

WIE BEN IK ALS IK PREEK?

THEOLOGISCHE UNIVERSITEIT VAN DE GEREFORMEERDE KERKEN
IN NEDERLAND TE KAMPEN

WIE BEN IK ALS IK PREEK?

BRONNEN EN HERBRONNING VAN HET HOMILETISCH ZELFBEELD

ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

TER VERKRIJGING VAN DE GRAAD VAN DOCTOR IN DE THEOLOGIE,

OP GEZAG VAN DE RECTOR DR. R. KUIPER,

ZO GOD WIL IN HET OPENBAAR TE VERDEDIGEN

OP MAANDAG 12 SEPTEMBER 2016

TE 15.00 UUR IN DE LEMKERZAAL,

BROEDERSTRAAT 16 TE KAMPEN

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geboren op 5 mei 1981
te Dordrecht

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Summary

Who Am I as a Preacher?

Sources and Revitalization of the Homiletic Self-Image

1. Introduction

In this study the central question is: “Who am I as a preacher?” Consequently, the goal is to contribute to the reflection on preaching, particularly on the theoretical thinking about the person of the preacher. In addressing the question of the self-understanding of the preacher, the term “self-image” is used as a research idea. Thus, homiletic reflection on the person of the preacher is organized around this concept, though the focus is primarily on the theological aspect of the preacher’s self-image. Against the backdrop of the modern emphasis upon the self, I will present a picture of the self-image of the preacher as it is found in contemporary homiletics. Subsequently, a revitalization of this self-image is attempted through a connection with the self-image of Paul, the New Testament preacher. In this manner, the contemporary self-image of the preacher is both enriched and critically questioned. The underlying hypothesis is that homiletic inquiry in an ever-changing context constantly benefits from retaining the Bible as the primary foundation for theological inquiry. This study, therefore, provides an exercise in the assimilation of biblical theology as it relates to homiletics. The main question of this study is: *Which theological self-image arises when the self-image of the contemporary preacher is reconsidered in connection with the self-image of the preacher Paul?*

The method of revitalizing which is applied presupposes a certain vision of the Bible and the manner in which it should be used in (practical) theology, in so far as it intends to serve the Christian community. With the aid of the drama metaphor, particularly in the work of Kevin Vanhoozer and N.T. Wright, as well as the work of Richard Hays on the use of the Bible in ethics, a hermeneutic justification is given for the reconsideration of the homiletic self-image. Paul and preachers today appear to play in the same act of the theodrama: that act which began at Pentecost and ends with the return of Christ. Paul, however, has a different, unique role to play in that act. This is particularly observable in the fact that his performance has been deposited in the canon of Scripture. The authority of the Bible for preachers today is not in its form but in its substance. That makes it impossible to establish in advance the criteria for the way in which Paul’s self-image has authority for the self-image of the contemporary preacher. It seems most obvious to see Paul’s self-image as authoritative in particular as an example (paradigm) for preachers today.

2. Self-Image

Several factors play a role in the understanding of preaching. In the second half of the twentieth century the preacher as a subject, in particular, is increasingly recog-

nized as a significant factor for homiletic research. This dissertation works from a particularly Trinitarian vision of practical theology, in which human activity is considered to be included in God's activity, and in which there is room to juxtapose theological praxis and anthropological knowledge. Practical theology, which stands in the hermeneutic tradition, besides highlighting the praxis itself, must always pay attention to the context of the activity being researched. This is consistent with recent theories about the self, which have made it clear that our actions express our self-understanding, and this self-understanding is a key factor for the meaning of our activity. The concept of self-image is used in this study as an organizing method for reflecting on the person of the preacher. In this study, self-image should be understood as "what comes to mind when someone thinks of himself". This, therefore, presupposes a descriptive handling of the concept of self-image, also known as the current self. The self has several facets, including social, cognitive, emotional, physical, spiritual and professional self-image. The last two are particularly highlighted in this study.

The development of self-image is outlined on the basis of three lines: theological, cultural and anthropological. The *theological* line shows how the Christian self-understanding can best develop in relationship to the knowledge of God. This is related to how Calvin speaks about the close connection between the knowledge of God and the knowledge of self. Man was created in the image of the Triune God. This image of God is inherently relational. Theologically speaking, someone can only develop an adequate self-image in relation to Christ, the true image of God. Someone who looks at himself in the face of Christ, sees himself as someone who does not exist independently, but in the particular relationships of communion with God, other people and the world.

