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Sermon: A (Non)Classical Genre?

It is impossible to provide a satisfactory answer to the question posed in the title of the present article without considering the equivocality of the used terms and the resulting variety of sometimes mutually exclusive solutions. Therefore, I am left with little choice but to restrict myself to formulating only a few remarks on the matter, and I wish to apologize in advance for their general and possibly quite obvious character.

The first difficulty concerns the word "sermon" whose definition—and, in effect, the generic status of the phenomena it denotes—is hardly as simple and straightforward as it could appear at first glance. A basic knowledge of the written or preached "sermons" reveals that the term is used to refer to several forms of expression, sometimes so different from one another that, when considered separately, they could be viewed as generically different text types. This seems further confirmed by the fundamental division of sermons *sensu largo* into homilies and sermons *sensu stricto*, a distinction usually acknowledged by homiletics, although not by literary history. In fact, Zygmunt Pilch notes in his 1958 *Wykład zasad kościelnej wymowy* that:

within the ecclesiastical oratory, the homilists generally distinguish two main forms of sermon: homilies and sermons, considered to be varieties of what the general term "sermon" denotes. The difference between the two is immediately noticeable:

a) a homily is an ecclesiastical exposition of a single selection from the Scripture (pericope), which follows the argument and reasoning of the source text. The second form is:

b) a sermon on a particular subject, unlimited by one pericope but based on material freely collected from all sources of ecclesiastical discourse. This kind of sermon develops its course depending on the goal intended by the preacher.[1]

Translated to the traditional terminology of genre theory this means that the sermon *sensu largo* is a generic name (*genus*) encompassing at least two different *species*: the sermon *sensu stricto,* or—as sermon theoreticians and

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[1] Z. Pilch, *Wykład zasad kościelnej wymowy* (Poznań, 1958), p. 132.

historians call it—a thematic sermon, and the homily, that is, an exegetic commentary on a passage from the Scripture, usually on an evangelical pericope for a given day.[2] This distinction (discussed also further in the text) is not entirely unrelated to the question asked in the title of this article, especially as it does not encompass all forms of expression covered by the term. For it is not difficult to see that the categorization of texts described as sermons is determined not by their immanent poetic but by their context or situational frame, in other words, their relation to the liturgical action which itself, obviously, is not without impact on the form or content of the sermons. This can be seen already in the still valid, medieval definition by Alain de Lille (Alanus ab Insulis) who recognized the—*ex definitione*—public and oral nature of sermons and pointed out that their subject matter usually concerns faith and morals.[3] However, all of these features remain secondary to the external determinants of the text. In other words, we can use the term to refer to any text which was effectively presented, or at least prepared to be presented, as a part of liturgical action. Put yet differently, in a manner slightly tautological but not devoid of logic, any speech that was presented (or prepared with the intention of being presented) as a sermon,

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[2] See also G. Kneidel, "Artes Praedicandi: Theories and Practice," in P. McCullough, H. Adlington, and E. Rhatigan (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of the Early Modern Sermon* (Oxford, 2011), pp. 6, 10–11, 17. J. Shami, "The Sermon," in A. Hiscock and H. Wilcox (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of the Early Modern English Literature and Religion* (Oxford, 2017), p. 187: "The first of these forms—the patristic *homily*—was 'a word-by-word or phrase-by-phrase explanation of the meanings (or levels of meaning) of a lengthy scriptural passage' structured according to the 'written sequence of the scriptural text.' … The *thematic sermon* was associated with the universities, where it thrived in both Latin and vernacular forms. Typically, it addressed a short scriptural passage, announced by an antitheme, and followed by a *divisio* that split the theme into parts. This form was further subdivided to provide a skeletal structure, subsequently dilated by various Scriptural and 'non-scriptural proofs' (patristic authorities, elaborate allegories, moral exempla, popular fables)."

