

CHAPTER II

PREACHING

Prologue

20. The *Acta* of previous General Chapters offer a rich source of reflections on the question of preaching. We reaffirm the recommendations and observations of the México Chapter and share the fundamental orientations expressed there. In this Chapter we have chosen to offer more focused reflections on preaching in terms of the four priorities of the Order as expressed in recent General Chapters, and to examine these in terms of three other dimensions of Dominican life: poverty, itinerancy and dialogue. These three themes cropped up repeatedly in the discussions of the capitulars and reflect the concerns of many friars seeking to live out their vocation more fully.

CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

20.1. Before making the recommendations which follow, we noted both the challenges which the world presented to the Order at the end of the twentieth century and the wide range of responses which Dominicans throughout the world have made to these challenges.

Though many of the “challenges” we discussed represent negative and dehumanizing trends, they also contain elements of a positive response by men and women to the difficulties of their lives - the instinct of a community to defend itself, the creative economic energy of the entrepreneur, the openness of the human spirit to the voice of God in every aspect of creation. Dominicans will therefore respond to these challenges in a nuanced way, true to our Thomist tradition that grace perfects rather than destroys nature. Such a confidence in the goodness of creation underlies the whole of this present document. The hand of God is seen in every moment of human history, and we are not merely preachers of God’s Word against the world, but of his blessing.

The universal challenge which we meet in our preaching ministry is the same as that which Jesus met: the culture of the “heart of stone”, namely, the anti-parable of the good samaritan. Its characteristics are: a false concept of good (the sabbath as more important than man); a spirit of discrimination and marginalization (the parable of the pharisee and the publican); an attitude of imposing rather than dialoguing (“they place burdens on others...”); giving more importance to the adjective than to the noun (parable of pharisee and the publican).

Non-Christian religiosity, nihilism and post-Christian culture

20.2. Outside the Christian tradition there exist forms of religious experience and knowledge which we must take seriously, first the great world religions, not excluding the beliefs and practices of the indigenous people of Africa, Asia and America, or indeed the religious quest implicit in nihilist thought and the entire post-Christian culture. Some aspects of these are deeply negative, while others are full of the Wisdom which comes from God. We must be discerning as to the difference, perceiving how God speaks to us in other cultures and traditions.

Violence and fear

20.3. Many people live with the constant threat of violence, and the resulting fear is a major challenge to the preaching of the Gospel. But the violence of which we speak is not only that of the criminal minority, damaging though this is. Governments invest ever greater sums of their people’s money in weapons, in building ever larger defense industries, and in research for improving their efficiency in slaughter, instead of investing in the social and economic measures which might defuse violent conflicts.

Tribalism, nationalism and racism

20.4. As a particular manifestation of violence, we note the disastrous effects of ideologies in which a particular collective (state, tribe or race) is given an absolute value to which human lives are sacrificed in a way which can only be described as idolatrous. Rwanda’s

ongoing agony, the violence which has engulfed former Yugoslavia, and the rising number of incidents of racial violence in Europe, all reveal the urgency of the preaching of the Gospel in the face of this particular form of inhumanity.

The all-embracing market-place

20.5. The collapse of the totalitarian pseudo-socialism of the Soviet Bloc has left the free-market economies of the West in total possession of the world stage. The damage done by this deification of market forces, as though the laws of supply and demand represented some unchallengeable feature of the divine law, has been considerable. Not only is this true at the level of international economics, but also in the growth of ideologies in which everything is seen as a commodity, as a marketable product which belongs by right to whoever can pay most for it. The Catholic tradition does not allow that everything can be treated as a commodity in this way: men and women may not be treated as commodities, nor may their lives and work, their culture and potential for flourishing in society be counted among negotiable tokens in the game of profit and loss. Such abuses also constitute a species of violence.

Individualism

20.6. Another cluster of challenges to Christian preaching can be described as individualism which is not only manifested in the anthropological assumptions of the free-market economy, but in countless assumptions of the consumerist culture of western civilization, and in the disintegration of many forms of community life: family and intermediate political structures, trade unions and so on.

As a counterpoint running through all these, we note that a universal challenge facing our ministry and preaching today is like that which faced Jesus Christ: the heart of stone. Its characteristics are the false concept of human good, discrimination, attitudes which seek to impose things on people rather than dialogue with them, and making detailed qualifications more important than the substance of faith.

THE DOMINICAN RESPONSE

20.7. We are impressed by the wide variety of preaching commitments of the members of the Dominican Family throughout the world. In many of these we discern a pattern which ought to be seen as a model of what it will mean to be a preacher in the twenty-first century.

First, many are committed to sharing the lives, joys and sufferings of those to whom they wish to speak about Christ. This first level of evangelization follows the paradigm of the Word of God, who was spoken to us when he took our flesh, pitching his tent among us. Among these are friars and sisters who have chosen to live among Moslems in Algeria, in spite of the risk to their lives. In Burundi, where the whole society has disintegrated into warring tribal factions, our brothers are trying to live in a community embracing both Hutu and Tutsi groups.

