

***Waiting for the other Word - God's advent in human preaching***  
**Considerations for a theology of preaching<sup>1</sup>**

**Hans G. Ulrich (Erlangen)**

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*The other God – on the grammar of God talk*

Preaching is one of the significant and constitutive practices in the Christian Church. Where there is preaching – there is the church, and vice versa. Otherwise there would be no church at all. This is the key to an ecclesiology as we find it in the theologies of the Reformation at least in its Lutheran shape. It is an ecclesiology, which is related to the political character of God's economy, to God's cosmic, global and particular regiment as it is always related to His word. To think about preaching is therefore finally not to think about the church or (in a different perspective) about Christianity and its place or conditions in this world, rather it is about God's very own way to be and to become present for us, human beings. The church and the Christian practices are not what we have to reflect, rather, what happens with it, why they are given – and this is a theo-logical question, a question about God.<sup>2</sup> To talk about God means to talk about a God who has decided to communicate with somebody, with his Son, the Spirit and - included in this communication - with us, human beings his creatures. He is God who therefore has to be encountered, not imagined; He is God who has to be heard and listened to. "We are such creatures with which God wants eternally and undyingly speak, whether it should be in wrath or in grace." (Martin Luther)<sup>3</sup>

This reflects the grammar of any talk about God, who is free and bound to us at the same time, even if we have to deal with the ways of God's absence or with the dialectic of His absence and presence, his silence and his word, as it is reflected in various theological and philosophical frameworks. God's will

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<sup>1</sup> For the following considerations I'm very much thankful to Friedrich Mildenerger. He is one of the very few Systematic Theologians who have genuinely included homiletics into their work on dogmatic. He has very much inspired the Theology of Preaching. See: F. Mildenerger: *Kleine Predigtlehre*, Stuttgart e.al. 1984, and: *Biblische Dogmatik. Eine biblische Theologie in dogmatischer Perspektive*, Bd.1-3, Stuttgart 1991-1993. For a further important contribution see: Ott, Heinrich (1965): *Theology and preaching. A programme of work in dogmatics*, arranged with reference to Questions I-II of the Heidelberg catechism, transl. Harold Knight. Philadelphia: Westminster Press.

<sup>2</sup> See for that issue: Hütter, Reinhard (2000): *Suffering divine things. Theology as church practice*. Grand Rapids Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub.

<sup>3</sup> Lectures on Genesis (1541), LW 5, 570 (WA 43, 481, 32-35 [on Gen. 26:24]; translated from Latin.

is to communicate: to start from here means to start with a Theo-logical proposition, which articulates the main grammar rule of any God talk<sup>4</sup> – a grammar, which is not fundamentally suspicious of the presence of God and doesn't think of a transcendence which may be the always present condition of our human existence, the condition of a moral existence or the condition of political coexistence and justice. A transcendence which is only thought of, which is not encountering us or even addressing us, a transcendence, which is thought of<sup>5</sup> or postulated cannot be that “opposite”, that “other” – if we, human beings, are really aware of that other God, and not simply for something beyond, hoping to meet what is not “ours”, hoping for that fundamental difference. The “other”, who is not ours, who is not within the prolongation of our intentions, this other God has to be an other “ego”, somebody who meets us – otherwise this God would not be our opposite, who encounters us, who meets as in His presence.<sup>6</sup> This other God must have a face looking at us *and* he must have a word for us – as it appeared in Jesus, the son of God. This is the core of the discovery of the Reformation theology insofar as it was a re-discovery of the word of God in its bodily positive appearance and encounter. This then will be the background of what has to be said about preaching.

The immense resonance on philosophies of difference, philosophies of the “other” from outside of our human existence, from outside the cave, outside the world of the selves – from Plato to Lévinas – can perhaps be seen as an ongoing reflection on this fundamental question, as we have it articulated in many philosophies not at least in Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of the transcendent God of morality, the transcendent God of moral justification, and in Feuerbach's reflection on the inescapability of our human condition.<sup>7</sup> Can this reflection of the other God really grasp a different God? Can it escape from our human attempt to be morally justified, i.e. legitimately bound at least by the attention to the other?

Lévinas remarks:

“That the thought awakened to God might believe that it goes beyond the world or listens to a voice more intimate than intimacy, the hermeneutic that interprets this life or this religious psyche cannot assimilate

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<sup>4</sup> See for a similar procedure in: Habermas, Jürgen: Die Zukunft der menschlichen Natur. Auf dem Weg zu einer liberalen Eugenik? Erweiterte Ausgabe, Frankfurt/M. 2002, pp 127-163.

<sup>5</sup> See Friedrich Nietzsche's critique.

<sup>6</sup> See for that reflection the discussion of Bernstein, Richard J. with Emmanuel Lévinas (1991): The new constellation. The ethical-political horizons of modernity/postmodernity. Cambridge UK.

<sup>7</sup> Löwith, Karl (1991): From Hegel to Nietzsche. The revolution in nineteenth century thought. New York: Columbia University Press.

it thinks precisely that it surpasses. This thought aspires to a beyond, to a deeper than oneself - aspiring to a from the out-of-oneself that the intentional consciousness opens and traverses. What does this surpassing signify? What physical character, we would like only to ask here how this transcendence, in its noetic structure, breaks with the out-of-oneself of intentionality. This demands a foregoing reflection upon the mode proper to intentionality in its reference to the world and to being.”<sup>8</sup>

The question for the “other God” is a crucial issue within theological traditions. On the one hand there should be held “Let God be God” in order not to miss God, and on the other hand that this God wants to be “ours”, our creator, our Lord, our father<sup>9</sup>. Can we disregard this presence of God, perhaps because of a kind of scepticism against either a God who will be “contaminated” by our human affairs<sup>10</sup> and or against human intentions? Do we disregard this positive presence because of an indispensable moral obligation and a moral intention not to be bound to anything?

Yet according to the biblical traditions God becomes positive, bodily present in his speaking – which is important for our understanding of the Eucharist as it is for our understanding of preaching. God’s positive presence is (as we can learn e.g. from Martin Luther) indispensable because it preserves us from any imaging of God (according to the second commandment)<sup>11</sup> and because it renders God’s comforting encounter in His positive way. It is essential for the biblical-Christian God talk that God who wants to communicate does it with his spoken word addressed to us. To say a word is an adventure to expose oneself, it is an exposure to be responsive, to be accountable. Talk is always a beginning insofar as it cannot be deduced from what is already said<sup>13</sup>, it is a risky beginning. A saying can interrupt what is going on as long

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<sup>8</sup> Lévinas, Emmanuel: *Of God who comes to mind*, Stanford, Calif 1998, 100.

