

Prêcher au XVI^e siècle: La forme du sermon réformé en Suisse (1520–1550)

Max Engammare

Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2018 (312 pages) \$15.99 softcover

What was the *form* of early Reformed preaching? That is the question asked by well-known Calvin scholar Max Engammare in his latest book. He does not investigate the form with respect to the rhetorical or dialectical figures of single sermons but asks a more fundamental question: To what extent did sermon series follow the *lectio continua*, the *loci communes*, or a lectionary? The author considers these three as the basic forms of preaching. Before the emergence of Reformed manuals on homiletics in the mid-sixteenth century, this question of sermon forms had not yet been addressed, as Engammare writes in his introduction. Nor has modern research provided an account of the preaching practices of the early Reformers. Therefore, Engammare takes us on a quest for the earliest source materials, which he defines as an “archéologie” (15) of the first preaching manuals. Two kinds of sources are given special consideration: collections of published sermons and church ordinances regarding feast days. Engammare delineates his research field in regard to place and period. He focuses on the Reformed territories of modern-day Switzerland from roughly 1520 to 1550. The book contains six chapters. In the first chapter, Engammare addresses the early modern humanistic setting in his review of Erasmus’s and Melancthon’s approach to preaching.

Their formal arguments rested on rhetoric and dialectic. The next three chapters, which are revisions of three separately published articles, focus on the Swiss-German cities of Basel, Zurich, and Bern respectively. Basel is considered first, as the author begins this chapter with the preaching practices preceding Johannes Oecolampadius's Reformation. In the two remaining chapters, the author moves to the French-speaking areas of modern-day Switzerland: the fifth chapter is on Geneva and the last one on Lausanne, Neuchâtel and a few other cities.

Engammare takes us on a very open quest. On the one hand, he discusses numerous details concerning the sources and his approach to them. He allows readers to become partners in the quest, to follow the argument step by step, and to reach conclusions of their own. On the other hand, this plethora of information occasionally disrupts the otherwise remarkably fluid and enjoyable flow of the book. As Engammare repeatedly admits, there is relatively little material on the form of sermons to be found in the impressive quantity of sources he has examined. As a result, his conclusions are drawn from a limited foundation of source materials. Engammare sees Geneva as the "exception" among Swiss Reformed cities, because the *lectio continua* form was applied "quasi-exclusively." However, he concedes that continuous preaching on a biblical book was interrupted for the few feast days still preserved in Reformed Geneva (192–193). On such occasions, the biblical texts pastors were to preach from functioned like a lectionary. In the other places considered in this study, Engammare concludes that the two other forms of preaching coexisted with the form of the *lectio continua*. The exceptional character of Geneva appears to be overstated, however. Engammare can show that in those other cities, given texts of the Bible were expounded on feast days, and that sermons on specific *loci* were also in use. However, he does not convince the reader that the *lectio continua* was not predominant outside of Geneva in the early Reformed era. Approaching the issue from the perspective of research on the Zurich Reformation, I was surprised to read that due to Bullinger's influence, the preaching on the *loci communes* would have superseded the *lectio continua* introduced by Zwingli (118). This conclusion is unwarranted. There is an early comment in Bullinger's *De prophetarum officio* written in 1532 on the homiletical form, which Engammare seems to have missed, where Bullinger acknowledges the homiletical usefulness of thematic preaching for persons not yet educated in

the true religion.¹ This use remains a catechetical exception to the rule as the well-attested *lectio continua* preaching of Bullinger himself proves.² As regards feast days and interruptions to the *lectio continua*, Zurich had only a few more than Geneva.

One does not have to endorse all of the conclusions of the book to appreciate Engammare's heuristic enterprise. His quest is a fresh and convincing approach to early preaching practice in the Reformation prior to later homiletical theory. The relationship between the liturgical calendar and the ministry from the pulpit is fascinating, and this book opens up new research questions. Engammare's work also offers a source of basic information for readers. His study is not only of interest for historical-theological scholarship of the early Reformed tradition, but also for those in the disciplines of practical theology and, more specifically, homiletics. This book merits attention by a wide readership. The English translation, which is already in the pipeline, will be most welcome.

—PIERRICK HILDEBRAND

¹ Heinrich Bullinger, *De prophetarum officio, et quomodo digne administrari possit, oratio* (Zurich: Froschauer, 1532), 12r–v.

² Fritz Büsler, *Wurzeln der Reformation in Zürich* (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 146–58.