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Is Anybody Listening?

Mark Greene presents the result of research into how evangelical congregations hear their preachers. He reveals that a disturbingly high percentage regard the sermons they hear as irrelevant. Greene suggests that the models of preaching proposed by the most influential evangelical preachers of the last sixty years fail to address the need for preachers to know their congregations intimately and to address their perceived needs.

I have never met a preacher who thought that his or her preaching was irrelevant to the daily lives of the congregation. But I have met a lot of people who say that the preaching they hear is irrelevant to their daily lives. And I have read a lot of commentators who agree with them. However, as I explored their writings one thing became startlingly clear: the teaching, academic and popular reflection on homiletics in the UK is not informed by any empirical research data. Rather, the current debate is based on informed hearsay and on individual experience.

As I researched further I realised that this failure to find out what the people think about preaching in any kind of systematic way was symptomatic of a much deeper problem in contemporary Evangelicalism – the failure to listen. I therefore sought to:

i) discover how individuals in evangelical congregations perceived the quality and helpfulness of the sermons they receive;

ii) field test a research tool that preachers could use to improve their own preaching – *The Three Eared Preacher.*

I was concerned not simply to identify the problems but also to find some practical way to help working ministers address them.

The scope of the research

The study used a variety of qualitative and quantitative tools – desk research, telephone interviews and a total of four separate pieces of questionnaire research:

i) a general survey among individual representatives, all students at London Bible College (LBC), from 87 evangelical churches;

ii) a survey of samples from a further ten evangelical churches;

iii) a survey of 127 evangelicals attending *Interserve* conferences on work;

iv) a survey of 36 London Baptist Association Lay Preachers.

Given the fact that the general survey was conducted among a sample that might well be unrepresentative – students at LBC – bigger samples were taken from ten of the students' churches to identify the extent to which their responses might be deemed representative. Similarly, the *Interserve* and LBA surveys served as controls. Only the results of the general survey are presented in any detail here.

The questionnaire was developed with three overall criteria in mind:

i) to discover what was of importance to respondents, rather than to supply a predetermined list of criteria for sermon evaluation;

ii) to try to overcome the hesitancy of Christians about offering negative criticism about their ministers behind their backs;

iii) to be usable within a local church.

As a result the questionnaire was short, used simple language and did not look intimidatingly formal. Overall, it sought to force respondents to consider the basic question about helpfulness more and more deeply as they moved through the questions.

A pilot study was conducted and some minor adjustments made. The basic questionnaire is set out below, though naturally it was modified slightly to reflect the different contexts in which it was used.

The questionnaire

A little research on preaching...

We're conducting a national survey designed to help ministers with their preaching. Help us please by answering the questions below. Be frank, it's confidential and ministers want to hear from you.

1. Overall, how would you rate your minister's preaching? Ring one:
   Excellent Good Adequate Needs improvement Poor
2. How helpful is his/her preaching usually? Ring one:
   Very helpful Quite helpful Not very helpful Not helpful at all
3. How do you think the majority of people in your church rate your minister's preaching? Ring one:
   More positively than you *About the same* *Less positively than you* *Don't know*
4. What, if anything, do you like about his or her sermons?
5. What do you dislike?
6. What major issues have you faced in your day to day life over the last year – at work, at home, in the church, in your spiritual growth?
   - *at work*
   - *at home*
   - *in the church*
   - *in your own spiritual growth*

7. To what extent has your minister's preaching helped you or prepared you to deal with these issues?

   A lot *Quite a bit* *A little* *Not much* *Not at all*

   - work issues
   - home issues
   - church issues
   - personal growth

8. What two topics would you really like to hear a sermon about?
9. What advice would you give your minister to help them with their preaching?
10. Have you ever given your minister that advice?

    Yes/no *Why/why not?*

11. Any other comments you would like to make?
12. Demographic questions.

The sample

The sample skewed young with an average age of 29, and an age range from 18 to 54. There was a broad denominational profile with Anglicans (25%) and Baptists (25%) most represented. Respondents consisted of people who were for the most part actively involved in their churches' programmes (66% held an official post or responsibility) and who had attended for a significant period (average 7.2 years).

In the event the evangelical students identified all the same basic problems as the sample from their congregations but were slightly more negative about the quality of the preaching. Whether this was a more or less accurate reflection of the situation on the ground is impossible to say – students may be more critical; congregations more reluctant to be negative.

