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# Persuasive Preaching. The *Books of Homilies* and the Reformation in England

**Abstract**: As an act of human speech, religious language has been analysed as an influential means of constructing social relationships through recurrent forms of mutual manipulation; hence, its persuasive nature has often been related to concepts of authority and control. The present paper aims to study the homiletic production offered both in the two Protestant Books of Homilies (1547 and 1563) and in their Catholic counterpart (1555), by locating stylistic analysis within the milieu of the Reformation in England, a context of religious as well as political fragmentation and instability. The study of questions related to genre and style, as well as the insight into linguistic and thematic concerns, will aim to present the rhetorical strength of these texts as an exercise of power in the context of the Reformation in England.

Keywords: *English Reformation*, *power*, *preaching*, *Latin*, *papal primacy*, *the Eucharist*

## 1. Introduction

In her definition of religious language, Valerie Hobbs highlights its domineering effect when she states that "by it we manipulate and are manipulated".[1] Among the various linguistic expressions of religion, this article intends to focus on preaching, which, according to F. Gerrit Immink's definition, is "an act of human discourse".[2] Thus, the scholar emphasises the multifaceted nature of this peculiar form of speech and poses homiletics within a broader multidisciplinary field. In other words, although the liturgical act of faith remains the milieu in which a homily originates, "theories of language, rhetoric, and communication are ... part of homiletical discipline".[3]

The present study, therefore, aims to consider and scrutinize the liminal nature of homiletics, which, according to Immink, "is precisely the intertwining of theoretical reflection both on the proclamation of the gospel and human discourse".[4] Accordingly, if, on the one hand, this essay agrees to consider rhetoric as "the basic frame of reference for homiletics",[5] it also aims to redefine and understand what persuasiveness came to mean within the historical and religious context of the Reformation in England. The years which witnessed the shift from Catholic tradition to Protestant faith resulted in a prolific time for the production of homilies, which is anything but unexpected if one considers what constituted the Reformation, and the Reformation in England, in particular. In fact, as Bryan Crockett reported, "the number of original sermons increased dramatically during the last half of the sixteenth century",[6] a fact which makes not only the Renaissance an interesting and stimulating age to study from the perspective of preaching but, most importantly, accounts for the centrality of the sermon within the changed theological environment of the Reformation. My aim, therefore, is to examine the revolutionary

[1] Valerie Hobbs, *An Introduction to Religious Language: Exploring Theolinguistics in Contemporary Contexts* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 2.
[2] F. Gerrit Immink, "Homiletics: The Current Debate", *International Journal of Practical Theology*, 8.1 (2004), 90.
[3] Ibid., 90.
[4] Ibid., 91.
[5] Ibid., 91.
[6] Bryan Crockett, *The Play of Paradox: Stage and Sermon in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 17.

complexity of English Reformation through the lens of the homiletic discourse and its persuasive power; as Susan Wabuda put it: "preaching is a useful subject to investigate as we attempt to determine what aspects of religious life changed and which did not".[7]

The present contribution does not seek to provide a thorough analysis of such a vast production but is circumscribed to the publication of the two volumes of the *Book of Homilies* (1547 and 1563),[8] in order to consider the rhetorical strength that these texts possessed in a time of great cultural clash and turmoil. Also, some homilies from the Catholic collection (1559)[9] which is named after Bishop Edward Bonner of London will be taken into consideration with the aim to compare the rhetorical strategies exercised by the counterpart, "who used the pulpits of London on Mary's accession to promote the return to Catholicism".[10]

## 2. Persuasion and Power in Early Modern England

It is a fact that any attempts to give a unifying definition of the Renaissance would result in oversimplification, due to its complex and heterogeneous nature. It seems more reasonable, instead, to try to interpret such an intricate system of cultural instances – "a critically important period in Western civilization",[11] as James J. Murphy defines it – from multifarious lenses and perspectives.

Rhetoric has often been intended as one of the decoding keys of early modern culture, as maintained by Torrance Kirby and Paul G. Stanwood: "of prime significance is the fact that the transition from a late-medieval to an early-modern religious identity was achieved to a very large extent through persuasion – arguments, textual interpretation, exhortation, reasoned opinion, and moral advice".[12] At the same time, in its intrinsic relationship to the Renaissance, rhetoric is also closely connected to the concept of power, not only because "persuasion is the true measure of the power of language in that it can effect change without recourse to anything but the strength of its own resources",[13] but such a bond proves to be even more evocative when rhetoric is intended as a means to 'gain' and 'exercise' power:

> Rhetoric has also always been intimately linked to the *accumulation* and *assertion* of power and authority and its key concepts intersect and build on one another to make meaning both in the service of, and against the exercise of, political and social power. Rhetoric centres several relationships in its analyses, relationships organised towards persuasion, attempts to get others to align their actions and thoughts with one's own.[14]

If, on the one hand, power is radically embedded in any rhetorical act of communication – according to what Jeanne Fahnestock has defined as "the ancient and enduring sense of the word ... constructed to have an impact on the attitudes, beliefs, and actions of its audiences"[15] – what did persuasive power come to mean in the specific context of the English Reformation?

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[7] Susan Wabuda, "Bishops and the Provision of Homilies, 1520 to 1547", *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 25.3 (1994), 552.
[8] Gerald Bray, ed., *The Books of Homilies: A Critical Edition* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2015).
[9] Ibid.
[10] Rosamund Oates, "Sermons and Sermon-going in Early Modern England", *Reformation*, 17.1 (2012), 209.
[11] James J. Murphy, "One Thousand Neglected Authors: The Scope and Importance of Renaissance Rhetoric", in James J. Murphy, ed., *Renaissance Eloquence: Studies in the Theory and Practice of Renaissance Rhetoric* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983), 20.
[12] Torrance Kirby and Paul G. Stanwood, eds., *Paul's Cross and the Culture of Persuasion in England, 1520-1640* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013), 3.
[13] David Hann, "Persuasive Language", in Philip Seargeant et al., eds., *The Routledge Handbook of English Language Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 252.
[14] Beau Pihlaja, "Rhetoric", in Stephen Pihlaja, ed., *Analysing Religious Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2021), 91. Emphasis mine.
[15] Jeanne Fahnestock, *Rhetorical Style: The Uses of Language in Persuasion* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2011), 4.

Among the many authoritative studies devoted to such a crucial time in English history, Cristopher Haigh's volume *English* Reformations has recognised the necessity to view the shift from Catholicism to Anglicanism, via Protestantism and Calvinism, as a compound process which, more than its European counterparts, remained profoundly marked by the political transformations which England underwent between XVI and XVII century; as Richard Mallette has explained, "all religion historians recognize that the various theological articulations are deeply embedded in political circumstances".[16] More than its German parallel, which mainly originated from Luther's theological stances against Rome, the process of 'reform' in England radically depended on the monarchs' decisions, often dictated by their personal interests and necessities or those of their counsellors and ministers: Henry VIII's urgency to declare his marriage to Catherine of Aragon null, Edward VI's and his regency council's enhancement of reformed teachings and practices, Marian restoration of Catholicism, and the establishment of the Church of England under Elizabeth I represent the undeniable steps of a process of transformation which resulted in a non-linear development, made of "spasmodic fits, uncertain starts, and threats of reversal".[17]

According to Eamon Duffy, conventional scholarship viewed "Reformation movements as the product of a single energy, unwitting agents or heralds of modernity, and so, self-evidently superior to the medieval Catholicism they replaced";[18] the scholar, instead, has highlighted the urgency to reconsider the impervious development of that transformation. More than a level and horizontal path, then, those years need to be reinterpreted in the light of conflicting and diverging instances, also featuring "resilience and social embedding of the late medieval religion so often caricatured or ignored in the older narratives".[19] In other words, according to what Mallette has defined as "revisionist political history",[20] there seems to be a strong and impelling necessity to consider that "even during the second half of the century, committed Protestant ministers encountered great resistance to the evangelical faith".[21]

In addition, Christopher Haigh's analysis accounts for such hybrid responses to the exercise of royal power, which all originated from a diffuse sense of political as well as religious precariousness; hence, according to the scholar, the plural identity of the Reformation is also to be intended as a scarcely coherent process of development: "from a modern perspective, such men may seem hypocrites, *politiques*, and cowards: perhaps in some measure they were. But they lived in confused and dangerous times, when ideas and power structures were unstable".[22] Therefore, the Reformation in England may be seen as a process which sprang from, but also questioned the nature of royal power, exercised or imposed, but also refused or even opposed to, "a contingent series of conflicts and crisis",[23] as revisionist historians have claimed.

