

Preface

*in principio erat Verbum*¹

“In the beginning was the Word” (John 1:1). This stands as the greeting above the gateway for all who enter St. Mary’s quad and St. Mary’s Divinity School at the University of St. Andrews, Scotland. It is fitting, of course, because all theology begins, continues, and ends with the eternal Word of God. And for nearly six hundred years, theologians have been formed and trained by this college in order to delve more deeply into that sacred story. Preachers, especially, are concerned with this Word and have been for centuries. It is from this Word that preachers have their life, their ministry, and, of course, their proclamation.

Yet the Word is not a static, timeless thing. As St. John continues: “The Word became flesh” (John 1:14). The Word, preexisting all things, took on tangibility and allowed himself to be handled and heard by us. Certainly, the fact that he is by nature *Logos* reveals a tremendous amount, but the fact that this Word took on flesh gives us an even deeper connection with the truth of his existence. It is to this Word made flesh that I would like to devote this work, searching particularly for his sacramentality—not only in the first century as

1. This, the Latin rendering of John 1:1, is the motto of St. Mary’s Divinity School of the University of St. Andrews, Scotland.

he walked and talked in Palestine, but even today as he engages the church in the fullness of his divinity and humanity by way of his *viva vox*.

This work demonstrates that some in the church, in failing to take the sacramentality of the word seriously, have produced and used incorrect models of preaching. In short, preaching has become a form of instruction, on the one hand, or a magical incantation of sorts, on the other, rather than an integral part of deepening our relationship with Christ by bringing about divine participation with Jesus in his living word as delivered by human proclamation.

Chapter one clarifies two terms critical to my investigation: word and sacrament. In this chapter, I demonstrate the way in which both word and sacrament have undergone a narrowing in definition. I then conclude that this narrowing has left the church with a very restricted understanding of preaching. I contend, however, that the word and preaching can, indeed, function sacramentally by bearing within themselves an innate corporeality.²

Chapter two examines specifically the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, the tradition within which I was formed. I propose that since the struggle that occurred within this denomination in the 1970s (referred to historically as “The Battle over the Bible”), those who remained in this church body have suffered from an over-adamant focus on the sole authority and inspiration of Holy Scripture at the expense of the christological and the sacramental. More specifically, I demonstrate that Holy Scripture has been placed above the person of Christ, making the formal principle of theology also the material principle. I compare this position with Calvin’s own theology of

2. Small portions of chapters one and two appeared in an earlier iteration as a conference paper given in 2010 for the Mariological Society of America (Joshua D. Genig, “A Forgotten Word and a Forgotten Woman: A Lutheran Attempt at Regaining the Sacramentality of Scripture by way of the Annunciation to Mary,” *Marian Studies* LXI [2010]: 52–72).

the word and preaching, demonstrating that, in fact, the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod’s theology has become “Calvinistic,” according to one common interpretation of his view. Moreover, I demonstrate how this reality has negatively affected the preaching of the Lutheran Church.

Chapter three discusses the nature of the eternal Word, as taught by Holy Scripture and promulgated by the church Fathers and the fathers of the Lutheran Confessions. I begin with an examination of the incarnation as the constitutive element of a truly *primary theology*. I then explore the classic confession of the incarnate Christ (*communicatio idiomatum*) and the way in which this confession has been further adapted by the Lutheran Church. Using Christology, I demonstrate that Christ, in his person and as the *Logos* of the Father, bears within himself an innate “tangibility” or “corporeality” that is still received today in his word. Moreover, I suggest that this ongoing incarnational life of Christ also implies an ongoing delivery of the fullness of his person—human and divine—that can only be grasped within the confines of a robust Christology. I then examine the account of the creation in an attempt to find the origin of this tangibility. In short, I explore the way in which the use of “good” and “very good” reflects the goodness of matter and, particularly, the goodness of humanity and our renewed potentiality for sacramental receptivity. Finally, I explore the way in which the goodness of this created matter finds its summit in the incarnation of Christ, which begins with the annunciation to Mary.

Chapter four discusses the “sermon” preached at the annunciation to Mary. Here, I give special attention to the way in which the angel spoke to Mary and, consequently, how his words speak to us in our own settings. These two levels of meaning display the adaptability of the word, which necessarily reflects its sacramentality.

Chapter five continues with an examination of the annunciation, particularly exploring the way in which the words spoken by the angel to Mary engage her personally and, in turn, deliver that of which they speak: the person of Christ. Moreover, I explore how the reception of this word by Mary grants her divine participation in that which the word delivers corporeally. This tangibility of the word necessarily reflects its sacramentality.

Chapter six explores the ways in which the Lord does to us what he did to Mary. In short, I examine the two levels of meaning as they relate to the Christian hearer today. Moreover, I propose that, just as the word granted divine participation to Mary, so it grants us divine participation with Jesus, the one who comes to us with corporality in the *viva vox* of the sermon.

Chapter seven briefly explores two academic works, both of which propose a sacramentality in preaching. I bring to the surface their weaknesses and the ways in which they, in actuality, fail to accomplish that which they propose. Additionally, I examine two contemporary preaching forms intended to aid in the preaching task. Specifically, I argue that they hinder the sacramentality of preaching rather than help it. Finally, I offer my own alternative for preaching, one that does not primarily seek to deliver information but seeks to draw hearers more fully into the life of Christ by speaking—corporeally and adaptably—his *viva vox*. Herein, I also offer two sermon examples in order to observe how one might accomplish this “Jesus form” more successfully.

In what follows, I rely heavily at times upon the work of a few sources, particularly the church fathers, the Lutheran Confessions, and Calvin’s *Institutes*. For ease of reading, unless otherwise indicated, all citations from the church fathers are from the English translation of the *Ante-Nicene Fathers* and *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*,³ all

citations from the Lutheran Confessions are from *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*,⁴ and all citations from Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* are from *The Library of Christian Classics, Vols. XX–XXI*.⁵ For other works, unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.

While some may question the need for such a work, I offer the following from Pope Benedict XVI's post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Verbum Domini* to demonstrate, in fact, both the timeliness and necessity of such an undertaking:

In our day the faithful need to be helped to see more clearly the link between Mary of Nazareth and the faith-filled hearing of God's word. I would encourage scholars as well to study the relationship between *Mariology and the theology of the word*. This could prove most beneficial both for the spiritual life and for theological and biblical studies. Indeed, what the understanding of the faith has enabled us to know about Mary stands at the heart of Christian truth. The incarnation of the word cannot be conceived apart from the freedom of this young woman who by her assent decisively cooperated with the entrance of the eternal into time. Mary is the image of the Church in attentive hearing of the word of God, which took flesh in her. Mary also symbolizes openness to God and others; an active listening which interiorizes and assimilates, one in which the word becomes a way of life.⁶

3. Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vols. 1–10, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2004); Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vols. 1–14, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2004); Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vols. 1–14, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2004).
4. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959).
5. *The Library of Christian Classics, Vols. XX–XXI*, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960).
6. Pope Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* (September 30, 2010), 27, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20100930_verbum-domini_en.html (italics original). For another example of Pope Benedict XVI's perspective, one might consider the pulpit at the high altar of the Vatican, installed under Benedict XVI's pontificate, which bears on its front an image of the annunciation to Mary. This is undoubtedly a reference, to a greater or lesser extent, to Pope Benedict's theology of the word and preaching.