

**AN ANALYSIS OF THE INFLUENCE OF CONTEXTUAL CHANGES ON THE  
PRACTICE OF PREACHING IN URBAN SUMI BAPTIST CHURCHES OF  
NAGALAND: PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE.**

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An Analysis of the Influence of Contextual Changes on the Practice of Preaching in Urban Sumi  
Baptist Churches of Nagaland: Pastoral Perspective.

By

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Dedicated to  
Sumi Naga Preachers

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## **Abstract**

*The practice of preaching cannot be done in a vacuum. Context and relevance are matters of great importance for the practice of preaching. The 21st century has witnessed significant changes in society, church and culture of Nagaland. This research seeks to explore how change in context affects the practice of preaching in urban Sumi baptist churches of Nagaland from the perspective of experienced pastors. Pastors who have been serving in urban churches face the challenge of keeping up with changes because urban areas are usually the center of new developments and changes. The main research question will explore how the practice of preaching is changing due to ecclesial and societal changes. The qualitative research will focus on experienced pastors serving in USBCs of Nagaland. Social and ecclesial changes which developed at the turn of the century will be examined from a pastoral point of view. Three sub-questions will be used in order to answer this. The methods to generate answers are semi-structured interviews along with literature research on Naga society and Contextual preaching.*

**Key words:** Urban, Sumi, Baptist, Nagaland, context, social and ecclesial changes, pastors, pastoral perspective, practice of preaching, influence of contextual changes.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### Chapter One – Introduction

- 1.1. Motivation for the Study
- 1.2. Problem Statement and Research Questions
- 1.3. Positionality
- 1.4. Justification and Purpose
- 1.5. Current State of Research
- 1.6. Methodology
- 1.7. Limitation of the Research

### Chapter Two – Theoretical Framework

2. What is Preaching?
  - 2.1. Theoretical Notion of the Contextuality of Preaching
    - 2.1.1. The Historical Context of Preaching
    - 2.1.2. The Pastoral Context of Preaching
    - 2.1.3. The Liturgical Context of Preaching
    - 2.1.4. The Theological Context of Preaching
  - 2.2. How Context Matters in Preaching
    - 2.2.1. Preaching is Occasional
    - 2.2.2. Preaching is Situational
    - 2.2.3. Preaching is Social
    - 2.2.4. Preaching is Cultural
  - 2.3. Why is Preaching Considered an Ecclesial Practice
    - 2.3.1. Preaching as God’s Word to the Church
    - 2.3.2. Preaching as Communal, Embodied Political Speech
    - 2.3.3. Preaching as Critical for the Mission of the Church
    - 2.3.4. The Worship of the Church as the Normal Context of Preaching

### Chapter Three – Ecclesial and Societal Changes

- 3.1. A Brief Overview of Nagaland

- 3.1.1. The Nagas as a Historically Unique Group of People
- 3.1.2. The Present State of Nagaland
- 3.1.3. Brief Account of the Coming of Christianity among Sumi Nagas
- 3.2. Ecclesial Changes
  - 3.2.1. The Beginning of Missional movements
  - 3.2.2. The Rise of Independent Churches
  - 3.2.3. Growth of Prayer Centers
  - 3.2.4. The Ten-Year Reshuffle Policy
- 3.3. Societal Changes
  - 3.3.1. A Threat to the Tribal Way of Living
  - 3.3.2. Frustration Among Younger Generation
  - 3.3.3. Uncontrolled Corruption
  - 3.3.4. Violence and Extortion
  - 3.3.5. Increasing Unemployment

Chapter four: An Overview of the Practice of Preaching in USBCs

Chapter five: Pastoral Perspective on Contextual Changes

Chapter 6: The Relationship Between Contextual Changes and the Practice of Preaching

Chapter 7: Implication of Contextual Changes on Homiletical Competence

Chapter 8: Analysis

Conclusion

Bibliography

Appendix A: Data Management Plan



## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY

The practice of preaching is constantly faced with changes in the church and society.<sup>1</sup> With changing context this practice has to keep up with new cultural, ecclesial and societal developments in order to stay relevant. ‘Relevance in preaching refers to the phenomenon of enabling a wide range of listeners in their unique life situations relate with the unique message of the Bible. Preaching that makes it easy for listeners to locate oneself meaningfully somewhere within the sermon can be considered as achieving the important goal of relevance.’<sup>2</sup> As James R. Neiman stated, “No preacher strives to be irrelevant.”<sup>3</sup> Pastors in Nagaland also, like any other preachers, have to face the challenge of being competent and relevant in a fast changing context. In Nagaland, change in lifestyle and thinking is stimulated, among other factors, by modern education, digitalization, easy access to internet and gadgets, influence of social media, new religious movements, decline of traditional way of living, and a stiff competition for job, wealth, recognition and status. This has prompted a general transition of the society from a community-oriented, slow and simple living towards a fast, individualistic and complex lifestyle. Medonuo Pienyu while writing on the issue of continuity and change in Naga society puts it this way, “Today’s civil/modern society is experiencing the impact of globalization that is peppered with elements of westernization, urbanization and technological advancement.”<sup>4</sup> With this underlying social current the Naga society, especially in the urban areas, is undergoing a paradigm shift in church and society. Preachers need to constantly ask whether the congregation is able to relate to the sermons. Communicating the Word faithfully and creatively is not an easy task in the face of numerous changes which are beyond our control.

### 1.2. PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

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<sup>1</sup> Theo Pleizier, “Homiletic Transitions in The Netherlands: The Spirit, Human Language and Real Preaching,” *International Journal of Homiletics* Vol. 2, No. 1 (2017):

<sup>2</sup> Klaas Runia, *The Sermon Under Attack* (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1983), 75.

<sup>3</sup> James R. Neiman, *Knowing the Context: Frames, Tools and Signs of Preaching* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 5.

<sup>4</sup> Medonuo Pienyu, “The Angami Naga Society: Continuity and Change,” *Journal of North East Indian Culture* Vol. 3, No. 2 (2017): 54.

In this research, ‘urban Sumi baptist churches’ refers to urban congregation of Sumi tribal community under the Baptist denomination. For convenience it will be referred to as USBCs. The reader may take note of the fact that the abbreviation USBCs does not denote any association or organization. It is simply a short form of the initials of the community in discussion. I am studying the practice of preaching among USBCs in Nagaland from the perspective of experienced pastors. I want to understand how societal and ecclesial changes at the turn of the century influence the practice of preaching. The reason for undertaking this research is to help pastors in two ways: first, how to critically reflect upon contextual realities as a preacher and, second, how to be intentional in appropriating contextual changes for the practice of preaching.

This leads to the main research question which flows from the problem statement:

*“How did ecclesial and societal changes at the turn of the century impact the practice of preaching in USBCs from the perspective of experienced pastors?”*

The following sub-questions will be important to limit the research within a specific frame:

Sub-question 1: *‘How do experienced pastors in USBCs view changes in church and society?’*

This question seeks to understand how experienced pastors in USBC deal with social and ecclesial changes. Which changes do they think are particularly significant to them as a preacher and why?

SQ 2: *‘Has the practice of preaching changed according to pastors during their ministry? If so, in what ways and what social or ecclesial factors could be responsible?’*

This question will explore if experienced pastors see any difference or change in their preaching practice throughout their ministry. If there is, then what are those changes and what factors altered or enriched or challenged their preaching practice? How does this change resonate with their congregation and do congregations still value preaching the way they did before in the opinion of these pastors?

SQ 3: *Does change in context influence the criteria for homiletical competence? If so, how do pastors evaluate their own sermons as well as sermons of fellow pastors?’*

This section will discuss the influence of contextual changes on the criteria and composition of homiletical competence as understood by these pastors. How do pastors know if their preaching is relevant, effective and authentic?

### 1.3. POSITIONALITY

My personal context is important to mention for this study. I was born in Kohima, the capital city of Nagaland, into a traditional Sumi Naga family in the year 1989. Life back then was simple, quiet and more communal. My observation is that the present society and church has evolved into a complex and fast-paced one. I moved out from my home in 2011 at the age of 22 to become a full time minister, got married in 2017 with my wife who is from another tribe, and currently I am serving in one of the urban Sumi baptist churches in Nagaland. I am aware of the possibility that through my position as a researcher I may be influencing my interviewees in the way they respond and also influence a change in their thinking and action after interviewing. ‘In relation to what Carla Willig mentioned about personal reflexivity, I acknowledge that as a researcher my own worldview, opinions, beliefs, spirituality, experiences, social identities and commitment can influence the motif and findings of the research. In addition to this, the process and outcome of the research also has the possibility to affect me.’<sup>5</sup>

### 1.4. JUSTIFICATION AND PURPOSE

This research seeks to offer a new way of looking at the practice of preaching in the context of USBCs. The researcher endeavors to find out practical and concrete ways of engaging with contextual realities for pastors serving urban congregations. Pastors and homileticians can find this research valuable for understanding how to engage meaningfully with contextual challenges while being creative, authentic and intentional about preaching in a given context. Aiming to improve the practice of preaching this research has a prescriptive task which is a part of the transformative goal of practical theology.<sup>6</sup> With regard to the context, the community (Sümi: a major tribe in Nagaland) and denomination (baptist: largest denomination in Nagaland) is also carefully chosen. “Nagaland has become the most baptist state in the world on a percentage

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<sup>5</sup> Tone Stangeland Kaufman, “Practicing Reflexivity: Becoming Aware of One’s Default Mode and Developing Epistemic Advantage.” In *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Theology and Qualitative Research*, ed. K. Tveitereind and Pete Ward (John Wiley & Sons, 2022), 112-113.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Osmer, *Practical Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 4.

basis,” a status formerly held by the state of Mississippi in USA (52 percent).<sup>7</sup> Nagaland is the only predominantly baptist state in the world and out of the 2 million residents of Nagaland at least 75 percent is affiliated to the baptist church.’<sup>8</sup>

### 1.5. CURRENT STATE OF RESEARCH

In the process of literature study I have observed a general pattern on contextual preaching, that is – contextual preaching revolves around the ‘What’, ‘Why’ and ‘How’ of context. The ‘What’ consists of meaning, parameters, types, and role of context in preaching. The ‘Why’ is concerned with the purpose, place and importance of context for preaching. The ‘How’ is the challenging part. There are two aspects of the ‘How’ – first, ‘How’ context influence preaching and second, ‘How to’ study context for Homiletics. My research question concerns the first aspect. This section will highlight some prominent concepts and ongoing discussions concerning contextual issues in preaching and the impact of contextual changes on the practice of preaching.

Klaas Runia explains the importance of recognizing the fact that the biblical message was given to people in a historical context. However, life situations and context of present times are different and therefore the sermon has to bridge the gap between the congregation of the past and the congregation of today. How can a preacher bridge the gap between our present life situations and the Scripture which is embedded in a particular culture and history?<sup>9</sup> ‘Runia while commenting on Karl Fror’s work, *Biblical Hermeneutics* argued for the need to recognize the uniqueness of our own present generation while handling Scripture. Fror argues that our situation may be unique but it is not something that has never occurred. “The pattern of life is the same, the temptations and desires are of the same nature, the message remains the same and the same gifts nourish the pilgrim (church) on her journey throughout the ages”. Runia maintains a different stand here by arguing that Fror’s notion of ‘Continuity’ has to be duly acknowledged but the ‘Discontinuity’ also has to be taken into serious consideration. We do not ask the same question. Every generation, every life-situation and every historical context grapples with unique

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<sup>7</sup> Vanlalhraia Kiangte, “Baptist Ecclesiology in Mizoram and Nagaland” (PhD diss., Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2022), 23.

<sup>8</sup> Philip Jenkins, “In the remote northeast region, Christianity has flourished for generations,” *The Christian Century* Vol. 138, No. 5 (March 2021): 3.

<sup>9</sup> Runia, *The Sermon Under Attack*, 61.

issue and raises unique questions.<sup>10</sup> This is why contextual preaching has to be guided by the element of relevance.

A particular congregation with its own history, tradition and theology also shapes the practice of preaching unique to its socio-cultural context. For example, Filip De Cavel while writing on the aspect of *'Calling' as a Source of Authority within the Flemish Evangelical Preaching Tradition*, presents the three dimensions of context: Evangelical context, Homiletical context and Spiritual context. De Cavel explains how these three dimensions of context can influence sermon preparation among Flemish evangelical preachers.<sup>11</sup> These three dimensions appears to be general in nature but there is a unique interaction going on in a triangular form: the Flemish Evangelical community, the unique way of preaching experienced by preachers, and the understanding of spirituality as experienced and lived out by a particular congregations.

James R. Nieman makes it clear that the very nature of preaching is contextual by nature. Preaching is occasional because it is a timely word. It is situational because it is a grounded word.<sup>12</sup> It is Social because it is a personal word.<sup>13</sup> And it is cultural because it is a symbolic word.<sup>14</sup> Nieman explains that preaching is contextually driven and also shaped by contextual changes. The need to recognize this four-fold nature of preaching is indispensable if, Nieman argues, a preacher don't want to become irrelevant. In addition to 'how context matters in preaching,' he also proposed how to approach context methodically. Although it is not within the scope of this research, yet it is interesting to mention so as to show how far the discussion has progressed. Nieman writes that literature on 'How' Context influence preaching is available but 'how to' appropriate context in the preparation of sermons is an area where literature is scanty. This is the reason Nieman, recognizing epistemological gap in the 'How to', wrote on the 'What' and 'Why' and the 'How' but also formulates 'How to' study context strategically. He proposes three strategic categories to analyze context – *frames, tools and signs*.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Runia, *The Sermon Under Attack*, 80-81.

