
The Extended Language of Religious Reform: Marking Up a Register for Early Modern Sermons

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This talk will report on the formation of an online open source register for early modern English sermons, a collaborative effort that includes scholars and technical experts from North America, the United Kingdom, and Japan. The need for a digital register of early modern sermons is abundantly clear to scholars who specialize in the history of the church and religious practice. Sermons were, for better or worse, central to efforts to broadcast and enforce disquieting religious reforms and to address the unsettling controversies in religious practice during the early modern period. It should be stressed, also, that a well-constructed and user-friendly platform of this nature would reach the many among the general public who are interested in the history of religion in general and in Christian church history in particular.

The term register is used here to denote a comprehensive and searchable list of English sermons, sermon events, and related sermon information from a variety of contemporaneous records and sources during the period 1500 to 1700, including sermons delivered to English audiences in Latin will also be catalogued. This project will not attempt to digitalize full texts of print or manuscript sermons.

Extant sermons were often printed long after they were delivered and many remain separately catalogued in manuscript. Non-extant sermons are known about from disparate sources: chronicles, diaries, private correspondence, and records of church and state. This lack of cohesion creates something of a vacuum amidst a plethora of sources that make reference to preaching in general and also to individual sermons. The goal of this project, therefore, is to bring to a list of sermons the cataloguing and search functionality (on a much smaller scale) that the British Library Short Title Catalogue (ESTC) online currently affords printed works.

There have been efforts recently to explore and document sermons during this period in digital formats but with differing objectives. These efforts include digital platforms in early development such as the announcement to 'Gateway to Early Modern Manuscript Sermons' ([GEMMS](#)), as well as digital projects such as The *St Paul's Cathedral Project* (formerly the [Virtual Paul's Cross Project](#)) and John Foxe's [The Acts and Monuments Online](#). Standard resources for this project are, of course, the *ESTC Online*, *EEBO-TCP*, and for later reprints of early modern sermons Internet Archive has become increasingly useful. A host of fine scholars have been drawn to the study of early modern sermons, but this field has lacked an annotated and comprehensive register of sermons and sermon events.

The developers of this project will use a TEI-compliant XML structure. Much of the platform can be encoded with standardized markups for such elements as date, speaker, and location. However, this project is faced with the task of identifying and defining elements for a register in a space between digital bibliography and online textual archives or corpora.

Metadata will have to be extended to include an abundant number of tags for such areas as theological debate (e.g. purgatory, Eucharist) and church practice (e.g. baptism, burial). An exhaustive list of meta-concepts peculiar to the religious attitudes and movements of the period will have to be constructed. Among the many examples, such meta-tags as "anti-theatre," "Anabaptist," and "recantation," will have to be identified, agreed upon, and listed.

In sum, the greatest challenge for this project is in developing a comprehensive taxonomy for its metadata. In the view of the project team, the best way to approach this challenge is to start small and to learn by doing. Phase 1 of this project, therefore, is to digitalize and annotate Millar Maclure's register of the sermons of Paul's Cross along with the supplement to this edition.

Paul's Cross, the outdoor preaching pulpit located on the northeast side of the St Paul's precinct in early modern London, will be treated as ground zero for the cataloguing of early modern sermons. Located in the commercial and cultural center of London, Paul's Cross was the most influential public site for preaching to large, non-elite audiences in England during tumultuous periods of religious reform. This one locale had an immeasurable impact on Christian practice and public opinion from the Henrican period until the years leading up to the Civil War.

As the project expands toward its goal of being a comprehensive annotated register for all early

modern sermons, the TEI XML encoding and extensions will allow scaling to a much larger platform. During Phase 1 the metadata arrangement for developers will be clarified. Should problems or omissions arise, which they invariably do, the fix can be made before the project expands. Finally, given that TEI has become the standard for what will become a partner project, this encoding will be highly adaptable should it eventually be contributed to a digital archive repository or OAIS.

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