

Preaching as Translation

Listening and Communicating God's Word in a post-secularized Society

Assessment of the Dominican Position*

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Introduction

Our congress bears the title: "God's voices in a post-secularized Europe"¹. The designation of our present time as "post-secularized" is based on *Jürgen Habermas*.² For this reason, I shall begin my reflections with Habermas.

In October 2001, the noted "Friedenspreis des Deutschen Buchhandels" (Peace Prize of the German Book Trade) was conferred on that Frankfurt Philosopher and Sociologist. That was only a few weeks after September 11th. It was *in tempore belli*: in Afghanistan the bombs were already falling. In this context, Habermas held a programmatic speech. It was published under the title "Glauben und Wissen" (Faith and Knowledge).³ Within the scope of this text, he poses his thoughts on the "post-secular society" (12) for discussion.

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¹ The complete title of the convention reads: "God's voices in a post-secularized Europe. Reading and Interpreting God's Word between Borders of Diversity" / "Las voces de Dios en una Europa post-secularizada. Leer y interpretar la palabra de Dios entre las fronteras de la diversidad".

² Incidentally, a considerably earlier usage of the term *post-secular* can be found in J. Milbank, *Das Ende der Aufklärung: postmodern oder postsäkular?*, in: *Concilium (D)* 28 (1992), p. 478-485.

³ J. Habermas, *Glauben und Wissen. Friedenspreis des Deutschen Buchhandels 2001, Frankfurt-am-Main, 2001*. In the following, the quotations will be specified as they occur in the text. For a criticism of Habermas' language about the post-secular society, see, above all, H. Joas, *Eine Rose im Kreuz der Vernunft*, in: *Die Zeit* 7.2.2002 (No. 7), p. 32.

Since September 11th, according to Habermas, the tense relationship between *secular society* and *religion* now has its place on the European agenda. This could be seen, inter alia, in the behaviour of many people after the attacks. As a reaction to the terrorist attacks, people everywhere gathered spontaneously in synagogues, churches and mosques – as if the “attack on the heart of the secular society set a religious string vibrating” (10).

This recent confrontation between secular society and religion has to do with, according to Habermas, “the incomplete dialectic of our own, occidental process of secularization” (11). In view of the worldwide fundamentalism, we Europeans must “be clear about what secularisation means in *our post-secular society*” (12⁴) – and, in fact, not through diagnostic interest, but to be able to “encounter the risks of (...) derailed secularisation with good judgement” (12).

For the purpose of “self-reflection” (12), Habermas takes up the old theme ‘Faith and Knowledge’. In doing so, he in fact maintains his “distance” from religion, but, at the same time, he does not want to close himself completely to the religious “perspective” (29). More still: Habermas pleads for “a critical *appropriation*” (24) of religious contents. The dialectic of criticism and distance on the one hand, and contact and appropriation on the other hand, characterises the post-secular society. Between the two poles of *religion* and *secular society* a translation process is required: in both directions.

In this connection, I am especially interested in the expectation which the Philosopher articulates with regard to believers. These – that is, us!- he urges to “translate their religious convictions into a secular language” (21). Then thus can “moral perceptions, which until now possessed a sufficiently differentiated expression only in religious speech, (...) find general resonance” (29⁵). Where an appropriate translation takes place, almost forgotten elements of tradition can be salvaged.⁶ Habermas sums up:

⁴ Italics: Ulrich Engel.

⁵ Insertion: Ulrich Engel.

⁶ The Habermas sentence which most baffled his hearers reads as follows in its entirety: “Moralische Empfindungen, die bisher nur in religiöser Sprache einen hinreichend differenzierten Ausdruck

“A secularisation which doesn’t destroy is carried out through the mode of translation.” (29)

Programme

In the post-secular societies of Europe, we believers are, therefore, called upon to carry out *translation work*. I understand Habermas’ plea for translation as a call to us Dominicans to understand our preaching as translation. It is in this sense that the title of my talk is to be understood: “Preaching as Translation. Listening and Communicating God’s Word in a post-secularized Society. Assessment of the Dominican position”.

I shall present my reflections in three chapters (plus a somewhat longer final comment):

(1) YEARNING FOR GOD

Here, I am interested in the religious string which has begun to vibrate. From an anthropological perspective, I inquire about the sound board which provides the happening of preaching - as *Walter Benjamin* says in his essay about ‘Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers’ (The Task of the Translator) – with an ‘echo’⁷ and so makes communication through preaching possible at all. Following *Thomas Aquinas*, I seek to get to the bottom of the potential for religious productivity in our post-secular culture in a systematic-theological way.

(2) EXPERIENCE OF GOD

Here, I am interested in that which Habermas referred to as the remembered forgotten things, which should be salvaged - reactivated through translation.

besitzen, können allgemeine Resonanz finden, sobald sich für ein fast schon Vergessenes, aber implizit Vermisstes eine rettende Formulierung einstellt.” (Moral perceptions, which until now only possessed a sufficiently differentiated expression in religious language, can find general resonance, as soon as a salvaging wording is introduced for something almost forgotten, but implicitly missed.); J. Habermas, *Glauben und Wissen*, op. cit., p. 29.

⁷ W. Benjamin, *Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers*, in: W. Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Collected Works), with the participation of T.W. Adorno and G. Scholem, ed. by R. Tiedemann and H. Schwepenhäuser, Vol. IV/1, Frankfurt-am-Main. 1991, p. 9-21, here p. 16.