<sup>11</sup> Filip De Cavel, *The Preacher as 'First Listener': Calling as a Source of Authority within the Flemish Evangelical Preaching Tradition* (LIT Verlag GmbH & Co. KG Wien, Zurich, 2020), 215-218

<sup>12</sup> Nieman, *Knowing the Context*, 10.

<sup>13</sup> Nieman, *Knowing the Context*, 11.

<sup>14</sup> Nieman, *Knowing the Context*, 12.

<sup>15</sup> Nieman, *Knowing the Context*, 2.

Arthur Van Seters: Van Seters, while exploring the Social Dimensions of preaching, puts forward his idea in this manner:

“The pervasiveness of social dimensions is implicit or explicit in all preaching...Every sermon is uttered by socialized beings to a social entity in a specific, social context and always at a social moment. The sacred texts that ground preaching come to expression in the culture of a community (whether ancient Israel or early church). The language of the sermon is socially shaped whether it is traditional or contemporary or a mixture of both. All of this is true regardless of our social awareness, position, or viewpoint. All preaching is a social act.”<sup>16</sup>

Seters brings out the person of the preacher as a *social being* who live in a social context and preach to a congregation who also lives in a context that is inevitably shaped by historical and cultural environment. Preaching, then, is a practice that is deeply conditioned by social realities in every culture. If preaching does not consider these social factors then preachers will fail in their *Social Act* – that is, failure to relate with concrete social realities and cultural situations.

Leo Hartshorn argues that ‘existing forms of sermon evaluation is inadequate because it treats the sermon as a singular event performed by an isolated preacher. Hortshorn is of the view that preaching is a communal, dialogical and formational practice of the church.’<sup>17</sup> Thus, evaluation of sermons is another area that is influenced by contextual changes. Here Anabaptist ecclesiology and preaching is used as a basis for his argument to prove how ecclesial movements, Anabaptist ecclesiology in this case, can and should alter the way homileticians and preachers evaluate sermons. Hortshorn considers congregational participation in evaluating sermons in a very high esteem. Hortshorn argues that “preaching is shaped by the stories, life experiences, and contexts of the congregation.”<sup>18</sup> The argument for this concept is that only the congregation can tell whether a sermon is productive or unproductive because the sermon is, most of all, meant for the congregation. Preaching is a practice and practice cannot occur in an isolated situation, it is a communal dialogue between preachers and listeners and only then it becomes a preaching (an act of spoken message communicated between preacher and congregation). Social and ecclesial factors undeniably create a homiletical necessity to understand how preachers formulate their own criteria on homiletical competence.

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<sup>16</sup> Arthur Van Seters, “Widening Our Vision,” in *Preaching As A Social Act: Theology and Practice*, ed. Arthur Van Seters (Nashville, Abingdon Press:1988), chapter\_id=1105 (4 of 16), <https://www.religion-online.org>

<sup>17</sup> Hortshorn, “Evaluative Preaching as a Communal and Dialogical Practice,” 13.

<sup>18</sup> Hortshorn, “Evaluative Preaching as a Communal and Dialogical Practice,” 21.

## 1.6. METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted for this research is a combination of qualitative interviews and literature research. ‘Semi-structured interviews will be used because it serves two crucial purposes – comfortable for interviewees and flexibility for the researcher. Some scholars hold the view that “semi-structured in-depth interviews are the sole source of information for qualitative researchers.” This type of interview are ideal for highlighting personal issues and the researcher can go deeper to understand the beliefs, opinions, experiences and understanding of the interviewees about the subject of research. This type of interview facilitates a relaxed, comfortable and genuine conversation without making the interviewees nervous. The advantage of such interviews is that it prevents the interviewees from feeling cornered or pressurized to the point that they commit the error of responding with baseless information.’<sup>19</sup> The research question will be answered based on interviews with experienced pastors of USBC. Each interview shall consist of two parts. The first half will be biographical in which pastors will briefly highlight about their pastoral ministry and preaching journey from the beginning of their career till the present. The second half will be specific question and answer conversation that directly addresses the sub-questions. The interviews will be conducted via online with six pastors, two from each age group namely; 30-40, 40-50, and 50-60 so as to get a decent range of opinions. These pastors have a rich experience in preaching ranging from 9 years to 36 years.

Another methodological element for this research is Literature research. Literatures on two areas will be integral to this study – homiletical literatures on contextual preaching and literatures which provide information on social and ecclesial changes in Nagaland. This includes journals, books, newspaper articles, blogs and websites. The first concerns homiletical literatures pertaining to contextual preaching. The second is literatures which provide information on the changing context of church and society in Nagaland.

## 1.7. LIMITATION OF THE RESEARCH

The research is limited to the two large urban congregations of Kohima, the capital city of Nagaland. The reason is the time limitation of this research which allows only so much for

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<sup>19</sup> Essa Adhabi & Christina Blash Anozie, “Literature Review for the Type of Interview in Qualitative Research,” *International Journal of Education* Vol. 9, No. 3 (2017): 4.

carrying out a lengthy research. Another limitation is the methodological limitation which makes in-person interviews impossible. Therefore online interview was the best alternative for collecting data. Six pastors from two churches were interviewed for this research. Since the research has to be precise and limited the focus has been largely on pastors, what they think about certain contextual issues, how they deal with contextual changes and how they evaluate their preaching practice. More research can be done from the perspective of the listeners. The regional scope of the research can also be expanded in future to include other urban districts so as to develop a broader knowledge of this subject.



## CHAPTER 2

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter will lay out the theoretical framework for this study. A suitable definition of preaching will provide an entrance to stimulate the discussion. It will be followed by three theoretical aspects in particular that are essential for establishing a firm base for this research. Firstly, ‘the theoretical notion of the contextuality of preaching’ will be explained. Basically, this revolves around the idea of what it means to preach in a context and the different types of contexts in which preaching is embedded. Secondly, ‘how context matters in preaching’ will be elucidated. This mainly concerns how context and preaching interacts, and why context matters to preaching. Thirdly, ‘why is preaching considered an ecclesial practice’ will be discussed. Here, the practice of preaching as primarily belonging to and naturally situated in the church will be expounded.

#### 2. WHAT IS PREACHING?

Preaching is generally understood as a proclamation of the Word of God.’ Thomas G. Long understands preaching as an event. He points out that any simple dictionary term for preaching is insufficient because it contains mystery and the depth of its meaning will be missed. For Long, actual event of the preaching is central with the determination to examine what preaching actually mean.’<sup>20</sup> For this purpose, a careful consideration of the crucial elements of preaching is necessary, namely, the congregation, the preacher, the sermon, and the presence of Christ. The congregation is an assembly or gathering of the people who are called out of the world to worship and eventually sent out into the world to witness. The preacher is a member of the congregation who has been positioned to stand before the congregation to preach the sermon in the name of Christ. The sermon is an event of speaking and hearing, performed by the preacher in Christ’s name. The presence of Christ is what validates preaching as a divine activity performed through a human agent.<sup>21</sup> Preaching is an event that involves more than one participant. It should be seen and understood in the context of a community of believers gathered in the presence of Christ and engaged in listening to a preacher proclaiming the gospel.

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<sup>20</sup> Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching* (Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville Kentucky: 2016), 15.

<sup>21</sup> Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 16-17.

According to D. W. Cleverley Ford, preaching is “proclaiming Christ from the scriptures, a ministry of the word specifically entrusted to the Church and which operates for the wholeness of the Church itself, but is also an instrument for the furtherance of God’s will to reconcile the world to himself.”<sup>22</sup>

## 2.1. THEORETICAL NOTION OF THE CONTEXTUALITY OF PREACHING

Fred B. Craddock states that sermons are oral in nature, although some are written for the press, but by and large they are an oral and acoustic event with less textuality. This implies that these oral words are spoken in context and not in a vacuum. The sermon as spoken words is socially owned, having its life at a particular time and place among a group of participants who are not only influenced by the nature and purpose of the occasion but who also bring to their hearing personal and social factors that are ingredients in the experience of the sermon. Craddock identified four categories of contexts in which preaching occur: the historical context, the pastoral context, the liturgical context, and the theological context. Let us look briefly into the four categories of context.<sup>23</sup>

### 2.1.1. The historical context of preaching

There is history that lies within the personal memories of both the preacher and the listener. For the preacher, it could be about some preachers and sermons, whether positive or negative, that play an important role in the formation of the preacher. Certain people, like seminary chaplains, youth pastors, conference and retreat preachers, popular preachers, or theological professors, do leave their mark on the memory of a preacher. One may remember the subject of the sermon or the occasion on which certain sermons were preached. While subtle things such as tone, dress, facial expressions, energy, or style of delivery can have a lasting impression, all these personal impressions and memories influence a preacher to look for approval or critical comments in the endeavor to become a well-rounded, effective preacher. The personal memories of listeners also have a bearing on how they experience sermons. As listeners continue to hear sermons for years, every sermon that is delivered from the pulpit, regardless of the quality of the sermon, is connected to or at least evokes a memory in the mind of the listener. In this way, the personal

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<sup>22</sup> Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 24.

<sup>23</sup> Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1985), Chapter Two: The Sermon in Context.

memory of both the preacher and the listener has a bearing on the experience of the event of preaching. This is rather a personal dimension of preaching, which is important for understanding how historical context matters to preaching. Apart from the personal memories and impressions of listeners and preachers, there is also the dimension of tradition, which is clearly visible within the historical context of preaching. Just as memories belong to individuals, institutions and communities also have a unique way of remembering. Examples of such recollection can be found in the Jewish Passover feast, where Jews gather to remember the Exodus events, Christians gather at the Eucharistic table to remember Jesus, and Americans gather on July 4 to remember the Declaration of Independence. In the same manner, the pulpit has a memory, participating in a tradition reaching back across the centuries. This tradition dates back to the prophets preaching to the people of Israel and her neighbors, coming down to John the Baptist preaching in the wilderness. This tradition continues with Jesus' preaching ministry, which was passed on to the Apostles and then continued by church fathers like Origen, whose exegetical homilies earned him the title "Father of the Christian Sermon," and Augustine, who combined Greek rhetoric and preaching in the first ever textbook on the science and art of preaching. Needless to say, preaching has been practiced in the modern era and contemporary times with different techniques and styles over the centuries. Preaching already has a rich and long tradition that influences a preacher in many ways when standing on the pulpit. The preacher continues the tradition, is influenced by the Christian community's memory, and also appropriates the tradition of a particular historical context. There are three benefits to being aware of the historical context of preaching.<sup>24</sup>

### 2.1.2. The pastoral context of preaching

Preaching and pastoring are always moving together as inseparable twins. An itinerant, televangelist, or radio preacher may visit the church once in a while as a guest speaker. It can be a day of rest or relief for the pastor on that particular Sunday. However, it is the pastor who is primarily tasked with the office of preaching. The two responsibilities—pastoring and preaching—cannot be pitched against each other as if they stand opposite and alien and are divided in the job description for a pastor. In most cases, it is the pastor who is the preacher, and the preacher is the pastor. The names 'preacher' and 'pastor' are also usually used synonymously

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<sup>24</sup> Craddock, *Preaching*. Chapter two: Sermon in Context – Historical Context.

or interchangeably in many parts of the world. One thing is for sure: “Preaching always occurs in a pastoral context and is in many significant ways influenced by that context.” Pastoral ministry and pastoral concerns are, for the most part, the subject, matter, and goal of preaching. Preaching connects the daily spirituality of the congregation with the scripture and brings clarity to theological concepts that are necessary for the church. It is an integral part of the total pastoral ministry and cannot be viewed as a separate phenomenon in pastoral life. Preaching can also find an extension of its life beyond the pulpit when parts of it or practical implications of the sermon are brought into consideration in the form of committee discussion, meetings, or personal conversations. It can also find its way beyond the church service if integrated or appropriated in daily pastoral care or teachings. So, the minister is not just a preacher for a few minutes, but someone whose words find resonance in the spiritual and practical matters of the congregation. Preaching profoundly influences the personal formation of members of a congregation as disciples of Christ. It plays a central role in sustaining the corporate identity, purpose, and growth of the body of Christ.<sup>25</sup>

### 2.1.3. The liturgical context of preaching

Preaching can occur in public gatherings that may not be particularly Christian in nature. For instance, a minister can be invited to preach in schools, universities, and at social and cultural events, which are not uncommon. However, it is in the context of worship where preaching is ‘at home’. Worship sets the environment and conditions conducive to a true freedom of speaking and hearing the sermon without external pressure or secular limitations. Liturgy sets the order and structure within which a sermon can be experienced without disruptive surprises and confusion. It reminds the minister that the congregation is assembled to worship God and listen to God’s Word, not to watch a performance or be entertained by the sermon. The liturgy of a worship service also secures the submission and humility of the preacher. The minister is reminded that the sermon is not the center of worship but is one part of the liturgy and subservient to the work of the Spirit. Moreover, preaching is not just an element of the liturgy; it is itself an act of worship. It is a word ‘to’ and ‘from’ the church. Just as the congregation experiences the Eucharist as part of their faith, just as the hymns express the truths and realities of the Christian faith, just as prayers give voice to the yearning and emotions of the worshippers,

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<sup>25</sup> Craddock, *Preaching*. Chapter two: Sermon in Context – Pastoral Context.

preaching also helps the listeners find themselves within the redemptive work of God's grace in Christ. It reassures them of their identity and belongingness to God and to the body of Christ, the Church.<sup>26</sup>

#### 2.1.4. The theological context of preaching

Preaching is a theological act. It is a proclamation of God's Word in which the preacher and the listeners participate in the event of the sermon. It is both 'participation in' and 'revelation of' the Word of God. The preacher is a practicing theologian in the sense that every sermon preached is a reflection of the preacher's understanding of God, the Bible, the Church, and the world. It is an interpretation of God's word that is carefully tailor-made while being faithful to the text and balancing the tune to the frequency of contemporary ears. The preacher also chooses which sermon the church needs to hear and when and why. In addition to that, the language of preaching is unique. The minister switches to a different mode of speaking while standing behind the pulpit. The language of the sermon makes use of concrete and graphic vocabulary, words that evoke and create images, and terms that stir the senses. Whereas theology deals with concepts, our language has the capacity to frame and deliver theological concepts in a manner that is both biblically sound as well as eloquent in communication.<sup>27</sup>

## 2.2. HOW CONTEXT MATTERS IN PREACHING

Context matters to preaching due to two main factors: theological reasons and the use or misuse of language. The sermon declares how God encounters us in the hopelessness and complexity of our lives. "That is, preaching offers a contextual word, one that takes our particular setting seriously as the place where saving hope is concretely known. We need not escape our everyday reality in order to receive such a promise, but instead learn the remarkable news that God bends to us through Jesus in the ordinariness of our existence."<sup>28</sup> Preaching directs us towards the abundant life with Jesus that can be ours here and now.

