure of time, public opinion, or false teaching. Also, the delivery of sermons requires different techniques that can become an end in themselves and thus overshadow the truth as the purpose of preaching. Theology is here to prevent that. Preaching, on the other hand, gives theology its *raison d’être* – when the church is fulfilling its mission of proclamation of the Good News, the work of theology is being justified.

Secondly, theology can play a corrective role since it can compel the preacher to deal with truly significant topics in his sermons. It is not enough to preach the truth: it is important to preach those truths that are truly worth preaching. There are numerous questions that sermons can address, but theology is here to point to those questions whose answers can significantly affect the community of believers on their way to eternity, provide them with signposts and help bring back those who have strayed off the path.

Thirdly, theology serves as a check on the language of preaching. Here we must quickly say that there is no doubt that the language of theology is not, and it should not be, the language of the pulpit. Theology needs abstract concepts and complex linguistic creations so it could comprehend and communicate the reality it longs to grasp. At the same time, a sermon yearns for immediate, tangible language that awakens the senses, evokes pictures and concepts, creates experiences, and does not hesitate to use direct speech. The use of such language undoubtedly enhances communication, but it can contain a snare – there is a possibility that the preacher will seem likable, but the content of his message will be devoid of permanent effect. This is precisely where theology can lend a hand by checking whether such picturesque and evocative language of preaching can be translated back into theological terms. Only the speech that can be re-said in the language of theology offers permanent teaching that is worth communicating in the preaching context.

These are, therefore, three out of four contexts that make up a nest for the laying of any sermon. It is time to turn toward the main point of interest in this paper, and that is the liturgical context.

2. The Liturgical Context – Relationship between the Word and the Rest of Worship

At the outset, it will be helpful to address some matters of terminology. First of all, what is the meaning of liturgy? The word *leitourgia* in classical Greek signified a public service, and in its religious sense, it was used to signify temple worship, i.e., cultic worship of gods. In the New Testament, the word *leitourgia* occurs about fifteen times, and it often signifies ministry or service, sometimes points to the Old Testament priestly cult, and sometimes to spiritual sacrifice. The early Church quickly started using this word for its Christian worship (perhaps even as early as in Acts 13:2), but it fell out of practice after Latin asserted its dominance over Greek. In the West, the word was not used again until the Renaissance, when it started spreading as the term for the Eucharist (or Lord's Supper), and then for the whole of Christian worship. This is the meaning that prevails to this day.

Without delving deeper into the genesis of mistrust that exists in certain Christian traditions, mostly in the so-called free churches, or Reformation heritage churches, it will be enough to point out that it originates, at least to a certain extent, from Luther's desire to reform the liturgy of the Roman Church, although it eventually led to something like the abolition of liturgy or at least to its divesting of outward, superfluous signs. In Luther's opinion, the sermon is the only act of worship Christ established for Christians to gather, exercise spiritually, and grow in godliness. In any case, several centuries later, the sermon or the service of the Word continues to find its natural habitat primarily in liturgy or worship. Although some will understand the term *liturgy* as something that carries connotations of ossified, unfree, and archaic worship, it is practically identical to the term *worship*, because they both signify the order in which worship of a Christian congregation takes place, regardless of its formality or "spontaneity."

Furthermore, if we want to explore the liturgical context to find out what the service of the Word looks like and how it functions in worship, it will be useful to find an appropriate definition of the term *Word*. Since I will soon be using Carol M. Norén's overview to explore different roles the Word has in the worship of different churches of our time, I will employ her definition of this term. This is how she phrases it: "'Word' is used to denote that portion of worship in which the written word (Scripture) and proclaimed word (sermon) both finding their source and center in the Incarnate Word (Jesus Christ), manifest God's gracious initiative and elicit the worshippers' response to this self-giving" (Norén 1992, 34).

Norén represents four models, and each one shows the liturgical context of preaching by observing how the sermon relates to other elements of worship. She notices that generally speaking, it can be argued that in the years since Vatican II, several aspirations regarding the structure of worship have been becoming ever stronger in the Catholic Church, but also in some Protestant churches that

stemmed from the Reformation (Evangelical, Reformed, Anglican, Presbyterian, and Episcopal Church). First, there is a tendency to find a better balance in the relationship between preaching and the Eucharist/Lord's Supper. Then, there is a tendency to find a more thoughtful way to incorporate preaching into the rest of worship, as well as a trend to introduce changes to make worship more participatory for the whole community of believers (Norén 1992, 34). The first two models are based on finding balance and complementarity between preaching and the Eucharist, and we will begin with the first one.