<sup>9</sup> See for the biblical-theological context especially: Ricoeur, Paul: *The conflict of interpretations : essays in hermeneutics* (ed. Don Ihde), Evanston 1974

<sup>10</sup> See for that question: Lévinas, Emmanuel (1998, New York, Columbia): *Entre nous. On thinking-of-the-other*. transl. Michael B. Smith; Barbara Harshav. London; New York: continuum, 2006.

<sup>11</sup> This has to be discussed with Adorno’s fundamental reference to the second commandment.

<sup>12</sup> We have to learn this from Wittgenstein.

<sup>13</sup> We have to learn this from Wittgenstein.

as this word has not to represent, what is already there, or to reproduce, what is already said, but is spoken by someone (by an ego) to another person.<sup>14</sup>

Several theologians have called attention to Martin Luther's insisting on the beginning of God's advent by a *spoken* word.<sup>15</sup> It is the spoken word (according to Joh 1), which was by God and came to us. Oswald Bayer especially has stressed this essential element:

“... in distinction to every metaphysical construction of the triune of God, God's truth and will are not abstract attributes, but that which is orally and publicly related as concrete words of comfort to a particular hearer in a particular situation.<sup>16</sup> ‘God’ is grasped as the one who in the oral word promises himself to a person in such a way that this one can rely on him. God's truth lies in his faithfulness, with which he stands to his given word.

God has so bound himself in the baptismal promise given once and for all that the conflict-ridden person, strengthened and encouraged by the oral word of preaching, may subject God ever anew to the one, specific promise: He can, as Luther drastically says, ‘hold’ this promise ‘up’ - rub it under his nose - and in such ‘defiance’ of faith one is torn away from presumption as well as from despair and anxiety. ‘For this is our assurance and defiance ... that God wishes to be our Father, forgive us our sin, and bestow everlasting life on us.’”<sup>17</sup>

### *The theological location of preaching*

Here we find the theological location of preaching. Preaching is like other Christian practices, i.e. prayer, baptism, and holy communion in a specific sense unique. That practices are unique because of their relation to God who is the only God who has delivered his presence to a spoken word. Whatever

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<sup>14</sup> This has been developed especially by Hans-Georg Gadamer. We can follow him at this point. See for an excellent interpretation of Gadamer's hermeneutic: Risser, James (1997): *Hermeneutics and the Voice of the Other. Re-reading Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Albany: State Univ. of New York Press. Risser describes the transformation of the dialectical into a dialogical and communicative procedure within the practice of understanding.

<sup>15</sup> See: Lischer, Richard (1992): *A theology of preaching. The dynamics of the Gospel*. Rev. ed. Durham N.C.: Labyrinth Press, 60f..

<sup>16</sup> For that meaning of worship see also: Hardy, Daniel W. (1996): *God's ways with the world. Thinking and practising Christian faith*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark: “Instead of seeing worship either as the most intensive expression of a faith already arrived-at, in which the issue of truth is suspended, or as a free approach to mystery, we shall see worship as that special and primary which incorporates truth in its activity, and thereby defines and rests a reality which exemplifies this truth. Cognition, as we will see, finds its proper placing and methods within worship as it participates in the movement of truth and exemplifies it in the understanding of reality.” (p. 7).

<sup>17</sup> Martin Luther: *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper* (1528), LW 37, 366 (WA 26, 505, 35-37); translation slightly altered

has to be said of this God – it is decisive that he is the God who speaks. He is the speaking other. The theological agenda for our God talk then is not “God ‘and’ man” but “God and his people”, “God and his creatures”, “God and his children” insofar God speaks to them. God’s word creates his creatures and his people by his word. God is not the “other” being He is the other whose otherness is not defined in relation to us, because God’s otherness is bound to his spoken word.<sup>18</sup> He is not simply the other God - he is the God, who came to Abraham, calling him as he called Jeremiah, as he called Paul, and as he is calling us. We have not to think about a relation “between” God “and” man, because the “and” indicates an open space which has to be bridged, filled by God. Rather it is already dissolved in Jesus Christ. This contradicts any religious attempt to bring “God” and “man” together, beyond worship, beyond Jesus Christ. This is the dramatic question: how does God in Jesus Christ meet us, his people, how do we meet him, get His message, do we understand Him, our God?

The encounter of the other word is unique because of its concreteness, strange because of its un-exchangeable content, because of its untranslatable words, like a gift, which cannot be exchanged but has to be received in its uniqueness. The word of the other cannot be refused, it cannot be transformed or translated into another word. It is this particular word, which with then somebody has to live with - like Adam, Abraham, Jeremiah, Jesus, Paul. God addresses – according to Gen 2 – his first sermon to Adam: “You may eat ...” This is as Martin Luther argues the *original starting of preaching and the church*.<sup>19</sup> God preaches to Adam because their relationship depends totally on this communication: it is God’s way to get in touch with his creature as his/her “other”. And this is what He wants to be. So everything depends on the question if Adam hears and trusts God’s word. It really depends on this

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<sup>18</sup> See for that difference: Lévinas, Emmanuel (1998): *Of God who comes to mind*. 2nd ed. Stanford Calif.: Stanford University Press, 68-69. See also below.

<sup>19</sup> “And He commanded him, saying: Eat from every tree of Paradise, (17). but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil do not eat.’ Here we have the establishment of the church before there was any government of the home and of the state; for Eve was not yet created. Moreover, the church is established without walls and without any pomp, in a very spacious and very delightful place. After the church has been established, the household government is also set up, when Eve is added to Adam as his companion. Thus the temple is earlier than the home, and it is also better this way. Moreover, there was no government of the state before sin, for there was no need of it. Civil government is a remedy required by our corrupted nature.

... But it is useful to note also that God gave Adam Word, worship, and religion in its barest, purest, and simplest form, in which there was nothing laborious, nothing elaborate. For He does not prescribe the slaughter of oxen, the burning of incense, vows, fastings, and other tortures of the body. Only this He wants: that he praise God, that he thank Him, that he rejoice in the Lord, and that he obey Him by not eating from the forbidden tree.