Summary of results

Space allows me to focus only on the main points.

Quality and helpfulness

- The majority of the sample placed the quality and helpfulness of their preacher's sermons in the top two boxes;
- 68% placed the quality of their preacher's sermons in the top two boxes;
- 56% placed the helpfulness of their preacher's sermons in the top two boxes;

Interestingly, it was clear that for some people a sermon could be excellent but irrelevant.

The ratings on helpfulness by area of life were less positive overall and do show work and home issues as weak areas:

Helpfulness by Area (0-4 scale)

Work	1.68	Home	1.83
Church	2.12	Personal	2.57

This reflects a pietistic, church-centred preaching emphasis – the further Christians get from the church building the less likely they are to have an adequate base of teaching to lead their lives in a godly manner.

Relevance is the key issue

• 84% (41) commented explicitly on relevance or application. This was by far the highest category of specific comment.

• 47% said that the preaching/preacher was marked by lack of relevance, depth or challenge.

• Lack of relevance/out of touch was mentioned more than any other positive or negative quality and dominated the 'advice' section.

• 22 people cited relevance as a positive attribute of the preaching they had been receiving. A further 10 commented positively on application.

The Bible and relevance?

• 33% (29) mentioned the preacher's use of the Bible as a 'like', though only 8 of these explicitly said that the preaching was relevant to their lives. 16 out of 29 liked the preacher's biblical base but found the preaching irrelevant. Teaching the Bible well is in itself no guarantee of relevance.

• Only two respondents cited lack of biblical foundation as an issue.

Given the evangelical character of the respondents and the fact that they were all Bible college students, we might conclude that if lack of biblical foundation was a significant problem it would have been mentioned specifically.

No feedback

• Only one respondent mentioned that he had had an opportunity to give feedback to the preacher through a questionnaire.

• 77% of the sample had not given the advice to their preachers that they recorded in the questionnaires.

• Lack of relationship and lack of opportunity were the two most common reasons for not offering advice to preachers. One respondent wrote:

> If ministers want feedback on their preaching they have to open up some sort of channels for that to happen (formally or informally). People (myself included) will not give advice without any invitation to do so except if they feel very strongly about something.

Comment – read *The Sun*

The most disturbing feature of these results is that such a high proportion of the sample view the preaching as being irrelevant – 47%. This is not primarily perceived to be a problem of presentation or a problem with the preacher as person, though these concerns do arise. Rather the critical issue is the relevance of the content. This is not to say that issues of delivery do not affect relevance – clearly they do. Content and form cannot be neatly separated. Nevertheless, the word 'boring' hardly appeared. The sample were not crying out for lively entertainment but for life-giving insight.

As we look more carefully at the verbatims what emerges most forcefully is the perception that the preacher is out of touch with people's day-to-day lives. In the pilot study alone the advice section is replete with comments like the following:

> 'To reflect more on the needs of the people and to respond to them.'
>
> 'Spend more time listening/engaging with the congregation.'
>
> 'Reaching them where they're at, not where they'd like to be.'
>
> 'Get to know the people more.'
>
> 'Talk to people on the streets/face the important issues.'
>
> 'Visit factories, nursing homes, schools in the area, go talk to the labour exchange – read *The Sun*.'

In general the Bible is being preached but, for many, not in a way that helps hearers to make connections with their lives. Indeed, the issues being faced by individuals in the sample were the issues that might have been expected and the topics they wanted to hear sermons about rarely idiosyncratic. Again, the call for relevance was not for some highly topical response to social and political events but for spiritual wisdom to deal with the pressures and relationships of day-to-day life.

This is a call that is entirely in line with Clark[1] and Fanstone's findings[2] and indeed with Tomlinson's unearthing of a large body of Evangelicals who felt unable to communicate honestly within their congregations:

> It is the same old effect of the emperor with no clothes on – nobody dares speak up.[3]

Furthermore, his view, as this research also suggests, is that leaders do not know their congregations:

> In the debates with evangelical leader X and more recently with evangelical leader Y it was clear that there was a huge gap between how they perceived the situation and the actual situation on the ground.[4]

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1 D. Clark, *A Survey of Christians at Work*, CIPL, Birmingham 1993.

