

with us. A summit conference between God and self is not held in order to decide which method of procedure is best to follow. According to such a notion man is trying to retain his self-identity and self-sufficiency while acknowledging the fact that God is a good "helper" and not much more. Acting this way, man merely augments his anxieties. Concern about his part in his actions blacks out the rôle of God's Grace and ultimately man finds himself stuck with himself once more, thrown back again on his own imperfect powers.

The reconciliation we are looking for is the reconciliation of a total, unconditional surrender. Man must give himself over completely to God. He must rely solely on the help of Divine Grace, knowing that he can accomplish nothing without it. He has to forget the rôle he plays in his life and see that all is ultimately from God. God directs man's life totally, and it is only when man rejects this divine direction that he falters and begins the long groping trek down the dark, void corridor of nothingness. Total dependence on God through His Grace is the only solution to man's anxieties and guilt feelings. For then, and only then, man can be free from fear of the future and the unknown. All is in the guiding hands of God; He knows the future and the unknown. Man has to trust in Him, take hold of His omnipotent hand and be led to peace and joy.

Grace is the only exit man has from his guilt and anxiety. It teaches total and unconditional surrender to God, a surrender in which man attains the perfect freedom he was created for. Without Grace man is nothing. Total dependence on God frees him from all concern, anxiety and questioning of the future and the unknown. Grace fills up the void in man. It is the day to inner peace. It is something for nothing.

—George Bernardine Dyer, O.P.

PREACHING—ITS HIDDEN NATURE

An eighteenth century English rhyme says:

Ah, let me enter, once again, the pew
Where the child nodded as the sermon grew;
Scene of soft slumbers!
. . . a power was there
Which conquered e'en the sage, the brave, the fair . . .¹

We smile; hardly would these lines describe the dynamic sermons of Peter or Paul preaching salvation. Here, however, are some words from the pew by an author of our own day:

For very many years I used to look upon the sermon as a bore, always hoping against hope that the priest, having finished his notices, would feel too tired to embark on a sermon, . . . yet where I dreaded the bad sermon and had little expectation of a good one, *I now look forward to any sermon.* In honesty I must also admit I like short ones.² (*Italics added.*)

The contrasting attitudes of the two quotations, 130 years apart, point up a rebirth of interest in preaching not just by laymen but by preachers as well. Here is a startling fact: for the first time since Pentecost Sunday when the Apostles began to preach the Word with captivating zeal, Catholic theologians are making a major effort to determine the exact nature of preaching. Why? Partly because Protestant theologians have made extraordinary claims about their preaching and partly because preaching has lost its importance within the Church. True, the Council of Trent (1534-1563) required that pastors instruct their flocks and even made up a special catechism for them. But the great concern of the Council with the definition and enumeration of the sacraments resulted in the sacrament-dispensing priest looming larger than the preaching priest.

The Lutherans had battered the sacraments and the dogma of justification. Holy Eucharist had been reduced to a mere symbol, justification to a coat. Such disastrous notions had to be dispelled, and in restoring some things others were bypassed.

But preaching has its own inner vitality. It cannot die off. There is a place for it in the Church even in times of its comparative unimportance. Christ preached. He was the master preacher. No Moses, Isaia or Elia ever equalled Christ. Nor did Peter or Paul, Augustine, Chrysostom, Bossuet or Newman. Christ's mind was clearer, His emotions finer. He had the greatest message and His words were the best chosen. He is the glory of the spoken word, because He is the Word made flesh.

The time has come to restudy the purpose, the goal of preaching in the church today: to give it anew some of the vigor of the early Church. For truly, preaching in the Catholic Church is muffled. Too often we have measured the sermon in terms of brevity rather than of grace coming down from heaven. Yes, there are bad sermons, but that is no reason to underestimate the worth of preaching.

Preaching has a core, a nerve, let us call it, a nature. The nature of man is "reason," the nature of a triangle is "a plane figure contained by three straight lines." This inner quality is not open to the mind to grasp at first. Getting to the nature of a thing is a laborious process. A nature makes a thing to be what it is and not something else. For many things people give only descriptive definitions. "Thunder is noise in the clouds." "A cat is an animal that pounces on its prey."

