



AARHUS UNIVERSITY



Cover sheet

This is the publisher's PDF (Version of Record) of the article.

This is the final published version of the article.

How to cite this publication:

Ringgaard Lorensen, M. & Helboe Johansen, K. (2020). Homiletics in the Nordic Countries. *Praktische Theologie*, 55(2), 88-93. <https://doi.org/10.14315/prth-2020-550207>

Publication metadata

Title:	Homiletics in the Nordic Countries
Author(s):	Marlene Ringgaard Lorensen & Kirstine Helboe Johansen
Journal:	Praktische Theologie
DOI/Link:	10.14315/prth-2020-550207
Document version:	Publisher's PDF (Version of Record)

The final publication is available at www.degruyter.com.

General Rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognize and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

If the document is published under a Creative Commons license, this applies instead of the general rights.

Homiletics in the Nordic Countries

Marlene Ringgaard Lorensen / Kirstine Helboe Johansen

Überblick

Die skandinavische Homiletik, traditionell nach Deutschland orientiert, rezipiert inzwischen ebenso die nordamerikanische Forschung. Der Artikel skizziert die vielstimmige Aufnahme theologischer und zahlreicher sozialwissenschaftlicher Theorien sowie die wachsende empirische Predigtforschung, etwa zur Rolle der Hörenden, zu Gender und anderen kulturellen Prägungen. Institutionell profitiert die Predigtarbeit von diversen Fortbildungsprogrammen zwischen Universität und Predigerseminaren.

1. Introduction

The field of homiletics has played a central role in the northern European countries since the Reformation. In recent years, the study and development of homiletics has however gained an even stronger role and increased interest among a broader group of theologians. This growing interest is likely linked to several factors such as inspiration from American *New Homiletics* and *Other-wise homiletics*, the »empirical turn«, development of homiletical further education in the form of homiletical master programs, and preaching preparation and feedback as a collaborative practice among colleagues as well as with lay people.

The study of homiletics takes place as both a sub-discipline of practical theology at the universities as well as a part of pastoral theology taught at the ecclesiastical institutions of further education. In addition to exchanging homiletical studies within a Northern European context¹, Northern homileticians have traditionally oriented themselves towards German theology. However, toward the end of the 20th century the inspiration has primarily come from the United States.

2. Systematic theological and historical approaches to homiletics

Homiletics in the Nordic Countries is not only diverse with respect to different fields of reflection – both academic and pastoral – but also with respect to a very broad reign of inspirations drawing on several neighbouring disciplines as well as both Anglo-American and German academic traditions.

Associate Professor in Homiletics at the Faculty of Theology in Oslo, *Sivert Angel* works primarily on sermons from the perspective of a church historian. In his work, sermons are not only studied as theological genre, but also as source for changes and shifts in the mentality of late middle ages and early reformation.² In addition, Finnish professor

¹ Some of the most influential historic Nordic representatives of homiletics are: Danish Søren Kierkegaard with his critique of preaching as well as his analyses and demonstrations of the intricate relationship between the communication and content of preaching, vgl. *Dorothea Glöckner* (Hg.): *Predigen mit Kierkegaard*, Göttingen 2012; *Yngve Brioth*: *Predikans historia* [Die Geschichte der Predigt], Lund 1945; *Gustaf Wingren*: *Predika: en principiell studie*, Lund 1949.

² Vgl. *Sivert Angel*: *The Confessionalist Homiletics of Lucas Osiander (1534-1604). A Study of a South-German Lutheran Preacher in the Age of Confessionalization*, Tübingen 2014.

in practical theology at Åbo Akademi, *Bernice Sundqvist* takes her inspiration from the reformation and explores sermons from a Lutheran dogmatic perspective with a particular focus on sacramentality. Sundqvist emphasizes that the sermon does more than speak about forgiveness or point to the world of God. The sermon is an act of forgiveness, a carrier of God's world.³

