

Abstract

To the Ends of the Earth: How does the Kerygma of the Early Church presented in the Sermons of Acts compare with Contemporary Evangelical Understandings of the Gospel in Ireland, and how might it inform the Homiletic Task today?

This dissertation seeks to address the question “How does the kerygma of the early church presented in the sermons of Acts compare with contemporary evangelical interpretations of the gospel in Ireland, and how might it inform the homiletic task today?”. The goal of this research, therefore, is to gain an understanding of the central kerygma of the early church and whether this corresponds to the gospel preached by evangelicals in contemporary Ireland. In light of this, I wish also to examine whether the homiletical methods employed in Acts can inform the way preaching is carried out today. I have drawn on both C.H. Dodd and James D.G. Dunn’s work on the apostolic kerygma to examine five representative sermons in the Book of Acts (viz. Acts 2:14-39; 3:11-26; 10:34-43; 13:16-4, and 17:22-31). On examining these selected sermons, I have come to the conclusion that the shorter list provided by Dunn seems to offer the most accurate account of the characteristic elements of these sermons. Research questionnaires have provided valuable insights into what contemporary evangelicals in the Irish context consider to be the central kerygma. These elements are similar to the list provided by Dunn, with the exception of an emphasis on the divinity of Christ and atonement, which is not present in the Acts sermons. From the research undertaken, it seems that the earliest preachers had a good understanding of homiletics and were able to use this to determine the form of preaching which was suitable for each audience. This observation is one that I believe can inform the church’s approach to preaching, encouraging it to understand its context and to be prepared to preach in a way that its audience will comprehend.