

Preaching and teaching

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It is widely assumed that preaching and teaching are similar if not identical activities. Books like Ronald Allen's *The Teaching Sermon* seem to be based on the assumption that good preaching is teaching.¹ Gordon Hugenberger argues that in the NT teaching includes preaching without the terms becoming synonymous.² Jim Packer seems to put the relationship the other way. He insists that 'preaching is essentially teaching *plus* application'.³

Earlier this century C.H. Dodd argued for a clear distinction between κηρυγμα = missionary preaching and διδαχη = ethical teaching to believers.⁴ Many scholars

have criticized Dodd's arguments, including Robert Worley who concludes that preaching and teaching were substantially the same activities.⁵ There is something of an irony about Worley's book in that he argues for a plurality of theologies, methods, principles and sources and yet opposes the distinction between preaching and teaching.

It is difficult to assess the validity of some of these arguments because words like 'preaching' and 'teaching' are used today with a range of meanings and it is not easy to tell how our understandings of these terms are related to understandings current in the first century.

Today

The primary meaning of 'to preach' today is 'to deliver a sermon or religious address'.⁶ Such an address might be based on a text of scripture or on a religious or moral subject. Some speakers assume they are sharing their own thoughts with the congregation; others believe they are declaring the word of God. In her recent analysis of types of preaching, Lucy Atkinson Rose distinguishes: traditional preaching, which aims to persuade people of something, or transmit truth to them; kerygmatic preaching, in which God himself is thought to speak; transformational preaching, in which the preacher's purpose is 'to facilitate an experience'; and conversational preaching, in which the sermon is a proposal given to the congregation for their evaluation and response.⁷

A secondary dictionary definition of preaching is 'to give moral advice in an obtrusive way'. This is usually resented by the recipients. It carries a negative connotation because the one who is preaching is forcing unwelcome advice on the hearers. This may be the experience of congregations in some churches but such preaching is not confined to that setting and should probably be avoided.

'Teaching' is also understood in different ways. A university professor claims to be teaching when he delivers a lecture. Parents also teach their children to clean their teeth, but not usually by means of an hour's lecture. Lois LeBar compares teaching with conducting a guided tour.

The competent guide is one who has previously taken the trip, usually many times, and who is familiar with all the points of interest, so that he can help the group map out their itinerary and answer their questions. He facilitates the trip by making necessary arrangements and leads them to the main attractions so that every hour brings new experiences. The satisfaction of the tourists comes from their firsthand experiences with new people and places.

This section of her book is headed 'Transferring the learning process from teacher to pupil' and draws attention to the central concern of teaching, to help students learn and induct them into the ways of learning so that they can become learners for themselves.⁸

A distinction is sometimes drawn between formal and informal teaching. Formal teaching takes place in an institution such as a school, or college, or church, or prison, in a context where planned and deliberate instruction is delivered by recognized teachers. Informal teaching occurs in more incidental settings such as the playground, the home, through the media and leisure activities and comes at the hands of various relatives, friends, acquaintances and public figures. Perhaps informal teaching uses the word in a secondary sense.

Even so brief a description distinguishes teaching from preaching in a number of ways: in terms of purpose, methods, expectations and content. The purpose of preaching is to present a message; the purpose of teaching, to equip people to learn a subject, a skill, attitudes and behaviours. The preacher hopes that the message will make a difference to the hearers' lives. The teacher hopes the students will themselves 'make something of' the subject. The methods of teaching are many and various compared with the more limited range of methods of preaching, even with recent innovations. Teachers provide resources and demonstrate how these resources can be used. They guide their students, encouraging, correcting and questioning them. Discussion, student presentations and responses are all part of teaching and learning. 'A multitude of studies in adult learning show the importance of interaction, discussion, discovery and hands-on learning. Preaching typically involves none of these.'⁹ While the gospel can be proclaimed through drama, film, poetry, music, the most frequently used method is a public address. It is usually uninterrupted.¹⁰

The expectations in a preaching situation are attuned to hearing a message, the declaration of some truth, or what somebody thinks about a given topic; or a word from the Lord, perhaps, except where people have lost all confidence in the idea of the Lord speaking today. The expectations in a formal learning situation are in keeping with the advertised subject and the students' previous experience of that subject but with the hope that they will learn something new. The range of variables in informal teaching situations create a huge variety of expectations, many of which may have nothing to do with what is taught or learned. Some of the best learning happens incidentally while other goals are being pursued.

