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Bachelor's Thesis

**COMMUNICATIVE, PRAGMATIC AND LEXICO-GRAMMATICAL
FEATURES OF MODERN CHRISTIAN SERMON IN GREAT BRITAIN**

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«Допущено до захисту»
Протокол засідання кафедри англійської філології
та міжкультурної комунікації
Протокол № 11 від 26.05.2025 р.
Зав. кафедри _____ д. філол. н., проф. Алла БЄЛОВА

KYIV – 2025

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ABSTRACT

The thesis explores the linguistic and stylistic features of British Christian sermons across several denominations, including Anglican, Roman Catholic, Methodist, Baptist, and United Reformed churches. The study combines theoretical perspectives with practical analysis, focusing on the structure of sermons, rhetorical strategies, stylistic devices, lexical choices, and means of audience engagement. Particular attention is paid to the use of biblical references, personal and shared experience, emotional appeals, and formal or informal tone depending on the denominational context. The analysis reveals that preachers use a variety of linguistic tools such as rhetorical questions, metaphors, pronoun usage, and figures of speech like anaphora and parallelism to enhance the communicative effectiveness of sermons. The research also underlines the differences in sermon delivery based on the audience, including sermons addressed specifically to clergy. Overall, the findings confirm that British Christian sermons serve not only as vehicles of theological instruction but also as means of emotional support, moral guidance, and spiritual encouragement.

Keywords: religious discourse, sermon, stylistic devices, rhetoric, Christian denominations, British sermons.

АНОТАЦІЯ

Ця бакалаврська робота присвячена дослідженню лінгвістичних та стилістичних особливостей британських християнських проповідей різних конфесій: англіканської, римо-католицької, методистської, баптистської та Об'єднаної реформатської церкви. У роботі поєднано теоретичний огляд із практичним аналізом, який охоплює структуру проповідей, риторичні стратегії, стилістичні засоби, лексичні особливості та способи взаємодії з аудиторією. Особливу увагу приділено використанню біблійних цитат, апеляції до особистого й колективного досвіду, емоційного впливу, а також формальному чи неформальному тону, що залежить від конфесійного контексту. Дослідження демонструє, що проповідники використовують широкий спектр мовних засобів, а саме риторичні запитання, метафори, вживання займенників, фігури мови (анафора, паралелізм тощо) задля підвищення комунікативної ефективності. Окремо висвітлено відмінності у проповідях, адресованих різним аудиторіям, зокрема духовенству. Загалом результати підтверджують, що британські християнські проповіді виконують не лише повчальну, а й емоційну, моральну та духовну функції.

Ключові слова: релігійний дискурс, проповідь, стилістичні засоби, риторика, християнські конфесії, британські проповіді.

INTRODUCTION

Christianity started to spread to Europe around the 4th century. Taking into account the fact that the majority of the population was illiterate, in most cases the preaching activity was carried out by means of oral communication. Preachers went from town to town and taught people the word of God. Nevertheless, people of high society had access to written materials. They were able to learn Christian doctrines from primary sources which help them better understand the core of their religion.

Considering the fact that nowadays most people in the world confess Christianity, Christian sermons have a significant impact on modern society. Priests use specific linguistic methods in their speeches to influence people's state of mind, their attitude to the world and their actions. For that reason, understanding the structure of modern Christian sermons, how priests convey information, what vocabulary, grammatical structures and stylistic devices they use is important to know for churches' parishioners, but also is of interest for researchers.

Comprehending religious texts requires awareness of their historical context. Numerous linguists have contributed to the study of the sociocultural aspects of religion, including Malikova O., Adam M., Barrett J., Crystal D., Edman L. R. O., Fondevila S., Wallace L., Wolde E. J. v., etc.

The object of our research is a Christian sermon in modern Britain.

The subject of our research is communicative, lexico-grammatical and stylistic features of British Christian sermons.

The aim of our research is to explore how priests of different denominations encourage specific actions of the parishioners through the sermons.

To achieve this aim the following tasks are undertaken:

- Critical review of existing linguistic studies on religious discourse
- Collection of empirical material
- Qualitative and quantitative analysis
- Comparison of structure- and content-related, linguistic, and stylistic features across denominations

- Formulation of conclusions

The relevance of this research lies in its contribution to deeper understanding of how priests convey information about complex religious doctrines and concepts in a way that is understandable to all people, regardless of their knowledge of the intricacies of religious lore.

Research methods: A range of research methods was used in this study to ensure a comprehensive examination of the subject. Theoretical analysis is utilized to establish a foundational understanding of basic concepts, allowing for a deeper exploration of linguistic and psychological aspects of religious discourse. The comparative method is applied to determine similarities and differences between various genres of religious texts. Additionally, discourse analysis enables the examination of language use within religious contexts, putting emphasis on patterns, strategies, and communicative intentions. The descriptive method is used to systematically present and categorize the features of religious discourse. Finally, pragmatic analysis is used to investigate how meaning is constructed and interpreted in religious communication while taking into account the contextual factors and the speaker-hearer relationship. Together, these methods provide the basis of the study that combines linguistic, cognitive, and pragmatic perspectives.

Research material: we analysed 20 written sermons (4 texts from each of 5 most popular denominations in Britain, namely the Anglican church, the Roman Catholic church, the Methodist church, the Baptist church, the United Reformed Church (URC)). The texts of the sermons were taken either from the main websites of the denomination or from individual parish websites.

The novelty of this study lies in identifying patterns in the use of certain language strategies in constructing sermons by priests of different Christian denominations.

The practical application of the results of this research is to provide a broader understanding of how priests can manipulate the minds of their parishioners through sermons. Furthermore, it may help parishioners better understand when they should not respond to provocations.

The theoretical application: our study is a thorough review of how priests use linguistic means in order to convey their ideas to the general public as accurately and clearly as possible.

The structure of our research: The first part of the research provides a theoretical foundation, showing the peculiarity of the psycholinguistic component of religious discourse and genres of Christian texts in British congregational practice. In the second part the results of the analysis of communicative, lexico-grammatical and stylistic features of the modern Christian sermons are presented. The study concludes with a summary of all findings and the discussion of their implications for the understanding of religious discourse. Finally, the references section consists of a list of sources that have formed a basis of the research.

1. RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE IN LINGUISTIC RESEARCH

1.1. Psycholinguistic characteristics of religious discourse

Poruciuc (2004: 30) argues that Christianity started playing a significant role in England since the Roman invasion of the British Isles and their spreading the Latin language of the church service to these lands. It provides a conversion of the local Celtic tribes into the new religion. Nevertheless, after the withdrawal of the Roman troops and Scandinavian invasion a contact with Papal Rome was cut. At that time monks of a newly emerged Irish church started their mission on the British Isles. As a result, not only the English language has been enriched with a number of words from the church lexicon but also the invaders from Scandinavia brought the Christian vocabulary to their native lands. Additionally, contrary to common assumption, some related to Christianity words had been already known to the Celts long before conversion into Christianity since this tribe had had contacts with the Christian bishops and had been involved in the despoilment of churches and monasteries earlier.

Christianity remains the most prevalent religion in the United Kingdom, even though the decline of the number of believers has been significant in recent years. According to the Office for National Statistics (2022), 46,2% of the population in England and Wales are Christians. The similar picture is observed in the statistical analysis provided by the House of Commons Library (2023), which highlights that 46% of people in Great Britain identified themselves as Christians.

Language and verbal expression occupy a prominent place in Christian communicative practices. Although rituals and religious ceremonies are significant for comprehension of the biblical doctrines, the use of linguistic means contributes to the full perception and understanding of religious dogmas. Mostly by listening to and reading the main principles and laws of the certain religious system, people are able to understand its core. The visual perception of devotional practices alone is not enough for the reason that people may misinterpret some points which may lead to

misconception. In other terms, people interested in a way of life that conforms to the principles of a particular religion, in this case, the principles of Christianity, should familiarize themselves with liturgical, scriptural, homiletic, doctrinal, ceremonial, polemical and other genres of religious texts. The main purpose of this is to understand the essence of the rituals that take place in the church.

A key reason for the centrality of language in religious discourse is its profound influence on human cognition. While the specific language an individual learns is shaped by cultural factors, the ability for language acquisition itself is inherent to human nature rather than culturally determined. All individuals raised in a social environment naturally develop language abilities. As a result, language may be considered as an integral component of human cognition. (Pinker, 2000)

The “Word” is the basic method of interaction between human and God and this lexeme is used in the Bible 739 times (The Holy Bible: King James Version, 2009). According to it, the Word as a concept is the basis and the beginning of the Universe and existed before the creation of time and space and was equivalent to God Himself, *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”* (John 1:1, King James Version). The second hypostasis of God, namely Jesus Christ, the Son, is equivalent to the Word, *“For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one”* (1 John 5:7). Moreover, the word is a combination of three factors, namely its sound, its written form and its meaning, which can be compared with the three aspects of the Holy Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Ivasyshyna & Rudenko, 2019: 167). In the Bible the Word has mystical power to influence the people’s fate. For instance, Jesus Christ was able to heal people, raise them from the dead and expel dark entities from people who were considered possessed by using the might of His word, *“... and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick...”* (Matthew 8:16).

Therefore, in the context of the Bible the concept of “Word” spreads beyond linguistically determined boundaries and starts covering all spheres of human existence and the whole Universe in general. As a result, Christianity should be

considered as a synthesis of language, cognition and belief system which relates to such study as psycholinguistics.

Theologians and priests have recently started using the achievements of the field of psycholinguistics in their practice to make complex archaic concepts more comprehensible for people's minds. Although it is suggested that the concept of the divine entity is an equal participant of the religious discourse (Matskiv, 2012), Sanders (2018) states that there is no special area in the human brain which purpose relates to believing and mentally contacting the divine. For this purpose, people use the same anatomical structures which they use for perception of everyday things and concepts. Therefore, people who perform interpretation of the religious texts should consider the fundamentally secular nature of human cognition.

Human cognition operates on two distinct strata: an intuitive, fast perception of the world, and a slower, more reflective mode of processing information. The intuitive system relates to detecting agency, ascribing actions and phenomena to intentional agents, even when such agents are unobservable. This cognitive bias leads individuals to perceive purpose and design in objects, reinforcing the belief that intentional agents must be responsible for their creation. Children frequently infer connections between an object's design and its purpose in ways that surpass common assumptions, demonstrating this cognitive tendency. It correlates with the intuitive belief that only an intentional agent can create something with a specific function. As a result, an idea about the higher Creator emerges even in the mind of the child from an atheistic family (Edman, 2015).

However, while humans are predisposed to accepting ideas that challenge purely intuitive reasoning, excessively detailed or complex narratives tend to be less enduring across generations. Concepts that disrupt fundamental existential assumptions can be compelling, but if they are overly intricate, they are unlikely to persist in cultural memory. Thus, beliefs that balance intuitive plausibility with some degree of conceptual novelty are more likely to be transmitted and maintained over time (Edman, 2015).

The development of a church depends on the presence of voluminous counterintuitive dogmas in its teachings, i.e if such dogmas prevail, the flow of new parishioners decreases, the teachings are not spread, and the transmission of knowledge from generation to generation ceases. In other terms, the effectiveness of establishing a certain religious system and its rooting in some groups of people depend on whether the offered ideas have the minimal percentage of counterintuitiveness (Bengtson et al., 2013).

However, according to Barrett (2012), children have an innate inclination toward belief and more easily perceive and assimilate complex theological concepts that are counterintuitive. This feature of the child's psyche can be successfully used in missionary practice, sermons, and conversion to faith (Edman, 2015: 246).

It should be mentioned that, according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, psycholinguistics can be defined as the study of human mental abilities for the comprehension, articulation, and learning of language. This study is characterized by interdisciplinarity and includes data from such scientific fields as linguistics, psychology, cognitive science, and neuroscience in order to explore how individuals perceive, process, and produce language at various levels of complexity and in various spheres of life (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, n.d.).

Language represents a fundamental aspect of human cognition and social interaction, which distinguishes humans from other species through their ability to construct and use complex linguistic systems. The ability of abstract reasoning and cultural expression is deeply intertwined with language. This emphasizes its role as a defining feature of human intelligence and communication. Therefore, the study of psycholinguistics not only broadens our understanding of language processing mechanisms but also facilitates a deeper appreciation of cognitive development and the relationship between thought and language in the field of theology.

Connections between the semantics, pragmatics and grammatical features of the word are influenced by a range of factors. These include an individual's exposure to language (people using sign language develop images of words which are different from images created in the consciousness of people using spoken language), direction

of the writing (right-to-left or left-to-right), geographical location of native speakers, etc. (Boroditsky, 2019:13). People of different regions may have opposite perceptions of the same universal concept. The word “to love” serves as an illustration of such a case. In the Hebrew Bible the lexeme ‘āhēb is used only for describing the feeling which a man has for a woman and not vice versa. This term was only once used to describe a woman's feelings for a man in a situation where the woman held a higher social status than the man. It can be concluded that in ancient Jewish society the verb “to love” was used to refer to feelings of a superior towards someone of lower status, in contrast to European society, where the word was used to refer to mutual equal feelings (Wolde, 2009: 47-48). It may be concluded that interpretation of religious texts should include acknowledgment with historical context and geographical location related to the creation of specific text.

Additionally, the relationship between the physical properties of a word and its meaning is based only on the established conventions of the speakers of the particular language community where the word exists (Boroditsky, 2019:13). Moreover, in the process of comprehension of verbal signals human consciousness focuses not only on the definition of the specific word but it evokes the complex net of connections related to it (Sanders, 2018: 543). Therefore, it once again confirms the fact that the incorporation of cognitive linguistics and psycholinguistics into research in the field of religious discourse is necessary for a deeper understanding of how religion and complex theological concepts affect human emotions and thoughts.