Luther, M. (1999, c1958). Vol. 1: *Luther's works*, vol. 1 : *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 1-5* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). *Luther's Works* (1Mo 2:17). Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, p.104.

risky, adventurous communication that God meets Adam and vice versa, so that Adam does not get lost. He would get lost if he would not stay within the continuity of that story.

It is a *spoken* word, which opens up that communication, which creates that communication. Martin BUBER – as a differentiated philosophical tradition<sup>20</sup> - stresses the priority of the spoken word. He argues that the spoken word is something, which tends not to remain with its author but to leave him for the other. It is his character as a message. A message is the origin of any further word – not to communicate because of any needs (there have been no needs), but to get a message from him, to be touched by him and not left alone. This is the origin of that hope for a further – surprising - word of the other.

This is the story of Job. He in his desperate situation is not interested in any explanation, he is not interested in any wise interpretation, even when this might be a correct explanation as Job's friends try to offer him. Job's whole desire is focussed exclusively to a spoken word from God himself, breaking through what is already said. Job insists, that God should say any word, He should judge. Only this would be for him an adequate consolation – the encounter with God that makes him sure that God hasn't forgotten, that he is still with him following a shared story, whatever this story may be. This is what any word of God is about: that the story is still going on and that God himself is loyal to this story. This is the kind of consolation what Job is after.<sup>21</sup> He is not interested in any attempt to show him his place in an "order". He is interested if there is still a story going on in which God is involved. Only a spoken word could give proof for that.<sup>22</sup>

Starting a message, inventing the message - this is God's very own work, the always present beginning of His economy contradicting other economies<sup>23</sup> as

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<sup>20</sup> It reaches from Plato to Gadamer. See: Pickstock, Catherine (1998): After writing. On the liturgical consummation of philosophy. Oxford UK ;Malden Mass.: Blackwell Publishers; Risser, James (1997): Hermeneutics and the Voice of the Other. Re-reading Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics. Albany: State Univ. of New York Press .

<sup>21</sup> See for that topos, which is also central for Luther's theology: Ricoeur, Paul (1974): Religion, Atheism, and Faith. In: Ricoeur, Paul: The conflict of interpretations, ed. Don Ihde. Evanston: Northwestern University Press (Essays in hermeneutics), pp 440–467.

<sup>22</sup> Job 42:5 "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, But now my eye sees You." Ricoeur argues that this "seeing" of Job is the fulfilment of an immediate hearing of the logos.

<sup>23</sup> See for that issue: Ulrich, Hans G.: Wie Geschöpfe leben : Konturen evangelischer Ethik, (Ethik im theologischen Diskurs; 2) Münster 2005.

the economy of desire<sup>24</sup>. This is the word of the other. It sets the difference - not between one thing and another, between one place and another or one meaning to another – but between Him and us, in order to present us, to establish us – “our” other. (The most fundamental – founding – action is according to the first commandment: not other God, no “other” as “our” God.)

God had to come in a most particular way: the God of Abraham and the father of Jesus. They have met the other God – because they have been confident, indifferent to this His particular “other” word given to them: “and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form, as a dove, and a voice came from heaven, ‘Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased.’” (Luke 3,22). Like Jesus, Abraham has been overtaken by the spoken word of the other: “After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, ‘Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.’” (Gen 15:1). The word of the other has overtaken Abraham. When he trusted this word – this was his “righteousness”. This is the beginning of a new story, not expected, not even hoped for – it is the beginning of the other story, the story with the other God.

This, roughly, is the core of a God talk, which holds together God’s independence in his beginning to speak to us, and his adventurous communication and making himself responsive. At this crucial point of God’s adventurous advent our human preaching is located as it is reflected within Scripture and theological traditions. God makes himself responsive because of His beginning to communicate with us. His word cannot be deduced from what is already said, this would not be a responsive word, it would not be an exposition of Him, it would be either representative for what is already said or an infinite account, which never can be answered – and which would therefore be morally invulnerable. Because of the same logic human preaching has nothing else to preach than solely God’s word – our preaching lets him preach. Only his preaching may touch the hearts without manipulating them, only God’s preaching may comfort them not to feed them with surrogates.<sup>25</sup> How is it possible? How is it a matter of hermeneutic and homiletic advice? Luther’s answer is that we have to preach solely referring to Jesus Christ, solely through the grammar of his work – addressing his work to the hearers. It is then the encounter of Christ’s work which is the ~~other word – because only~~ this addressed to everybody and only this is the

<sup>24</sup> See the critique by E. Lévinas. He contradicts to a hermeneutics which follows the logic of desire as it leads Gadamer’s reconstruction of the Socratic (Platonic) hermeneutic. See: Risser 1997.

<sup>25</sup> See for this issue: Meuser, Fred W. (2004): Luther as preacher of the Word of God. In: McKim, Donald K. (Hg.): The Cambridge companion to Martin Luther. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press (Cambridge companions to religion), pp 136–148.

this addressed to everybody and only this is the “other” word, because it let us escape from our strategies of a morally self-justification.

*God’s word of justice*

The theology of the Reformation has seen here the focus of the biblical tradition. It is God in his *justice* – i.e. in his faithfulness to his community<sup>26</sup> – who wants to communicate with us. God’s justice is his faithfulness to his creatures, the loyalty to his people and his responsiveness to his children. Where the proof, the probing of God’s justice is at stake there is worship: there is a worshipping celebration of this God who wants to communicate with his creatures, who wants to call and rescue his people and who wants to reconcile and comfort his children and to live with them. This is the economy of God’s rescuing and reconciliatory justice. This involves “law and gospel” in its unity. Otherwise there would be no meaningful worship at all, or worship would be the most paradox action because we would celebrate a representative surrogate or even worse ourselves. Worship is about this dramatic proof – how will God communicate with us, how will he be present in his justice? Worship is in this respect distinct from the pagan attempt to get in contact with God, to make God present, or to establish a representative for God, perhaps a language representing him.

