

# Steven Tramel Gaines

---

## Redefining Preaching : a Beginning

---

Res Rhetorica nr 3, 31-45

---

2017

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej [bazhum.muzhp.pl](http://bazhum.muzhp.pl), gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

## Rhetoric in religion Retoryka w religii

3/2017 EDITOR: ANNA BENDRAT

---

**STEVEN TRAMEL GAINES**

UNIVERSITY OF MEMPHIS

stgaines@memphis.edu

### Redefining Preaching: A Beginning Redefinicja kaznodziejstwa: początki

---

#### Abstract

Scholarly disagreement about preaching has suffered confusion due to definitions of the subject that do not sufficiently consider the diversity of that interdisciplinary field of study. This article provides a summary of historical perspectives that is more comprehensive than any such summary in recent literature. That overview leads to suggestions for investigating what preaching is and does.

Nieporozumienia naukowe dotyczące kaznodziejstwa spowodowały zamieszanie w związku z definicjami przedmiotu, które nie uwzględniają w wystarczającym stopniu różnorodności tej interdyscyplinarnej dziedziny badań. W artykule podsumowano historyczne perspektywy, które są bardziej wyczerpujące niż jakikolwiek podsumowanie w najnowszej literaturze. Przegląd ten prowadzi do wskazówek, jak badać, czym jest a czym nie jest głoszenie kazań.

---

#### Key words

rhetoric, religion, Christianity, preaching, homiletics  
retoryka, religia, chrześcijaństwo, kaznodziejstwo, homiletyka

---

#### License

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 international (CC BY 4.0). The content of the license is available at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

---

Received: 21 March 2017 | Accepted: 15 June 2017

**STEVEN TRAMEL GAINES**  
UNIVERSITY OF MEMPHIS  
stgaines@memphis.edu

## **Redefining Preaching: A Beginning**

Recent disagreement among scholars of preaching has suffered confusion due to definitions of the subject that do not sufficiently consider the diversity of that interdisciplinary field of study. Instead of assuming singular definitions, a more enriching approach is to consider multiple ways in which preaching has existed and currently exists in various manifestations of religious experience. After illustrating scholarly disagreement by exploring two contrary views, this article provides a summary of historical perspectives that is more comprehensive than any such summary in recent literature. That rather holistic and interdisciplinary overview leads to suggestions for investigating what preaching is and does.

Three clarifications are needed here. First, I do not in this essay define preaching. Instead, I survey ways in which scholars of preaching have defined it and, based on that historical survey, offer suggestions for scholars' definitional work. Second, although I write this article for a journal in the field of rhetorical studies, I do not limit my study to a single discipline. The study of preaching has long been interdisciplinary, combining perspectives especially from theology and rhetoric. In offering this contribution to the study of preaching, I illustrate that scholars who work in the interdisciplinary study of preaching can benefit from each other. Third, this paper conducts neither rhetorical criticism nor theology but performs foundational work for a multidirectional course of scholarship.

### **Disagreement**

David Norrington (1996) posits that preaching did not exist in the early church prior to the third century CE. That argument is based on a limited consideration of rhetorical practices in early Christianity. The limitation results from a hole in scholarly literature about preaching at that time. Valerity Alikin (2010) explains, "The history of preaching in the first centuries of the Christian Church has not yet been investigated satisfactorily in critical scholarly literature" (183). In that lack of scholarly exploration, Norrington should be commended for working to correct it.

The New Testament portrays Jesus preaching and teaching his disciples to preach (Mark 3:13-17). Norrington (1996) admits that “Jesus made extensive use of . . . the sermon as a platform for announcing the arrival of the kingdom of God” but states that the maturation of disciples required less formal teaching (5-7). The New Testament, however, does not clearly distinguish between preaching and teaching.<sup>1</sup> For example, the first chapter of the Gospel of Mark uses words related to both teaching and preaching in reference to Jesus’ speaking in Jewish synagogues (ἐδίδασκεν in 1:21, κηρύσσω in 1:39).<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, Ronald Osborn (1999) observes, “Nowhere does Paul indicate a sharp distinction between preaching . . . and teaching . . . between his missionary preaching and his pastoral exhortation” (271). The place of preaching in the early church also appears in the probability that at least most of the New Testament documents were written to be read at worship assemblies (Dunn-Wilson 2005, 12-13; Wilson 1992, 24; Ferguson 2009, 189). Alistair Stewart-Sykes (2001) writes, “There is hardly a document from the first two centuries of Christian discourse that has not been claimed at some point to be a homily” (1). That likely is because the writers’ purpose was to provide instruction and encouragement to the church through documents shaped by a preexisting practice of oral communication in the church (Shields 2000, 5). James Thompson (2001) explains, “The role of the letter carrier or public reader was decisive for the communication of the Pauline letter, especially in a culture that placed great significance on the oral performance of texts” (30). That statement builds on Walter Ong’s (1982) observation: “In western classical antiquity . . . a written text of any worth was meant to be and deserved to be read aloud, and the practice of reading texts aloud continued . . . through the nineteenth century” (115). The reading aloud of written texts was more than reading; it was oral interpretation (Thompson 2011, 31).

