

Two Homiletic Twins

Introduction

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1. The discovery of the homiletic twin

The story of Jacob and Esau, the twin brothers, was problematic from the very beginning: "The children struggled together within her (Rebecca)" (Gen. 25.22) – so begins their joint way, and it continues in like manner through the sale of Esau's birthright (Gen. 25.29–34), Jacob's obtaining the blessing of the first-born by devious means (Gen. 27.1–40) up to Jacob's flight from his understandably furious brother Esau (Gen. 27.41–28.9). But what is really striking – despite this, the two brothers cannot get away from one another. *God* himself sends Jacob back into the land of his ancestors, to his relatives, to Esau, the brother whom he cheated (cf. Gen. 31.3). No easy way – and yet the two are reconciled. "To see your face is like seeing the face of God since you have received me with such favour" (Gen. 33.10), Jacob says.

In recent descriptions of the Christian-Jewish dialogue it is sometimes suggested that one should use the not-always-simple interaction of twin brothers as a paradigmatic metaphor for the Christian-Jewish relationship.¹ Just as the stories of the two brothers Jacob and Esau are antagonistic, polemic and yet inseparably intertwined (cf. Rom. 9.10–13), so might one describe the history of the varying relationship between Judaism and Christianity.²

Up till now, we have frequently used the model of a "mother-daughter relationship" in Christian-Jewish dialogue, or the model of a Jewish "root" from which Christianity developed. The new pattern of

1 Cf. e.g. *Gerard Rouwhorst*, *Identität durch Gebet. Gebetstexte als Zeugen eines jahrhundertelangen Ringens um Kontinuität und Differenz zwischen Judentum und Christentum*, in: *Albert Gerhards/Andrea Doeker/Peter Ebenbauer* (Eds.), *Identität durch Gebet. Zur gemeinschaftsbildenden Funktion institutionalisierten Betens im Judentum und Christentum* (Studien zu Judentum und Christentum), Paderborn et. al. 2003, 37–55, here: 39–44.

2 Cf. *Daniel Boyarin*, *Dying for God. Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism*, Stanford (CA) 1999, 1–21; 133–148 (notes).

twin brothers could offer a way to overcome the one-sidedness of the relationship “mother-daughter” or “root-plant” and focus our attention on the *mutual reciprocity* of the relationship. On the other hand, it could also provide the opportunity to look more clearly at the connection of Judaism and Christianity which was not simply given initially as a root but remains *permanent*.

In homiletics, too, a “mother-daughter” paradigm frequently predominates. It was often recognized that Christian preaching somehow had its origin in Jewish preaching.³ But Christian homiletics has up till now shown very little interest in how Jews over the centuries and in the present interpret the Scriptures in the synagogues, what kind of radical changes and modifications can be observed and what kind of answers Judaism has found and is finding to homiletic and hermeneutic challenges.

Put bluntly: on the Christian side, one usually imagines that one can pursue homiletics without the Jewish twin. Surprisingly this assessment holds true for the majority of recent reflections on homiletics that deliberately orientate themselves to the Christian-Jewish dialogue. These for the most part ask how Christian preaching must change *in content* to avoid anti-Jewish nuances and to achieve a fair representation of Judaism in Christian preaching. They are concerned above all with applying to the Church’s preaching that which has been recognized in other branches of theology, particularly in exegesis and dogmatics.⁴ Of course this objective was important – and will remain so in future. But it overlooks the potential for learning which might be discovered when there is an earnest appreciation of the Jewish homiletical brother.

By contrast, in his consideration of preaching the Old Testament in his famous “*Predigtlehre*”/Homiletics, which first appeared in 1971,

3 Cf. e.g. Frieder Schulz, *Die jüdischen Wurzeln des christlichen Gottesdienstes*, in: *Idem*, *Synaxis. Beiträge zur Liturgik* (ed. Gerhard Schwinge), Göttingen 1997, 15–36, esp. 15; or Wilfried Engemann, *Einführung in die Homiletik* (UTB 2128), Tübingen/Basel 2002, 88f.

4 I refer simply as an example to Evelina Volkmann, *Vom ‘Judensonntag’ zum ‘Israelsonntag’*. Predigtarbeit im Horizont des christlich-jüdischen Gesprächs, Stuttgart 2002, and Eadem, *Homiletik und christlich-jüdisches Gespräch*, in: *PrTh* 38/2004, 253–260. Both of these contain references to further literature. So, too, do the two series of meditational sermons, which up to now have arisen in the context of the Christian-Jewish conversations and at best merely glance in passing at Jewish preaching and homiletics; cf. Arnulf H. Baumann/Ulrich Schwemer (Eds.), *Predigen in Israels Gegenwart. Predigtmeditationen im Horizont des christlich-jüdischen Gesprächs*, 3 vol., Gütersloh 1986–1990, and Wolfgang Kruse/*Studium in Israel* (Eds.), *Predigtmeditationen im christlich-jüdischen Dialog*, Neuhausen 1996–2001; Berlin 2002–2007.