Addressing other basic processes in consciousness, there is a tendency of the human mind to categorize objects and concepts (Sanders, 2018: 542). Categorization helps to organize concepts and facilitate the perception of the world. According to the classical approach to categorizing provided by Aristotle, all entities of the category are equal (Wolde, 2009: 23). By contrast, Eleanor Rosch (1973) states that entities in the category are not equal and alike, some of them are higher in rank than others, i.e. some words are better representation of the core of some group than others. The hierarchy in the group depends on the cultural and even geographical background of the speakers of the specific language. For this reason, the cognitive abilities of the

brain are not simply determined by the object we perceive, but depend on the human ability to interpret a particular object, which in turn engages the entire spectrum of culturally determined prototypical schemas. Thus, it may be concluded that since in every Christian denomination people share a certain worldview, belief system, speech patterns, etc., they have such a perception of language and its elements that is different from that of secular people.

The religious Christian texts have a number of distinct features, e.g. exalted and archaic language, richness of metaphors and figurative speech, intertextuality, esoteric vocabulary, etc. Usage of pious language in Christian community creates an atmosphere of elevated sacred pageant and evokes the overwhelming sense of relatedness to something extra-terrestrial. Overstimulation created with the combination of sublime language of religious texts and the atmosphere of consecrating place makes parishioners vulnerable and coercible for absorption of the information provided by a priest during a sermon. For this reason not only for scientists but for every parishioner it is important to acknowledge the basic structure of sacred texts of all genres for deeper comprehension of the principles of the Christian faith and holding a more stable foundation for leading a pietistic life.

According to Sanders (2018: 543), our perception of the concept which is coded in the word depends on the metaphors we use for its description. Metaphors are rooted in human consciousness and decoded with minimal effort (Fondevila et al., 2016). They serve as cognitive structures that shape not only linguistic interpretation but also emotional and psychological responses to the concept in question. For instance, in the context of religious discourse, the metaphorical definition of the word “repentance” by clergy members can significantly influence how parishioners perceive and respond to it. If “repentance” is described as an “absorption in an all-consuming feeling of guilt”, it will result in individuals’ experiencing psychological distress, potentially leading to feelings of self-worthlessness and spiritual despair. By contrast, if it is described as “a release from the bonds of sin”, people will be more passionate and have a better mental state. This positive establishment promotes psychological well-being and strengthens the individual’s

connection to their faith, and also emphasizes the profound impact of linguistic choices in religious communication.

Considering the fact that multifaceted doctrines and complex theological concepts form the foundation of every longstanding religious tradition, the language used within this domain often contains a significant number of archaisms and lexically challenging expressions. Religious discourse is characterized by a distinct register that reflects both historical continuity and doctrinal authority, which can pose comprehension difficulties for contemporary audiences. According to David Crystal (1966), the Catholic Church in past centuries made considerable efforts to adapt the language of sermons to the cognitive and linguistic abilities of the general public. However, this adaptation was carefully balanced to avoid an overuse of colloquialisms, ensuring that sermons remained both accessible and doctrinally sound. Effective sermon delivery requires priests not only to possess a profound conviction in their message but also to exhibit enthusiasm and sincerity in their communication. Additionally, they must consider several critical factors, including the thematic content of their sermons, the demographic composition of their audience, and the evolving communicative expectations of the congregation. These elements play a crucial role in providing engagement and ensuring the intended message is conveyed with clarity and spiritual resonance.

Connor (2004) claims that persuasion is an inseparable part of every existing discourse. It is resulted from the fact that any interaction between people involves the purpose to influence someone's mind or actions or reinforce already existing beliefs (Virtanen and Halmari, 2005). Persuasion may be applied either directly by using words with specific emotional connotations, rhetoric questions, etc., or indirectly by using various interactive tools (Cotterell & Turner, 1989: 294-299).

In terms of religious discourse, persuasion methods serve as essential tools that enable church authorities to achieve a range of ecclesiastical objectives. These objectives include not only the establishment and reinforcement of Christian ideology but also the dissemination of religious doctrines to both adherents and potential converts. Persuasion within religious discourse often relies on rhetorical strategies,

emotional appeals, and authoritative language to stimulate a sense of spiritual conviction and communal belonging. Furthermore, the strategic use of persuasive techniques aids in addressing theological doubts, reinforcing moral values, and encouraging active participation in religious life. Ultimately, these methods play a significant role in facilitating the church's overarching mission of spiritual guidance, social cohesion, and the continual expansion of the faith community.

Regarding persuasion, it is essential to consider Aristotle's three modes, namely ethos, logos and pathos. Religious discourse is unique in its comprising all of them; and the genre of sermon is a good illustration of it. By referring to the authority of the church and drawing upon the priest's personal experiences or moral integrity, he establishes credibility and reinforces his position as a trustworthy spiritual guide, which relates to the mode of ethos. Furthermore, he integrates factual evidence and theological arguments from the Bible or other authoritative religious texts, which forms the doctrinal foundation of his message and corresponds to the mode of logos. This logical structuring of ideas not only strengthens the sermon's persuasive power but also provides the audience with a rational foundation for understanding faith-based concepts. Finally, the priest aims to evoke emotional responses by addressing the spiritual concerns and lived experiences of the congregation, thereby creating a sense of personal connection and emotional resonance. This emotional appeal, characteristic of pathos, serves to inspire, comfort, and motivate believers, resolving obstacles between abstract theological principles and their practical application in everyday life. (Adam, 2021)

The range of emotions evoked during the sermon vary from negative, such as sadness and guilt, to positive ones, which include solace and the feeling of security. Preachers often strategically employ scriptural references to achieve specific emotional responses among the congregation. For instance, to invoke feelings of guilt and fear, they often refer to passages depicting the crucifixion of Jesus Christ or apocalyptic imagery from the Book of Revelation (also known as the Apocalypse of John). On the contrary, in order to elicit positive emotions, priests often emphasize narratives surrounding the birth of Jesus Christ, highlighting themes of divine grace

and redemption. However, it is important to note that the categorization of emotions as “negative” or “positive” is highly subjective and context-dependent. As it was previously mentioned, the pragmatic interpretation of certain lexical units within religious discourse may diverge significantly from their conventional meanings in secular contexts, as their connotations are deeply influenced by theological perspectives and cultural factors. This distinction emphasizes the complexity of religious language, where identical terms may carry varying emotional and spiritual implications depending on the audience's beliefs and experiences. (Adam, 2021:10)

Considering the points discussed, it can be concluded that the data gained while conducting the psycholinguistic research provides a deeper understanding of the cognitive and emotional aspects of religious discourse. The audience's cognitive disposition, emotional involvement and theological background influence how religious language is processed, understood and emotionally experienced. Throughout history, the development of Christianity in Britain – from its introduction by Romans in the 4th century to its emergence as the dominant religious tradition – has influenced the linguistic and rhetorical strategies used in religious communication. Over time, the structure and style of sermons have changed in accordance to societal changes, but their fundamental role in shaping belief systems and spreading of the religious teachings has remained the same.

Regarding the necessity of the study of the linguistic aspect of Christianity, it should be admitted that the "Word" as a phenomenon is one of the key concepts of all of Christianity, and even the second hypostasis of the Holy Trinity namely Jesus Christ is called the Word.

Moreover, the emotional impact of religious discourse, particularly in sermons, demonstrates how language functions not only as a tool for theological instruction but also as a mechanism for reinforcing religious doctrines. The differences in interpretation between believers and non-believers underscore the importance of context in religious language. Also, churches with more abstract and counterintuitive theological ideas may face greater challenges in ensuring the effective conversion across generations. However, missionaries should leverage that, according to the

recent studies, children are supposed to have better and easier comprehension of such ideas due to particularities of their cognitive development.

The study of psycholinguistics within the context of religious discourse shows that cognitive processes involved in the comprehension and interpretation of religious language are not connected to a specialized region of the human brain. It is suggested that there is no distinct area dedicated exclusively to the perception of mystical or religious concepts. Instead, religious language and its associated emotional and cognitive responses engage multiple cognitive faculties, based on both general language processing mechanisms and specific aspects of individual belief systems.

Although religious language is characterized by a great number of archaic and difficult for comprehension terms and expressions, the church of the last centuries endeavored to adapt the Christian teachings according to the abilities of the parishioners. This adaptation has been crucial in ensuring the accessibility of theological concepts and facilitating the conveying of religious beliefs across generations, especially in the face of evolving societal contexts.

Overall, by considering both linguistic and psychological factors, we can gain a more detailed understanding of religious communication within faith communities. The cognitive science of religion and linguistic analysis enhance our understanding of the ways in which religious ideas are interpreted and internalized by believers.

1.2. British religious discourse: the main genres of texts used by the congregations in Britain

First of all, a religious or sacred text may be defined as a text which contains an idea of religious teachings (Fedyshyn, 2018). Such texts are characterized by the existence of the information not in the text itself but beyond it with a connection to the primary source namely the Bible (Chernyshova, 2012). Every religious text relates to a specific genre according to its style, purpose, structure, etc. and some of them can exist in both written and oral form. However, all genres are intertwined and contain features inherent in other genres (Fedyshyn, 2018). Additionally, Miller

(2015) states that texts should be divided into genres according not to their forms or structure but according exclusively to their purpose of use and situation they have connection with.

Although there is still no established classification of the genres of the Christian religious texts, some linguists made an attempt to categorize them. According to Fedyshyn (2018), every biblical book may be considered as an example of a certain genre. Some of the genres connect directly to the books of the Bible, others emerge from the discussion of some theological concepts, church activities, etc. Fedyshyn divided religious genres into four groups on the basis of their function. The classification includes biblical, liturgical, theological, and religious-popular genres.

The first group, namely genres of the biblical books, includes such genres as biblical narrative, biblical historical narrative, psalm, sermon, proverb, prayer, prophecy, biblical song, gospel, parable, epistle, and apocalyptic literature.

Regarding the genres used in the church services, this group contains church hymns, religious poetry, greetings or blessings, confession, testimony, prayer, and prophecy.

Theological-analytical genres include theological articles, monographs, reviews, annotations, commentaries, conference theses, and abstracts.

Religious-popular genres involve Christian narratives, collections of religious poetry and hymns, brochures, promotional invitations, calendars for believers, posters, and other means of parishioner engagement.

Regarding the division between religious and theological texts, Pleizer et al. (2020) suggest that religious texts are considered as primary source and basis and supposed to engage with the audience, bring in more parishioners into a church and interact with those who are already there. By contrast, theological texts are characterized by an author's reflectiveness and introspection upon basic sacred texts.

There is a common practice in Britain that the genre of sermon is accompanied by the following range of genres, namely homilies, encyclicals, religious testimonials,

catechisms, exegesis, and apologetics. What is more, sermon is considered to be an interdiscursive genre (Malikova, 2010, 2012).

Since the main focus of our research consists in the genre of sermon, it is reasonable to analyse texts related to preaching.

1.2.1. Sermon

First of all, according to the Bible (1 Corinthians 1:21), God designated a sermon as one of the sources of involvement into His grace and revelation. As a result, some followers of Calvinism pay particular attention to visiting sermons even in the case their messages had been already heard (Morrissey, 2019).

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, a sermon is a religious speech which is conducted by a priest and which is included in a church service (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). Moreover, in some specific contexts a sermon may be considered as a long oration, which indicates a wide range of the usage of this lexeme (Oxford University Press).

Regarding a categorization of sermons, they can be classified on the basis of their organisation (whether they are conducted in church or any other place), denomination (Roman Catholic, Anglican, etc.), place, and dedication to a specific event (holiday of the ecclesiastical calendar). Separately, such subspecies as missionary and apostolic sermons are distinguished (Kapranov et al., 2024).

Furthermore, it is assumed that the most skilled speakers are those who believe in what they are saying. In view of this fact, the preachers should have intense faith in what they are delivering. Additionally, it is widely known that symbolism occupies a prominent place in the life of the church and in the whole Christian teaching. Therefore, for greater pomp, persuasiveness, and better imprinting in memory, the priests may resort to accompanying their speeches with vivid gestures and symbolic objects set on a pulpit, e.g. a burning candle in a sermon about the transience of life (Eijnatten, 2009).

Besides, it should be mentioned that sermon language can vary depending on the nature of the audience, i.e. clergy, general laity, some specific groups such as the

young, etc. According to David Crystal (1966), the priests should pay particular attention to language style while conducting the speech, e.g. the clergy can effortlessly perceive a large number of archaisms, Latin expressions or references to various church councils while young parishioners may not have such thorough knowledge in this area. Moreover, many theologians and scholars argue that the text of the sermon be constructed in as simple a manner as possible for better comprehension among the parishioners (Morrissey, 2019).

Additionally, concerning the use of the Latin language, while some denominations, e.g. The Roman Catholic church, have tended to use such quotes in the preaching for many centuries, the Puritans of the 17th century were strongly opposed to it because of their fear of the audience's misunderstanding. It indicates a striking difference between approaches to the linguistic content of sermons within various Christian denominations (Morrissey, 2002).

Furthermore, the main goal of the sermon delivering is not demonstrating the priest's knowledge, awareness of the topic, and wittiness, but teaching and guiding people on their spiritual path (Morrissey, 2019). It should result in such a choice of lexical design of the sermon which will help convey the dogma for the target audience as clearly as possible. Moreover, an emphasis is placed on the structure of the speech and its composition. For this purpose back to the 17th century the preachers used the assets of rhetoric, logic and grammar as they do nowadays (Morrissey, 2002).

1.2.2. Homily

Conducting the missionary practice and spreading the God's word was highly appreciated and encouraged by the Church through the centuries and the very essence of theology as a study exists exclusively for preaching (Sławiński, 2024). For this purpose such genres as a sermon and a homily emerged. Although they are quite similar, texts of these genres still have differences in their structure and context.

Regarding a homily, this term may be defined as a short variation of sermon. These texts are also more precise and focus more on the interpretation of some parts of the Bible (Merriam-Webster Dictionary).

The main purpose of a homily is a clarification of some biblical passage in formal or semi-formal style. Moreover, as well as sermons, homiletic language include a mix of theological terminology and accessible lexicon. Basis of well-prepared homily includes focus on the Jesus Christ's teaching, announcing of positive news from the Holy Bible, assuring people of God's grace and salvation, adjusting complex biblical themes to the current social problems, incorporation of the feeling of being connected to sacred mysteries, and finally, reference to one single issue. The author should reflect on the needs of the parishioners and shape a homily in such a way that it is comprehensible either for clergy or laity. Writing such a text requires the author's creativity and his ability to reflect on one topic after collecting the material for his future homily and adapting it to the needs of the audience (Sławiński, 2024).