2.1. *Word and Table as Complementary – Roman Catholic Perspective*

In the modern liturgy of the Catholic Church, the sermon holds a clearly defined place and role. However, it was not so always in past – although it held some importance, it was nevertheless considered accidental to the Mass so that its omission was not seen as an infringement on the whole worship (Burghardt 1987, 108). The situation began to change after the Council of Trent, and especially after the Second Vatican Council. Although the liturgical renewal lasted a long time and encompassed wide geographical areas,⁵ one of its highlights is certainly the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum Concilium)*, published at the beginning of the Council in 1963. Here is what, among other things, it prescribes in relation to preaching: “By means of the homily the mysteries of the faith and the guiding principles of the Christian life are expounded from the sacred text, during the course of the liturgical year; the homily, therefore, is to be highly esteemed as part of the liturgy itself; in fact, at those Masses which are celebrated with the assistance of the people on Sundays and feasts of obligation, it should not be omitted except for a serious reason” (*II. vaticanski koncil* 1986, 52). What followed was that the sermon, just like communion, which was at that point granted to the laity, became a necessary part of worship on Sundays and higher holidays.

What does a typical Sunday worship look like inside such a liturgical tradition?⁶ Having performed the introductory rites of an entrance, greeting, and song, the priest will begin the celebration of the Mass. He will lead the people in worship by first greeting those gathered and then calling them to penitence. This is followed by prayers, singing of *Glory to God in the Highest*, and group prayer. At this moment, the liturgy of the Word begins and is made up of readings from Holy Scriptures. This is followed by the sermon, or homily, and the Nicene Creed. That

5 For a very useful overview of the liturgical movement, see: Haquin 2006, and for a somewhat more concise survey of the history of Roman liturgy from the 16th to 20th century, see: Pecklers 1997. A summarized outline of the liturgical restoration in the Croatian Catholic Church can be found in: Zagorac 1990, while a survey of the dynamic of appearance of church movements created in the wake of that restoration can be seen in: Baloban 2008.

6 A more detailed representation of the main parts of Mass can be found in: Pažin 2018, 92–135.

is when it is time for the prayers of believers. These prayers have been prepared in advance as the assumed response of believers to God's Word. It is only then that the other half of the worship begins, containing the celebration of the Eucharist. It all ends with concluding rites.

Let us now have a closer look at the relationship between the service of the Word and the rest of the liturgy. There are three Scriptural texts, together with a responsorial Psalm, that are read on Sundays, and this is mostly done according to a three-year plan of the lectionary. Reading of Scriptures plays multiple important roles: (1) It makes God and Christ present – The Roman Missal expresses it like this: “When the Sacred Scriptures are read in the Church, God himself speaks to his people, and Christ, present in his own word, proclaims the Gospel” (*Rimski misal* 2004, 29); (2) It prepares the faithful for the Eucharist part of worship – the Eucharist represents an act of thankfulness to God for his works, and the readings remind the faithful, kindling awe and gratitude; (3) Public reading during Mass brings about the announcement of the Word that is impossible to achieve through private reading. Furthermore, liturgical reform strongly emphasizes the primary importance of the Holy Scriptures: “Sacred scripture is of the greatest importance in the celebration of the liturgy. For it is from scripture that lessons are read and explained in the homily, and psalms are sung; the prayers, collects, and liturgical songs are scriptural in their inspiration and their force, and it is from the scriptures that actions and signs derive their meaning” (*II. vaticanski koncil* 1986, 24).

If we briefly turn our attention to the sermon, we can see that just like Christ is present in readings from biblical texts, so the preacher's speech about God in the homily represents God's speech to us. There is a visible connection between preaching and reading – they are both integral components of liturgy, while sermon usually stems from some of the readings (and very often appeals to all the texts read). Sometimes we find echoes of the sermon in the group prayer. However, what stands out is the fact that the homily itself always takes the form of a monologue and contains no possibility of active involvement on the part of the congregation, in the sense of a dialogical response, even though a great deal of liturgical restoration focuses on encouraging the faithful to participate in worship as fully as possible.

In any case, a homily is above all directed toward its relationship to the Eucharist. It awakens faith in the listener, and faith is necessary for one to receive the sacrament of the Holy Communion. In other words, preparation for the Eucharist leads to the Eucharist. Or, in the words of Schillebeeckx, what is begun in the liturgy of the Word ends with the sacrament of the Eucharist (Norén 1992, 38). It is important to notice here that preaching is most often focused on the second person of the Trinity, and the reason for this is very important – it points to the connection with the Eucharist prayer since it is by nature anamnestic or memorial. Therefore, if we wanted to simplify this relationship between the sermon and the

Eucharist in Catholic theology and practice, we could freely express agreement with this Rover's utterance: Speaking and listening prepare souls for the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, and the Eucharist prepares souls for a more fruitful hearing (Norén 1992, 38).