The biblical worship is about God’s advent in his word spoken by him. This word cannot be occupied it has to be responded. The response indicates the understanding. The biblical grammar as it is in various forms reflected within the biblical tradition is bound to that logic following this unique positive presence of God as it is responded within the worship of his creatures, his people and his children. Their worship is not a beginning it follows his beginning, His invention with his word. This is reflected when our worship begins with saying “In the name ...”.

This differs from procedures of religious representation.<sup>27</sup> To lose more and more confidence in representation of the transcendent is the character of a time without religion as Bonhoeffer has announced it. It is a time, which prefers an empty deity, an empty other, an empty face, anonymous. To worship yet means to respond to an obvious presence which cannot be disregarded whatever the attempts may be to neglect or to replace it. The “word”, God’s word

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<sup>26</sup> Rad, Gerhard von: *Theologie des Alten Testaments I. Die Theologie der geschichtlichen Überlieferungen Israels*, 2.Aufl., München 1958, pp 382-387.

<sup>27</sup> We have to discuss the logic of “representation” again with Paul Ricoeur and with Michel Foucault’s analysis of the loss of the logic of representation within the new “modern” sciences on language, life, and economy..

is already said, and even to repeat what is already “said” reminds us for the presence of God to which we have to respond.

*The encounter of God in his word*

We find this disposition of God’s advent in worship in its dramatic form reflected within the biblical tradition. Worship is about that encounter, it is about that advent – reversing whatever transcendence we, human beings, may expect or desire, as it is articulated in Psalm 4: “There are many who say, ‘Who will show us any good?’ LORD, lift up the light of Your countenance upon us” (NKJ Psalm 4:6) The prayer is saying: God may encounter those, who are intending to see any good, or even to see “the good”, God himself may instead become present. This is the prayer for the right worship. It locates worship at this reversion or our intention to God’s coming. Worship is about this reversion to God’s advent. God is expected to communicate, so that he becomes accountable – instead of us. This is the reversion of any moral justification relating to “the good” or getting “the good”. The light of God’s countenance – this is the way of God’s advent, God’s coming presence encountering our intentions and questions, overwhelming human desires – as we find it in Job where God encounters Job with his finally spoken word, with his speech on His economy in its inconceivable fullness (Job 38-39).

The biblical location of worship is focussed where God is expected to speak, where he is expected to become present in his word, as it is articulated in Psalm 130:

- 1 Out of the depths I have cried to You, O LORD;
- 2 Lord, hear my voice! Let Your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.
- 3 If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, o Lord, who could stand?
- 4 But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared.
- 5 I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in His word I do hope.
- 6 My soul waits for the Lord More than those who watch for the morning -- Yes, more than those who watch for the morning.
- 7 O Israel, hope in the LORD; for with the LORD there is mercy, And with Him is abundant redemption.
- 8 And He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

Worship happens at this interface between waiting in suspense for Him and His coming, fulfilment, between listening to what is already said by Him and about Him and hoping for a new spoken word, a new saying, between remembering the story with God and His beginning a new story. What is trans-

lated into “In his word I do hope” is literally again “waiting for”, “expecting” God’s word, knowing that he has spoken the word of forgiveness several times. But this word has to be spoken anew. This is not because of an only actual realisation of a meaning but because of the need for a personal address by this God who cannot be substituted or represented because he is the address of our human – sinful – living, and not a moral instance. This has to be held not because of the “personal” character of the relation between God and man, but because it concerns God’s justice and his decision to communicate.

Worship is like Abraham’s encounter with the three men promising him and his wife an heir (Gen 18) – a worship between his experience and a new beginning, opposite to his experience and any hopeful perspective (Rom 4). Worship is like Abraham’s story with Isaac: when Abraham had “laid him on the altar, upon the wood” (Gen 22) he didn’t stop listening, he still was waiting in full readiness for the other word – and then “the Angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, ‘Abraham, Abraham!’ So he said, ‘Here I am.’” Abraham is worshiping first of all in listening. What would have been happened if he would not have been aware of the other word!

### *Preaching justice in Christ – and becoming just*

This location of worship as it is especially bound to preaching. It is the place of God’s encountering and of God’s interruptive advent in order to live with his addressees – in justice. Justice – God’s justice is His faithfulness to His creatures, His loyalty to His people and His responsiveness for His children. This justice fills the empty space of a morality, which at best is a general readiness for any other, intending to be moral, but is not the ground for justice to the other. Self-sufficient morality has to become interrupted by concrete, positive faithfulness, loyalty and responsiveness for the other. Preaching is about the appearance of this justice, it is the praxis of this justice, which is the essence of God’s economy – it is embodied in the advent of Jesus Christ. Preaching is at the interface between encountering the spoken word of God’s justice and self-justification in any morality, it is at the interface between receiving God’s word of justice and becoming just to the other, between God’s becoming responsible and accountable to us because of his word and our responsibility for the other. God’s spoken word is in its beginning not a verbal event but this creative opening of a communication – which is beyond any morality, but receives an ethical contour and finitude of life.

This spoken word is addressed to the hearers in order to set them free of pursuing their attempts to assure their life, its sources, and its meaning, to set them free of self-justification – so that they turn to the other, become aware

of the other.<sup>28</sup> This is the dramatic turn induced by God's advent in his word of justice, his faithfulness – the dramatic turn from God's liberating justice to a new way of being just to the other, i.e. to be aware of his needs and to encounter him. This is reflected in Psalm 82 – the psalm, which is according to Martin Buber the psalm for the 20th century. This psalm is about God's speech addressed to other mighty Gods who had have to do their just duties, therefore God asks them to do justice, however, they don't hear and they are not aware of the other, they remain anonymous. They do anonymously wrong against the other, not present for them, not facing them. Buber remarks, that Kafka has described this kind of world as ours: "Kafka describes the human world as one which is given over to the intermediary beings, with which they play their confused game. From the unknown One who gave this world into their impure hands, no message of comfort or promise penetrates to us. He is, but he is not present."<sup>29</sup>

Preaching justice means presenting, practicing God's word of justice. This may be supported by the insight in aspects of a speech-act theory as Oswald Bayer<sup>30</sup> and others have argued. This is, however, more than that: it is important to describe preaching – as we attempt to do here – as the place of the appearance of God's word of justice. Here we have to think beyond the phenomenology of the "other". We have to turn to the phenomenology of the *new creation* within our preaching and hearing of God's word. The new creation appears where "justice" replaces the given existence of such sinners who are bound on their self-justification, who are bound to their ego and its "other", which doesn't recognise the other ego. And this new creation begins with a speaking other "ego".<sup>31</sup> Preaching is the unique place in the world where this is at stake. To hear (and to see) needs a transformation, a new creation. This is according to the biblical tradition. Preaching is at the interface between creation and the new creation. The hearers of the word become *creaturae verbi* – this belongs to the grammar of Reformation theology. This includes a specific hermeneutic: the hermeneutic of the "other word" (*verbum alienum*). Close to that is a hermeneutic – like the concept of Hans-Georg Gadamer – reflecting the phenomenon of understanding through the event of a permanent creative transformation within a dialogue or a conversation.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> This is the disposition in Martin Luther's *The Freedom of a Christian* 1520.