A second stage follows when Dominicans so implanted engage in critical theological reflection, exploring questions together in community, searching for the meaning of the Word of God in establishing the content of their preaching ministry. In Multan (Pakistan) and Ak'Kutan (Guatemala), for example, the friars are involved in reflection on the challenge presented by indigenous cultures. This reflection will be enhanced if we listen to each other preaching.

The third stage is one in which more outgoing apostolic activity is possible, projects are planned and executed and their effectiveness assessed. The formation of preaching teams has met with great success, and centers of theological study provide formation for those who will be preachers of the Word of God, enhancing the doctrinal and critical quality of their preaching.

These should not be seen as chronologically distinct stages, but rather as three elements of evangelization which must constantly test and nourish each other, so that even at the stage of project-development

the impetus of sharing the fate of those to be evangelized is constantly renewed.

In this process, the question of power is raised. We preach Christ crucified, the naked Christ who was despised and rejected by men. If we are to do this faithfully, we will find ourselves following the naked Christ, naked. The hesitation that some may have in adopting a strong sense of proclamation in their preaching, for fear of “religious colonialism”, is best answered by this criterion of authentic preaching. The powerless cannot colonize, but they can and must speak about why they have chosen this strange discipleship, and if they speak faithfully they can and will awake hope in the hearts of men and women of this age.

THREE DIMENSIONS OF THE DOMINICAN RESPONSE

(I) Poverty and preaching on the frontier

20.8. “He emptied himself, taking the form of a servant”. In imitation of Jesus himself, and of Dominic who renounced the fruitless opulence of the Cistercians in Provence, we are invited to take steps in order to realize our option for the poor by sharing their life. As an Order, we are asked to make a serious effort in terms of standards and style of life, reflected in the neighborhoods in which we dwell and the people with whom we live. Experiences today among the marginalized, immigrants, and lower income groups, energize our preaching ministry. We learn to speak their language, and to recognize God’s presence and action in their daily lives. We learn what it means to be deprived of those goods which correspond to human dignity. And so we are empowered to proclaim the word of compassion, announcing the presence of Jesus Christ crucified and risen among his people, proclaiming their dignity and worth as temples of the Spirit, and articulating their basic human rights.

This is the Word that has the power to change hearts; to open people to one another in dialogue and to the living God who longs to converse with us in prayer; to create the disposition for a manifold of

healing; to put into motion the mysterious dynamism of mutual forgiveness; finally, to set the foundation for genuine community, where the Eucharist is celebrated as the dangerous memorial of him who gave himself away only to receive as his own heritage the first fruits of the Reign of God, life in abundance. In this process Dominican life in community is itself challenged and enhanced, and Dominicans themselves are given the impetus to move on to new frontiers.

At the frontier of the marginalized, evangelical poverty is experienced as a voluntary choosing of simplicity of life, whereby we acquire a new vision of social reality and the Reign of God, seeing them through the eyes of the poor. This provides us with content for our preaching on the issues of Justice and Peace. Among the poor we proclaim Jesus, inviting people to live his life, and to practice the sort of dialogue which promotes ever new understanding and realization of the Reign of God.

Of those goods which we do possess we must constantly ask ourselves the question: "How does our possession of this help the poor, or help us to preach Good News to the poor?"

(II) Itinerancy

20.9. Jesus of Nazareth had nowhere to lay his head. Such itinerancy was also central to Dominic's vision. We have to a great extent forgotten the traditional Dominican ethos of "itinerancy". So too, what distinguished the Order in its early days was not only its preaching - for bishops and priests already had the mandate to preach - for papal approval was given to the Order in term of the "apostolic" character it should possess in order to be able to preach everywhere free from restraints of local structures. Finally, our profession was made not to a priory or a province, but to the Master of the whole Order, so that the needs of the whole Order are the concern of every friar. We must rediscover this all but forgotten value in our tradition.

Itinerancy is in the first place a spatial concept, involving readiness for travel, but we suggest that our preaching demands this kind of

mobility in many other ways: social, cultural, ideological and economic. This itinerancy is not to be understood as an additional priority, but rather as an aspect of Dominican spirituality which must inform all our attempts to pursue the four priorities of the Order, manifested in a certain mobility, in sitting lightly in our existing forms of life and work, in order to preach wherever our preaching is actually needed. In many places our commitment to parishes is the main obstacle to our itinerancy and our preaching.

(III) Dialogue

20.10. In the long history of God's dialogue with humanity, the Incarnate Word is the paradigm of our understanding. Jesus never spoke down to people, but always with them. Both Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman at the well were his partners in dialogue. Our Father Dominic himself renounced the positions of power claimed by those who preceded him in the campaign against the Albigensians. His preference was for conversation, as indeed was that of brother Thomas in his ministry of preaching by teaching.