As a result, the prominence of Renaissance homiletics must be viewed in such a context of diverse and contrasting forms of persuasive pressure, both as a means to spread reformed teachings as well as to resist them. Accordingly, this essay focuses on the process of communication and spread of power, by means of the persuasive strength of early modern English preaching: to what extent did the homiletic production – at least those homilies gathered in the official collections – contribute to support the monarchs' decisions or dissent from them? What persuasive influence did they try to exercise?

David Hann has given an inspiring definition of persuasion by highlighting the intimate process of interpersonal relationship which is established when one tries to persuade others; such intimacy is

[16] Richard Mallette, *Spenser and the Discourses of Reformation England* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 9.
[17] Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics and Society under the Tudors* [1993] (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2012), 169.
[18] Eamon Duffy, *Reformation Divided: Catholics, Protestants and the Conversion of England* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 1.
[19] Ibid., 2.
[20] Mallette, *Spenser,* 9.
[21] Ibid., 10.
[22] Haigh, *English Reformations*, 14.
[23] Mallette, *Spenser,* 10.

granted by one's slipping into the other's beliefs, into their system of personal views and convictions: "the notion of persuasion as a belief system, as when referring to someone's 'political persuasion', hints at an important element in persuasion itself. The process involves tapping into another's beliefs or viewpoints and moving them in some way."[24] Is it not part of the intrinsic nature of a homily to involve personal beliefs and principles in order to mould them into a communal experience of faith? Do sermons not aim, as Immick puts it, to "form the community of faith, to edify the people in their distinctive language of faith"?[25]

Nevertheless, hardly could early modern Christianity be depicted as a communal experience of faith; instead, those were the years when the solid unity and uniformity of Catholicism were challenged as never before, thus initiating an irreversible process of disaggregation and fragmentation. Not united in the profession of faith nor in the celebration of their rites, early modern Christians had to find ways to reshape their new forms of aggregation, their 'churches', precisely by sneaking into individuals' beliefs and stirring them towards new convictions:

> In the Renaissance era, reliance on symbol and image gave way to the privileging of the audible or visible word. While peace remained a fundamental Christian aspiration, ritual and sacrament gave way to persuasion and instruction as the means to achieve it. A newly professional breed of intellectuals and activists – the 'new clerks' – arose, who understood Christianity not as a community sustained by ritual acts, but a teaching enforced by institutional structures.[26]

In other words, the Reformers' protest against Rome, which reverberated throughout Europe in many and various ways, marked the beginning of a process of increasing disaggregation which deconstructed what had been formerly perceived, despite the many internal differences, as united. The abolition of most of the sacraments, the rejection of traditional doctrines like purgatory or indulgences, the abolition of consecrated life, and – as far as England is concerned – the proclamation of the monarch as a religious leader created a sense of radical crisis and fragility, which demanded new ways to rebuild social and religious bonds. Hence, the present contribution shares the conviction that homilies played a decisive role in reshaping the culture of a fragmented and destabilized society through a consistent and widespread catechesis: "with the Mass abrogated and mandatory auricular confession abolished, priests became ministers and ministers were preachers above all else. As a result, preaching came to occupy a central place in English culture, occurring on more occasions than ever before."[27]

As Bryan Crockett has shown, just like the stage, the pulpit played a decisive role in Reformation England so much so that not only did they both function as places in which ideas and beliefs could enjoy a certain freedom of circulation, but they also operated a process of substitution, according to which the persuasive influence of ritual and sacramental actions was replaced by the power of the spoken word.

Several studies about early modern homiletics have underlined the relationship between the pulpit and the stage: according to Alison Shell, for example, the question cannot be debated merely in terms of mutual rejection or, conversely, influence; rather, the scholar argues, preaching was marked by "what could be a profound ambivalence to the theatre, even among preachers who enjoyed drama and borrowed from it".[28] Despite what Shell defines as "considerable overlap between the two" (76), the undoubted discontinuity between the pulpit and the stage must be taken into consideration, especially since these two forms of expression were also granted different degrees of freedom: according to Stephen Greenblatt, "there was no freedom of expression in Shakespeare's England, on the stage or anywhere

[24] Hann, "Persuasive Language", 253.
[25] Immink, "Homiletics", 95.
[26] Duffy, *Reformation Divided*, 8.
[27] Eric Josef Carlson, "The Boring of the Ear: Shaping the Pastoral Vision of Preaching in England, 1540-1640", in Larissa Taylor, ed., *Preachers and People in the Reformations and Early Modern Period* (Boston, Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2003), 255.
[28] Alison Shell, *Shakespeare and Religion* [2010] (London and New York: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2015), 38.

else".[29] Nevertheless, while Greenblatt rightly associates forms of totalitarian censorship and oppression to drama, which produced "techniques to speak in code" (3), homilies, especially those grouped in the official collections analysed in the present essay, enjoyed a higher degree of freedom and verbal openness: "Preachers, like other religious writers, were both allowed and expected to inhabit the moral high ground, and had more freedom than professional playwrights to tell their audience how they ought to act".[30] As will be discussed later, controversial issues are not presented here with obliqueness or artifice; rather, frank explicitness emerges as a part of their rhetorical power of persuasion.

In a context of deconstructed faith and beliefs, then, when the inconstancy of political power mined the unity of the nation, preaching – and theatrical performances – reinforced "the reformers' impulse to shift the mode of representation from the visual to the aural … just as the impulse to abolish the priest as mediator resulted in a different kind of mediation in the person of the preacher".[31]

Therefore, various and multifaceted though it was, the English Renaissance undoubtedly rested upon the centrality of preaching as a means of circulating and persuasive power, especially because of the fragile and unstable nature of social identity. The homilies at the centre of the present essay, then, are intended as a distinguished trait of that 'culture of persuasion' – as Torrance Kirby and Paul G. Stanwood have put it – which is an expression of early modern England. Their words about St Paul's Cross – "the most influential of all public venues in early-modern England"[32] – seem to be valid also as a general description of Reformed England:

> this pulpit remained continuously at the centre of events which transformed England's religious identities, and through this transformation contributed substantially to the emergence of a public arena of discourse animated above all by a 'culture of persuasion'. … At the end of the reign of Elizabeth, religious identity could no longer be assumed as simply 'given' within the accepted order of the world. Structures which had previously connected a hierarchically-ordered cosmos to a parallel, interconnected religious understanding in late-medieval 'sacramental culture' had given way, even among adherents of Rome, to a 'culture of persuasion.'[33]

## 3. Persuading from the Pulpit: The *Books of Homilies* and Bishop Bonner's Homilies

The publication of the first *Book of Homilies* in 1547 responded to the precise purpose "to instruct the nation in the doctrinal changes crucial to Protestantism ... a principal question for the early English reformers".[34] As Duffy and others have explained, although Henry VIII's separation from Rome had lacerated the unity of English believers, this did not grant the successful and uniform acceptance of the new creed by his subjects. Only under Edward VI was Protestantism implemented in England, as Henry's last interventions still concealed evidence of his compromising attitude towards Catholicism.[35] Analogously, Christopher Haigh presented the young King's accession as a remarkable turning point in the advancement of the Reformed faith, an event that, according to the scholar, brought about "a second, truly Protestant, Reformation".[36] It is not arduous, therefore, to recognise the first *Book of Homilies* as a "significant example of both confidence and fear of the efficacy of preaching", a powerful instrument

[29] Stephen Greenblatt, *Tyrant: Shakespeare on Politics* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company), 2.
[30] Shell, *Shakespeare and Religion*, 77.
[31] Crockett, *The Play of Paradox,* 6.
[32] Kirby and Stanwood, *Paul's Cross*, 3.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ronald B. Bond, "Cranmer and the Controversy Surrounding Publication of 'Certayne Sermons or Homilies' (1547)", *Renaissance and Reformation/Renaissance et Réforme*, 12.1 (1976), 28.
[35] See Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars* [1992] (New Haven and London: Yale U.P., 2005), particularly chapters 12 and 13.
[36] Haigh, *English Reformations*, 168.