In conclusion, Norén thinks that it is still the case that the Eucharist holds a central place in worship, even though the Catholic Church has greatly strengthened the emphasis on the service of the Word. She lists the following arguments in support of this notion: (1) there is still no preaching during those Masses that take place during the week (not on Sunday and holy days); (2) the celebration of the Eucharist routinely lasts longer than the liturgy of the Word; (3) the laity is often under the impression that Mass begins only after the sermon, and that the offertory is the central element of worship (that is why in *The Constitution on Sacred Liturgy* we read the following: "The two parts which, in a certain sense, go to make up the Mass, namely, the liturgy of the word and the eucharistic liturgy, are so closely connected with each other that they form but one single act of worship. Accordingly this sacred Synod strongly urges pastors of souls that, when instructing the faithful, they insistently teach them to take their part in the entire Mass, especially on Sundays and feasts of obligation" (*II. vaticanski koncil* 1986, 56)); (4) there is an evident hierarchy in liturgical actions – whereas even a layperson can in certain circumstances give the homily, only a priest may celebrate Mass (Norén 1997, 39).

2.2. *Word and Table as Complementary – a Protestant Perspective*

If we were to run the risk of oversimplifying things, we might say that modern Catholics have recently rediscovered the value of sermons in the course of regular Sunday worship. Charles Taylor uses similar logic when he says that the Protestants are finding anew in the Eucharist a personal encounter with Christ, a source for the sense of Christian fellowship and social responsibility, but also a new awareness of the eschatological dimension of the Lord's Supper (Norén 1997, 39). Of course, due to a relatively great diversity of theological perspectives within Protestantism, it would be impossible to isolate one united perspective on the relationship between the Word and the table. Regardless, we can still briefly point to certain tendencies and frequent topics we observe among those churches that are increasingly leaning toward Sunday worship services that include preaching and the Lord's Supper.

At the outset, we must say that the liturgical movement did not only set in motion changes in the Catholic Church but that its motions created ripples in the Reformation churches as well. Norén reminds us that before the Second World War, these churches partook in the Lord's Supper relatively infrequently, and the ritual was mostly interpreted as a "memorial meal," emphasizing the "worthy par-

taking” which had a long-term effect on the isolation of believers, meaning that more and more people did not partake in it. Additionally, the ecumenical dialogue with other traditions did not touch on the matters of worship. This all failed to recognize the unity of the Word and sacrament in the worship practices of Protestant churches (Norén 1997, 39).

However, the strengthening of the liturgical movement in Protestantism brought about significant changes in the liturgical practice. Among other things, Wainwright (1997, 556–560) detects the following characteristics: (1) return to the Holy Scriptures, seen in the adoption of lectionaries containing significantly revised importance of Old Testament readings and in allowing biblical texts to present their witness more clearly; (2) renewed interest in the Church Fathers, especially visible in the acceptance of the eucharistic prayer known as *Great Thanksgiving*;⁷ (3) a stronger emphasis on the Church as a community where all members have their ministry, which is then seen in the revision of the initiation rite; (4) ecumenical activism, which came about as a consequence of efforts to change worship in ways similar to those mentioned above, which is especially evident in the work of the World Council of Churches and its Faith and Order Commission.⁸ In short, Protestant churches are increasingly interested in their liturgical heritage and have been rediscovering liturgical treasures of earlier periods of Christianity. Also, there is a growing commitment to understanding worship according to the concept of “royal priesthood,” which encourages participation from all its participants.

If we look at the current state of Protestant churches, we might, together with Norén, say that their worship services, unlike those belonging to Catholicism, definitely have more diversity in the practice of the service of the Word and the table, as well as an inclination to deviate from the regular order of worship. Norén believes that this has a double effect: on one side, it most certainly prompts more prominent participation of a greater number of believers, because spontaneity and sensitivity to contextual communal occasions play an important role in decision making. However, on the other side, this opens a possibility for worship to become a reflection of preachers’, or celebrants’, personal preferences, as well as to turn into what feels like disconnected and low-definition ceremonies. Besides, the situation is further complicated by the fact that Protestantism generally does not agree with the content, form, or style of sermons (Norén 1997, 40).

Be that as it may, theologies of worship in Protestant churches mostly think that the liturgy of the table is a necessary complement to the service of the Word – both the words of proclamation and the sacramental act of the Lord’s Supper fall

7 The description of the structure and parts of this prayer can be seen in: White 2019, 127–130.

8 It is worth mentioning here the so-called Lima liturgy and the document *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (White 2019, 130–131, 152–153, 186).

into the same God's revelatory and redeeming activity. However, it is interesting to observe ways in which arguments are made in favor of that complementarity and how their relationship is seen. Norén will say that some see a foreshadowing of this relationship in the post-resurrection encounter with Jesus on the road to Emmaus. In that encounter, the presence of the risen Lord is experienced through Scripture reading and interpretation, and then in the breaking of bread together (this pattern is later reflected in the liturgy of the early Church). Also, it is possible to find support for this in the practice of Reformers, who believed that every worship should include both the sermon and the Lord's Supper (Norén 1997, 41).