<sup>29</sup> Buber, Martin (1997): *Good and evil, two interpretations. I. right and wrong II. Images of Good and Evil*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 30.

<sup>30</sup> Bayer, Oswald: *Promissio. Geschichte der reformatorischen Wende in Luthers Theologie*, Göttingen 1971.

<sup>31</sup> See the discussion of Richard Bernstein (Footnote No 3).

<sup>32</sup> See a description of Gadamer's hermeneutic that way in: Risser 1997.

Preaching the word of justice, however, is different from that hermeneutic because it is not the place of any “event” of understanding but the “advent” of God’s inventory reverse of human intentions and the economy of desire. Gadamer’s event of understanding opens up an infinite movement of meaning following the desire for what others have to communicate. The advent of God’s other word, however, will reverse the movement into a finite new way of living within which the “other” is present as somebody who needs something definite, whom I have to encounter and who should not be appropriated. Living in this coexistence means all what understanding is about (Ps 82). Not to understand means to become unjust. In this coexistence of understanding and justice there will be disclosed the world of the needs of the other. From there they may follow a further listening for a further knowledge – but justice, the practice of justice comes first.

*Eucharist – beyond morality – bodily worship*

Preaching is not the only location or focus of worship. Eucharist, where God’s presence in Christ and the community with Christ are celebrated, is a different topos, however (particularly in the Lutheran Tradition) including preaching the word. Eucharist is where God communicates with his people, through and within the body of Christ. It is about the appearance of the body of Christ – the appearance of the other body. This is beyond the relations of responsiveness and accountability. It is beyond the logic of a “to-be-for” the other facing him in his bodily existence. The Eucharistic reality is the opposite of that moral, demanding situation of facing the other.<sup>33</sup> It is more than the encounter with the other word. The formula “word and sacrament” (when we follow the Reformation theology) holds that this is a unity – a sacramental word and a word-bounded sacrament, but there is still a distinction between preaching the word and celebration the sacrament, between God’s freeing interruption of moral justifications and God’s bodily presence in his word, between creative enactment and celebration.

The communication within the body of Christ is the positive, finite exploration and probing of God’s communication with his people. It is the positive bodily presence of Christ continuing his incarnation into our human reality by his kenosis into the elements of bread and wine. This again is God’s exposing action, delivering him-self to a new creation. This makes his real presence, because God doesn’t retain anything beyond or behind which belongs only to him. This is the positive opposite to the intention for something “other”- it is

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<sup>33</sup> Here there could be some discussion with: Purcell, Michael (2006): *Lévinas and theology*. Cambridge.

the positive opposite to that intention. Luther's theological point here was primarily this reality because otherwise it would not be a sensitively perceptible fundament of trust, the comforting other.

*Worship – a unique location of God's public presence*

This fundamental reflection – following the Reformation theology - may come into our mind when we try to talk about preaching or any other basic Christian practices. According to the unique logic of the presence of God, we have to be aware that all these practices are not simply there but belong to the “worship” where they have their unique location. “Worship” presupposes that any reflection about transcendence, religion, or God relates to a concrete venue – a topos – where what we may call “religion” is practiced and where really happens what our reflections on practices are about. Christian theology, however, includes in this respect a specific point. Worship is the *unique* place, it is a “heterotopos”, where it is at stake how God will communicate with us, human beings, how God will dwell with us, will be among us so that no human being is left alone. This heterotopos (not utopos) is not the (dialectic) other side of reality, but the other topos within reality.

There are different theological locations of worship at different interfaces within God's economy, within the different practices of worship – and one includes the other one. They follow different ways of God's communication with us, His creatures, His people, and His children. None of them can stay without worship none of them can remain in a “private” relation to God. Worship is per se public because God is characterized by his will to communicate with his creatures, his people, and his children.<sup>35</sup> In order to understand preaching theologically we have to consider its location within worship in all the dimensions of God's economy as it becomes present for his creatures, his people, and his children. The practices of worship belong to different locations, which altogether constitute the topology of God's economy. Preaching is one of them.

God is not simply there, he is not anywhere, but he wants to meet his creatures, his people, and his children. This is the logic of incarnation (becoming a bodily existence) with the consequence that God gives up his absolute

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<sup>34</sup> See for that issue: Hütter, Reinhard (2000): *Suffering divine things. Theology as church practice.* Grand Rapids Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub.

<sup>35</sup> Purcell, Michael (2006): *Lévinas and theology.* Cambridge: Cambridge University, 51: „But, the God whom monotheism intends - the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob - has no private meetings. Or, in abstracting God from engagement with the human, one reduces God to an abstraction, accessible to and through thought, an abstraction in which the very transcendence of the infinite is compromised by the finite.”

“otherness” as it appears in philosophies, which look for a specific intervention of “the other” interrupting our human existence as it is bound to the existing world, cleaving the world of beings. This interruption of the absolute other, however, is different to the biblical God’s kenotic positive advent, it is different to the reverse movement from God to us, to his will to communicate with his creatures, indeed interrupting their intentions, but – more than that: willing to stay with them, and therefore bodily present, accompanied by his bodily positive word<sup>36</sup> – a word so bodily and concrete that it is more than an encounter it provokes to participate – a different, new reality.

Joh 1, 11 He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.