There are four basic aspects explained by Neiman to clarify exactly how context relates to preaching.

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<sup>26</sup> Craddock, *Preaching*. Chapter two: Sermon in Context – Liturgical Context.

<sup>27</sup> Craddock, *Preaching*. Chapter two: Sermon in Context – Theological Context.

<sup>28</sup> Neiman, *Knowing the Context*, 6-7.

### 2.2.1. Preaching is occasional

It is not a daily activity, but it is also not distant from our daily lives. It occurs during worship services within an orderly liturgy. Sometimes it occurs irregularly during death, crises, healing, marriage, tragedies, and unusual events. Whether planned or spontaneous, preaching does not happen automatically; it is called for, and for a reason: to address the times in which it occurs. Therefore, preaching can be understood in context because it is a timely word. Preachers utter words that may be relevant either for generations or just for today. Whichever is the case, there is an obligation for preachers to know the times and hit the right notes according to the tune of the moment. The sermon may be drawn from scripture, personal experience, or even the hopes and aspirations of the listeners.<sup>29</sup> By paying attention to the times and seasons, preaching engages the context in order to challenge its assumed normalcy and envision life-giving alternatives.<sup>30</sup>

### 2.2.2. Preaching is situational

Sermons are inextricably embedded in situations and real settings with distinctive features. Sermons are oral and associated with physical and social spaces. The listeners apply these uttered words to their environment and surroundings to make sense of their existence. “Defined by a specific place, preaching is distinctly able to pay attention to that place closely and realistically, patiently and amply engaging a setting through what is declared.” Therefore, preaching can be understood in context because it is a grounded word. A universal or generic way of preaching may appeal to a wider audience, but it is grounded preaching that creates the most impact. The grounded word “engages the context by narrating the breadth of the local story: its approved version, its contrary tales, and its emerging voices.”<sup>31</sup>

### 2.2.3. Preaching is social

Sermons are intended for real people at social gatherings. It is addressed to a group with the goal of conveying what it really means to live with others as a social entity. It is meant for the church to be an assembly of God’s chosen people who gather to worship and grow in the image of God. It is therefore able to attend to context because it is a personal word. Preaching meets an

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<sup>29</sup> Neiman, *Knowing the Context*, 9.

<sup>30</sup> Neiman, *Knowing the Context*, 10.

<sup>31</sup> Neiman, *Knowing the Context*, 10.

individual with socially constructed or obtained identities such as ethnicity, class, status, beliefs, etc. The listeners are persons with personal disorders, struggles, identity crises, or biases and prejudices engraved on the mind by the environment and culture. Preaching confronts all these social constructs that pose a challenge for an individual along the journey to social, spiritual, and moral development. It therefore engages the context by pointing to what is needed for genuine human growth.<sup>32</sup>

#### 2.2.4. Preaching is cultural

Human communication is conditioned by culture, and therefore, preaching is also subject to culture. One component of culture is language. ‘Languages is a way to bring people together, find a common setting, to express and articulate, by giving a greater sense to human life and purposes. It is a kind of currency that preacher trades. This way preaching help contact with congregation, affiliate with the community, and fulfilment of ultimate purposes.’<sup>33</sup> Therefore, preaching can be understood in context because it is a symbolic word. By deploying the local language at hand, preaching meets a context literally in its own cultural terms. “It can analyze those terms to reveal their underlying anxieties and biases, the symbolic freight of the local setting. It can draw from those same terms as from a symbolic storehouse, calling forth language that appeals deeply to its hearers.”<sup>34</sup> By being knowledgeable about the symbolic, preaching therefore engages the context through words that work deeply and in ways few other cultural expressions can.<sup>35</sup>

### 2.3. WHY IS PREACHING CONSIDERED AS AN ECCLESIAL PRACTICE?

Preaching is the peculiar public speech that arises out of, is addressed to, and is critical for the formation of the body of Christ, the church.<sup>36</sup> There are four characteristics of preaching that makes it an ecclesial practice:

#### 2.3.1. Preaching as God’s Word to the Church

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<sup>32</sup> Neiman, *Knowing the Context*, 11.

<sup>33</sup> Neiman, *Knowing the Context*. 12.

<sup>34</sup> Neiman, *Knowing the Context*. 12.

<sup>35</sup> Neiman, *Knowing the Context*. 12.

<sup>36</sup> William H. Willimon, “Ecclesiology” in *The New Interpreter’s handbook of Preaching*. Ed. Paul Scott Wilson (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008): 452.

Preaching is primarily God's Word addressed to the church through a preacher. The Bible survived in its unwritten form because it was circulated orally within the community through stories and sayings. This word is survived by the church, serves to nourish the church and preserves the church as a living faith community. Preaching this word was meant for the community of worshippers and proclamation of the truth of the gospel among the nations. Basically, the Bible is more of a church's book because it defines and edifies the community called for 'Koinonia'. The use of the word Koinonia occurred thirty-eight times in the New Testament. Apostle Paul's letters were addressed mostly to the church except for few individual letters. In this sense, preaching can be considered as being faithful to the Bible only if it is addressed to the church or through the church. Bonhoeffer beautifully stated, the risen Christ is made alive by preaching, allowing Him to walk, talk and live with His people.<sup>37</sup>

### 2.3.2. Preaching as Communal, Embodied Political Speech

In the present multi-cultural and globalized context ideas such as individualism and existentialism are widely popular. Any kind of external or social word and actions have become a threat to personal freedom. For example, many people exhibit less interest for communal values. However, God's intent for humans is to socialize and not to remain alone. The prophets functioned as a moral and spiritual voice for kings of Israel. Jesus always found Himself being opposed and unwelcomed by the political and religious leaders of His time. The apostles were willing to be persecuted and killed by political leaders. The gospel is revolutionary in its purpose and counter-cultural at its core.<sup>38</sup> The world has its own language and ideas conditioned by media, environment, ethnicity, culture, history and so on. Even after preaching with theological clarity or spiritual vigor, if there is no transformation it is meaningless. Transformation cannot be initiated without an active, corporate and grounded agency – church. Preaching is therefore tasked with confronting the listeners with the truth of the gospel even if it means being shaking up the existing socio-political institution.<sup>39</sup> And through the agent of ecclesia, this counter-cultural message gets embodied in a living and tangible entity.

### 2.3.3. Preaching as Critical for the Mission of the Church

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<sup>37</sup> Willimon, "Ecclesiology", 452.

<sup>38</sup> Willimon, "Ecclesiology", 453.

<sup>39</sup> Willimon, "Ecclesiology", 453.



Luther stated, ‘the preacher intent to preach on Sunday so that the members can preach to others all week long.’<sup>40</sup> Preaching serves as a powerful medium for the mission of the church.. Preaching builds the church and equips the body of Christ for witnessing to the world. Spoken words from the preacher in every church service are an act of witnessing the reign of God.<sup>41</sup>

#### 2.3.4. The Worship of the church as the Normal context of the church

Preaching is largely church-based because worship and sacrament accompanies the word of God. It is the congregation who authorizes the preacher to preach and the church community takes responsibilities to bestow some privileges to the pastors as their spiritual leader. There cannot be preaching without the congregation or church community. The pastor and church members are supposed to feel intimately and spiritually connected with each other in the church. The preacher also focuses to take the mantle to share the message and speak the truth with love even though sermons may not be pleasing to the listeners. The preacher gives hope from the pulpit that there is an ultimate reality as promised waiting for those who love the Lord. Preaching keeps the heart and mind of people connected to these Biblical truths and make church members constantly yearn for that promised reality. Preaching may sound against the church while standing for the church but as a genuine preaching must become vulnerable to conflict, resistance, rejection from the church body itself while submitting to the will of God. A preacher serves the Lord and not to please members of the church. The responsibility of the preacher is to maintain the sacredness of ecclesia against overwhelming secular influences.<sup>42</sup>

In this chapter, the theoretical foundation for the research is laid. Preaching is embedded in context because it occurs in various contexts namely: historical, pastoral, liturgical and theological contexts. Context matters to preaching because its preaching event is occasional, situational, social and cultural in nature. This event is largely communal in character. Thus preaching is an ecclesial practice since it is addressed to the church, for building an ecclesial community, serves the mission of the church, and normally operates in the context of worship.

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<sup>40</sup> Willimon, “Ecclesiology”, 454.

<sup>41</sup> Willimon, “Ecclesiology”, 454.

<sup>42</sup> Willimon, “Ecclesiology”, 455.

## CHAPTER THREE

### ECCLESIAL AND SOCIETAL CHANGES

This chapter will discuss contextual changes facing urban Sumi Baptist churches in Nagaland today. A brief overview of the state of Nagaland will be essential in situating the research. It will be followed by a brief introduction about the arrival of Christianity among the Sumi Nagas. Then, contextual changes in church and society will be described in order to get oriented with the context and the community.

#### 3.1. A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF NAGLAND

##### 3.1.1. The Nagas as a historically unique group of people

The word ‘Naga’ refers to a transnational indigenous group consisting of about forty tribes numbering approximately three million. “Ethnically the Naga tribes trace their origin to Indo-Mongolian race and speak a variety of dialects originating from the Tibeto-Burman language family.”<sup>43</sup> They live in a landlocked mountainous region, formerly known as “the Naga Hills,” surrounded by powerful neighbors like the Chinese empire in the North, the Ahom kingdom in the South and West and the Burmese empire in the East.<sup>44</sup> The Naga people were self-sufficient, self-governing village-states/village-republics led by a king, chief, leader or village council. Even to this day village council is the center of power in Naga villages. Today there are seventeen major tribes along with other sub-tribes in Nagaland, namely, Ao, Angami, Sumi, Lotha, Chang, Konyak, Chakesang, Khiamningam, Phom, Rengma, Sangtam, Yimchunger, Zeliang, Pochury, Kuki, Rongmei and Bodo-Kachari and some other sub-tribes inhabiting this hill state. Each of the tribes is unique and distinct from the others in terms of language, customs, practices, polity, food habits, attires, ornaments, dress and folklore.<sup>45</sup> They also have a vernacular term for their own tribe. Some example of this are, the Angamis and some other allied tribes call themselves as the Tenyimia, the Ao as Aos, the Lothas are known as Kyong, and the

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<sup>43</sup> <https://nagaland.gov.in/pages/nagaland-profile> Official State Portal Government of Nagaland: accessed on 05<sup>th</sup> December 2023.

<sup>44</sup> Tezenlo Thong, “A Clash of Worldviews: The Impact of Modern Western Notion of Progress on Indigenous Naga Culture,” 1.

<sup>45</sup> <https://nagaland.gov.in/pages/nagaland-profile> Official State Portal Government of Nagaland, accessed on 05<sup>th</sup> December 2023

Semas are called as Sumi, etc. These tribes have been distributed in different geographical areas of the state and nearby areas.<sup>46</sup>

The Nagas were free people before the coming of the British colonizers. The territory which was occupied by Naga tribes were almost all hilly and covered with thick forests. These hill forests were filled with dangerous insects, wild animals, evil spirits and head hunters. Even the mighty Burmese empire and the powerful Ahom kingdom never dared to enter Naga territory. The British called the Naga occupied area simply as 'jungles beyond Assam'. The British imperial appetite was stimulated by various economic and political incentives to conquer these fierce warrior tribes. In 1866, formal colonial annexation of Naga Hills had already begun and most of the Naga tribes, with the exception of few tribes, came under British administration by 1910.<sup>47</sup> The colonization of Nagas Hills were very thorough and a testament to that is a landmark event which took place during World War I. 2000 Naga warriors were chosen to form the famous Naga Labour Corps and sent to France to support the Allied war efforts. In 1947 India got independence and took control over Naga Hills. There was a long and bloody movement against illegal and violent Indian occupation of Naga Hills. It was a struggle for complete independence and sovereignty of Naga country. This movement unified the different warring Naga tribes and firmly established a sense of 'Naganness' and oneness in the hearts of the various Naga tribes.