Following (above all) *Edward Schillebeeckx OP*, I inquire about the correlation between experience and living tradition. These things, so it will be possible to show, open up the field of tension within which our preaching has its place.

(3) SPEAKING ABOUT GOD

Here, I am interested in the dialectic between criticism and appropriation, how they, according to Habermas' analysis, are characteristic for our post-secular society. Following (above all) the Münster Dominican theologian *Tiemo Rainer Peters OP*, I shall define preaching as *public speaking*, which receives its function of criticising society and church within the context of a presently denatured general public.

The starting-point of my account is, in all three steps, a text from the Dominican tradition. It concerns the "Libellum de instructione et consolatione novitiorum"⁸ from the beginning of our Order, more exactly from the 13th century. (Raymond Creytens OP published the text in 1950 in the *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum*.)

1. YEARNING FOR GOD

If I understand our preaching as an act of translation, in the Habermas sense, then it necessarily requires a potential for religious productivity on behalf of those who participate in the communication. Only through such starting points is it possible for the preached word to "penetrate into people's hearts". The mediaeval instruction for novices formulated it in the following way:

"That wisdom which penetrates into the depth of the heart and kindles the fire of love, through which the words of the preacher (...) penetrate into people's hearts and scatters their hardness, so that the preacher speaks and their hearts melt and the blazing heat of divine love burns their coldness away (...). Then the listeners will be able to say about the preacher: 'Did not our hearts burn

⁸ Cf. R. Creytens, L'instruction des novices Dominicains au XIII^e siècle d'après le Ms. Toulouse 416, in: *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum* 20 (1950), p. 115-193.

within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?’ (Lk 24:32)“⁹

It needs – to reverse a saying of the sociologist *Max Weber* (1864-1920) – a certain *religious musicality*¹⁰ – at least potentially. This is what I call “yearning for God”. Here I am consciously modelling myself on the Thomist language about “*desiderium naturale*”.¹¹ It is the yearning which is inherent in the mortal spirit, a yearning for final being in God (cf. *STh I 75, 6; CG II 55*). It is closely linked with the (typically Dominican) theology of the incarnation.¹² According to Thomas, the natural yearning for God belongs to a person’s deepest being and his capacity for reason. But that means that the yearning for God (as a free gift from God) is, at the same time, something which concerns a person’s free will. For this reason, it is possible for Thomas to say that a person is originally *receptive* for God; he is open for God.¹³ This openness for

⁹ Ibid., p. 164. Lat.: “(...) illam, inquam, sapienciam penetrativam usque ad intima cordis et inflammativam igne caritatis, per quam verba predicatorum (...) ad corda perveniunt auditorum, ut eorum duricia liquefiat, ut emmitat verbum suum predicator, et lique faciet ea, videlicet dura corda, et ardore divini amoris eorum frigiditas inflammetur, ut de predicatore possint dicere auditores: ‚Nonne cor nostrum ardens erat in nobis, cum loqueretur nobis in via, et aperiret nobis Scripturas‘; Luc. Ultimo (XXIV, 32)“.

¹⁰ M. Weber, Brief an Ferdinand Tonnies (19. February 1909), in: M. Weber, Gesamtausgabe. Abteilung II: Vol. 6 (Briefe 1909-1910), Tübingen 1994, p. 63-65, here p. 65: “[I]ch bin zwar religiös absolut ‚unmusikalisch‘ und habe weder Bedürfnis noch Fähigkeit, irgendwelche seelischen ‚Bauwerke‘ religiösen Charakters in mir zu errichten – das geht einfach nicht, resp. ich lehne es ab. Aber ich bin nach genauer Prüfung, weder antireligiös noch irreligiös. Ich empfinde mich auch in dieser Hinsicht als einen Krüppel, als einen verstümmelten Menschen, dessen inneres Schicksal es ist, sich dies ehrlich eingestehen zu müssen“ (I am, nevertheless, completely ‘unmusical’ as regards religion, and have neither the need nor the ability to erect any sort of ‘spiritual building’ in me with a religious character – that is simply not possible, or, on the other hand, I refuse this. But, scrutinising the matter more closely, I am neither anti-religious nor irreligious. I perceive myself in this respect also as a cripple, as a mutilated person whose inner fate it is to have to admit this honestly).

¹¹ On the discussion of the *desiderium naturale* in Thomas Aquinas cf. P. Engelhardt, Das „natürliche Verlangen“. Die mittelalterliche Sinnfrage, in: ders., Thomas von Aquin. Wegweisungen in sein Werk. Mit einem Geleitwort von O.H. Pesch, hrsg. von U. Engel (Dominikanische Quellen und Zeugnisse Vol. 6), Leipzig 2005 [in preparation].

¹² Cf. about this, by the same author, *Menschwerdung des Wortes und menschliches Verlangen nach Wahrheit. Ein Versuch, die grundlegende Denk- und Glaubenserfahrung des Thomas von Aquin zu erschließen*, in: (same author). *Thomas von Aquin*, loc. cit.