The reason that preaching and teaching are often confused is that both are means of communication. From this it is obvious that understanding is one of the ends sought. But there can be different levels of understanding. These are related to different connotations of such words as 'to learn' and 'to know'. At a minimal level, to register certain information in the mind might be described as learning. To be persuaded of some particular view by rhetoric or force of personality might also be attributed to learning from a particular preacher. To be transformed by the Spirit of God through a believing response to his word is something more than learning and perhaps coming to know in the deepest sense of all. Teaching involves both more and less than this. It is more than the transmission of information or persuasion to a particular point of view. Teachers seek to engage the minds, hearts and wills of those they are teaching with the subject so that the students will practise it. It will make some contribution to their lives but fall short of the life-transforming experience of hearing God's word.

In the NT

Friedrich notes the wide range of Greek words used in the NT for what we call preaching and he includes διδασκειν among them.¹¹ We will concentrate our attention on two terms widely recognized as the most significant: κηρυσσειν and εὐαγγελιζεσθαι¹² and see if they can be distinguished from διδασκειν.¹³

Κηρυσσειν

The use of this verb can be illustrated by Matthew 3:1–3 where the activity of John the Baptist is described as ‘proclaiming’¹⁴ (v. 1) and something which can be described in the words of Isaiah as ‘crying out in the wilderness’. The event John announces is the coming of the kingdom of heaven/God, the same theme which characterized the proclamation of Jesus (Mt. 4:17). Such proclamations in the Graeco-Roman world were often formal and official, for the herald, κηρυξ,¹⁵ spoke for an authoritative figure such as the emperor. So, for example, Tom Wright explains, ‘When the herald makes a royal proclamation, he says, “Nero (or whoever) has become emperor”. He does not say, “If you would like to have an experience of living under an emperor, you might care to try Nero”. The proclamation is an authoritative summons to obedience—in Paul’s case, to what he calls “the obedience of faith.”’ Wright goes on to talk of the announcement of the cross as Christ’s royal victory.¹⁶ Coenen comments that the verb κηρυσσω ‘characterizes the concrete proclamation of the message in a particular instance, with special reference to the claim that is being made, and its authority to set up a new order’.¹⁷ Its primary meaning is to announce with authority.

Worley tries to evade the significance of this by arguing that it is doubtful if its meaning ‘can be restricted to its Hellenistic usage’.¹⁸ No one wishes to call this a restriction but Worley fails to take the Hellenisation of Judaism seriously.¹⁹

A secondary meaning for κηρυσσειν is illustrated by the public testimony of the man from Decapolis (Mk. 5:20). He told everyone he met the story of his experience at the hand of Jesus. His authority for doing so was the commission of the one who had healed him (v. 19).

Louw and Nida argue for a third sense represented by Romans 10:14. This, they claim, means ‘to publically announce (*sic*) religious truths and principles while urging acceptance and compliance—“to preach”’.²⁰ They appear to overlook the following verse which indicates that this is actually an example of the primary sense, for people cannot proclaim the good news unless they are sent, and such sending is understood to be by God. This verse is also important for the argument that κηρυσσειν is sometimes virtually synonymous with

εὐαγγελιζεσθαι. However its range is greater, see e.g. Luke 12:3; Acts 15:21.²¹ The most significant point for our purposes is to note the element of authoritative public proclamation, or declaration, which features in the uses of both words.

Κηρυσσειν is sometimes used alongside διδασκειν (Mt. 4:23; 9:35; 11:1; Ac. 28:31; Rom. 2:21). This kind of evidence leads writers like Hugenerger to argue that no clear distinction can be drawn between the two. Against this one can suggest that the verses are summarising statements. The Matthean verses speak of Jesus engaged in three activities: preaching, teaching and healing. While they are undoubtedly related to each other there is no reason to regard preaching and teaching as any more interchangeable than teaching and healing.²² One verse which might seem to support the identification of preaching and teaching is Romans 2:21, but it must be read in context where the highly rhetorical style of Paul’s writing must be recognized. This means the use of κηρυσσειν here is one of Paul’s special effects. It is not an account of the usual state of affairs.

Εὐαγγελιζεσθαι

Outside the NT this verb meant to announce joyful news of victory and peace, or a wedding or the birth of a son.²³ Pliny uses it for the news of the succession of Caligula as emperor and his recovery from illness.²⁴ The LXX adds the good news of God’s intervention to save (Ps. 68:11–12; Isa. 52:7).²⁵ It was this good news ‘the joyful announcement of the long awaited Messianic salvation, when God had come to the rescue of a world in need’ which burst on the world with the coming of Jesus.²⁶

In the NT εὐαγγελιζεσθαι is used only once in Matthew and not at all in Mark²⁷ but frequently in Luke-Acts and in Paul. It is used of John the Baptist’s proclamation (Luke 3:18 referring back to 3:3ff) and to express the purpose of Jesus with reference to the kingdom of God (Lk. 4:43). In the early church the summary statement of Acts 8:4 is illustrated by Philip in Samaria (vv. 5 (ἐκηρυσσεν), 12), Peter and John in the Samaritan villages (v.25) and Philip again with the Ethiopian (v. 35) and in the coastal towns (v. 40). The content of the good news is now Jesus himself as well as the kingdom of God (vv. 12,35).