1.2.3. Encyclical

Regarding the encyclical, it may be defined as an official letter written by the Pope and addressed either to all the bishops of the Church or to the bishops of a particular country (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, n.d.). However, the Popes appealed not only to the members of Christian community but to everybody who seeks righteousness and justice regardless of their personal faith. In the encyclicals they mentioned a range of universal truths and common principles of well-being alongside religious statements and ideas (Niechwiej, 2015).

The genre of encyclicals emerged in order to discuss some aspect of Catholic teachings and connect it to the current agenda (Dorssemont, 2011). Taking into consideration the fact that none of the previous encyclicals have ever been cancelled, the next Popes have frequently referred to them in their own encyclicals (Dorssemont, 2011). As a result, Papal encyclicals maintain lasting authority and

continuity within Church teachings and influence subsequent doctrinal developments and theological discourse.

Regarding the linguistic and stylistic peculiarities, encyclicals are characterized with authoritative tone and formal theological and ecclesiastical vocabulary. The syntax is marked with long, multi-clause sentences, emotionally charged epithets, similes, metaphors, etc. Moreover, the Popes frequently resort to the Latin phrases presumably for maintaining traditional liturgical tone. In order to create a sense of consolidation they often employ inclusive pronouns such as “we”, “our”, and “us”.

1.2.4. Testimony

Another genre of Christian religious texts which is closely related to the genre of sermon is a testimony. According to the Merriam Webster dictionary (n.d.), it is a publicly expressed declaration of personal religious experience. The texts of this genre are marked with personal and narrative style. Moreover, their authors predominantly don't use complex liturgical vocabulary and stick more to everyday and emotionally charged lexicon. As it was previously mentioned, the modern Church aims to explain complicated and ambiguous theological doctrines in simple terms and encourage more and more people to join the church and dedicate their life to God's service. For this purpose Christian religious leaders and educators often refer to other people's stories of conversion to the religion. Providing specific examples of faith in action helps the audience better acquire ethical lessons and comprehend the spiritual truth (Peetz, 2024).

However, not only newly emerged believers but also those who lost their faith once and then believed again after a fall share their experience in the form of testimony. They contribute to church discourse on an equal footing with those who have just begun their journey in search of truth (Bielo, 2004).

Besides, such narratives offer empirical support for one of the central messages of Christian teaching, namely that true happiness can only be found in God (Ps 144:15). The main goals for both testimonies and sermons are persuasion, inspiration for their audience and transformation of their mindset. Listening to someone's

personal spiritual experience establishes the emotional connection between the audience and a speaker. As a result, people feel belonging to the community and see an example of practical application of the complicated theological doctrines.

1.2.5. Catechism

A further genre to consider is catechism. This term may be interpreted as a compendium of the main doctrine of a particular religion and is established in the form of questions and answers (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, n.d.). The language of catechisms is notable for precise and concise theological terms. The syntax is characterized with short and declarative sentences. However, the word “catechism” can be used not only exclusively in the context of religion but also to refer to any set of rules in a "question-answer" format. As a result, it may be concluded that the usage of the term catechism spreads beyond the religious domain and can reach almost every sphere of life (Pleizer et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the Bible says that we should seek simplicity and the Lord wants all people to enter the Kingdom of Heaven regardless of their level of education or intellect (Matthew 18:3). It emphasizes the importance of the truth of life to be accessible so information set in the form of catechism may bring clarity to understanding of the multifaceted religious concepts. As a result the will of God will be fulfilled.

Such corpora of the Christian religious doctrines are frequently used by preachers in their sermons as a basis for educating people in the main tenets of the church. However, catechisms were created not only to be read by priests to the congregation in the churches but also to be interpreted by parents to children at home (Green & Bowman, 1997). Thus, it launches a process of information transmission where complex theses formed by the Overmind passed the path of "God - priest - parent - child" and wedged into the worldview of a person from an early age.

It can be concluded that catechisms serve as an educational tool and, by creating a structured dialogue, encourages active participation in religious discourse. Such format fosters better and easier memorization by making the teachings more

cognitively accessible through organization of the complex doctrinal knowledge in the form of laconic answers to frequent questions.

1.2.6. Exegesis

Another genre connected with sermons is exegesis which may be defined as a detailed critical analysis and interpretation of a religious text (Oxford University Press, n.d.). Concerning the linguistic and stylistic peculiarities of the genre, it is of scholarly and interpretive nature. The lexicon contains text-critical, theological and historical terminology. Taking into account the fact that exegesis is a practical application of such study as hermeneutics, we should consider some basic peculiarities of this discipline.

First of all, the etymology of the term hermeneutics relates to the Greek word *hermēneuein* which means “to interpret” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, n.d.). Moreover, this word may have a connection to the name of the Ancient Greek god Hermes who was believed to be the messenger of the Olympian deities. Further, a compelling analogy can be noticed. In the Bible the Holy Spirit is frequently mentioned as an assistant for communication between people and God the Father and as an interpreter of their prayers to Him (Rom 8:26-27). Then, Augustine of Hippo claimed that the biblical hermeneutics is supposed to be guided by the Spirit since He is believed to be the main and primary author of the Scripture while those who put it on paper are thought to be just secondary ones (McGrath, 1995; Hamadi et al., 2022). In other terms, the interpretation of the Bible is impossible without experiencing an influence of some mysterious divine forth. Therefore, the motif of the absolute necessity of the presence of the Holy Spirit during the interpretation of the Scripture runs through like an invisible thread. Although Hermes and the Holy Spirit come from different religious belief systems, they both give a representation of divine mediation. Nevertheless, since the Spirit is the third hypostasis of the Holy Trinity and actually the God Himself, the complex religious phenomenon can be observed, namely the God in his hypostases is considered as the author of the Scripture and its interpreter through the mouths of theologians (2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Peter 1:21). To turn

to the connections between Ancient Greek mythology and Christianity, this parallel highlights the universal human need for divine guidance in comprehension of religious texts and puts emphasis on the interconnection between linguistic properties of theological terms, divine revelation, and interpretation across different traditions.

Expanding on the topic of hermeneutics, it should be mentioned that there are different approaches to biblical interpretation. Some theologians state that allegorical approach is the most exact in biblical readings, however, some argue that the biblical text should be literally comprehend and one doesn't need any other text for understanding except of the Bible itself. As a result, the choice of approach may differ depending on which layer the theologian wants to uncover (Hamadi et al., 2022).

Moreover, while analyzing the Scripture, theologians should take into account not only stylistic features and linguistic properties of the analysed text but also its historical context (Hamadi et al., 2022). As it was previously mentioned, the meaning of universal concepts can vary significantly among speakers depending on their geographical location and historical context (Wolde, 2009). Thus, biblical scholars and laity as well should take this aspect into account in order to interpret the verses correctly.

Concerning the linguistic and stylistic peculiarities of the genre, it is of scholarly and interpretive nature. The lexicon contains text-critical, theological and historical terminology.

Regarding the connection between the genre of exegesis and preaching, the priests should be aware of the main exegetical traditions and theological commentaries on the Bible, e.g. The Anchor Yale Bible Commentary Series. Exegesis is primarily theoretical but the priests provide its practical application. In contrast to the purely academic nature of exegesis, the genre of sermon may add more emotional appeal and personal reflections to the main message of the speech. It helps to complete the main mission of the priest namely to make the teachings understandable and accessible for the broad audience.

1.2.7. Apologetics

A further genre to consider is apologetics. This term is generally understood to mean a field of theological study the main purpose of which consists in the intellectual defense of the truthfulness of Christianity in academic fields (Pickering, 2022). It can be supported with the fact that the word “apologetics” derives from the Greek word *apologētikós* which means “effective in supporting of defense” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, n.d.). However, the usage of this word spread beyond the field of Christian theology and can be applied to presentation of one’s ideological views which are substantiated with rational arguments (Amoran, 2019).

There are various classifications of the apologetic schools. According to Van Vlastuin (2016), they may be divided into four groups namely classical apologetics, evidentialism, revelational apologetics and fideism. These schools’ approaches differ depending on the proportions of strict rationality and personal experiences. Furthermore, those making accusations to Christian community regarding the doctrines of their faith may be persuaded in the wrongfulness of their criticism in different ways since all people are different and different assertions may seem more convincing to them. Consequently, engaging in apologetic reasoning should presuppose the insertion of different apologetic approaches (Van Vlastuin, 2016).

Additionally, for the presentation of the apologetic arguments theologians may rely not only on the Scripture but also on doctrinal formulations established at the Council of Nicaea and other foundational ecclesiastical councils. These conciliar teachings serve as theological and historical foundation for defending core Christian beliefs (Amoran, 2019).

Concerning linguistic and stylistic features of the genre, the style can be defined as persuasive and logical, and the lexicon contains philosophical and theological terminology. It is believed that the main focus is set on the interpretation of the original biblical texts.

Regarding a connection between a genre of sermon and apologetics, priests often adopt apologetical strategies of information delivery, i.e. convergence of emotive sermonic features and logical and evidential aspects of apologetics. Although

those genres serve quite different purposes within Christian discourse, they both provide understanding and application of religious teachings.

Conclusion to Chapter 1

Taking the aforementioned points into account, it can be inferred that Christian religious discourse is characterized by a number of genres. Although there is no unified classification, Fedyshyn (2018) distributes them into four groups according to their function. The classification contains biblical, liturgical, theological, and religious-popular genres.

As the main focus of this study is the sermon, particular attention is given to genres closely related to it. These include homilies, exegesis, apologetics, encyclicals, testimonies, and catechisms. All these texts go beyond simple communication. They are performative in nature and aim to affect the audience emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually. Sermons often integrate elements of explanation (as in exegesis), defense of faith (apologetics), and personal appeal (as in testimonies). Encyclicals are sometimes quoted within sermons, reflecting their shared intent of transmitting doctrinal truth to the public. Catechisms and sermons also overlap in their didactic function, aiming to simplify and reinforce core beliefs.

Psycholinguistics offers insight into how these genres shape perception and belief. Devices such as repetition, rhetorical questions, and formulaic expressions help encode theological messages into memory. Moreover, genres like testimonies and sermons rely on cognitive framing and emotional engagement to connect with diverse audiences. This explains the adaptability and persuasive power of Christian discourse across various contexts.

Those genres connected with preaching suggest the implementation of the number of psychological techniques which enforce easier memorization of complicated information. This may include formulaic expressions, question-answer format, and other rhetorical strategies. Furthermore, psycholinguistics studies how religious discourse evokes emotions and influences belief formation. For example,

such genres as testimonies and sermons rely on cognitive framing to persuade and engage listeners.

Finally, we can summarize that inclusion of the studies of psycholinguistics in religious discourse can shed light on how cognitive and psychological mechanisms shape the perception, interpretation, and effectiveness of different genres of religious discourse.

2. BRITISH CHRISTIAN SERMON AS A KEY MEANS OF COMMUNICATION WITHIN A RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY

2.1. Content and structure of British Christian sermons

For this research we randomly selected 4 examples of sermons from every mentioned above Christian denomination in Britain. First of all, we analysed those from the Church of England.

2.1.1. The Anglican church

Worship of the Church of England has a number of prominent features among which the central position of the Book of Common Prayer (Church of England, 2004). This book was created as an antipode to Roman Catholic Liturgy (Jensen, 2021).

Furthermore, Anglican worship is characterized by a language which is comprehensible for the parishioners, i.e. the language of Anglican liturgy is English in contrast to Catholics whose liturgies are performed in Latin which is archaic and may be difficult for the perception. Moreover, the Scripture written in the native language is the cornerstone for the whole Anglicanism and most church practices and rituals are focused on the scriptural texts (Jensen, 2021).

We analysed such Anglican sermons as *Jesus, the reflection of God's glory, the very imprint of his being: The Bishop of London's sermon at St Paul's Cathedral* by The Rt Revd and Rt Hon Dame Sarah Mullally DBE, *God's strange glory [Weekly sermon for the Sunday before Lent]* by the Venerable Sue Lucas, The Archdeacon of Southend, Sermon preached at the Sung Eucharist on the Feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary 2024: *'Come, you elect of my Father, receive the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the earth'* by The Reverend Mark Birch MVO Precentor, and *Love's Trinity – A sermon for Trinity Sunday* by Charles Jordan.

Regarding the introduction of the selected sermons, they begin either with the biblical verse (Mullally, 2024; Lucas, 2025), reference to specific historical example

to frame the theological discussion (Birch, 2024), or trinitarian invocation (Jordan, 2024).

All of the sermons are marked with explanation, discussion or proving of some theological doctrine. Mullally (2024) expands the topic of Jesus Christ's being a reflection and imprint of God's glory. Lucas (2025) tells about God's omnipotence: *"God is a God not of war, nor yet of power as the world sees it, but of love..."* Birch (2024) emphasizes the theological significance of the Virgin Mary's role in the Incarnation: *"Hers is the body within which the Word was made flesh—Christ's body issued from hers."* Jordan (2024) gives explanation of the biblical passage: *"Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 13 '... and if I have the faith to move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.' The word Paul uses for nothing comes from the understanding of Genesis 1, that God created the heavens and the earth from nothing."*

Another common feature of the selected sermons is sharing of the priest's personal (Mullally, 2024; Jordan 2024) or common for the congregation experience (Lucas, 2025) in order to establish emotional connection with the audience. Furthermore, two of the four sermons were notable for mentioning the current state of the world (Mullally, 2024; Lucas, 2025).

Concerning the Scripture, which is the core of Anglican worship, there are more references to the New Testament than to the Old Testament. This is because Christian congregations consider the New Testament as a fulfilment of God's revelation through Jesus Christ. While the Old Testament provides the foundation for understanding of God's covenant and promises, the New Testament is seen as the ultimate authority, as it records the teachings of Jesus Christ as well as the formulation of the early Church.