Life, ministry, and the passion of Jesus Christ also offer some possible ways of supporting complementarity. For example, it could be said that Jesus' preaching of the Kingdom would not have been complete had he not sealed it with his blood, or that his passion would have remained unexplained had he not interpreted it in advance through his prophetic ministry of teaching. Therefore, this "dual testimony" of preaching and Eucharist in worship helps us to constantly be reminded of what God did in Christ.

However, the complementary relationship between the Word and the table can also point to a dialectic between divine and human action. What takes place in worship is at the same time divine revelation and man's response to that revelation. Service of the Word and the sacrament of the Eucharist simultaneously represent God's service to us and our service to God (although it should be said that the former is their primary function). Furthermore, they are so complementary that preaching also has a sacramental nature, because the proclamation of the Word, albeit uttered in feeble and human words, not only reveals God but also produces a change in the recipient of the Word. This is how Mary Catherine Hilkert (1997, 192) expressed this: "Depth words – the words of the poet, the preacher, the priest – affect what they signify. They are audible signs of inexpressible realities. In the end, we return to Augustine's insight: sacraments are visible words; words are audible sacraments."

2.3. Word as Center of Worship

The previous two models have shown that worship is structured around the sermon and the Eucharist as its two focal points. We saw their mutual relationship as two different approaches to understanding complementary relationship dynamics. However, what should we do when the service of the Word is placed at the very center of worship, not least through the very fact that regular worship most often does not even include Lord's Supper? How do we determine the relationship between preaching and liturgy in this case?

As I have remarked in the introduction, in certain church communities, the sermon is seen as the most important part of worship. In many of these church-

es, we can discern some similarities and congruence in the structure of a typical worship service. For example, Sunday worship will quite commonly begin with a greeting followed by several congregational songs, that can, but don't have to be, interspersed by readings of biblical texts and a short exhortation or meditation by the worship leader. Somewhere in that segment, the leader will call believers to spontaneous and individual prayer, and then conclude with his prayer. After one or more congregational songs, it will be time for the sermon. The preacher will sometimes be the same person who has been leading the previous part of worship (this is more frequent in smaller congregations), and sometimes the preacher will only now come to the pulpit. Here we must add that most of the interaction between the person leading the worship and the congregation of believers takes place while this person is in the pulpit, regardless of whether it happens during the sermon or some other part of worship. The sermon will again be followed by a few songs, perhaps a report on the life of the community, and it will all finish with a concluding prayer and possibly a blessing.

However, despite conspicuous similarities among worship traditions of such church communities, Norén is right to warn that they have "quite different theological and pragmatic reasons" for such liturgical practice (Norén 1997, 43). Moreover, this is why it is not possible to unambiguously determine their sources, although we are mostly talking about contemporary churches that broadly share the common Protestant heritage. In any case, these practices trace their roots in the understanding that the Word holds a primary place in the relationship between God and us. "The sermon acquired its central role (as a ministry of the Word of God) in Protestant worship because of its relationship to the fact that the speaking God revealed himself in Christ. The Christ event is the good news, and this good news is spread around the world as the Word of God" (Immink 2014, 109).

There are multiple lines of reference to ancient biblical examples, and it is worth mentioning at least some of them. In the sixth chapter of Isaiah, we find God's calling of a prophet that could be schematically used to form a structure of worship: God's revelation – man's repentance and confession of unworthiness – new openness to the voice of God – man's response ("Here I am, send me!"). Another thing that is also often mentioned is the kerygmatic pattern of preaching in the New Testament because such missionary sermons took place unrelated to the clearly defined liturgical context. In 1 Thessalonians 2:13, the apostle Paul writes: "... when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers," which is to say that the oral proclamation of the Gospel represents the word of God and stirs up faith in believers. In Romans 10:17 we come across another connection between oral proclamation and faith in the words, "faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." It is because of this direct cause and effect connection between oral proclamation and the birth of faith that the sermon is seen as the crucial element of worship. In other words, the

sermon is given a central role not only because God spoke in Jesus Christ, but also because he continues to speak here and now through the preaching of the Word.⁹

The practice of worship in Jewish synagogues in Jesus' time, but also earlier than that, can also serve as the basis for worship patterns in contemporary churches. So, for example, the well-known beginning of Jesus' ministry in Galilee, recorded in Luke 4:14–30, was to a great extent characterized by Jesus' interpretation of the words he read in the Scriptures. A study of the earliest history of the Church suggests that first worship services probably followed that pattern, although it must be said that New Testament texts do not present us with decisive conclusions about the precise forms of first liturgical rituals.¹⁰