[3] Alani de Insulis, *Summa de arte praedicatoria*, in *Patrologiae cursus completus*, J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologia Latina,* vol. 210 (Lutetiae Parisiorum, 1855), col. 111D–112A: "Praedicatio est manifesta et publica instructio morum et fidei, informationi hominum deserviens, ex rationum semita, et auctoritatum fonte proveniens. Manifesta debet esse praedicatio, quia in manifesto proponenda est. Unde Christus ait: Quod dico vobis in aure, praedicate super tecta (Matth. X). Si enim praedicatio occulta esset, suspiciosa esset, et videretur redolere haeretica dogmata. …Publica debet esse, quia non uni, sed pluribus proponenda est. Si enim uni tantum proponeretur, non esset praedicatio, sed doctrina. Ea enim differentia est inter praedicationem et doctrinam, et prophetiam, et concionationem." English translation by Gillian R. Evans can be found in: *The Art of Preaching* (Kalamazoo, 1981), pp. 16–17. See also: Alan of Lille, "The Seventh Rung," in R. Lischer (ed.), *The Company of Preachers. Wisdom on Preaching, Augustine to the Present* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 4: "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.' Preaching should be public, because it must be delivered openly. That is why Christ says: 'What I say to you in your ear, preach upon the housetops.' For if preaching were hidden, it would be suspect; it would seem to smell of heretical dogmas. …Preaching should be public because it must be delivered not to one, but to many; if it were given to a single man, it would not be preaching, but teaching—for that is where the distinction lies between preaching, teaching, prophecy, and public speaking."

that is: in a time and place designated for a sermon, is a sermon. One could thus imagine a situation where the same speech given by a preacher during a funeral mass constitutes a sermon and given on a different occasion—for instance, in a cemetery over the casket of the deceased—remains nothing more than a funeral speech.

The sermon's ambiguous generic status and the resulting problems with defining and characterizing it as a kind or genre of speech do not help in the attempts to address the question of its classical or non-classical character, especially as the adjective "classical" itself is far from unambiguous, not to mention the fact that it is marked axiologically and suggests a normativism typical of classicist poetics—which in turn undermines its usefulness in a purely descriptive function. After all, in ancient Rome *classicus* was originally a word used for a member of the most affluent social class belonging to the highest of the five income brackets instituted by king Servius Tullius. Aulus Gellius was the first known author to have used the adjective with regard to the men of letters. When in doubt about a matter of language, he advised to follow the usage of a model author: "some one of the orators or poets, who at least belongs to the older band, that is, a first-class and tax-paying author, not a proletarian" ("e cohorte illa dumtaxat antiquiore vel oratorum vel poetarum, id est classicus adsiduusque aliquis scriptor, non proletarius," Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* 19.8.15).[4] Therefore, "classical" means as much as "first-class" or "first-rate," and, moreover, distinguished by the mark of the past. Although at least eighteen centuries have passed since the composition of the *Attic Nights*, the adjective continues to be used in that sense, not only in everyday language but in the discourse of literary studies as well, mostly to describe particular authors or works. Today, however, one hardly uses "classical" to mean "first-rate," "model," or "perfect" when talking about the so-called "generic objects" (S. Skwarczyńska), such as genres, types, and varieties.[5] One may, however, describe as "classical" those among them (i.e. those genres) which carry the already mentioned mark of the past or are rooted in the past and have managed to survive for a long time. Considering this—and because it would be difficult to imagine European literature without it—the sermon may and even should be viewed as a form of speech that is classical for our culture and which has been continuously present in it for almost two millennia.

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[4]   E.R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (Princeton, 2013), p. 249; J.M. Ziolkowski, "The Classics and the Middle Ages," in C.W. Kallendorf (ed.), *A Companion to the Classical Tradition* (Blackwell, 2007), p. 17. More on "classicism" in H. Peyre, *Q'est-ce que le classicisme?* (Paris, 1965); W. Tatarkiewicz, "Les quatre significations du mot 'classique,'" *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, 12/1 (1958), pp. 5–22; R. Wellek, "The Term and Concept of Classicism in Literary History" in *Discriminations: Further Concepts of Criticism* (New Haven, 1971), pp. 55–90.
[5]   S. Skwarczyńska, *Wstęp do nauki o literaturze*, vol. 3 (Warszawa, 1965), p. 36.