The main intents of the sermons vary among information, persuasion, education, and comforting. In her sermon Mullally (2024) aims to inspire, comfort the audience and establish emotional connection through referring to the problems of the current state of the world and vivid descriptions of the biblical events regarding the birth of Jesus. Lucas (2025) intends to comfort the audience through assurance of God's all-encompassing love *"God is a God not of war, nor yet of power as the world*

sees it, but of love...” Birch (2024) informs and persuades the audience through speculation on the theological truthfulness of the holiness of the Virgin Mary. Jordan (2024) intends to educate the audience while discussing the historical background of the sermon’s topic “*This Sunday is Trinity Sunday. It is the only Sunday in the church calendar that celebrates a doctrine and not a person or an event.*”

2.1.2. The Roman Catholic church

Now we turn to the examples of the Roman Catholic church, namely *Sermon for Solemn Evensong and Commemoration of the Carthusian Martyrs, St. John Houghton and companions* by Reverend Vincent Nichols (2011), *Solemn Vespers for Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O’Connor* by the Most Reverend Bernard Longley (2017), *Sermon at St. Andrew’s University Chaplaincy* by John Sherrington (2025), *Like St. Oscar Romero, we are called to be a faithful disciple of Christ: Evensong in St Alban’s Cathedral commemorating St. Óscar Romero* by John Wilson (2024).

Regarding the introduction of the selected sermons, three of them (Nichols, 2011; Longley, 2017; Sherrington, 2025) begin with setting the scene for the sermon and one (Wilson, 2024) begins with a greeting.

All of the sermons defend or explain a particular doctrine, or provide a story about a historical event and explanation of its significance and connection with the Scripture. Nichols (2011) expands on the topic of the presence of the Holy Spirit and His role in our life, Longley (2017) discusses the theological role of Jesus Christ, Sherrington (2025), and finally, Wilson (2024) clarifies Christ’s teaching.

Another integral feature of the Catholic sermons is the references to the Scripture either direct, paraphrased, or implicit. Nichols (2011) mostly quotes it directly, and the quotes from the New Testament are more common (John 15:26, Luke 1:37-38, Luke 23:46, John 20:22, John 6:20) than those from the Old Testament (Isaiah 43:1, Psalm 30:1). Longley (2017) gives exclusively direct quotes from the New Testament (Romans 5:2, Romans 5:1, John 17:21, Romans 5:3-5) without referring to the Old Testament. Sherrington (2025) gives direct quotations 7 times, paraphrased ones - 6 times, and implicitly mentions biblical verses 5 times. The

quotes from the New Testament are more common (Matt 17:4, Luke 9:29, Luke 9:25, Romans 9:16, 1 John 4:19, 2 Corinthians 3:18, Matt 17:1-9, Luke 24:4, Luke 9:1, Luke 23:25, John 18:10-14, Luke 9:54, Acts 1:10) in contrast to the Old Testament (Dan 7:9, Exodus 34:29-35, Exodus 2:11-12, 1 Kings 18:40-41). Wilson (2024) refers exclusively to the New Testament and gives an equal number of direct quotes and implicit references (John 15:5, Matt 25:40, Mark 15:24, John 12:24). As previously mentioned, the New Testament is believed to be more theologically significant.

Furthermore, all of the priests except Wilson refer to other works and documents of religious significance, namely Nichols (2011) refers to *Dialogue of Comfort* by St. Thomas More, *Ut Unum Sint* by the Pope John Paul II, and *Act of Supremacy* by the Parliament of England (1534). Longley (2017) mentions *Gaudium et Spes*, and *Nostra Aetate* by Vatican Council II (1965). Sherrington (2025) mentions *Against the Heresies Book 4* by Irenaeus of Lyons, *Gaudete et Exsultate* by the Pope Francis (2018), *Óscar Romero's Theological Vision: Liberation and the Transfiguration of the Poor* by Edgardo A. Colon-Emeric (2018).

Another common feature is the reference to the priests' personal experience, e.g. Wilson (2024) says the following: "*I first encountered Romero's story when I was 17, long before I became a priest, let alone an Archbishop.*" Moreover, in order to establish emotional connection with the audience the priests frequently refer to the current events, as Sherrington (2025) mentions: "*Today, this recognition is important as often migrants are presented as numbers without a name, refugees as people without a history and family...*" Additionally, the priests frequently resort to vivid descriptions of various tragic events, e.g. "*The exploding bullet penetrated his chest... Romero died in the arms of the people he loved.*" (Wilson, 2024).

Concerning the audience composition, two of the selected sermons (Sherrington, 2025; Wilson, 2024) are aimed at a general congregation while others are aimed at clergy. The last ones have several specific features of the text among which is the reference to "*processing to the Chapel Court*", "*liturgical actions*" (Nichols, 2011) and "*Solemn Vespers*" (Longley, 2017) which in turn points to a structured, ceremonial event.

Concerning the conclusion of the sermons, most of the priests wrap up their speeches with a summary of the main points of the utterance (Longley, 2017; Wilson, 2024).

2.1.3. The Methodist church

The next sermons we analysed were those of the Methodist church, namely *Methodist President's Christmas sermon* (Richardson, 2018), *Celebrate but don't canonise Wesley* (White, 2018), *Feeling low* (Cameron, 2019), *Susanna Wesley 350th anniversary: Sermon at Wesley's Chapel* (Baker, 2019).

Introductions of the sermons are marked with setting the scene for the utterance, e.g. *"Today is an occasion for celebration."* (White, 2003), *"By the time Christmas Eve arrives, many people are ready to pull up the drawbridge: draw the curtains, switch off, and enjoy the holiday with family and friends."* (Richardson, 2018).

Furthermore, in order to establish strong emotional connection the priests refer either to shared experience within the congregation (*"Perhaps, because we are called Methodists, they expect us to be rather dull and dreary – kill joys and party poopers... so there's a tension there between what we are called to be, what, even, we want to be, and what the rest of society sometimes sees in us..."*) (Baker, 2019), or personal one (*"As a child I can remember being disappointed that the glorious Easter hymns were rarely sung after Easter Sunday in the chapel where I worshipped."*) (Cameron, 2020). Moreover, the priests frequently refer to current events in order to make their speeches sound not abstract but relevant to today's world.

Concerning quoting of the Bible, it was discovered that the Methodist priests use it less frequently than Catholics but more often than Anglicans. The New Testament is quoted more times than the Old Testament.

Moreover, the Methodist priests resort to humor and a more informal manner of addressing the audience. Richardson (2018) uses a lot of exclamations, rhetorical questions, humorous relatable for the audience constructions and a range of metaphors not common for the Christian religious discourse, e.g. *"...even if Aunt*

Effie, or Cousin Willie are a bit of a pain, and make you quite glad Christmas comes round only once a year”, “...is not a God who waves a magic wand...” The largest number of rhetorical questions and exclamations we found in the Baker’s (2019) sermon, namely 13 and 6 respectively (“*Did she expect ‘Methodism’ to be born?*”, “*What about us?*”; “*It’s almost laughable, it’s almost a joke!*”, “...what an awesome task!”). Besides, the priest uses irony in his speech: “*It’s almost as if Jesus is pulling her leg – you think I can do something here, Mother? Just watch me!*” Such rhetorical strategy is used to engage the audience into the discourse and make them think on the topic suggested by the priest.

Regarding the persuasive techniques and rhetorical devices, the Methodist priests frequently use such inclusive pronouns as “we” and “us” to foster unity within the congregation. Further, they often use calls to action which are organized in the form of slogans (“*From a changed person to a changed community.*”) (White, 2003), and simple sentences and constructions to make the complex doctrines easier for comprehension.

On the subject of sermons’ content, the prevalence of such concepts as hope in God’s providence, transformation in God’s grace, ongoing work of the Holy Spirit, spiritual meaning of Jesus Christ’s birth, etc. can be observed. In other terms, in their sermons the Methodist priests appeal to concepts of God’s nature and rediscovering one’s salvation in Him.

Concerning a conclusion, in most cases the speakers are wrapping up the sermons with blessing (Cameron, 2020), summarizing the main points (Richardson, 2018), a concluding affirmation (White, 2003), or affirmation of faith: “*Thanks be to God. Amen.*” (Baker, 2019).

2.1.4. The Baptist church

Further sermons analysed in our study originate from the Baptist tradition, namely *Your kingdom come, your will be done* (Gouldbourne, 2018), *Longing for peace* (Dowding, 2020), *God is not fair* (Naylor Davis, 2023), and *The love of God* (Woodman, 2023).

On the subject of introduction, most sermons are not marked with specific opening sentences. However, Woodman (2023) starts his speech with a parable. Moreover, three speakers (Dowding, 2020; Naylor Davis, 2023; Woodman, 2023) make references concerning the current state of the world and mention global events which are supposed to be relatable to the audience; two speakers (Naylor Davis, 2023; Dowding, 2020) share their personal experience to make themselves closer to people on emotional level, particularly Naylor Davis (2023) is quite sincere when telling about her feelings and a bit of nervousness while delivering the speech: *“I must admit to being nervous today, I know your usual preacher and I follow his sermons...”* Additionally, some preachers mention other religious figures, e.g. Woodman (2023) mentions Martyn Lloyd-Jones, and Dowding (2020) refers to Charles Spurgeon, Martin Luther, and John Wesley.

Furthermore, some of the selected sermons contain critique of certain institutional failures within Christianity, e.g. Gouldbourne (2018) advocates for victims of abuse and explains that the phrase “love your neighbour” should not be understood straightforward: *“...it does not mean reconciliation with the abused paying the cost, ... or any of the other horrific things that the church has all too often preaching in the name of peace and forgiveness.”*

Regarding quoting the Bible, in most of the sermons the New Testament is quoted more frequently since, as previously mentioned, it is considered to be the primary source of authority in Christian teachings.

Moreover, all four sermons are intended for a general audience, and the manner of addressing it is informal. In simple terms the preachers clarify various complex doctrines and make the religion less abstract and more relatable to people. Among the core topics are the omnipotence and unconditional love of God, our salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ, the importance of praying and seeking the Kingdom of Heaven, etc. Consequently, the main message of the Baptist sermons may be stated in the following way: any human effort alone is insufficient since true strength and salvation come exclusively from God.

Furthermore, all of the speakers use strategies of audience engagement, i.e. rhetorical questions: “*That’s 72 years. 72 years.*” (Dowding, 2020), calls to action: “*Think about it*” (Gouldbourne, 2018), repetitions: “*A place where we must know one another. A place where we must serve one another.*” (Naylor Davis, 2023), exclamations: “*The sad truth is that most people are not at peace!*” (Woodman, 2023), etc. Besides, in order to foster unity within the congregation every preacher uses inclusive pronouns “we”, “us”, “our”.

Additionally, it was discovered that in their sermons none of the speakers use any special closing phrase such as “amen”, “thank be to God”, etc.

2.1.5. The United Reformed church

The last congregation which we analysed is the United Reformed Church. It should be mentioned that due to the scarcity of available transcripts we included multiple sermons from the same preacher. We chose the following sermons: *Friend, move up to a better place* (Templeton, 2019), *The beauty of God* (Templeton, 2020), *Sermon preached at service marking 100 years since the ordination of Constance Coltman and celebrating women’s ministry* (Welch, 2017), *Sermon for the 20th anniversary service of Woking United Reformed Church* (Bradbury, 2025).

First of all, in all of the selected sermons the priests start with setting the scene for their speech through storytelling or paraphrased reference to the biblical events, e.g. “*Luke’s weaving of his account of the Jesus story hangs heavy with a dark cloud*” (Bradbury, 2025).

Furthermore, in order to make their sermons relatable for the audience and evoke emotional resonance the priests refer either to their personal experience (Welch, 2017), or to the current problems in the world (Bradbury, 2025; Templeton, 2020), or to both (Templeton, 2019).

Compared to other Christian denominations, the preachers of the United Reformed Church less frequently refer to the passages of the Scripture. It was discovered that, compared to the Old Testament, the New Testament is quoted more often, especially the Gospel of Luke (in general is quoted 10 times). Moreover,

references to other works of religious significance is not quite popular among the priests of the United Reformed Church, and only Templeton (2019; 2020) refers to some, namely *The Parables of Grace* by Capon, *Psalms* by George AF Knight, *Church Dogmatics* by Karl Barth, and *Confessions* by Augustine. Such remarks may be used in order to support the arguments that priests give in their sermons.

For deeper audience engagement, the speakers often ask rhetorical questions the number of which can range from 1 to 7 pieces per sermon. Besides, there are a lot of calls to action and exclamations in the sermons, which are used to motivate and encourage people, e.g. *“Let us, then, share in God’s renewing work, showing the loveless that they are loved and therefore beautiful”* (Templeton, 2020), *“These issues of what seems like a departure from tradition don’t always get an easy passage!”* (Welch, 2017).

Moreover, it should be mentioned that all preachers of the United Reformed Church as well as preachers of other denominations frequently use inclusive pronouns such as “we”, “us”, etc.

The conclusions of the sermons vary between affirmation of faith (Templeton, 2019), a prayer (Templeton, 2020), a summary of the mentioned points (Welch, 2017), or a word “Amen” (Bradbury, 2025).

Regarding the sermons’ content, such concepts as importance of selflessness in one’s actions (Templeton, 2019), trust in God to fight anxiety (Templeton, 2020), importance of role models in everyday life as well as in church life (Welch, 2017), the colossal significance of Jesus’s birth for salvation of the whole world (Bradbury, 2025) are covered in selected speeches. In other terms, the priests of the United Reformed Church emphasize key aspects of Christian discipleship in their sermons.

Based on the data obtained and the statistics presented in Appendix 1, we have reached a number of conclusions. First of all, regarding the structural peculiarities of the selected sermons, we discovered that any kind of special introduction is more typical for Anglican sermons while others don’t include any greetings, blessings, etc. in the beginning and instead they immediately provide a background for the main topic of a speech.

