

Background with Respect to the Order's Theological Commission on the Charism of Preaching
for Women and Men of the Order of Preachers and Its Report to the Master of the Order dated
May 2001

by Gregory Heille and Mary Jean Traeger
for the Dominican Leadership Conference Preaching Committee
September 2004

On 1 June 2004 Mary Jean Traeger and Gregory Heille met at the Springfield Motherhouse to
talk by telephone with Mary Catherine Hilkert at Notre Dame. Our purpose was to establish
**some of the context for the writing and subsequent handling of the document “The Dominican
Charism of Preaching: An Inquiry” written by a theological commission appointed by Timothy
Radcliffe in fulfillment of a petition by the General Chapter of Bologna and submitted in May
2001 for consideration by the General Chapter of Providence.**

The pertinent sections of the Bologna acts are given here, §34 setting context for the petition in
§42. (Edward Ruane, then provincial of the Central Province, was on the Bologna commission
that wrote §34.)

MEN AND WOMEN IN MISSION TOGETHER

1. The Order of Preachers is proud of its tradition and legacy which includes Friars, Cloistered Nuns, vowed religious women, and lay men and women. While other Chapters have referred to the dignity of women and our collaboration both with the laity and our sisters, this Chapter believes it is important to say more at this time in our history. Our Order reflects an understanding of mission that has its origin in the life of the Triune God. As a sharing in the divine mission, our Order, in all its unique branches, is both to manifest communion and collaborate in the mission of leading all creation towards communion in the divine life. The friars do not monopolize the vocation, nor the charism, nor do they hold 'pride of place' in the Order founded by St. Dominic. The mission holds the 'pride of place,' while every branch realizes this vocation in the manner proper to it. We, together, constitute the Order and together realize its whole mission.

2. Thus, the most complete manifestation of our total identity is in our collaboration together. This collaboration includes praying together, mutual planning, decision making, and the execution of projects in mutual and equal complementarity. These projects include such fields as ministries of prayer, preaching, teaching, pastoral leadership, justice and peace, mass media, research and writing, as well as in the promotion of vocations and formation.

3. We are aware that this consciousness calls for a conversion of mentalities on the part of everyone, and will be only gradually realized. Often friars of the Order have treated the sisters and the laity solely as objects of their pastoral care rather than as peers in their apostolic mission. Failure to listen to the laity has created a dependency of the lay chapters on a friar, thereby impeding the development of their own self-responsibility. Failure to recognize the apostolic capacities of Dominican Sisters has negatively affected the mission of the friars as well. Further, we believe it is important for the friars to examine their image of women and what is conveyed to others by our speech and behavior. If we listened to the brothers and analyzed attitudes, reactions, spontaneous

reflections of speech, we would be surprised to note that our masculine and ecclesiastical world carries strongly contrasting images of women. We ask pardon for all the instances of condescending and destructive attitudes and action on the part of the friars. For many Chapters now, the Order has called us to this conversion.

4. Lay men and women offer a unique vision of preaching and living the Gospel because of their total insertion into society with all of its secular, economic, and political realities. They are able to live shoulder to shoulder with men and women with whom our religious brothers and sisters will hardly have contact. The friars and sisters need their vision and expertise. In addition, women bring a distinctive vision and sensibility which we can learn from and which is essential to save the soul of an age in risk of losing its soul. Women are the principal educators and nurturers of the children of the world, so their critical formative role needs to be acknowledged and valued more highly. In a world characterized by social and religious fragmentation, women are often models of solidarity in families and society, transcending forces that create division.

5. Our contemplative nuns are at the heart of the mission of the Order. By their way of life they proclaim to all that God is capable of totally captivating the human heart. At the same time their prayer is a cry that the word proclaimed by the preachers may be received by the world. Their hospitality to their brothers and sisters of the Order strengthens fraternal bonds and stirs up a deeper faith and more fervent prayer. Sharing their liturgical prayer with God's people and offering an oasis of peaceful retreat and study is fundamental to the mission of the Order.

6. We encourage Dominicans from all branches of the Order to claim their identity as preachers. Furthermore, we ask all members to prepare themselves for this preaching and to take advantage of every opportunity. We are aware that the exclusion of women from ordained ministry and consequently from preaching the homily at the Eucharist is a painful experience for many. At the same time we are also aware that the debate itself on the ordination of women is painful for many. While remaining respectful of the Church's Magisterium, we are convinced that our Order is called to find creative ways to release the fullness of our preaching charism. We owe it to Veritas--the

Dominican goal of truth--to advance the theological and ecclesiological dimensions of this question.