Unlike Norrington, Hughes Oliphant Old (1998a) writes that preaching was a core aspect of Jesus’ ministry and that of the early church. The contrast between the claims of Norrington and Old is due to their differing understandings of preaching. Norrington defines a sermon as “a speech, essentially concerned with biblical, ethical and related material, designed to increase understanding and promote godly living amongst the listening congregation, delivered by one in good standing with the local Christian community and addressed primarily to the faithful in the context of their own gatherings” (1996, 1). That definition relies more on a twentieth-century understanding of preaching than on a first-century perspective.<sup>3</sup> The beginning of Norrington’s first chapter makes this obvious:

1. For a discussion of perspectives regarding the relationship between preaching and teaching, consult Worley (1967, 14-20).

2. For multiple words related to speaking, consult Acts 20 and Stewart-Sykes (2001, 13).

3. Other writers do similarly (e.g. Edwards 2004:3-6; Stewart-Sykes 2001:6).

“In this chapter, biblical and early church data will be examined in order to assess the extent to which the modern form of the sermon was used” (1). Old (1998a), however, holds a broader view: “It was almost as though one had in the Temple all at the same time the preacher’s pulpit, the professor’s lectern, and the judge’s bench. All this belonged to the ministry of the Word. It was this whole ministry of the Word with all its facets that Jesus fulfilled when he preached daily in the Temple” (122). Old’s perception aligns with that of Edwin Charles Dargan (1905): “preaching cannot be reduced to one type at any time” (36). More recent scholarship continues this observation (Thompson 2001, 1). Such a holistic approach allows a consideration of preaching’s forms in the early church more so than approaches like Norrington’s can.

Even with such an understanding of preaching, one cannot find in the New Testament clear evidence that preaching occurred on a weekly basis in early Christian worship assemblies. The earliest evidence of a sermon as a standard part of the weekly Christian worship assembly is found in the mid-second-century *First Apology* by Justin Martyr: “And on the day called Sunday there is a meeting in one place of those who live in cities or the country, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read as long as time permits. When the reader has finished, the president in a discourse urges and invites [us] to the imitation of these noble things.”<sup>4</sup> Observing that preaching as it currently occurs (e.g. in weekly assemblies) is not in the New Testament, however, is different from claiming that preaching played little or no meaningful role in the life of the early church.

The New Testament, although not providing a full description of early Christian worship, gives a few indications. Christian preaching began in synagogues and the Temple, contexts that shaped young Christianity that had not yet developed an identity apart from its parent religion, Judaism.<sup>5</sup> Jesus preached/taught in both contexts (Norrington 1996, 5; c.f. Mark 1:21; 1:39; 6:2; Luke 4:16-27).<sup>6</sup> Early Christians worshiped in synagogues in addition to meeting in homes. Synagogue sermons usually were speeches on preselected scriptural texts—or at least preselected books (Luke 4:17)—although first-century Judaism likely did not yet use a “fixed lectionary” (Norrington 1996, 4; c.f. Edwards 2004, 23). People who preached in synagogues apparently were invited in advance and therefore had time to prepare, but this was not always the case (Acts 13:15). Synagogue sermons were speeches with room for impromptu communication, including questions and even challenges from listeners (Norrington 1996, 4). In Matthew 13:54-57

4. Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, 67. Accessed on the Christian Classics Ethereal Library website at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/richardson/fathers.x.ii.iii.html>.

5. For Greek influences on early Christian preaching, consult Alikin (2010, 183-191). Alikin disagrees with some points accepted in this paper and deserves more consideration in future research.

6. For a brief treatment of Judaism’s influence on early Christian preaching, consult Osborn (1999, 274-84).

Jesus' preaching offends some listeners, who question his credentials; and Jesus responds. In Luke 4:28-30 people in a synagogue interrupt and remove Jesus. In Luke 13:14-17, when people object to Jesus' words, he calls them hypocrites. In Acts 18:6 people in a synagogue abusively oppose Paul's preaching, and he leaves. Preaching existed in first-century Jewish worship in the form of lectures with some spontaneous interaction between speakers and listeners. Jesus' ministry occurred in "a community which was accustomed to preaching" (Norrington 1996, 4).

### Early Preaching

Old (1998a) observes five preaching genres in the New Testament and traces their development in the church's first few centuries. First, expository preaching "is the systematic explanation of Scripture done on a week-by-week, or even day-by-day, basis at the regular meeting of the congregation" (8). Before the ministry of Jesus, this kind of preaching existed in synagogues, "when the Law was read through Sabbath by Sabbath, beginning each time where one had left off the Sabbath before" (9). Expository preaching arose in the synagogue tradition from at least two Old Testament passages.<sup>7</sup> In Exodus 19-24, when people gather in worship to hear a message from the Lord, Moses preaches on the Law (Old 1998a, 21-28). In Nehemiah 8 Ezra reads the Law in worship gatherings. According to Acts 15:21, the reading of the Law was a weekly practice in synagogues in the first century of the church's existence. Luke 4:14-30 indicates that a sermon commented on the reading; and First Timothy 4:13 tells its reader to pay attention to reading, preaching, and teaching. The synagogue practice of publicly reading scripture and commenting on it continued in the early church, as we find in Origen, who spoke "of taking a text and explaining it" (1982, 2.1; Larsen 1998, 73).