When sketching the *cultural* line, use is made of Charles Taylor's description of the genesis of the modern self. Central to the Western culture of the twentieth and twenty-first century is the reflexive attention to the self. This fixation on the self is so strong that it can be said to be an icon of contemporary culture. Taylor outlines 'inwardness' as one of the most important developments in the history of the self. This development begins with Augustine, who connects inwardness to God: the way inside leads upwards, to God the source of the good. This is called the theistic stream of inwardness. In addition, Taylor distinguishes the rational stream of the Enlightenment that sees the self determined by reason: it is only about the way inside—about finding the good in ourselves. This implies a detached way of looking at yourself. Finally, Taylor mentions the expressive stream of Romanticism which looks for the good in the expression of what is present inside. Here, originality and individuality play an important role. No longer is it reason, but nature which determines the answer to questions of personal identity. The above three lines of thought are present and influential in contemporary perceptions of the self.

How does our self-image come into existence? This question is answered from a *anthropological* perspective as well, from the meta-perspective of the humanities or social sciences. Central to this perspective is the idea that knowledge is not an individual possession, but a byproduct of community relationships. A self-image is

never an individual projection, but it is culturally determined and historical in nature through social interaction with others.

In the description of the three lines of development above, it becomes clear that the question of the self of the preacher cannot be avoided. Attention to the self is not just the product of contemporary culture, it is rooted in the theology of Augustine. For him, focusing on God is essential for one's self-understanding. Critical attention should therefore be given to the hyper self-conscious and hyper expressive mode of self-understanding in the Enlightenment and Romanticism. Social constructionism also questions this development, and it reveals how important the place of social interaction is for one's self-image.

3. *Modern Homiletics*

In this chapter, the theological self-image of the preacher is outlined using theories about the preacher found in modern homiletics from the European continent, particularly the twentieth century. Thus, this step of the study provides a theoretical reconstruction of the self-image. In the description of the self-image of the contemporary preacher a connection is made with the broadly accepted periodization of recent homiletic history.

Taking one's cue from the nineteenth century it becomes clear how the self-image of the preacher develops from principled opportunity to principled challenge. For Schleiermacher and his immediate successors, the sermon was primarily an expression of the subjectivity of the preacher. The authentic personality of the preacher was the way to give shape to the Word of God. From this perspective, it becomes clear how much the self-image of the preacher matters. In an optimistic mood the opportunities provided by this insight were explored. In a next phase of homiletics, "the modern sermon," this optimistic speaking about opportunities turns into a challenge which becomes more and more of a heavy burden for preachers. The function of sermons becomes a point of observation, and as a result, all sorts of standardized instructions are formulated for the person and conduct of the preacher. The expectations with respect to the preacher are high, and the preacher is called upon to involve himself in the sermon. Now the self of the preacher explicitly becomes part of the picture in homiletics. This ideal, however, is counter-productive because in reality, it is a difficult task to achieve.

The twentieth century can be divided into three phases: the normative-deductive, the empirical-inductive and critical-constructive phase. These phases will each be described through the lens of important representatives.

The first phase, *the normative-deductive phase*, was clearly a response to the high expectations regarding the self of the preacher in the second half of the nineteenth century. Homileticians in this phase, such as Eduard Thurneysen, Karl Barth and K.H. Miskotte and also C. Veenhof and C. Trimp, were more likely to see the person of the preacher as an obstacle to the preaching rather than as an opportunity or a challenge. In their view, the preacher needs to get out of the picture to make room

for the speaking of God himself. An exception in this phase is Rudolf Bohren. In his writings, the example and individuality of the preacher are important elements. At the same time, he was also hesitant to positively formulate instructions for the person of the preacher. The preacher must above all learn to understand himself, particularly when as is warned against the ways in which the preacher can be a hindrance to the sermon.

The initial liberation in the first stage regarding speaking about the preacher was soon seen as being too oppressive. The dogmatic approach made emphasis on praxis impossible. The second phase of modern homiletics, *the empirical-inductive phase*, reacted in the twentieth century to the dogmatic approach. The transition from the normative-deductive phase to this new phase is ably illustrated in the work of Wolfgang Trillhaas. The preacher is more than a burden to the sermon. The self-image of the preacher now becomes more explicit: a real person who knows his audience well and stands alongside them. This portrait of the preacher also comes into the picture in the work of Ernst Lange, Hans van der Geest, Hans-Christoph Piper, Axel Dencke, Manfred Josuttis. From empirical data it becomes clear how essential the preacher is for the concrete praxis of preaching. The self-image of the preacher is in this phase a necessary constitutive element of the preaching event. In this phase, attention is given to theoretical development from outside theology, in communication and psychology. In a certain sense this stage reverted back to the ideals of the nineteenth century. On the one hand, those ideals were relativized, but at the same time the crisis of preaching was resolved almost unilaterally by focusing on the preacher.

