1. Are sermons an educational medium?

Both historians and theologians would be well advised to view the sermon as an educational medium. A sermon introduces its listeners to particular attitudes of mind as well as imparting a body of knowledge. The extent of this attitude in the context of applied theology is evident from the frequent checks made in the course of empirical research into preaching, into how accurately those listening to a sermon are able to recall its content after the service. Anyone hoping that answers to the questions “What can you still remember?” and “What was the sermon about?” will provide information about the substance of a sermon assumes that sermons are first and foremost a means of transferring knowledge. If sermons are to be seen as an educational medium, it would seem reasonable to analyse sermons with a view to reconstructing the educational purpose intended by preaching them. This would apply to sermons from previous eras as well as to contemporary sermons. In this way it is sometimes possible to reconstruct the religious ideas and moral standards that applied to a particular time and within a specific religious community;[[1]](#footnote-1) or even what content is conveyed in sermons preached nowadays. This creates the impression that sermons had and continue to have an effect on the subjective collective wisdom of the listener and to change and extend it. In this sense, sermons come into focus primarily because of their socialising and integrating function. One might assume that sermons are particularly suited to reconstruction of this kind as they furnish texts reflecting ‘real’ life, which thus presumably provide authentic information regarding the religious practices of a particular era. In this sense, it is certainly reasonable to look on sermons as an educational medium.

1. cf. e.g. Simone Lässig, Jüdische Wege ins Bürgertum. Kulturelles Kapitel und sozialer Aufstieg im 19. Jahrhundert (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004): 303–325. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)