Moreover, we came to the conclusion that the speakers of most denominations tend to mention other religious figures in their speeches which brings us back to the Aristotelian triad, namely to ethos. This strategy helps make the preacher's words more credible and supported by centuries of church experience.

Furthermore, in order to establish strong emotional connections with the audience, most preachers refer to shared or personal experience as well as mention the current state of the world. Among the British Christian denominations, preachers of the Methodist church more often refer to shared experience. Concerning personal experience, which is Aristotelian pathos, it is referenced more frequently in the Roman Catholic and Methodist churches. On the subject of mentioning the current events in the world, it is more common for the speakers of the Roman Catholic, Methodist and United Reformed Church to draw parallels between modern global events, which are relatable for the audience, and biblical events. As a result, the religion is not comprehended as something distant and ephemeral but instead it becomes more personable.

In terms of conclusions, the usage of special endings is not typical for most of the selected sermons and the preachers tend to wrap up their speeches with the short summary of aforementioned points.

With regard to the biblical quoting, the Scripture is equally referenced both directly and indirectly (Appendix 2). However, the usage of direct quotations is more common in the Roman Catholic church. Additionally, the New Testament is quoted more often in all denominations. Therefore, a flexible approach to biblical engagement may be seen. This may indicate that preachers adapt their style based on the purpose of the sermon, namely their aim for precise scriptural authority or interpretative application.

2.1.6. Rhetorical devices and communicative style in sermons

Now we move to the other audience engagement strategies. First of all, we should mention rhetorical questions which are used by priests in order to push the

audience to further reflection on the topic of the sermon and lay the foundation for changes in people's worldview and actions. Such rhetorical devices more frequently appear in Anglican, Baptist and United Reformed churches. The preachers of the Roman Catholic, Baptist and United Reformed churches more often call their audience to action and the priests of the Methodist church tend to use exclamations in their utterances. All these rhetorical devices attract the people's attention and keep them engaged, constantly keeping their attention sharp.

Regarding a manner of speaking, Anglican, Roman Catholic and United Reformed Church sermons tend to be more formal due to their liturgical traditions and structured approach to worship whereas Baptists and Methodists tend to use informal manner which may align with their emphasis on personal engagement and accessibility of biblical knowledge.

Additionally, we discovered that sermons may be delivered to various social groups. They are primarily addressed to general congregations. However, Roman Catholic sermons show a significant exception, i.e. half of the analyzed Catholic sermons were delivered to clergy on special occasions. This may suggest that Catholic preaching sometimes serves an internal instructional purpose and reinforces doctrine among clergy rather than addresses laity.

Besides, in this research we identified a range of main topics covered by the preachers among which the omnipotence of God, His unconditional love for humanity, the holiness of the Virgin Mary, the complex nature of the Holy Trinity, the flawlessness of God's plan, finding joy in hope in God, the importance of remaining faithful regardless of circumstances, the significance of the birth of Jesus Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit, love for our neighbor, the importance of following the example of Jesus Christ, etc.

Overall, it can be concluded that the most significant intent of all selected sermons lies in appealing to the audience's feelings through various rhetorical devices, clarifying sophisticated theological principles, comforting and encouraging people to make a contribution to their spiritual development and living according to the Bible.

2.2. Language and stylistic features of British Christian sermon

First of all, we discovered that sermon language varies significantly across British Christian denominations. Some priests prefer to use archaisms and Latin-derived expressions while others opt for simple and more accessible language to ensure comprehension across different audiences which also fosters a welcoming and engaging atmosphere. As previously mentioned, Anglican, Roman Catholic and United Reformed Churches preaching is characterized by a more formal style of delivering information which reflects their structured theological discourse, e.g. *“And, despite all the struggles of ecumenical dialogue, it was not a misplaced hope that made him accept his appointment as the Catholic Co-chairman of the second phase of ARCIC...”* (Longley, 2017). Nevertheless, an informal tone of communication is not alien to Methodist and Baptist churches, e.g. *“...a national holiday can be a rare opportunity to see each other ... (even if Aunt Effie, or Cousin Willie are a bit of a pain, and make you quite glad Christmas comes round only once a year)”* (Richardson, 2018). Those tendencies are connected to broader denominational traditions, i.e. formal sermons may contain longer sentences, traditional terminology, and structured argumentation, whereas informal sermons often incorporate simpler language, irony, anecdotes, metaphors which are not typical for religious discourse, and direct engagement with the audience.

Concerning the metaphors which are unusual for the traditional Christian discourse, Richardson’s sermon serves as a good illustration for this as well. In his utterance he uses such metaphorical comparisons as *“For the God who crept into our lives ... is not a God who waves a magic wand...”* and *“What a C.V.!”* (regarding the biography of Jesus Christ). The first phrase is most likely used to debunk misconceptions that God solves problems instantly or unrealistically. Also, the phrase contrasts the omnipotent and purposeful nature of God with the human-created image of a whimsical magician who could entertain the audience with his unexpectedness. The second phrase is an example of using the modern job-related term “C.V.”

(Curriculum Vitae) to describe the life of Christ. It introduces contemporary and secular vocabulary into a sacred narrative. Such stylistic devices create a contrast and humanize the image of the second person of the Holy Trinity in a relatable and amusing way. However, this choice of language and stylistic content does not exclude the value or doctrinal truth of the priest's words. On the contrary, humour and novelty help engage contemporary audiences particularly those who are not familiar with or distant from traditional theological expressions.

Another aspect of sermon-going is the Biblical and religious language. As mentioned before, in most cases the preachers use direct quotations of the Scripture which provide validity and doctrinal grounding to their words. People hear something which was said by God Himself or written under the influence of the Holy Spirit which results in their total obedience to the authority of a higher power. However, the priests of some denominations stick to traditional and more formal interpretation of biblical verses while others prefer rephrasing such quotes in modern and informal terms. An example of this can be found in Jill Baker's (2019) sermon where she explains one of Jesus's miracles, namely turning water into wine. She uses ironic style which makes the image of Jesus Christ closer to people: *"Whatever Mary expected, I can't think that it was this. ... It's almost as if Jesus is pulling her leg – you think I can do something here, Mother? Just watch me!"*

Furthermore, the priests of all selected denominations frequently use faith-related vocabulary, e.g. *"Incarnation"*, *"martyr"*, *"blessed"*, *"God"*, *"gospel"*, *"covenant"*, *"sin"*, *"psalmist"*, *"holiness"*, etc. The choice of this terminology creates a sense of unity and belonging to something greater among parishioners.

Moreover, the core figure of all Christianity is Jesus Christ, the second figure of the Holy Trinity, has a range of titles used regarding Him, e.g. *"Jesus"*, *"Jesus Christ"*, *"Jesus Christ our Lord"*, *"Lord"*, *"Christ"*, *"Prince of Peace"*, *"the Glorified Christ"*, *"The Son of Man"*, *"The Son of God"*, *"The New Tent"*, *"the Face of God"*, *"The Son"*, *"The Human One"*, *"The Beloved"*, *"The Beloved of God"*, etc. Additionally, few indirect, descriptive references instead of His proper name, e.g. *"the very revelation of God"*, *"that human being who stands before Pilate"*.

Regarding reference to His childhood, He is called “*the baby in Simeons arms*”, “*a small baby*”, “*Christ-child*”, etc.

Another essential feature is the use of Latin. For centuries this language was considered to be a language of Christian scholarship and liturgy. Nowadays priests of various denominations, especially Roman Catholicism, include Latin phrases in their sermons, e.g. “*In te, Domine, speravi*” - “*In Thee, O Lord, Have I Hoped*” (Nichols, 2011), “*Gaudium et Spes*” - “*Joy and Hope*” (Longley, 2017). Such inclusions add an atmosphere of solemnity and formality, and reinforce continuity with historical church teachings. Additionally, Latin phrases can be used stylistically to induce a sense of mystery or reverence, particularly in sermons that focus on historical reflections on faith. However, such linguistic choices are not found in sermons of such denominations as Anglican, Methodist, Baptist, and United Reformed Church. Those churches deliberately avoid language that might alienate modern audiences and instead prioritize simplicity and inclusivity in order to make their utterances more accessible and comprehensible.

Building on the analysis of the linguistic features of sermons, it is important to mention the role of sensory language. The priests of various denominations frequently appeal to the senses of the audience, i.e. they provide vivid descriptions of sound, touch, sight, and feeling. For example, the Roman Catholic preacher Vincent Nichols (2011) creates a special auditory image while delivering the speech: “...*the monks experienced the voice of a gentle breeze, which, though no more than a sweetly whispered murmur...*” Moreover, the Methodist priest Jill Baker (2019) provides an olfactory sensation imagery: “...*we can still smell the frankincense...*” Such linguistic choices allow preachers to emotionally engage with the audience, create a more immersive experience and draw the listener’s attention to the main message on a deeper level.

Furthermore, sermons serve one or several purposes, e.g. inspiring, encouraging, persuading, instructing, informing, evoking strong emotional responses, etc. which directly influences a choice of stylistic techniques. Although there is some kind of intersection in the usage of the same rhetorical strategies for different goals,

we can still see a predominance of ones against others. In order to inspire the congregation the preachers use simple sentences which may be organized in a form of slogan, e.g. *“From a changed person to a changed community.”* (White, 2003). Another significant method of uplifting the audience’s spirit is the usage of metaphors which make abstract theological doctrines more comprehensible, e.g. *“She carried the bridegroom; and through her the whole church would become his bride...”* (Birch, 2024).

Regarding persuasion of the audience, the Christian preachers often resort to such rhetorical devices as repetitions and exclamations. Repetitions play a crucial role in embedding core ideas into the listener’s mind and strengthening their impact. These rhetorical tools enhance the sense of rhythm, memorability, and persuasive appeal. A good example of such a device can be seen in one of the Baptist sermons conducted by Nalor Devis (2023) *“A place where we must know one another. A place where we must serve one another. A place where... A place where...”* This particular abstract is a representation of anaphora in which we can observe the speaker’s attempt to create cadence which mirror biblical poetry and psalmic structures where repetition intensifies the delivery’s flow.

Furthermore, it was discovered that closer to the end of the sermon the preachers more often use such figures of speech as anaphora and anadiplosis. The good illustration of it can be observed in the Methodist President Christmas sermon conducted by Neil Richardson (2018) where the last but one paragraph includes exclusively sentences with repetitions, i.e. *“... the Christian faith calls grace. Grace is ...”*; *“You can find it ...”*, *“You can experience...”*; *“That is why the world...”*, *“That is why we...”*. The first pair of sentences is an example of anadiplosis, and the next two pairs are examples of anaphora. Anaphora frequently mimics scriptural or liturgical patterns which are resulted in creating the sense of spiritual participation. Additionally, such devices are used in the Psalms, prophetic books, and even Jesus’s own teachings, e.g. *“Blessed are...”* in the Beatitudes (Matt 5:3-10). Concerning the use of anadiplosis, it creates a soothing and mantra-like rhythm, and can be found in the Scripture, namely Romans 5:3-5.

On the subject of exclamations, they can be used to convey specific emotion and emphasize key messages. Their spontaneous and emphatic nature helps preachers create a sense of urgency, immediacy, passion, and conviction in their delivery, which make the message more sincere. For example, in her sermon, Baker (2019) uses the following phrase for interaction with the audience: *“I think I’ll let you tell me the answer to that!”* In such a way she encourages people to reflect on her previous statement which brings dynamic in the sermon.

Additionally, some priests of Roman Catholic and Methodist churches directly address the audience by using such pronouns as “you” and “your”, e.g. *“No doubt you know...”* (Nichols, 2011), *“You can experience it...”* (Richardson, 2018). Moreover, as previously mentioned, the preachers use such inclusive pronouns as “we”, “us”, and “our” in all selected sermons. From a stylistic and linguistic perspective these pronouns contribute to inclusivity, engagement, and persuasion in several ways. The pronouns “we”, “us”, “our” establish a shared identity between the preacher and the audience while pointing out collective faith, common experiences, and shared beliefs. “You” and “your” form direct interaction and appeal to personal reflections.

Moreover, concerning the use of contrast and tension, the priests quite often resort to such methods of persuasion by using emotionally evocative vocabulary. For example, the Methodist preacher Helen Cameron (2020) states that in *“loss and pain”* people will find the true God and His *“grace and revelation”*. As a result, she creates a contrast and a sort of paradox and suggests a counterintuitive idea about Christians’ unusual attitude toward grief and suffering.

In terms of evoking intense emotions, the speakers use vivid imagery and accompany their storytelling with detailed descriptions and emotionally charged lexicon especially when their goal is to create an atmosphere of either extreme joy and spiritual enthusiasm or sorrow and fear. The sermon conducted by Mark Birch (2024) serves as a good illustration of this. Telling people about the significance of the Holy Mary’s image in Christian theology, he uses such epithets as *“eternal embrace”*, *“a disembodied hope”*, *“divine purpose”*, *“heavenly glory”*. All of them

instill a sense of sacred sublimity and introduce people into some sort of a trance. The audience is captured by the beauty of the Kingdom of Heaven and perspectives of eternal living near God. As a result, the listeners become more sensitive and vulnerable to any further information delivered by the priest.

On the other hand, John Wilson (2024) resorts to graphic description of violence and horrors which were faced by the Christian in San Salvador during Oscar Romero's lifetime especially he uses such epithets as "*his bloodied body*", "*massive internal bleeding*", "*murdered countless innocent people*", etc. This stylistic technique helps people easily empathize with the figures mentioned in the priest's story and creates a sense of fear. Such images stick in mind and make the sermon's message harder to forget. Hearing about suffering and persecution of Christians based on hatred towards them, the audience starts feeling the urgent need to unite and defend their beliefs.

Another significant rhetorical device used for a range of purposes in British Christian sermons is rhetorical questions. They may be used to draw the listeners' attention, tease the audience, make them reconsider their views on life, emphasize the main points of the utterance, or reinforce moral lessons by making the audience mentally affirm the answer. For example, in his sermon the Roman Catholic priest Nichols (2011) provides reasoned evidence of the influence of the Holy Spirit and then asks the listeners: "*Was this not another manifestation of the Holy Spirit's work?*". The audience mentally responds in the affirmative, and thus the information and doctrines of the teaching are imprinted more deeply in their memory.

