

**Jennifer Farooq.** *Preaching in Eighteenth-Century London*. Studies in Modern British Religious History. Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2013. 360 pp. \$115.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-84383-871-5.

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It is difficult today to underestimate the influence of sermons upon those beyond the faithful who gather for worship week by week. Even within Christian circles there are those who believe that the act of verbal proclamation as a means of communication has had its day. So to read Jennifer Farooq's fascinating study of preaching in London in the early 1700s is to enter a world alien to us today in many ways, yet at the same time one where echoes can be found of the divisive nature of public communication.

In her introduction and first chapter, Farooq maps the strange territory of the eighteenth century where sermons were a ubiquitous method of communication, on Sundays and in midweek meetings and at most state functions and charitable fundraising meetings. In addition, a full calendar of public days of celebration (such as the November 5 commemoration of the thwarting of the Gunpowder Plot of 1605) and royal accession and birthdays produced many more sermons preached and then published for wider consumption. Along with the established Church of England, older Dissenting denominations like Baptists, Independents (later Congregationalists), and Presbyterians, Moravians played a small but significant part in the London scene through the Sunday worship midweek lectures of the Fetter Lane congregation in Nevil's Alley: their pietistic

influence was to be especially influential on the emerging Methodists.

In chapters 2 and 3, Farooq surveys extant published sermons of the time and explores both the process and the multifunctional nature of their publication. For Dissenters, ownership of sermons by leading preachers helped form a sense of denominational identity and community, and nowhere was this more so than among foreign congregations. Moravian sermons made up 2 percent of all published sermons during this period, almost all preached by Nicolaus Zinzendorf at Fetter Lane and mostly printed in German. In addition to this interior unifying function, sermons served to enhance the public face of denominations. As the century progressed, ownership of sermons, particularly in collected volumes, also became a sign of status among "the middling sort" (p. 104).

Farooq next turns to the question of how sermons were received. Here a surprising degree of ecumenism sometimes prevailed, with hearers and rival preachers able to appreciate the homiletical gifts of those beyond their own denominational circles and, when published, across large geographical areas. Independent divine Philip Doddridge's response to reading Moravian Zinzendorf's London homilies at home in Northampton was to write to Anglican rector

Samuel Clarke “I long to see the Count’s Sermons” (pp. 118-119). Such generosity has its equivalence today, but other less charitable responses recorded by Farooq also have modern resonance: pamphlet wars over controversial sermons in the eighteenth century could escalate to the level of the viciousness of a modern “Twitter storm” and beyond, with public burnings of sermons not unknown. Ironically those brave or foolish enough to preach sermons in a public forum on the subject of altruism or morality faced particularly strong denigration and Farooq tells us that “the critics of the SRM [Society for the Reformation of Manners] and charity schools were assaulted with particular venom” (p. 208).

In chapter 6, the investigation of the role of the sermon in the religious culture of the eighteenth century reveals similarities and contrasts in the purpose of preaching across denominational boundaries, along with the deployment of similar homiletical weapons but for variant purposes. Common themes that appear from the sermons of the period include the person and work of Christ, the need for family devotions in the home and the importance of attendance at public worship. This latter subject was of special importance among Dissenters for whom congregational worship had only recently been legalized by the Act of Toleration of 1689. Anglicans and Dissenters alike displayed attitudes of anti-Catholicism, but often for diametrically opposed purposes, with the former claiming the Church of England’s practices to be a bulwark against popery and the latter drawing similarities between the same practices and those of the Church of Rome. Embarrassingly for those modern Methodists who weaponize John Wesley in ecumenical advocacy, Farooq notes that Wesley was “well known for his vehement anti-Catholicism” (p. 158). His Methodist followers, meanwhile, were condemned for their dangerous “enthusiasm” by all sides.

Any illusions that political preaching is a modern phenomenon will be dispelled by Fa-

rooq’s survey. She identifies a range of civic and political purposes in chapters 7 and 8. These included advocacy of the existing social order, including the authority of magistrates and loyalty to the government obedience to social “superiors” but also reminders of the wealthy of their paternal responsibilities to the less well off. Dissenters, unsurprisingly, often used sermons to rail against the legal restrictions and prosecutions they endured. In conjunction, congregations were also exhorted to set exemplary standards of behavior in the face of persecution: “When they go low, we go high” in the words of Michelle Obama.

Inevitably Farooq’s work focuses largely on extant published sermons, which were only a fraction of the total preached; notes and observations on those that did not make it to publication are comparatively scarce. She is surely mistaken though to claim that “eighteenth century sermons that remained in the oral realm were unlikely to have much of an impact in society” given that her research provides a portrait of an England in the early stages of a spiritual awakening effected through itinerant preaching, which was influenced in no small part by the mostly now-lost homilies of pietistic Moravians of Fetter Lane on John and Charles Wesley (p. 263). Indeed this aspect of her work makes the book of particular interest to those in the Methodist tradition where the eighteenth-century published sermons of John Wesley are still seen as theologically foundational, but the stories of his open air preaching of unpublished addresses are the identity forming stuff of legend.

Farooq’s book is a rich resource for all who are interested in sermon studies and the religious culture of the 1700s and includes a number of helpful graphs at the conclusion of its early chapters summarizing information in the text. As well as appealing to students of the eighteenth century and of the context of early British Moravian activity it will have particular interest for those engaged in the growing field of sermon studies. Fa-

rooq explores a number of themes introduced in essays in *The Oxford Handbook of the British Sermon 1689-1901* (2012), including the role of occasional sermons, views of Catholicism in preaching, and the place of homiletics in political discourse. Thus her work makes an excellent companion volume. She takes the reader to a London where the sermon was a “ubiquitous, flexible and influential genre that engaged with the political, religious, social and cultural life of the capital” and where it had an influence that those of us who are preachers today can only imagine (p. 269).

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