



A fox on the pulpit and its audience - XVth century misericord (Ripon, Yorkshire)

## Following the Rules or Not in Preaching

9-12 July 2012

International Medieval Congress (IMC) - Institute of Medieval Studies, University of Leeds

European Medieval culture was based largely on oral transmission and preaching was one of the most important vehicles of teaching and learning. Numerous preachers across Europe condemned vices and praised virtues in order to instruct and exhort both lay and religious people in regard to faith and morals. Considering the role sermons played in religious life, preachers were exhorted to act following rules established by *Artes praedicandi*, manuals on formal composition, so to find the best way to convey the religious message. These treatises (which depicted different models of sermon) provided preachers with directives regarding sermon contents, structure, rhetoric; nonetheless they also listed a lot of rules preachers were expected to follow in their daily activity and in their habits. As it is clear, *Artes Praedicandi* defined the theory of sermon, still preaching was a lively event, subjected to the context in which it took place, continually changing for the differences both of the preachers and of audiences. This session of the IMC, which is sponsored by the International Medieval Sermon Studies Society, seeks to decline the theme of Leeds 2012 ("Rules to follow... or not") addressing three constitutive elements of preaching: sermons, preachers, audiences.

We invite paper proposals that address the rules to follow or not in each of these three directions, where it is possible to highlight tensions between theory and practice, the functionality of the rules or the need to change (or break) them, the role played by the personality of individual preachers and by specific characteristics (or reactions) of the audience. The period considered will be primarily the Later Middle Ages (XIV-XV centuries). We have planned three possible sub-sessions (here below the abstracts), however their actual realisation will depend on the papers proposed.

### 1. Following the rules or not in preaching: the sermons

This session aims to investigate in which ways sermons followed or not rules during the late Middle Ages. In particular, it aims to explore the connection between the rules for preaching as theoretically stated by *Artes Praedicandi* (that had important differences among themselves) and the sermons delivered from the pulpits. In this perspective, also a comparison between model sermons and *reportationes* can provide many information. Exploring this theme, the session has two primary purposes: firstly it wants to underline the adherence to rules, the possible presence of fixed and repetitive structures of sermons and their functionality in regard to the religious instruction; secondly, based on the analysis of specific case studies, it aims to show that there were occasions in which preachers decided to break (or change) the rules of preaching in order to arouse the audience's attention or to better convey their message in regard to specific contents/purposes.

## 2. Following the rules or not in preaching: the preachers

This session will focus on preachers' lives and behaviours, highlighting their adherence or not to religious and civil conventions. Furthermore it will focus on preachers' efforts (and their strategies beyond preaching) to convince people to break "wrong" habits or to change consolidated costumes. Finally, the session will address episodes of tensions between preachers' initiatives and the existing laws. In this perspective, the session seeks to re-investigate the hagiographical lives of preachers, the information in contemporary chronicles, or in their own sermons. Beside well known *stars* of the pulpit (for instance, Vicent Ferrer or Bernardino da Siena), papers on less known preachers are particularly welcome.

## 3. Following the rules or not in preaching: the audiences

This session aims to decline the theme of the rules in preaching in the perspective of the reception by the audience, or otherwise put, of the different ways in which the audience played an active role in the event of preaching. Which were the rules for a good audience? In which ways were the people instructed by the preachers to memorize and interiorise their message? How did the audience influence the preacher? The focus of this session will be the possibility to detect the reactions of the audience as they were recorded in sermons (especially through *reportationes*), but also in other sources which testify the effects (not always positive) on the audience. How did people accept or refuse the message (and the rules) proposed by preachers? Which kinds of selection processes were enacted by listeners and/or *reportatores*?

Please send paper proposals of 250 words maximum together with a short biography by 23 September 2011 to: Pietro Delcorno, Radboud University Nijmegen (p.delcorno@let.ru.nl) and Valentina Berardini, Università di Roma La Sapienza (valentina.berardini@gmail.com).



A preacher and his audience – XVIth century Italian woodcut