2 M. J. Fanstone, *The Sheep that Got Away*, MARC, Tunbridge Wells 1993.

3 D. Tomlinson, *The Post Evangelical*, Triangle, London 1995, p 25.

4 Source: Telephone Interview with MG, 15.8.96.

Why aren't we listening?

We know we should: 'Everybody should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry...' (Jas. 1:19). Communication theory underlines it. 'Silent speech (listening) is the necessary preliminary to overt speech, and the quality of overt speech cannot be better than the quality of silent speech from which it springs.'[5]

This basic insight finds fertile soil in the thinking of the major contemporary US homileticians. Rice calls for the sermon to arise from listening and solidarity with the life of the congregation.[6] Craddock argues that the deductive method is in itself out of touch with US congregations because it tends to lead to: 'No listening by the speaker, no contributing by the hearer.'[7] Similarly Augsburger, Kraft, Myers, Buttrick, Galli and Larson, Miller, Hybels, Lewis and Lewis, and Robinson all emphasise the importance of listening. It may go without saying but it is never left unsaid.

Why then have we become deaf to our congregations' day to day lives?

The divided life – historical and sociological considerations

In the post-war period, there has been a galactic chasm between church life and working life, for reasons which I have explored elsewhere.[8] Overall, our orientation has been centripetal, our concerns primarily internal, not of the wider world, and many of our initiatives neighbourhood-oriented and pastor-centred. This reflects a deep, hierarchical sacerdotalism and a view of the pastoral task as more the enlistment of volunteers for the pastor's ministry than the equipping of the saints for whatever ministry God has called them to. Indeed, this sacerdotalism further undermines the sense of the value of 'secular work'. 'Holy' work is done by ministers – the biblical theology of vocation recovered in the Reformation has been lost.

Despite some initiatives, evangelical spirituality remains deeply marked by the privatised pietism of the Keswick movement,[9] which according to Mortimer, was a key factor leading to the irrelevance of much contemporary evangelical preaching.[10] Furthermore, evangelism has, broadly speaking, been relegated to a leisure-time activity, as opposed to a whole life activity.

This 'leisure-time' spirituality and indifference to the world of work is reflected in what Mahoney characterised as a kind of neo-Manichaeanism[11] and it has

5 P. W. Keller and C. T. Brown, *From Monologue to Dialogue*, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall 1973, quoted in D. Augsburger, *Caring Enough to Hear and Be Heard*, Regal, Ventura 1982, p 9.

6 C. Rice quoted in R. L. Eslinger, *A New Hearing*, Abingdon, Nashville 1985, pp 24-25.

7 F. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, Abingdon, Nashville 1979, p 54.

8 Cf. M. Greene, 'Capital Gains or Evangelicals are not working' in A. Billington, A. Lane, M. Turner eds, *Mission and Meaning*, Paternoster, Carlisle 1995, pp 288-305.

9 Cf. I. Randall, 'Spiritual Renewal and Social Reform: Attempts to Develop Social Awareness in the Early Keswick Movement', *Vox Evangelica*, 23 (1993), pp 67-86.

10 Source: telephone interview with Revd P. Mortimer, Church Life Advisor to the Baptist Union, and heavily involved in preaching research and the training of lay preachers, July 1996.

11 J. Mahoney S. J., *Christian Approaches to Modern Business Ethics*, The Hugh Kay Memorial Lecture, CABE, London 1993, p 4.

combined with the forces of modernity to deepen the separation between the public and private spheres. The evangelical church has failed to address this schism. This is perhaps why individual evangelicals have not thought it appropriate to bring their day-to-day issues to their teachers. 'All of life' is not on the minister's agenda, so it can't be important.

Let us turn now from the homiletical subjects that have been legitimated by Evangelicalism to the homiletical methods that have been passed down.

The legacy of the great tradition

Are there flaws in the preaching models offered to evangelical preachers in the UK?

