PREACHING THE WORD: THE THEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

A PRE-NOTE

The Christian, we may take it, is one who "repents and believes [that] the Kingdom of God is at hand [in Jesus of Nazareth]." This relationship to God acting in Christ can best be categorized in terms of "discipleship" towards Christ. Discipleship is not ministry, but the latter is radicated in the former, flows from it necessarily and spontaneously, and is inseparable from it. It is to witness to Christ and constitutes, in this basic sense, ministry of the Word—taking Word here in its Old Testament sense of *dâhbar*, i.e., as meaning primarily deed and only secondarily speech as interpretative of deed. All other Christian ministries are particularizations of this basic ministry of the Word, and in a general sense they fall into two categories: official ministries of the Word and charismatic ministries of the Word. The latter are spontaneous and unstructured in kind, and as varied as the changing circumstances of life of those who form the Church; moreover, they are indispensable to the Church.[1] The former are radicated in church order, i.e., in occupying a distinctive order within the organic and therefore structured Church, which founds a determined relationship of the minister to others.[2] It should perhaps be noted parenthetically that such distinction of order holds true only of the hierarchical Church, i.e., of the Church viewed as the totality of the *means* of salvation; viewed as the people of God, as the community of the saved, no such distinctions prevail, as for example that between priest and faithful. This official ministry, founded in orders, was

[1] Vatican II, for example, speaking of husband and wife as "witnesses to one another and to their children of faith in Christ" (Chap. IV, No. 35), designates parents as "the first preachers of the faith to their children" (Chap. II, No. 11), *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium)*.

[2] Ministerial preaching is also charismatic in the sense that the call to office is a grace and that graces of office lie at the root of its effective discharge.

original to the Apostolic College, and is a derived ministry in all others. As expressly formulated in the Second Vatican Council this is threefold: (1) the presbyter—bishop, (2) the presbyter—priest, and (3) the non-presbyter—deacon.[3] The purpose of this introductory note is the need to delimit what this brief paper will attempt. "Preaching" here will mean the activity of the official minister rather than charismatic proclamation, i.e., the activity of presbyters and deacons. The reasons for this are that the latter is so broad that it is not readily tractable to theological systematization in a treatment as brief as this one, and that charismatic preaching can be more richly dealt with from a prior, less imprecise, notion of preaching.

PREACHING AS CHARISMATIC

Having said this, it is now necessary to note that ministerial preaching is itself charismatic. That is, it is a grace of God, an unexacted gift of the Spirit; it cannot be delivered by any amount of theological endeavor. Genuine preaching occurs only when the Holy Spirit (in St. Paul's phrase) "lays fast hold upon"[4] the faith-consciousness of the one called to preach. But the Spirit is invisible, intangible, ineffable; he comes shrouded in anonymity and his identity remains elusive. He brings the action of God to visibility—or better, to audibility—not in himself but in the *Logos*. He hides himself, if we may so speak, behind the Word—who is not his Word but the Father's. Needless to say, this is not our Word, yet the *Pneuma,* evoking in us the response of faith (St. John speaks of the "anointing of the Holy Spirit")[5] affords us accessibility to that Word—so that it is now the Father's Word uttered *in us.*[6] What has thus far been described is,

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[3]"Thus, the divinely established ecclesiastical ministry is exercised on different levels by those who from antiquity have been called bishops, priests, and deacons"; *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium),* Chap. III, No. 28.

[4]Romans 8:26.

[5]1 John 2:20 and 27; cf. 2 Cor 1:21.