Danish Professor Emeritus in Dogmatics, *Bent Flemming Nielsen* also engages with homiletics in a Lutheran context, in his case inspired by the Reformed theologian Karl Barth. However, Nielsen combines his dogmatic outset with an interest in the relationship between rituals and communication in contemporary liturgy.⁴ Thus, Nielsen seeks to uphold an understanding of preaching as »the Word of God«, while taking theories of ritual and communication into perspective as means to understanding the sermon as oral culture as well as part of the performance of a ritual. Sermon

Oral rituality

as oral genre is also addressed by Danish homiletician *Sanne Thøisen*, in her doctoral dissertation.⁵ Thøisen analyzes the notions of orality, rhetoric, and imagination in the works of selected proponents of North American New Homiletics. In particular, she explores the potential of Ong's authorship in order to describe the oral genre of preaching. Danish practical theologian, *Kirstine Helboe Johansen* continues the engagement in the particularities of a Lutheran context. Nevertheless, drawing heavily on ritual theories as well as cognitive theories of religion, Johansen's interest is predominantly worship as ritual and thereby, the sermon as part of a ritual performance.⁶ Recently, the focus on the liturgical embedding as the sine qua non for understanding preaching has gained renewed interest driven by inspiration from professor in Practical Theology, Leipzig Universität, *Alexander Deeg* who describes worship as a »WortKult« in which the tension between word and ritual is seen in light of the different modes of interaction in respectively a »Sinnkultur« and »Präsenzkultur«⁷. As a way to respect yet navigate in these tensions Deeg has (in collaboration with Martin Nicol) developed a »Dramaturgische Homiletik« with the intention of staging theological interruptions and biblical texts in liturgical contexts.⁸

³ Vgl. *Bernice Sundqvist*: Det sakramentala draget i Luthers förkunnelse [Der sakramentale Atem in der Predigt Luthers], Åbo 2001; *ders.*: Evangelium och existens [Evangelium und Existenz], n.p. 2003. Sundqvist has also contributed to empirical research following the interest in the listener-perspective: *ders.*: En predikan – nio berättelser: en studie i predikoreception [Eine Predigt – neun Geschichten: eine Studie über Predigtrezeption], Åbo 2003.

⁴ Vgl. *Bent Flemming Nielsen*: Genopførelser. Ritual, kommunikation og kirke, [Reaktualiseringer. Ritual, Kommunikation und Kirche] København 2004.

⁵ Vgl. *Sanne Thøisen*: Dialog undervejs: mundtlighed, retorik og imagination i nyere amerikansk homiletik [Dialog unterwegs. Mündlichkeit, Rhetorik und Imagination in der jüngeren amerik. Homiletik], Århus 2005.

⁶ Vgl. *Kirstine Helboe Johansen*: Den nødvendige balance: En ritualteoretisk og praktisk teologisk analyse af højmesse mellem magi og symbol [Das notwendige Gleichgewicht: eine ritualtheoretische und praktisch-theologische Analyse des Sonntagsgottesdienstes in der Kirche von Dänemark zwischen Magie und Symbol], Aarhus 2009.

⁷ *Alexander Deeg*: Das äußere Wort und seine liturgische Gestalt: Überlegungen zu einer evangelischen Fundamentalliturgik, Göttingen 2011.

⁸ For convergences and dialogue between Deeg and the Danish theologian, Bent Flemming Nielsen see: *Alexander Deeg*: Fundierendes und Fundamentales im Wechselspiel von Theologie und Liturgie, in: *ders./Erich Garhammer/Benedikt Kranemann/Michael Meyer-Blanck* (Hg.): Gottesdienst und Predigt - evangelisch und katholisch, Neukirchen-Vluyn/Würzburg 2014, 99-138.