Unfortunately there is no extensive research on the content and quality of the training of preachers over the last forty years so, though it has clearly not been without flaw, the question cannot be answered definitively. Nevertheless, there is within the UK evangelical community a tradition of evangelical preaching. That tradition is perhaps best embodied by the preaching and teaching of Martyn Lloyd-Jones and John Stott, and is being continued with a reformed flavour through the work of the Proclamation Trust. With that in view, are there flaws in their teaching, particularly in relation to audience? Here I have focused on Lloyd-Jones' lectures on preaching published as *Preaching and Preachers*[12] and on Stott's book *I Believe in Preaching*[13] as works representative of their thought and, though old, probably most influential in theological training and preaching practice.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Doctor's orders

Lloyd-Jones' discussion of relevance and audience is relatively narrow in scope and pietistic in character. He sees many of the calls for relevance as ways of sidetracking preaching from the gospel to social and political issues, of making false distinctions between types of people that are not pertinent to their spiritual health.[14] For him, there is no reason to address a group of Oxford students any differently from a group of farm-labourers. Indeed, the preacher does not need to know the details of people's lives:

> Why not? Because he knows that all the people in front of him are suffering from the same disease, which is sin – every one of them.[15]

And later:

> It is a vital part of preaching to reduce all listeners to that common denominator.[16]

The approach is generic: Lloyd-Jones focuses on what he perceives to be the patient's disease – sin – rather than on any agenda set by the person himself or herself.

12 D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, Hodder & Stoughton, London 1971.
13 J. R. W. Stott, *I Believe in Preaching*, Hodder & Stoughton, London 1982.
14 Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching*, pp 122-141.
15 Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching*, pp 134.
16 Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching*, pp 134.

Certainly with other reformed Evangelicals like Clements[17] I would not want to deny or minimise the importance of humankind's essential need to face sin, but the struggle against individual sin is not the whole counsel of God. What seems to be absent in Lloyd-Jones' approach is not spiritual food for the inner person but an appreciation of people's needs for Biblical wisdom to lead their everyday lives. As a result, his recommended reading for preachers is chiefly confined to theology, church history and apologetic material. Lloyd-Jones concedes the need to know:

> ... something about their background and their outlook, and what they are thinking, and what they are reading, and the influences that are being brought to bear upon them. People in their innocence and ignorance are still ready to listen to plausible speakers and to believe anything they read in a newspaper or popular journal, and it is our business to help and protect them.[18]

But the section lacks specificity and the relative unimportance of really knowing the congregation is perhaps caught in the phrase, 'He must know something...' from the quotation above. The preacher does not need to know a lot, or to be intimately acquainted with his people, he must know 'something'.

For Lloyd-Jones there is no sense in which the congregation's felt needs or issues may affect the preaching. For him, 'Preaching prepares the way for all the other activities of a minister.'[19] So he comments that preaching 'prepares the way for visiting', but he does not even hint at the possibility that pastoral visiting might have any impact on preaching. Nor is there any mention of evaluation or feedback from congregation, elders or peers. For Lloyd-Jones, the preacher's relationship with God is the critical factor and there is a strong sense of the separation of pulpit and pew, not simply in function and call, but in relationship.

In sum, there is very little in terms of theme or technique in Lloyd-Jones' *Preaching and Preachers* to encourage ministers to listen carefully to their congregations or to seek feedback.

J. R. W. Stott: playing white

For Stott, relevance and listening to people are clearly important:

> The best preachers are always diligent pastors who know the people of their district and congregation, and understand the human scene in all its pain and pleasure, glory and tragedy...
>
> Humble listening is indispensable to relevant preaching...[20]

Similarly, he calls for a deep understanding of the contemporary world, a monthly pastoral reading group to ensure the working preacher stays in touch with current issues, and a ministry team planning group to feed local pastoral concerns into sermon selection.

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17 R. Clements in *'The Preacher as Prophet'* in C. Green and D. Jackman eds, *When God's Voice is Heard*, IVP, Leicester 1995, p 103.

18 Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching*, p 178.

19 Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching*, p 185.

20 Stott, *I Believe*, p 192.

Clearly, Stott's praxis has also been deeply impressive and has, as McCutcheon noted,[21] been built on 'listening.' Furthermore, as one person put it, 'He has a genius for friendship.' The flaw lies not so much in omission in praxis but in emphasis in his writing. Stott writes in detail about how the preacher is to acquire knowledge of the world and of the Bible but he does not make clear how intimate knowledge of a congregation is to be acquired.