Second, evangelistic preaching proclaims the gospel<sup>8</sup> to people who have not heard it (or at least have not accepted/believed it). Old (1998a) notes that "evangelistic preaching in its more proper sense announces that the time is fulfilled; the time has come" (11). This kind of preaching "responds most directly to the Great Commission of Jesus" and is "closely related to baptism" (11). Jesus' synagogue preaching in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-30) was both expository and evangelistic, and Paul's sermon in Athens is an example of evangelistic preaching (Acts 17:22-31).<sup>9</sup> Old observes that "whereas Jesus was presenting the gospel to the people

7. "Old Testament" and "Hebrew Bible" are almost synonyms. A few differences in canonical order and versification exist. Because Christians tend to cite the Old Testament, this paper uses that term in discussing their works.

8. "Gospel" means "good news" and may refer either to teachings by Jesus (e.g. Mark 1:15, referenced in the next sentence) or to teachings about Jesus (e.g. 1 Corinthians 15:1-8).

9. Like other sermons in the New Testament, this one likely is a summary of the author's or someone else's memory of the sermon.

of the Old Covenant, Paul was preaching to pagans” (11-12).<sup>10</sup> Like expository preaching, evangelistic preaching continued in the early church, exemplified in Origen. He sought to preach Christ in terms that would connect with his Greek audience. Despite arguments about the merits of his biblical interpretation, scholars acknowledge the ways in which it adapted to the Greek rhetoric and philosophy that shaped his listeners (Hauck 2006; Kolbert 2011; Martens 2012; Scalise 1987; Somos 2011).<sup>11</sup>

Third, whereas evangelistic preaching addresses people who are not yet Christians, catechetical preaching instructs Christians. As mentioned previously, “it was the practice of the rabbis, long before the time of Jesus, to teach the interpretation of the Law in a systematic manner day by day in the courts of the Temple or in the synagogue school” (Old 1998a, 11-12). The Sermon on the Mount indicates that Jesus was skilled in catechetical discussion, and such material also appears in the New Testament’s letters (e.g. Ephesians and 1 Peter). This kind of preaching continued in the early church, as found in Gregory of Nazianzus. He was one of three members of the “Cappadocian cloverleaf,” who were rhetorically trained preachers (Larsen 1998, 75-76). His orations explored how to talk about theology, the existence of God, the church and the Trinity, the divinity of Christ, and the Holy Spirit (Gregory of Nazianzus 2003).

Fourth, festal preaching uses scripture in an explanation of a special occasion, especially a holiday of the Christian calendar. “One might trace the origins of festal preaching to the Passover Haggadah, in which the child asks the father, ‘Why is this night different from any other?’ and the father answers by reciting the sacred history of the deliverance from slavery in Egypt and the entry into the Promised Land” (Old 1998a, 14-15; c.f. Johnson, 2009, 9). This traditional practice recites sacred history, and Peter’s Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:14-40) comes close to what Old describes as festal preaching of the Christian gospel. This kind of preaching continued in the early church. In his Easter sermon, one of the earliest extant Christians sermons, Melito of Sardis commented on the Passover reading, quoted Isaiah 53:7, presented Jesus as the sacrifice-bound lamb, and used other scriptures as well to retell the biblical story of salvation (Halton 1968).

The fifth genre is prophetic preaching, in which a preacher announces a God-originated “message from outside the established religious or political order” and “calls for the reform of existing practice” (Old 1998a, 16). This kind of preaching arises from the Old Testament, in which prophetic rhetoric often occurred outside worship assemblies but also took place in liturgical contexts. According to the New Testament, prophetic preaching occurred in worship gatherings in the early

10. In early Christianity, the term “pagans” referred to people who were not Jews or Christians.

11. Norrington negatively perceives Greek influence on patristic preaching.



church (1 Corinthians 14:29; c.f. Stewart-Sykes 2001, 7-8, 13). The continuation of prophetic preaching in the early church can be found in John Chrysostom, in whom the “Greek homily, shaped by the preaching of Origen and developed by the Cappadocians, was given its final form” (Carroll 1984, 97). His sermon series on the “statutes” was an exception to Chrysostom’s general practice of expository preaching and was prompted by his social situation (Old 1998b, 189). It was an atmosphere of widespread corruption that, Chrysostom (1956), the “Golden Mouth,” called a “season . . . for tears, and not for words; for lamentation, not for discourse; for prayer, not for preaching.” In that context he warned against the dangers of wealth, as Amos and Micah had prophetically done centuries before Chrysostom.