¹³ Cf. E. Schillebeeckx, *Verlangen naar ultieme levensvervulling. Een kritische herlezing van Thomas van Aquino*, in: *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 42 (2002), p. 15-34, here p. 20: “Het verlangen naar die ene eindbestemming – die, als keerzijde van Gods genade, behoud en geluk, heil en levensvervulling van de mens in de wereld insluit – schuilt volgens Thomas dieper in het wezen van de mens en zijn redelijk vermogen dan (...) in zijn genen: het verlangen naar een eindbestemming in God (als vrije goddelijke gave) wordt dus *tegelijk* een autonome zaak van de menselijke vrije wil. Daarom is voor Thomas duidelijk dat de mens ‘van huis uit’, op grond van zijn herkomst, ‘ontvankelijk’ is voor God’ (capax

God can be described more exactly: every person possesses a natural yearning to want to see God (*desiderium naturale videndi Deum*): a yearning for a personal encounter with God. This means for Thomas, that every person is religious. He is receptive for the absolute-transcendent.¹⁴

In one of his most recent texts, *Edward Schillebeeckx OP* concerned himself with *desiderium naturale*. He also demonstrated how Thomas' thought is limited to his time. When Thomas identifies *all people* ("omnes") with the Christians of his *time*, then he is committing a typical mediaeval flaw in his reasoning ("denkfout"¹⁵). Schillebeeckx demonstrates this with the example of the wording of the famous "quinque viae". The first three ways end with statements about *all people*: "et hoc omnes intelligunt Deum" (prima via); "quam omnes Deum nominant" (secunda via); "quod omnes dicunt Deum" (tertia via [according to P and L]).¹⁶ At the end of the last two ways, Thomas formulates this differently: "et hoc dicimus Deum" – "and this *we* call God"¹⁷ – "...wat doch wel bescheidener is!"¹⁸ ("...but which is more modest!"). Such is Schillebeeckx' commentary.

Where mediaeval theology still understood *Christians* and *all people* as synonyms, this correspondence has become obsolete in the modern period. Important for today are the wordings in via quarta and via quinta: "et hoc dicimus Deum" – "and this *we* call God". The subjectively coloured 'we' indicates that religion is not the conclusive result of logical argumentation. In this sense, talking about a *natural* yearning for God is at least ambiguous. I therefore plead for a definition of people's religious yearning as *natural* and, at the same time, *culturally conditioned*. In the following sense, so to

Dei), dit is; openstaat voor de 'komende' God. Uit zichzelf, op eigen kracht, kunnen mensen zonder genade nooit bij God thuishomen. (...) De 'natuurlijke' eindbestemming van het menszijn is juist de transcendent vrije gave van Gods genade, aangereikt aan de vrije wil van alle mensen zonder uitzondering."

¹⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 22: „Die menselijke openheid naar absolute en dus mens-overstijgende transcendentie is een noodzakelijke voorwaarde om religieus geloof in God überhaupt mogelijk én menswaardig te maken.”

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Cf. STh I 2, 3 [Italics – Ulrich Engel].

¹⁷ STh I 2, 1 [Italics – Ulrich Engel].

¹⁸ E. Schillebeeckx, *Verlangen naar ultieme levensvervulling*, loc. cit., p. 22.

speak: that our present-day culture contains a potential for religious productivity.¹⁹ (To what extent this potential is more capable of resonance as graphical rather than [traditionally Dominican] word communication must remain unanswered here.²⁰)

In our late-modern society as well, people are potentially receptive for the absolute-transcendent. It is in the midst of this society, with its secular as well as post-secular characteristics, that Dominican preaching of “Deus Humanissimus” has its beginning - which means “that God is recognizable primarily in that which is human”.²¹

What has just been said is, however, not only valid for the hearers of our preaching, but also for us ourselves: as friars and sisters preachers, we receive “the word of faith which we preach” (Rom 10:8), from the Lord and pass it on (cf. 1 Cor 11:23). That is, that which we preach belongs fundamentally to our own life as people who are trying to believe. “So our preaching is not only an act of the mind grasping the faith, but also an act of the heart, emanating from the *whole man*”.²²

¹⁹ Cf. A. van Harskamp, *Het nieuw-religieuze verlangen*, Kampen 2000, especially p. 48-115. Further, see R. Polak (Ed.), *Megatrend Religion? Neue Religiositäten in Europa*, Ostfildern 2002; P.L. Berger (Ed.), *Desecularization of the World. Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, Washington 1999.

²⁰ Cf. about this F. Martínez Diez, *Die dominikanische Predigt in der medialen Welt. Theologische und anthropologische Überlegungen*, in: *Wort und Antwort* 40 (1999), p. 73-78, here p. 73f.: “Medienwelt schafft eine neue, umfassende Kultur. Man spricht von einer Kultur der ‚ikonosphärischen‘ Darstellung, im Gegensatz zu einer Kultur des ‚logosphärischen‘ Wortes. Diese umfassende, allgegenwärtige und fast allmächtige Kultur schafft ebenfalls ein neues, anthropologisches Modell: und zwar das ‚ikonosphärische‘ menschliche Wesen, das im Gegensatz zum ‚logosphärischen‘ steht. (...) Der Mensch, der diese neue Kultur evoziert, besitzt folgende Eigenschaften: Er ist eher ‚ikonisch‘ als ‚logisch‘, d.h. er empfindet mehr durch bildliche Darstellung als durch das Wort, er ist eher empfindsam als rational, er erfährt eher intuitiv als durch Nachdenken, er ist eher ‚Augenblicks-Mensch‘, als daß er dem prozeßhaften Werdegang der Dinge zugetan wäre, er ist allumfassender informiert, als dies herkömmlich der Fall war.” (The world of the media creates a new, all-encompassing culture. We speak of a culture which is represented by the ‘iconospherical’, in contrast to a culture of the ‘logospherical’ word. This comprehensive, omnipresent and almost omnipotent culture likewise creates a new, anthropological model: in fact, the ‘iconospherical’ human being, who is the opposite of the ‘logospherical’. (...) The person who is represented by this culture possesses the following characteristics he is rather ‘iconical’ than ‘logical’, i.e., he perceives more through graphical representation than through words, he is rather sensitive than rational, he understands rather intuitively than through reflection, he is rather a ‘man of the moment’ than he is fond of the process-like development of things, he is more all-embracingly informed than was traditionally the case.) On the relationship between logos (word) and icon (picture) see also, J. Werbick, *Theologische Ästhetik nach dem Ende der Kunst*, in: *Religionspädagogische Beiträge* 30 (1992), p. 19-29.

