

Preaching in the Christian Tradition (relating to a church visit)

Concept:

Preaching in Christianity is not simply a lecture, or reading a paper, or some sort of written or even ad-libbed speech. It is believed to be the **activity of the Holy Spirit** (third Person of the Trinity) working through the preacher who is authorised by the particular Church or denomination speaking according to Christian belief.

The Holy Spirit is both **stimulator** and **awakener** (Coggan, 1987, 76), and this is the purpose of preaching. The preacher is one of God's workers (75), and the act of preaching is to stimulate and awaken the worshipper through hearing faithful words. God does not put the words in the mouth of the preacher, but activates and motivates, hears and approves. The preacher has freedom, but God works through the words offered by the preacher into and through the congregation who participate by listening.

Preaching is associated with the **importance of the Bible**. The Bible is the container of the Christian message and the centrality of Christ comes from the Church interpreting the Bible. Christian preachers may or may not preach directly on a passage in the Bible (depending on the denomination's rules) but will not differ from their interpretation of it.

Preaching may take place from a raised platform called a **pulpit** or from a **lectern**, if from either.

Evidence in architecture:

Church architecture inside gives clues to the prominence of preaching. The pulpit or lectern may be **central** or perhaps it is to the **side** when the altar table is central, or maybe they are **bi-focal** (equal prominence).

In the Reformed or dissenting tradition, the earliest Protestant churches, the pulpit was central in focus as was the use of the Bible. However, this was on the longer wall, with the pews facing it, but in Victorian times in the nineteenth century many churches turned pews around and suddenly the pulpit was in a side position. The pulpit may have been moved as well or instead. This meant preaching was **less important** in comparison with other parts of the service of worship. In the nineteenth century there was a gathering **movement from austerity to decoration** within most churches. The source of this change was Anglican (Church of England) in the 1840s onwards, where Anglicanism became more Catholic-like and colourful, and this influenced other churches too into Victorian Gothic, a more artistic and beautiful presentation of church architecture inside and outside. Plain windows would become colourful, bare walls were painted with designs. Candles and other objects were used. The church might have a steeple. This **meant less stress on preaching and more on ceremony**. **The eye and other senses became as important as the ear** (Coggan, 1987, 77). Methodist churches, however, on the whole retained a moderate Protestant appearance. They were never as severe as older dissent but never as decorative as changed churches.

Analogy from student experience:

We can think of dominant [preaching like early compulsory schooling](#). In Victorian schools they were a bit like early Reformed churches. Every child faced the teacher, in [austere](#) (harsh or bare) surroundings; pupils sat in rows and learnt directly from the teacher, or the representative monitor, often from memory. The teacher spoke and the children listened, without comment. Church and school were about [authority](#) and telling everyone what to think. Today schools like children to participate in their education more, even though there is a National Curriculum to follow. The teacher should design far more methods of learning by children taking part. It should be interesting and may even be entertaining. In the same way churches have more stress on participation today, and preaching may be less important. Remember however that churches even today are quite conservative and can be slow to change, and people like familiarity, especially older people attending them.

Modern and Postmodern:

A modern church to visit may have [computer graphics](#) projected on to a [large screen](#) above. This can show words of hymns or songs. It may even demonstrate a preacher is saying. The stage may have [no traditional church architecture at all](#), but be a place for the production of amplified music. This church might be called [modern](#). The Hull Vineyard Church is like this. Although this is a very biblical church, there is no pulpit and even the cross may not be brought out. There is no altar table and there are seats rather than pews. The service is broken up and preaching is more like teaching with a ministry time (response/ discussion/ healing) afterwards. Christian music is produced for sale in CDs and this generates income. The church gets these changes from its origins. It arose out of the austere American evangelical Quaker sect and the influence of the hippy-like Jesus movement, as well as the strong place of using music once it had become separate. Churches like Vineyard, which seem very free and easy, are often called [charismatic](#).

Some churches now go further have club-scene lighting, strobe lights, smoke effects, dance music with religious themes and promote the arts; a small number of these have even ceased to be evangelical (biblical based) and have elements of other faiths recognised along with Christianity. Preaching still takes place but very informally and often only briefly in amongst the music. There are points however where the music stops and discussions take place. These churches might be called [postmodern](#).

Resources:

Video clips of colourful and austere churches and activities including preaching
Use or no use of pulpit
Evangelical preaching styles heard (e.g. Billy Graham)

Church visit points:

- Is the church being visited [more or less pulpit centred](#)?

- Is the architecture **traditional or modern** and **where** does preaching take place?
- Is the architecture **austere or colourful**? What **effect** does this have on preaching?
- Are there uses of **modern technology**? How does this **affect** words spoken?
- Is the church **very creative with technology** for lighting effects and what happens to words in this situation?
- Of the many symbols of Christianity, which are **present** and which are **not present**?

Reference:

Coggan, D. (1987), *The Sacrament of the Word*, Fount.