Naturally, I am aware that in genre studies the adjective "classical" is usually used in a different sense, namely, as a synonym to adjectives such as "regular" or "Aristotelian," describing genres "codified by the humanist poetics alluding to the ancient and—less explicitly and consciously—to the medieval poetics."[6] "Non-classical genres," in turn, denote irregular forms, in other words, forms (such as the novel, morality or mystery play) which "admittedly were not completely spontaneous creations but whose conventions were rooted in the custom rather than a formulated codification."[7]

Clearly, according to this classical (no reason to avoid the word) approach in literary studies, the regular or classical nature of genres is determined by two factors: by an unspecified—though, as can be fathomed or deduced from Jerzy Ziomek's wider argument, potentially definable in terms of broadly conceived imitation—association with ancient poetics; and by the degree of conventionalization as outlined by normative codifications, usually in the form of handbooks on poetics and rhetoric. Moreover, these two aspects remain closely related, as conventionalization, especially when understood as subordinating art to explicitly formulated and codified rules and regulations, is not merely a characteristic feature of ancient poetics—and of classicist poetics to an even higher degree—but it is, in fact, one of its fundamental principles.

Putting aside the doubts arising with regard to the very division of genres into "classical" and "non-classical," it should be noted that the entire history of preaching, regardless of its historically determined transformations, was marked by a propensity for conventionalization and the subordination of ecclesiastical discourse to some sort of principles, as is evidenced by homiletic theory, which until the twentieth century usually took the form of clearly normative codification. Thus, sermons almost always corresponded to the order of regularities typical for classical aesthetics, that is, to rules (or principles) that determined their poetic to a smaller or greater degree. As a result, sermons may be viewed as a product (I am using this word on purpose, alluding to the basic sense of the Greek ποίησις) of art understood *antiquo modo*, that is as a kind of handicraft, a skilled production or the skill of producing as such, a mastery of the rules and expert knowledge.[8] In fact, the view of the sermon as this kind of art may have become most prominent in High and Late Middle Ages, in the treatises and handbooks about the contemporary *ars praedicandi*.[9]

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6   J. Ziomek, *Renesans* (Warszawa, 1995), p. 29.
7   Ziomek, *Renesans,* p. 29.
8   W. Tatarkiewicz, *A History of Six Ideas. An Essay in Aesthetics* (Hague, 1980), pp. 11–17; A. Czechowicz, "Uwagi o przymusach metodologicznych w badaniach literatury staropolskiej," *Roczniki Humanistyczne*, 56/1 (2008), p. 8.
9   H. Caplan, "Classical Rhetoric and the Medieval Theory of Preaching," *Classical Philology*, 28 (1933), pp. 73–96; T.M. Charland, *Artes praedicandi. Contribution à l'histoire de la rhétorique*

I believe that the aforementioned issue of homiletics' relation to the fundamental principles of classical art and aesthetics deserves closer attention, as the question of the classical or non-classical nature of the ecclesiastical oratory has been usually formulated rather differently, that is in terms of its relation to classical rhetoric. The latter issue has been raised in the homiletic theory for quite some time, at least since the patristic period, and was variously stated, for instance through questions such as: Do those who spread the word of God need rhetoric? Is it appropriate for a preacher to have knowledge of its principles? What kind of rules should guide Christian elocution and how does it relate to the teachings of pagan authors? What is the difference between the rhetorical art and the homiletic art, and between speeches and sermons?[10] Answers given to these questions differed sometimes quite radically. While Francesco Panigarola advocated far reaching autonomy of the homiletic art, Paolo Aresio believed it should be considered as part of a broadly understood oratory art, analogously to painting: painters create works on various subjects, both secular and sacral, but still practice the same art.[11] Some of the writing on the matter makes the impression of a rhetorical exercise aimed to prove that, on the one hand, "the ability to preach according to the divine will and for the benefit of the soul is no human invention and does not depend on the precepts of any art, but is a gift from God and depends on God," but, on the other hand, it is God who wants men to use their ingenuity, as speaking about matters of utmost importance without proper preparation indicates not just negligence, but impertinence and rashness.[12]