[6]By way of clarifying the roles of the Two Persons sent into the soul, it may be helpful to distinguish faith from belief as the cognitive dimension of the

of course, common to all believers; preaching is rather the articulation in the preacher's own words of the uttered Word of God, it is the coming to expression of the Eternal Word in the form of the Apostolic Word. Nevertheless, the Father's Word (and I think it crucial to retain here the Trinitarian aspect) can be truly spoken to men only in a human way; that is to say, within a consciousness that is simultaneously historic and historical. This means two things: (1) that God's Word to us is *present address,* (2) that such utterance must have objective focus *in given events of history now past.*[7]

PREACHING AS MEDIUM OF GOD'S PRESENT ADDRESS

The proclaimed word, then, is the means of rendering present and operative God's Word to men—present at this moment of time and in this segment of space, and in a way that is at once human and proper to the order of faith. This Word of God occurring originally in creation, then later in the prophets of Israel, is spoken to us in these latter days finally and definitively in Jesus of Nazareth. As present address, however, we have to do not with the Jesus of history but with the risen Jesus made glorious at the right hand of the Father. There is, perhaps, an important corollary to this: namely that Christ in glory has formed the Church into his body of which he is the head, so that the ecclesial reality which is the Church is not only spoken *to* by Christ but is mysteriously made to be with Christ a *source* whence the Word comes · to believers.[8]

former; it is the *Paraclete* who evokes faith in us, but a faith finding its objective and specifying focus in the *Logos,* who both proclaims the message and is himself the content of that message.

[7]Seen as total faith response, this division corresponds to St. Thomas' distinguishing the "causam interiorem quae movet hominem interius" from the "quidem exterius inducens" in faith (*Summa Theol.,* II-II, q. 6, a. 1). The former is "interiori instinctu Dei invitantis" (II-II, q. 2, a. 9, ad 3), "Instinctus interior impellens et movens ad credendum" (*Comm. in Joan.* c. 6, lect. 5); the latter rather the material objects of faith, the events known "ex auditu" (Rom 10:17) "verborum significantium ea quae sunt fidei" (II-II, q. 1, a. 4, ad 4).

[8]The Christ in whom all preaching must take its origin today (as at Pentecost and as in Paul's sermons), is not the "Christ according to the flesh," but

Preaching is thus Christocentric insofar as it is a prolongation of the action of God upon man, which is only in and by way of Christ as *Kyrios.* As such it renders the Christ-Word present and operative in a saving way. As with any word, one can distinguish the *content* of what is said from an *invitation* always implicit in the speaking; beyond the mere conveying of information the speaker seeks to elicit from the listener some kind of response that will constitute genuine human communion.[9] Here, the latter is precisely God's offer, through the proclamation, of salvation and reconciliation. Thus the proclaimed word is *itself* a saving Word; it is more than the mere occasion for salvation, precisely because it is itself the divine word in the form of the apostolic word. Man is a symbol-making creature, and his symbols are the embodiment, the incarnation of meaning, the emergence of meaning within materiality and bodiliness, on which basis the meaning occurs, comes to pass, arises in availability. It is the proclamatory act that achieves, symbolically and so humanly, the actual encounter with the living Word of God—at which very moment that Word itself convinces us of sin, summons to conversion, uproots man from his own world, overthrows all human kingdoms, judges and challenges man in his existence. For this reason, Bultmann would seem right in insisting that the preacher must allow for a response on the part of the congregation that is one of rejection. To the extent that the preaching is genuine, to the extent that it is not the preacher confronting the people, but God—there can be no neutral response, since the demands of God upon us are unconditional.

At the same time, if we have to do here with genuine address, then man's response is drawn up into and becomes part of that address, even when such response is the resistance of sin. This is only to say that the preaching act has about it a dialogic character, which is made actual in the preacher himself. It is concrete and existential in kind, demanding that the preacher realize in his own consciousness the existential

the Risen Christ, the Lord with his body, of which we all are members"; Joseph Ratzinger, "Christocentric Preaching," in *The Word* (New York: P. J. Kenedy & Sons, 1964), p. 208.

[9]Cf. the development of this distinction borrowed from G. Gusdorf (*La Parole,* Paris, 1953) by Edward Schillebeeckx: "Revelation in Word and Deed," in *The Word,* p. 258.

faith-situation of the people if he is to mediate the Word of God to their needs. Perhaps, another way of saying this is to note that if it is the Word itself that is effective—"more effective than any two-edged sword"—then it should cut into the soul of the preacher himself.

