

The Dominican Charism of Preaching: An Inquiry (May 2001)

Fr. Paul Philibert, O.P. writes: “[This is] the final draft of the Commission on the Preaching of the Non-Ordained that went to the General Chapter of Providence in 2001. Timothy Radcliffe established that commission to examine the charism of preaching in the Order and the manner in which it is expressed today following the signs of the times.

“Two friars were members: myself and Fr. Hervé Legrand who is professor of ecclesiology at the Institut Catholique in Paris; three Sisters served on the commission: Sister Mary Catherine Hilbert, O.P. of the University of Notre Dame (Akron Dominicans), Sister Mary O'Driscoll, O.P., professor of Spirituality at the Angelicum (Cabra Dominicans of Ireland), and Sister Benedikta Hintersberger, O.P., doctor of theology and professor at the Dominican Sisters' Academy in Augsburg, Germany.

“The document has no constitutional status at present. The General Chapter did not act on it and the Master General took no action on it. I presume that it will be reviewed by the present Master General and his Curia at some point. It nonetheless represents an international theological perspective and is a good state of the question document for issues of preaching in the Church.”

The General Chapter of Bologna (§42) made the following petition:

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.

1. As the opening numbers of the Book of Constitutions make clear, the Order of Preachers has a privileged mandate to preach God's word in fulfillment of its very nature. "You have given yourselves to the proclamation of the Word of God, preaching the name of our Lord Jesus Christ throughout the world."(LCO 1) The following paragraph continues: Dominic founded the Order from the beginning "especially for preaching and the salvation of souls." The very reason for the establishment of the Order was evangelization. The particular concern to which Dominic and Bishop Diego responded was the special and urgent need to preach to uncatechized baptized Christians in Christian lands who had been carried away by the seduction of the inauthentic spirituality of the Cathars.

The context for the original preaching of Dominic and Bishop Diego included public disputations having the character of theological debates. At the same time, they engaged in revivalist preaching both inside and outside church buildings. We know of historical examples of incidents in which such disputations and missions of preaching occurred. The work of evangelization that inspired the foundation of the Order was not normatively homiletic preaching during Eucharist, but catechetical preaching in any contexts where adult faith formation could take place.

The structure of the friars' life was designed explicitly to foster a ministry rooted in the word of God. As LCO 100 reminds us, "In the beginning of the Order, a convent was called 'Sacred Preaching'." All the elements of community life from the ways in which the Friars celebrated common prayer to the way in which study was given a privileged role oriented them toward the preaching ministry. The so-called "mixed life" that characterizes Dominican community has as its goal familiarity with divine intimacy, on the one hand, and a passion for

popular evangelization, on the other. (cf. *ST II II*, 188, 6) The thirteenth century revival of preaching was also linked to the revival of theology in the universities. A great transition took place there, moving theological reflection from the model of *lectio divina* to *sacra disputatio*. Friars Preachers were deeply involved in the activities that brought about this change, especially at the University of Paris. In addition, early friars began a missionary endeavor that continues in the life of the Order to the present day.

The first followers of Dominic the preacher were women. The foundation of the monastery at Prouille both recognized the essential role of women in an Order of Preachers, on the one hand, and charged them with an apostolic objective, on the other hand. Dominic clearly considered their contemplative prayer to be an integral part of the spiritual ecology of an Order of Preachers. The nuns are part of the Preaching Order organically, and not only by helping with their prayers; linked with the preachers, they foster the Dominican consciousness of the divine reality of the truths that we preach. It is significant that the first brothers took as patrons of the Order Mary Magdalene, the apostle to the apostles, and Catherine of Alexandria, the student and professor of philosophy. (cf. D. Byrne, *A Pilgrimage of Faith*, 105)

In the 14th century, a growing number of laity attached themselves to the Order, such as the *Mantellate* of Siena where St. Catherine found her spiritual home. St. Catherine's life and teaching show how central the proclamation of God's word was to her understanding of her Dominican vocation. For the sake of "God's honor and the salvation of souls," she brought the message of divine love and mercy to all whom she encountered. Raymond of Capua, the Dominican friar who was her friend and who later became Master of the Order, in his *Legenda* (II, vii) describes the transforming effect of Catherine's words on the huge crowds who came to listen to her. When Paul VI proclaimed Catherine a Doctor of the Church in 1970, he made special mention of her "lucid, profound and inebriating absorption of divine truths" and of her "charism of exhortation" which enabled her to communicate words of wisdom and knowledge (AAS LXII 10, 1970, 673-8). These are the qualities which made Catherine of Siena, a non-ordained Dominican woman, a great preacher.