Only a few claims about the nature of preaching have been made in all the years since Christ first preached. The question may be placed another way; what makes preaching preaching? It looks like an easy question. But preaching, though continuously used, remains to be tagged. Theologians have written long and precisely on the virtues, utilizing where possible antiquity's legacy to thought. The proofs of the existence of God and His various attributes—Knowledge, Wisdom, Goodness, Power—have been explored at length. Man's movement toward his final end in the various states of life have been carefully charted. Perhaps the study of preaching is approaching the day when it, like Mariology or medical ethics, will be a stimulus to great intellectual activity.

Exploits in this direction are now very evident. At Montpelier, French bishops held a national congress on preaching in 1954. Three years later German homiletics (professors of sacred eloquence) met at Wurtzburg. In that same year, the seven hundredth anniversary of the death of St. Hyacinth, the Dominican Order held a congress on preaching at Rome. In 1958 the Catholic Homiletic Society was formed in New York to enkindle interest in all parts of preaching. In 1959 the Jesuit publication *Gregorianum* ran a seventy-five page bibliography on the theology of preaching, and in 1960 *Lumière et Vie* devoted an issue to it entitled *La Prédication*. Summing up a modern trend, here is a multiple quotation: "It is only very recently that any interest has been shown in preaching as a theological entity. Soiron, one of the pioneers in this field, remarks that 'Homiletics required a long time for its *theological* (italics added) character to become known.' A number of modern theologians are beginning to realize, however, that, as Leclerc says, 'An activity which occupies so important a place in the life of the clergy *deserves study for itself*, independently of the work which it produces.'"³ (Italics added.)

But never far off from the renewed consideration of preaching is the question of its relationship to the sacraments. Recently one author said: For some, Christianity is seen primarily under the aspect of revelation of

the word; for others it is above all, the deification of man by sacramental communion with God in Christ. Isn't it time to examine thoroughly the intimate connection between these two complementary aspects of Christian truth?⁴

But thirty years ago a noted Protestant theologian combined these two elements, the word revealed and sacramental union with God, to produce this idea:

Yet it is very clear that the Reformation wished to see something better substituted for the Mass it abolished, and that it expected that better thing would be . . . our preaching of the Word . . . the objectively clarified *preaching* of the Word is the *only sacrament left* to us.⁵ (Italics added.)

Three possible solutions on the nature of preaching are presented here to show how Catholic thinking is progressing on this point. Negatively summarized, no opinion maintains preaching to be an eighth sacrament. Listing the opinions is the simplest way:

- 1) Preaching is neither a sacrament nor a sacramental but a sign causing the grace necessary for faith.
- 2) Preaching is a sacramental (to the likeness of a sacrament) and delegation to preach publicly, the *canonical mission*, is the essence of it.
- 3) Preaching is a sacramental and in so far as it is a human activity, sacred eloquence is the nature.

The relationship to sacrament was indirectly treated in the sixteenth century at Trent when the sacraments were numbered at seven and preaching not included as one of the seven. Obviously preaching is a human activity and as such can expand at a variable rate to meet particular demands of a given period in history. But it is a human activity elevated to a supernatural end; and the first opinion stresses that the end is disposition for grace, the grace of faith.

The second solution, which favors the canonical mission or the authority to teach publicly, brings to mind the sudden increase in preachers in the thirteenth century, when the preaching orders occasioned the delegation of authority to preach to simple priests in large numbers, where previously it had been exercised by the bishops to whom it belonged by right.