"to communicate and control the central convictions of the realm, and to define a vision of evangelical faith and life for the transformation of England into a commonwealth under the royal supremacy". [37]

The first collection includes twelve homilies, which were published under the large influence of Thomas Cranmer, to whom some of them are consensually attributed; the Archbishop's influence on the publication is undeniable and testifies how concerns about the importance of carrying out a plan of meticulous and thorough catechesis had preceded the actual issuing of the *Homilies*: "no bishop spent more time devising homilies after the breach from Rome than Archbishop Thomas Cranmer. Starting in 1534, the preparation of homilies was one of his most important concerns".[38]

The *Preface* to the first *Book*, published under the new King's consent and "by the prudent advice of his most dear beloved uncle Edward, duke of Somerset, governor of his majesty's person ... with the rest of his most honourable council", states that the homilies contain "certain wholesome and godly exhortations, to move the people to honour and worship the Almighty God and diligently to serve him, everyone according to their degree, state and vocation".[39]

Fifteen years later, during the reign of Elizabeth I, a new volume was added (1563), but, although it was clear that this was intended to foster the spread of Protestantism, "which heretofore was set forth by her most loving brother, a prince of worthy memory", the two volumes "were regarded as a separate collection, not being printed together until 1623".[40]

If compared, the two prefaces highlight common elements which feature the special place that homiletics held in the years of the Reformation. One first striking characteristic is that some expressions contained in the 1547 Preface are quoted in the successive volume; the two texts, for example, converge on the threatening reasons which made the publication impelling: "the manifold enormities which heretofore have crept into his grace's realm through the false usurped power of the bishop of Rome"[41] (1547) and "the manifold enormities which heretofore by false doctrine have crept into the Church of God" (1563).[42] The two texts also agree that the solution to this "corrupt, vicious and ungodly living, as also erroneous [and poisoned (1563)] doctrine tending to superstition and idolatry"[43] consists in a more accurate and regular reading of the Bible, "which is the principal guide and leader unto all godliness and virtue" (1547 and 1563).[44] Yet, the author of the 1563 Preface seems to be more aware of the fact that an even more urgent reason has imposed the publication of the volume, that is the worrying state of cultural decadence in which contemporary preachers were, illiteracy and incompetence to preach being among the risks which could jeopardize the spread of the reformed creed: "all they which are appointed ministers have not the gift of preaching to instruct the people which is committed unto them, whereof great inconvenience might rise and ignorance be maintained if some honest remedy be not speedily found and provided".[45] Also, the two prefaces regulate how and when the homilies had to be delivered: on Sundays and holidays during the Communion rite, and read in the very same order as prescribed by the *Book*; in case of longer homilies, these were "broken down into several parts so that they could be read over a few Sundays instead of all at once".[46]

[37] Michael Pasquarello, "Evangelizing England: The Importance of the Book of Homilies for the Popular Preaching of Hugh Latimer & John Wesley", *The Asbury Journal*, 59.1 (2004), 154.
[38] Wabuda, "Bishops", 559.
[39] Bray, *Homilies,* 3-4
[40] Gerald Bray, "Introduction", in Gerald Bray, ed., *The Books of Homilies: A Critical edition* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2015), 16.
[41] Bray, *Homilies*, 3.
[42] Ibid., 5.
[43] Ibid., 3.
[44] Ibid., 3 and 5. The presence of biblical quotations will be discussed further later.
[45] Ibid., 5.
[46] Bray, "Introduction", 10.

Nevertheless, the fate of the *Books of Homilies* adherently followed the tumultuous development of the Reformation in England, which knew a temporary halt with the accession to the throne of Mary Tudor: during the years of Catholic counter-reformation, the Edwardian collection was suppressed, although the Queen "recognized the value of homilies for maintaining orthodoxy".[47] Several attempts, therefore, were made to produce new sets of homilies, whose aim, together with "numerous books of Catholic teaching and devotion", was "to recreate Catholic understanding by printed sermons, homilies, and works of instruction".[48] The figure who led such a process of restoration was Bishop Edmund Bonner, who "supervised the production in 1555 of Catholic teaching" (216).

Bishop Bonner's homilies were not the only ones to be produced in the years of Mary Tudor's reign, nor did they emerge only as an "attempt to restore Catholic worship and piety";[49] the choice to include them in the present study resides, instead, in the fact that they witness the key role played by homiletics in the years of English Reformation as a powerful means of persuasion. Since Bonner's thirteen texts occupy a central position between the publication of the first and the second *Book of Homilies*, they shed light on those issues which were considered problematic and dubious in the shift from one faith to another.[50]

Therefore, if the three sets of homilies underline the urgency of regular catechesis, "recognized by English and continental reformers alike to be a major part of the new service and a primary instrument for popular religious instruction",[51] at the same time, we should also never forget that English Reformation was radically embedded in the political vicissitudes of the monarchy. As a consequence, the political impact of the homilies, and the fact that their authors adhered to the views of their monarchs, augmented the nature of these texts as political acts of persuasion. For this reason, it is of particular interest to consider the definition that Torrance Kirby and Paul G. Stanwood gave of early modern England as "a world where sermons generally counted among the conventional means of adult education, as vital instruments of popular moral and social guidance, not to mention political control".[52]

In other words, if, on the one hand, the homilies responded to the pastoral care of the reformers to reveal "the nature of God's salvific plan and … how that should dictate actions",[53] the political nature of the Reformation in England, as many scholars have discussed, also requires reconsidering them as proper acts of speech, whose rhetorical nature needs to be explored further:

> For it is likely that most of those who lived in Tudor England experienced Reformation as obedience rather than conversion; they obeyed a monarch's new laws rather than swallowed a preacher's new message. Even the preacher's freedom to convert was circumscribed by official policy; underground proselytizing at risk of persecution would be far less effective than public preaching of an official gospel. Religious change was governed by law, and law was the outcome of politics. The Reformations were begun, defined, sustained, slowed, and revitalized by political events. So the core of a study of English Reformations must be a political story.[54]

[47] Bond, "Cranmer and the Controversy", 34.
[48] Haigh, *English Reformations*, 216.
[49] Bray, "Introduction", 14.
[50] Christopher Haigh examined the wide circulation of homilies also from an alternative stance as he discussed the question in terms of popularity and distribution. According to him, although Bonner's homilies were welcomed with great enthusiasm – "there were ten editions of the homilies alone" (*English Reformations*, 217) – "publications which supported Mary's policies outnumbered critical works by only two to one, and … English Protestants published larger numbers of controversial tracts in secrecy and exile than Catholics managed with the backing of the state. So Marian Catholics lost the battle of the books" (223).
[51] Bond, "Cranmer and the Controversy", 28.
[52] Kirby and Stanwood, *Paul's Cross*, 1.
[53] Mary Morrissey, "Scripture, Style and Persuasion in Seventeenth-century English Theories of Preaching", *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 53.4 (2002), 693.
[54] Haigh, *English Reformations,* 21.

## 4. Preaching during the English Reformation: A Rhetorical Approach

In the following section, I will analyse some of the homilies collected in the two *Books of Homilies* and in Bishop Bonner's collection from the point of view of their rhetorical strength. Of course, a thorough investigation of all the texts included in the collections should not be expected here; instead, I will consider these texts as a whole, highlighting some peculiar aspects when necessary. General questions related to authorship, genre, language, and style will be examined; these elements will finally illuminate some aspects related to the controversial topics of papal authority and the Eucharist.

The *corpus* of the homilies contained in the *First* and *Second Book of Homilies* and in Bishop Bonner's collection consists of forty-six texts, distributed as follows: twelve (Book One), twenty-one (Book Two), and thirteen (Bonner). Each homily has a clear title which states the main theme.

| *First Book* (31 July 1547) | *Bonner's Homilies* (1555) | *Second Book* (1563) |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Scripture | 1. The creation and fall of man | 1. The right use of the Church |
| 2. Sin and Fall | 2. The misery of man's fallen state and his condemnation to death | 2. Against idolatry |
| 3. Salvation (justification by faith) | 3. The redemption of man | 3. Repairing churches and keeping them clean |
| 4. Faith | 4. How Christ's work of redemption is applicable to man | 4. Good works, especially fasting |
| 5. Faith and good works | 5. Christian love and charity | 5. Against gluttony and drunkenness |
| 6. Love | 6. How dangerous a break of charity is | 6. Against excess of apparel |
| 7. Against swearing and perjuring | 7. The nature of the Church | 7. Prayer |
| 8. Falling away from God | 8. The authority of the Church | 8. The place and time of prayer |
| 9. Fear of death | 9. Papal supremacy | 9. The use of vernacular in common prayer |
| 10. Civil order and obedience | 10. Papal supremacy | 10. An answer to people who are offended by certain passages of the Scripture |
| 11. Against adultery | 11. The real presence of Christ in the sacrament of the altar | 11. Alms and acts of mercy |
| 12. Against contention and brawling | 12. Transubstantiation | 12. Christmas |
| | 13. Answers to objections made against the sacrament | 13. Good Friday |
| | | 14. Easter |
| | | 15. Worthy reception of the Sacrament |
| | | 16. Pentecost |
| | | 17. Rogation week |
| | | 18. Matrimony |
| | | 19. Against idleness |
| | | 20. Repentance |
| | | 21. Against rebellion |

Table 1. Topics of the homilies[55]

### 4.1 *"To be truly and faithfully instructed": Questions about genre and style*

Given that a homily belongs to the category of communicative acts, one essential element to consider is whether it shares characteristics with other forms of speech. In other words, what genre does a homily

[55] The table synthesises those found in Bray, "Introduction", 13-18.

belong to? To what extent is this essential in order to understand the rhetorical strength of English Reformation homilies? As George A. Kennedy has argued, there is always a mutual dependence between the genre and the efficacy of a text: "It is often useful to consider the dominant rhetorical genre of a work in determining the intent of the author and the effect upon the audience in the original social situation".[56] In John W. O'Malley's opinion, the question of the genre is crucial to the correct analysis of a homily, since "rhetoric has implications … for literary interpretation";[57] it also reinforces a homily's dimension as a communicative act and its persuasive purpose by illuminating the author's intention to use that specific genre.