Therefore every Dominican should see dialogue as a way of life demanding openness and a readiness to adapt in our search for truth.

As a preparation for a life of dialogue, we should avoid all temptations to sectarian ways of thought, and cultivate a deep sense of compassion and belonging to every person and situation in the world. It is in meeting the other that the journey of life leads us in the path of truth.

Dialogue could cover three main areas, which may be described as follows:

- a) ecumenical dialogue
- b) inter-religious dialogue
- c) cultural dialogue

The activity of dialogue presupposes that we have our own convictions and beliefs and that we desire to share our faith with others. So dialogue does not mean a surrender of our own beliefs. It should be seen as a process of mutual enrichment. It is a necessary mode of existence in a world of difference. Nevertheless, in any culture we will still encounter things to which we are implacably opposed. No amount of dialogue will remove the need for counter-cultural preaching.

a) Ecumenical dialogue

20.11. Among Christians we should seek out more opportunities to create the unity which will enable us to answer modern challenges and to show the world that solidarity can bring about greater friendship and peace in place of suspicion and competition. Such events as Christian Unity Week offer opportunities to pray together and express our common fellowship in Jesus. A special challenge emerges for our brothers in Central and Eastern Europe who are working in daily contact with Orthodox Christians.

b) Inter-religious dialogue

20.12. We have to recognize the presence of other world religions in our neighborhood, affirming what is good in them. Our openness to other major religions may help us to attune our preaching to their needs. We should bear in mind that our duty is not merely to boost the numbers of Christian recruits, but to speak and spread the message which Jesus proclaimed to all people. Before we attempt to share our message, all the brethren should be encouraged to develop sincere human contacts with men and women of other religions. This human relationship can lead us to a stage where we are able to share our spiritual riches with greater freedom and ease.

The area of Justice and Peace is a field where we can cooperate with men and women of other religions. Working together often proves to be a stage which leads people to deeper forms of sharing. In recent years, Christians have become very successful in creating a com-

mon platform for people of different faiths to come together to address problems that threaten society with disintegration, and to pray for peace. This leadership should be encouraged and perfected in the days to come. Inviting people of other faiths to come into close quarters with Christianity may challenge them to be more deeply committed Buddhists, Hindus, Jains or Moslems.

Dialogue with Judaism must be developed in recognition of the roots of our faith in the faith of Israel. In this respect we commend the establishment of the network of Dominicans working in dialogue with Judaism.

c) Cultural dialogue

20.13. Evangelizing people immediately brings us face-to-face with their culture. Culture is the articulated expression of life in art, music, literature, language and forms of worship. A Dominican should try to be in constant dialogue with a given culture, realizing that positive cultural forms are ways through which the Gospel can make inroads into the hearts of the people.

As society is being deeply influenced by science and its rapid progress, it is imperative to maintain a dialogue with the scientific community, and to be attentive to the explosion in technology, especially in the field of information exchange. We should address questions that crop up in the bio-ethical field from a moral and theological viewpoint. The pseudo-scientific imagination of much New Age religion is also one which needs to be understood if we are to have anything to say to those who are attracted to it.

The activity of dialogue should be undertaken by the whole Dominican community, and we should teach our Christian people that the activity of dialogue is an integral part of one's Christian vocation. Thus we should try to do away with the false notion that dialogue is something which is carried out only by persons in ecclesiastical authority.

We often find that our attempts to establish dialogue are frustrated by the refusal of the other party to hear what we have to say. We recall that Christian dialogue is rooted in God's dialogue with humanity, and that our own response to his approaching Word was not one of absolute openness. Yet he paid the price for our refusal, and so brought peace. This establishes a pattern for our approach to dialogue: we must take risks as we approach others in openness and trust - even risking the possibility that our openness may be abused.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Justice and Peace

21. We reaffirm the Mexico Chapter's recommendation that every province should have at least one community in a poor or marginalized area. These communities, in their response to local needs, must have the support of their provinces, including financial support if this is made necessary by the poverty of the people they serve.
22. We require each province to give real support, moral and financial, to the Provincial Promoter of Justice and Peace, and each Provincial Council should approve a budget for his work.
23. New needs arise continually which call on us to respond in the name of Justice and Peace. In Europe this might mean the arrival of new immigrants, in Africa we think of the permanent refugee crisis affecting millions. These situations require of us itinerancy in terms of where and how we work.
24. We ask the General Promoter for Justice and Peace to study the possibility of establishing a Dominican NGO for Human Rights to help the brethren work in such areas.
25. The external debt of countries of the Third World is a primary cause of the misery in which their poor live and die, and is also a destabilizing influence in regional politics. In the tradition of St.