12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: 13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. 14 And the Word became flesh and *dwelt among* us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

This is the description of a personal bodily worship – in opposition to mere intentions and to desires to find God anywhere or everywhere. It is the bodily encounter of God – different to any spiritualizing way of worship. Here we have to consider the work of the Holy Spirit as it is bound to the other word.<sup>37</sup> This has been the core of protest within the theology of Reformation not only against enthusiastic movements but even more than that against a church, which does not encounter Christ in his bodily existence because it claims to “have” his body. This kind of religious representation – without the drama of a new creation - is the other side of the coin of spiritualizing God’s presence. The encounter of Christ would not provide comfort, it would not provide a resistant positive “other”. Comfort – in German “Trost” – has to be related to a trust-worthy positive, speaking vis-à-vis – this is the core of that theology of preaching which follows this logic. We find it expressively in Luther’s theology and in his own preaching.<sup>38</sup>

### *Hermeneutics for the other word – hermeneutics of the verbum externum*

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<sup>36</sup> See also Rom 12,1. Bayer, Oswald: Leibliches Wort. Reformation und Neuzeit im Konflikt, Tübingen 1992

<sup>37</sup> This would need a extra chapter on the pneumatology of the Reformation theology. See for that: Asendorf, Ulrich (1988): Die Theologie Martin Luthers nach seinen Predigten. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht.

<sup>38</sup> Asendorf, 1988.

This is God's risky adventure of becoming and being present. His risk is that we may miss him not because we are within the limits of our human existence but because we are already occupied by our intentions or even in a different "worship", worshipping ourselves, perhaps the "other" side, "our" transcendence. Preaching as we have said is located where God communicates with his creatures, calls and transforms his people, and comforts his children. His communication, His calling, and His comfort reverse our human ways of getting the other word. The crucial point is that this will happen, different to the story of the young rich man (Mt 19). Listening to Jesus' preaching, getting the other word contradiction his intention to gain eternal life, the young rich man missed God's call, because he was already occupied.

Preaching is at the encounter with this other word. The hermeneutics demanded here has the task to let appear this "other" word in its *positive* appearance, not in a universal moral obligation for the other and not through the idea of an infinite world of meanings, to infinite possibilities of meanings. The task of preaching is to let any "given" word as we can read it in Scripture and its interpretation become an occasion for this "other" word, become interrupted or broken by this other word. The preacher's speaking provokes this other word. This kind of hermeneutics is found, where preaching opens up a listening to the other word, to the *verbum externum*, the word from outside, the external word. It the word, which has to contradict what seems to be said, it has even to contradict the written "text" and his readers, it has to interrupt this liaison or conspiracy. This word from outside is the word of God's justice, his faithfulness, loyalty, and responsiveness. Any proposition, any story within our preaching has to follow this grammar. It has to communicate the message of God's faithfulness, loyalty and responsiveness.

This has been reflected within the theology and hermeneutics of the Reformation. Its theological recovery was fundamentally related to the discovery of that finite *verbum externum* – because this other word is the only word, which can transform people, can comfort us with what is not a reassurance or a repetition of ourselves. Martin Luther practiced this hermeneutic and homiletic in his sermons. They may therefore appear apart from all homiletic variability monotonous. We have to ask, how to describe, how to learn this hermeneutic of the *verbum externum*. It is a hermeneutic which has to describe how to preach in order to let people hear God's judgment, God's calling and promise.

This needs a debate about the difference between various hermeneutics. There is a paradigmatic difference between a hermeneutic of encountering the

word<sup>39</sup> and a hermeneutics of infinite possibilities of meaning. Following this theological perspective we have to discuss a hermeneutic bound to a primary “text” (Paul Ricoeur), an original text prior to any further texts or spoken words. This, however, will be still different to a hermeneutics according to the hermeneutic of comfort (*verbum externum*) and transformation (*creatura verbi*) in Luther’s hermeneutic. This is a hermeneutic aiming at the transformation of our perception – the presupposition for understanding and exploring of God’s will (Rom 12,2). A hermeneutic for the awareness of the speaking other must not separate the word of God from its narrative context<sup>40</sup> – on the contrary: it has to be aware of the exploring of God’s will in the ongoing story and to stay in accordance to the new beginning of God’s story through his spoken word. The hermeneutics according to the Reformation theology is different also to a hermeneutic which shows understanding as an infinite movement towards new possibilities of meaning within which then appear the limits of human understanding. James Risser summarizes the point of Gadamer’s hermeneutic:

“The wholeness of tradition is more regulative than constitutive of experience, for every speaking is a new voice. And thus in every speaking something comes into being that had not existed before, that is to say, new possibilities of sense emerge from within the tradition itself. Like the kinesis of living being, the movement of tradition repeats its own dynamis, and more importantly, this unfolding of possibility does not come from a sphere of an already delineated essence. If such were the case possibility would not be higher than actuality. If such were the case the totality of sense would be nothing other than a prescribed set of possibilities, and thus the merely indeterminate as such. The contemporaneousness of every interpretation, the repetition of its possibility, is imbedded in the multifarious mixture of past and future, which opens up to a whole new field of possibilities. The inexhaustible depth found in every interpretation must be understood in this context: the infinite is a function of the finite and not vice versa.”<sup>41</sup>

There has to be discussed the encounter of that indefinite movement of understanding and God’s own finite word – opening up his own economy to human beings who are not subjected to a dialectic of infiniteness and finitude.

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<sup>39</sup> See for some aspects in Luther’s hermeneutic: Bayer, Oswald (2004): Luther as an Interpreter of Holy Scripture. In: McKim, Donald K. (Hg.): The Cambridge companion to Martin Luther. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, pp 73–85.

<sup>40</sup> See for that critique Paul Ricoeur.

<sup>41</sup> Risser 1997, p. 138.

(From here follows the notion of the *claritas scripturae*.) Theology contradicts to an apotheosis of infiniteness be it the infiniteness of meaning, economy, or bios.<sup>42</sup>

*New creation (creatura verbi) – exploring God’s will*

Preaching is at the interface between peoples listening to a sermon and God’s advent to that worship. Preaching is the test if there will be people, who let themselves created anew, called anew, gifted anew.