### 3.1.2. The present state of Nagaland

In 1963 there was a temporary settlement between the government of India and Nagas resulting in the creation of the state of Nagaland. Even today the political issue between the Nagas and the government of India is yet to reach a conclusive state. Talks and agreements are being held between the government of India and political entities of Naga freedom fighters but without a permanent solution. Today almost all the recognized seventeen tribes of Nagaland have their own separate district or sub-divisions where they dominate and own the land. Nagaland is now an Indian state located in the far northeastern part of India. Nagaland shares borders with the states of Assam in the West, Manipur in the South, Arunachal Pradesh and parts of Assam on the North, and an international boundary with Myanmar (Burma) on the East. It is one of the

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<sup>46</sup> Neizovou and Pradip Jyoti Mahanta, "Impact of Westernization on the Naga Society," *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts (IJCRT)*, Volume 11, No. 9 (September 2023): e497

<sup>47</sup> Surender S Ghonkrota, "Socio-cultural and Political Impact of Colonization on Naga Hills," *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)* Vol. 25, No. 6, Series 10 (June 2020): 2.

smallest states in India with an area of 16,578 sq. Kms. According to the Aadhar statistics of 2021/2022 the population of the state is 2,189,297. There are sixteen administrative districts in Nagaland namely, Kohima, Phek, Mokokchung, Wokha, Zunheboto, Tuensang, Mon, Peren, Longleng, Kiphiri, Dimapur, Noklak, Tseminyu, Niuland, Shamator and Chümoukedima.<sup>48</sup> Kohima is the administrative capital of Nagaland and Dimapur is the commercial hub. These two districts are the most urbanized districts and the epicenter of almost every political, social, economic and religious activity in the state.

Nagaland is also called Switzerland of the East because of the exquisitely picturesque landscapes, the vibrantly colourful sunrise and sunset, lush and verdant flora, and pleasant climate. It is a land of folklore passed down the generations through word of mouth. Here, music is an integral part of life; folk songs eulogizing ancestors, the brave deeds of warriors and traditional heroes; poetic love songs immortalizing ancient tragic love stories; Gospel songs that touch the soul or the modern tunes rendered exquisitely to set one's feet a-tapping.<sup>49</sup>

### 3.1.3. Brief account of the coming of Baptist Christianity among Sumi Nagas

The first attempt to evangelize the Nagas was made by Rev Miles Bronson in 1839 but it was a limited success.<sup>50</sup> The second attempt was made under the initiative of Rev Edward Winter Clark in 1872. With the encouragement of Rev Clark, an Assamese (Indian) evangelist by the name Godhula Rufus Brown entered Naga territory. After a long, rigorous and relentless effort there was a breakthrough and on December 23, 1872 fifteen persons were baptized in Deka Haimong (Molungyimchen village today).<sup>51</sup> Eventually, American baptist Christianity became the religion of the Naga people. The Americans left Nagaland in 1955, passing the baton of their ministry to local church leaders. With regard to Sumi tribe, 1904 is marked as the official birth year of Christianity among Sumi Nagas when Ghopuna and Ghosuna, chiefs of Ighanumi village, were baptized by Rev. Rivenburg in Kohima. In 1906 Rev. Dickson became the first American missionary to be given official license to work among the Sumi. He briefly toured some of the

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<sup>48</sup> Neizovou and Mahanta, "Impact of Westernization on the Naga Society," e497

<sup>49</sup> <https://nagaland.gov.in/pages/nagaland-profile> Official State Portal Government of Nagaland accessed on 05<sup>th</sup> December 2023.

<sup>50</sup> Ksh. Rajesh Singh, "Coming of Christianity in the Naga Area of North East India", *IOSR-Journal Of Humanities And Social Science* Vol. 20, No. 4 (April 2015), 14. DOI: 10.9790/0837-20441317 [www.iosrjournals.org](http://www.iosrjournals.org)

<sup>51</sup> Singh, "Coming of Christianity in the Naga Area of North East India", 15.

Southern Sumi villages from Kohima before returning to America in 1908. As a result of his departure, Rev Bailey and Rev. Longwell in Impur and Rev. Tanquist in Kohima were tasked with preaching in Sumi area. In November 1928, the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society (ABFMS) passed a formal resolution to open a new mission field for work specifically among the Sumi but due to lack of funding no actual work was carried out. It was only when Rev. Anderson saw the need to work among Sumis that real substantial mission work began. In 1936 Rev. Anderson was assigned to supervise mission work in Sumi area and to build a Sumi mission center at Aizuto in Zunheboto District, the traditional headquarters of the Sumi.<sup>52</sup> Rev. Anderson resided at the new mission center briefly from 1949 to 1950. The first permanently resident American missionary for the Sumi was Rev. Delano who served in the newly established Aizuto mission station from 1949 to 1955. Rev. Delano's family was also the last American missionary family to leave the Naga Hills when the Indian government expelled all foreign missionaries from the turbulent Naga areas in 1955.<sup>53</sup>

In the absence of foreign missionaries, Sumi local preachers had to take up the responsibility of spreading the gospel message to every Sumi villages. Asu Kushe of Chishilimi village, Rev. Yemhi of Lazami village, Inaho Kinimi of Lumami village, were some pioneer evangelists who got an almost legendary status among Sumi because of their efforts and contribution towards spreading the gospel to every nook and corner of Sumi area.<sup>54</sup> Apart from sporadic external/foreign support, Sumi is the only tribe in the Naga Hills that can be credited with self-propagating and self-sustaining the work of preaching the message of Christ among their own people. These pioneers and many other local preachers worked tirelessly during the 1920s and 30s even in the face of persecutions, excommunication and threats. They are remembered in their own villages and duly acknowledged with sacredness during jubilee celebrations and also remembered from the pulpit by contemporary preachers. When the chief of a village accepted the message of Christ it was the end of persecution in that village. Apart from the patronage of the village chief, the tightly knitted family and clan network also played a great role in mass conversion. Whenever the head or any member of a family or clan converted, the message was spread to the rest of the family or clan through the initial converts. Foreign missionaries like Rev.

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<sup>52</sup> Iliyana Angelova, "Colonial rule, Christianity and sociocultural (dis)continuities among the Sumi Naga", *The South Asianist* Vol. 5, No. 1 (2017): 28.

<sup>53</sup> Angelova, "Colonial rule, Christianity and sociocultural (dis)continuities among the Sumi Naga", 28-29.

<sup>54</sup> Angelova, "Colonial rule, Christianity and sociocultural (dis)continuities among the Sumi Naga", 29.

Anderson and Rev. Tanquist were impressed by the unexpected growth of Christianity among Sumi even without much outside support.<sup>55</sup>

## 3.2. ECCLESIAL CHANGES

### 3.2.1. The beginning of missional movements

Until the early 1970s the Baptist church was more or less united and other denominations were outside of the spotlight. There was not much change in the ecclesiastical domain. It was only during the late 70s when a great spiritual awakening took place across Nagaland. It was a Revival Movement which swept across Nagaland like a wild fire. This movement led to the decision of sending missionaries outside of Nagaland.<sup>56</sup> By the 1990s Naga Christian Fellowship (NCF) formed in many major cities of India and by 2012 NCF was established in 16 major cities.<sup>57</sup> By the turn of the century local churches and tribal baptist associations were sending missionaries to neighboring states and countries. New churches and mission schools were being set up in various mission fields across Assam, West Bengal, Arunachal Pradesh, Nepal and Burma. Young people from every local church expressed their zeal for theological education. Large number of youths came forward committing their lives for full-time ministry. This necessitated the establishment of several new theological institutions to accommodate increasing number of aspirants who were eager to become pastors, missionaries, preachers and church leaders.

### 3.2.2. The rise of independent churches

Another ecclesial change is the emergence of independent churches. There are three reasons for the emergence of non-denominational churches in Nagaland. Firstly, there is the problem of language. Families and couples living in mixed marriages face difficulty to attend tribal church services. Tribal churches conduct worship services in their own tribal dialects. This made it difficult for wives from another tribe to follow the worship and preaching of their husband's tribal church. Secondly, those who are frustrated with their tribal churches quit their own tribal

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<sup>55</sup> Angelova, "Colonial rule, Christianity and sociocultural (dis)continuities among the Sumi Naga", 29-30.

<sup>56</sup> Angelova, "Colonial rule, Christianity and sociocultural (dis)continuities among the Sumi Naga", 31.

<sup>57</sup> Chongpongmeren Jamir, "Segmentation, unity, and a church divided: a critical history of churches in Nagaland, 1947-2019" (PhD Thesis., Middlesex University / Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, 2019), 182. Middlesex University Research Repository.

churches and either joined a new independent church or started a new one.<sup>58</sup> The dissatisfaction was due to the rigid rules of the church, monotonous worship pattern, uncompromising stance on traditional practice of the church, leadership and power struggle, lack of adequate pastoral care, etc. Thirdly, there are also those who became undesirable for the society, such as drug abusers and alcoholics who got disconnected from their tribal church. They felt left out and abandoned in one way by their church for not showing any sign of interest towards community life and repentance. Independent churches targeted these undesirables and offered them an alternative community, new spiritual environment, warm embrace and hope for a new life, a second chance to be part of the kingdom of God. The time was ripe, so to say, for the emergence of independent churches. This type of church is inter-tribal, inter-denominational, multi-lingual and vibrant with *Hillsong* style of music and Praise & Worship. Worship services and preaching are conducted in common languages such as English and Nagamese. The worship environment is comparatively comfortable and welcoming which attracts many youths from tribal churches. Preaching is done by a charismatic pastor who preaches while walking, singing, praying, holding a microphone and rarely standing behind the pulpit. These preachers put a lot of emphasis on deliverance, hope, blessings and repentance. They preach with conviction, confidence, moral and spiritual authority, clarity and uninterrupted flow of thought. They demonstrate boldness and anointing of the Holy Spirit in their preaching and pastoral ministry. These churches began to grow exponentially. Tribal churches see this as some form of existential threat. Many tribal churches also feel the need to adapt certain elements of worship and preaching that are being practiced by independent churches.

### 3.2.3. Growth of prayer centers

Another major ecclesial change is the emergence and growth of prayer centers. As a result of the revival movement churches remained open till midnight and even the whole night in prayer and fasting. Eventually prayer centers were established and prayer ministry was taken up by many as full-time vocation.<sup>59</sup> Spiritual gifts such as prophecy, vision, dreams, casting out demons, healing and prediction of future has become widespread and popular among the masses. However, there is a group of 'anti-revival' who does not approve of this type of spiritual practices. Prayer

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<sup>58</sup> Chongpongmeren, "Segmentation, unity, and a church divided", 190.

<sup>59</sup> Chongpongmeren, "Segmentation, unity, and a church divided", 186.

warriors and ‘pro-revivalists’ find themselves in conflict with ‘anti-revivalists’. Some of the pro-revivalists ended up breaking away from the Baptist church and forming the Nagaland Christian Revival Church (NCRC).<sup>60</sup> This division of ‘pro’ and ‘anti’ revival exists to this day even within the Sumi Baptist church.

#### 3.2.4. The ten-year reshuffle policy

In addition to these, all the four Sumi Baptist Churches Associations introduced a new policy called the ‘Ten Years Reshuffle Policy’. It was first implemented in the year 2019. According to this policy, ministers serving under the baptist church will work only for ten years in one place. After ten years of serving in a local church or mission field or association, the reshuffle must take place and he or she will be transferred to another position or place. The introduction of this policy is met with mixed reaction among both ministers and laity. Some ministers who have been serving in a less advantageous place were optimistic of transfer to a more advantageous place. While some ministers who have become comfortable and rooted in one place suddenly faced the inevitable and unpleasant transition to another place. Some ministers refused to move from their place of posting. The association had to take action in response to this insubordination. These ministers were stripped off their titles and privilege, terminated from active official duty, banned from being recruited by any local church hereafter, and forbidden to exercise their priestly authority such as administering Holy Communion, water baptism, conducting holy matrimony, child naming, house dedication, etc. Basically, they were not ministers anymore in the eyes of the association. Some unwillingly accepted this policy and criticized the association of dictatorial and manipulative governance. While there are ministers who welcomed this change as a just and equal opportunity for everyone.

### 3.3. SOCIAL CHANGES

#### 3.3.1. A threat to the tribal way of living

Since the twilight years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Nagaland has been experiencing an influx of western media and entertainment. Television is the medium through which common Naga people were introduced to western lifestyle and culture. The society and culture of the Nagas experienced a

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<sup>60</sup> Chongpongmeren, “Segmentation, unity, and a church divided”, 186.



paradigm shift from community oriented life towards individualism. Although it is important to mention that community life is still strong. Late night Rock music concerts, violence and gang fights, pop culture, widespread immorality and sexual promiscuity became rampant. Increasing divorce and broken families, the menace of drug and alcohol addiction, etc. shook the very foundation of Naga society and tribal way of life.

### 3.3.2. Frustration among younger generation

Competition for academic excellence has become stressful for younger people. Now it is all about being the best student, scoring high marks and sacrificing every other aspect of life just to pass the civil service exams and get a government job. If one is not able to get a job by academic merit, the alternative is bribing and nepotism. If bribing or political manipulation is not possible, then the ultimate result is unemployment. There are no large scale industries that can generate employment and therefore government job has become the center point of many socio-economic evils in the state.