Occasionally εὐαγγελιζεσθαι is brought into conjunction with διδασκειν (Lk. 20:1; Ac. 5:42; 15:35). It is notable that these are summary statements and it is by no means evident that the two words are two ways of pointing to the same activity. It is also notable that each time the order of words is the same and if they do overlap the most that can be claimed is that proclaiming the good news was part of their teaching. But it is equally

possible that the *καί* joins two oral activities which can be distinguished.

We can conclude that *κηρυσσειν* and *εὐαγγελιζεσθαι* both refer to announcements or declarations and are close to being synonymous.²⁸ The former may be distinguished by the authoritative nature of the announcement, derived from the one the announcer serves, and the latter by its characteristic note of joy.

Διδασκειν

What was involved in education in the Roman world? No doubt there was a wide range of theory and practice and the two seldom coincided. One major feature of the theory was that education, especially physical education, contributed to the making of the whole person.²⁹ Yet Carcopino writes of the 'wretched teaching methods' and schools which undermined children's morals and abused them. He describes, 'senseless stumbling repetitions punctuated by savage punishments'.³⁰ One major difference from formal teaching today is incidentally noted by Bouquet when he writes that students were taught 'to write elegantly and to make fine, graceful and florid speeches' but not to think.³¹ Education was much more a matter of induction into a tradition enshrined in a classical literature. In this respect it was closer to the ideals of Muslim education today. Many parents today struggle with the goal in many British schools of fostering rational autonomy, a critical attitude which questions everything. This is part of the legacy of the Enlightenment and is itself being widely questioned. In first century Jewish homes, schools and synagogues the content in formal teaching settings was the memorisation and interpretation of the scriptures.³² Learning a profession or trade was done by a kind of apprenticeship in which the learner attached himself to one recognized as proficient in that occupation.

So what counted as 'teaching'? A wide range of activities including imparting information, passing on knowledge and/or skills. It implied a continuing relationship between teacher and taught. In the LXX it is used for instruction in the use of weapons but more importantly for God teaching men his will. Rengstorf distinguishes this kind of instruction from prophetic proclamation. In the later OT and Rabbinic Judaism *διδασκειν* is used for the exposition of the Law as the revelation of God's will.³³

In the gospels there are frequent references to the teaching of Jesus where the primary meaning is to give instruction directly (Lk. 11:1-4) or indirectly (vv. 5-8, a parable which teases to provoke insight). Much of the teaching of Jesus is in parables which themselves required further explanation (Mk. 4:33-34; cf. vv. 10-12). He was widely recognized as a remarkable

teacher and the very fact that he was accompanied by disciples reinforced this idea (Mk. 1:22).³⁴ Matthew presents examples of his teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (chs. 5-7). We must not be misled by our tendency to call this the *sermon* on the mount.

There is a secondary sense in which *διδασκειν* is used in the sense of 'to tell'; e.g. in Matthew 28:15 the tomb guards were directed to tell people a most unlikely story. This appears to have been an instruction of the moment rather than part of continuous teaching.

That teaching was to be a significant dimension of the work of the apostles after the ascension of Jesus is seen in the great commission of Matthew 28:16-20. It is central to the activity of making disciples. Its content is the teaching of Jesus and in this respect it can be distinguished from the proclamation of the gospel of which Jesus himself is the central theme.³⁵ In Galatians 1:12 and 2 Thessalonians 2:15 to be taught is equivalent to receiving a tradition from a human being or from an apostolic letter. Sound or healthy teaching is one of the measures Timothy and Titus are to use to counter false teaching at Ephesus and in Crete (1 Tim. 1:3-7; 4:1-11; 6:1-5; Tit. 1:5-2:1). They are to hold on to it themselves and teach it to others who themselves will be able to teach a further generation (2 Tim. 1:13; 2:2). When the writer of Hebrews rebukes his readers for their inability to teach (5:12) he has in mind a body of teaching (6:1ff).