“The sermon itself is, therefore, a saving event. When God speaks, things can never be the same again. God’s Word touches the hearer, condemns, offers forgiveness, appeals and draws. No one can listen in cool detachment on the perimeter in a neutral stance. One cannot go away from preaching in the same relationship to God as before. ... When the word about Christ is preached, God has spoken and one answers yes or no.”<sup>43</sup>

This saving event includes the ethical meaning of preaching. Preaching has not to address a universal morality, which is already there, perhaps an always given responsibility to the other. The young rich man (Matth 19) will be confronted not with the moral demand of merciful deeds for the poor, but to let God change his life, i.e. to let God work in his justice on him as Jesus did. Discipleship is about that way of living. Preaching is the entrance to a different worship, it does not presuppose any disposition rather it carries a new creation for the creatures, a new gathering for his people and a new calling of his children. Preaching is the practice related to God’s justice – as far as we follow the biblical notion of justice i.e. God’s concrete, bodily faithfulness to his creatures and his children, his loyalty to his people. Preaching is at the interface of the word already said and the new addressing. Preaching is where people are waiting for that “other” word – like Abraham - because of the (written) word already said – where they demonstrate that they do not yet have the word and do not stay in what is already said, where they let themselves anew created, transformed into a new life with God – as Paul defines worship in Rom 12,1f.

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be

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<sup>42</sup> Here we had to discuss the analysis of that dialectic by Michel Foucault. He shows how this dialectic has been developed since the 18<sup>th</sup> century determining what we call “modernity”.

<sup>43</sup> Meuser, Fred W. (2004): Luther as preacher of the Word of God. In: McKim, Donald K. (Hg.): The Cambridge companion to Martin Luther. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press (Cambridge companions to religion), 137f..

transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove (explore) what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

*At the interface between God's new creation and ethics*

Preaching (Rom 12,1: “parakalein” is the exact term for preaching, it includes “comforting”) is thus at the interface to ethics in a specific meaning. This is not because of a hermeneutic or homiletic ethical application of an insight into God’s will, but of a new creation of new people. This again points to the meaning of “justice” according to the biblical grammar – as far as justice means the practice of faithfulness, loyalty and responsiveness. Preaching is at the interface between God’s justice (his merciful work), our becoming part of his justice, and our own just practice living in God’s justice.

The point of Rom 12 is, that people who are going to be transformed (transfigured) by the eschatological renewal<sup>44</sup> of their minds (their perception) are those who are ready to explore God’s will, i.e. what God wants to be ours: the good, the acceptable, the fulfilled. “To prove” means to try it, to explore it by practicing, by living according God’s will. This then is the presence of God’s justice again in an adventurous way. What he will to be realised for us, is delivered to the shape of our lives and to our way of living.

Preaching has to come to that point. It has to develop a hermeneutic of this ethical exploration and probing (Rom 12,2). It has to provoke that exploration and probing, it has to provoke that adventure of living. It has to let appear an ethos of those, who have explored God’s will that way, who have delivered themselves (Rom 12,1) to that ethical exposition. The ethical exposition is not infinite because it is related to the ethos of living with God. Here any further meaning becomes finalized – finalized in the way of living with God, the way of living as his creatures, people and children: “Then the LORD said to me, ‘Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, saying: ‘Hear the words of this covenant and do them.’” (Jer 11,6)

We find in the biblical tradition many forms of presenting that ethos – not at least within the psalms (the pivotal source of Luther’s theology). They sing that ethos.<sup>45</sup>

The tradition of Jesus entails vivid examples of that kind of preaching, e.g. his parable of the merciful Samaritan. It is a story about a transformation and the story is addressed for a transformation to his listener, likewise the story of

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<sup>44</sup> Rom 12,2: The Greek word for “renewal” has an eschatological meaning. It relates to the new creation. The whole chapter (Rom 12) is about the eschatological shape of the Christian ethos.

<sup>45</sup> See: Brian Brock: Singing the Ethos of God. Singing the Ethos of God. On the Place of Christian Ethics in Scripture, Eerdmans, Forthcoming March 2007.

the young rich man (Matth 19). He, however, will not become transformed, he cannot follow the other word. Jesus' preaching aimed at that adventus of a new life not by a long exercise but simply by that transition into another story.

*Political advent – calling his people into justice*

Preaching is at the interface between any crowd of religious people gathering because of whatever religious intentions and exercises and God's becoming present in his justice. This implies the political character of God's advent, because his word in its particular and specific articulation is *addressed* to human beings called to be God's people. This makes the difference to any – political rhetoric. God's people are called to be a new kind of citizens.<sup>46</sup> God's way is going the long way with his people. Also in this sense does God deliver himself – not to “the history”, but to a specific story touching and changing what we may call history. This is God's political advent, it is (according to the theology of the Reformation) the way of the “*Politia Christi*”. Biblical-Christian hope is related to this *political* perspective of God's kingdom. Christians are called to give account of that hope, to explore it by their living. (1 Petr 3,15).

This is again about the positive located advent. Its beginning is where people let God's word reign their hearts and where they become witnesses of that other word to the world. They are the people, who gather because of the expectation of this word from Him. They wait for this word from outside, the *verbum externum*. This is the other root of political power: where power is originated in a word from outside.<sup>47</sup> This political power is different from any “naturally” originated power, it is its permanent contradiction – as the prophets preaching. This political power is different from forming power by assembling people without a give word of hope. This political power depends on people who become ready to listen – different from those powerful “gods” (Psalm 82) who will not be moved to listen and to understand. This is what worship is about.

This is one of the basic lines of a theology as it reflects God's political presence for his people. It reflects the theological location of preaching. It is embedded in the sacramental celebration of Christ's presence, but it remains the

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<sup>46</sup> See for that whole topic: Wannenwetsch, Bernd: *Political worship : ethics for Christian citizens*, (Oxford studies in theological ethics) Oxford 2004.

<sup>47</sup> See for that theory: Rancière, Jacques: *On the shores of politics*, (Phronesis) London ; New York 1995.

actual procedure of God's advent, his becoming present. If we look at this *political advent* we have to see the difference to any talk about God's universal and indefinite controlling. This includes the eschatological tension between a political practice connected with God's presence as it happens within the Christian worship and a reality articulated in doxological practices and the sacramental reality. It is important to hold that eschatological tension against any hopeless closeness of the world. This can be considered to be the logic of the formula "word and sacrament". It points to the eschatological tension between the political story of God's still beginning *coming* kingdom and the fulfilled kingdom of Christ. This tension is not a reflection of the "not yet", rather it is the insistence on the dramatic beginning in our time. The (Lutheran) formula "*word and sacrament*" points to the tension between the ongoing adventurous story of God's political regiment and "the fullness of the times", where "He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth". Christian people live within this distinct extension of God's story. Preaching has to open up the perspective to God's coming presence, his advent. Preaching has to be in accordance with the prayer "thy kingdom come" – and with psalm 7 and others, which denote the place of worship:

“7 So the congregation of the peoples shall surround You; For their sakes, therefore, return on high.