Regardless of what served as the basis for worship structure, the purpose of preaching has always been similar and has always attempted to interpret the divine revelation recorded in the Holy Scriptures to motivate new commitment among believers, which is why the immediate and (somewhat) measurable effect of preaching mostly mentions something akin to a greater readiness to serve and act practically. It is thus no wonder that the leader of worship is primarily seen as the preacher, the one whose primary task is to interpret the Bible. In communities where more than one person serves in leading or presiding over different parts of worship, the preacher is usually considered to be the “main” leader, the one who leads the service of the Word.¹¹

What happens in worship or how exactly does the liturgical context look like if the sermon is placed in the center of worship? First, the sermon often takes up a great portion of time, and thus a disproportionately significant share in the total length of worship. In this manner, all other elements are seen primarily as marginal concerning the sermon, and their value sometimes differs depending on their

9 It was Heinrich Bullinger, Zwingli's successor in Zürich, who coined probably the most famous expression of this conviction. In the Second Helvetic Confession (1566), he wrote: “*Praedicatio verbi Dei est verbum dei*” (Preaching of the word of God is the word of God).

10 For example, McGowan writes: “Worship’ language in the NT texts suggests a great deal about ethos or a Christian way of life, but relatively little about the specifics of distinctive liturgical practice or performance” (McGowan 2014, 7). A crosscut of modern historical and archaeological exploration findings about the earliest forms of Christian liturgy can also be found in Doig 2018, 1–19.

11 This hierarchy is very clearly shown in some official documents of certain congregations. In the agreement made between the Government of the Republic of Croatia and Evangelical (Pentecostal) Churches in the Republic of Croatia, Christian Adventist Church in the Republic of Croatia and the Baptist Union of Croatia, article 1 defines key terms, and it says there that the official term for a church minister who performs worship is “priest (pastor, preacher)” (Ugovor 2003, art. 1). The Statute of a local Baptist Church, an addendum to the Statute of the Baptist Union of Croatia, lists several ministries as requisitions for the establishment of a local church, including preaching (as well as autonomous managing of a local church and pastoral care). This all points to the fact that the ability to organize regular worship depends on the ability to regularly preach (Statut 2015, art. 4).

placement – whether they came “before” or “after” the sermon. Typical worship of some congregations might have more liturgical elements than the structure I outlined at the beginning of this segment – some regularly recite confessions of faith, listen to songs or hymns sang by a choir, collect tithe as part of worship – but all these elements can change places in a relatively flexible manner, and even be added or omitted. That is, all except the sermon. We can only conclude that in this model the sermon is the climax of worship, and all other parts are subordinate to it, in one way or another. A good example would be the prayers of believers which sometimes come immediately after the sermon so that they effectively function as its extension. Something similar can be said about the choice of the topic or biblical text for the sermon – when this choice is made by the preacher (instead of being prescribed by the lectionary or the liturgical calendar), then the use of all other worship materials serves the overall theme or the planned effect of the sermon.

It is interesting to observe what can be surmised about the liturgical context from the layout of the liturgical furniture, or the church’s interior arrangement.¹² Norén points out that churches that see the proclamation of the Word as the most important event in worship visually show this emphasis through the pulpit’s size, central position, and visibility. At the same time, the font and the Eucharist table, if they are there at all, are probably lower, smaller, and less central than the pulpit. The physical space where worship takes place sends a subtle, but the strong message – there usually is not enough room for the movement of believers, which means that the role of the laity is limited and *a priori* defined. This makes it easy to conclude that the sermon is something that is exclusively in the preacher’s domain (Norén 1997, 45).

In this worship structure, as well as in previous ones, the sacramentality of preaching is undeniable, but here the relationship between preaching and the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper can be seen only partially and in a limited manner because worship services that contain both the service of the Word and the Eucharist are relatively rare (in some church communities it is a common practice to have it once a month).¹³ Be that as it may, in an ideal scenario, this model emphasizes

12 James and Susan White point to a significant particularity of Christian places of worship in relation to other religions. They claim that the focal point of the Christian church is always inside, where people gather and where worship is taking place, and not outside “like in pagan temples that are built as monuments in honor of a god and which people are prohibited from entering” (White and White 1988, 16).

13 It is true that there are isolated calls to revise the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. Budiselić suggests that the Lord’s Supper should be understood as a communal meal in which God enjoys fellowship with his people, where the form of the celebration should be changed so that it would not be driven by “altar mentality” but “table mentality.” Therefore, it should be celebrated every Sunday, and its liturgical function could serve as a “corrective and a balance to the preaching” (Budiselić 2012, 159).

the prophetic aspect of preaching, and sees the preacher's speech as a supernatural act in which God addresses man anew. In the opposite, worse scenario, this model can serve as a disguise under which the preacher can manipulate a congregation of believers to agree with his (hidden) intentions (Norén 1997, 45).

