

BOOK REVIEW

## O'Mara, Veronica, and Patricia Stoop, eds. *Circulating the Word of God in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Catholic Preaching and Preachers across Manuscript and Print (c. 1450 to c. 1550)*

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These essays started as conference papers in 2017 at the University of Hull, but this volume is not merely a collection of conference papers. The editors should be congratulated for encouraging interaction. The final product covers manuscript and printed sermons, seen from the perspectives of not only authors but also of printers and consumers. Emphasis on “Catholic” preaching should not mislead: several essays examine the reception of Catholic sermons by Protestants. Explored is the relationship of Latin versus the vernacular, how and why and by whom some sermons were preserved and/or reworked, the relationship between manuscripts and printed texts, the links between the spoken and printed word, and how such homilies were actually used. The editors’ introduction is superb: they present relevant historical and historiographical contexts, and each contribution is summarized with reference to others. The volume is not only beautifully produced (a Brepols tradition), but each essay’s scholarly utility is enhanced with appendices and bibliographies. Three indices make the volume easy to navigate.

The fifteen essays are arranged in six geographical categories: England (2), Scandinavia (3), Transylvania [Romania] (1), Romance Regions (3), Germanic Lands (3), and the Low Countries (3). Each author certainly deserves mention.

*England:* Anne Thayer takes her expertise on model sermon collections and applies it to the Benedictine Thomas Swalwell (d. 1539), who employed medicant sermons in a variety of printed formats. Thayer interprets his marginals to recreate his use of sermon collections to prepare his own. The result is a rare glimpse of a preacher authoring sermons who himself was not an author of extant sermons. Veronica O'Mara addresses the conundrum of England's printed sermons 1483–1532, which appeared in tiny numbers relative to those elsewhere and, when compared with the larger corpus of manuscript homilies, give an inaccurate picture of English preaching. She examines four sermons from the 1490s to consider why some sermons were printed and others were not.

*Scandinavia:* The problem is one of surviving sources, due to accidents such as fires or to the deliberate destruction of medieval Catholic culture. In a reconstructive feat, Jussi Hanska overcomes the paucity of evidence and demonstrates that late medieval preaching in Finland was not only on a par with elsewhere but in fact declined due to the continuity of clerical poverty and insufficient training. Jonathan Adams overcomes a similar problem in his study of Denmark, where the destruction of Catholic texts left only one printed and five manuscript examples of vernacular sermons behind. Adams examines the fate of a printed 1515 collection, noting the various annotations and mutilations to demonstrate how Protestants “corrected and purged” Catholic texts. Christer Pahlmblad revises the traditional, more optimistic notion of Sweden's Reformation by highlighting its lack of vernacular sermon collections: of the five printed in the sixteenth century, three were translations of German works, and two by the Swedes Olavus and Laurentius Petri. The brothers' homilies demonstrate that pronouncements that God's Word be “purely preached” could be accepted by both Catholic hangers-on

as well as Lutherans: the point was to employ only biblical materials, which meant that some exegetical traditions could continue even if they underwent modification.

*Transylvania (Romania)*: Adinel Dincă and Paula Cotoi's essay is revelatory, not least because sermon production here mirrored that of Europe's centers. They examine printing, ownership, and readership on the basis of published books as well as inventories from numerous archives, aware that most of their readers (including this one) need explanations of the distinct historical contexts.

*Romance Regions*: Oriol Catalán, Sophie Delmas, and Pietro Delcorno provide some key revisions to the more familiar areas of Spain, France, and Italy. The sermons of Vincent Ferrer, OP (d. 1419) are well known, but their transmission from manuscript to print requires correction. Catalán distinguishes between Ferrer's postils and his popular, cheaper Spanish sermons that focused on eschatological themes. Catalán examines neglected manuscripts—and revises the standard scholarship—to show that although printers certainly censored Ferrer, many contested topics (apocalyptic and social-critical) found their way into printed editions. Sophie Dalmas examines another influential author, Nicolas de Biard, OP (d. ca. 1300), whose best-selling manuscript manual for preachers (*Summa de abstinentia*) was frequently printed as *Dictionarius pauperum* ("paupers" being poor priests, not laypersons), and demonstrates its relationship to his well-known *Distinctiones*. Pietro Delcorno studies another popular but now neglected author, Ludovico Pittorrio (d. 1525), whose *Omilario quadragisimale* was printed at least thirty-eight times between 1506 and 1630. These sermons provided clerical and lay audiences with biblical excerpts and exegesis and found reception in other popular works thereafter.

*Germanic Lands*: Detailed studies of German preaching emerged already in nineteenth-century scholarship, but here again there are surprises. Ralf Lützelshwab studies that other, neglected mendicant order—the Carmelites—including over 200 manuscript and numerous printed sermon collections particularly in the convents of Straubing and Mainz. Although the order's friars did not produce that many original homilies, they equipped themselves with the tools necessary for ministry and produced a few towering homilists. The final two pieces begin in Strasbourg's cathedral with two of its preachers—Johannes Kreutzer (d. 1468) and Johannes Geiler von Kaysersberg (d. 1510). Natalija Ganina's piece on the (eventual) Dominican Kreutzer, who went on to count among the University of Basel's founders, examines his allegorical treatises and sermons (especially on the liturgical year) that would be lost had it not been for female scribes in the convents in which he also preached. Rita Voltmer's piece on Geiler focuses on the transmission of his sermons—some 1,300 of them in manuscript and printed editions. Voltmer lays to rest the myth that Geiler resisted the dissemination of his homilies. Geiler understood the importance of preserving and printing his sermons for the spread of both observant and lay reforms.

*The Low Countries*: Thom Mertens studies the best-selling anonymous postil (printed forty-one times, 1477–1553), "*The Gouda Gospel Sermons*," which unlike many others was probably composed with the printing press in mind. Mertens examines a few homilies therein, but his focus is on the work's genre as biblical translation and exegesis. Like other vernacular postils, the book was the closest most laypersons ever got to a vernacular "bible." Its disappearance after 1553 reflects less a distrust by authorities of vernacular scriptures (although that certainly existed) and more their insistence that scriptures appear without paratext. Kees Schepers examines the more familiar works of Johannes Tauler, OP (d. 1361), but with an emphasis on sixteenth-century prints, a Catholic (in German, 1543) and a Protestant (in Dutch, 1565). Both purported to be *opera omnia* but included works that were not Tauler's. Why? Schepers demonstrates that Tauler's works were appropriated for confessional means. The 1543 Catholic edition became "Tauler" until later scholars sorted things out. The Flemish Jesuit Franciscus Costerus (d. 1619) presents a similar problem: the relationship between his vernacular sermons as delivered (preserved in manuscript) versus those printed (1598ff.). Patricia Stoop focuses on publishing but demonstrates that Costerus's delivered sermons to nuns were preserved and shared among them in manuscript—these sermons were perfectly "late medieval"—whereas his printed homilies were part of counter reformation missionary efforts. Stoop distinguishes between the preservation of some sermons by a more limited, female, cloistered audience and those supported by the (male) authorities more interested in widescale indoctrination and polemics.

The above summaries do little justice to these contributions, which, as already mentioned, are not merely a collection of conference papers but form a substantial volume that revises much about Catholic preaching in the later Middle Ages and its reception in the sixteenth century by Catholics and Protestants alike.