Kennedy has also given an exhaustive introduction to the question of genres by referring both to Plato's and Aristotle's well-known traditions; according to the latter, in particular, "there are necessarily three genres of rhetoric: sumbouleutikón, or deliberative; dikanikón, or judicial; and ἐpideiktikón, or demonstrative".[58] The widely inclusive nature of the third genre, which results particularly apt to "enhance knowledge, understanding, or belief", also befits the requirements of religious preaching, which, "except when specifically aimed at a future action on the part of the audience such as receiving baptism or at the judgment of some past action as requiring excommunication or anathema of a heretical doctrine by the church, can be viewed as epideictic".[59]

Although Aristotle's traditional distinction has been questioned over the centuries, it has never ceased to be a precise point of reference to discern the nature of speeches. The Renaissance, though, needed to reinterpret them in the light of the new cultural instances of the time, which included the liturgical celebration among the most popular contexts where persuasive discourses were held; as the previous sections have shown, the place occupied by the homily was central in such contexts: "in the Renaissance and early modern period there are often references to the three genres of the senate, the pulpit, and the bar, an adaptation of the classical triad".[60] New spaces as well as new 'rhetoricians' addressed their discourses in order to persuade their listeners; homilies responded to such mutated conditions as long as they partially abandoned the exclusively didactic tone of the thematic sermon, typical of early Christian and medieval centuries. Yet, the fragmentation of Christian faith imposed that the believers be taught and convinced at the same time, persuaded to agree to one faith or another: "whereas the thematic sermon emphasized *docere* at the expense of *movere* and *delectare*, the demonstrative oration more effectively coordinated teaching with persuasional aims".[61] Thus, didactic and persuasion came to characterise early modern preachers, who were preoccupied with instructing their listeners as well as urging them to adhere to the new faith or to reject it.

Protestant homilies in both *Books* seem to agree on the importance of the double nature of the sermon as their arrangement clearly shows; in fact, the first homilies in the two lists offer dogmatic teachings about the nature of the Church or the history of salvation, while later ones are "more 'pastoral' in content".[62] Bonner's texts, instead, appear to be more focused on doctrinal issues, thus exhibiting a more determined insistence on the didactic aim of preaching, to the detriment of pastoral themes: "He probably felt that such issues were of secondary importance in the battle he was fighting for the restoration of Catholicism".[63]

[56] George A. Kennedy, "The Genres of Rhetoric", in Stanley E. Porter, ed., *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period (330 BC-AD 400)* (Leiden, New York, Köln: Brill, 1997), 45.
[57] John W. O'Malley, "Content and Rhetorical Forms in Sixteenth-Century Treatises on Preaching", in James J. Murphy, ed., *Renaissance Eloquence: Studies in the Theory and Practice of Renaissance Rhetoric* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983), 252.
[58] Kennedy, "The Genres of Rhetoric", 44.
[59] Ibid., 45.
[60] Ibid., 50.
[61] O'Malley, "Content and Rhetorical Forms", 240.
[62] Bray, "Introduction", 12.
[63] Ibid., 16.

The choice of the demonstrative genre by early modern preachers is supported also by analysing the titles of the homilies, which give an account of their authors' aims. According to Cristina Pepe, "the construction of the identity of the genres continues with the introduction of a further criterion, the τέλος", which corresponds to "καλόν/αἰσχρόν ('honorable/disgraceful') for the epideictic".[64] In elaborating the main features of the genres, Aristotle established their aims in terms of binary couples; in Pepe's words, the peculiarity of the demonstrative genre resides in the fact that the Greek philosopher made "the traditional notion of ἐπίδειξις coextensive with that of praise (and its counterpart, blame) and hence in assigning to the epideictic genre the lofty moral task of praising and blaming".[65] Accordingly, the *Homilies* – in particular those contained in the two Protestant *Books* – list texts featuring what O'Malley defined as a "'rhetoric of congratulation' applied to God and his works",[66] along with 'against' sermons or "warnings against anti-social behaviour".[67] Adhering, thus, to the demonstrative nature of their genre, the *Homilies* praise, celebrate, and stimulate, on the one hand, but also warn, deprecate, condemn, and denounce, on the other. Even though the authoritative analysis conducted by John W. Blench underlined that the choice of the genre in Renaissance homiletics is far from rigid and exclusive, the affinity of the homilies in question to the *genus demonstrativum* allows us to align them to what Michael Pasquarello stated about the value of sermons during the Reformation in England: "the pulpit was utilized for preaching Christ, teaching new doctrine, introducing new practices, articulating new visions, and moving listeners to adopt them".[68]

As for their style, it is essential to remember that Cranmer's *Homilies*, as well as Bonner's and those contained in the Elizabethan volume, shared the common feature of being supposed to be read during Sunday liturgy. Both the prefaces to the Protestant sermons ask "all parsons, vicars, curates … to read and declare to their parishioners plainly and distinctly in such order as they stand in the book";[69] similarly, Bishop Bonner, writing to "all parsons and curates within his diocese of London", presented his collection as "somewhat to instruct and teach your flock withal, requiring every one of you that diligently … ye read to your flock".[70] Considering repetitive reading among the most preeminent characteristics of these texts, Ronald B. Bond hypothesised that the effect they may have had on the listeners was anything but exciting, "for the homilies are written in a plain style and … this plainness of style, though conducive to ready understanding, must have grown wearisome".[71] Bond's comment is in agreement with general criticism (Blench, 1964; Auksi, 1995), which maintains that "in this period only the plain and the colloquial styles are found; the Reformers in their fiery zeal to change the religion of England until it accords with the simplicity of 'the Gospel' eschew the mannered elaboration of the ornate style".[72]

Peter Auksi has devoted a noteworthy volume to the in-depth analysis of the use of the plain style in Christian homiletic tradition, which – he argued – "has been gradually appropriated as a description for a religious culture which in its written and material expression has chosen to distinguish itself from more worldly and sensuous styles and forms".[73] In their intent to distance themselves from the embellished

[64] Cristina Pepe, *The Genres of Rhetorical Speeches in Greek and Roman Antiquity* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013), 170.
[65] Ibid., 157.
[66] O'Malley, "Content and Rhetorical Forms", 240. The scholar also interpreted this feature as a further sign of discontinuity and innovation, typical of Renaissance preaching: "Much more important was the change in the materials with which the sermons dealt – the *res*. These became focused more clearly on God's deeds and actions – his *beneficia* – and less on the abstract doctrines that were the standard materials for the thematic, that is, the scholastic, sermon of the Middle Ages". (240)
[67] Bray, "Introduction", 13.
[68] Pasquarello, "Evangelizing England", 154.
[69] Bray, *Homilies*, 4.
[70] Ibid., 122.
[71] Bond, "Cranmer and the Controversy", 33.
[72] John W. Blench, *Preaching in England in The Late Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries: A Study of English Sermons 1450–C.1600* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1964), 142.
[73] Peter Auksi, *Christian Plain Style: The Evolution of a Spiritual Ideal* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 1995), 6.

forms of classical rhetoric, then, Renaissance preachers moulded their own style, according to which the preaching of the Gospel, stripped of unnecessary adornments, might display its own strength and beauty. Plainness and simplicity emerge from these texts as a common trait and as an expression of the shared agreement on the "rhetoric of truth, which seeks the removal of devices".[74] Thus, far from being a sign of inelegance or stylistic coarseness, plainness is the means through which those preachers expressed the rhetorical strength of their message, by replacing the insistence of classical rhetoric on *elocutio* with the persuasive authority of their sources: the Bible and the writings of the Fathers. The peculiar characteristic of the plain style of Reformation homiletics, then, does not consist in the absence of rhetorical devices; rather, it features the recurrent intertwining of the preacher's words with the Word, which determines the speaker's credibility and persuasiveness.[75] In this sense, plainness also characterizes Bonner's collection: the eleventh homily, for example, despite its aim to present the much-debated topic of the Eucharist, does not recur to any particular forms of stylistic eloquence; rather, it emphasises "the undoubted authorities of the Scripture, which declare *plainly* unto us what meat it is that we must eat".[76] The adverb is repeated four times and always in reference to the authority of the Bible, which seems to be the only device sustaining the preacher's teaching.