### 3.3.3. Uncontrolled corruption

Corruption has become rampant across the state of Nagaland. Misappropriation of public funds by bureaucrats and politicians, unhealthy church politics and widening gap between the haves and have not are just few of Nagaland's sorry state of affairs. Bribery, nepotism, extortion and embezzlement have made a mockery of the 'Nagaland for Christ' slogan proclaimed and adopted by Nagaland.<sup>61</sup> The former way of living which used to be identified by communal and social values, honesty, generosity, hospitality, genuineness and moral purity has gone out of the window. Now it is all about getting a government job either by academic merit or by political manipulation or by simply buying off bureaucrats and political leaders. This has become an uncomfortable issue for preachers because all sorts of people are within the congregation. The ones who pull the political strings, those who paid huge sums of money to get the job, position, those who abuse their power and manipulate the office, and those who accepted bribes – everyone is present in the congregation. A preacher runs the risk of coming under immense pressure for preaching against these social evils.

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<sup>61</sup> T. Zarenthung Ezung, "Corruption And Its Impact On Development", International Journal of Rural Studies (IJRS) Vol. 19, No. 1 (April 2012): 1.

### 3.3.4. Violence and extortion

Factional killings within Naga National Political Groups (NNPG) have become a cause of major concern in Nagaland. Many innocent citizens have lost their lives due to factional clashes and gun fights. Between the years 2012-2016, 145 Naga national workers, 9 Indian security personnel, and 29 innocent civilians were killed. In that same period, 387 cases of kidnappings for the purpose of extortion and ransom demands were reported.<sup>62</sup> Extortion and unabated taxation plays a big role in stagnating socio-economic progress and crippling the development of the state. Government officials, business community, contractors, politicians and even small shops and vegetable vendors, no one can escape the terrorizing 'Demand Letter' from multiple armed factions. The so called 'National Workers' have turned into an organized extortionist group taking from individuals, government and all sources of public funds.<sup>63</sup> They too sit in the pew listening to preachers week after week. At the same time victims of such Demand Letters are also sitting in the pew. Both the perpetrator and the victim could be sitting in the same bench and a preacher has to be conscious of it.

### 3.3.5. Increasing unemployment

Unemployment in the state is another major social challenge which stands at 24.7%. As of 2022 the registered number of unemployed youths in Nagaland is 77,746. The actual number could be much higher because many don't get themselves registered at the employment exchange office.<sup>64</sup> Poor industrial sector, traditional method of agriculture, lack of skilled labor, exam-oriented rather than vocation system of education, excessive dependency on government job, lack of industries and investments are some reasons for this problem.<sup>65</sup> Poor work ethic such as lack of dignity of labor, hard work, integrity and honesty is another factor contributing to this issue.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Chongpongmeren, "Segmentation, unity, and a church divided", 177.

<sup>63</sup> Bendangjungshi, *Confessing Christ in the Naga Context: Towards a Liberating Ecclesiology*. (Berlin: Lit verlag Bennett, Huw, 2012), 70.

<sup>64</sup> Avibou Nagi and Besü Kholi, "A Study on Youth Unemployment in Nagaland Employment Prospects and Opportunities", *International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews* Vol. 4, No. 8. (August 2023): 1677.

<sup>65</sup> Nagi and Kholi, "A Study on Youth Unemployment in Nagaland Employment Prospects and Opportunities", 1678-1679.

<sup>66</sup> Nagi and Kholi, "A Study on Youth Unemployment in Nagaland Employment Prospects and Opportunities", 1680.

Although there are many other changes, it is sufficient to end the list here because these are the most relevant issues at hand. In the subsequent chapters some of these social and ecclesial changes will be discussed in the interviews with the respondent.

## Chapter Four

### AN OVERVIEW OF THE PRACTICE OF PREACHING IN USBCs

Preaching in USBC has now become diversified in its types and function. In this chapter, we will get an idea of how preaching is being organized in USBCs. The only way to find information about the practice of preaching in USBCs is to rely on the interviews and the researcher's own personal experience and knowledge acquired from working among this community. The congregation is divided into fellowships according to geographical location to make it manageable. Each Fellowship is placed under the care of a Fellowship pastor. Preaching in these congregations occurs at least 5 times in a week. Sunday morning devotional service is the most anticipated and celebrated among all the others. Sunday evening which is less formal and most of the time conducted in the Fellowships. Then other services like Women's fellowship, Youth fellowship, mid-week fellowship are conducted mostly in the respective Fellowships. Sunday morning devotional sermon normally last between 20-40 minutes. The fellowship sermons also follow a similar time pattern. The interviews can give a better picture of the way preachers organize their preaching practice. To maintain anonymity, the six interviewees will be referred to as respondents for referencing and addressed as R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, and R6, respectively.

Most of the pastors preached more of topical sermons during the initial phase. With more experience and years of serving most of them switch to textual or expository sermons. For instance, one of the respondents said, "my initial years of preaching was all topical sermons because it is easier to prepare topical sermons and I don't have to stress about the frequency of sermons that I have to deliver which is two or at times even three sermons in a week."<sup>67</sup> A senior pastor said that his sermons have always been textual and expository.<sup>68</sup>

All the respondents have more or less the same opinion regarding time. The sermon is expected not to exceed 30 minutes. "On Sunday morning devotional service the whole service is expected to be wrapped up within one hour which gives 20-30 minutes maximum for sermon. If a sermon

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<sup>67</sup> Online Interview with respondent 2 on 28-12-2023. Respondent 2 has been preaching in urban churches for 9 years.

<sup>68</sup> Online interview with respondent 5 on 03-01-2024. Respondent 5 has been preaching for 36 years of which more than 25 years is in urban churches.

extends beyond this time there is movement among in the pew. The preacher takes it as a signal that listeners' attention is almost exhausted."<sup>69</sup> However, in special occasions it can go up to 45 minutes. In annual conferences, revival hours, crusades, Bible camps and healing service preaching can last for an hour or more because people are mentally prepared to sit for long duration.

A preacher has to be fluent in both Sumi and English. Preachers are supposed to set an example for the congregation. This means "urban pastors are expected to master the Sumi Bible and all the deep vocabularies with their origin, usage, variations and be able to communicate to Sumi speaking congregations with clarity and confidence."<sup>70</sup> A poor knowledge of Sumi vocabulary and inability to speak flawlessly in Sumi is a huge minus for preachers. At the same time knowledge and mastery over English must be at least a basic or intermediate, of not professional, level. All the respondents specifically mentioned the role of context in sermon preparation process. "Life situation, struggles, expectation of the congregation from a preacher, challenges faced by family and personal issues, all these should be taken into consideration in order to stay relevant."<sup>71</sup> The primacy of the inspiration from the Holy Spirit as the first step in preparation is a common theme. The church does not follow a fixed liturgy unlike episcopal churches that follow the Liturgical calendar throughout the year. So the sermon topic, the theme, the text and the goal of the sermon is largely on the shoulder of the preacher. During common occasions and special celebrations such as Passion Week, Christmas, Jubilee and Anniversaries, etc. the church has themes and texts given to the preacher in advance. However, on normal services it is the pastor who has to prepare monthly liturgy along with fellow pastors and colleagues every month. Prayer is another primary step in preparation process which is practiced seriously by all the respondents. "The secret of my sermon preparation is prayer",<sup>72</sup> said one of the respondents. "Commentaries, supplementary books, even internet sources are important sources but the most important book is the Bible. You have to know your Bible in and out"<sup>73</sup> If the sermon speaks to the preacher, it will also speak to the congregation, this is what half of the respondents asserted.

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<sup>69</sup> Online Interview with respondent 3 on 29-12-2023. Respondent 3 has been preaching for 21 years which includes 13 years of preaching in urban churches.

<sup>70</sup> Online Interview with respondent 6 on 06-01-2024. Respondent 6 has been preaching in urban churches for more than 15 years.

<sup>71</sup> Online Interview with respondent 2.

<sup>72</sup> Online Interview with respondent 3.

<sup>73</sup> Online Interview with respondent 6.

One respondent said, “I prepare most of my sermons based on my personal testimonies because I feel that I must not preach what I myself do not practice.”<sup>74</sup> Half of the respondents said that their preparation begins the moment they are informed of upcoming sermon schedule. They pray for God’s guidance, reflect on certain issues and challenges facing the church and society today, and finally sit down to prepare a day or two before the day of delivery.

“Your dress should be formal because it adds weightage to your message”,<sup>75</sup> said one of the respondents. “Body language is very important if you want to be expressive and keep your congregation fixed on to you during the sermon.”<sup>76</sup> Your eye contact is also very important because you will be able to figure out how the congregation is receiving your sermon. So you have to make sure that your view covers all the corners and angles of the pew”.<sup>77</sup> One of the respondents remarked, “whether you sit or stand behind the podium or walk across the pulpit, it doesn’t matter as long as you are comfortable. If I was allowed to sit and preach, I would be very happy to do so.” But body language and movement depends on the occasion and type of service. In morning devotional service formal dress and standing behind the podium for preaching is the standard etiquette. While body language, dress, and movements can be relaxed and adapted to one’s own comfort during revival hours, healing services, evening services, youth service, women’s fellowship, Sunday school for kids, and men’s fellowship. One of the respondents remarked, “Tone is very important, some people have irritating tone. It is monotonous and there is no variation in voice modulation. It can put off your listeners. So you have to be aware of your voice intonation.”<sup>78</sup>

The sermon is generally prepared for a mixed congregation and speaking of mixed congregation, all the respondents who participated in this research mentioned that they have to keep in mind both the highly educated and less uneducated groups of listeners. Another factor is age group. For example, one of the respondents recounted that every time she sits down to prepare a sermon “the whole congregation appears before my face and I have to make sure everyone fits into my sermon. If both old and young people can locate themselves somewhere in the sermon, then it is

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<sup>74</sup> Online Interview with respondent 2.

<sup>75</sup> Online Interview with respondent 4 on 29-12-2023. Respondent 4 has been preaching for 9 years in an urban church

<sup>76</sup> Online Interview with respondent 6.

<sup>77</sup> Online Interview with respondent 2

<sup>78</sup> Online interview with respondent 2.

an effective sermon. The comments and feedback of people who will be honest to you such as family and close friends also helps in evaluating my preaching.”<sup>79</sup> The sermon should be biblical. “You must preach the truth even if it is uncomfortable for some people’s ears.”<sup>80</sup> “A preacher must be able to draw out principles from biblical texts and make it applicable for today’s audience. If a small child can understand your sermon, then it is a good sermon and everyone in the pew will understand what you are preaching.”<sup>81</sup>

This is first-hand information acquired through interviews with the pastors themselves who have shared from their rich experiences. Preaching in USBCs, like any other, is concerned with language, occasion, time, culture, delivery, etc. However, there are some unique issues or challenges that arise from contextual changes which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

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<sup>79</sup> Online Interview with respondent 4.

<sup>80</sup> Online Interview with respondent 6.

<sup>81</sup> Online Interview with respondent 5.

## Chapter 5

### PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE ON CONTEXTUAL CHANGES

Since the twilight of the 20th century, Nagaland has been experiencing a paradigm shift that has had a significant impact on the church and society. In this chapter, the question of how pastors in USBCs view changes in church and society will be explored. The respondents picked certain contextual changes related to their practice of preaching.

In the past two decades, Nagaland has been witnessing a transition towards digitalization. This is made possible due to the wide and easy accessibility of the internet and smartphones. These two have become almost an essential commodity for every citizen. While digital technology has had a positive impact on various aspects of life, it also poses several challenges to Naga society and the church.<sup>82</sup> For example, R1 is concerned about the negative influence of social media, the internet, and celebrity lifestyle influences. The morality, decency, modesty, and purity of our culture and Christian faith are being discarded. Pompous Christmas celebrations and extravagant wedding ceremonies are some practices that the church needs to seriously re-evaluate.<sup>83</sup> It has turned into a silly display of power, wealth, and a misplaced sense of pride. Another example of negative impact, according to participants, can be mentioned here. R2 views the endless flow of information as highly deceptive and misleading. “It gives false confidence to people that they know everything.”<sup>84</sup> In reality, it is not helping much with their overall spiritual and intellectual growth.

Education has also changed the landscape of the church and society. Most of the respondents mentioned that the majority of the congregation members are educated, and there are many intellectuals today. To give an example, R3 stated that 60 percent of church members are highly educated.<sup>85</sup> This has created a new situation in the church. There are two groups of people in the congregation: highly educated and less educated. The highly educated are mostly young people below the age of 45, and the less educated mostly fall under the age group of 55 and above. The former is intellectually vibrant. They critically observe ecclesial and social phenomena, are

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<sup>82</sup> Jacob Singh Sundas, “Impact of Internet in Youths” *Nagaland Post*, June 7, 2019.

<sup>83</sup> Online interview with respondent 1 on 13-12-2023. Respondent 1 has been preaching in urban churches for 30 years.

<sup>84</sup> Online interview with respondent 2.

<sup>85</sup> Online interview with respondent 3.



usually inquisitive, raise questions about socio-religious practices, and sometimes even challenge age-old traditions that are sanctioned by either the church or culture. R6 said, “We need experienced pastors in urban churches like ours because we, as pastors, have to confront the congregation with moral authority. We cannot give in to the pressure of the congregation and their expectations. We must tell them what they need to know and not what they want to hear.”<sup>86</sup> All the respondents recognized the division between the two groups of congregations that has been created due to the large number of people who have acquired higher education.