²¹ Cf. P. Kennedy, *Deus Humaisimus. The Knowability of God in the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx* (Ökumenische Beihefte vol. 22), Fribourg, Switzerland 1993, p. 24 Annotation 104.

²² E. Schillebeeckx, *Dominican Preaching*, in: *Dominicana* 52 (1967), p. 102-109, here p. 108 [Italics – Ulrich Engel].

2. EXPERIENCE OF GOD

The true wisdom of the preacher is acquired through “humble and devoted prayer, which the spirit illuminates more than anything else”. For – according to the *Instructio novitiorum* – “one can perhaps acquire knowledge of some science or art from books, and the sermon will be true and elegant accordingly, but that wisdom which comes from above cannot be acquired: humble, virtuous, modest, convincing, complete forbearance and good works; one can only acquire this wisdom if one asks God – humbly and earnestly – to give it”.²³

Our preaching grows out of the almost 2000-year-old tradition of the Christian community of faith. Being such an enterprise which is saturated with tradition, preaching must link itself and form an alliance with the “signs of the times” (Gaudium et spes 4) which can be recognized today. The members of the commission “The Dominican Charism of Preaching”, which was set up by *Timothy Radcliffe OP* – *Mary Catherine Hilkert OP*, *Benedikta Hintersberger OP*, *Hervé Legrand OP*, *Mary O’Driscoll OP* and *Paul Philibert OP* – wrote in their final report in May 2001:

“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. (...) 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’.”²⁴

Both elements – tradition and the current situation – are in a situation of mutuality.

Schillebeeckx describes this relationship as follows:

²³ R. Creyten, *L’instrucion...*, loc. cit., p. 163f. Lat.: „Forsitan per studium lectionis habere poteris noticiam alicuius sciencie sive artis, ex qua in predicatione forse poteris dicere verba aliqua veridica et polita, sed illam sapienciam [que] desursum et descendens, pudica, pacifica et modesta, suadibilis, bonis consentiens, plena misericordia et fructibus bonis [cf. Iac. III (17); Ulrich Engel] (...) hanc, inquam, sapienciam est impossibile te habere, nisi in sequenti et ferventi ordine a Deo eam postulaveris tibi dari.”

²⁴ M.C. Hilkert / B. Hintersberger / H. Legrand / M. O’Driscoll / P. Philibert, *The Dominican Charism of Preaching: An Inquiry* (May 2001), see: www.op.org/DomCentral/preach/theologicalcommission.htm.

“...in each case, the actual situation in which we live – the second source - , [is] an inner constitutive element in understanding God’s revelatory speaking in the history of Israel and in the history of Jesus (...), who, for Christians, is witnessed to as salvation from God and for people – the first source.”²⁵

It should not, therefore, – even in our preaching – be a question of how to *apply* the biblical message to our present-day situation ‘just like that’. In accordance with hermeneutics, it is rather the case that no-one can get to the bottom of what the gospel message *means for us today, except in relation to our present-day situation*. Without the constitutive reference to the experiences of post-modern, post-secular people, the appeal to scripture and tradition would be merely fruitless and, at the end of the day, irrelevant repetition.

What, however, should an experienced-orientated sermon look like? Or: how can we, in the context of our post-modern experiences, raise the subject of God in a meaningful way? What at all can we say about religious experiences – about our own faith experiences as well as those of the hearers of our preaching? In short: how are subjective experience and theological reflection connected, as regards preaching?

The first point that is valid is: theology (like preaching as well) is not the starting-point itself. It is always – in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s* words – only an “aid”²⁶. First of all there is the experience, the faith experience. This is in the service of nothing and nobody. Theology and preaching are secondary acts. They are reflective faith: *fides reflexa*.

The problem is: experiences cannot really be shared. I cannot experience someone else’s experience and someone else cannot experience my experience. “These findings are serious but not hopeless.”²⁷ For, according to the English social phenomenologist and psychologist *Ronald D. Laing*, “even if I do not experience your experience,

²⁵ E. Schillebeeckx, *Menschliche Erfahrung und Glaube an Jesus Christus. Eine Rechenschaft*, Freiburg/Breisgau 1979, p. 14.

²⁶ Cf. D. Bonhoeffer, *Konspiration und Haft. 1940-1945* (Dietrich Bonhoeffer-Werke Vol. 16), Gütersloh 1996, p. 496: Theologie ist “ein Hilfsmittel, ein Kampfmittel, nicht Selbstzweck.” (Theology is ‘an aid, a weapon, not an end in itself.’)