Christian worship had adopted the synagogue’s practice of weekly sermons by the end of the second century CE (White 1993, 35). Those sermons existed in ways that Old’s five genres describe, and the preaching forms can reach back to New Testament documents for life and meaning. Paul Bradshaw (2002, 51), however, offers a message of caution that can benefit historians of preaching:

Many conclusions about worship in the New Testament . . . are arrived at only by assuming that liturgical customs found in later centuries must have been in continuous existence from the first century. But that is precisely to beg the question: if there is no unambiguous witness in the New Testament documents themselves to a particular liturgical practice but it can only be detected by interpreting obscure allusions there in the light of evidence from several centuries later (and often from a quite different geographical region), are we justified in making such a connection? While it is certainly possible that in some cases a line of historical continuity may run from New Testament times to the liturgical practices of later ages, there are enough instances where recent scholarship is able to demonstrate the improbability of such a trajectory (and to propose instead a much more likely genesis for a particular liturgical custom in the circumstances of a later period) as to make all similar speculation highly risky.

As mentioned earlier, scholars define preaching variously; and different definitions result in different conclusions about the existence and nature of preaching in the early church. If preaching is a weekly monologue in a Sunday morning worship assembly, it does not appear in any records from the church’s first century. That perspective must labor to pull together puzzle pieces into a picture that never existed. If, however, preaching is more than weekly monologues, if it surpasses modern practices and encompasses various communication forms, then the story of the early church is full of preaching. In this case, room for development exists in the study of early Christian preaching.

One such development is the observation that both Norrington’s and Old’s studies of preaching in the early church suffer an anachronistic fallacy. Preachers in early Christianity did not know the definitions and categories employed by Old and Norrington. More accurate perspectives, however, are not available. The



discussion about preaching's place in Christian tradition and contemporary and future practice, therefore, must rise above the terminology of Norrington and Old.

### Definitions of Preaching

The history of Christianity has variously defined preaching, as Lischer's (1987) anthology reveals. Alan of Lille in the twelfth century CE claimed that preaching is "an open and public instruction in faith and behavior, whose purpose is the forming of men; it derives from the path of reason and from the fountainhead of the 'authorities'" (Lischer 1987, 10).<sup>12</sup> Alan delineated preaching (for listeners' edification), teaching (to increase knowledge), prophecy, and public speaking. Later he said, "There are three kinds of preaching: that which is of the spoken word . . . . Another is by means of the written word . . . . The third is by deed" (Lischer 1987, 12). In the early twentieth-first century, Phillips Brooks proclaimed, "Preaching is the communication of truth by man to men. It had in it two essential elements, truth and personality. Neither of those can it spare and still be preaching" (Lischer 1987, 12). Dietrich Bonhoeffer taught not only that preaching "has its origin in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ" but even that the "proclaimed word is the incarnate Christ himself" (Lischer 1987, 28).

Another collection (Childers 2004) presents more recent perspectives. Ronald J. Allen writes about preaching as a conversation between congregation, preacher, and others (Childers 2004, 1; c.f. Allen and Allen 2015). He cites John S. McClure (1995) to say that the congregation "seldom talks aloud as part of the message" but may participate in sermon preparation (Childers 2004, 7). Charles L. Campbell claims that "the ultimate purpose of our preaching" is "the building up of the community of faith as a people who practice the way of God, as embodied in Jesus Christ, in and for the world" (24). Jana Childers identifies preaching as an incarnational act (43), and Teresa L. Fry Brown portrays preaching as oral interpretation "of the written text in the life of a particular context at a particular time, for a particular purpose" (52). After presenting the Aristotelian doctrine of judicial, epideictic, and deliberative rhetoric, Lucy Lind Hogan proposes that preaching "must strive to hold all three—the past, the present, and the future—in divine tension of balance" (69). John S. McClure states that preaching resistantly and redemptively speaks "what cannot be spoken" (83). Christine Smith "view[s] preaching as first and foremost the craft and act of a working theologian, committed to religious community, and committed to the transformation of an unjust, oppressive world" (93). Thomas H. Troeger pictures preaching as an illumination of "this essential

12. Although I avoid masculine nouns and pronouns in referencing all people or people whose sexes are not specified, quotations in this paper retain their authors' gendered word choices.

paradox of human existence: our simultaneously being in touch and out of touch with the source and sustainer of ourselves and everything that is” (114). Mary Donovan Turner describes preaching as disruption in which the speaker “hopes for change” (135-36). According to Paul Scott Wilson, preaching is communication of faith (144). Contemporary understandings of preaching arise from these and countless other perspectives, including witness (Long 1989), celebration (Mitchell 1990; c.f. Thomas 2013), conversation (Norén 1991; Rose 1997), experience (Craddock 1971, 1978; Reid, Bullock, and Fleer 1995), “speaking of God” (Pasquarello 2006, 10), performance of the world created by the Bible (Bland and Fleer 2005; Fleer and Bland 2009), and more (Sensing 2003).

Even more numerous than preaching’s basic definitions are its forms. Ronald Allen (1998) explains several patterns, including traditional ones, such as the verse-by-verse exposition, the thesis-antithesis-synthesis model, and the theological quadrilateral, and more recent ones, like image movement and plot and moves. Similarly, Wesley Allen (2008) describes seven forms: propositional lesson, exegesis-interpretation-application, verse-by-verse, four pages, valley, new hearing, and negative to positive.