Rudolf Bohren, former Professor of Practical Theology in Wuppertal and Heidelberg, formulated a far reaching perspective. Bohren writes:

“Only pride and ignorance could prevent the Protestant [and of course, I may also add, the Christian – AD] preacher from learning from the rabbi. [...] Even if the preacher should not speak like a rabbi, he still should not preach without the rabbi: The Church cannot discount the Synagogue without losing her Promise.”⁵

Even if the preacher should not speak like a rabbi, he still should not preach without the rabbi! This was said more than thirty years ago – but few have really noticed what Bohren said and wrote. One of those who did was Axel Denecke. With regard to preaching Denecke wrote about ten years ago:

“[...] after all, the Jewish experience of the success and failure of speech about God is twice as old as the Christian. It is really astonishing that up till now – as far as I can see [...] – no one has come upon the obvious idea of going as a preacher [...] into the Jewish school and learning from Jewish rhetoric for our preaching.”⁶

This is why we decided to organize this conference in Bamberg. Because we think that time has come to do homiletics as *twin brothers*. Learning from one another, asking questions together and jointly trying to find answers.

2. “Walking alongside you” as a paradigm of dialogue

Jacob and Esau, the twin brothers, met one another again after years of alienation. After this meeting Esau says: “Let us journey on our way, and I will go with you” (Gen. 33.12). The phrase in Genesis 33.12b can be translated as “I will go opposite to you” or “I will go alongside you” (Buber/Rosenzweig and the NRSV; אֶל־כֶּה לַנֶּגֶד). A new cooperation of the twin brothers is indicated but in a manner which – if one follows the story in Gen. 33 – by no means denotes that Jacob and Esau now travel in step; Jacob takes the liberty of travelling “leisurely behind” (as we read in v. 14) and lets Esau go first.

If Christian and Jewish homiletics recognize one another as complementary opposite numbers and “go alongside” one another, this will not, should not and cannot mean that common, somehow consensual Jewish-Christian homiletics must be developed. As we Christians have learned in the meantime in ecumenical dialogue, the

5 Rudolf Bohren, *Predigtlehre*, Gütersloh 1993, 121.

6 Axel Denecke, *Als Christ in der Judenschule. Grundsätzliche und praktische Überlegungen zum christlich-jüdischen Gespräch und zur Rede von Gott* (Schalom-Bücher 4), Hannover 1996, 84.

stimulus of cooperation does not necessarily lie in agreement but in the jointly reconciled and reciprocally challenging difference.⁷ For homiletics this means to go there together and work with one another where this is possible and, for example, to ask questions together about the history of Jewish and Christian homiletics and their interrelation, about the relevance of the sermon today, about the relationship of preaching and liturgy, and about the hermeneutics of sacred texts. But this means at the same time calmly and clearly searching for one's own way. For it is precisely this which will be attractive to the other twin and make it alluring not to look away but to be interested in the other: it is not impossible but is, on the contrary, very likely that one might discover potential for learning and change for one's own way in the other way of the twin brother.

3. Thematic overview

This is exactly what happened in Bamberg in March 2007. Jews and Christians learned together and from each other, discussed the history of Jewish and Christian preaching (with its many open questions!), and faced the challenges for Jewish and Christian preaching today.

Of course, the theme could not be covered completely. And at the end of conference a dozen ideas were collected for further conferences about the "two homiletical traditions". But the conference tried to enter the field and give an overview, also marking questions for further research and clarification. According to its basic aims, the conference was arranged in two main parts: one larger part dealt with the history of Jewish and Christian preaching – and especially with the interrelation, or lacking interrelation, between the homiletic twins. The conference started in hellenistic and rabbinic times and in the times of the Early Church, moved forward to the Middle Ages, and finally reached the 19th and 20th century. The second part focused on current challenges and dealt with homiletical hermeneutics, Christian preaching of the Hebrew/Jewish Bible, developments in Jewish preaching in the USA, and new forms of interpreting the Bible (we chose the so called "*Bibliolog*" as an exemplary learning field).

It is impossible to sum all this up. But it should – we do hope – be possible for the readers of this conference volume to discover the richness and variety of doing research on the "two homiletical traditions" and thus jointly practicing homiletics – as "twin brothers."

7 Cf. e.g. *Ilse Bulhof*, Die postmoderne Herausforderung der ökumenischen Bewegung, in: US 50/1995, 15–29.