²⁷ T.R. Peters, *Was ist Theologie?*, loc. cit., p. 107.

because it is invisible (in-valuable, incomprehensible, un-smellable, inaudible) for me, nevertheless I experience you as *someone who is experiencing*.”²⁸ Only, then, through personal encounter and interaction is it possible for us to exchange our experiences.

That means that religious experiences as well are ‘only’ experiences with people who are experiencing - or, as Schillebeeckx says: “Experience[s] with experiences”²⁹. These experiences with experiences challenge us to give personal answers. Our answers can, however, go in several directions: religious and non-religious. Nevertheless: the “experience with experiences actually never [happens] abstractly, nor through an isolated person, but rather always through someone who lives in a certain culture and tradition of religious (...) experience. This experience with ambivalent human experiences only then becomes a Christian faith experience when someone – in the light of that which he has heard about Christianity – arrives at the conviction, in this experience-with-experiences: ‘Yes, so it is; that is it’”.³⁰

But the following is also valid: “Faith does not only come from hearing”³¹. What is meant here is that faith does not in the first instance have its origin in ‘heavenly words’. Rather, our faith is related first of all to an earthly happening. Concrete people have experienced liberation and salvation in Jesus. Then they begin to communicate this saving experience with others. We only become hearers at the second stage.

As reflection, preaching interrupts the immediacy of the in itself silent religious experience. Such an interruption is urgently necessary, so that we do not fall into silence: for instance, where protest would be necessary. Preaching, as the articulation of religious experience, strives to get as close as possible to the original experiences which are concealed in the stories, prayers and pictures of the biblical texts. Preach-

²⁸ R.D. Laing, *Phänomenologie der Erfahrung*, Frankfurt-am.Main. ¹¹1981, p. 12.

²⁹ E. Schillebeeckx, *Menschliche Erfahrung und Glaube an Jesus Christus*, loc. cit., p. 20.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 20f.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 24. Cf. against this P. Knauer, *Der Glaube kommt vom Hören. Ökumenische Fundament-
altheologie*, Freiburg/Br. ⁶1991; this book is in principle based on a lecture in 1969.

ing as an argument is trying to communicate faith experiences. It has to make a defence for the hope which fills the preacher (cf. 1 Pet 3:15³²). Preaching is remembered hope. As such *memoria spei* it is “concerned with enabling the exchange of experiences over and above the different generations and so to enable as many as possible to participate in the articulation of hope”³³ – including those without hope, for whom really we have been given hope, as *Walter Benjamin* writes at the end of his “Wahlverwandtschaften” (Chosen Relatives) essays.³⁴

In the process of preaching, tradition and experience meet each other through the mode of “critic[al] correlation”³⁵. What is meant here is a correlation in which our faith and action, in the scope of the concrete world of our life, are tuned to what is expressed in the biblical tradition.³⁶ For the pragmatics of Dominican preaching, a coming-together of *soteriological*, *Christological* and *anthropological* aspects arises out of this correlation. That means: our preaching must have as its subject *salvation-from-God* in *Jesus Christ*. Included in this threefold theological quality of our preaching is a *principle of ecclesiological practice*. That is, we also write our chapters in the story which was begun by Jesus and has been carried down to us over the generations through tradition. This practice is the Church.

If our preaching really wants to be translation in the sense of expounding reality from the point of view of the Gospel, then it must no longer be solely at home in the liturgical-clerical context. Dominican preaching will increasingly take place “in the non-sacral and non-confessional area”³⁷, - especially within the scope of an increasingly ‘medialised’ society – just as it will no longer appear as something male-clerical.

³² 1 Pet 3:15b (RSV): “Always be prepared to make a defence to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you.”

³³ T.R. Peters, *Was ist Theologie?*, loc. cit., p. 111.

³⁴ Cf. W. Benjamin, *Goethes Wahlverwandtschaften*, in: (same author), *Gesammelte Schriften*, loc. cit., Vol. I/1, p. 123-201, here p. 201.

³⁵ E. Schillebeeckx, *Menschliche Erfahrung und Glaube an Jesus Christus*, loc. cit., p. 40.

³⁶ Cf. *ibid.*

³⁷ F. Martínez Diez, *Die dominikanische Predigt in der medialen Welt*, loc. cit., p. 74.

In this connection, I quote, in agreement with this, the comments of the already-mentioned Dominican group of preaching experts about “Liturgical Preaching in our Dominican Context”:

“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 (...). The preaching charism is (...) not restricted to the ordained. (...) 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”³⁸.

3. SPEAKING ABOUT GOD

If I understand preaching, following Habermas, as translation, then it must speak its message inside the post-secular public sphere. Looking at this from the pragmatics of language, Dominican preaching is, therefore, public speaking, and theologically speaking it is witness.³⁹ So that speech and witness succeed, it is necessary to ratify the words through the practice of the preachers’ lives,

“so that it will be clear to your hearers that you are genuine friars [and sisters] preachers, and everyone who hears you will be able to say: ‘Certainly you are also one of them, for your accent betrays you’. (Mt 26:73).”⁴⁰

The appeal of the (last) quoted passage from the *Instructio novitiorum* to the Passion narrative of the Gospel of Matthew introduces our preaching to the centre of the pub-

³⁸ M.C. Hilker et al., *The Dominican Charism of Preaching*, loc. cit.