The propositional lesson form has also been called the “university sermon” and the “three-point sermon” (Allen 2008, 21). It is “deductive and topical,” calls for exegesis in preparation but uses “logic unconnected to the logic of the text” in the actual sermon (21). A sermon in this form presents an argument, stating the thesis in the introduction and proceeding with points supported by illustrations. This kind of sermon has a didactic, persuasive purpose. The form has three weaknesses. First, it reduces “every biblical text... to logical propositions, thesis, and subpoints” (23). Second, “people do not learn and listen in a deductive mode as much as they do in an inductive manner” (24). Third, the points frequently “become multiple mini-sermons” (24). This form, however, can be effective “in the black church” and in this “post-Christendom, post-denominational day” when people listening to sermons need instruction (24).

The exegesis-interpretation-application form is also called the “Puritan Plain style” and consists of a foreshadowing introduction followed by three main parts that focus on “*biblical exegesis... theological interpretation, and... hortatory application*” (Allen 2008, 29). The exegesis part is inductive, and the other two parts are deductive. This kind of sermon focuses on the theological interpretation but climaxes in the application. The form’s strength is “its ability to function didactically... However, too often this type of sermon is more informational than inspirational” (34). It also “can become three separate lectures,” and preachers frequently omit the middle section (34).

A verse-by-verse sermon “works through the biblical text . . . from beginning to end, allowing the structure of the text to determine the structure of the sermon” (Allen 2008, 39). After an introduction, the preacher exegetes a portion of the text, makes an application, exegetes the next portion of the text, makes another application, and continues this process through the chosen text. This form “draws on the form and logic of the biblical text” and counters “biblical illiteracy,” but it suffers two weaknesses. It “is not appropriate for all occasions,” and its users “can easily allow the *divisions* of the text to win out over the unity of the text” (41-42).

The four pages form, after an introduction, “moves from the ancient text to the contemporary context by way of direct analogy” and “has a clear turning point in which the direction changes” (Allen 2008, 47). The “pages” are the problem in the text, the problem today, the good news in the text, and the good news today. The order of those “pages” can vary. This form’s main strength is its simplicity, which also can be a weakness. “Viewing every biblical text in terms of sin → grace or law → gospel is somewhat reductionist” and can “diminish the full scope of the Christian faith” (51).

A valley sermon is “simple in structure” but “emotionally complex;” after an introduction, it goes “down into the depths of an issue, problem, or question and then” hinges, and moves upward “with the good news that addresses, solves, or answers what was introduced in the first half” (Allen 2008, 55). The biblical text generally appears at the hinge, and the sermon ends “with a climactic image” (57). This form has “great potential for engaging hearers intellectually and emotionally and inspiring a behavioral response,” but it can suffer “difficulty with creating an ascent that is able to overcome the experience of the descent” (57, 60).

The new hearing form can be helpful when a preacher wants to counter a commonly held perspective. Without a “separate introduction,” the sermon’s first movement introduces the topic and establishes a widely accepted view, which the second movement rejects (Allen 2008, 65). The third and final movement is the climax, claiming “about half of the time of the sermon,” and should provide an experience of the sermon’s claim (66). This form has a didactic strength but has a weakness; it “has the potential to open minds but will rarely do much to move the heart” (68).

The “Negative to Positive” form inductively moves from an introductory question through a series of rejected answers to a “proposed answer—at least a third of the sermon” (Allen 2008, 74). Such a sermon requires consistency in argumentation. “To reject a set of possible answers on one basis and to accept another on a different one is not fair to the issue nor does it really aid the congregation in making a theological or ethical judgment” (75). This form “can leave hearers in their heads and not move them into their hearts or inspire use of hands unless imagery is used well” (75).

### *Preaching as Testimony*

As preaching's meanings and forms continue to morph, attempts to understand preaching will need to include consideration of eclectic mixes of definitions, purposes, and practices in various cultural groups that experience preaching. Such consideration will necessitate engagement beyond the traditionally white, male perspectives under which the interdisciplinary field of homiletics has developed in the last couple of centuries. To illustrate this opportunity, I briefly reflect here on Anna Carter Florence's (2007) *Preaching as Testimony* before offering implications for the future of homiletics (i.e. the interdisciplinary study of preaching, more than theology of preaching).

Florence tells about three preaching women—Jarena Lee of the nineteenth century, Sarah Osborn of the eighteenth century, and Anne Hutchinson of the seventeenth century—and observes, “None of these women set out to preach the Word. They set out to *interpret Scripture*, and in the process, recognized that there were things that needed saying. They didn't rely on some external authority like the act of ordination. Yet they became authoritative in their communities because they were seen as women who deeply engaged and embodied Scripture; women who heard, hosted, and lived the text” (Florence 2007, 78). The three women, like many others, found and employed methods of testimony to communicate in contexts of sexual inequality. To do so, these testifiers pushed against cultural assumptions that religious authority resided primarily in ecclesial positions of power. According to Florence's survey of Hutchinson, Osborn, and Lee, authority in preaching resided primarily neither in official positions of leadership nor in sacred texts but in the rhetors' experiences with the texts in their lives. This nature of rhetorical agency in religious experience empowers testimony. More than mere narrative, testimony tells of what encounters with sacred texts in lived experiences have led people to believe and to feel obligated to proclaim.