2.4. *Word as Catalyst*

The fourth model that will be briefly represented is one we find in that sphere of the liturgical spectrum which is taken by different groups such as Pentecostal churches, various Charismatic groups, or some black congregations across the world.¹⁴ In Croatian culture, Jambrek named this model "Pentecostal-Charismatic" because it focuses on nurturing the relationship with God through the Holy Spirit, and the emphasis is on spontaneity and unpredictability this fellowship can be realized (Jambrek 2003, 270–271). The order and default characteristics of other liturgical elements are subject to believers' reaction to the Spirit's incentive. What seems to be a constant in such worship are invitations to conversion and re-commitment. In this sense, the sermon retains its importance, but it also functions as the catalyst for the second focal point of worship, and these are the voluntary, Spirit-induced responses and reactions to the proclaimed Word (Norén 1997, 46–47).

What can occur in such liturgical events that usually follow the sermon? Among other things: the act of conversion to Christianity accompanied by public and spontaneous confession of the newly gained faith, a decision to rededicate one's life to Christ, personal testimonies, laying of hands, and prayer for the infilling (baptism) of the Holy Spirit, as well as the exercise of spiritual gifts – mostly speaking in tongues and healing. Besides, there are some characteristics that we usually associate with the traditionally black expressions of faith – shouting (even during the sermon as an expression of agreement or motivation for the preacher) and dancing during the musical parts of worship.¹⁵ Here it is crucially important to understand that all these acts are considered to be outward signs of inner experiences that God himself, through his Holy Spirit, set in motion in believers.

14 For an interesting overview of specific characteristics of Charismatic-Pentecostal worship across the globe, with a special review of music, see: Ingalls and Yong 2015. It is especially intriguing to consider the attitude of different Catholic Charismatic groups toward liturgy. New church movements in Catholicism have inevitably led to "liturgical pluralism" and opened the question whether it is even possible to have liturgical reform without separating from parish communities and terminating liturgical unity, since these movements also go outside the usual worship space in the desire to affirm their own identity. Liturgy is also being "turned into an intimate or even spectacular fidei protestation," writes Žižić in his critique of new church movements from the perspective of liturgical issues (Žižić 2008, 466).

15 For a representation of the genesis of black liturgy and its influence on Pentecostalism, see: Vondy 2021, and for a theological background of black worship, see: Proctor 1986.

These experiences include justification, sanctification, conviction, or assurance (Norén 1997, 47).

It is commonly believed that this liturgical frame, with its prominent spontaneity and participation of as many believers as possible, does not have a lot of prescribed elements. It is generally understood that the only parts certain to happen are the sermon, prayer of the worship leader, and congregational singing, and, among those, only the sermon is given a somewhat fixed position in the actual course of the worship service. This is why it is assumed that Pentecostal worship does not even contain liturgical characteristics, an attitude frequently held (often with pride) by the very members of Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, or movements. However, in the practices of local churches, there are usually certain implicit, tacit assumptions about how the Holy Spirit will move and which of his manifestations will be acceptable, and every one of those communities is very good at detecting any deviation from that norm. Furthermore, Vondey (2021, 164) convincingly argues in favor of the claim that Pentecostalism “as a liturgical movement... exhibits a destructuralizing, flexible, oral, participation-centered, and pneumatologically oriented ‘open arrangement’ of worship, prayer, and praise.”

Significant indications regarding the relationship between preaching and liturgy can in this case also be glimpsed through the arrangement of the worship space. The pulpit, whether a massive, wooden piece of furniture at the center of the church or just a microphone in the preacher’s hand, always represents the most important part of worship equipment. At the same time, the baptismal font or pool and the Eucharistic table are either small or not visible to the congregation (Norén 1997, 47). These congregations often baptize adults, so their baptismal fonts are either covered and invisible during the regular Sunday worship or they are just not a part of the church space because baptisms take place in the open. When we talk about the table used for the Lord’s Supper, it is often moved or removed from the room if the Sunday in question does not contain the celebration of the Eucharist. What is specific to the structure of this model is that it often leaves a lot of free space for the expected response of the congregation to the sermon. This means that the front part of the room, most often exactly in front of the pulpit, will have enough space for those who respond to the so-called altar call,¹⁶ as well as for the church ministers, elders, and others who pray for them. It is not rare that this or some other space is taken by the choir members who regularly participate in worship through singing and are facing the rest of the congregation. All these things point to the importance of the sermon, but even more to the symbolic and physical space that this liturgy opens for the reaction to the proclamation of the Word, all directly prompted by the Holy Spirit.