Although such peculiarity has sometimes been judged as a "movement against humanistic eloquence and the deification of Cicero",[77] more appropriately, it must be viewed and interpreted as an expression of the insistence – fostered by the Reformation and shared by Catholicism – on the dogmatic assertion about the centrality of the Scriptures: "There is … a deeper and simpler sense in Reformation preachers that the beauties of pagan rhetoric are not needed in proclaiming Christ".[78]

Of course, as several scholars have taught,[79] English Reformation homiletics cannot be restricted to one single style; also, I do not intend to argue that all the homilies contained in these collections do not present variations or exceptions. The eleventh homily in the first *Book*, for example, is characterized by a more vehement and passionate language, which suits the theme clearly expressed by the title: *A Sermon Against Whoredom and Uncleanness*. The preacher's style here abundantly recurs to metaphorical expressions, which associate the sin of adultery to images derived from the semantic field of water: "the outrageous sea of adultery", "overflowed", "filthy lake, foul puddle and stinking sink", "incommodities which issue and flow out of this stinking puddle"; in order to support his teaching, here the author resorts to a more elaborate style which reinforces the deprecating tone of the homily by means of what Jeanne Fahnestock defines as "extended metaphor".[80]

Plainness and simplicity reverberate in the *Homilies* also through their themes; such is the case of the first three sermons in the Elizabethan collection of 1563. As the titles suggest, the preacher[81] seems

[74] Ibid., 271.

[75] Despite general agreement on the fact that plainness came to be a peculiar trait of Renaissance sacred rhetoric, the meaning and use of plain style have been investigated from several perspectives. According to Debora K. Shuger, the insistence on "unadorned sanctity" has produced "reductive dichotomies of oratory and the plain style, rhetoric and philosophy, Ciceronianism and 'Atticism,' *verba* and *res*, and so forth" (*Sacred Rhetoric: The Christian Grand Style in the English Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1988, 3). More recently, Chad Schrock has shown that 'plain' "may even demand adornment" ("Plain Styles: Disillusioned Rhetoric in Edward Sexby's Killing Noe Murder", *Modern Language Review*, 105.2 [2010], 332), which suggests that we should not view plainness as a synonym for inelegance. Mary Morrissey, instead, has underlined the theological dimension of the plain style as an expression of God's revelation through the incarnated Word ("Scripture, Style and Persuasion").

[76] Bray, *Homilies*, 179. Emphasis mine. The relationship between biblical authority and the Eucharist will be discussed further later.

[77] Auksi, *Christian Plain Style*, 238.

[78] Ibid., 268.

[79] See Blench, 1964, *Preaching in England*, chapter 3, and Auksi, *Christian Plain Style*, 1995.

[80] Fahnestock, *Rhetorical Style*, 107.

[81] Although there is no further evidence to support the thesis, the common style of these three texts has suggested common authorship. See Bray, "Introduction", 17.

to be particularly interested in the question of respect and decency in churches; unfortunately, he laments,

> the corruption of these latter days, hath brought into the Church infinite multitudes of images, and the same, with other parts of the temple also, have decked with gold and silver, painted with colours, set them with stone and pearl, clothed them with silks and precious vestures, fantasying untruly that to be the chief decking and adorning of the Temple or house of God and that all people should be the more moved to the due reverence.[82]

These homilies, in other words, support the Protestant polemic against the Catholic tradition of having churches richly and splendidly decorated. Basing their theological views on the interpretation of faith as an inner spiritual process, the Reformers generally denounced and rejected the "allegedly excessive display and outward pomp of Catholic buildings",[83] which they regarded as a source of sinful distraction. Therefore, by warning against the sin of idolatry, which the *Homily* intends as connected with the excesses of outer embellishments and superfluous decorations – "making, setting up, painting, gilding, clothing and decking of dumb and dead images which be great puppets and mauments"[84] – these texts highlight "the topos of truth's nakedness",[85] thus creating a strong association between the necessity to adopt a plain and simple style in preaching with the Reformers' option for a barer and unadorned conception of art in general:

> The Renaissance assault on eloquence was also fuelled in part by Cicero's view of style and rhetoric as a covering added to thought. To the religious imagination particularly, this habit of thought suggested and exaggerated other analogies which implied that artful style of any degree was deceptive clothing, coloration, trickery, merely outward adorning, and so on. The Bible's concern with hypocrisy deepened further the moral suspicion of beautiful verbal surfaces among the religious.[86]

### 4.2 *"Words of everlasting life": The Homilies and Biblical Authority*

The very first homily in the *First Book*, whose title is *A Fruitful Exhortation to the Reading and Knowledge of Holy Scripture*, clarifies that if the aim of the collection was to "move the people to honour and worship Almighty God, and diligently to serve him",[87] the most urgent means to achieve such a goal was the "knowledge of Holy Scripture".[88] The first sermon does not only recommend the faithful to be familiar with the Scripture but establishes a paradigmatic homiletic style which consists in the frequent presence of biblical quotations and references throughout the texts, a trait which drives them away from the hagiographic tendency of medieval preaching: "miracle stories and saints' lives were the stuff of medieval sermons, particularly those based on the most common sermon collections".[89] Also, the Reformers' insistence on faithful reference to the Bible constituted a point of rupture from medieval preaching in the sense that adherence to biblical truth was a preeminent way to free people from 'popish' and, therefore, superstitious expressions of faith. This does not mean, of course, that the previous centuries had disregarded the necessity to embed preaching within a precise and accurate biblical framework, according to St. Jerome's insistence on the importance of knowing the Scriptures as a point of reference in Christian evangelization;[90] nor does it imply that biblical references were absent from

[82] Bray, *Homilies*, 217.
[83] Auksi, *Christian Plain Style*, 216.
[84] Bray, *Homilies*, 290.
[85] Auksi, *Christian Plain Style*, 234.
[86] Ibid., 242.
[87] Bray, *Homilies*, 4.
[88] Ibid., 7.
[89] Carlson, "The Boring of the Ear", 252.
[90] "Not to know the Scriptures is to be ignorant of Christ" (Jerome, *Prologus ad Isaiam*, quoted in Bray, *Homilies*, 368).

Catholic homilies, as will be discussed later. Rather, the Reformation progressively rejected the traditional insistence on the allegorical interpretation of the Bible, in favour of "a concern for the native and original meaning of biblical expressions depending upon a knowledge of the original languages of the sacred books".[91]

As the main promoter of this innovative way of preaching, Thomas Cranmer himself began to make extensive use of biblical passages in his sermons: "He wished to replace traditional homilies, which often featured pious stories about the saints and their miracles, with new material based upon scripture. This shift to scripturally based homilies was an important innovation".[92] In fact, the Reformation witnessed an inversion of the medieval concept of 'seeing' the contents of faith through the artistic representation of the Bible in order to sustain the faithful's poor literacy. Although the homily had always been part of the rite, what the Reformation proposed, then, was the insistence on the presence of the Scripture as a means to sustain the aural dimension of faith more than the Medieval predilection for the visual one:

> Because the Bible was the chief source for the rhetoric of the homilies, their aim was to imitate the language of Scripture, and in particular, its examples, thus replacing religious images with the image of the Word-*pictura* with *scriptura*. This biblically shaped style renders the sermons more forceful and vivid, while increasing their clarity and immediacy, yet keeping their teaching grounded in the soil of Scripture.[93]

More than highlighting the numerous references to the Bible interwoven in these texts, it seems noteworthy to consider how similarly, or differently, Protestant and Catholic preachers used the sacred texts to bring about "the exhortation of hearers to follow the doctrines presented in a sermon".[94]

The first part of the *Fruitful Exhortation* celebrates the prominence of the Bible in praising terms, yet it is the second part which clarifies the special role assigned to the Scriptures and their use to support the main tenets of the faith. The section lists two possible reasons for disaffection towards the Word of God: some people "dare not read Holy Scripture, lest through their ignorance they should fall into error"; others complain about "the difficulty to understand it and the hardness thereof is so great that it is meet to be read only of clerks and learned men".[95] The first homily, in other words, while stating the importance of the Bible in the life of the faithful, also deals with the very first controversial issue regarding the gulf between the access to the Sacred texts by the clergy and the people. Through the recurrent use of biblical references, the homily witnesses a way of preaching which will be standardized in the next years to the point that, as Barret J. Miller has explained, "it seems clear that the book's publication is a concrete expression of the conviction that the Bible and its teaching should be available to all Christians in the context of some normative teaching and exposition of holy scripture".[96] Furthermore, not only does the text provide an imperative invitation to 'know' the Bible, but it interestingly insists on 'reading' it, a verb which is repeated forty-three times throughout the homily.[97]