³⁹ Cf. E. Arens, *Bezeugen und Bekennen. Elementare Handlungen des Glaubens (Beiträge zur Theologie und Religionswissenschaft)*, Düsseldorf 1989.

⁴⁰ R. Creytens, *L’instrucion...*, loc. cit., p. 183. Lat.: „(...) ut sit omnibus te audientibus manifestum, quod tu vere frater es predicator, et omnis homo qui te audierit, dicere possit tibi: ‚Vere tu ex illis es, nam et loquela tua manifestum te facit‘ ; Matt. XXVI (73).“ [Insertion – Ulrich Engel]

lic domain. The word which we are to preach has its own place there and in the partly conflicting variations there.

Preaching, according to my thesis, is public speaking.⁴¹ As translation, it should be directed mainly towards the uninitiated. That, however, is no (post-) modern idea. For, as we can already see in 1 Cor 14:23, the word of preaching goes beyond the borders of the arcane; only when the sermon breaks out beyond the inner circle of the congregation can it cause an understanding of God. In the Acts of the Apostles, we read how the Gospel spreads over to the heathen (cf., e.g., Acts 17:16-34): “a ‘transition’ which has a constitutive significance for church preaching: the Christian faith should be expounded in the dimensions of urbane, enlightened reason.”⁴² The representatives of the mediaeval *Evangelical Movement* go on from this tradition. Thus, the young community of preachers established itself in the middle of the world of mediaeval town life, which was just arising. Their “preaching halls”⁴³ – planned for a massive number of hearers – were “public civic centres”.⁴⁴ The preaching sought, through well-founded theological knowledge, to make the citizens of the towns theologically mature also. That was in the 13th century.

Where, in the writings of *Immanuel Kant* (1724-1804), the principle of ‘the public’ was aiming at the “departure of mankind from his self-indebted immaturity”⁴⁵, today we can observe the decline of the (critical) public.⁴⁶ Where public and private used to stand in an indissoluble correlation, today the public sphere *and* the private sphere are breaking apart from one other without any sense of proportion. Where, however, the protection of the private sphere is lacking, the individual gets caught in the disastrous wake of the public ship. However: Not only is the individual in danger of

⁴¹ On the following cf. T.R. Peters, Predigt als öffentliche Rede, in: *Zeitschrift für Gottesdienst und Predigt* 2/1985, p. 17-22.

⁴² Ibid., p. 17.

⁴³ I.W. Frank, Mittelalterliche Bettelordensklöster als paraprochiale Kultzentren, in: *Wort und Antwort* 36 (1995), p. 78-83, p. here 81.

⁴⁴ T.R. Peters, Predigt als öffentliche Rede, loc. cit., p. 17.

⁴⁵ I. Kant, Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung? Königsberg, 30.9.1784: *Berlinische Monatsschrift* Dezember 1784, p. 481-494, here p. 481.

⁴⁶ Cf. fundamentally on this also P.U. Hohendahl, Öffentlichkeit. Geschichte eines kritischen Begriffs, Stuttgart 2000; P. Engelhardt, Öffentlich – Öffentlichkeit – privat, in: *Wort und Antwort* 43 (2002), p. 1-3.

disappearing. The public sphere itself is being “denatured”⁴⁷ in this relationship which has become lop-sided, as Habermas established more than 40 years ago. The person is being reduced to a privatness which makes him ill, as the American sociologist *Richard Sennett* describes the situation of the ‘flexible’ person. This ‘Flexible’ person is drifting aimlessly along as anonymously dictated by a capitalism which is all-encompassing.⁴⁸

This matter is not made any easier by the fact that this decline of the public sphere reaches right into the furthest corner of church and theology. For there, where we say ‘God’, we are already surrounded by idol-gods and soon will also be dominated by them. If we don’t undertake any theological countermeasures, they will infiltrate the whole of our preaching: “Gods which have firmly established themselves in the agreements reached in society, in the way in which things are produced, consumed and distributed; in the values, need for security and ideals.”⁴⁹ These idol-gods – all consumer gods – must be unmasked through our preaching, when we publicly say ‘God’ – in the interest of people’s freedom and adult responsibility.⁵⁰ It does not, however, seek the public sphere in order ingratiate itself or put on a clerical show. Rather, preaching should be analysed as public speaking, revealed and critically influenced in its shape – above all where the Christian heritage is unscrupulously but lucratively marketed.

However, the larger Christian denominations as they actually exist hardly count as institutions which want to promote such a critical public sphere.⁵¹ And even if they *wanted* to: as administrative bureaucracies which are, at the end of the day, uncontrollable and uncontrolled, they are hardly in a position to be co-founders of a new public sphere of civic society.

⁴⁷ J. Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, Neuwied 1962, p. 175.

⁴⁸ Cf. R. Sennett, *Verfall und Ende des öffentlichen Lebens. Die Tyrannei der Intimität*, Frankfurt-am-Main 1983.

⁴⁹ T.R. Peters, *Was ist Theologie?*, loc. cit., p. 116.

⁵⁰ Cf. auch E. Arens, *Wenn es um alle geht. Orte und Intentionen öffentlicher Gottesrede*, in: *Wort und Antwort* 43 (2002), p. 17-21.