3. Combining Nordic, German and North American traditions

Though the German theological tradition both within dogmatics and homiletics plays a central role in the Nordic Homiletic tradition, a main characteristic of the Nordic context may be seen as the eagerness to combine Anglo-American and German traditions. The work of the Swedish homiletician *Carina Sundberg* manifests the constructive convergences and dynamic differences emerging when combining Scandinavian, German, and American homiletical traditions.⁹

The work of associate Professor in Practical Theology, Copenhagen, *Marlene Ringgaard Lorensen* is another example of international dialogue and collaboration. Inspired

Polyphonic otherness

by the Russian communication theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, Lorensen describes preaching as a polyphonic dialogue and listeners as co-authors of preaching.¹⁰

In continuation of Søren Kierkegaard, Lorensen emphasizes the radical otherness of God as well as the importance of the mutual otherness of human beings. Lorensen's focus on human otherness and polyphonic dialogue has inspired others and led herself towards empirical research.¹¹

4. Empirical Turn: From incorporating to conducting empirical research

The empirical turn within the discipline of homiletics in a Northern European context consisted originally in the study of sociologists' and anthropologists' empirical work.¹² Since the turn of the millennium, Northern European theologians have however started to conduct their own empirical studies of religious practices including preaching.¹³ First, an interest in the listeners has dominated. Lately, sermons as theological and religious interpretations of societal events have attracted research interest.

Listeners as co-authors and addressees

In her doctoral dissertation, Danish homiletician and now bishop, *Marianne Gaarden*, conducted a study of how listeners interact with preaching in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark.¹⁴ The empirical study was interpreted in a description of listening to a sermon as a polyphony of voices, which is not limited to the liturgical room or the sermon, but is activated by it. The third room created is neither controlled nor occupied by the listener or the preacher. It is a room in which both engage.¹⁵ In continuation of Gaarden's empirical study, scholars at MF Norwegian School of Theology have conducted

⁹ Vgl. *Carina Sundberg*: Här är rymlig plats: Predikoteologier i en komplex verklighet [Hier ist viel Raum: Theologien der Predigens in einer komplexen Realität], Karlstad University 2008.

¹⁰ *Marlene Ringgaard Lorensen*: Dialogical Preaching. Bakhtin, Otherness and Homiletics. Göttingen 2013.

¹¹ *Dies.*: Preaching as Repetition – in Times of Transition, in: International Journal of Homiletics. 1 (2016,1), 34-51; *dies./Gitte Buch-Hansen*: Listening to the Voices: Refugees as Co-authors of Practical Theology in: Practical Theology 11/1 (2018), 29-41.

¹² See for instance Nielsen 2004.

¹³ Vgl. *Jonas Idestrom/Tone Stangeland Kaufman* (Hg.): What Really Matters: Scandinavian Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography, n.p. 2018.

¹⁴ *Marianne Gaarden*: The Third Room of Preaching: The Sermon, the Listener, and the Creation of Meaning. Louisville 2017.

¹⁵ Vgl. *dies./Marlene Lorensen*: Listeners as Authors in Preaching: Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives, in: Homiletic 38 (2013,1), 28-45.

empirical research of how preaching is enacted and experienced by people of different age groups. This study is called »Mer enn ord: Forkynnelse for store og små« (More than Words: Preaching to Young and Old).¹⁶

Also within a Swedish context, there is an interest in the role of the listener. In his doctoral dissertation, Swedish homilistician, *Jonny Karlsson* describes the role of the listener in contemporary homiletical research. Karlsson analyses a large number of sermons held by the Swedish theologian Gustaf Wingren in light of Bakhtinian dialogicity. His particular focus is different congregations as addressees and thereby, he contributes to dissolving the traditional dichotomy between production- and reception-oriented approaches to preaching.¹⁷

Sermons as theological interpretations of societal events

This interest in the theological production of sermons and the interpretations of theology, society and humans that arise from it has led to a different strand of empirical research. A number of Nordic homilisticians participated in a European empirical homiletical project focused on how the refugee situation was handled in contemporary sermons in seven European countries. Toward the end of 2015, 65.3 million people were seeking refuge or were otherwise forcibly displaced globally. The crisis situation stirred public debate as well as church-based initiatives trying to deal with the situation. In order to understand the interaction between public discourse and local preaching, a group of homilisticians collaborated on an empirical study of how the refugee crisis impacted preaching.¹⁸