Another illustration can be seen in the sermon conducted by the Methodist speaker, Baker (2019), where she says: "*Are we up for a transformation beyond our imagining?*". In such a way she inspires people and encourages them to develop spiritually. One more example is the speech conducted by Naylor Davis (2023) where she mentions the parable of the labourers in the vineyard and after that says: "*I was struck because I read it and it does seem a little unfair if I'm honest. Anyone else kind of feel for the 'early' day workers?*". She appeals to people's feelings and some of

them may indeed relate to her spiritual experience. As a result, it creates a bond between the speaker and the listeners.

What is more, unlike the previous examples, preachers can ask rhetorical questions after which they provide immediate answers. An illustration for this can be found in the sermon *The Beauty of God* conducted by Julian Templeton (2020), namely “*But how does God do this? He does it through his Word and Spirit...*” Although this rhetorical strategy fosters audience engagement, it helps the priest not only provide food for thought but guide reflections of their parishioners.

Moreover, the Christian sermons are marked with the use of antithesis. For example, Anglican preacher Sarah Mullally (2024) employs this figure of speech: “*Everything that exists has been brought into being by God – nothing is beyond the horizon of God’s creativity and love.*” Such a statement appeals to the very essence of the Universe and makes a good impression on parishioners. By listening to simple and structured affirmations, the audience feels less anxious since a sense of security is set. What is more, binary oppositions serve to dramatize key ideas. Nevertheless, mentioning of extremes, stimulates better and stronger information imprinting into memory.

Regarding sentence structure in the sermons, it varies depending on the message contained in it. For example, if the author clarifies some difficult theological doctrines, e.g. the nature of God, they may tend to use complex long sentences in order to give detailed explanation. For example, in his sermon “The Beauty of God”, Julian Templeton (2020) says: “*And if such a person were able to offer us comfort when we were afraid, and give us confidence when we were despondent, we might rightly say that this person had done something beautiful for us.*” In such a way the preacher of the United Reformed Church brings people to the main idea of the speech by providing a hypothetical scenario and illustrating the transformative impact of God’s presence and support.

On the other hand, some priests prefer to use simple short sentences since sometimes a large accumulation of words in a sentence can cause confusion. A good illustration of this can be seen in the sermon conducted by Anglican priest Charles

Jordan (2024) where he says “*You participate in the Light, the Life, and the Love of the Trinity.*” and “*For God is Love.*” The preacher relies on concise and authoritative phrasing to deliver a profound theological truth.

Concerning grammatical structures used by Christian preachers, a number of sermons are marked with the use of apposition. It extends the meaning of the sentences and clarifies the main points of the statement. For example, one of the Anglican preachers says: “*...we become the character — the imprint — of Christ...*” (Mullally, 2024). In such a way the speaker not only arranges her thoughts into a metaphor but gives a more detailed explanation of this symbolic and imaginary expression.

Furthermore, we discovered the priests’ tendency to use parallelism in the selected sermons. An example of it can be found in the sermon conducted by Julian Templeton (2019). Telling about an episode from the Bible, namely Luke 14:1-14, the speaker puts parallel constructions “*Those who exalt themselves will be humbled*” and “*Those who humble themselves will be exalted*” at the end of nearby paragraphs. It is considered that information placed at the beginning as well as at the end of the text is better remembered. Additionally, this stylistic device creates a rhythm which may reflect the structure of some biblical texts. As a result, at the subconscious level the audience may perceive the information received as more authoritative, reliable and veritable.

Another prominent feature of sermon syntax is the use of such rhetorical devices as suspense. An illustration of this can be found in another Templeton’s (2020) sermon *The Beauty of God* where he says the following: “*The psalmist is praying—and the whole psalm is a prayer—that despite the threat posed by opponents and enemies, there is One to whom he, and we, may look for strength and shelter.*” The suspense is reached by postponing the core message of the sentence and the use of subordinating conjunctions “that” and “despite”. This form of thought organizing mirrors a flow of many Christian prayers, i.e. firstly, there is tension, and then resolution.

Moreover, we detected another figure of speech which is quite popular in British Christian sermons, namely inversion. It occurs more frequently in sermons of the Methodist and United Reformed churches (Baker, 2019; Templeton, 2019, 2020). This is exemplified by the sentence “*Thanks be to God*”. In contrast to a more modern variant of this phrase (“We give thanks to God”), the priests of previously mentioned denominations put the word “thanks” at the beginning and use “be” as a linking verb which resulted in establishing a more formal and elevated atmosphere. This expression combines both syntactic inversion and traditional liturgical register.

Conclusion to Chapter 2

In terms of structure, Anglican sermons often begin with formal greetings and blessings, while other denominations tend to start directly with the main topic. Most sermons across denominations end with a brief summary rather than an elaborate conclusion (Appendix 1).

Regarding the Aristotelian triad, ethos is reflected in references to religious figures and tradition. Pathos is expressed through personal stories and parallels between current events and biblical narratives, especially in Roman Catholic, Methodist, and United Reformed sermons (Appendix 1).

Scripture is used both directly and indirectly, with Roman Catholic sermons favoring direct quotes. The New Testament is predominant across all denominations, showing flexible engagement with biblical texts (Appendix 2). Common sermon themes include God’s power and love, the Virgin Mary’s holiness, the Trinity, hope, faith, the Holy Spirit, and following Jesus’ example.

Stylistically, Anglican, Roman Catholic, and United Reformed sermons are more formal, using traditional vocabulary and complex sentences. Methodist and Baptist sermons are more informal, using humor, modern language, and simpler syntax (Appendix 3, 4).

Lexically, sermons are rich in biblical terms and titles for Jesus, and often use sensory language to enhance imagery. Sermons serve multiple purposes such as

teaching, inspiring, persuading and employ various rhetorical devices accordingly, often overlapping in their use.

Syntactically, longer sentences help explain complex ideas, while shorter ones ensure clarity. Paragraphs often include parallelism, suspense, and inversion to mirror biblical style and maintain liturgical rhythm.

CONCLUSION

Taking into account the data obtained, we come to the conclusion that the genre of sermon plays a crucial role in shaping the worldview of modern British Christians. In the United Kingdom Christianity is the most popular religious system with a long history of development (House of Commons Library, 2023).

Besides, it was discovered that spreading of the specific religious belief requires understanding of the principles of the human psyche since some metaphysical concepts are more comprehensible for people due to the specificity of our perception. Consequently, preachers should resort to the scientific achievements of such field as psycholinguistics in order to make their speeches as clear and convincing for the general audience as possible. What is more, a very lexeme “word” may be considered a core of the whole Christian religion since the second hypostasis of the Holy Trinity, namely Jesus Christ, the Son, is described with this term (1 John 5:7). It may result in placing the essence of linguistics at the heart of the teaching.

Moreover, a perception of language within the Christian community differs from the perception of the same linguistic units among people who do not belong to any religious organisation. This fact should be taken into account by preachers while writing a sermon or conducting it in public. Regarding the spreading of Christianity and attracting new followers through preaching, at last centuries the church tends to make the teaching more accessible to a laity. The peculiarities of age, gender, social status of the parishioners are taken into consideration which reflects in the choice of lexical units, figures of speech, etc.

Furthermore, it was detected that the genre of sermon is connected to a number of other genres of religious texts. The preachers frequently refer to various testimonies, encyclicals, etc. to make their own speeches more substantive and support them with a number of irrefutable evidence from different authoritative and respected resources.

For our research we selected 20 written sermons from 5 main Christian churches in the United Kingdom. According to Religion Media Centre (2018), the

most popular denominations are the following: the Anglican, the Roman Catholic, the Methodist, the Baptist, and the United Reformed churches.

Moreover, the sermons are characterized with a range of structural and content-related organisational features. It was discovered that special introduction and special conclusion is not typical for the majority of sermons, however, the Anglican priests tend to use special phrases at the beginning of the sermon and the Methodist and URC priests close their speeches with fixed expressions. Then, we detected some topics and references used in the sermon which include mentioning other religious figures, references to shared experience, references to personal experience, mentioning the current state of the world (Appendix 1). Additionally, the general tone of the speeches varies between formal and informal with a significant predominance of the former (Appendix 4).

For highlighting such key topics as hope, love, faithfulness, omnipotence of God, His plan, the Trinity, Christ's birth, the Virgin Mary's holiness, the Holy Spirit and His work, and following Jesus' example, the priest use a great number of linguistic means such as faith-related lexemes, sensory language, Latin expressions, etc., as well as rhetorical devices, e.g. humor, rhetorical questions, anaphoras, anadiplosis, exclamations, etc. (Appendix 3). Concerning the Scripture references, the vast majority of preachers prefer direct quotations, particularly the New Testament in contrast to the Old Testament (Appendix 2).

In general, it was identified that the choice of the sermon content and structure depends on the denomination of the priest conducting it. Those of the Anglican, Roman Catholic, and United Reformed Churches prefer a more formal manner of addressing the audience, which may include longer and more complex sentences, sophisticated lexicon, etc. On the other hand, the Methodist and the Baptist preachers fill their sermons with anecdotes, secular vocabulary, direct engagement, etc. This reflects the established traditions within the particular denomination and their worldview.

Regarding the prospects for future research, it may include comparative analysis of British Christian sermons with sermons from other cultural traditions, e.g.

American sermons. Moreover, research could focus on sermons addressed to special audiences, e.g. children, clergy, non-believers, analysing how language is adjusted to suit that particular audience.

РЕЗЮМЕ

У сучасному світі релігійна комунікація залишається актуальним та впливовим інструментом передачі ідей, духовних цінностей та моралі. Одним із найпоширеніших жанрів християнського дискурсу є проповідь – монологічний вид мовлення, спрямований на переконання, навчання, натхнення та емоційний вплив на аудиторію. У своєму дослідженні ми провели лінгвостилістичний аналіз британських християнських проповідей, зокрема зосередившись на їх жанрових, структурних, лексичних та риторичних особливостях. Актуальність цього дослідження зумовлена необхідністю глибшого розуміння механізмів впливу релігійного мовлення, а також недостатнім рівнем вивченості англійських християнських проповідей у вітчизняному мовознавстві.

У теоретичному розділі розглянуто поняття релігійного дискурсу, його специфіку та функціональні характеристики. Окрема увага була приділена психолінгвістичному аспекту релігійного мовлення, зокрема механізмам обробки й інтерпретації релігійних текстів, впливу емоційно забарвленої лексики на формування настанов слухача. Було визначено, що релігійний дискурс здатен активізувати глибинні психологічні структури, викликати емпатію, моральну рефлексію та мобілізувати волю до дії, що є важливим чинником його впливовості. Було проаналізовано суміжні жанри, такі як гомілії, літургійні молитви, енцикліки, катехізиси, екзегези, релігійні свідчення та апологетика. У результаті аналізу було встановлено, що ці жанри, хоча й відрізняються за структурою, метою та цільовою аудиторією, мають спільні лінгвістичні риси: використання біблійних алюзій, формул благословення, імперативів, інверсій, анафор, архаїчної лексики, а також прагнення до максимальної переконливості.

У практичній частині дослідження було проаналізовано корпус з 20 автентичних британських християнських проповідей, що представляють такі деномінації: Англійська, Римо-католицька, Методистська, Баптистська та Об'єднана реформатська церкви. Основною метою аналізу було виявлення лінгвостилістичних засобів, що використовуються для досягнення головних

комунікативних цілей проповіді: навчити, надихнути, переконати та втішити слухачів.

Нами було встановлено, що структурні особливості проповідей варіюються залежно від конфесійної належності. Англійські проповіді зазвичай мають чітко виражений вступ, який включає привітання пастви, заклик до молитви, іноді коротке нагадування про священність моменту зібрання. Такий вступ виконує функцію налаштування вірян на сприйняття сакрального змісту. У той же час проповіді Римо-католицької, Методистської, Баптистської та Об'єднаної реформатської церков частіше починаються одразу з оголошення теми, актуального питання або біблійного уривку. Такий прямий вступ дозволяє зосередити увагу аудиторії на головному посланні проповіді вже з перших хвилин.

Посилання на слова інших релігійних діячів виконує важливу функцію апеляції до авторитету (*ethos*), підвищуючи довіру до сказаного, допомагає закріпити ідеї проповідника в усталеному каноні віри. Це створює відчуття спадковості, єдності віросповідної традиції, де сучасна проповідь не є чимось новим, а слугує продовженням Божого послання, вже викладеного в Писанні.

Крім того, особистий й колективний досвід, а також згадування актуальних подій, виконують функцію емоційного залучення аудиторії (*pathos*). Проповідники активно використовують приклади з власного життя або життєвих ситуацій, близьких до досвіду пересічного слухача. Таке "олюднення" духовної істини робить її ближчою до реальності, яку переживає слухач, сприяючи виникненню емпатії. Згадування актуальних соціальних чи політичних подій (наприклад, пандемії, війни) також допомагає укорінити релігійне послання в теперішньому моменті, демонструючи його релевантність та відповідь на виклики сучасності.

У проповідях широко використовуються як прямі, так і непрямі цитати зі Святого Письма. У Римо-католицькій традиції переважає пряме цитування. У всіх деномінаціях частіше використовується Новий Завіт, що свідчить про

фокус на євангельських істинах та постаті Ісуса Христа. Гнучке використання цитат демонструє адаптивність стилю проповіді.

Серед риторичних засобів найчастіше трапляються риторичні запитання, анафора, анадиплозис, вигуки, порівняння, метафори, які створюють емоційний резонанс та допомагають донести складні богословські істини.

У церквах з глибокими літургійними традиціями, а саме в Англіканській, Католицькій, та Об'єднаній реформатській церкві, проповіді виголошуються у формальному стилі, тоді як Баптистська та Методистська традиції демонструють більш неформальну, розмовну манеру, що відповідає їх прагненню до доступності богословських ідей для простих вірян.