⁵¹ Cf. on this also the theme volume “Kirche und Öffentlichkeit” (Church and the Public) of the periodical *Wort und Antwort* 43 (2002), p. 1-48.

Against the background of this pessimistic finding on the situation of the churches as they actually exist, I place my further reflections about preaching as public speaking somewhere in the middle between hypothesis and utopia. In doing this, I follow Theodor W. Adorno, who already in 1964 established: "The public sphere could never be regarded as a given and still cannot be today."⁵² The memory of earlier church forms of practice – namely, at the beginning of the Jesus movement as well as in the beginnings of our Order – permits us, in my opinion, despite the current bleak situation, to think of church as a *potential* body jointly responsible for a (new) critical public sphere.

Closely linked with this is

the important "question of where we [– sisters and brothers –] get our authority to preach (...). 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"⁵³.

As public speaking, our Dominican preaching has two functions: "firstly, (...) the *unveiling* of every form of presumed power and its tendency to manipulate both the public and private sphere; secondly, the *confrontation* with the so-called 'public opinion' with its own unreasonable, inhuman, mad implications."⁵⁴ ...and, in fact, *ad extra* (in the 'world') as well as *ad intra* (in the Church)!

Unveiling and *confrontation* were genuine methods of preaching used by Jesus (cf. e.g. Mk 5:1-20). Using these methods, he proclaimed salvation-from-God, directed towards repentance and atonement.⁵⁵ With this background, and following *Tiemo Rain-*

⁵² Th.W. Adorno, *Meinungsforschung und Öffentlichkeit*, in: (same author), *Soziologische Schriften I*, ed. R. Tiedemann (Gesammelte Schriften Vol. 8), Frankfurt-am-Main. 1972, p. 532-537, here p. 533.

⁵³ M.C. Hilker et al., *The Dominican Charism of Preaching*, loc. cit. [Insertion – Ulrich Engel]. Cf. *Constitutions of 1241, Distictio II, c. 12*; D. Byrne, *A Pilgrimage of Faith*, Dublin 1991, p. 107.

⁵⁴ T.R. Peters, *Predigt als öffentliche Rede*, loc. cit., p. 19 [Italics – Ulrich Engel].

⁵⁵ Cf. on this U. Engel, *Heil-von-Gott-her und menschliche Unheilserfahrungen. Theologie als intellectus amoris zwischen compassio und Gerechtigkeit*, in: Ch. Bauer / St. van Erp (Eds.), *Heil in Differenz. Dominikanische Beiträge zu einer kontextuellen Theologie in Europa / Salvation in Diversity. Dominican Contributions to a Contextual Theology in Europe* (Kultur und Religion in Europa Vol. 2), Münster 2004, p. 149-160.

er Peters OP, I define the task of our preaching as follows: "Preaching as public speaking is exactly not, in the first instance, the interpretation of the written form, but rather the interpretation of reality, of society, and of the world from the point of view of the Good News."⁵⁶

Conclusion

Our Order, as founded by Dominic "is known from the beginning to have been instituted especially for preaching and the salvation of souls" (LCO 1). For that reason it has the name of 'Order of Preachers' from the beginning – or, better, 'New Order of Preachers', so as not to confuse its mandate with that of the "bishops, who represent the first 'Order of Preachers'" ⁵⁷.

Of course, from the very beginning there were various forms of Dominican preaching. For example, in the first generation, the brethren preached mainly according to the Gospel and plainly. The preaching of the second generation of Dominicans (from ca. 1260) came rather more from an intellectual source. But Dominican preaching was always '*teaching preaching*'. "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."⁵⁸

This teaching function, which is a basic trait of Dominican preaching, had as its precondition and also as its consequence the close link between theological studies and preaching.⁵⁹ And that was not just from the time that Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas reformed the Dominican studium. For:

⁵⁶ T.R. Peters, Predigt als öffentliche Rede, loc. cit., p. 19.

⁵⁷ F. Martínez Diez, Die dominikanische Predigt in der medialen Welt, loc. cit., p. 73.

⁵⁸ M.C. Hilker et al., The Dominican Charism of Preaching, loc. cit. [Italics – Ulrich Engel].

⁵⁹ Cf. fundamentally on this T. Radcliffe, Die Quelle der Hoffnung. Studium und Verkündigung der Guten Nachricht, in: (same author), Gemeinschaft im Dialog. Ermutigung zum Ordensleben, ed. T. Eggenesperger und U. Engel (Dominikanische Quellen und Zeugnisse Vol. 2), Leipzig 2001, p. 65-96; G. Vergauwen, Predigt der Wahrheit, in: *Wort und Antwort* 37 (1996), p. 147-150.

Albert and Thomas “did not initiate the doctrinal character of the Order but inherited it from the fathers of the first generation. Dominic sent his followers to the universities not so much to exercise a pastoral ministry there but rather to further their preparation for preaching. This is evidenced by the first mission of the brethren to Paris and Bologna in 1217”⁶⁰.

Even the so-called ‘Oldest Constitutions’ (from 1220-36), prescribe that every priory must have a lector: “A community should have not less than twelve members, and should not be founded without the permission of the General Chapter or without prior and lector.”⁶¹ Likewise, preaching was, from the very beginning, one of the original tasks of the professors of the Order. *Preaching* had an equal worth with the *interpretation* of Holy Scripture and the scientific *Disputatio*. According to Thomas

“[a]ll doctors of Sacred Scripture should lead an eminently virtuous life so as to be qualified for *effective preaching* (...) They must be enlightened to comment well on the Scriptures. (...) They must be prepared to answer difficulties in disputations. These three functions, (preaching, expounding, and refuting) are mentioned in the Epistle of Titus, ch. 1, v. 9”⁶².