Since the beginning of the new millennium, a number of independent churches have grown significantly. When asked about this, many respondents spoke positively about it. R5 pointed out two aspects of independent churches. First is the role of independent churches in witnessing among migrant workers who come to Nagaland in search of work. Secondly, English-speaking families who are mostly living in mixed marriages find it more comfortable to go to these churches.<sup>87</sup> R6 appreciates the lively and passionate services in independent churches. “I attended one of the independent churches. The pastor is filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. The church invests a great deal in prayer and fasting. They are attracting many people because they perform healing and deliverance and also take in people who have been excommunicated from traditional churches.”<sup>88</sup> R4 spoke highly of these churches. “We need to learn from independent churches. ‘We must adapt to the changing needs of the society.’”<sup>89</sup> R1 lamented that traditional churches are too rigid and we want to remain in the 60s and 70s. We need more collaboration with them.”<sup>90</sup>

In the past three decades, prayer centers have become increasingly dominant in the spiritual life of Nagaland. Many prayer warriors have emerged, and some of them have established their own prayer centers. There has been a lot of debate and discussion in the ecclesial circle about the theological and biblical validity of prayer centers. Nevertheless, prayer centers have managed to gain a permanent foothold in Naga society. R5 commented on the rise of prayer centers as a result of “spiritually gifted individuals who are deeply convinced that they are called and

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<sup>86</sup> Online interview with respondent 6.

<sup>87</sup> Online interview with respondent 5.

<sup>88</sup> Online interview with respondent 6.

<sup>89</sup> Online interview with respondent 4.

<sup>90</sup> Online interview with respondent 1.

empowered by God to intercede for others.”<sup>91</sup> Prayer ministry has become a vocation for many spiritual enthusiasts.<sup>92</sup>

The emergence of prayer centers cannot be understood in isolation from the rise of a new group of people in the church and society. These spiritually gifted individuals are sometimes part of a local church and work in collaboration with the church by serving as prayer warriors and ministering to church members alongside pastors. Some of them have their own independent prayer ministry, which functions as a parachurch with their own unique style of conducting services. However, in the eyes of many pastors and mainline traditional churches, prayer warriors are even criticized as unbiblical, money-making ministries. For example, R6 expressed skepticism about those prayer warriors whose prophecies, visions, and dreams seem to be generated from personal agendas rather than inspired by the Holy Spirit.<sup>93</sup> In this connection, R3 also commented on the way people are looking for prayer warriors in an almost frenzy-like state. “Many people are running after prayer warriors and prayer centers, hoping to receive some prophecies, visions, or direct messages from God. Only a handful of people are willing to build their spiritual life steadily through the listening and reading of the Word.”<sup>94</sup> People want to see miracles and wonders happen instantly. Many pastors have a critical or suspicious attitude toward prayer warriors. They warn their congregation not to be deceived by false prophecies, which feed on fear and ignorance. This type of prophecy is seen as a publicity stunt in order to gain recognition and followers.<sup>95</sup>

With regard to the ten-year reshuffle policy, most of the older respondents who have been serving for more than twenty years disagree with the way the policy is being implemented. R5 clearly stated that it is a monopoly of some individuals who want to control all the pastors. Job security among full-time ministers and trust issues between the administrative council and pastors are two core challenges arising from this.<sup>96</sup> R6 doubted the efficiency of this policy and

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<sup>91</sup> Online interview with respondent 5.

<sup>92</sup> Chongpongmeren, “Segmentation, unity and a church divided” 186.

<sup>93</sup> Online interview with respondent 6.

<sup>94</sup> Online interview with respondent 3.

<sup>95</sup> Chakhesang Baptist Church Council, “CBCC advises citizens not to be swayed by false prophecies” *The Morung Express* January 17, 2021.

<sup>96</sup> Online interview with respondent 5.

challenged the idea behind this new policy.<sup>97</sup> R1 expressing discomfort indicates that this policy is sensitive. Ministers who are being transferred feel displaced suddenly. The pastor's entire life is interrupted by this policy.<sup>98</sup>

It is somehow clear that the respondents indicate some common issues may be affecting pastors of USBCs in general. In the next chapter we shall see the relationship between these changes and practice of preaching in USBCs as experienced and understood by pastors.

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<sup>97</sup> Online interview with respondent 6.

<sup>98</sup> Online interview with respondent 1.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CONTEXTUAL CHANGES AND THE PRACTICE OF PREACHING**

In this chapter, the opinions and arguments of the respondents on certain aspects of preaching practice in USBCs will be presented in detail. Respondents' perspective on the relationship between contextual changes and preaching will be elucidated in detail. Agreements and disagreements among respondents will also be explained. Reasons for their individual views will also be stated as to why they hold certain positions on various aspects of preaching.

The understanding of preaching among pastors in USBCs is interesting to explore to begin with. For example, R5 stated during the interview that “more than 30 years ago, when I first entered ministry after completing my bachelor’s, I preached only topical sermons. Preaching, for me, at that time, was being the oracle of God.” It is important to see the change after thirty years of preaching. “Now I understand preaching as an act of convincing the congregation to accept what we profess and believe.”<sup>99</sup> Likewise, R1 describes the development of a personal attitude towards preaching. “In the initial period of my ministry, preaching was all about dressing up nicely, looking sharp on the pulpit, instructing the congregation, and giving out lots of advice. But now it’s embarrassing to think about the way I used to preach. After more than 25 years in the ministry, I see preaching simply as exposing the truth of the Bible.”<sup>100</sup> Similarly, R4 also reflected the change in perceptions about preaching. “In the beginning, preaching to me was all about how well you could speak in the pulpit. My focus was on the oratory and presentation of the preacher. But now I would define preaching as making the Word of God come alive in the lives of the listeners. It is an effort to communicate the Word of God in order to help everyone find themselves as a valued member of the church.”<sup>101</sup> While pondering this matter, R6 stated, “Well, during the early years of my ministry, I understood preaching as the proclamation of the gospel. But after 20 years in the ministry, I say it is confronting the congregation with the truth of the Bible. Preaching is exposing the issues embedded in our church and society without fear or reservations and contrasting them with what the Bible says.”<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Online interview with respondent 5.

<sup>100</sup> Online interview with respondent 1.

<sup>101</sup> Online interview with respondent 4.

<sup>102</sup> Online interview with respondent 6.

According to the interviews, all the respondents echoed the change in the length of the sermon. For instance, R2 stated that sermons have become shorter compared to initial years in the ministry. 15-20 minutes is the usual time now. “We don’t need to discuss many subjects at length. Normally, I pick a single theme or issue and try to do justice to that specific matter at hand.”<sup>103</sup> Likewise, R5 also said, “I used to preach for an hour. Now I keep it between 25 and 30 minutes.” When asked about the reason why it has become shorter, two reasons were given. First, church members have their own respective village prayer fellowships right after the service. Second, to avoid the heavy Sunday traffic congestion since all the churches in the city will be concluding their services by noon time.<sup>104</sup> While some respondents, like R3 and R5, opined that people are not patient anymore, this lack of patience can be caused by excessive use of smartphones, playing games, and spending extended hours on social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and YouTube.

The value of preaching among congregations, according to pastors, is also a topic of debate. While R1, R2, and R6 are of the opinion that people don’t value preaching the way it used to be, these three respondents argue that congregations have become more critical of preaching and preachers due to trust issues raised by incompetent preachers and ill-prepared preachers.<sup>105</sup> Other reasons could be internal church politics within the clergy, sugar-coated preaching by some opportunistic pastors, and the seduction of feel-good sermons [4] gaining a foothold in USBCs. However, R6 is of the opinion that preaching is still valued by today’s congregation to the same degree as it used to be, but due to factors such as traffic jams and village prayer fellowships, the congregation requires shorter sermons. Whereas R3 and R4 are not sure about the congregation’s view on the value of preaching, as they feel that it depends on individuals and cannot be examined as a whole.

The subject of the language used in sermons is also important to consider. Participants such as R1 and R4 hold the view that there is a need to incorporate the use of English in preaching. The argument for the need for English is that children and youths are unable to follow all the Sumi dialects. They have been trained to read, write, think, contemplate, and reflect in English since their childhood. All educational institutions, like schools and colleges, are English-medium, and

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<sup>103</sup> Online interview with respondent 2.

<sup>104</sup> Online interview with respondent 5.

<sup>105</sup> Online interview with respondent 1.

therefore the Sumi dialect is spoken only at home or in the church. In this situation, there is a need to bridge the language gap by using English so that younger people can really connect with the sermon. About 30 percent of the sermon should be in English.<sup>106</sup> Couples in mixed marriage can also understand the gist of the sermon if the preacher highlights the main parts of the sermon in English. Promotion of culture and the Sumi dialect cannot take precedence over pastoral concern.<sup>107</sup> However, R2 argues that the use of English is time-consuming. It is only a repetition in English of what has already been spoken in Sumi.<sup>108</sup> R6 is of the opinion that Sumi pastors should be confident in the Sumi dialect and try to preach as much as possible only in the Sumi dialect. Identity is directly linked to language, and the responsibility of a Sumi pastor is also to master the Sumi dialect and preach fluently in Sumi. Other tribes do not speak a single word in English because they uphold the value of their own tribal dialect.<sup>109</sup> While R3 inclines towards this position on this matter, adding that language in the sermon depends on the expectations of the congregation regarding the choice of language.<sup>110</sup> R5 holds the view that English should also be used if and when necessary because there are many linguistic dynamics in preaching. One has to first study the biblical text, compare it with Greek or Hebrew root words, and then compare it with the English version. After this, there is also the issue of finding the closest possible translation in the Sumi dialect. Many Sumi vocabularies do not have the exact English equivalent, and vice versa. Language is conditioned by culture, which makes the task of the preacher a meticulous one. Any language can be used if the message is communicated effectively.<sup>111</sup>

When it comes to the style of delivery and pulpit presentation, many respondents expressed a desire for freedom of movement in the pulpit. Traditionally, Baptist churches in Nagaland place the pulpit on a high pedestal. R4 asserted that wearing formal clothes adds weight to the person of the preacher. It also promotes the sanctity of the pulpit. Youth expect pastors to be bold, charismatic, and confident. Monotonous and motionless preaching has become unattractive. The stage presentation of pastors needs major attention today if the church wishes to retain young

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<sup>106</sup> Online interview with respondent 4.

<sup>107</sup> Online interview with respondent 1.

<sup>108</sup> Online interview with respondent 2.

<sup>109</sup> Online interview with respondent 6.

<sup>110</sup> Online interview with respondent 3.

<sup>111</sup> Online interview with respondent 5.

listeners in the pew.<sup>112</sup> R6 also said that it is good to move around the stage while preaching. This way, connecting with listeners is easier and more comfortable. Female preachers should not wear beaded clothes. But it is acceptable for male preachers.<sup>113</sup> This gender-specific argument for beaded clothes is significant because of the cultural context of Sumi tribal churches. Beaded clothes are extremely popular across Nagaland. Wearing a beaded dress indicates wealth, power, prosperity, qualification, and status. So, it is culturally understandable if women preachers are discouraged from wearing such dresses. But as for the male preachers, it may be acceptable because of the patriarchal dominance in the Sumi tribe, which extends to the church as well. R1 expressed that if it were permissible, sitting would be more preferable than standing or even walking. Dress code is also a sensitive aspect of preaching because many listeners look up to pastors as models who ought to show what kind of clothes to wear in church. So, wearing high-end designer clothes or making formal dresses mandatory can become stereotypical. Wearing comfortable and simple clothes is more important than formal clothes.<sup>114</sup>

Preaching in the Sunday devotional morning service is different from fellowship preaching. Since fellowship churches are more homogenous and more informal, the sermons can also be personal and intimate. Until around 2010–15, these fellowships did not have fellowship pastors. It was only recently, around ten to fifteen years ago, that USBCs began to realize the importance of institutionalized yet informal small group fellowships under the care of a theologically trained pastor. R1 expressed that it is more comfortable and personally engaging with listeners in these fellowships. Sunday morning service preaching is too generalized. It is in smaller congregations that effective communication of the sermon happens.<sup>115</sup> R2 goes one step further on this subject and says that sending short messages to small groups during house visitation is more satisfactory than preaching in a fellowship church. Individual problems and needs can be addressed directly because the conversation is focused on a specific individual, couple, or a family.<sup>116</sup>

After a detailed discussion, it is safe to say that pastors are becoming increasingly self-aware of contextual changes and how it is influencing their preaching practice. Although they hold contrasting views on certain issues, yet there is a common undeniable friction and interaction

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<sup>112</sup> Online interview with respondent 4.

<sup>113</sup> Online interview with respondent 6.

<sup>114</sup> Online interview with respondent 1.

<sup>115</sup> Online interview with respondent 1.

<sup>116</sup> Online interview with respondent 2.

between context and preaching. This points us to the next chapter which asks, if preaching is changing, how do pastors evaluate preaching in light of the new changes in their practice?



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### IMPLICATIONS OF CONTEXTUAL CHANGES ON HOMILETICAL COMPETENCE

This chapter explores what experienced pastors think should be the criteria for homiletical competence in a changing context. Respondents, with their rich experiences, give reasons why they think certain aspects of preaching are important to reconsider. Observing how contextual changes may influence the practice of preaching, all the respondents have given their opinions about what constitutes effective contextual preaching. In the context of USBCs, apart from traditional homiletical principles, socio-cultural values as well as the personal authenticity of a preacher play a major role.