The three women featured in Florence's book exercised the power of testimony in different ways. Hutchinson wrote for the *Colonial Times*. Osborn published devotional messages based on scripture. Lee wrote a spiritual autobiography to communicate arguments that her religious establishment did not allow her to present in its official Sunday assemblies. These accounts reveal that, through testimony, marginalized people can communicate despite religious and cultural limitations. Florence's book highlights that preaching can happen—and has happened—beyond the stereotypically masculine, Enlightenment-plagued approach to preaching as the work of a man who deals with sacred texts in isolation from his community and then, in a well-prepared and systematic manner, presents a list of facts to his audience.

## Future Directions

Neither the form nor the function of preaching has ever been singular. As this paper has explained, preaching happened in various ways in the first four centuries of Christianity and continues to occur diversely today. To ask if preaching as it is known today appears in early Christian literature, one must assume that preaching is only one kind of rhetorical event now and was only one kind then. Furthermore, answering the question entails an examination of early Christian experience through more recent lenses. Such anachronistic interpretation may lead answerers—and perhaps askers—of the question to assume that early Christians thought about preaching in recent vocabulary and to ignore the apparent fact that the earliest Christians preached but, in the excitement and busyness of a new religious sect, did not take time to categorize their rhetorical actions. Avoiding the anachronism allows an appreciation of preaching's continuing diversification.

For most of its history, the study of preaching focused on theologies and practices by male members of dominant cultural majorities. Reflecting on Florence's *Preaching as Testimony*, I propose that we widen our scope by expanding our definitions of preaching, by exploring practices by women and members of cultural minorities, and by engaging with non-Christian religions' understandings and practices of preaching. I also propose that, to better understand preaching, we should utilize close reading more than philosophical and theological reflection.

First, we should expand our definitions of preaching. Rhetoricians have been pushing the boundaries of rhetoric (e.g. Gallagher 1999, 304; Blair, Dickinson, and Ott 2010, 2). Florence's book illustrates a similar trend in homiletics, bringing written discourse into a speech-dominated field. Preaching has largely meant the act of speaking monologues, arising in various ways from sacred texts, that deliver information from speakers to listeners in official religious assemblies, such as Sunday morning worship gatherings. In this kind of preaching, the authority to interpret scripture and to apply it to congregational knowledge and life lies in ecclesial positions of pastoral leadership. If we, however, broaden our understandings of preaching, as Florence has done, we can learn from and draw attention to more diverse expressions of biblical interpretation and spiritual experience. Furthermore, as we widen the scope of our studies, we can reconsider the nature and function of authority in preaching, spreading rhetorical agency and incorporating more perspectives into the process of interpreting scripture and living in its community (McClure 1995; Rose 1997). In doing so, we might also contribute to the other-wise ethic that arises from early Christian language (e.g. Philippians 2:1-11) and develops in recent works (McClure 2001; Allen 2005). However, to embrace the full potential of current study and practice of preaching, we need to move beyond the pulpit to consider various forms of religious rhetoric as preaching (e.g.



Jarena Lee's autobiography). In this way, preaching might survive attacks such as that in Norrington's (1996) critique of preaching's place and usefulness.

Second, we should explore practices by women and members of cultural minorities. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell (1973) called for increased recognition of women in the history of rhetoric. Her challenge has not yet received adequate response from her own scholarly community of rhetoricians, and the field of homiletics also has much room to mature in this way. Now we need to advance further by incorporating not only women but also members of other largely ignored populations (Askew and Allen 2015; Go, Jacobsen, and Lee 2015). As Florence teaches us, forms of preaching, such as testimony, that lie outside the traditional norm can increase our awareness and appreciation of multiple marginalized perspectives, experiences, and interpretations, enriching the natures, meanings, studies, and practices of preaching.

Third, we should interact with non-Christian religions' understandings and practices of preaching. A few scholars, such as those in *Preaching in Judaism and Christianity* (Deeg, Homolka, and Schöttler 2008), have begun such interreligious exploration of homiletical thought and practice. More work needs to be done in this area, not merely to apprehend different understandings and approaches, but also to facilitate interfaith learning and creativity in rhetorical efforts. Such work has potential to enrich preaching in religious communities and to increase their responsibility and effectiveness in communicating beyond the walls of worship places, connecting with their surrounding cultures' increasing religious pluralism.