7. It is crucial for us to note that, through our baptism and in a special manner through our Dominican commitment, all members of the Order participate without distinction in the common priesthood of the faithful. We ask all our brothers who exercise an ordained ministry in the Church to understand it as a service to this common priesthood lived in charity and without claims to power.

8. While we Friars desire to do all we can to collaborate with other branches of the Order, we encourage, in so far as is financially possible, all branches to be formed deeply in the theological traditions of the Church and the Order. Otherwise collaboration will remain unbalanced.

9. Having said all this, the great challenge that lies before us is addressing in our concrete situation the many injustices that are still major issues for all of society, but

which cause particular burdens for women and children: economic issues, health care services, violence, discrimination, disempowerment, and lack of fundamental dignity, equality, resources, and opportunity. Addressing those issues requires that we stand in solidarity with our sisters, that we listen to their voices, concerns, and challenges, and that we engage in genuine dialogue with an open spirit so that together we can understand, address, and change attitudes and structures of male dominance, lingering feudalism, and systematic discounting of women's gifts and leadership.

We petition the Master of the Order to constitute a commission of highly competent theologian brothers and sisters of the Order whose task will be to examine the question of the charism of preaching for men and women of the Order and its relation to ordained ministry, and to advance the theological and ecclesiological dimensions of the question.

In addition, other related issues of the priestly and prophetic roles ought to be explored. Members appointed to the commission were Sister Mary Catherine Hilkert (professor of theology at **University of Notre Dame, Akron Dominicans**), **Sister Mary O'Driscoll** (professor of spirituality at the Angelicum, Cabra Dominicans of Ireland), Sister Benedicta Hintersberger

(professor **of theology at the Dominican Sister's Academy, Augsburg, Germany**), Friar Hervé

Legrand (professor of ecclesiology, Institututa Catholique, Paris), and Friar Paul Philibert (then

prior of St. Dominic Priory, St. Louis, and chairperson for the commission). Sister Antonieta

Potente (Italian-born theologian teaching theology in Cochabamba, Bolivia) also was appointed

but withdrew due to her inability to communicate in English or French.

Timothy Radcliffe asked Paul Philibert to convene the group and asked that the group appoint its chairperson at its first meeting. The commission met once in Paris, 11–13 March 2000, with the intention of this being an introductory meeting with other meetings to follow.

The group appointed Paul Philibert as chairperson.

The process which followed in drafting the document could be characterized as follows:

1. Communication was difficult, due to multiple languages and lack of common access to email or fax.

2. The purpose of the March 2000 meeting was to clarify their common task and decide on

the tasks each member would accomplish before a next meeting.

3. The members never reached full agreement on their mandate. For example, Cathy saw the mandate calling for a discussion of liturgical preaching in the Order, while Hervé felt the commission was constrained by canonical restrictions on liturgical preaching by the nonordained.

4. By the end of the March 2000 meeting, a five-point structure for a document was proposed. Committee members shared ideas and sketched drafts for their proposed sections. **Mary O'Driscoll had to leave prior to this time. The committee was going to** meet again the following December 2000 in New York.

5. Paul met Timothy Radcliffe in April 2000 to clarify the mandate. Timothy said the mandate was describe the frontiers of preaching for the Order today and that the group might produce a document to be submitted to the Dominican Curia or an edited book on this topic.

6. As a result, the “to whom” for “from whom” questions of the mandate continued to shift in the members’ understanding.

7. At the General Assembly of the Dominican Family in Manila, 25–30 October 2000,

Timothy Radcliffe made an address “To Praise, To Bless, and To Preach” (printed in I

Call You Friends and online at www.op.org at Documents) in which he stated :

For many Dominicans, the discovery that we all have the authority to preach has been exciting and liberating. And the restriction of preaching after the gospel during the Eucharist is deeply painful for many of our sisters and laity. It is experienced as a negation of your full identity as preachers. As asked by the General Chapter, I appointed a Commission to examine this question, but unfortunately its conclusions will not be published until next March. I wish that I could have read them before preparing this talk!

8. In January 2001, Paul sent a letter to Chrys Finn in Rome asking for a clarification of the

committee's task and whether the committee might meet with the Dominican Curia in

Rome around Ash Wednesday 2001.

9. The meeting of the commission in Rome was to have happened in March 2001 was cancelled.

10. At that time, Paul wrote to commission members, proposing a revised five-point structure for a report to be submitted to the Providence Chapter in May 2001. He invited members to do the tasks he had described for them or to submit what they thought they best could contribute to a final report to the Chapter.