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au Moyen Age (Paris, 1936); J. Wolny, "Kaznodziejstwo," in M. Rechowicz (ed.), *Dzieje teologii katolickiej w Polsce*, vol. 1, *Średniowiecze* (Lublin, 1974), pp. 273–280; J.J. Murphy*, Rhetoric in the Middle Ages. A History of the Rhetorical Theory from Saint Augustine to the Renaissance* (Berkeley, 1981); S. Wenzel, *Medieval Artes Praedicandi. A Synthesis of Scholastic Sermon Structure* (Toronto, 2015).

[10] F. Panigarola, *Il Predicatore* (Venetia, 1609), p. 22; "Se alla predicatione della parola di Dio necessaria l'eloquenza? Se al predicatore della parola di Dio convenga o disdica l'eloquenza? Quali conditioni debba havere la nostra eloquenza christiana? Quale proportione habbia la nostra eloquenza con quella, che insegnarono gia i maestri del dire?"; P. Aresio, *Arte di predicar bene* (Milano, 1617), pp. 65–72: "Qual differenza si ritrovi fra quest'arte della Predica e l'Oratoria, e fra l'Orationi, e le Prediche?" See also: L. Carbone, *Divinus orator vel de rhetorica divina libri septem* (Venetiis, 1595), pp. 1–17, 24–27: "Detur-ne aliquod genus eloquentiae Divinum? An concionator divinus eloquentia uti debeat? Quid sit rhetorica divina et quomodo ab humana differat?"

[11] Aresio, *Arte*, p. 66.

[12] Cf. C. Regius, "Ad lectorem. Praefatio," in *Orator christianus* (Romae, 1612), f. [4] r–v: "Facultatem recte et ex divinae voluntatis sententia, atque cum animarum fructu concionandi non esse humanae industriae opus, nec ab artis cuiuspiam praeceptionibus manare, sed Dei esse donum, ab eoque maxime pendere… Haec autem cum ita sint, concionandique facultas, ut Dei donum, plus a Deo, quam a quacumque arte, vel humana industria pendeat, et praedicatori longe plus Deo, quam suo studio, ingenio ac diligentiae fidendum sit: illud tamen pariter verum est, Deum nostram a nobis etiam industriam postulare. Nam sine dubio non solum negligentiae, sed temeritatis esset imparatum, de rebus gravissimis verba facturum, sacrum oratorem ad dicendum accedere."

One can clearly detect in the works of past theoreticians of homiletics the same hesitation and objections that had been expressed in much earlier texts by the Church Fathers, for instance in St Augustine's *De doctrina christiana*,[13] and which the bishop of Hippo ultimately resolved in favor of rhetoric, though not without reservations:

> Now, the art of rhetoric being available for the enforcing either of truth or falsehood, who will dare to say that truth in the person of its defenders is to take its stand unarmed against falsehood? For example, that those who are trying to persuade men of what is false are to know how to introduce their subject, so as to put the hearer into a friendly, or attentive, or teachable frame of mind, while the defenders of the truth shall be ignorant of that art? That the former are to tell their falsehoods briefly, clearly, and plausibly, while the latter shall tell the truth in such a way that it is tedious to listen to, hard to understand, and, in fine, not easy to believe it? That the former are to oppose the truth and defend falsehood with sophistical arguments, while the latter shall be unable either to defend what is true, or to refute what is false? That the former, while imbuing the minds of their hearers with erroneous opinions, are by their power of speech to awe, to melt, to enliven, and to rouse them, while the latter shall in defence of the truth be sluggish, and frigid, and somnolent? Who is such a fool as to think this wisdom? Since, then, the faculty of eloquence is available for both sides, and is of very great service in the enforcing either of wrong or right, why do not good men study to engage it on the side of truth, when bad men use it to obtain the triumph of wicked and worthless causes, and to further injustice and error?[14]