Також було з'ясовано, що переважна більшість проповідей адресована широкій аудиторії, однак у Католицькій традиції виявлено значну частку проповідей, спрямованих до духовенства. Це свідчить про наявність внутрішньоцерковного повчального компонента, спрямованого на зміцнення віровчення серед кліру.

Тематично тексти охоплюють широкий спектр християнських ідей: всемогутність Бога, Його любов, жертва Ісуса Христа, роль Духа Святого, надія, прощення, значення Різдва, любов до ближнього, святість Діви Марії. Ці теми не лише відображають основи християнського віровчення, але й відповідають на запити сучасної людини, що шукає духовної опори.

У результаті дослідження було доведено, що британські християнські проповіді є багаторівневими текстами, які поєднують богословську глибину, риторичне мистецтво та прагматичну спрямованість. Лінгвостилістичні особливості проповідей залежать як від конфесійної належності, так і від цільової аудиторії, що свідчить про адаптивність релігійного дискурсу до умов сучасного комунікативного середовища. Робота створює підґрунтя для подальших досліджень у сфері прагматики та стилістики релігійного мовлення, зокрема в контексті міжкультурної комунікації, перекладу, та медіа-релігії.

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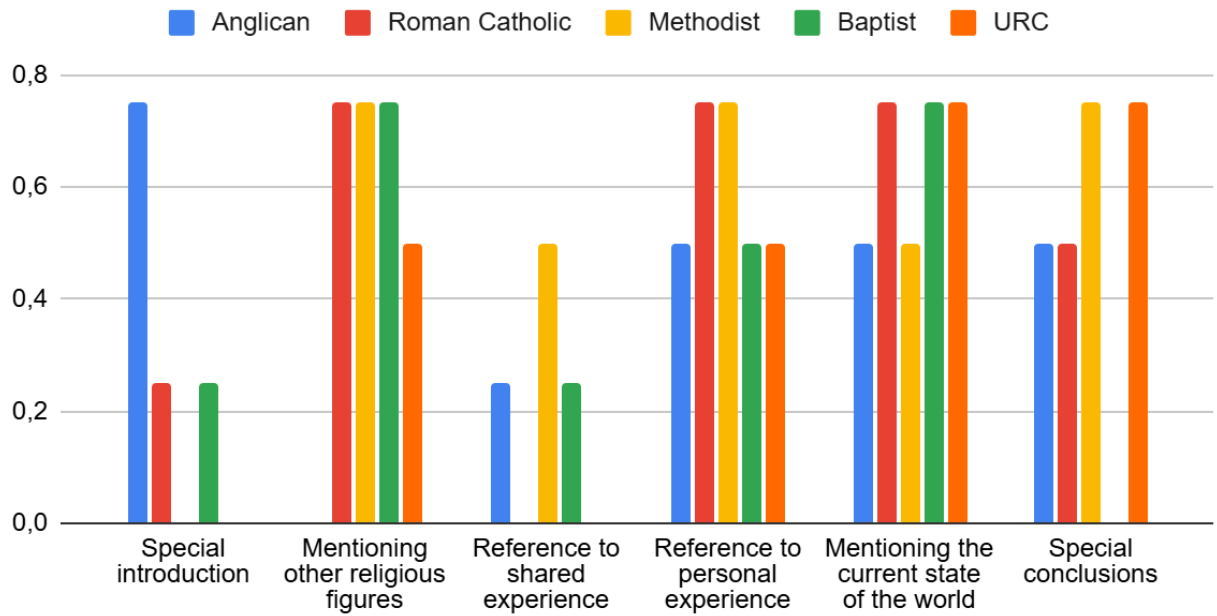
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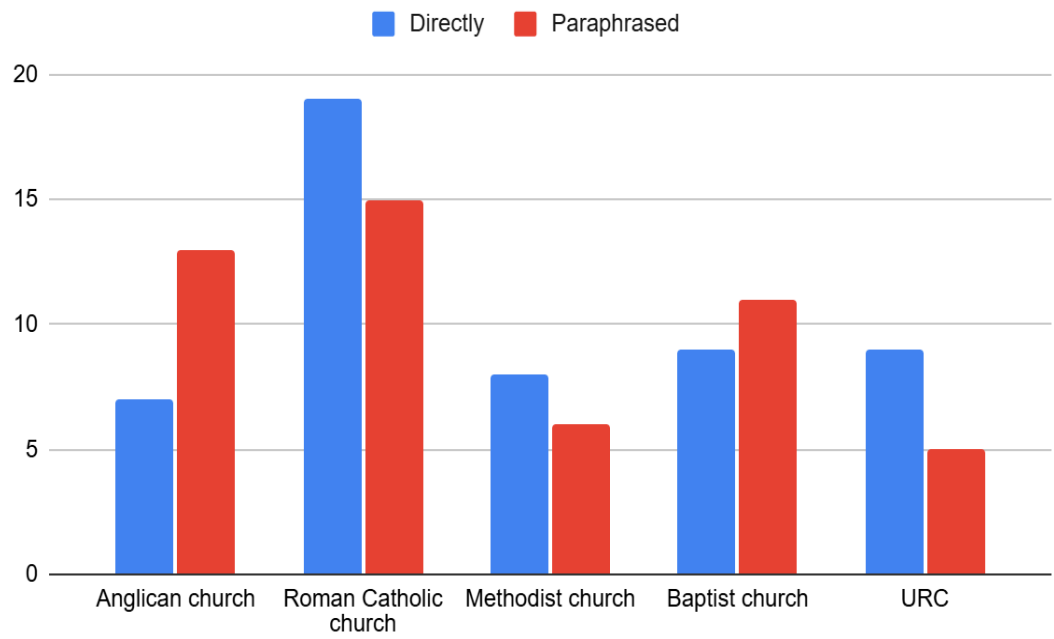
APPENDIX 1

Frequency of structural and content-related features in sermons



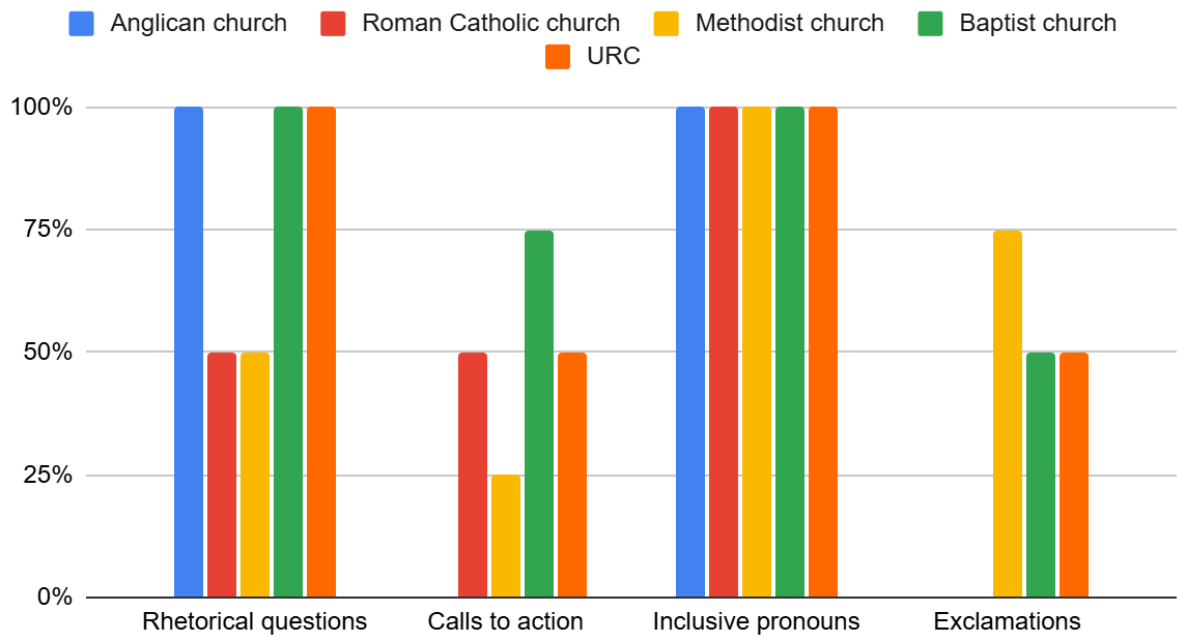
APPENDIX 2

How is the Bible quoted?



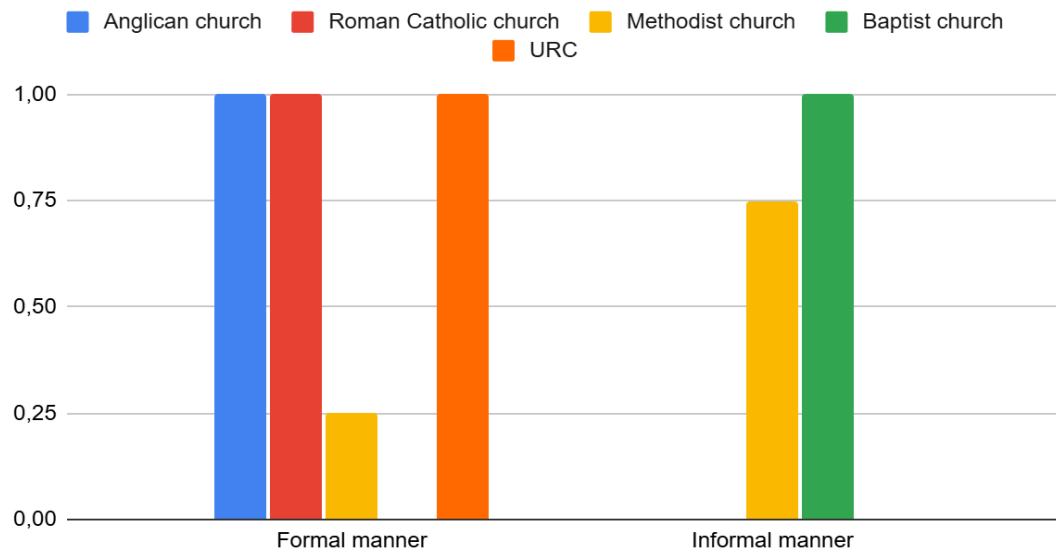
APPENDIX 3

Frequency of audience engagement devices in sermons



APPENDIX 4

Speech style in semon delivery



APPENDIX 5

Illustrative example of a sermon of the Anglican church

‘Come, you elect of my Father, receive the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the earth’

The Reverend Mark Birch MVO *Precentor*

Thursday, 15th August 2024 at 5.00 PM

“Hidden away in a small chapel just around that corner, miraculously preserved from the iconoclast’s chisel, is a neat little ceiling boss of a woman, hands folded in prayer, being borne upwards, surrounded by the faces of delighted angels. Of all the images that attracted the Reformers’ ire, images of Mary entering into heavenly glory were among the foremost. Such a fond notion was not to be found in Scripture; neither, they felt, should it be found in church. The finest medieval art and hope was routinely chipped away to dust. The reason the one around the corner survived is anyone’s guess.

If you ever get the chance to walk slowly from the west door of the Frari Basilica in Venice, through the Quire and up to the altar rail, keeping your eye fixed on the image behind the altar of a woman being lifted up on billowing clouds—to see in her uplifted arms both terror and wonder, and then in her face, as it comes into focus, an intense rapture, on the point of tears—in this phenomenal sixteenth-century work by Titian, you might begin to get a sense of what this ‘fond notion’, held by faithful Christians since earliest times is all about.

And, at the danger of beginning to sound like a Cook’s tour, if you could then pop across to Rome, to the Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere, and gaze into the mesmerising twelfth-century mosaics; the colossal figures of Christ and his Mother; his arm around her shoulder, and in his hand the text from Matthew 25: ‘Come, you elect of my Father, receive the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the earth’; if you can see, even in such imposing figures an astonishing intimacy and fondness, then you might begin to understand why the Assumption of Mary—her

bodily passing from earth into heavenly glory, sharing in the resurrection and ascension of her Son, might have been so central to Christian hope and piety.

We could talk about the fact that though there are two tombs ascribed to Mary, in Jerusalem and Ephesus, they are both empty, and that the only relics relating to her are items of clothing, or a dubious lock of hair; but that probably wouldn't cut much ice with our chisel-wielding friend.

We may not be able to provide irrefutable historical evidence to prove that she, the whole woman, shares in the fullness of the heavenly, resurrection life, but we can surely say that it is logical, based on what we are given in the Gospel, and how we might best receive it.

Hers is the body within which the Word was made flesh—Christ's body issued from hers. Her 'let it be', in response to the angel's message, opened a space within her, a tiny space within a vast creation, in which God could wed himself, not just to humanity, but to everything that he had made. She carried the bridegroom; and through her the whole church would become his bride, and the whole creation be called to his wedding feast. Her 'let it be' spoke for a whole cosmos.

And if the hope of the cosmos is to be brought to fulfilment in Christ, redeemed by his sacrifice, to share his eternal embrace, then just as Mary stood for the whole cosmos on earth, who else could stand for the cosmos, to embody its hope in heaven?

The reformers concern is always that Mary somehow obscures or eclipses Christ, but by removing Mary from our vision of heaven we remove ourselves—or at best our hope becomes disembodied, as if it were only about souls—and in a disembodied hope, if it is just about souls, then by extension the rest of creation is also eclipsed; losing its standing in our understanding of salvation.

But if the whole woman through whom the Word was made flesh has been taken up by angels into the embrace of the one whom she bore - the victorious, resurrected Son of God—then we have a vision of hope not just for ourselves, but for all creation. We see in her the fulfilment of the divine purpose in the Incarnation, to

gather all things together in Christ. This is not a fond notion; it is central to our Christian hope, and may no chisel prevail against it.”

APPENDIX 6

Illustrative extract from a sermon of the Roman Catholic church

Evensong in St Alban's Cathedral Commemorating St Óscar Romero

4 February 2024

'Those who reject me,' wrote Archbishop Oscar Romero, 'do me a great honour, because I somewhat resemble Jesus Christ, who was also a stumbling block.'