The third and final phase of modern homiletics, *the critical-constructive phase*, shares with the previous phase an opposition to a one-sided dogmatic approach. The uniqueness of this position is found in its criticism of the independence of the text and the hearer. The work of Henning Luther, Wilfried Engemann, and Gijs Dingemans is discussed. The preacher should bring the text and hearers into a playful and creative conversation. The preacher is no longer in front of the hearers, but facilitates the meeting that the hearer has with the text. The subjectivity of hearers should be taken with full seriousness. The preacher is allowed to see himself as a hearer among the hearers, who, through subjective interpretation and the staging of the text enables the subjectivity of the hearers.

The three phases of the modern homiletics of the twentieth century are finally typified by a keyword for each phase. The focus in the normative-deductive phase is upon content; in the empirical-inductive phase upon relevance; and in the critically-constructive approach upon meaning.

4. *Biblical Theology*

In order to facilitate a revitalization of the self-image of the contemporary preacher, an important place must be given to biblical theology. Within this stage of research, Paul's self-image is reconstructed on the basis of his two letters to the Christian congregation in Corinth. Methodologically, a form of biblical theology is employed

that advocates a theological reading of the Bible as canon which the church has recognized as the enduring Word of God. The selected biblical material is thematically ordered around the central idea of Paul's self-image: his identity as an apostle. In his speaking on apostleship he makes clear that his self-understanding is always connected to the initiative of God. Prior to the further exploration of the Paul's sense of apostolic identity, attention is first given to how Paul describes the action of God in preaching. Paul sees preaching primarily as God's work, to which he himself has been appointed by God. In order to do this work, God equips Paul, guides him and blesses his work.

The key concept 'sent one' is then explored in three directions. First, there is a subject of Paul's mission: he has been sent by... Second, he knows his mission destination: he was sent to... Finally, his mission has content: he was sent in order to do something. The words and images Paul uses to describe his missionary identity are then systematized in these three directions.

In regard to the first direction (*sent by...*), three aspects can be distinguished: Paul sees himself as subservient to God, as a representative of God, and he knows that he is accountable to God. In the second direction (*sent to...*), the focus is upon the relationship between Paul and the Corinthians. What is striking is that all the images Paul uses have something to do with giving: the father who gives life, the call to follow Paul as he offers his life for the Corinthians, the image of feeding his hearers, and the image of a slave. The content of Paul's preaching determines his attitude to his hearers. This is characterized as double servitude; that is, servitude to the hearers to give them the gospel of Christ and then framed by servitude to the Lord of the gospel. The third and final direction (*sent in order to...*), gives insight to Paul's sense of identity. A central element is 1 Corinthians 1:17 "sent to proclaim". Many of the words and images that Paul uses to describe the content of his mission have to do with initiation. That's not surprising, because Paul was a missionary and apostle to the Gentiles. In Paul's speaking about preaching, various aspects are covered: encouragement, persuasion, fighting, announcing good news, and so on.

One aspect that permeates all of Paul's speaking about preaching the Gospel is the glory of God. Paul is aware that preaching is an action that takes place before God.

Although Paul's self-image is discussed on the basis of three directions, there is a unity in the movement. Paul participates in the great work of God, in which Paul knows himself depends on the one who sent him. The manner in which Paul carries out his work is determined by the gospel. Whoever proclaims the suffering Christ, must himself be confronted with the reality of suffering.

5. *Dependent self*

In a next step, the reconstruction of Paul's self-image is associated with the self-image of the preacher. This connection is implemented through revitalization. The structure of the self-understanding of the preacher is outlined on the basis of the theological concept of participation. This theological approach provides a correction

to the privatization of reflection upon the self as expressed in the Enlightenment and Romanticism. The self was set adrift in both streams of thought when it broke free from the original theistic source. These cultural movements have had their impact on homiletic reflection and has led to too much of an independent approach to the self of the preacher, especially in the nineteenth century and in the empirical-inductive phase of homiletics. In this perspective, the preacher himself must come to the fore as the most decisive factor for the sermon. In response to this attention to the self focused upon the preacher in the nineteenth century, the normative-deductive phase began to speak of the 'dying' of the preacher. Thus an effort was made to marginalize attention to the self.