The interest in sermons as contemporary theological interpretations of religious as well as societal affairs also drives a recent and ambitious project on sermons based at Faculty of Theology, Aarhus University. *Sermon database 2011-2016* is a cooperative project that takes the study of sermon manuscripts to a new level by incorporating tools and methods from the field of digital humanities. With a focus on sermons as both interpretations of and bearing witness to contemporary culture and society, sermons are also an exciting research topic for neighbouring disciplines. The core research group consists of practical theologian *Kirstine Helboe Johansen*, scholar of religion *Uffe Schjødt*, digital humanities scholar *Kristoffer Laigaard Nielbo* and phd-student in the study of religion *Anne Agersnap*, all at Aarhus University.

The database comprises 11955 sermons from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark. The sermons represents both male and female pastors, different ages, different regions and congregations of different size. The project is still building up, but so far initial analyses point to interesting results with respect to the construction of gender as well as to the representation of and interaction with different cultural domains such as literature and politics. Even in its early phase, *Sermon database 2011-2016* reveals new insights into the

**Sermons as
big data**

¹⁶ Vgl. <https://www.mf.no/kom/forskning/foss-forkynnelse-sma-store> (07.01.2020); https://www.academia.edu/34621826/Forkynnelse_for_Sm%C3%A5_og_Store_i_Folkekirkespagaten_HVORDAN_SKJER_FORKYNNELSE_SOM_PRAKSIS_I_GUDSTJENESTER_FOR_SM%C3%85_OG_STORE (07.01.2020).

¹⁷ Vgl. *Jonny Karlsson*: Predikans Samtal: en studie av lyssnarens roll i predikan hos Gustaf Wingren utifrån Michail Bachtins teori om dialogicitet [Das Predigtgespräch: Eine Untersuchung der Rolle des Hörers in Predigten von Gustaf Wingren im Lichte von Michail Bachtins Theorie der Dialogizität], Skellefteå 2000.

¹⁸ Vgl. *Marlene Ringgaard Lorenzen/Tone Stangeland Kaufman et al.* (Hg.): Preaching in times of the European »Refugee Crisis«. Scandinavian perspectives, in: *International Journal of Homiletics* 2 (2017), 74-100.

ways in which sermons are also constructions of social worlds – supporting or challenging the social worlds of societal life.¹⁹

5. Homiletics as further education among pastors

The scholarly engagement in homiletics fuels and is further enforced by a strong interest in homiletics in further education among pastors. This interest unfolds in numerous ways. Important are educational programs and homiletical networks.

Inspired by the *Doctor of Ministry in Preaching Program* at the *Lutheran School of Theology* in Chicago, the Swedish pastoral further education established in 1994 a program of homiletical education for pastors.²⁰ Since then a large number of Swedish pastors have taken this education and some of them have supplemented the studies in Sweden with homiletic studies in Chicago. In 2013, a master's programme of homiletics was established at the University of Copenhagen.²¹ The large number of experienced pastors taking master's degrees in homiletics appear to have created a momentum which have influenced the study and development of homiletics locally in the dioceses. In Denmark, most dioceses have established homiletical networks in recent years, often led by a pastor with a master degree in homiletics. This seems also to entail increased interest in collaborative preaching preparation and feedback.²²

Homiletical network collaboration in the churches in Norway has been analyzed and described in an academic context by Rolv N. Jakobsen and Gunnfried L. Øierud in their book *Prekenbegrivelse (Sermon description)*.²³ In continuation of the empirical turn within homiletics, the focus of the method is on the performed and heard sermon in practice rather than on the preparation of the sermon. However, use of the Norwegian model of sermon description has shown that the preachers' conversations about the heard sermon also tend to influence their sermon preparations.²⁴

