

Presentation: Promoter of Preaching on International Theological Commission of the Order
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In my role as Congregational Promoter of Preaching, I come to you to talk about the Theological Commission on Preaching of the Order and to provide a broader context for our future study and discussion of the charism of preaching. In this brief presentation, I will review the historical background of the International Commission, discuss its purpose, and, finally, I have a request for your follow-up efforts.

History of the International Commission on Preaching

The International Commission on Preaching originated from the General Chapter of Bologna (1998). Article #42 of the Chapter stated:

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 questions. In addition, other related issues of the priestly and prophetic roles ought to be explored. (see Heille and Traeger, 2004)

Following this petition, Timothy Radcliffe named the first theological commission in 2000. Meeting once in Paris in March of that year, the initial commission experienced challenges due to language, means of communication, and a lack of clarity about their task coupled with differing priorities from diverse parts of the world. They did, however, complete a document entitled *The Dominican Charism of Preaching: An Inquiry* (Theological Commission on Preaching, 2001). Completed in May 2001, the document was submitted to the Chapter of Providence, meeting that summer. For a number of reasons, the Chapter of Providence was not able to attend to this document.

The next action toward Bologna's goal was a letter and survey sent to every member of the Order inviting an expression of experiences and reflections on how the charism is alive throughout the branches of the whole Dominican family. Some of you may remember we participated in this survey. Results of the survey were summarized by David Rocks, of the Ireland Province (Rocks, 2006).

In 2004, the Chapter of Krakow studied the report submitted by the first Commission on Preaching and responded affirmatively: (see back side of handout)

We acknowledge the work of the commission...

We support the ongoing study...for apostolic life and intellectual life...

We encourage responses to this study...

We recommend focusing on the following two questions for the future:

- **Is collaborative preaching by Dominican women and men, lay and ordained,** essential to our witness to the Gospel?
- **How does profession in the Order of Preachers** imply a commission to preach as a participation in the essential mission of the Order?

We recommend that before the next chapter a small meeting of theologians, historians, pastors and canonists be held to evaluate responses, continue the reflection, and propose future steps to be taken. (see Heille and Traeger, 200j4)

The current theological commission, appointed by Master Carlos Aspiroz Costa in 2006, used as their foundation the summary report of our survey responses prepared by David Rocks in their meeting of February 2007. This commission drafted a letter to all of the brothers and sisters of the Order calling us to deeper and ongoing study and discussion of the charism. That letter, entitled A Work in Progress, has been prepared in packets for you to take home today.

Why is this important?

The historical background of the Commission, looks at the question: What is the Commission? More importantly to our life is the question, Why is there an international commission? or So what? For this, I want to name two significant points from the Chapter of Bologna and three points from the article published by the first commission.

Building up to its petition constituting a commission on preaching, the Bologna Chapter discussed several significant issues. First, they spoke of the importance of unity within the Family. They acknowledged that other Chapters have referred to the dignity of women and of collaboration with laity and the sisters, but found it important to say more on this topic. I quote:

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 toward 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.

Secondly, the Chapter asserted that the most complete manifestation of our total identity **is in our collaboration together. They also acknowledged that a need for a “conversion of mentalities” on everyone’s part will take time. The Chapter called the friars to examine their images of women and what is conveyed in their speech and action, saying, “We ask pardon for all the instances of condescending and destructive attitudes and action on the part of the friars.”** The Chapter highlighted the unique gift each branch of the Order brings to the mission and called members from all branches to claim their identity as preachers.

Now, a few points from the first commission’s document, An Inquiry: first, the Order of Preachers has a privileged mandate to preach God’s word in fulfillment of its very nature. Theological reflection on preaching in the Dominican tradition shows that our ministry arises **from the power of God’s word. The commission pointed out that “we need to develop more clearly the theological rationale for our pastoral practice according to the spirit of our preaching charism.”**

Secondly, the commission underscored the importance of considering the signs of our times in relation to our charism. Citing the Fundamental Constitution which urges us to constantly renew our understanding of our preaching mission, we must live more fully the grace of our charism in order to respond to these challenges.

Finally, noting that there are several theological concerns that need to be addressed

regarding liturgical preaching, the commission named the relationship between the ministerial priesthood and the common priesthood of the baptized as one of vital importance.

Homework Assignment

So, where do we come into this picture? As you can see, the intention of the Chapter of Bologna has resulted in an ongoing process of study, reflection, and prayer. It is the purpose of our current International Theological Commission to continue this study so that we may deepen our understanding and living out of our charism so that the creative power of the Spirit may be **more freely unleashed through us to bring God's redemptive love into our world.**

The current commission sees our most basic challenge is rediscovering that preaching is at the heart of our vocation and identity, the current commission calls us to **“grater dedication to study and finding new modes of preaching in today's world.”**

The commission invites us to participate in this discussion, but states that they require prayer, study and disputation of the entire Family. They invite us to share in this important project of the Order and to share with them the fruits of our contemplation. Two specific questions were named: First, what are our own experiences of collaboration and our hopes, difficulties and dreams of how we can work together more fully in the future? Secondly, the commission urges us to share models for making our houses a Holy Preaching.

Each community will receive a packet today containing a copy of the current **commission's letter in a booklet form. (goldenrod booklet.)** The booklet was actually prepared by S. Bernadette Campbell (Columbus) for her congregation, and was shared with other Promoters of Preaching at our national meeting. Bernadette prepared the reflection questions that you will find inside the booklet. While these particular questions are not of the commission, they may be helpful for our own reflection and discussion.

So that we can send our responses to the Commission, I ask that you read and reflect on the booklet in its entirety, then gather to discuss the questions named for you in a communal setting of some form. Please submit your communal responses to me no later than January 23, 2008 so I can forward them on to the commission. Thank you.

References

- Heille, G. & Traeger, M. J. (2004). **Background with respect to the Order's Theological** Commission on the charism of preaching for women and men of the Order of Preachers. Presentation for the Dominican Leadership Conference Preaching Committee, September 2004.
- Theological Commission on Preaching. (2001). The Dominican Charism of Preaching: An inquiry.
- Theological Commission on Preaching. (2007). To the brothers and sisters in the Order of Preachers from the Preaching Commission of the Order: A report on work in progress.