[91] Blench, *Preaching in England*, 40.
[92] Susan Wabuda, "Bishops and the Provision of Homilies", 551. In her more recent study, *Preaching during the English Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2002), Wabuda has also explained that the popularity of preaching in early modern England should not be viewed as a revolutionary presence itself as opposed to a stagnant disregard of the homiletic genre in late Middle Ages: "A persistent myth has haunted the scholarly and popular mind that sermons were relatively rare before the Reformation" (26). Instead, she argues, "sermons were part of the regular life of English churches long before the breach with Rome" (Ibid.).
[93] Pasquarello, "Evangelizing England", 156.
[94] Morrissey, "Scripture, Style and Persuasion", 694.
[95] Bray, *Homilies*, 10.
[96] Barrett J. Miller, "The First Book of Homilies and the Doctrine of Holy Scripture", *Anglican and Episcopal History*, 66.4 (1997), 444.
[97] Among the many examples: "let us reverently hear and read Holy Scripture" (Bray, *Homilies*, 7); "by diligent hearing and reading thereof" (10); "I shall show you how you may read it without danger of error" (11).

Such insistence results of particular interest, especially if compared to what Susan Wabuda has taught about late-medieval tradition: "only a deacon or a priest, who had taken the most solemn vows at the highest levels of holy orders, could read the Gospel text".[98] The *Exhortation*, therefore, suggests a closer contact of the people with the Scripture by explicitly inviting them to read it, thus creating a bond of proximity not mediated by the ministers.

This intimacy is reinforced in the tenth homily contained in the 1563 *Book*, which is entitled *An Information for Them Which Take Offence at Certain Places of the Holy Scripture*. Although the text is more concerned with giving an exegetical explanation of those passages which cause 'offences', it insists on suggesting access to the Scripture by showing an even more noteworthy recurrence. Here, the invitation to 'read' the Bible is repeatedly connected with hearing; in the text 'reading' is associated with 'hearing' ten times,[99] thus creating a strong invitation to have access to the Scripture by "hearing and reading".[100] If hearing the Bible is among the opportunities provided by the *Homilies* themselves, as they are "to be grounded in holy scripture",[101] this Elizabethan sermon reinforces the idea that 'reading' is supposed to be a more intimate and personal act of proximity to the Bible and warns against those who "pull out with violence the Holy Bibles out of the people's hands".[102] Finally, reading is also intended as an autonomous action to be performed by the faithful even outside the liturgical context, as the second homily in the Elizabethan volume, *An Homily Against Peril of Idolatry and Superfluous Decking of Churches*, unmistakably states: "The which places, as I exhort you often and diligently to read, so are they too long at this present to be rehearsed in an homily".[103]

An opposite position emerges when we approach Henry Pendelton's *An Homily of the Authority of the Church, Declaring What Commodity and Profit We Have Thereby*, the eighth homily in Bonner's Catholic collection. He made immediately clear that his aim was "to declare in what special points this authority doth consist, and that same authority was not only given to the apostles of Christ but also to their successors in the catholic church, ever to endure";[104] then the homily goes on to list what such authority consists of and, interestingly, it begins by referring to the importance of the Bible and the necessity to have its interpretation mediated by the Catholic Church: "First, Almighty God hath given power and authority to the catholic church to have the true sense and understanding of the Holy Scripture, yea and to approve also reprove, all writings as Scripture or no Scripture".[105] Therefore, against Protestant preachers' insistence on direct and proximate access to the Bible by hearing and reading it, the homily warns against any personal interpretation since "if in such case ye will fly from the catholic church and ask counsel of yourselves or of any that doth swerve from the said church, then … you shall fall from ignorance to error and from doubting and disputing to plain heresy, and so from one to another, to the utter confusion of the body and soul".[106]

As the text explicitly states, biblical authority is always intertwined with the authority of the Church, a theme that Catholic preachers developed in a group of three texts in Bonner's collection. A close reading of the eighth, the ninth, and the tenth homily allows us to infer that if the presence of biblical quotations is a common feature both of Protestant and Catholic homilies, in the latter the argument of authority is discussed from a different perspective, while the Scriptures serve the purpose to endorse the Catholic belief in the authority of the Roman See.

[98] Wabuda, *Preaching during the English Reformation*, 28.
[99] Eleven if one considers the reference to "ears and eyes" (Bray, *Homilies*, 367).
[100] Bray, *Homilies*, 366.
[101] Miller, "The First Book of Homilies", 443.
[102] Bray, *Homilies*, 366.
[103] Ibid., 223.
[104] Ibid., 160.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid., 163.

Interestingly, these homilies all deal with the nature of the church and, in particular, with "the most important theme of controversy ... that of the primacy of the Pope".[107] These texts converge on discussing the topic in terms of power and authority, which, deriving from St. Peter, who had "more authority general than any one of the apostles else",[108] are exercised through "the primacy and supremity of the see of Rome as an authority instituted by Christ".[109] To such authority, the preacher exhorts, the faithful had to adhere as "obedient children in the bosom of our mother".[110] Throughout the three homilies, the term 'authority' is repeated thirty-five times – sometimes associated with the term 'power' – but never is it related to the Bible *per se*; more remarkably, instead, the authors make use of the Scripture to shift the question of authority from the Protestant insistence on *sola Scriptura* to the necessary mediation of the church, "instituted … for the spiritual edifying of the whole body in the faith and for the defence of the whole body, from the poison of heresy".[111] Furthermore, the author of the eighth homily teaches that the origin of the Bible itself depended on the authority of the church, thus establishing the latter as pre-eminent: "for the space of certain years, there was no gospel at all written, but all things concerning the faithful Christians were ruled by the disciples of Christ, being the heads of the church".[112]

Catholic apology of papal primacy is counterbalanced, of course, by Protestant homilies, which also insist on the necessity to show obedience and respect to authorities. However, these are identified with "the king's majesty, supreme head over all, and next, to his honourable council and all to other noblemen, magistrates and officers, which by God's goodness be place and ordered".[113] Nevertheless, although the judgment of Protestant homilies in both collections is explicitly pungent and acute against what is considered 'Roman', from the point of view of their style, they lack "scurrility in preaching against the primacy".[114]

In the analysis of Catholic homilies collected in Bonner's volume, one last example regarding the authority and the presence of biblical quotations is worth mentioning. As the list of titles clearly shows, these preachers were more concerned with doctrinal issues than their Protestant antagonists, whose sermons were "more exclusively theological than those of the first book".[115] The homilies regarding the nature of the Church and Roman primacy are followed by a series of three texts, all dealing with the other most controversial issue dividing early modern Christianity: the Eucharist.[116] The author of the eleventh homily addresses the faithful straightforwardly and aims to teach them their "duties", among which "one of the chief is diligently to prepare themselves to the worthy receiving of the blessed sacrament of the altar".[117] As stated before, the convincing nature of the Bible is acknowledged as the source of faith: "The faith which we must have in our hearts ... is to be builded likewise upon the undoubted authorities of the Scripture",[118] states the preacher. Of course, the author quotes the main passages from the Gospel that refer to the institution of the Eucharist, yet biblical references seem to be recognized here as authoritative *per se*, without the necessity to be interpreted or mediated since their meaning is, according to the preacher, "plain": it is the Scripture that "most *plainly* declareth unto us

[107] Blench, *Preaching in England,* 253.
[108] Bray, *Homilies*, 172.
[109] Ibid., 178.
[110] Ibid., 166.
[111] Ibid., 168.
[112] Ibid., 162.
[113] Ibid., 87.
[114] Blench, *Preaching in England,* 254.
[115] Bray, "Introduction", 16.
[116] For a more detailed analysis of the Eucharistic discourse and its impact on the Reformation, see Lee Palmer Wandel, *The Eucharist and the Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2006); David Aers and Sarah Beckwith, "The Eucharist", in Brian Cummings and James Simpson, eds., *Cultural Reformations* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2016), 153-165.
[117] Bray, *Homilies*, 179.
[118] Ibid.

that this sacrament is a marvellous worthy mystery".[119] In particular, when the preacher refers to the very much debated words spoken by Jesus during the Last Supper, he seems to support the idea that the faithful should adhere to the Catholic teaching about the real presence without any "exposition or interpretation of them"; "No evangelist", he continues, "maketh any exposition because the words are *plainly* and simply to be taken as they were spoken".[120]

Nevertheless, if the belief in the institution of the Sacrament could be confessed based on the plain and authoritative firmness of the Bible, the author of the *Homily about Transubstantiation* seems to be more aware of the controversial nature of the argument that came to be the most divisive and scandalous one in the years of the Reformation: "Obsession with transubstantiation, reification of the *corpus verum* and its warranting… sets the framework for teaching Christian about the Eucharist".[121] Therefore, in order to support his position, while quoting from the Bible, he explicitly states the necessity to resort to Catholic tradition: "the general belief of the catholic church (if there was nothing else) ought and may be sufficient ground for every godly man to build up his conscience upon".[122] Once again, then, Catholic preachers, while acknowledging the authoritative nature of the Bible, teach and persuade their listeners to conform their beliefs to the faith of the Church.