Stott commends the need for dialogical preaching:

> One of the greatest gifts a preacher needs is such a sensitive understanding of people and their problems that he can anticipate their reactions to each part of his sermon and respond to them.[22]

But this commendation is not accompanied by any advice about how such a gift is to be acquired or nurtured. Furthermore, it reflects a greater interest in how the people will *respond* to what the preacher has to say rather than how the preacher should respond to what the people are saying. Stott uses the analogy of playing chess[23] to illustrate the kind of anticipatory insight required but he is always playing white. He wants to make the first move. Jesus, by contrast, played black as well as white. Indeed, according to Lewis and Lewis in 54% of Jesus' reported teaching ministry the encounters were initiated by others.[24] He answered people's questions – those spoken and those unspoken:

> Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, 'Why are you thinking these things in your hearts.[25]

Sometimes too the text makes it clear that the questions are the 'wrong' ones. So the expert in the Law in Luke 10: '... wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbour?' What follows is the parable of the Good Samaritan – a long answer to a poorly motivated question. The issue here is not to make a case for a twentieth-century mimicking of Jesus' first century communication techniques but simply to point out that Stott does not wrestle with the implications of Jesus' inductive methods or with the hermeneutical and homiletical issues of using Jesus' 'preaching' ministry and the NT sermon material as the basis for contemporary praxis.[26]

The difference between an audience-oriented methodology and Stott's can be illustrated by comparing him with Hybels. So, Stott's example reading list is general, reflecting his interest in overall social and political issues. Hybels' reading list is, by contrast, closely and deliberately related to his congregations. He seeks to read what they read and listen to and watch what they listen to and watch. His list arises out of living in a middle-class Chicago suburb and out of a concern to reach the unchurched by knowing their world:

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21 Conversation with the Revd T. McCutcheon, June 1997.

22 Stott, *I Believe*, p 61.

23 Stott, *I Believe*, p 61.

24 R. L. Lewis and G. Lewis, *Learning and Preaching Like Jesus*, Crossway, Westchester 1989, p 22.

25 Luke 5:22. Cf. also Luke 5:30; 7:22; 7:40; 9:18.

26 Cf. the cursory discussion of Jesus and Paul and its selective focus in *I Believe*, pp 16-17, and his swift, and by no means uncontended, identification of the 'ministry of the word' in Acts 6 with 'preaching'.

> I read *Time*, *Newsweek*, *US News & World Report*, *Forbes*, and usually, *Business Week*. Every day I read the *Chicago Tribune* (*USA Today* when I travel) watch at least two TV news programs, and listen to an all-news radio station when I'm in the car.[27]

Stott's method of selecting his sermon series relies on the insight of the staff team, 'and the perceived pastoral needs of the church family'. The key word here is 'perceived' because it indicates a reliance on insight which may well be flawed. Hybels begins elsewhere in selecting his sermons. First, he solicits the insights of a representative group of lay people, takes them away for a weekend to listen to and discuss their prepared suggestions and only then goes away for a further three days with the elders and the pastoral team to make the final selection.

A number of contemporary American homileticians advise pastors to spend time with their people actually in their places of work. I have as yet not located any such advice in the work of Lloyd Jones or Stott or the contributors to the Green and Jackman *Festschrift*. Indeed, there is no hint in Stott's work that congregational feedback on delivery or content is an important part of the process, and there is no encouragement to use any congregational feedback mechanism. Nor, in fact, is there any comment on how to deal with the feedback that arises. The British evangelical tradition does not include any accepted mechanism for considered dialogue between preacher and people about the quality of sermons.

Peter Adam: Speaking God's Word

The chief exponents of the Proclamation Trust's teaching on preaching have not written extensively on the subject,[28] though their principles are, according to the Revd D. Jackman, well reflected in the work of Peter Adam, whose latest book is also warmly commended by the Revd R. Lucas.[29] Adam shares a number of characteristics with the teaching of Stott. Here I will simply focus on his discussion of Peter's Pentecost sermon in Acts 2 and other points which relate directly to the question of relevance.

In *Speaking God's Word*[30] Adam states that one of Luke's objectives in recording Peter's Pentecost sermon is to give us a model of the 'ministry of the word,' a contentious claim in itself. Adam then goes on to analyse this model almost entirely in terms of structure and content, not also in terms of audience and occasion. Peter is preaching in response to a specific set of questions. This Adam notes but does not build on. Peter's agenda has not been set by a lectionary, nor by the need to teach the Bible but rather by the questions that the crowd have about the phenomena they see and hear.