Thomas and St. Antoninus of Florence, we should denounce this institutionalized usury as a sin crying to heaven for vengeance, and regard this as a central part of the work of Justice and Peace which is our priority. We require that every entity in the Order take into account questions of Third World Debt when choosing the institutions they appoint to handle their funds.

Media of social communication

26. Each province should have at least one person who is trained to a high degree in professional competence in one or more of the major media - journalism, TV, radio, etc. Such a person, or another, should have as a part of his responsibility the encouragement of other brethren in the use of the media.

27. Dominican itinerancy in the context of the media suggests that we should move beyond the participation of the brethren in religious broadcasting and publishing and into a more general use of the secular media. For example, while the “God slot” or “jour du Seigneur” type of broadcast is valuable and commendable, we must seek to establish ourselves in the mainstream of secular programming.

28. We appreciate the recent study by CIDAL: “Presence and Absence of the Dominicans of Latin America in the Media.” We recommend that the Promoter for Media of Social Communication, hold regional meetings elsewhere to make similar studies and to promote our further participation in the media, paying special attention to creating a network of Dominicans in the media.

29. We appreciate the work of the Commission for Internet and related technology, and look forward to the publication of its report. We recommend that on the basis of this report information about this technology and its potential for Dominican use be communicated to the Order internationally, and some form of support and advice service for Dominicans who wish to use this medium be established.

Cultural policy

30. We have to work harder at being intellectually prepared to contribute to the cultures in which we live. Formation of a friar must equip him to participate critically in various ways in the cultural life of his society, and to do so with a certain expertise. We must go out of our religious world to participate in the discussion of a wider cultural world of artists, writers, cinema, TV, music, etc. This includes the world of scientific culture in which we must be prepared to offer critical theological dialogue.

31. We are living in two worlds: the world of the marginalized whose experience we are already committed to sharing, and the world of an intellectual and cultural elite. Itinerancy will require of our communities the ability to hold these two in tension, so that our participation in the cultural goods of our society serves our Justice and Peace commitment to those who are excluded from those goods.

Mission in non-christian and de-christianized milieux

32. We recommend provinces to establish and maintain a Dominican presence in areas where people of other faiths are in the majority, particularly in Arab countries where our presence is growing weak. Wherever dialogue occurs we should pursue it without adopting a defensive posture with regard to other faiths. We should have a genuine interest in other religions, as they are truly ways of seeking God. In our dialogue with non-Christians, we witness to the mystery of the living God revealed in Jesus Christ through the power of the Spirit. This mystery inspires our religious discourse and preaching. But we should be aware that our language can never express totally this God to whom we are joined “as to the unknown” (ST Ia, 12, xiii, ad 1um.). In this way, by witnessing to what we have seen and heard in Christ, who is the revelation of God whose very nature *prout in se est, neque paganus neque catholiciis cognoscit* (ST Ia, 13, x, ad 5um), we can bring to birth and nurture in others the truth which makes us free.

33. We should learn to adopt for Christian use, wherever appropriate, the forms of religious expression of other faiths.

34. We recommend Dominicans working with those of other religions to develop with them shared projects in such fields as human rights and relief of poverty.

35. Eighty-five per cent (85%) of the brothers live and work in Western Europe and America, but preaching needs are great in Asia and Africa and Eastern Europe, where there are millions of people who have never heard the Gospel. A rigorous intellectual and attitudinal formation is required for those who may be called to work in these fields and in the field of inter-religious dialogue.

36. Young people in the West represent most clearly its character as “post christian” or “de-christianized.” We must send brethren into this milieu, and develop further the existing contacts of the brethren with the young in groups, personal contacts, chaplaincies and schools, or through ministries to drug-abusers, prostitutes and homeless people, among whom young people are the major sufferers - as well as very generous and idealistic helpers when they are invited to share in such missions.

37. In parishes we must not be satisfied with preaching to those who come to Mass. We require every province to consider its present commitment to parishes and ask if each one represents the best basis for itinerancy in preaching to the unchurched. Is a particular parish a basis of new evangelization? Can it become so? If not we should probably hand it over to the diocese.

OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

38. Without prejudice to our calling to enter into dialogue with all Christians, but considering the widespread proselytism among Catholics by various groups of Christian evangelical inspiration, we can learn from aspects of their efforts: biblically-based preaching centered on Jesus in the language of the people, giving immediate access to lay ministry in the context of basic communities.

39. We must have special pastoral care for those who feel isolated from the moral teaching or dogmatic theology of the Church, and be prepared to study the theological questions underlying their isolation.

40. We strongly recommend anew the promotion of the cause for the beatification of fr. Bartolomé de Las Casas (according to the Acts of the Chapter of Rome 1983, 291). As well, we renew the call of the same Chapter (292) that beatification of fr. Girolamo Savonarola be promoted.