This view inspired many Church representatives, for instance, Jesuit Pedro Perpinyá who in 1561 encouraged the students of the Roman College to fight the heretics using their own weapon, namely, the art of oration.[15] It also became a norm in the post-Tridentine homiletic theory, which (not without the influence of the humanists, including Erasmus of Rotterdam) allowed for a certain compromise, reconciliation, or—as Marc Fumaroli puts it[16]—"marriage" between theology and rhetoric. Some of the theoreticians, like Lorenzo Villavicencio, approached it as a forced marriage and a necessary evil,[17]

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[13] S. Giombi, "La Chiesa e l'eloquenza. Radici antiche del motivo 'antiretorico' e sue riprese moderne," *Intersezioni*, 18 (1998), pp. 473–496.

[14] Augustine, "On Christian Doctrine," in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Ph. Schaff, vol. 2 (Buffalo, 1887), p. 575.

[15] P.J. Perpinian, "De arte rhetorica discenda," in *Orationes duodeviginti* (Ingolstadii, 1592), p. 230: "Quid igitur est, quod in tantis malis ad retundendam et frangendam eorum corroboratam iam venustate audaciam, facere debeamus, veritatis et religionis amatores? Hoc unum opinor: arma impiis et persidiosis extorqueamus e manibus, ut eisdem ipsi petantur telis, quibus nos oppugnant: et quoniam in utramque partem valet copia dicendi, ut eam haeretici transferunt ad Ecclesiam opprimendam, sic nos ad eandem fortiter defendendam convertamus." See also: F.J. McGinness, "Preaching Ideals and Practice in Counter-Reformation Rome," *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 11/2 (1980), p. 118.

[16] M. Fumaroli, *L'età dell'eloquenza. Retorica e "res literaria" dal Rinascimento alle soglie dell'epoca classica*, trans. E. Bas, M. Botto, and G. Cillario (Milano, 2002), p. 154.

[17] Fumaroli, *L'età dell'eloquenza,* p. 129.

others—like Luca Baglione—as a union based on love,[18] and the majority, to continue with the comparison, as a marriage of convenience, one which—as many of the contemporary marriages did—included a prenuptial agreement, as well as several conditions and reservations.[19] The inspiration for the compromise can be found in the following words by St Augustine, which emphasize and praise the importance of the human factor in proclaiming the word of God: "Abiecta esset humana condicio, si per homines hominibus Deus verbum suum ministrare nolle videretur" (*De doctrina christiana*, *Prooemium* 6: "the condition of our race would have been much more degraded if God had not chosen to make use of men as the ministers of His word to their fellow-men").[20] Polish preacher Fabian Birkowski, paraphrasing St Augustine, wrote that "Our Lord wants men to learn from men; He wants His Word to spread from man to man,"[21] and this meant acknowledging the human art of oration as a legitimate and privileged instrument for expressing and communicating the truths of faith.[22] It was in the spirit of *De rhetoricae artis utilitate et necessitate* that Louis of Granada[23] and other sixteenth- and seventeenth-century homilists agreed that ecclesiastical oratory *was* an art in the classical sense of the word[24] and that it was governed at least by some rules and principles formulated by the theory of rhetoric.

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[18] Fumaroli, *L'età dell'eloquenza*, p. 141.