Considering all this, it may be possible to conclude that the homilies contained in the *First* and *Second Book*, as well as those belonging to Bonner's collection, adhere to the general characteristic of being firmly rooted in the Scripture: "the art of preaching in the Elizabethan and early Stuart Church ... an act of biblical interpretation whereby the teachings of the Bible were made relevant (or applied) to the circumstances of the sermon and to the hearers' lives".[123] Yet, here the Bible functions also as a cultural border as well as a rhetorical means of persuasion, whose powerful aim is to "carry the weight of proving or authorizing the point or points in question".[124]

### 4.3 *"In a tounge that is understanded of the hearers": Latin as a Means of Persuasion*

The faithful gathered on Sunday after 1558 may have felt a sense of bewildering novelty while listening to the very first lines of the *Homily of the Creation and Fall of Man*, which introduces Bishop Bonner's collection. The text starts by quoting a psalm[125] which explicitly states the theme of the sermon: man's creation. Yet, the quotation would sound like this: "*Scitote, quoniam ipse est Dominus, ipse fecit nos, et non ipsi nos*".[126] Later, quoting from Genesis, the same homily reads: "*Vidit Deus omnia quae fecerat et errant valde bona*".[127] Bewilderment, of course – if this was the case – could not be attributed to the biblical references contained in the homily; rather, listeners may have recognized the presence of old-fashioned, outdated sounds belonging to a language which epitomized the restoration of Catholicism during Marian regime.

Undoubtedly, Protestantism may be interpreted as a 'reformation of language', in the sense that the shift from one faith to another can also be viewed from a linguistic perspective: the shift, in other words, from a thoroughly Latin liturgy to the use of translations into national languages. Interestingly, Peter Horsfield has analysed European Reformation in terms of predominance and power achieved through language and media. Luther's written production in Germany as well as the massive circulation of its printed versions – Horsfield maintains – allowed reformed ideas to be spread quickly and easily:

[119] Ibid., 180. Emphasis mine.
[120] Ibid., 180-181. Emphasis mine.
[121] Aers and Beckwith, "The Eucharist", 158.
[122] Ibid., 183.
[123] Morrissey, "Scripture, Style and Persuasion", 693.
[124] Miller, "The First Book of Homilies", 465.
[125] Psalm 100:3. Biblical references are from *The Geneva Bible: A Facsimile of the 1560 Edition* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2007).
[126] Bray, *Homilies*, 123.
[127] Genesis 1:31.

> Building on the cultural changes of the Renaissance and its humanists and in cahoots with the commercial printers, Luther achieved more than just putting into the marketplace new perspectives on Christian beliefs and practices. By shifting religious discourse into the vernacular of German and in a style of German that appealed to a mass/popular audience, he subverted the linguistic monopoly on which the Church's authority and political control had been built.[128]

English Protestantism followed its German counterpart soon after with the publication of a Bible in vernacular (1525), which consecrated the linguistic nature of the Reformation: "The monopoly of the Catholic Church over the language of faith had been broken and Protestant Christianity in the local vernaculars had become politically established in a number of European countries".[129]

The presence of quotations in Latin in Bonner's collection, then, must be intended as a choice which is more than merely aesthetic. They represent an evident rhetorical device whose aim is to assert an ideological shift: the effort to restore a form of supremacy through language, a stylistic feature which epitomises the cultural and religious background of Marian restoration: "language", Tim William Machan has reminded us, "is more than a structured code. For speakers, language is a lived experience, used to accomplish real tasks in real time".[130]

Conversely, the presence of Latin in the first *Book* is exceptional and limited to the eleventh homily, *A Sermon Against Whoredom and Uncleanness*. This single occurrence, though, does not contradict Cranmer's whole project, who "was at work on sermons in the vernacular as early as 1539";[131] rather, it bears witness to a long and uneasy process of adaptation and inculturation which had been preceded by a sort of liturgical bilingualism: "before the Reformation, homilies were often printed in Latin, and could be delivered in that language, or in English".[132] From a linguistic perspective, therefore, homiletics came to function as a mighty signpost of the Reformation. The progression and expansion of Protestant liturgy coexisted with, rather, consisted in a process of translation: the homily "was when the priest, in the intimacy of the parish, best represented Christ in his preaching ministry, and explained in English texts that had just been presented in Latin. In the homily, the pericopes were Englished, then explained and expounded, their relevance to daily life was discussed and the spirit of God in them was revealed to the congregation".[133]

The question of the presence of Latin quotations in the *Homilies* is even more noticeable when we turn to the Elizabethan *Book* and, in particular, the ninth homily, whose title is *Common Prayer and Sacraments Ought to be Ministered in a Tongue that is Understanded of the Hearers*. After stating the aim of the homily, which is to "consider first, what prayer is and what sacrament is, and then how many sorts of prayer there be and how many sacraments",[134] the preacher inquires whether "public or common rite … to be ministered in a tongue unknown or not understand of the minister or people; yea, and whether any person may privately use any vocal prayer in a language that he himself understandeth not".[135] "To this question", the homily authoritatively and decisively declares: "we must answer, No".[136]

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[128] Peter Horsfield, "Power, Control and Religious Language: Latin and Vernacular Contests in the Christian Medieval and Reformation Periods", in Kennet Granholm et al., eds., *Religion, Media, and Social Change* (New York and London: Routledge, 2014), 31.
[129] Ibid., 34.
[130] Tim William Machan, "When English Became Latin", in Brian Cummings and James Simpson, eds., *Cultural Reformations* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2010), 248.
[131] Bond, "Cranmer and the Controversy", 28.
[132] Wabuda, "Bishops and the Provision of Homilies", 553.
[133] Wabuda, *Preaching during the English Reformation*, 32.
[134] Bray, *Homilies*, 355.
[135] Ibid., 359.
[136] Ibid.

The author goes on to explain the reasons for his denial by structuring his speech in three sections: first, he states, it is necessary to celebrate public rites and the sacraments in a "known language … to end that the congregation of Christ might from time to time be put in remembrance of their unity".[137] To support his position, he first quotes from the Bible and then from the Fathers of the Church: "thus are we taught by the Scriptures and ancient doctors that in the administration of common prayer and sacraments no tongue unknown to the hearers ought to be used".[138] Yet, one might ask, does the preacher's insistence on the fact that the language to be used during the liturgy must be understandable by the congregation mean that 'any' language may fit the purpose as long as it is comprehensible? Although the homily never mentions Latin plainly, the text openly enters the confessional controversy by associating it with the debated question of the pope's primacy: "As for the time since Christ, till that usurped power of Rome began to spread itself, and to enforce all the nations of Europe to have the Romish language in admiration, it appeareth, by the consent of the most ancient and learned writers, that there was no strange or unknown tongue used in the congregations of Christ".[139] By advocating the use of an understandable language, then, the preacher is not simply suggesting the presence of the vernacular as much as he is distancing himself and his congregation from Latin as a distinguishing feature of Catholic faith.