There is a corollary to this: if the address which the preacher renders present and actual is a saving address, then it occurs, ideally, within the content of worship. With this it becomes clear that the proper context for ministerial preaching is the sacramental one. In the case of six sacraments, that context is inchoative in kind, scil. ordered to the central and consummate sacrament which gives meaning to all the rest, the Eucharist.[10] At this point, the teaching of the Second Vatican Council on the "many presences" of Christ within the integral Eucharistic act does much to enrich an understanding of what preaching is meant to be.[11] Basically, these presences reduce to three: (1) in the gathered community, (2) in the proclaimed word, and (3) in the consecrated bread and wine. The first means that the Church pre-exists those who make it up it is the Church that forms them into people capable of hearing the saving and reconciling word proclaimed by the preacher. The "real" presence (so-called from Scotus' time) is the subsequent realization in new symbols (scil., bread to be eaten and wine to be drunk) of the saving presence of Christ already realized in the proclamation. Obviously, this is no denial that the third presence of Christ is *secundum substantiam,* but it does highlight the fact that it is the proclamation which conveys the meaning and the purpose of that presence. So, ideally, the preacher is at once the minister of the Eucharist, the priest. Karl Rahner, among others, has attempted to relate these two roles more richly by viewing the presbyter—priest as one whose role or function is: (1) first of all, to preach the Word, (2) secondly, to do so in virtue of office or orders, rather than charismatically, and (3) thirdly, at the highest level of sacramental intensity of that Word, namely in the anamnesis of Christ's death and resurrection.[12]

[10]"Hence the Eucharist shows itself to be the source and the apex of the whole work of preaching the gospel," Vatican II, *Ministry and Life of Priests,* Chap. II, No. 5.

[11]*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy,* Chap. I, No. 7.

OBJECTIVE FOCUS IN HISTORY

One cannot do full justice to the Word of God by seeing it as only present address to men; it is also a Word in the sense of bearing content, a delivered Word, Over and above being something active, the source of preaching, it is also something given, the object preached. This is so because God's revealing-saving act is not only existential and historic (*Geschichte*), it is also historical (*Historie*); man transcends time only in the sense that events of his past become real for him in the present by way of opening the future. Granting then this historicity of man, God's address to him finds objective focus in certain deeds of God within man's past, deeds which retain their once and for all character, and which supply the objective data from which the preaching act originates. There is one sole link with these mighty deeds of God and that is the inspired literary record of them which constitutes the books of Sacred Scripture, especially the New Testament. This remains normative for all preaching; what that record means can be gotten at with the help of the sciences of exegesis and hermeneutics. The sole other norm is Tradition—articulated as the dogmas of the believing community, exposed and illumined somewhat with the help of the sciences of dogmatic and systematic theology. As one integral source of preaching, these two can perhaps best be brought together in the phrase suggested by the First Vatican Council "the Gospel read in the Church."[13]

But what do we find in Scripture to be preached? First of all, not dogmas; the basis for dogma is there, yes, but not dogma as such. These are rather definitions, authoritative in kind, that serve as guideposts and as limits to the sense in which Scripture can be propounded. The preacher must know the dogmas; they do not, however, as such constitute the themes of his preaching. Secondly, not doctrines; these

[12]"What is the Theological Starting Point for a Definition of the Priestly Ministry?" *Concilium, The Identity of the Priest* 43 (1969), 85. Rahner is here developing an emphasis of Vatican II: ". . . priests as co-workers with their bishops, have as their primary duty the proclamation of the gospel of God to all," *Ministry and Life of Priests,* Chap. I, No. 4.

[13]*Denz.-Schon.,* 3006.

are undefined truths developed by the theologian speculatively, with a certain degree of abstraction, and rendered into a particular conceptual system. The activity here is rational in kind and its prime instrument is the science of logic.