16 For a short presentation of how this custom evolved in American congregations, cf. White 2019, 138.

Regarding the role of the preacher, he can, but does not have to preside over the whole worship. It is not unusual for someone else to lead the worship service until the point when the sermon begins. There is no commonly accepted term or title for that person – depending on the tradition, sometimes they are simply “brother,” “sister,” “evangelist,” “bishop,” or even “apostle.” It is worth noticing that the preacher does not only use the Bible to read from it (and this too is subject to change because Scriptures are sometimes read before the sermon, sometimes several times during the sermon, and sometimes the whole sermon is based on one verse) but also as a visible, physical symbol of authority.¹⁷ Therefore, it is not seldom that the preacher will hold the Bible during the entire length of the sermon. Norén reminds us that it often happens in this worship model that the process of Scripture interpretation and preaching is not derived from an intellectual encounter with the text only, but also the preacher’s personal religious experience, and there is always room for extra-canonical revelations such as dreams and visions. This activity is attributed to the Holy Spirit working similarly in the hearts of believers, illuminating the meaning of the Word and galvanizing them to godly responses that ensue after the sermon (Norén 1997, 48).

In conclusion, we can say that the connection between preaching and the liturgical elements that precede it is relatively loose. On the other hand, it can be said that the role of the preacher is very much to prepare the believers to participate in the manifestation of God’s grace which is understood as the direct (visible and audible) work of the Holy Spirit in the part of worship that comes *after* the proclamation of the Word. Of course, this is precisely where one can find a potential weakness of this model, and Norén is right to warn about it. Namely, amid pronounced congregational expectations that the proclamation of the Word will be followed by certain manifestations, it is difficult to avoid the tendency to evaluate the preacher and/or the sermon through the prism of visible and tangible results. For example, if after the sermon about renewal and revival no one answers the altar call by “going forward,” the conclusion will almost certainly be that something has gone wrong. Whenever liturgy is expected to be primarily oral, subjective, and spontaneous, every sermon that does not manage to produce enough catalytic effect and inspire visible expressions of godliness, receives negative evaluation from believers (Norén 1997, 49).

3. Some Further Suggestions

In my introduction, I have indicated that I will use Carol M. Norén’s model as a grid for thinking about the liturgical context of preaching, precisely because it

17 Craddock (2009, 232) also thinks that the Bible should always be read from the pulpit, even when the preacher knows the given quote by heart. This further establishes the connection between the read passage and the Bible which every believer can read from on their own.

appropriately considers the relationship between the sermon and other liturgical elements. However, it seems important to add that it certainly does not represent the only suitable model and that further study of this topic would require views from other perspectives. So, for example, Long offers a brief, but profound insight into the role of worship spaces, namely, how their arrangement and design communicate the kind of worship that takes place in them (Long 2001, 65–76). In his opinion, every church building reflects one of the three biblical models for the place of worship – tabernacle, temple, and house. Every one of them, among other things, represents an incarnation of some ideas about God’s holiness – the tabernacle communicates the idea of God’s holiness as well as his presence traveling through history. The temple communicates the understanding of holiness as merciful reign over all of creation, while the house communicates the holiness of God’s people, the body of Christ (Long 2001, 70–71). Undoubtedly, these three models also signify different worship dynamics, which have inevitable consequences on preaching, among other things. Readers interested in this topic would profit from studying preaching that follows this approach.

I will conclude this paper with another suggestion, the seed of which I have gleaned from Craddock’s observation that the relationship between the sermon and overall liturgy can be viewed as a relationship between the space of security and the space of freedom (Craddock 2009, 45). By coming to worship, God’s people seek the security of order, the comfort of a familiar environment where believers feel at home, where they can find calm and respite from unpleasant news and ambushes their everyday life throws at them. The stability that springs from acts of worship woven from decades or centuries of practice, strengthened by its journey through numerous generations of believers, means that liturgy, with its defined order and patterns of repetition (even when they are not characterized as specifically “liturgical”), satisfies one of man’s deepest needs. Contrary to this general atmosphere of worship, preaching can be the element that introduces variation in the existing order. It is there to overcome the familiar outline and freely open questions that will perhaps even invite believers to leave their comfort zones if the gospel requires it. Behind this idea, we see the presupposition that believers will boldly expose themselves to creativity and surprises that preaching can bring only if they have solid trust in the harmony of creation which we gain through liturgy.