"Dear brothers and sisters in Christ

Forty-four years ago, on the 24 March 1980, Óscar Romero, the Catholic Archbishop of San Salvador, was assassinated. He was in the chapel of Divine Providence Hospital, standing at the altar celebrating the Eucharist.

I first encountered Romero's story when I was 17, long before I became a priest, let alone an Archbishop. Ever since, I have been captivated by his witness. It was, therefore, remarkable, almost precisely a year ago, to be in San Salvador in that same hospital chapel. It was so intensely moving to see for myself a place I had known only from photographs and films.

The chapel was smaller than I imagined. On the sanctuary, behind the altar, there is a life-sized outline of Romero's body showing where he collapsed and died. The inscription beside the crucifix reads: 'At this altar Mons Oscar Romero offered his life to God for his people.'

I celebrated Mass precisely where Romero celebrated Mass. I stood in exactly the same place he did when he was killed, the silhouette of his bloodied body beneath my feet.

To stand where someone's life was taken puts their life and our life into relationship and perspective. Memory, loss, sadness, and reality all intertwine as we sense the enormity of living and dying; and, for some, the potency of their Christiform sacrifice.

From behind the altar there was a clear view of the chapel door. Romero would have seen the car arrive and the gunman get out and point the gun towards him. In a split-second movement from Gethsemane to Calvary, Romero saw his death unfold before him. The exploding bullet penetrated his chest, just above the heart. The fatal

injury causing massive internal bleeding. Romero died in the arms of the people he loved.

We were just six people in the chapel for Mass that day. The Gospel was from the discourse about the vine in St John, where the Lord Jesus says: ‘cut off from me you can do nothing.’ (Jn 15:5) The moment Romero was ‘cut off’ from the earth, everything that mattered most to him came alive. His entire existence was oriented towards fullness of life with Christ. ‘Christianity’s only true absolute,’ Romero once said, ‘[is] God and his Christ.’ In changing times he preached a changeless truth: God in Christ is with us, ‘a pilgrim accompanying us throughout history.’ How we too need to travel in this truth.

Archbishop Romero was declared a saint by Pope Francis on 14 October 2018. Looking back at his life, we see someone, first and foremost, given over completely to Christ: as a disciple, priest, bishop, and, finally, as a martyr. His impassioned stance for justice, his courageous defence of human rights, his relentless advocacy for the poor, his damning critique of oppression and violence, all stemmed from his faith in Christ. Romero knew that what was happening before his eyes, to the weakest and the poorest, was happening to Christ and to His body. Like the crucified King he served, Romero entered into the suffering of his people. Here was a shepherd who not only smelled of his sheep, but also shed his blood with and for them. ‘God knows how hard it was for me to become archbishop,’ he said in February 1978, ‘how timid I have felt before you, except for the support that you as Church have given me. You have made your bishop a sign of Christianity.’

We cannot understand Romero separated from his faith in Christ and his love for the Church. His episcopal motto was ‘Sentir con la Iglesia’ - to feel, to think, to make sense of life within the Church, united to her faith in Christ. ...

During and after Romero’s lifetime, El Salvador was scarred by ruthless conflict. Around 75,000 civilians were killed in the civil war, along with approximately 8000 disappeared persons. Death squads murdered countless innocent people, including priests, religious sisters, and laity. Among them, the names of Fr Rutillio Grande, Manuel Solorzano, Nelson Lemus, Sr Maura Clarke, Sr Ita Ford, Sr

Dorothy Kazel, Jean Donovan, Fr Cosme Spessotto, and those massacred at the Central American University, all shape the Salvadoran martyrology. ...

Dear friends, Romero calls us to faithful discipleship of Christ and the proclamation of his Gospel. We are a people of the Beatitudes. We must announce God's kingdom and live as kingdom dwellers. When Christ taught us to love and serve others, he really did want us to put it into practice. Love of Christ and love of neighbour means that defending human life and protecting human dignity, and working for justice and peace, are not optional extras, but integral to our mission. This is not always easy. We may not get it right. But even though we cannot do everything, we must each do that something which is more than nothing. In this we look to imitate St Óscar's example, passing it forward to future generations, and asking his heavenly intercession."

Archbishop John Wilson

APPENDIX 7

Illustrative extract from a sermon of the Methodist church

“A friend remembers childhood Christmas celebrations as being quite dour and joyless. On Christmas Eve at 3 p.m. a sack was carried down from the attic and from within it a small artificial Christmas tree already decorated with baubles and coloured lights emerged.

The lights were switched on with no ceremony.

On Boxing Day at 3 p.m. the lights were switched off, the plug withdrawn from the socket, the sack placed over the little tree and it was carried back into the attic for another year. As an adult he has enjoyed making his own celebrations with his family and friends less perfunctory and more joyful, more creative and definitely more sustained.

As a child I can remember being disappointed that the glorious Easter hymns were rarely sung after Easter Sunday in the chapel where I worshipped. I remember someone saying on the Sunday after Easter, “Well it is Low Sunday”. I can also remember the moment when I realised that the joy of Easter was for life, not just for one day.

The liturgical knowledge that Eastertide was a whole season, not even just an Octave of celebration, certainly just not a single day, came much later but the joyful knowledge that each day was a day of resurrection came first.

The origin of the name Low Sunday for the Sunday after Easter Sunday is uncertain, but it seems intended to indicate the contrast between it and the great Easter festival. It is still Easter but the 8 days of feasting is now over. On this day, for the first time, those baptised on Easter Eve laid aside their white baptismal robes, having worn them continuously since their baptism. St. Augustine mentions this custom in a sermon for the day.

This year, of all years, it seems vital that we make the most of the season of Easter, 50 days, 7 weeks available to us until we reach Pentecost and we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit. Marking Eastertide and not just Easter Day seems more important than ever. In the biblical accounts, this period of time for the friends of

Jesus, is a time of encounter with the risen Jesus, discovery about God, themselves and one another and a time for the renewal of relationships. It is a time of waiting and a time of learning as they wait for all that God will pour out upon them. This is hardly a “low season”.

As we seek to celebrate Eastertide and be people of the resurrection we need to be honest about what we are finding difficult and challenging about a period of isolation. We read in Acts 2, “ the believers were gathered together in one place” and we long to be gathered together. There is consolation that the Christian Church is a global phenomena and we are too big for one room, one city, one nation.

We are learning, as the first friends of Jesus did, that he is with us always, even to the end of the age, and certainly to the end of this isolation. This Eastertide I have spent time with Mary Oliver’s poem Egrets, which describes the poet struggling on a path, attacked by briars and mosquitos and arriving at a pond, seemingly dark and deathly. Suddenly there is a flash of white and out of the reeds fly some egrets, who unruffled,

“opened their wings
softly and stepped
over every dark thing.”

We will, in the same power that raised Jesus from the dead, step over every dark thing. We will be changed and will be transformed by our experience. There is loss and pain and these things will have shaped us differently and in them we will have known God’s grace and revelation – just like the poet. May we know we have risen with Christ.

Alleluia Christ is risen,
He is risen indeed, Alleluia.”

The Revd Helen Cameron

APPENDIX 8

Illustrative extract from a sermon of the Baptist church

God is not fair

“When I read this parable and started to think about it, in my head I called this talk ‘God is not fair’.

I was struck by the end of the parable, which in the NIV reads ‘I have not dealt unfairly with you’, but in other versions tends to be ‘I have done nothing wrong by you’.

I was struck because I read it and it does seem a little unfair if I’m honest. Anyone else kind of feel for the ‘early’ day workers?

Just me?

Maybe you are better than me!

So I set out to understand what was wrong with me, if I identify with that petulant lot... But also because I believe we deeply misunderstand God if we think that God is a God of fairness instead of justice, mercy and love. None of which are quite the same as fairness in my experience.

I hope this idea will make more sense as we go along.

I must admit to being nervous today, I know your usual preacher and I follow his sermons, but also I know the things that you as a community are involved in with regards inclusion and accessibility, and I’m very pleased to be here among you. So I over engineered my sermon in prep.

I read so many things on this parable that my brain began to swirl.

I wanted to find a way to explain the parable or make it clear. It felt like I needed to get it right.

But the thing about parables is they aren’t often clear. They often have more than one meaning, as we’ll see.

But the genre of Parables exists to provoke us to think, or ‘imagine’, as much as they do to teach us.

This parable occurs in Matthew's gospel, a gospel in which Jesus is not shy of making bold, clear statements about how his followers should behave or indeed what they are doing wrong. So I suggest to you, that when we come upon a parable, it is there to provoke something more than simply a clear meaning we can easily grasp. ...

My opinion was, yes it is hard. Yes we do have to think. But that is good.

because hopefully we are encountering more people who don't look like the old version of the 'majority'. Hopefully our lives intersect with more diverse people.

And It's a tiny thing - to think before we say something whether it is going to hurt a person, EVEN if we are saying what we consider to be the truth.

But oh what a Christlike thing – to look at the person you are talking to and consider their wholeness above your own?

That is the sort of sacrifice that brings the statement 'we are all one in Christ Jesus' into reality for *just* a moment and makes it true here and not only in something we believe in.

We need to still be working harder to sacrifice the privileges of those of us who are white, or male, or non-disabled, or straight or cis gendered so that our siblings in Christ can get a seat at the table. ...

You see a denarius is what a man needed to live on, a day's wage would be a fair price to feed a family. And the landowner gives everyone what they need, and ignores economic rules about pay. It's not a lesson about how to pay people but a lesson for those of us who have been around a while doing the work to see that generosity disrupts the rules. ...

My parents had taught me all this lovely stuff about sharing and all it made me do was want my own thing!

Awful child.

But Christmas morning I got a block of marzipan. With a note saying it was just for me and I didn't have to share it.

My mother could have doubled down on her teaching. That would have been 'fair'. It would have been equal.

But she knew, that I just needed to feel she had something of my own.

And she still ribs me about it my pointedly putting a block of marzipan in my Christmas gifts, even now at 44...because, come on, what parent is gonna let that go, it's hilarious. ...

From meeting the rich young man to predicting his death Jesus keeps throwing the disciples the enigmatic value the kingdom of heaven as a place where the first shall be last and the last shall be first.

It echoes the contrariness of the beatitudes.

Blessed are the poor,

Blessed are they that mourn

God is not fair.

Rather God challenges us to work with new values entirely and create this place:

A place where we must know one another.

A place where we must serve one another

A place where we must be connected

A place where the abundant generosity of the landowner disrupts the rules and equality is no longer a fairy-tale.”

Dr Charlotte Naylor Davis

APPENDIX 9

Illustrative extract from a sermon of the United Reformed Church

Sermon by the Revd Dr John Bradbury, General Secretary of The United Reformed Church, for the 20th anniversary service of Woking United Reformed Church

2 February 2025

Luke 2: 22-40

“Luke’s weaving of his account of the Jesus story hangs heavy with a dark cloud. ‘In those days a decree went out from Emperor August that all the world should be registered’. What power and might is this that one human being can issue a decree and the whole world jumps – or at least sets off to the place where they are to be registered? One cannot escape throughout Luke’s account the ever-brooding presence of the Roman empire. Israel, with its puppet kings, under the forces and powers of occupation. ...

As we hear this text this morning, I wonder how different our world is from that in which Simeon took Jesus in his arms, and Anna gave thanks? We may not have an Emperor who can command the whole world to be registered. We have those who, however, through a single Tweet or an Executive order can make what feels like the whole world jump in either consternation or delight. The so-called Holy Land is still a place of occupation, strife and fear – for all its peoples, Jew and Palestinian alike.

I want to hold before us for a moment, another moment from the other end of Jesus life when someone gazes upon him, as Jesus stands before Pilate. Here again, we are powerfully aware of the might of the Roman Empire, its power over life and death. Pilate asks the question ‘What is truth’? ...

One destined for the falling and rising of many – and not the way round the world might have expected. One in whose future lay that moment of judgement before Pilate, death upon a cross, such that it would pierce the soul of his mother.

The very early Church became so troubling to this great Roman Empire precisely because in following its Lord, this baby in Simeon's arms, it challenged and turned upside down so many of the assumptions of the world. Through baptism, individuals became part of his body. He became their Lord – entirely relativising the Lordship of the Emperor who could only be a Lord in this world for an ephemeral moment.

The community of this Lord was one where the boundaries of slave and free, male and female, Jew or Gentile fell away – what united them was being sisters and brothers together, in this baby in whom the salvation of the world rested, in this embodiment of truth that stood before Pilate to be condemned. And so the complex and difficult relationship between the Lordship of Christ and the Lordship of the kingdoms of the worlds began to unfold. In a fallen world, awaiting the fullness of God's kingdom, ever playing itself out imperfectly.

We live today in troubling times. I defy you to watch the news, scroll your social media, or browse your news app and not be troubled. And it is a world in which many are reaching for Jesus to defend, uphold and support their own worldview or philosophy. Their own version of truth. Their own set of moral rules. But as soon as that happens, what goes out of focus is that human baby upon whom Simeon gazes and sees the salvation of all peoples. That human being who stands before Pilate and is the very truth Pilate is asking about. Jesus, God with us, will not be adopted to any human cause, no national agenda, no economic or moral agenda.

God with us, in the fragility of a baby, in the fragility of one bound and headed for a cross, will not be co-opted to any supposed human wisdom or common sense of this day.

So here we are this morning. Here in this part of the body of Jesus, God with us. Celebrating the extraordinary life and witness of this Church, born from the life and witness of the congregations that came before it and united here. For God with us, Jesus, always acts by gathering around him a community of apostles and disciples.

It is the first thing Jesus does in public ministry, almost his last act as risen Lord being to commission them and send them out into the world to make known the

Good News of God's salvation for all peoples. This is not an easy moment to be Church. It is a vital moment to be Church. And this congregation stands as testament to that which is possible when faithful people gather around the one who is the salvation of all peoples, and the very embodiment of truth. ...

I give thanks for your faithfulness to that baby in Simeon's arms, very God-with-us, over 20 years, over a lifetime. I give thanks for the public worship and witness. I give thanks for the domestic faithfulness in faith and practice, like that of Mary and Joseph as they took Jesus to the temple. ..."