[19] The work of Lodovico Carbone may be seen as typical in that regard: having reviewed the argument that the oratory is of no great importance to the preacher or, in fact, should be rejected ("concionatori divino eloquentiam vel esse dispiciendam, aut certe non magni faciendam"), he expresses his own, much more moderate, view in the form of four positions (*positiones*): "Prima positio, eloquentiae studium et usus divino concionatori interdicendum est. …Secunda positio, divinum scriptorem oratoremve nullo modo decet eloquentia quaedam fucata, calamistrata, immodice ornata et penitus forensis. …Tertia positio, eloquentia quae in sacro concionatore desideratur, debet esse gravis, sobria, pudica, nativo quodam succo plena, ingenuoque colore affecta, forma bona, quae res, quas tractat, finem quem propositum habet, locum in quo versatur, et eum cuius personam concionator personam gerit deceat. …Quarta positio, oratori legatoque divino humanae eloquentiae facultas nullo modo est contemnenda, ex qua ea sumere debet, quae sint ad eloquentiam divinam observandam, et ad usum traducendam necessaria," Carbone, *Divinus orator,* pp. 8–13.

[20] Augustine, "On Christian Doctrine," p. 520. See also R.P.H. Green's more recent translation: Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, ed. and transl. R.P.H. Green (Oxford, 1995).

[21] *Kazania na niedziele i święta doroczne*, vol. 2 (Kraków, 1628), p. 714.

[22] Cf. Fumaroli, *L'età dell'eloquenza,* pp. 125, 147.

[23] Luis de Granada, *Ecclesiasticae rhetoricae, sive de ratione concionandi libri sex* (Coloniae Agrippinae, 1578), pp. 3–14. See also A. Valier, *De rhetorica ecclesiastica ad clericos libri tres* (Venetiis, 1574), pp. 10–11 ("De ecclesiasticae eloquentiae utilitate").

[24] Tatarkiewicz, *A History*, pp. 11–17. Compare the definition of the ecclesiastical rhetoric by A. Valier, *De rhetorica ecclesiastica,* p. 11: "Ars autem, quae ecclesiasticam eloquentiam christiano populo tam utilem docet, rhetorica ecclesiastica appellatur: quae est ars sive facultas inveniendi, disponendi et eloquendi ea, quae ad salutem animarum pertinent." This is obviously Quintilian's definition adapted for the needs of homiletics (*Institutio oratoria*, 5.10.54): "Rhetorice est inveniendi recte et disponendi et eloquendi cum firma memoria et cum dignitate actionis scientia" (See J.Z. Lichański, "Kwintylianowskie rozumienie retoryki – przeoczona definicja," in D. Rott, P. Wilczek, and B. Stuchlik-Surowiak (eds), *Liber amicorum professoris Ioannis Malicki*

Naturally, the alliance or union of rhetoric and theology that occurred in the post-Tridentine homiletic theory had its limitations and did not entail a complete subordination of ecclesiastical oratory to the precepts of rhetoric. In fact, with time, one can note a growing awareness of the former's specificity and autonomy. This was a consequence of the still evident prejudice against rhetoric and the belief in the divine nature of the preaching ministry (hence descriptions such as *rhetorica divina*, *caelestis*, *sacra* or *orator sacer*, *orator divinus*)[25] but also of the objective causes related to the positioning of the secular and sacral oration in a different, so to say, living environment (*Sitz im Leben*). Following John W. O'Malley, one can identify at least two specific traits of ecclesiastical oratory (mentioned already in this text), which gave rise to constant and virtually irresoluble tensions between it and the secular oration. The first of these traits is a close relationship with liturgy, which constitutes a common, although non-essential, context for the sermon. It imposes, among other things, time constraints on the speaker.