As for the sacred eloquence referred to in the third and final position, the seventeenth century preacher Bossuet said:

As to the Fathers, I would wish to combine St. Augustine and St. John Chrysostom. The former elevates the mind to great and subtle thoughts, the latter brings it down to the level of the capacity of the people. The former [Augustine] taken by himself would lead one to form a style too abstract, the latter [Chrysostom] a style too simple and too popular. . . . In St. Augustine we find doctrine, in St. John Chrysostom, exhortation, rebuke, vigor.⁶

The statement of Karl Barth earlier quoted, that preaching is the last sacrament left to us, is most directly answered by Fr. Charles Davis, editor of the *Clergy Review* in the September 1960 issue. Fr. Davis can also stand as an advocate of the first opinion mentioned.⁷

Preaching like any sacrament is a sign but unlike a sacrament does not cause sanctifying grace. What is a sign? Something which leads us to the thing indicated by it. A picture of your mother evokes memories of her, not of other pictures. An easterly wind indicates rain. The rain concerns us really, not the wind. A certain arrangement of red, white and blue bunting makes the American flag and arouses sentiments of patriotism. But the flag is not America. The colors of the flag are determined by common agreement. Now sacraments are signs. They are signs chosen by Christ. They indicate something besides themselves—the grace of God. These signs cause grace in your soul and the grace brings about your sanctification, hence the term, “sanctifying” grace.

Now here is the nub of the problem according to Fr. Davis. Any sermon by its words constitutes a sign indicating some divine truth. But preaching does not cause sanctifying grace. Rather it *disposes* your soul to *receive faith*. Following faith you receive the sacraments. The proof of this for Fr. Davis is simple. If you entered the Church as an adult you had to have faith before you received the sacrament of Baptism. No one can believe, unless the truths of faith are put before him. Preaching presents not only the outward form of the words but gives an interior prompting that disposes for the grace needed for faith. Preaching is completed by the sacraments, particularly in the union with God, effected by Holy Communion.

As a ministry of faith, preaching directs itself to a living faith as well as to an imperfect dead faith. No Christian virtue is possible without faith,

because only by faith can we perceive the motives of the virtues according to their supernatural values.

Two more authors also maintain preaching is not a sacrament; but they maintain it is a sacramental. The sacramentals are blessed objects or ceremonies employed by the Church to obtain graces or even temporal favors. The intention here is that by the use of words in the sermons, God may communicate His graces upon us. Sacramentals differ from sacraments in that sacraments confer grace of themselves infallibly (*ex opere operato*) while a sacramental does not operate of its own power but only in virtue of the one using it. Manifestly, preaching was instituted by Christ. Another example of a sacramental instituted by Christ in the Washing of the Feet, a ceremony still in use by the Church on Holy Thursday.

Of the two opinions holding that preaching is a sacramental let us look at the conclusion of Fr. Augustine Rock, O.P., author of *Unless They Be Sent*, W. C. Brown, 1953. He represents the canonical mission school.

Fr. Rock quotes St. Albert the Great, St. Thomas' teacher. St. Albert held that John the Evangelist would not have preached unless the Lord had sent him to preach. "That therefore, is the word of the Lord, which is proposed by the one the Lord has sent."⁸ This is, in so many words, the canonical mission or the commission to preach the Gospel publicly. Then St. Albert strengthens the argument, it would appear, by the phrase, "The mission confers authority and in this it gives the form [nature], lest anyone should teach without having the Spirit. . . ."

Fr. Rock correlates texts of St. Thomas Aquinas to support the same opinion. Actually St. Thomas did not discuss the matter specifically so inferences must be made. Fr. Rock writes, "Here, he [St. Thomas in his *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*] says that because preachers do not have the faith from themselves, but from God, unless they are sent by God they are *non dignus* (unfit) to preach. . . . One is not necessarily *non capax* (not able) because *non dignus*."⁹

But later in his writing Thomas says, "No one, no matter how great his learning, or how great his sanctity, *unless sent* by God or by a prelate is able to preach."

It can be noted that Fr. Rock entitles his book with reference to the canonical mission.