What then does our history show us about the Dominican charism of preaching? We already see these three elements: (a) The Dominican preaching charism is a faithful and compassionate response to an uncatechized (or poorly catechized) world. (b) It is a broad weaving together of words and contexts: study, proclamation, teaching and earnest conversation, on the one hand, and books, churches, universities, and multiple other social contexts, on the other. (c) The charism is also a title for members of the Order--not only ordained, but all members--to participate in the broad structures of a highly diversified apostolic existence.

Theological Considerations

Theological reflection upon preaching in the Dominican tradition shows that the efficacy of our ministry arises from the power of God's word. Both in proclamation and exposition, it is the grace of the Word of God that is saving. We also recognize that this ministry arises from obedience to God's word. Just as Jesus is sent (in John's Gospel), so Dominicans are sent to be bearers of a word that is illumination, promise, and empowerment. All the ministries of Dominicans have a relationship to proclamation and catechesis. All of the General Chapters since 1977 state that preaching is the priority of priorities of our Dominican ministry.

We need to develop more clearly the theological rationale for our pastoral practice according to the spirit of our preaching charism. This has to do with the relationship of the ministry of the word and the sacraments. It is sadly true that much pastoral practice in the Catholic Church today appears to treat preaching as an accidental ornament of a substantially ritual experience (especially at Eucharist). However, good theology understands that the

celebration of the Eucharist arises out of the ministry of the word and is in some way shaped by the word. Preaching is a theological act for both the preacher and the assembly, shaping the people in their readiness to give themselves to the Body of Christ both through sacramental life and apostolic witness.

Finally, preaching is linked to contemplation. The saving word of God arises out of the experience of God received in anointed silence. From both biblical and psychological perspectives, silence is the cradle of prophecy. A shared praxis of study and prayer is essential to the fullness of Dominican life. In this way the Dominican tradition which holds that the community is the subject of the preaching act--the preaching community--becomes realized in practice. (Think of the example of Fray Antonio de Montecinos in Hispaniola in the sixteenth century.) Although only one may stand before the assembly in proclamation and catechesis, the whole community has lifted up the preacher through dialogue and community support.

The Signs of the Times

For half a century, the church has been conscious of the theological category of "the signs of the times." This phrase refers to the activity of God in the world and in the changing events of human history. The phrase comes from the Bible (Mt 16: 3) and is used in John XXIII's encyclical *Pacem in Terris* (§126-29) and in *Gaudium et Spes* (§4). The basic idea points to the church's responsibility to examine the signs of the times and interpret them in the light of the gospel.

This concept is pertinent to the participation of all members of the Order of Preachers in the Order's central charism. The Fundamental Constitution (§5) urges us to constantly renew our understanding of our preaching mission "with due consideration for the conditions of persons, times, and places..." This is another way of exhorting us to be attentive to the "signs of the times."

The signs are clear that the times have changed. Here are some important examples of those changes:

(a) In many parts of the world, not only are women the clear majority of churchgoers, but the majority of ecclesial ministers as well.

(b) In mission countries, it is still largely non-ordained catechists who are responsible for faith formation and community organization for the majority of Catholics in parishes and mission churches.

(c) In North America, northern Europe, Australia and New Zealand, Central and South America, and elsewhere, where no presbyters are available to serve in parishes as residential pastors, the majority of those who become local parish leaders in the absence of a priest are lay (and largely women).

(d) In most parts of the world, the responsibility for catechetical formation falls upon the laity, prominently to women who are not religious.