> This setting—inter missarum solemnia—put certain time-constraints on the preacher, but it did more than that. It made preaching part of a larger liturgical action, in which some intellectual, affective, and even aesthetic relationship between word and sacrament could rightly be expected. The properly eucharistic part of the liturgy begins with the words: "Lift up your hearts." This directive could serve as a leit-motif for the sermon, which almost immediately preceded it, and would thus caution against reducing the sermon to mere instruction and exhortation.[26]

The other, perhaps even more important feature of the ecclesiastical oratory, one preventing its complete subordination to the rhetorical principles, is related to its intertextual or—as Gerard Genette puts it—metatextual dimension (or aspect) that "unites a given text to another, of which it speaks without necessarily citing it (without summoning it), in fact sometimes even without naming it."[27] In the case of the sermon, we are talking naturally about its unique relation to the Scripture.[28] Among the so-called theological places (*loci theologici*)—sources of inspiration specific to the religious oratory mentioned by the traditional homiletics—the Holy Writ occupies the first and the most prominent position. "Primum itaque et principalem locum habere debet Sacra Scriptura"—wrote German Jesuit Tobias Lohner.[29] This was emphasized,

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(Katowice, 2011), pp. 161–166); this adaptation aptly presents the alliance of the classical rhetoric and the post-Tridentine homiletics.

[25]   J.W. O'Malley, "Erasmus and the History of Sacred Rhetoric: The Ecclesiastes of 1535," *Erasmus of Rotterdam Society Yearbook*, 5 (1985), p. 19.

[26]   O'Malley, "Erasmus," p. 22.

[27]   G. Genette, *Palimpsests. Literature in the Second Degree*, transl. Ch. Newman and C. Doubinsky (Lincoln, 1997), p. 4.

[28]   O'Malley, "Erasmus," pp. 19–22. See also W. Pawlak, *Koncept w polskich kazaniach barokowych* (Lublin, 2005), pp. 72–74.

[29]   T. Lohner, *Instructio practica septima de munere concionandi…* (Dilingae, 1679), p. 9.

without exception, by all preaching theoreticians, who sometimes actually viewed proclaiming and interpreting the Word of God as more important than administering the sacraments.[30] Other sources are of value to the preacher only if they complement and explain the books of the Bible. This applies in particular to the writings of the Church Fathers, which held a position almost equal to the Scripture in the hierarchy of homiletic sources. They were especially valued for the commentaries and explanations of the Gospels and other inspired books.[31]

According to Maximilian Neumayr's argument—that holds true until today—preaching's reliance on biblical sources constituted an important and at the same time most valuable element of post-Tridentine homiletics: "The close connection between the Word of God as preached from the pulpit and the Word of God in the Book of Books is an obvious matter to the baroque theory of preaching."[32] This connection had consequences for the shape of contemporary homiletics that can hardly be overstated but, at the same time, prevented its full subordination to the principles of rhetoric. O'Malley notes:

> The second problem is that preaching at least since the days of Origen had been a text-related enterprise. That is to say, its purpose was somehow to comment upon or simply deliver the words of Scripture. Classical rhetoric did not envision oratory as dealing with a text but with an event, a situation, a person, a practical decision. It was, therefore, much more immediate and, by definition, less bookish than most Christian sermons. The more closely Christian preaching attached itself to the text of Scripture … the more difficult it became to adopt the principles of classical oratory.[33]

This argument is somewhat echoed in the opinions formulated (perhaps too sharply) by those scholars who deny any connection between rhetoric and the strictly exegetic homily:

> The method—one of them wrote many years ago—known as "the lower homily" cannot be called a work of rhetoric and a sermon in the full and proper sense of the word. Also the homily needs to have a defined subject to which other parts of the text are subordinate akin

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[30] Regius, *Orator christianus*, p. 131: „Cum autem varia eum eruditione oporteat esse ornatum, a notitia et studio sacrarum literarum ordiamur, quae in nostri Oratoris persona videtur principem locum habere; qua debet adeo dives esse ut de eo dici possit. …Cum enim praedicator Divini Verbi praedicator sit, et instrumentum Dei ad animarum beneficium, non per sacramentorum administrationem, aut alio quovis modo, sed per ministerium Verbi Dei, perspicuum est, sacram scripturam, cum in ea Verbum Divinum contineatur, propriam in qua versetur materiam et cognitam esse debere."