Fourth, to better understand preaching, we should utilize close reading (Leff 1986; 1992; Brummett 2010) more than philosophical and theological reflection. Some influential developments (e.g. Campbell 1997; McClure 2001; Pape 2013a; Pape 2013b) in recent homiletics have engaged philosophy and theology over rhetorical criticism, but the task of defining preaching and investigating its forms and functions requires rhetorical criticism more than theological and philosophical speculation. Studying the ethics of preaching may reasonably involve primary engagement with philosophy. Reshaping the relationship(s) between preaching and the divine may faithfully interact mainly with theology. Determining how preaching exists, however, requires rhetorical criticism. More than thinking about what preaching should be or do, scholars who desire to define preaching need to closely read sermons as rhetorical artifacts. Furthermore, our study of sermonic artifacts should incorporate texts by preachers from various backgrounds, communities, and experiences, including multiple genders and ethnicities, numerous cultures and nationalities, diverse Christian denominations, and non-Christian religions. Also, such study should incorporate rhetorical artifacts by preachers barred from traditional pulpits.



## Conclusion

We students of preaching should investigate, analyze, and write more broadly and diversely than we traditionally have (e.g. Allen, McClure, and Allen 2013). We need to widen our scope by expanding our definitions of preaching, by exploring rhetorical practices by women and members of cultural minorities, by engaging with non-Christian religions' understandings and practices of preaching, and by privileging close reading over theological and philosophical reflection. When we think beyond our own religious traditions and move from prescriptive theologies and philosophies to descriptive analyses of diverse homiletical artifacts, we can transform our understandings of preaching, learn from previously ignored perspectives and experiences, connect with our globalized (and globalizing) cultures, and avoid anachronistic reasoning.

Establishing a singular definition of preaching lies outside this essay's scope, but I have provided a foundation for such definitional effort. I have proposed that such work should follow a multiplicity of directions. In that diverse endeavor, no single definition will ever be sufficient. By embracing preaching's vast varieties, however, we may describe, analyze, interpret, and appreciate preaching more holistically than scholars of preaching have previously done.

## References

- Alikin, Valerity A.** 2010. *The Earliest History of the Christian Gathering: Origin, Development and Content of the Christian Gathering in the First to Third Centuries*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill.
- Allen, O. Wesley, Jr.** 2005. *The Homiletic of All Believers: A Conversational Approach*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox.
- Allen, O. Wesley, Jr.** 2008. *Determining the Form: Structures for Preaching*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress.
- Allen, Ronald J.**, ed. 1998. *Patterns of Preaching: A Sermon Sampler*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 1998.
- Allen, Ronald J., John S. McClure, and O. Wesley Allen, Jr.**, eds. 2013. *Under the Oak Tree: The Church as Community of Conversation in a Conflicted and Pluralistic World*. Eugene, OR: Cascade.
- Allen, Ronald J., and O. Wesley Allen, Jr.** 2015. *The Sermon without End: A Conversational Approach to Preaching*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon.
- Askew, Emily, and O. Wesley Allen, Jr.** 2015. *Beyond Heterosexism in the Pulpit*. Eugene, OR: Cascade.
- Blair, Carole, Greg Dickinson, and Brian L. Ott.** 2010. "Introduction: Rhetoric/Memory/Place." In *Places of Public Memory: The Rhetoric of Museums and Memories*, ed. Greg Dickinson, Carole Blair, and Brian L. Ott, 1-54. Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press.
- Bland, Dave, and David Fleer**, eds. 2005. *Performing the Psalms*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice.
- Bradshaw, Paul F.** 2002. *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. New York, NY: Oxford.
- Brummett, Barry.** 2010. *Techniques of Close Reading*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Campbell, Charles L.** 1997. *Preaching Jesus: The New Directions for Homiletics in Hans Frei's Postliberal Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