Conclusions

From the evidence presented here it may well be that what we mean by preaching and teaching are different from each other and different from related activities in NT times. There may in fact be no word for 'preaching' as we understand it (unless we settle for the declaration of the word of God) in the NT. The key words portray authoritative announcements. Most, if not all of the NT, is concerned with a kind of teaching. This is the explanation of the inclusion of scriptural exposition in the reported speeches in Acts.³⁶ The fact that Paul's letters were read to the churches and possibly the gospels were read aloud too does not turn them into preaching.

It seems to me that it is advantageous to think of preaching and teaching as different functions today, each with its own purpose, methods, expectations and content. The grounds for taking the biblical evidence to identify preaching and teaching are far from secure. They are related activities but the more we see this to mean overlapping activities the less sharply clear our focus on each becomes. What is worse is that people draw the conclusion that preaching includes teaching so that if preaching is taught in our Bible colleges, teaching is by definition included too. But to my knowledge there is almost no consideration given to what is involved in

teaching people to teach in ministerial training. Recognition of the distinction between these terms might also stimulate an interest in adult education in the churches.

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Footnotes

- 1 Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995.
- 2 Preach, *ISBE*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1986), 941-42.
- 3 'Why Preach?' in *Preaching: The Preacher and Preaching in the Twentieth Century*, ed. S.T. Logan, (Welwyn: Evangelical Press 1986), 3.
- 4 *The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1936).
- 5 *Preaching and Teaching in the Early Church* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1967), 35-36, 90.
- 6 *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 1990.
- 7 *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church* (London: SPCK, 1997).
- 8 *Education That is Christian* (Fleming H. Revell, 1958), 136-38, q. 137.
- 9 Goodbourn, D. 'Overcoming Barriers to Adult Christian Education', *Ministry Today*, 7 (1996), 40.
- 10 see Packer for a defence of the monologue, 22-23
- 11 'κηρυξ', *Theological Dictionary of the NT*, ed. G. Kittel tr. G.W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 703.
- 12 so Craddock, F. 'Preaching', *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, ed. P.J. Achtemeier (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 452, Friedrich, 711-12, Hugenberger, 941.
- 13 Dr. Stephen Wright points out to me that it is unlikely the Evangelists would have so regularly used three different words if they regarded them as simply synonymous or interchangeable.
- 14 The NRSV translates the term 'proclaim' which is preferable to the NIV 'preach'.
- 15 James Barr criticizes Friedrich's argument that only three uses of κηρυξ in the NT means that the early Christians were reluctant to use this word, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (OUP, 1961), 287.
- 16 *What Saint Paul Really Said* (Oxford: Lion, 1997), 45,47.

- 17 'Proclamation, Preach, Kerygma', *DNTT* vol. 3 ed. Colin Brown (Paternoster, 1975), 57.
- 18 158, n. 7. He does acknowledge Hellenistic influence, 139.
- 19 The seminal work here is Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism* (ET London: SCM/Philadelphia: Fortress 1974).
- 20 *Greek-English Lexicon of the NT Based on Semantic Domains* (NY United Bible Societies, 1988), 417.
- 21 Green, M. *Evangelism in the Early Church* (London Hodder & Stoughton, 1970), 59.
- 22 One passage which might suggest that teaching and healing were interchangeable is Mark 1:21-28 where the people in the synagogue acclaim the exorcism of a demon as a new teaching. But it is better to follow Gundry here. 'It goes too far to equate the exorcistic command with the authoritative teaching, however; for Jesus teaches in vv. 21-22 before he casts out an unclean spirit in vv. 23-26. Verse 27 simply coordinates the two, and follows the order of vv. 21-22 and 23-26 in doing so' [*Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993-74), his emphasis].
- 23 Horsley, G.H.R. *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity*, vol. 3 (North Ryde: Macquarrie University, 1983), 10-12.
- 24 *Legatio ad Gaium*, 231, 18.
- 25 Spicq, C. *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody MS: Hendrikson, 1994), 82-84.
- 26 Green, 48.
- 27 On the other hand the noun εὐγγέλιον is used in Matthew and Mark.
- 28 Friedrich, 711-12.
- 29 Latin 'humanitas'; Ferguson, E. *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 83.
- 30 *Daily Life in Ancient Rome* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1941), 120-122.
- 31 *Everyday Life in NT Times* (London: Batsford, 1953), 160.
- 32 Ferguson, 85-86.
- 33 Rengstorf, K.H. 'διδασκω' etc *TDNT* II., 135-38.
- 34 Rengstorf, 153-57.
- 35 Rengstorf, 145
- 36 Worley uses this to argue for no difference between preaching and teaching, 119. In fact all his review of the parallels between Jewish literature and the NT writings can be understood in the category of teaching without bringing preaching into it (56-70).