The homily also provides one more reason by mentioning Emperor Justinian's decree, which demanded that the clergy should celebrate the rite "with a clear or loud voice, which may be heard of the people".[140] As it is evident, the text does not refer to the type of language to be used, but to the volume of the speaker's voice; despite this, Justinian's declaration is interpreted by the preacher in support of the controversy regarding Latin: "This emperor … favoured the bishop of Rome, yet we see how plain a decree he maketh for the praying and administering of sacraments in a known language, that the devotion of the hearers might be stirred by knowledge, contrary to *them* that would have ignorance to make devotion".[141] Latin, once again, functions as a cultural mark between the two faiths and helps the preacher to distance himself – and his community – from those who use it in the celebrations of the rites; the choice of the pronoun 'them' performs such distance and makes the gulf between the two communities even larger: "unlike the first and second person pronouns, third person pronouns … isolate their referents from the essential *I/you* of the rhetorical situation".[142] Finally, the homily reinforces its polemical purpose by defining the 'unknown' language as "barbarous words" and "words disordered".[143] When analysed from a rhetorical perspective, then, the homily's preoccupation to use a language which is "understanded by the hearers" acquires a wider meaning, which is not to be identified with merely pastoral care; rather, it serves the purpose to strengthen religious identity, which – as Helen Ringrow has argued – "is constructed *through language*.... Any discussion of religious identity should consider, therefore, the role of language in its construction".[144]

As far as Latin quotations are concerned, the homilies in Bonner's collection display one more stimulating feature. Most of their references to the Bible are indeed in Latin, yet the preacher seems to be preoccupied that his listeners may fully understand him; therefore, almost all quotations are followed by the translation into English, preceded by the phrase "that is". In other words, in a text thoroughly written and read in English, and addressed to English speakers, the preacher intentionally quotes from the Latin version of the Bible; at the same time, he uses a double version of the same quotation in

[137] Ibid.
[138] Ibid., 363.
[139] Ibid., 360.
[140] Ibid., 363.
[141] Ibid. Emphasis mine.
[142] Fahnestock, 279.
[143] Bray, *Homilies*, 365.
[144] Helen Ringrow, "Identity", in Stephen Pihlaja, ed., *Analysing Religious Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2021), 276.

English. The Latin quotations do not substitute the English ones; rather, the latter are used – we may conjecture – to make the former understandable by the assembly.

Among the many examples, let us consider the second Catholic homily: *The Homily of the Misery of All Mankind, and His Condemnation to Everlasting Death, by His Own Sin*. As this text is present both in the *First Book* and in the Catholic collection, it lends itself to a better comparison. Attributed to John Harpsfield, together with Bonner's homily about love and charity, the second homily is, according to Gerald Bray, "reproduced from the first book, with slight modifications".[145] In both versions, the first quotation is taken from Genesis (3:19) and is used by the author to support his description of human origins from dust. Besides the "slight modifications" – "turned again/returnest"; "ground/earth",[146] among the others – what is worth noting here is the fact that when compiling the Catholic version of the homily, the author kept the same quotation, but had it preceded by its Latin translation, connected by the phrase "that is to say": "'*In sudore vultus tui vesceris pane, donec revertaris in terram de qua sumptus es : quia pulvis es et in pulverem reverteris*,' that is to say 'In the sweat of thy face thou shalt…'".[147] The same occurs two more times in this homily and in almost all Catholic ones.

What might the authors have desired to communicate by shifting so often from one language to another? Recurrent though it is, the use of Latin is exceptional in the sense that it represents a digression from the main language, which is English; in this regard, Catholic homilies seem to respond to what Fahnestock has argued: "quite deliberately, speakers and writers shift into a different language variety. In a single word, phrase, or sentence they suddenly depart from the prevailing dialect, register, or level and switch to another. Such departures draw attention to themselves by violating the surrounding norm, often with persuasive consequences".[148]

If one considers that Catholic homilies were produced after the publication of the *First Book*, and that this particular one was a revised copy of a former edition, the presence of a Latin quotation may be interpreted as a later intentional act of insertion, as if the author was paying attention not just to the contents that he was communicating, but to the linguistic medium through which such a meaning was conveyed. In other words, the "modifications" do not consist of a few changes, nor does the topic possess a different theological perspective, but the shift from one language to another, we may hypothesize, is an intended act of "violation" from a cultural system of beliefs to another, mediated by a precise linguistic choice.

Finally, the number of Latin quotations in the homilies is of particular importance if one considers the themes that they deal with. As stated above, the arrangement of these texts emphasises the editor's concern with some peculiar issues ranging from doctrinal to pastoral ones. If one considers the homilies dealing with very controversial arguments (papal primacy and the Eucharist, for example), the analysis of the number of occurrences results rather interesting especially if one notices that the Catholic preachers who composed the seventh, the eighth, the ninth, and the tenth homily felt the urgency to use Latin more than in the other texts: nineteen times in the eight homily and eleven in the ninth, for example. Here, then, the presence of Latin seems like a rhetorical choice which underlines the gulf between the two faiths.

In conclusion, the stylistic choice of the authors of some of Bonner's homilies to insert biblical quotations in Latin not only marked the historical passage to the Catholic reign of Mary I, but can be viewed as a persuasive and intentional act of inviting their audience to embrace the restored faith through the precise use of language; thus, we may conclude, by speaking "the language of a rejected religion",[149] these preachers may have given their contribution to the confessional controversy of the time.

[145] Bray, "Introduction", 14.
[146] Bray, *Homilies*, 14 and 128.
[147] Ibid., 128.
[148] Fahnestock, *Rhetorical Style*, 87.
[149] Machan, "When English Became Latin", 257.

## 5. Conclusions

The analysis conducted in this essay has tried to investigate the manifold complexity of the English early modern age through the lenses of Protestant and Catholic homiletics; in particular, the homilies gathered in the official collections of the time – the Protestant *Books of Homilies* and Bishop Bonner's homilies – have been scrutinized from the perspective of their nature as persuasive acts of communication. What, according to Maura Nolan, is true for poetic style, may be also valid to understand the complex relationship between these texts and their cultural context: "because poets live at certain moments in time, at certain places and in specific communities of people and texts, their styles are also forged by history in a particular way. … It is in the investigation of what is possible at a particular time that a local, or period, or epochal style may be discerned and elaborated".[150]

Such complexity may be decoded through the interest of early modern thinkers in rhetoric, which allows us to view the age as pervaded by a 'culture of persuasion'. Although new and great emphasis was given to classical rhetoric, whose main canons had been established by Aristotle, the Renaissance interpreted them in the light of mutated social and cultural stances and, in particular, the religious transformation which disaggregated Christian Catholic unity into the fragmented reality of Protestantism. Thus, the pulpit came to function as a place from which to exercise the power of persuasion, which consisted both in catechising the faithful about the new creed, but also in convincing them to reject or adhere to one faith or another.

English Protestant rhetoric was especially exercised through the publication of the *Book of Homilies*, a collection of sermons in two volumes (1547/1563). During the years of Mary I's reign, a new collection, which was named after Bishop Edward Bonner of London (1555), tried to counterweigh the spread of Protestant ideas by restoring Catholic beliefs. All these homilies epitomise the concern shared by their authors to foster their respective cause by means of a repetitive and thorough catechesis conducted during Sunday liturgy.

Not only do the homilies share the common trait of belonging to the *genus demonstrativum*, but they are also arranged in a way that features the τέλος of this genre: these texts celebrate and praise, but also warn and deprecate. Thus, they aim to persuade their listeners to share beliefs and ideas, but also to reject and distance themselves from one faith or another. Furthermore, although plainness is a stylistic feature that the homilies present mostly, this is not to be intended as a form of coarseness or inelegance; instead, despite few exceptions, the general scarcity of rhetorical devices is explained by the fact that their rhetorical strength is rooted in the abundance of biblical quotations, which support the preacher's words.

The presence of biblical quotations also functions as the main controversial feature of English official collections of homilies; in fact, while Protestant preachers exhort their listeners to approach the Bible in a direct way by "hearing and reading" it – also outside the liturgical *Sitz im Leben* – Catholic authors insist on the necessity to trust the mediating role of the Church, thus inhibiting any personal interpretation. This is particularly true when Catholic authors deal with the divisive polemic about papal primacy and transubstantiation.

Finally, the analysis of the homilies from a linguistic perspective has shed light on the use of Latin as a cultural and confessional marker: in the years of Marian restoration, homilies feature a renewed use of the language associated with Catholicism and Rome, which is almost thoroughly rejected, instead, by Protestant preachers. When Catholic authors compiled their volume, they inserted Latin quotations, which may be read as a deliberate act of digression, aiming to enhance the persuasive nature of their speech, especially if one considers those texts copied from the former Protestant *Book*. As a

[150] Maura Nolan, "Style", in Brian Cummings and James Simpson, eds., *Cultural Reformations* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2010), 396-419.

consequence, the homilies contribute to identifying language as "a major cultural location where social knowledge, identity and power are fought over and negotiated".[151]

In conclusion, these characteristics strongly reinforce the idea of the English Renaissance as an age of fragile and fragmented social identity, where dynamics of assertion of religious and political power were exercised also by means of rhetorical strategies. Of course, the impact and the success of such strategies will probably remain unknown as the definite implementation of Protestantism in England is rooted in more complex and varied factors. Yet, the stylistic analysis of early modern English homiletics allows us to reconsider and appreciate the nature of these homilies as communicative acts, through which their authors tried to persuade and "push England toward religious consensus".[152]

[151] Horsfield, "Power, Control and Religious Language", 19.
[152] Bond, "Cranmer and the Controversy", 34.