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27 S. Briscoe, B. Hybels & H. H. Robinson, *Mastering Contemporary Preaching*, Multnomah, Portland 1989, p. 36.

28 Though see Green & Jackman (eds), *God's Voice*.

29 Peter Adam, *Speaking God's Word*, IVP, Leicester 1996, pp. 7-8.

30 Adam, *God's Word*, p 77.

Similarly, in his discussion of Calvin as model preacher, Adam cites a sermon on Deuteronomy 5:17, asserting that it is obviously and sharply applied to the 'common life of people in Geneva'[31] and to recent contemporary events. In my view this is not at all plain. The only contemporary reference quoted is to street fighting which Adam identifies as a clear reference to the recent Perrinist revolt. This is probably the case but a single cursory reference to a major political event in a sermon of 30 paragraphs hardly constitutes an incisive application to the 'common life of people in Geneva'. This is not to say that some of Calvin's sermons are not sometimes highly situation specific, as R. Peter points out,[32] but rather to suggest that Adam's examples provide no model for intimate congregational application. This becomes particularly plain when his discussion is compared with the startling specificity of Robinson's knowledge of, for example, the ethical challenges facing competing business people in his congregation.[33]

Similarly Adam's examples of application from his own sermons seem generalised, rather than specific to the current state of Australian society or his own church. That said, Adam is the only non-US homiletician I have read who lists several very helpful ways to generate appropriate applications. However, Adam begins with the congregation's actual or imagined response to a chosen text, rather than with informed insight into the issues which the congregation is facing which Scripture should address.

Conclusions

Overall, what we may tentatively conclude is that the virtuosi of British evangelical preaching have been relatively weak on teaching the need and the practical means to develop deep and intimate understanding of their congregations. They appear to do little to ensure that their messages are understood and relevant to their legitimate needs for 'teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the person of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work' (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Post-war British evangelical teaching on preaching seems also to be founded on a distorted presentation of the character of biblical and post-biblical models and does not, in my view at least, sufficiently address preaching in the overall context of a church's ministries of word and worship (Clark is an obvious exception here).[34] Whilst the Puritans are held up as model preachers, there has been a failure, with some exceptions, to give due weight and consideration to the implications of

31 Adam, *God's Word*, p 148.

32 R. Peter, 'Genève dans la prédication de Calvin', in Wilhelm H. Neusner ed., *Calvinus Ecclesiae Genevensis Custos*, Verlag Peter Lang, Frankfurt am Main 1984, pp 23-47. Calvin makes numerous references to the state of Geneva life – the bourgeois, the magistrates, the deceitful religious refugees, the general corruption, etc. See, for example, p 37 and his response to the blasphemous, nocturnal carousing of a group of youths. See also T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's Preaching*, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh 1992, particularly chapter 11, 'The Stimuli of Exhortations', pp 114-128.

33 See H. H. Robinson in 'What Authority Do We Have Any More?', *Leadership*, 13 (1992), pp 24ff..

34 N. Clark, *Preaching in Context*, Mayhew, Bury St Edmunds 1991.

the wide variety of teaching ministries they exercised and their relative impact on congregational maturity. Further, the absence of advice on feedback and the relatively small amount of practical advice on how to listen to one's congregation and use that learning in sermon preparation stand in stark contrast to many of the US homileticians and are probably contributory factors to the irrelevance of sermons to so many evangelical churchgoers. Overall, the evangelical preacher has inherited a method which begins with a biblical text and works outwards to the people, rather than a method which works in both directions.

Whether this is an accurate reflection of past and present training of preachers will have to be established by further research, but it is the case that none of the British preachers who agreed to test my feedback tool, *The Three-Eared Preacher*,[35] had ever been taught by their training institutions how to get accurate feedback. Listening to the congregation has not been a priority. As the Revd Phil Thomas said before using *The Three Eared Preacher*: 'In any other job these days you get feedback... and you need it.' And the people in the pew seem to agree.

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35 *The Three Eared Preacher* is a field-tested tool designed to help busy ministers find out what their congregations think about their preaching and how it might be improved. It is available from The Open Learning Department, London Bible College, Green Lane, Northwood, Middlesex, HA6 2UW.