In addition, most of the responsibility for transformative evangelization even in first world countries is the initiative of the laity. By "transformative evangelization," we mean such work as the adult catechumenate, leadership for small Christian communities, Christian education, social ministries to the poor and children, etc. Both because of their experience in these social contexts as well as because of their expertise in leading works of this kind for the sake of the gospel, laity have a particularly important message that is genuinely theological and evangelical. Many laity have theological training and pastoral expertise equal to that of our friars. Their voice is one of graced spiritual experience.

Ecclesiology

Our reflection on the preaching charism should likewise pattern itself upon developments in ecclesiology. The theology of the "People of God" imagines a church whose horizons reach outside of itself (LG 1, GS 1, AA 5-8, CL 33-36). One of the major themes of the encyclicals of John Paul has been the *missionary* church. It is clear that a living ecclesiology must envisage an apostolic people who alone, as John Paul puts it, can close the gap between gospel and culture.

The use of the theological category *in persona Christi capitis* (cf. CCC 1548, LG 10) for the presbyter can obscure the necessary complementarity of the category *in persona Christi corporis* for the baptized. An ecclesiology which overprivileges the prerogatives of the ordained is in conflict with the powerful imagery of LG 33 where the vocation of the baptized is described as "this special vocation: to make the church present and fruitful in those places and circumstances where it is only through them that it can become the salt of the earth." This intuition of the unique role of the baptized in evangelizing the cultures that they know from within is expressed well in PO 2: "Therefore there is no such thing as a member who does not have a share in the mission of the whole body."

Social and Cultural Context

Likewise, we must be realistic about dramatic changes in the social and cultural contexts of the Christian life. All the cultures that preceded us were androcentric, especially the Roman, Latin, European cultures that dominated the formation of Western ecclesiastical traditions. However our modern industrialized societies have changed those dominant patterns from the past--and for objective, not ideological reasons. Among the many factors that have contributed to the "promotion of women" (John XXIII's term for this particular sign) are these:

Medical progress has liberated women from many burdens linked to their biological role in the species. Few women die in childbirth any longer. Most newborns now survive. Child-bearing no longer removes women today from social effectiveness.

Further, we recognize clear injustice based on sex. Women have always had to work without cease both in the family and in society. Before, they did this without pay. Now most professions and social contexts recognize that lack of gender balance and other forms of discrimination are genuine detriments to the authenticity of any social project. They honor the fact that women have a special and invaluable contribution to make particularly from their feminine experience and social location. This is why we now find women in roles of executive leadership and in other prominent positions in business, politics, education, science, and communications. Unfortunately, these sorts of developments are not generally apparent in significant ways within the church (or even within many of our international Dominican entities).

As an Order with a centuries-long tradition of membership of both men and women, we Dominicans have the opportunity and a particular responsibility to respond to the "signs of the times" relative to cultural and social change inclusive of women in leadership and prophetic insight. The General Chapters of the Order have developed for over a generation strong statements on the solidarity of all the members of the "Dominican Family" in a common spirituality, history, and charism. "The Chapters of Walberberg in 1980 and Rome in 1983 made significant contributions to acknowledging the importance of preaching by Sisters. Walberberg asks the brethren to form preaching teams with our Sisters: 'In this way our preaching will more easily and effectively reach the whole person' (§ 77) We are challenged to form preaching teams not just to help each other, but to make our preaching more effective in people's lives." (D. Byrne, *A Pilgrimage of Faith*, 106. Cf. Bologna 1998: §34 and 42) Our challenge is to live out that rich tradition of history and prophecy.

These remarks intend to provide an overview of the context within which our theologizing and our policy-making need to develop. In the next section, you will read a reflection on a particular challenge, namely, the need to make a case for the liturgical preaching of the non-ordained in the face of the clear pastoral need for evangelization and the growing recognition of the irreplaceable value of the voices of women in shaping Gospel preaching. Following that, you will find a resumé of suggested initiatives that challenge the Order of Preachers to integrate its history and its charism concretely into the new possibilities of the signs of the times.

Liturgical Preaching in Our Dominican Context

1. The changing pastoral situation is marked by a hunger for the Word of God and for deeper spirituality on the part of many Christians. This creates a clear need for more effective preaching. A decrease in numbers of the ordained is paralleled by an increase in numbers of professionally trained lay ministers who are gifted and prepared to preach. The needs of multicultural communities to hear the Word of God as expressed through the particular life experience and cultural heritage of their members creates special needs for preaching.