The final position is maintained by Fr. Jude Nogar, O.P., who lectured at a meeting of the Catholic Homiletic Society in 1959, under the title "Theological Principles of Preaching."¹⁰ He points out two aspects of

the nature of preaching. Principally it is grace. He too quotes St. Albert, "Preaching has the nature of the Gospel well proclaimed, and this nature is grace." But from the viewpoint of human activity, "The power to persuade by instructing, pleasing and moving men" is the nature of preaching. Human rhetoric is not what he refers to specifically. The proper name for this capacity to persuade is ecclesiastical rhetoric or Sacred Eloquence. Why this special name? Because the Gospel proclaimed by the preacher is a rhetoric elevated to a sacred end infinitely above that of human rhetoric. He refines his definition further to read, preaching "is the faculty of speaking the Word persuasively by instructing, pleasing and moving men."¹¹ To help corroborate this point he quotes from St. Augustine:

Since persuasion both to truths and falsehoods is urged by means of the art of rhetoric, who would venture to say that truth in the person of its defenders, ought to stand its ground unarmed against falsehoods? . . . The power of eloquence . . . so effective in convincing us of either wrong or right . . . lies open to all.¹²

These are the considered opinions of earnest men, who out of love for Christ seek the Truth. They seem to have a genuine dialectic in process, and certainly it should be continued to obtain maximum results. To many of us they all stand for something valid and useful, just as they are. They express thought developing in the Catholic milieu. They bring before our eyes preaching as something majestic and holy, instead of a few moments' mumbling at Sunday Mass. This is solid work and will do infinitely more good than myriad exhortations calling for better preaching but not saying why. This is work that will result in more of the preaching which disposes for the faith, which is worthy of its canonical mission, and which truly raises eloquence to the realm of the sacred.

—Eugene Cahouet, O.P.

¹ "My Native Village," by N. T. Carrington, 1830.

² Michael de la Bedoyere, "From the Pew," *Life of the Spirit*, Oct. 1958, p. 168.

³ Quoted in *Unless They Be Sent* by Augustine Rock, O.P., W. C. Brown, Dubuque, 1953, p. 10.

⁴ E-H Schillebeeckx, O.P., "Parole et Sacrament," *Lumière et Vie*, Jan.-Mar. 1960, p. 25.

⁵ *Word of God and Word of Man* by Karl Barth, translated by Douglas Horton, Boston, 1928, p. 114 quoted by A. Rock, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁶ *Oeuvres de Bossuet*, vol. xi, edit. 1863, quoted in *On the Priesthood* by St. John Chrysostom, translated by P. Boyle, C.M., p. xvi.

⁷ Charles Davis, "Theology of Preaching," *The Clergy Review*, September, 1960, *passim*.

⁸ *Omnia Opera*, In Lucam, iii, 2 (xxii, p. 265) Paris, 1880, quoted by A. Rock, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

⁹ A. Rock, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

¹⁰ *Principles of Preaching*, by Jude Nogar, O.P., River Forest, 1959.

¹¹ J. Nogar, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

¹² *De Doctrina Christiana*, IV, 2, quoted by J. Nogar, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-8.

AS BRIGHT AND GLITTERING BODIES

MANY MEN TODAY are forlorn. They feel abandoned. They cannot find anything to depend upon either within or outside themselves.

The great giants of man's own creation have humbled him. Our T.V. screens present the dazzling facade of the triumph of human genius. We see rockets shooting, sputniks spinning. A finger-on-the-button will unleash H-bombs and intercontinental missiles. Never before has man displayed such genius for scientific discovery and technological invention. But if one face on the edifice of man's creation shows the flame of human genius rising higher and higher, there is another, more sinister face. The gigantic toys that infatuated man now threaten to turn Frankenstein and devour him. This other face sneers at man, makes him shrink to the level of an ant hill.

And what do the masterminds of this generation do for shrunken man? They manufacture strange definitions for him. They call him an electron-proton complex, or an animal related to the ape, or a psycho-analytical bag filled by physiological drives; or a mechanism controlled by digestive and economic needs. They reduce him to smallness and make him feel like so many human ants and bees. The multitude of possibilities beyond his control force him to act without hope. There is nothing to depend upon. Man is on his own —abandoned, forlorn. So speak the prophets of despair.¹

What is the Christian to do? Can he be unconcerned; pretend not to sense the darkness of despair in the atmosphere about him? The Chicago stock yards stink. If you spend any time there, you will take some of the stench away with you. It is the same with the world around