

PREACHING AS INTERPERSONAL

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Much of what applies to evangelism applies to preaching. Evangelism addresses the gospel to non-believers. Preaching addresses the gospel to believers by and large since most often the term describes teaching and exhortation in the gathered community of Christians. Evangelism tends to think of itself as cross-cultural; preaching usually addresses people in the same culture. Interpersonalism calls us to remember that preaching is communication to people; so it is not oratory, which emphasizes the form of delivery. It is also not recitation, which highlights the verbalizing of information and gives the impression that it does not come from the heart, that a person is saying words into the air rather than speaking into the listeners. It is not “heart to heart” talk. Reciters are performers; they are “saying their piece.”

Rhetoric has as its guiding principle the concept of τὸ πρέπον, “the fitting thing.” Appropriateness derives from the substance of the message, from the listener, from the nature of the speaker, and from the context of the subject (verisimilitude). We cannot overemphasize the interpersonal nature of the rhetorical: good oratory is “good people speaking well.”

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