[31] Lohner, *Instructio practica,* p. 9: "Secundum locum Sancti Patres merito tenent, quia hi, ut bene notat Sanctus Salesius in modo concionandi a se composito cap. 3 nil aliud continent, nisi Evangelium explicatum seu Sacram Scripturam compositam."

[32] M. Neumayr, *Die Schriftpredigt im Barock. Auf Grund der Theorie der katholischen Barockhomiletik*, (Paderborn, 1938), p. 31: "Der innere Zusammenhang zwischen dem Gotteswort auf der Kanzel und dem Gotteswort im Buch der Bücher ist der barocken Predigttheorie eine Selbstverständlichkeit".

[33] O'Malley, "Erasmus," pp. 19–20.

to body parts, so that the development of the text becomes the development of the subject. Adding commentary to the text, explaining it line after line and word after word, complementing the explanation with remarks about life or religious values without acknowledging any actual rhetorical goal, can be called an edifying lecture on the Scripture. But such work is not a sermon, not a homily.[34]

A certain "scripturalism" postulated by homiletics remains thus somewhat contradictory to the expansion of rhetoric in preaching, and gives rise to dilemmas which, despite various attempts, were never resolved fully and satisfactorily, according to O'Malley.[35] But, as this may be the reason why the ecclesiastical oratory has retained its autonomy and specificity, it may be worthwhile to recall the words of Erich Auerbach who noted the stylistic separateness of the Christian prose, resulting from the influence of biblical patterns:

> In antique theory, the sublime and elevated style was called *sermo gravis* or *sublimis*; the low style was *sermo remissus* or *humilis*; the two had to be kept strictly separated. In the world of Christianity, on the other hand, the two are merged, especially in Christ's Incarnation and Passion, which realize and combine *sublimitas* and *humilitas* in overwhelming measure.[36]

Henri-Irénée Marrou takes a similar approach, while also emphasizing the decisive role played by the Bible in shaping of the new model of Christian oratory:

> Despite its dependence [on classical rhetoric—W.P.], the Christian oratory in itself, as discussed by St Augustine, is actually entirely different from the one whose principles were taught in pagan schools. For it is a religious oratory, whose subject and goal are to an equal degree miraculous. What else does it concern if not those inspired truths "quibus liberamur ab aeternis malis, atque ad aeterna pervenimus bona?" (*De doctrina christiana* 4.18.37).[37]

I am well aware that the above deliberations and recalled argumentation do not provide the answer to the question of the classical or non-classical nature of the sermon as a literary genre, and perhaps, do not even bring us closer to providing one. But is such an answer even possible? And moreover, is it necessary?

Translated by Anna Warso

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[34] F. Stingeder, "Grundfragen der Predigttheorie (I. Das Verhältnis von Predigt und Rede, Homiletik und Rhetorik)," *Kirche und Kanzel*, 2 (1919), p. 107.
[35] O'Malley, "Erasmus," p. 22.
[36] E. Auerbach, *Mimesis. The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, transl. W.R. Trask (Princeton, 2013), p. 151.
[37] H.-I. Marrou, "Christliche Beredsamkeit," in C. Andresen (ed.), *Zum Augustin-Gespräch der Gegenwart* vol. 1 (Darmstadt, 1975), pp. 63–64: "Trotz ihrer Entlehnungen ist faktisch die christliche Beredsamkeit als solche, so wie Augustinus sie analysiert, durchaus von jener Beredsamkeit verschieden, deren Regeln durch die profane Schule schriftlich festgelegt worden waren. Es handelt sich un eine religiose Beredsamkeit, deren Gegenstand und Ziel gleichermaßen übernatürlich sind. Von was anderem handelt sie, wenn nicht von jenen erhabenen Wahrheiten, «quibus liberamur ab aeternis malis, atque ad aeterna pervenimus bona? [*De doctrina christiana*, 4, 18, 37]»".