2. The renewal of the Church's preaching ministry cannot be limited to the pulpit. The entire church is called to announce the reign of God in word, deed and relationship as Jesus did. In the broadest sense, preaching includes the many diverse ways in which the baptized announce and promote the reign of God (e.g., "Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive part of preaching the gospel." Justice in the World, 1971 Synod of Bishops). Within that broad mission of the Church to preach the gospel, specific members of the community are gifted and called to exercise diverse ministries of the Word, including preaching ministries (evangelization, missionary work, itinerant preaching teams, catechists, directors of RCIA, preachers of retreats and missions, spiritual directors, etc.)

3. The Preaching Charism: "The Spirit distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank. By these gifts [the Spirit] makes them fit and ready to undertake various tasks and offices for the renewal and building up of the Church" (LG 12). In 1 Cor 12, Paul includes within the diverse manifestations of the Spirit given for the common good, "the gift of prophecy" and the gift of "wisdom in discourse." From the reception of a charism or gift "there arises for each believer the right and duty to use them in the Church and in the world for the good of [humankind] and for the upbuilding of the Church" (AA 3).

The preaching charism is grounded in baptism and confirmation; it is a charism that is at the heart of presbyteral and episcopal office, but that is not restricted to the ordained. (Remember Thomas Aquinas's discussion of *gratia sermonis* and whether women receive that "grace of speech" in *ST II-II*, 177. Note as well Congar's work on the share of all of the baptized in Christ's prophetic mission.) The charism for preaching is at the heart of the mission of the Order of Preachers. All members are called to participate in the mission of the Order according to their diverse abilities, gifts, training, and call. This call arises from the very purpose for which the Order was founded. Therefore those who are professed for the Order's mission receive some title from their profession to partake of that mission according to their role, gifts, and circumstances.

Further, we should ask if this title to partake of the preaching mission which is received by apostolic Dominican Sisters is parallel in significance to the title to preach that derives from ordination to the office of deacon. How are they similar? What is the theological explanation of the title to preach in each case?

4. Reflections on Liturgical Preaching.

The purpose of the homily is to enable the gathered congregation to celebrate the liturgy with faith and to "apply the perennial truth of the gospel to the concrete circumstances of life" (PO 4). The preacher is called to connect liturgy and life, to name the grace of God operative in the community here and now in light of the Scriptures of the day and the specific liturgical celebration. (The latter statement reflects the emphasis of the 1982 document "Fulfilled in Your Hearing" written by the U.S. Bishops' Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry). A distinction may need to be drawn here between formal liturgical preaching and testimony (or the witness of faith) which presiders or preachers sometimes invite within the liturgical context. The latter, while valuable, is not the only appropriate form of liturgical preaching by the non-ordained

Pastoral experience with diverse ministers of the Word has led an increasing number of communities and persons to question why the eucharistic homily, as the preeminent preaching of the Church, is restricted to ordained males. (Carlo Molari wrote in the early 1970s: "[T]he content [of the announcement of the gospel] emerges only through the experience of the gospel which believers have lived out in their different life situations through the action of the Spirit. For this reason the fact that only the priest comments on the scripture readings and unveils their present-day meaning is not sufficient for the authentic proclamation of the Word of God today." (*La Fede e il suo linguaggio*, Assisi: Cittadella Editrice, 1972, 280-284. Translation by John Dunn)

We need to question what is the pastoral impact on communities of faith (and especially women and girls) when the gospel is preached only by males (and most often, celibate males).