In addition to collegial peer preaching groups, a growing number of pastors have established sermon workshops with parishioners. These workshops consist of groups of 4-10 parishioners who meet with the preacher, typically on Tuesday for 1,5 hours in order to discuss the preaching text for the coming Sunday. The practice is quite popular both among parishioners and preachers. Some of the initiators of this practice in the Danish context

Homiletical networking

¹⁹ Kirstine Helboe Johansen/Anne Agersnap: Forpligtelsen til at tale – om prædikener som kristendoms- og samfundsfortolkning i dag 1:2, o.O. 2017; *dies.*: Præsteforeningens Blad 107 (46), o.O. 2017, 1185-1188; *dies.*: Forpligtelsen til at tale – om prædikener som kristendoms- og samfundsfortolkning i dag 2:2, o.O. 2017; *dies.*: Præsteforeningens Blad 107 (46), 1210-1214.

²⁰ Vgl. Kvalificerad Fortbildning Predikan.

²¹ The Danish master programme in homiletics has involved American and German homileticians as guest lecturers. Some of the Danish masters of homiletics have continued their homiletical studies by taking the »David G. Buttrick Certificate Program in Homiletic Peer Coaching« at Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN. For articles by Danish masters of Homiletics see: Marianne Gaarden/Kirstine Helboe Johansen (Hg.): Homiletik, in: *Kritisk forum for praktisk Teologi* 34 (2014), 137.

²² Vgl. Marianne Gaarden/Marlene Ringgaard Lorensen: Das Reflektierende Team: Im dritten Raum fürs Predigen lehren, in: Peter Meyer/Kathrin Oxen (Hg.): Predigen lehren. Methoden für die homiletische Aus- und Weiterbildung, Leipzig 2015, 269-275.

²³ Vgl. Rolv Nøtvik Jakobsen/ Gunnfried Ljones Øierud: Prekenbegrivelse. Forstå – formidle – forbedre – forkynne [Predigtbeschreibung. Verstehen - kommunizieren - verbessern – verkündigen], Oslo 2009.

²⁴ Vgl. Jørgen Demant: Homiletisk netværk – Prædikenbeskrivelse [Homiletisches Netzwerk – Predigtbeschreibung], in: Marianne Gaarden/Kirstine Helboe Johansen (Hg.): Homiletik. *Kritisk forum for praktisk Teologi* 34 (2014), 137.

were pastors who encountered the American homiletician, John McClure and read his works on ›other-wise‹ collaborative preaching²⁵ as part of their master program of homiletics.

6. Conclusion: Recent trends in the Nordic Context

In the Nordic context, there is a long and lively tradition for both considering the theological meaning of preaching, and co-working with ecclesial continuing education as well as local interest in the practice of preaching. This tradition continues.

However, in recent years an interest in investigating preaching as practice has evolved. Thus, today empirical research has become an important voice in uncovering what preaching is and does. The dialogue between empirical insights and on-going theological reflections on preaching will probably lead to new ways of understanding preaching in the context of Nordic churches, religion and society.

Dr. Marlene Ringgaard Lorensen ist Associate Professor für Praktische Theologie, Schwerpunkt Homiletik, an der Theologischen Fakultät der Universität Kopenhagen. Sie hat mehrere Jahre in den USA zur Predigtlehre geforscht. E-Mail: mrl@teol.ku.dk

Dr. Kirstine Helboe Johansen ist Associate Professor für Praktische Theologie, Schwerpunkte Liturgie, Kasualien und Kirchentheorie, an der Kultur- und Sozialwissenschaftlichen Fakultät der Universität Aarhus. Sie ist für zahlreiche empirische Projekte zur Religionsforschung verantwortlich. E-Mail: kp@cas.au.dk

²⁵ Vgl. *John S. McClure: Other-wise Preaching. A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics.* St. Louis 2001; *ders.: The Roundtable Pulpit. Where Leadership and Preaching Meet,* Nashville 1995.