At some point in the Middle Ages, the work of the professor (master, lector) became separated from that of the pastor and preacher. Pastoral and academic work, preaching and teaching fell apart. There came a “breach between academic knowledge and religious instruction”.⁶³

To be able to accomplish the work of translation which Habermas reminds us about, it is necessary to overcome this breach. Study and preaching should now be, in recourse to the mediaeval sources of our Order, brought together again. One of our

⁶⁰ E. Schillebeeckx, *Dominican Preaching*, loc. cit., p. 103. Cf. also H.-M. Féret, *Vie intellectuelle et vie scolaire dans l'ordre des Frères Prêcheurs*, in: *Archives d'histoire dominicaine* 1946, vol. 1, p. 5-37.

⁶¹ *Oldest Constitutions*, *Distinctio II*, c. 24a [according to the numbering of the critical edition by S. Tugwell]: in: Jordan von Sachsen. *Von den Anfängen des Predigerordens*, ed. W. Hoyer (*Dominikanische Quellen und Zeugnisse* Vol. 3), Leipzig 2003, p. 244-297, here p. 287.

⁶² Thomas von Aquin, *Brevi principio quando incoepit Parisiis ut Magistri in S. Teologia*: Opusc. IV, ed. Mandonnet, p. 424, cited here according to E. Schillebeeckx, *Dominican Preaching*, loc. cit., p. 104 [Italics – Ulrich Engel].

⁶³ E. Schillebeeckx, *Dominican Preaching*, loc. cit, p. 104.

own sources is to stress the *humanity of Christ*. Typically Dominican, this stands in the centre of our mediaeval doctrinal preaching. For us post-modern companions of Dominic this means:

“Doctrinal preaching should be grounded in the humanity of Christ who is our way to God as well as God’s contact with men.”⁶⁴

Following on from this, I close with the famous words of Irenaeus of Lyon: “Gloria Dei, vivens homo; vita autem hominis, visio Dei”⁶⁵. Our preaching is committed to this double glory: “The glory lies in happiness and in the raising-up or setting upright of people, of the lowly and the degraded; but the glory and the happiness of people lies, at the end of the day, in God.”⁶⁶

It is a continuing scandal that a person, as an image of God, often takes on the shape of the poor. Bishop *Oscar A. Romero* showed us this when he said: “Gloria Dei vivens pauper”⁶⁷. And, that the person as a symbol of God all too often is not a person at all, but only a mutilated and shattered victim, is just as true and can be seen, day in, day out, on television (and not only there); following the Italian philosopher *Giorgio Agamben* we could critically amend the quotation from Irenaeus as follows: “Gloria Dei vivens homo sacer”⁶⁸.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 108.

⁶⁵ Irenaeus of Lyon, *Adversus haereses* IV 20, 7: Irénée de Lyon, *Contre les hérésies* II, ed. A. Rousseau (Sources Chrétienne vol. 100/2), Paris 1965, p. 648-649.

⁶⁶ E. Schillebeeckx, *Menschliche Erfahrung und Glaube an Jesus Christus*, op. cit., p. 50. Schillebeeckx expands on this in the same work, critically, 50f.: “Bei Irenäus erhält diese christliche Lebensüberzeugung innerhalb seines spätantiken Lebensgefühls selbstverständlich einen hellenistischen Klang, nach unserem Lebensgefühl zu formal und abstrakt. Die konkrete, historisch situierte – auf ein menschliches Fiasko hinauslaufende – Vermittlung Jesu von Nazaret steht in der Formulierung des Irenäus mehr formal als historisch-inhaltlich im Mittelpunkt.” (In Irenaeus, this Christian conviction of life within his late-antique-world feeling of life obviously has a hellenist ring about it, too formal and abstract for feeling of life. The concrete, historically situated – leading to a human fiasco – mediation of Jesus of Nazareth stands at the focus, in Irenaeus’ wording, more formally than according to history and content.)

⁶⁷ O. Romero, *Die politische Dimension des Glaubens. Rede anlässlich der Verleihung der Ehrendoktorwürde durch die Universität Löwen*, in: M. Bogdahn / I. Zerger (Ed.), *Ich habe das Schreien meines Volkes gehört*, Munich 1990, p. 72.

⁶⁸ Ch. Bauer, *Transgressionen der Moderne. Grenzen und Horizont einer Theologie nach Gottes und des Menschen Tod*, in: (same author) / M. Hölzl (Ed.), *Gottes und des Menschen Tod? Die Theologie vor der Herausforderung Michel Foucaults*, Mainz 2003, p. 19-47, here p. 47. Bauer bases his thoughts on G. Agamben, *Die souveräne Macht und das nackte Leben*, Frankfurt-am-Main 2002.

Where the poor are degraded and the foreigners are excluded, where the weak are violated and in all the senses in which people become victims, that is the place where our preaching has its proper location.⁶⁹

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⁶⁹ Cf. on this U. Engel, Heil-von-Gott-her und menschliche Unheilserfahrungen, loc. cit., especially p. 159f.