One major criterion for being an effective preacher is gaining the trust of the listeners. If the preacher is not well-versed in the Bible and ill-prepared for the sermon, the congregation loses confidence in the preacher. People are becoming more intellectually sophisticated due to higher education. With the introduction of 4G internet service and cheap smartphones, pastors cannot take anything for granted. There is a possibility of cross-checking facts among the pews after or during preaching. Gone are the days when pastors were looked up to with great admiration. Now many theologically trained students and graduates have come up. There are seminary graduates sitting in the pew. There must be biblical truth, sound theology, a logical flow of thought, and engagement with the reality of the daily struggles of church members.<sup>117</sup> Simply picking a verse from the Bible and sharing some stories and quotes is not enough now. Congregations expect a certain level of depth in the sermon. Instead, well-structured expository sermons would resonate with the intellectually vibrant urban audience.<sup>118</sup> Today, sermons must stimulate the listeners mentally and, at the same time, have an element of emotional appeal.<sup>119</sup>

The authenticity of the preacher is becoming increasingly a decisive criterion for homiletical competence. As R1 puts it, “people are observing you more than they are listening to your sermons. Your life and your testimony speak louder than your words from the pulpit.”<sup>120</sup> Personal integrity, full-hearted commitment to ministry, and boldness to confront the

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<sup>117</sup> Online interview with respondent 1.

<sup>118</sup> Online interview with respondent 2.

<sup>119</sup> Online interview with respondent 5.

<sup>120</sup> Online interview with respondent 1.

congregation with the truth of the Bible without vested interest have become crucial qualities to win the trust of church members. The congregation won't listen to a preacher who cannot lead the community by example.<sup>121</sup> In tribal churches like USBCs, the boundary between individuality and community is almost absent. Everything is closely knitted, and information spreads instantly. Every action, decision, and conduct is closely monitored by the congregation. It can sound very suffocating for individualistic societies, such as Indian metropolitan cities or western societies. But such is the social fabric of the Naga tribal community, in which the personal authenticity of a pastor largely dictates the reception of sermons by the congregation.

Language has become a sensitive matter for USBCs. This makes it highly important for preachers to be not only fluent in Sumi but also in English.<sup>122</sup> USBCs are basically tribal congregations that have a strong sense of homogeneity and exclusivity as a tribal community. The church is not only a religious community but also a social and ethnic community. It is language that distinguishes one tribe from the other. Language is also a carrier of culture. Language is a system that involves symbols, images, concepts, and words, all of which have cultural representation<sup>123</sup> for each tribe. Thus, a church service is not only a gathering for worship but also an event that contributes to keeping the congregation intact as a tribal community distinct from another tribe. If pastors are to lead the congregation, they have to know the seriousness of language. Pastors in USBCs today need to be well-equipped with language skills, both English and Sumi. Children and youths also feel more connected if English is spoken alongside Sumi during sermons.<sup>124</sup> There has to be a way to find a balance between the congregation's cultural identity on the one hand and bridging the linguistic gap for those who require English to be incorporated in sermons.

Due to the influence of independent churches and charismatic preachers on YouTube, the aspect of sermon delivery and stage presence has also become a major criterion for getting the sermon effectively communicated to the listeners. Pastors need to become assertive and smarter in their preaching and leadership. Monotonous ministry patterns and a lack of passion and energy during

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<sup>121</sup> Online interview with respondent 6.

<sup>122</sup> Online interview with respondent 1.

<sup>123</sup> Sultan Hammad Alshammari, "The Relationship Between Language, Identity and Cultural Differences: A critical Review." *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences* Vol. 8 , No. 4 (2018), 98.

<sup>124</sup><sup>124</sup> Online interview with

preaching are big factors in low attendance in the church.<sup>125</sup> However, this expectation may not be entirely credited to the influence of media and charismatic movements. R6 asserted that “I just feel comfortable not standing behind the podium, and this has nothing to do with any western influence.”<sup>126</sup> Keeping the audience attentive to the preaching is a task that requires knowing what stimulates their interests.”<sup>127</sup> Keeping the audience attentive to the preaching is a task that requires knowing what stimulates their interests.<sup>128</sup> Since the attention span of the congregation is shorter, the sermon should begin with an attention-catcher to induce enthusiasm among the people.<sup>129</sup>

Being updated with global news and happenings around the globe has become yet another task for pastors in USBCs. The preacher must demonstrate an inquisitive mind that keeps track of developments at the city, state, nation, and international level that may be relevant to the church directly or indirectly.<sup>130</sup> Pastors should be able to relate the Bible to current challenges because the congregation nowadays is not satisfied with superficial sermons. There is a scarcity of preachers who can really bring out a connection between ancient Biblical texts and modern problems that plague our scientific and digital society.<sup>131</sup> The pastor's responsibility is also to educate the congregation on new issues and events that should not be taken for granted by a Christian community. At the same time, being able to interpret biblical texts in light of those issues is a homiletic challenge for pastors. Important to note here is the responsibility of segregating and distinguishing what kind of changes should be accepted or discouraged. Not every change is beneficial for the church, and not every event is relevant for the community.<sup>132</sup> As pastors, it requires great discernment to preach about what changes are permissible and what changes are incompatible with the Sumi tribal church. In that sense, pastors are standing at a crossroads, deciding for people which direction to move depending on which changes are compatible with Sumi tribal Christianity. This implies that pastors need to be crystal clear with doctrinal and ethical boundaries in their theological reflection while preaching.

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<sup>125</sup> Online interview with respondent 4.

<sup>126</sup> Online interview with respondent 6.

<sup>127</sup> Online interview with respondent 5.

<sup>128</sup> Online interview with respondent 2.

<sup>129</sup> Online interview with respondent 1.

<sup>130</sup> Online interview with respondent 2.

<sup>131</sup> Online interview with respondent 1.

<sup>132</sup> Online interview with respondent 5.

Feedback from listeners has been the classical way of evaluating sermons. It is still held in high regard in USBCs. However, in the past two decades, a new kind of self-evaluation has become increasingly popular among urban pastors. All the respondents are unanimous in this matter. Just to give some examples, R2 stated that “If my sermon speaks to me, it will speak to my congregation. A lot depends on my preparation and how much I invest in producing the sermon.”<sup>133</sup> R6 even went to the extent of telling church members not to praise or compliment the sermon because it has become a formality and there is no genuineness. “I tell them, please don’t praise or compliment me for my preaching; just pray for me if you think you are blessed through my preaching.”<sup>134</sup> R4 stated that feedback from close friends, family members, and church members is important, but the deep feeling of satisfaction that comes after a sermon is the decisive factor in evaluating one’s own preaching.<sup>135</sup> R3 asserted that observing the expressions on the faces of the listeners during preaching reveals a lot about the sermon.<sup>136</sup> This is a real-time live evaluation of the sermon by the preacher while preaching simultaneously. When the preacher observes many heads nodding with undivided attention, it is a clear indication that the sermon is being communicated effectively.<sup>137</sup>

The impact of the revival movement and prayer centers on Naga society also found its way to the area of moral competence. All the respondents share a similar view on this as well. Preparation begins by praying for many days or weeks before actually sitting down to study the text. Without the guidance of the Holy Spirit, it is impossible to prepare a meaningful sermon.<sup>138</sup> A preacher must be prepared to allow the Holy Spirit to even change the subject matter of the sermon if God speaks.<sup>139</sup> Spontaneity on the part of the preacher needs attention and must be empowered by the Holy Spirit priori. Without empowerment by the Spirit, it will only be a lecture, not preaching.<sup>140</sup> Fasting and prayer are indispensable if people’s lives are to be impacted. The elements of fasting and prayer act as measures of the seriousness of preparation.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Online interview with respondent 2.

<sup>134</sup> Online interview with respondent 6.

<sup>135</sup> Online interview with respondent 4.

<sup>136</sup> Online interview with respondent 3.

<sup>137</sup> Online interview with respondent 5.

<sup>138</sup> Online interview with respondent 1.

<sup>139</sup> Online interview with respondent 3.

<sup>140</sup> Online interview with respondent 5.

<sup>141</sup> Online interview with respondent 3.

The charismatic preaching of independent churches and those seen on YouTube and television also shape expectations of what it means to be a great preacher. The charisma of a preacher has become a big indicator of the authenticity and quality of a preacher. Pastors must be bold and be able to speak with authority and confidence.<sup>142</sup> The ability to speak with a thrill and explosive zeal is what sets a preacher apart from the others, even in the context of USBCs. This is clearly an influence of the charismatic preaching that is now gaining more popularity in Nagaland.<sup>143</sup> Prophesying and predicting impending fortune or disaster while preaching has become a sensational attraction for both pastors and laypeople. Such preachers are invited by many churches for revival hours, crusades, Bible camps, and conferences. “If the congregation responds to your preaching with Amen, Hallelujah, and Praise the Lord, then your sermon is powerful and well-received by the congregation.”<sup>144</sup> Basically, the validation given by the congregation is now taken seriously as a criterion for homiletical competence. This is because they are educationally higher, intellectually vibrant, and spiritually aware of the global charismatic church, which was seen as less in congregations twenty or twenty-five years ago.

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<sup>142</sup> Online interview with respondent 4.

<sup>143</sup> Elungkiebe Zeliang, “Traditional Practices and the Charismatic Movement Among the Zeliangrong Naga Baptists in North East India.” *American Baptist Quarterly* Vol. XXVIX No 1 & 2 (Spring-Summer 2010): 92.

<sup>144</sup> Online interview with respondent 5.

## CHAPTER 8

### ANALYSIS

This chapter will analyze the results of interviews presented in previous chapters in light of relevant literature. While doing so, it is necessary to keep the ecclesial and societal changes as the contextual frame within which this analysis will be carried out. So far in this research certain contextual issues pertaining to preaching in USBCs have been discussed. The researcher has selected only those issues which seem to have affected the preaching ministry of all the respondents in one way or the other. The interviews were conducted between 13<sup>th</sup> of December, 2023 and 06<sup>th</sup> of January 2024. In order to get a range of opinions the researcher has targeted three age-groups of experienced pastors serving in urban churches: 30-40, 40-50, 50-60.

The value of preaching seems to have depreciated among congregations according to most of the respondents. If congregations are unable to pay attention or disinterested in preaching for various reasons then there are implications which preachers have to rethink. Since congregations have become highly educated and aware of many local, regional and global issues, preachers have to ensure that they are up to the task. Learning the art of rhetoric and persuasion will give preachers a better chance to capture the attention of the congregation and speak more convincingly.<sup>145</sup> But rhetorical skill is not enough if it is not standing on sound theology and doctrinal clarity<sup>146</sup>. The fact that congregations today has free access to unlimited sermons on the internet creates a tendency to be easily disappointed or frustrated if the preacher is not qualified enough to speak convincingly and sensibly. Comparison has made it tough on urban preachers today since “superstar” or “popular” preachers are used as benchmark to compare and criticize local preachers.<sup>147</sup> This also somehow resulted in many preachers pursuing higher theological education and courses on leadership or music in order to be more effective as well as gain the confidence of the congregation.

Understanding the congregation is one of the common themes running throughout all the interviews. Some preachers may still prefer the three-point sermon structure, with a story and

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<sup>145</sup> Lucy Lind Hogan, *Graceful Speech: An Invitation to Preaching* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2006), 20.

<sup>146</sup> Wilfried Engemann, *Homiletics: Principles and Patterns of Reasoning* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2019), 514.

<sup>147</sup> Chuck Lawless, “8 Ways the Internet Can Hurt the Church.” April 25, 2017.

[8 Ways the Internet Can Hurt the Church | ChuckLawless.com](https://www.chucklawless.com/8-ways-the-internet-can-hurt-the-church/)

quote to wrap it up. Perceiving the congregation as a homogenous group with one ethnic, denominational, cultural and historical background can make the preacher complacent, ignorant and insensitive. However, times are changing and there is an urgent need for preachers to closely study and understand the congregation. Leonora Tubbs Tisdale asserts that “exegesis of the congregation and its subcultures is not peripheral to proclamation, but central to its concerns.”<sup>148</sup> Preachers in USBCs are realizing the need to recognize the pervasiveness of diversity within a local congregation. There are diverse sub cultures within the congregation. Education, age, gender and profession are general categories of classifying different groups in a congregation. However, there are more ways to look at diversity within a congregation. Different spirituality among church members, specific problems and needs of individual members, societal and cultural issues are avenues that preachers must explore while preparing sermons. A superficial understanding of the congregation can be disastrous for preaching. The preacher must carefully study the landscape and terrain of the congregation in order to know the true nature and context of the audience.<sup>149</sup> Understanding the audience requires a detailed knowledge of their situation, problems, aspirations, challenges, interests and fears.

The level of stress involved in sermon preparation is at all-time high among pastors in USBCs. Preachers are under immense pressure to prepare sermons in such a way that it generates an interest or arouse the curiosity of the listeners.<sup>150</sup> Preaching is stressful because it is hard work. There are five reasons why sermon preparation can be stressful.<sup>151</sup> Firstly, preachers are stewards of the Word and they are expected to practice what they preach (1 Corinthians 4:2). Secondly, there is much to study and study involves mental, emotional, spiritual and physical investment (2 Timothy 2:15). Thirdly, preachers bear the responsibility of shepherding the church and lead them to live a life of repentance. To do this, the preacher is required to humble themselves and internalize the sermon before teaching others (Luke 18:14). Fourthly, preaching aims to move the hearts of the listeners to persuade them gently in love. It requires a balance of faithful living on the part of the preacher and communicative skills, so that listeners are persuaded in a gentle and inspiring manner (1Timothy 1:5). And fifthly, the words of sermon are sometimes hard. To

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<sup>148</sup> Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), 48.