Support for this understanding of the relationship between preaching and liturgy can be found in the research conducted by a Dutch pastor and psychologist, Hans van der Geest (1981), in the 1970s. Using 200 worship services as the sample, he was primarily interested in the short-term, immediate effects of sermons. From the data he gathered, Van der Geest concluded, among other things, that to be effective, a sermon had to possess three dimensions, two of which are the dimension of security and the dimension of deliverance. Put simply, believers keep coming with the hope that their basic trust and desire for security will be

solidified in worship. They want to find their ultimate security and rest in God. Although Van der Geest was focused on sermon effects, his presentation of results clearly shows that this expectation stretches across the entire experience of worship. However, besides this dimension of security, people also long for something that will open their way toward the future, something that will break the fetters of their present state. They want to hear a message of deliverance and hope. The role of the preacher is very important here because his “own discovery of the relevance of the Bible represents the only promising approach to that book, because without this discovery, without this subjectivity, the Word is devoid of its humanity” (Van der Geest 1981, 82). Only in the tension between these two dimensions, says Van der Geest, the listeners will sense that the Word is truly directed at them.

I have registered echoes of these observations in the empirical, field research done via interviewing believers of different Baptist churches in Croatia (Šeba 2021). The main goal of my research was to discover what they expected from sermons. One of the expectations detected was the “filling of spiritual batteries.” What believers mean to say by this is that they come to worship to confirm their deep convictions; that they come from the uncertain world to renew their strength for times ahead and once again hear that they are in the right place and that they are going in the right direction. They expect that the whole of worship will remind them of well-known truths and that they will be affirmed in their identity.

How important this repetitiveness can be for their spiritual welfare is aptly pictured in the following statement of a mature believer, who thus commented on the effect of repetitive hearing of important truths of faith: “But, it is good to remember, especially when the sermon is well designed... It encourages you again, and that sustains you for a while, a month or two, a year...” (Šeba 2021, 197). However, that is not the only expectation. Something of a counterpoint is found in the sincere longing that the sermon will motivate change. Examinees used different ways to express their awareness that comfort and security sometimes are not all there is. They understand that they can look for life directions in sermons because they know there are aspects of their lives that should be improved. In other words, the function of the sermon is to create in its listeners a desire for change and to nudge them away from a routine that does not bring true satisfaction and spiritual growth. Nevertheless, they also know that their desires to move forward, to change, and to free themselves from their current state and habits are sometimes too weak, and that is why they expect the sermons to “push” them and encourage them to move in the right direction. This state could be described as a fluctuation between “evident inertia and dynamic longing for change” or, in the words of one of the examinees: “Sometimes I am satisfied with the way things are going, and sometimes I’m not. Sometimes I would like to, but don’t feel like getting involved, and I think, ‘Let the sermon touch me somehow’” (Šeba 2021, 198–199).

Conclusion

Preaching can never be reduced to its context, and even less to only *one* context. However, even this short and selective portrayal of the liturgical context can, hopefully, clearly show how impossible it is to comprehend everything that takes place in preaching and what we as believers hope for when we preach and listen to sermons unless we try to raise our gaze above the immediate environment of our personal experience, the theology of our tradition, and familiar expressions of church life. Although it might sometimes seem confusing, I think that the diversity of the liturgical context can be critical, constructive, and enriching for preaching and worship as a whole. This is precisely why I believe that the four suggested models of the relationship between preaching and liturgy, as well as this counterbalance between liturgy as the space of security and preaching as the space of freedom, can stimulate some new and even more fruitful considerations of this matter.

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Enoh Šeba

Propovijedanje u liturgijskom kontekstu

Sažetak

Propovijedanje ili služba Riječi predstavlja značajan dio svake liturgije ili bogoslužja, pa stoga vrijedi pobliže proučiti upravo taj liturgijski kontekst. Autor toj zadaći pristupa tako što najprije donosi prikaz ostalih konteksta koji zajedno s liturgijom uvelike oblikuju dinamiku propovijedanja, a to su redom povijesni, pastoralni i teološki kontekst. Slijedi analiza četiriju modela ustroja bogoslužja koji se međusobno razlikuju po načinu kako se propovijed odnosi prema ostalim sastavnicama bogoslužja – nadopunjavanje Riječi i stola (rimokatolički pogled), nadopunjavanje Riječi i stola (protestantski pogled), Riječ kao središte bogoslužja i Riječ kao katalizator. Prikaz svakog modela sadrži ključne argumente u prilog takvom razumijevanju propovijedanja, najbitnije odlike navještaja Riječi i glavne obrise odgovarajuće liturgije, kao i njegove prednosti i nedostatke. Pri kraju rada autor iznosi i dodatni model, djelomično potkrijepljen rezultatima vlastitoga empirijskog istraživanja, prema kojemu je propovijedanje moguće promatrati kao prostor slobode, iznenađenja, izbavljenja i promjene unutar šireg okruženja liturgije kao prostora sigurnosti, stabilnosti, reda i potvrde identiteta. U zaključku se predlaže da se razumijevanje propovijedanja obogaćuje kad god uspijemo pogled podići iznad ograničenja vlastitih crkvenih tradicija i osobnih iskustava, a proučavanje liturgijskoga konteksta dobar je izbor za početak takvog istraživanja.