8 The LORD shall judge the peoples; Judge me, O LORD, according to my righteousness, And according to my integrity within me.

9 Oh, let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end, But establish the just; For the righteous God tests the hearts and minds.”

Christ's kingdom is delivered to the political adventure with his people. God judges, he reigns the hearts of his people by his word – this point is essential (as for Martin Luther) for any political ethics which cannot agree to a privatized faith ("judge the peoples, judge me"). Preaching is the place where the hearts of the people become political addressed – already by the fact of their listening to that public event. God's judging is his very political action<sup>48</sup>, renewing the political relation, and judging again is not anonymous, but addressed by a word. God's political presence is his judging forgiveness. This is God's recognisable identity (Ps 130,4).

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<sup>48</sup> See for that issue: O'Donovan, Oliver: *The ways of judgment : the Bampton lectures*, 2003, Grand Rapids, Mich. 2005

The other word – the word of judgment - has here its paradigmatic function. It is a political function, not a commentary, rather a creative, foundational action – as it is articulated in the Aaronitic Blessing (Nu 6,26): “The Lord ... establish for you peace”.<sup>49</sup> This political action is especially needed where nothing else than a “natural” context is leading human live, not the context of loyalty, justice. And this is first of all urgent where people are suppressed and suffer injustice. God’s story with his people is formed by justice, i.e. by His loyalty to his people. Injustice therefore is the main opposition to God. Here is the crucial point – the point of his contradiction, as we find it in the prophetic tradition.

When we ask for God’s presence then we find it first of all focussed on that urgent situation where His contradiction is needed, His political action, starting anew His story with his people. He needs people for that: therefore he has to speak to them. That’s all what He can do having delivered himself to that political adventure, beginning with Jesus. This is the way to reaffirm the resurrection.<sup>50</sup>

God’s other word reflects the accountability of those, who do not have the authority to change things, to establish any kind of order, but who have to follow the given “reason” of God’s word, His authority. And this is that other root of the political which contradicts its foundation within different economies. God’s presence has is paradigmatic situation here – in this founding action, beginning His story, and contradicting the established structures non-political as they are. God’s other word is the beginning of His kingdom. His word is performing this kingdom and announcing his coming – it is the horizon of His story with His people. Matthew reports: “From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’” (4:17) What we find about Jesus’ preaching is for the renewal preparing the coming kingdom. This is part of the “politics of Jesus”. Jesus’ preaching follows up the preaching of the prophets. This is the very situation of God’s appearance. It is not about a general revelation of Him, it is about the urgent appearance at the scenery because of the lack of responsible politics. His appearance is focussed on his kingdom. Then in this perspective the whole creation will be also become present again. The preaching however is about justice.

*Conclusion: Preaching – the unique practice of the other word*

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<sup>49</sup> ~Al V' ^l. ~fyll>- the Hebrew word “sm” means as the Latin “ponere” “to put”, “to set”.

<sup>50</sup> Ricœur, Paul (1974): Freedom in the Light of Hope. In: Ricœur, Paul: The conflict of interpretations. ed. Don Ihde. Evanston: Northwestern University Press (Essays in hermeneutics) (402–424) 406-410..

Many may probably say: preaching is about God's word as we find it in Scripture and as it is addressed to us from there. This needs a particular hermeneutic – the hermeneutic for that addressing, a hermeneutic for that encounter of God's word. This has not to be a hermeneutic intending a possible consensus “between” the hearer and the text, a fusion of horizons. Rather it is a hermeneutic of letting appear the “other” word, a hermeneutic serving that encounter, a hermeneutic for those people who wait for the other word. The given Scriptural word itself is already the resistant reminder for an “other” word, which cannot be replaced or revoked.

Preaching is the unique practice for the other word as there is an original sermon by God himself: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD.” (Deut 6,4) This is the meaning of the formula “sola scriptura”. It points to the uniqueness of scripture, there is no other scripture than this particular one, there is no other text. This indicates that God makes him-self responsive. God's other word as it is needed because of the justice we need doesn't dissolve in the infinite movement of interpretations. Scripture is not one among many others, rather it is the other unique scripture, the other book, opposite to any book. This makes preaching a unique practice, as it is already witnessed throughout Scripture, which tells the message as it is communicated within the context of a most complex story always accompanied by preachers who are part of that story. Abraham is in the tradition one of the most important preachers. Abraham had – as Martin Luther argues – to leave for different countries because he had to spread the message he had received: the message of God's story with him and his people. And Jesus preaches the message of his coming kingdom. In continuation of Jesus' preaching our human preaching can be understood as part of the other word because he was the “other” speaking to us – and not only content of a message from anywhere. His word does not end up in an indefinite history, it is the other story which is founded in the resurrection preaching belongs to. It follows that story – it enacts the story.

It is that unique story – enacted by a spoken word, enacted within worship where this word is to be heard. God has bound his advent to this political act, he has delivered his advent to that. There has not to be expected an “angel of history”.

The other word interrupts the infinite morality of responsibility. It provokes a response by his addressees: as the creatures, the people, and the children of God – exploring that way of living within its finite contours.

Preaching within the Christian Church is not a general, neutral hermeneutical practice, which relates to a given Christian tradition or to the Scriptures in

order to “actualize” it, but which is determined by its task to let appear the *verbum externum*. Its hearers have to understand it by exploring and probing it in their way of living with God as this living is disclosed by his word.<sup>51</sup>

Thus far we have tried to follow a biblical understanding as it was not at least recovered and reformulated by the Reformation theology. In our time we have to reformulate it again – on a quite different background (especially on the background of that various discourses (indicated in this papers) on the infinite possibilities of a world absorbing the word of God, which is the subject of the practice of preaching, and within the perspective of an ethical bounded way of living within the economy of God.

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<sup>51</sup> Here we have to think of the connection of hermeneutics and practical philosophy as it is conceived in Gadamer’s hermeneutic.