- Campbell, Karlyn Kohrs.** 1973. "The Rhetoric of Women's Liberation: An Oxymoron." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 59:1:74-86.
- Carroll, Thomas K.** 1984. *Preaching the Word*. Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier.
- Childers, Jana,** ed. 2004. *Purposes of Preaching*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice.
- Craddock, Fred.** 1971. *As One Without Authority: Essays on Inductive Preaching*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon.
- Craddock, Fred.** 1978. *Overhearing the Gospel: Preaching and Teaching the Faith to Persons Who Have Heard It All Before*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon.
- Dargan, Edwin Charles.** 1905. *A History of Preaching: Vol. 1: From the Apostolic Fathers to the Great Reformers, A.D. 70-1572*. New York, NY: Burt Franklin.
- Deeg, Alexander, Walter Homolka, and Heinz-Güther Schöttler,** eds. 2008. *Preaching in Judaism and Christianity: Encounters and Developments from Biblical Times to Modernity*. Studia Judaica. Berlin: Walter De Gruyter.
- Dunn-Wilson, David.** 2005. *A Mirror for the Church: Preaching in the First Five Centuries*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Edwards, O. C.** 2004. *A History of Preaching*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon.
- Ferguson, Everett.** 2009. *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Fleer, David, and Dave Bland,** eds. 2009. *Reclaiming the Imagination: The Exodus as Paradigmatic Narrative for Preaching*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice.
- Florence, Anna Carter.** 2007. *Preaching as Testimony*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox.
- Gallagher, Victoria J.** 1999. "Memory and Reconciliation in the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute." *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 2:303-20.
- Go, Yohan, David Schnasa Jacobsen, and Duse Lee.** 2015. "Introduction to the Essays of the Consultation on Preaching and Postcolonial Theology." *Homiletic* 1:3-7.
- Gregory of Nazianzus.** 2003. *Select Orations*. Tr. Martha Vinson. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press.
- Halton, Thomas.** 1968. "Paschal Homily: Melito of Sardis." *The Furrow* 4:212-222.
- Hauck, Robert J.** 2006. "'Like a Gleaming Flash': Matthew 6:22-23, Luke 11:34-36 and the Divine Sense in Origen." *Anglican Theological Review* 4:557-73.
- John Chrysostom.** 1956. *On the Priesthood; Ascetic Treatises; Select Homilies and Letters; Homilies on the Statutes*. Tr. W. R. M. Stephens. In *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*. Ed. Philip Schaff. Vol. 9. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Johnson, Lawrence J.** 2009. *Worship in the Early Church: An Anthology of Historical Sources*, Vol. 1. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical.
- Justin Martyr.** *First Apology*. Christian Classics Ethereal Library. <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/richardson/fathers.x.ii.iii.html>.
- Kolbert, Robert R.** 2011. "Rethinking the Rationales for Origen's Use of Allegory." *Studia Patristica* 4:41-49.
- Larsen, David L.** 1998. *The Company of the Preachers: A History of Biblical Preaching from the Old Testament to the Modern Era*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel.
- Leff, Michael.** 1986. "Textual Criticism: The Legacy of G. P. Mohrmann." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 72:377-89.
- Leff, Michael.** 1992. "Things Made by Words: Reflections on Textual Criticism." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 78:223-31.
- Lischer, Richard,** ed. 1987. *Theories of Preaching: Selected Readings in the Homiletical Tradition*. Durham, NC: Labyrinth.

- Long, Thomas G.** 1989. *The Witness of Preaching*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox.
- Martens, Peter W.** 2012. "Origen Against History?: Reconsidering the Critique of Allegory." *Modern Theology* 4:635-56.
- McClure, John S.** 1995. *The Roundtable Pulpit: Where Leadership and Preaching Meet*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon.
- McClure, John S.** 2001. *Other-Wise Preaching: A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics*. Saint Louis, MO: Chalice.
- Mitchell, Henry H.** 1990. *Celebration and Experience in Preaching*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon.
- Norén, Carol M.** 1991. *The Woman in the Pulpit*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon.
- Norrington, David C.** 1996. *To Preach or Not to Preach? The Church's Urgent Question*. Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Paternoster.
- Old, Hughes Oliphant.** 1998a. *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church: Volume 1: The Biblical Period*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Old, Hughes Oliphant.** 1998b. *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church: Volume 2: The Patristic Age*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Ong, Walter.** 1982. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the World*. New York, NY, and London: Routledge.
- Origen.** 1982. *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*. Tr. Ronald E. Heine. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America.
- Osborn, Ronald E.** 1999. *Folly of God: The Rise of Christian Preaching*. Saint Louis, MO: Chalice.
- Pape, Lance B.** 2013a. "Coming to Terms with Barth's 'Third Thing': Hans Frei, Paul Ricoeur, and the Possibility of Postliberal Homiletics." *Homiletic* 1:18-27.
- Pape, Lance B.** 2013b. *The Scandal of Having Something to Say: Ricoeur and the Possibility of Postliberal Preaching*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press.
- Pasquarello, Michael, III.** 2006. *Christian Preaching: A Trinitarian Theology of Proclamation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker.
- Reid, Robert, Jeffrey Bullock, and David Fleer.** 1995. "Preaching as the Creation of an Experience: The Not-So-Rational Revolution of the New Homiletic." *Journal of Communication and Religion* 1:1-9.
- Rose, Lucy Atkinson.** 1997. *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox.
- Scalise, Charles J.** 1987. "Allegorical Flights of Fancy: The Problem of Origen's Exegesis." *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 1:69-88.
- Sensing, Tim.** 2003. "After the Craddock Revolution: A Bibliographic Essay." *Leaven* 4:1-9.
- Shields, Bruce E.** 2000. *From the Housetops: Preaching in the Early Church and Today*. Saint Louis, MO: Chalice.
- Somos, Robert.** 2011. "Is the Handmaid Stoic or Middle Platonic?: Some Comments on Origen's Use of Logic." *Studia Patristica* 4:29-40.
- Stewart-Sykes, Alistair.** 2001. *From Prophecy to Preaching: A Search for the Origins of the Christian Homily*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill.
- Thomas, Frank A.** 2013. *They Like to Never Quit Praisin' God: The Role of Celebration in Preaching*. Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press.
- Thompson, James W.** 2001. *Preaching Like Paul: Homiletical Wisdom for Today*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox.
- White, James F.** 1993. *A Brief History of Christian Worship*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon.
- Wilson, Paul Scott.** 1992. *A Concise History of Preaching*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon.
- Worley, Robert C.** 1967. *Preaching and Teaching in the Earliest Church*. Philadelphia, PA: Westminster.