<sup>149</sup> Adam Hearlson, “Are Congregations Texts?” *Homiletic* Vol. 39, No.1 (2014): 21.

<sup>150</sup> Engemann, *Homiletics*, 513.

<sup>151</sup> David Mathis, “Good Preaching Takes Hard Work” August 25, 2022.

[Good Preaching Takes Hard Work | Desiring God](#)

communicate the truth, the preacher must use decisive and clear-cut words which may not be pleasant to some people (2 Timothy 4:2-4). In spite of multiple responsibilities, preachers need to take out time to sit down and invest more in study and meditation. Many preachers have to go through isolation from family, fatigue, exhaustion and burnouts due to administrative affairs, denominational obligations, family responsibilities, visiting church members, meetings, social participation and community activities with neighborhood or municipality. Preachers need an efficient stress and time management system to maintain a healthy life.

Communication has become a subject of major importance for preachers in USBCs. There are two contextual challenges of communication that have been observed during the research. First, oratory is cultural requirement in a tribal congregation. Tribal societies have a long tradition and history of oral communication. Every story is narrated and passed down from one generation to the next orally. A preacher in this context should have a good story-telling ability in order to connect with the cultural element of the congregation. Keeping an urban congregation interested in preaching is quite a challenge today. With so many technological distractions and moral distortions preachers must be both engaging and edifying in their communication.<sup>152</sup> Second, the language used in preaching has become a sensitive matter for both preachers and listeners. “Language is the most important medium of the preaching event.”<sup>153</sup> The language closest to the heart should also be the medium of preaching. A language that is embedded in the history and identity is the language that resonates with the congregation. It is an effective way of communicating the truth of the Christian faith in a contextually relevant manner.<sup>154</sup> If Sumi pastors are expected to master the Sumi dialect, it is absolutely a valid and healthy expectation. If an urban Sumi pastor is expected to be able to include English for the sake of children, youths and couples in inter-tribal marriage, then it should be considered as a primary necessary skill.

The interviews reveal another crucial issue for preachers in USBCs. The person of the preacher is being brought under scrutiny. The preacher’s character and moral integrity is no more a secondary subject in the ministry of preaching. The constant monitoring and observation by the congregation and fellow preachers calls for authenticity, originality, genuineness and

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<sup>152</sup> Bob Adams, “7 Features of a Church for the City.” March 28, 2020.

[7 Features of a Church for the City | \(27gen.com\)](http://27gen.com)

<sup>153</sup> Engemann, *Homiletics*, 211.

<sup>154</sup> David Lyle Jeffrey, “Biblical language and the language of preaching.” *Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society* Vol. 21, No. 2 (September, 2012): 12.



commitment to ministry even more. The preacher is a part of the congregation who lives among them, wrestles with the same challenges of life and yet somehow able to lead the church at all times professionally, ethically and sensitively. The members of the church should be able to trust the preacher as prudent, diligent, sensitive and honest. A preacher's life, like any other profession such as doctors, lawyers, judges and teachers, is concerned with actual humans and real life situations. It calls for the elements of sincerity and trust to usher a healthy relationship between the preacher and listeners.<sup>155</sup>

Another common theme moving back and forth in every interview is the pneumatological dimension of preaching. Every respondent acknowledged the primacy of the role of the Holy Spirit. Guidance of the Spirit in choosing the text or topic, relying on the power of the Spirit to speak with boldness, praying and fasting to be filled with the Spirit during the preparation and delivery of sermons, are all clear indications of pneumatological nature of preaching. Preaching is an event that occurs in the presence of Christ. Preaching also occurs in the Holy Spirit. In the preaching event Christ and Spirit operates in unison. The Bible describes the Holy Spirit as the enabler who is active in the life of Christ. "All that can be said about the Holy Spirit in turn also refers to the appearance, speaking and acting of Jesus as practice of the communication of the gospel."<sup>156</sup>

Relevance is yet another burning issue that all respondents mentioned during the interviews. Preaching becomes distant and monotonous if it does not touch the lived realities of the listeners. If preachers take preaching as another chore in the list which has to be ticked it will antagonize the listener and also become an unwanted burden for the preacher. Assuming or attributing attitudes, beliefs and values upon the congregation which they themselves don't hold, is the mistake that preachers make. Preaching generic sermon for generic humanity is the reason why the Word cannot become flesh in the preaching event. To make the Word come alive in the lives of the congregation implies that real humans with real issues are able to relate with the sermon.<sup>157</sup> Knowing the situation of the listeners is not enough. There should be a strong link between the preacher and the listeners about the shared context. Listeners and preacher should be aware of the situation that both are in one place because they travel the same path as fellow

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<sup>155</sup> Engemann, *Homiletics*, 515.

<sup>156</sup> Engemann, *Homiletics*, 491.

<sup>157</sup> Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, 19.

pilgrims. The preacher must be able to authentically display an interest in the life and situation of the listeners which is the motivation for communicating the gospel. Only then can there be a real relationship of openness, trust and receptivity. In other words, preachers should also become a participant-observer in the life of the congregation.<sup>158</sup> Another aspect of relevance is the preacher's responsibility to pay attention to the individual life-situation. This is important to prevent preachers from uttering abstract ideas and irrelevant concepts from the pulpit. Instead preachers should aspire to become a mouthpiece of the congregation by grappling with complex issues of faith and life on behalf of individuals struggling with doctrinal or practical issues.<sup>159</sup>

Sermon delivery has also become an interesting subject in USBCs. The act of delivering a sermon requires the preacher to act as a theologian. Without sound theology the role of theologian remains empty. There are young people in the pew who prefer a moving preacher and not a static, behind-the-podium preacher. At the same time older listeners may prefer the opposite. The point is to feel comfortable in one's own skin and be able to speak truthfully and interestingly. There is the temptation of satisfying the consumerist listener by entertaining the audience. It comes at the cost of disregarding authenticity and integrity of the preaching office. Looking at the preacher as an entertainer can hamper the whole enterprise of preaching. Many listeners expect the preacher to entertain them rather than confront them with the truth.<sup>160</sup> But preachers are responsible for leading the listeners to repentance and sanctification. Another aspect of delivery is the duration of the sermon. The length of sermon has clearly reduced for all the respondents. The attention span may be shortened by various reasons but it has also created a specific time-frame for preachers to present their sermons with precision, concreteness, quality content and prioritizing the need of the hour. Today, engaging with the congregation and retaining their attention till the end of the sermon delivery depends on keeping curiosity alive.

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<sup>158</sup> Engemann, *Homiletics*, 511.

<sup>159</sup> Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, 12.

<sup>160</sup> Bryant Evans, "The Church Consumer" *Preacher's Study Blog*, August 15, 2023  
[The Church Consumer - Preacher's Study Blog \(preachersstudyblog.com\)](https://preachersstudyblog.com)

## CONCLUSION

The last few decades has been marked by what seems to be an endless roller-coaster of social and ecclesial changes in Nagaland. Digitalization has completely changed the landscape of Naga society. Information can be accessed and disseminated with a touch of the finger. People have a better access to knowledge about other nations, cultures, religions, ideologies and lifestyles. Social media brings along a mixture of boon and doom. Fashion, technology, celebrities, entertainment and science have all bombarded the minds of church members. There is also an increase in the number of people who have attained higher education, which as we have seen in the interviews, created new challenges for preaching. Moral degradation, corruption at every level in every sphere, high rate of unemployment, violence and a stressful urban life has become the order of the day.

New independent churches expanding and growing in the cities have also profoundly impacted the traditional/denominational churches in multiple ways. The rise of a new spiritual group of people known as prayer warriors has left an imprint on the church and society. Charismatic movement and popular preachers also changed the way pastors and congregations view preaching in one way or the other. There is clearly a generation gap between millennials and older generation. This generational gap has been further complicated by internet and technology which makes social relationships disconnected. The digital world has become a reality and the human interaction is becoming more superficial.

The respondents have been extremely vocal and transparent regarding their views on social and ecclesial changes. It does affect them because everything that is happening outside the church building eventually finds their way into the church service. Every time they stand to preach, they see many confused, disturbed, unsatisfied or skeptical listeners in the pew. While many issues may be complex and difficult to address from the pulpit, they do realize the need for confrontation. The very nature of the gospel being counter-cultural compels them to preach against all sorts of distortions that is entering the church.

The content and subject matter of the sermon of preaching is being determined by contextual issues to a large extent. The type of sermon preferred by most of the respondents is expository and prophetic preaching. This is an indication of the influence of the prayer center and prayer

warriors. It can also be attributed partly to televangelists and enthusiastic preachers on YouTube. There is a great amount of pressure on the ability to keep the congregation interested in preaching. The value of preaching among congregations, according to most of the respondents, is not held in high esteem anymore. There are several distractions and activities that take up the time and mental space of listeners. Declining lifespan of attention and focus on communal and spiritual values is also another factor that adds to the pressure of impressing the congregation.

Gaining the trust of the listeners has become a major concern for preachers. Compromising and shying away from confronting the challenges in the church is now a determining factor to authenticate the commitment of a preacher. The spiritual zeal and energetic stage presence of a preacher is also becoming more important for congregations and preachers. The focus on individual spirituality is also affecting the sermon evaluation among preachers. Personal satisfaction, confidence in one's own preparation, the amount of prayer and fasting invested in sermon preparation, and inner spiritual assurance of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit are very important now. Sermon evaluation has become a more of individual enterprise and less of group activity. Of course the congregation's reactions and expressions during the sermon delivery are still considered important, but it is not the ultimate determinant. The ultimate factor is the self and the individual. The expectation of the congregation may play its role during the sermon preparation and delivery. But after delivery it all comes down to the preacher as the final and most important agent of sermon evaluation.

Societal and Ecclesial changes in Nagaland as discussed in this research thus have a deep and undeniable influence on the practice of preaching in USBCs. It has affected the sermon preparation process, the type of sermon and choice of language, the style of delivery and the duration of the sermon. It has also influenced the criteria for evaluating sermons and determining homiletical competence. The social, ecclesial, linguistic, technological and educational factors have profoundly changed the way preaching is being practiced in USBCs. All these factors need to be considered and examined closely by preachers because there is a danger of preachers and preaching becoming obsolete, irrelevant and ineffective if these new contextual reality is ignored. It would benefit both listeners and preachers if these contextual changes are appropriated in our preaching practice intentionally and professionally.

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## Data management plan

### *1. General information*

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(PROVISIONAL) TITLE OF THE RESEARCH/THESIS:

An Analysis of the Influence of Contextual Changes on the Practice of Preaching in Urban Sumi Baptist Churches of Nagaland: Pastoral Perspective.

SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT AND METHOD(S):

The 21st century has witnessed significant changes in society, church and culture of Nagaland. These changes are caused by several phenomena of which three major factors will be analyzed: effects of rapid urbanization, emergence of independent non-denominational churches, and impact of digitalization. This research seeks to explore how these changes in the context affects the practice of preaching in urban Sumi baptist churches (USBC) of Nagaland from the perspective of experienced pastors. Social and Ecclesial changes which developed at the turn of the century will be examined from the viewpoint of experienced pastors serving in USBC. The main research question will explore how the practice of preaching has changed due to ecclesial and societal changes. Three sub-questions will be used in order to break down the main RQ to smaller and more manageable questions. The methods to generate answers are semi-structured interviews along with literature research on Naga society and Contextual preaching.

TYPE OF RESEARCH DATA TO BE COLLECTED

Qualitative data for chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 and literature study for chapters 1, 2, 3 and 8.



PERIOD IN WHICH DATA WILL BE COLLECTED:

December 2023– January 2024

### *3. Technical aspects of the data storage*

HARD & SOFTWARE

Laptop with a secured external drive / Microsoft programs - MS Word and programs to record interviews conducted via Zoom/Teams.

FILE FORMATS:

.doc, (word)

SIZE OF THE DATA (ESTIMATELEY IN MB/GB/TB):

5 GB – 10 GB

STORAGE OF DATA DURING CONDUCTION OF THE RESEARCH:

On a secured external drive

STORAGE OF DATA AFTER COMPLETION OF THE RESEARCH:

After completion, all personal and sensitive data will be deleted, other data will be stored on a computer.

### *4. Responsibilities*

MANAGEMENT OF THE DATA DURING CONDUCTION OF THE RESEARCH:

Stored in folder, and description with dates (DD/MM/YYYY)

MANAGEMENT OF THE DATA AFTER COMPLETION OF THE RESEARCH:

After completion, all personal and sensitive data will be deleted, other data will be stored on a computer.

### *5. Legal and ethical aspects*

OWNER OF THE DATA:

Shenato Assumi

IS THE DATA PRIVACY SENSITIVE: YES/NO

Some data such as interviews is privacy sensitive.

IF YES: HOW WILL YOU ARRANGE SAFE STORAGE AND CONSENT OF THE PERSONS AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED IN YOUR RESEARCH?

Files will be saved in a secured external drive. Before interviewing persons, I will ask consent to record the conversations. They are allowed without reasons to withdraw from participation. In that situation, I will not use the data and will delete it immediately.

## *6. Other aspects*

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(The following has to be filled in by the thesis supervisor)

Approved

Not Approved, because: -----  
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Name : -----

Signature : -----

Date : -----