5. Various theological and liturgical reasons have been given for restricting liturgical preaching to the ordained:

a) "the homily is part of the liturgy itself," an act of worship. (True, but the entire assembly is engaged in the act of worship, and other ministries within the liturgy are exercised by non-ordained members of the assembly.)

b) There is a unity of word and sacrament. Does the unity of word and sacrament necessarily require that a single minister be both preacher and presider? Here Mary Collins proposes: If Eucharist is the act of the whole Church and if the ordained is one who presides within, not over, the community of believers, then "[e]cclesial experience confirms that it is possible for one who presides within the liturgical assembly to engage another believer to lead them all together into deep communion with the mystery of Christ by the power of the word, and this collaborative ordering does not fracture the sacrament of unity." ("Baptismal Roots of the Preaching Ministry," in *Preaching and the Non-Ordained*, ed. Nadine Foley [Liturgical Press, 1983] 111-133, at 130).

c) Some express the concern that lay preaching breaks "the intrinsic bonds between word, sacrament, and community leadership." In fact, in many pastoral communities (as we noted above) the primary pastoral ministries, including ministries of the word, are exercised by non-ordained pastoral ministers. Even when an ordained minister is available for sacramental celebrations, he often is not the regular pastoral leader of the community.

d) Those who preach in the liturgical context are forming the faith of the community at the most fundamental level. Who/what authorizes them to speak in the name of the church? Public recognition and commissioning of those who preach in a liturgical context need not be identified with ordination. All those who preach in the liturgical context should have adequate preparation and give evidence of a gift for preaching. An increasing number of dioceses and local churches have begun to develop and implement guidelines for the formation of preachers and for a process of discerning who is gifted with a charism to preach. Competence should be more highly prized than status in the choice of ministers for preaching in the Church.

6. What about Canonical Restrictions (cf. c. 767)? Although canon 767 restricts the homily to the ordained, not all canon lawyers or bishops agree that this means that it is never possible for the presider to invite another baptized member of the community to preach after the proclamation of the Gospel at the Eucharist. Further, at times it may be pastorally advisable to do just that, although the preaching would not then be called a homily in the technical canonical sense. [See James H. Provost, "Canon 766" in *Roman Replies and CLSA Advisory Opinions* 1986, ed. William A Schumacher and J. Cuneo (Washington, D.C.: Canon Law Society of America, 1986) 71-73; idem., "Brought Together by the Word of the Living God (Canons 762-773)," *Studia Canonica* 23 (1989) 345-371; J. A. Corriden, "The Preaching of the Word of God (cc. 762-772)," in *The Code of Canon Law: A Text and a Commentary*, ed. J. A. Corriden, T. J. Green, and D. E. Heintschel, commissioned by the Canon Law Society of America (New York: Paulist, 1985), 551-555; John M. Huels, "The Law on Lay Preaching: Interpretation and Implementation," *Proceedings of the Canon Law Society of America* 52 (1990) 61-79; idem., "The Ministry of the Divine Word (Canons 756-761)," *Studia Canonica* 23 (1989) 325-344; idem., *Disputed Questions in the Liturgy Today* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1988) 17-25.]

Theological and pastoral rationales for that practice can be found in the "Directory of Masses with Children" and the Vatican-approved experiment with lay preaching at Eucharist in Germany in the 1970s. The "Directory of Masses with Children" uses the pastoral principle of determining who might best communicate the Word of God to a specific community at a given time: "One of the adults may speak after the Gospel, especially if the priest finds it hard to adapt himself to the mentality of children" (§ 24). The German bishops offered a further theological and liturgical rationale: "Since the church teaches that the entire community preaches the gospel and celebrates the liturgy, the responsibility for maintaining the office of preaching should not be given to the priest alone. Further lay preaching is a way of making visible the different charisms, services, and offices which exist in the Christian community without detracting from the unity of its mission." (Taken from the 1973 petition by the German bishops asking for Vatican authorization for lay preaching at Eucharist, "Die Beteiligung der Laien an der Verkündigung," 2, 33, trans. William Skudlarek; see Appendix 3 in William Sudlarek, *Assertion Without Knowledge? The Lay Preaching Controversy of the High Middle Ages*—Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1979. That initiative led to eight years of authorized lay preaching at Eucharist in the dioceses of Germany.)