11. Paul drafted the majority of the report, including some material from the March 2000 meeting and the Acts of the Bologna Chapter. Cathy submitted material related to liturgical preaching. Mary sent the material and Catherine of Siena.

12. Paul sent a draft of the report to all committee members. Benedicta responding positively

to the draft and, in light of a call for theological education for women as deacons in Germany, asked that the deacon recommendation be included. Mary and Cathy affirmed the report and sent any further suggestions they had to Paul.

13. Paul undertook pulling together a final draft, which he sent to the DLC Preaching Committee—which submitted suggestions and critique on 3 May 2001.

14. Paul submitted a final draft to the Curia later in May 2001.

15. The final report was received by a different General Chapter (Providence) than the one that commissioned it (Bologna), and the leadership of the Order changed also at Providence.

16. When the document did not appear to be coming to the floor for discussion at the Providence Chapter, Sister Mary Faith Geelan, who was present, brought it to the attention of the United States provincials that the report was not being brought to

discussion. Alberto Rodriguez, provincial of the Southern Province, brought this to the attention of the Chapter committee.

17. Several reasons have been put forward to explain the lack of action by the Chapter of

Providence with regard to the document, all of which carry a grain of truth:

The document was submitted just before the chapter and therefore could not be translated.

The chapter had too much other business.

The concern from the United States about women being allowed to preach at Eucharist was not the principle concern of Dominicans from other parts of the world.

18. The document appears to be such that different readers interpret the document and its

agendas very differently, according to their own social location and agendas.

19. In the view of Paul Philibert, the gap in perspectives among those interested in this

question appears to be between those who are interested in finding the most positive

practical-pastoral response to Vatican policy that adds prohibition upon prohibition on

lay liturgical preaching and those who wish to use this document and its possibilities to

lobby and theologize for a rationale for lay preaching in the Church—and specifically

with reference to a presumed title to do so because of profession into the Dominican

Charism. In Paul's view, this tension was represented in the commission. The document,

therefore, does not go as far as some Commission members wished and went farther than

others wished. This may explain why the document never made to the table at the

General Chapter of Providence.

The DLC leadership signed a letter dated 7 October 2001 asked Carlos Azpiroz to attend to

follow-through with the commission document. Carlos responded in a letter of 21 November

2001, explaining the overfull agenda of the Providence chapter and assuring the DLC he would

do everything possible to continue the reflection. A reply was sent by the DLC executive

committee on 17 December 2001 expressing their sense of urgency that Carlos do so. In March

2002, the DLC preaching committee made an email intervention to Jerry Stookey in Rome, and

Jerry replied that he would keep the DLC concern before the curia.

On 28 May 2003, a letter was sent to the brothers and sisters of the Order from Chrys McVey,

Assistant for Apostolic Life, and Wojciech Giertych, Assistant for Intellectual Life, inviting a

sharing of experiences and reflections on how the charism is alive in the branches and regions of the whole Dominican family. These reflections are to be submitted by the end of 2005 and could develop into an international symposium on preaching a few years hence. This letter appears to be in direct response to the second recommendation **of the theological commission's document.**

In a letter of 5 April 2004, the DLC preaching committee calls upon all Dominican friends in the United States to respond to this request from the curia. The committee also plans to solicit response to this request at the All Dominican Day on 18 September 2004, following the Catholic Coalition on Preaching national conference in San Jose. Mary Jean Traeger and Gregory Heille will facilitate this reflection.

In March 2004, the Congregation for Divine Worship issued *Redemptionis Sacramentum* (Instruction on certain matters to be observed or to be avoided regarding the Most Holy Eucharist) which stated:

[161.] As was already noted above, the homily on account of its importance and its nature is reserved to the Priest or Deacon during Mass. As regards other forms of preaching, if necessity demands it in particular circumstances, or if usefulness suggests it in special

cases, **lay members of Christ's faithful may be allowed to preach in a church or in an** oratory outside Mass in accordance with the norm of law. This may be done only on account of a scarcity of sacred ministers in certain places, in order to meet the need, and it may not be transformed from an exceptional measure into an ordinary practice, nor may it be understood as an authentic form of the advancement of the laity. All must remember besides that the faculty for giving such permission belongs to the local Ordinary, and this as regards individual instances; this permission is not the competence of anyone else, even if they are Priests or Deacons.

At the General Chapter of Cracow in August 2004, the Preaching Commission began their work by studying the Report on Preaching that was submitted in Providence by the Special Commission. Both Timothy Radcliffe and Chrys McVey worked on the Preaching Commission, and they both told Paul Philibert that the Special Commission Report was important for their work.