The solution to the varying attention to the self, however, does not lie in more or less attention to the self, but in putting it in a theological framework. The structure of the preacher's self-understanding is determined by the preacher's learning to see himself theologically as "in Christ". This is an important core of the reconstruction of Paul's self-image. As someone who was sent, he was included in the mission of God to the world. The concept of participation helps to explore the action of God and the action of the preacher simultaneously, and yet to do full justice to the individuality of the preacher. In Christ the preacher loses his old self, but he receives a new self. The biography of Jesus Christ in which humiliation and exaltation go hand in hand now becomes visible. Attention to the 'dying' of the preacher should be accompanied by attention to the 'resurrection' of the preacher in the new life. In Paul, humiliation and exaltation often go together without there being an order.

For homiletic reflection this means that the homiletic triad of text, preacher, and hearers must be seen as the field of influence in which the Holy Spirit is working.

The first result of the revitalization of the self-image of the contemporary preacher is specifically the contention that the self can no longer be regarded as an independent entity. The particular notion that the self participates in the mission of Christ to the world provides a gracious perspective on the self-image. The self can fully come into the picture, because the person who preaches actually matters. At the same time, the preacher matters in relation to God, and the ultimate responsibility for preaching always remains with the Holy Spirit.

6. *Revitalization*

The revitalization of the self which was begun in the previous chapter is further developed and completed in the sixth chapter. Paul emerges as an example for preachers today, even in the way in which he sees himself. In this way a theological self-image for the preacher is outlined. This is done only after the question is answered how Paul's self-image has authority for preachers today. From the drama metaphor it is concluded that Paul and preachers today participate in the same act of the theodrama, but in different scenes. The scene in which Paul occurs has great significance for the scenes that follow, because of the authoritative interpretation through the Apostles of the events surrounding Jesus. This interpretation has been deposited in the script of the canon. There is also a substantial difference between

Paul's scene and later scenes in the way in which God makes known the theodrama: through direct teaching of Jesus in Paul's case through the authoritative script of the canon in the case of preachers today. This difference implies that Paul's self-understanding may not be applied in a one-to-one manner to preachers today.

The self-image of the preacher today is sketched by means of revitalization through the homiletic triad. First of all, attention is given to the fact that the contemporary preacher may see himself as included in the field of influence of the Spirit. Here, the relationship between the preacher and God as the primary actor in the preaching is given further exploration. Next, the focus is on the way preacher may see himself as a creative part of the preaching process. In this way the goal of preaching as a whole is applied to the preacher. Third, attention is given to the relationship between preacher and text. The text is seen as a window to the gospel. Finally, attention is given to the self-understanding of the preacher in relation to the hearers of the sermon. An important result of this revitalization includes the relationship between preacher and hearers. This relationship is characterized by double servitude: preachers are servants to their hearers, because of the will of Jesus who has even more authority for the preachers of the gospel. The reconstructed self-image of Paul has in the way of an example authority for preachers today. For Paul's self-image the notion of example is also essential, particularly when he offers himself as a pattern for imitation. So preachers today also may see themselves as an example for their hearers through the way in which they themselves are transformed into the image of God restored in Christ.

Curriculum Vitae

Marinus Beute is geboren in 1981 in Dordrecht en opgegroeid in Zwijndrecht. In 1999 behaalde hij zijn diploma VWO aan de Gereformeerde Scholengemeenschap Randstad in Rotterdam. Hij studeerde theologie aan de Theologische Universiteit (Broederweg) te Kampen en studeerde in 2007 af op het terrein van de Noord-Amerikaanse homiletiek met een scriptie getiteld: *Homiletiek in beweging; Preekmethode en preekvisie binnen de 'New Homiletic': een reconstructie*. Aansluitend aan zijn studie was hij van 2007 tot 2012 als promovendus werkzaam aan diezelfde universiteit. In 2012 werd hij predikant en tot op heden is hij verbonden aan de Gereformeerde Kerk (vrijgemaakt) te Leens. Marinus Beute is sinds 2005 getrouwd met Wilma van Hoffen. Samen hebben zij drie kinderen: Jorieke, Pepijn en Iris.