7. Theological Concerns that need to be addressed:

a) The relationship between the ministerial priesthood and the common priesthood of the baptized is of vital importance. When the initial permission for the German experiment was granted, the Congregation for the Clergy affirmed that the people of God share responsibility for proclaiming the word of God, but expressed a concern about "whether extending the office of preaching to the laity will obscure the essential distinction between the ministerial priesthood of priests and the universal priesthood of believers." The concern over a presumed confusion about the distinct identity of the ordained also seems to be the primary concern in recent Vatican documents such as the 1997 Instruction on "Some Questions Regarding Collaboration of Nonordained Faithful in Priests' Sacred Ministry," and a letter from the Congregation for the Clergy on "The Priest: Teacher of the Word, Minister of the Sacraments, Leader of the Community" (*Origins* Vol 29, September 9, 1999, 198-211).

b) There is a relationship between charism and office. The bishop oversees the ministries of the Word. He is therefore responsible for the discernment, testing, and ordering of charisms within a local church.

c) There are other on-going pastoral concerns: first, that the word of God be preached and heard more effectively; and second, that the community recognize not only the ministerial role of

the ordained, but also genuine ministries of the word exercised by other baptized members of the community who are not ordained.

d) How is Canon Law related to pastoral practice? How can we as Dominicans contribute to an interpretation and implementation of church law with regard to preaching that fosters a fuller hearing and proclamation of the Word of God?

Challenges for the Order from Our Shared Charism

1. The principal challenge for the Dominican Family is to own the shared heritage of the charism of preaching given to us by St. Dominic, by our Constitutions and by our history as the essential work and mission of our Order. “The question of where we get our authority to preach is an important one. Obviously, today, both men and women need the permission of the local bishop. In earlier days it was the General Chapter, following Dominic’s requirements, that decided ‘whether God’ had given the grace for preaching (cf. Constitutions of 1241, Dist. II. Cap. XII)” (from Byrne, *op cit.*, 107).

2. For the friars, the first challenge is to affirm and implement the primacy of preaching in the life and ministry of our houses. We are called to account for the nature of our ministries in terms of their relationship to the primacy of preaching that is at the heart of the Order’s charism.

3. In addition, the Manila Dominican Family Convocation (2000) explicitly reaffirmed everyone in the Dominican Family as being the Order. All have responsibility to advance the realization of the preaching charism of the Order. The friars have the responsibility to assure the appropriate collaboration of the nuns, sisters, and laity of the Order in their ministries of the Word of God in response to pastoral needs. These include joining the voices of women and laity in the catechetical mission of our provinces and houses, inviting them to contribute specific and distinctive voices and witness in particular pastoral situations, and creating opportunities for collaborative preaching by friars and other members of the Dominican family in various works of evangelization.

We all hold responsibility for bringing this desired collaboration into play. We recall the words of the Bologna Chapter §34: “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. Together, we constitute the Order and together realize its entire mission.”

Recommendations

1. We recommend that a commission of the Order continue the theological and canonical study necessary to advance the question of liturgical preaching by qualified and gifted non-ordained members of the Order and the Church. Theologically and canonically competent women and men of the Order should pursue the investigations initially explored by this commission (established by the General Chapter of Bologna, 1998) in order to examine in greater depth the points raised in this document and others of a similar nature. We recommend that these issues should include the following:

- How do we reinterpret what it means to preach “for the salvation of souls” in our present day?
- In what ways is collaborative preaching by women and men, lay and ordained, essential to the Church’s witness to the Gospel?
- How does profession in the Order of Preachers provide a title for preaching as a participation in the essential mission of the Order? How is this title analogous to the title that pertains to the order of deacon?

• How can the Order of Preachers take more responsibility for the renewal of preaching throughout the Church, aiding diocesan priests and others to accept responsibility for this essential ministry and aiding them in fulfilling it?

2. We recommend that some structure be established to document the many ways that the Dominican friars, nuns, sisters, and laity are already collaborating in the preaching mission of the Order throughout the world. This collaborative study can identify the theological and pastoral insights and questions that are emerging from the experience of the Order, and make recommendations for future collaboration. In addition to serving as a valuable source of encouragement and challenge for members of the Order, this study can also serve as a resource for the larger Church, which lacks effective structures for collaboration in ministry by women and men, lay and ordained.

3. We recommend that the Order request from the Holy See permission for the ordination to the order of deacon of apostolic Sisters who are charged with preaching and ministries of the word.

Submitted

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N.B.:

CL = Christifideles Laici

CCC = Catechism of the Catholic Church