What is found in the biblical record is a people's experience of God's action toward them within the context of their actual history; in a word, *Heilsgeschichte* (Salvation-history). The task of the preacher, as I would view it here, is to render that salvation-history present and operative in the world today. One caution on this comes quickly to mind: this should not be misconstrued into the attempt to reconstruct the earthly history of Jesus of Nazareth for the purpose of providing a model for Christian living in a psychological or moral sense.[14] What one seeks to realize are rather the "mysteries"—e.g., the Trinitarian truth (that the *Logos* and the *Pneuma* are *homoousion tò Patri*) and the Christological truth (that Christ is *homoousion* with us)—not as theological doctrines, but as (and here I borrow a phrase of Father Ratzinger's) "modes of our Christian existence."[15] This is the way the mysteries of the Trinity and Christ are proclaimed to us in the New Testament, and thus it is not bold to say that the model for preaching is the Bible itself. We need to do for our age what, e.g., Paul and John did for theirs. One difference, of course, is that our experience has its objective focus in the reading of the New Testament whereas theirs was immediate.

THE SPECIFIC TASK OF "KERYGMATIC RE-INTERPRETATION"

But all of this only brings us down to the precise question facing

[14]Cf. Ratzinger, "Christocentric Preaching," p. 208.

[15]Neither "doctrinal preaching" nor "prophetic preaching" expresses exactly what is meant here; the former tends to confuse preaching with teaching and the latter to suggest private charisms and to neglect continuity with objective revelation. Also, it would be untoward to present the truths of Christianity as "ideology," i.e. as a system alien to reality and dominated by ideas whose content is dependent on factors outside of thought, especially goals. Marxism is an ideology, Christianity is not.

us: *how* does the preacher do this? Not by a mere representation of what is found literally in the Scriptural texts themselves, though that may well be a starting point! A positive clue may be uncovered in Heidegger's understanding of hermeneutics. Hermes (Heidegger writes) is the messenger or herald of the gods.[16] The historicity of man is such that when we go back to a text that recounts an experience of our common past, we unavoidably bring to it out of our cultural milieu questions which force the text to yield answers not heard before.[17] Something genuinely new comes to light, and granting that this occurs only within man's subjectivity, it is not subjectivistic because it comes from the text itself, which (in this case) is God's own objective Word. What is meant here is not any "accommodated" sense of Scripture (one given by the interpreter to fit his own purposes) but something closer to the *sensus plenior,* a sense that God himself intends beyond the explicit sense of the words. For one who stands in the Catholic tradition, this cannot be carried to the extremes of Bultmann's radical demythologization or of Tillich's spontaneous religious symbolization.[18] The latter dismiss out of hand any literal meaning or objective historical referent; the newness of meaning for them derives exclusively from religious subjectivity. On the other hand, to merely repeat the traditional formulas of the past is to run the risk of failing to grasp the *meaning* as intended by God here and now.

If this task of "kerygmatic re-interpretation" is not done by the preacher then the consequence in the people addressed is very apt to be incredulity—and the whole purpose of the sermon is, after all, to arouse faith. Either what is said will be dismissed as utterly irrelevant, or it will be "believed" as a mere notional affirmation that remains sealed off from concrete and real life—in neither case will there be a hearing of the

[16]Cf. *Unterwegs zur Sprache,* p. 121, where Heidegger plays on the word *Erscheinen* ("appearing").

[17]In this sense, Heidegger's understanding of historicity allows for something genuinely new, in a way that Hegel's dialectic of history as idea does not.

[18]Heinrich Fries has noted Barth's assessment of Bultmann as "the error of making existential pre-understanding the measure of the word of God" and his warning to Catholics against an uncritical Bultmannian influence; *Faith Under Challenge* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1969), p. 93.

Word of God. At this point, two examples, one doctrinal and one moral, may serve to show why this task is necessary. First, the miracles of Christ: these are not peripheral to the New Testament; in St. Mark's Gospel alone, one-third of the verses recount miracles, thus they must be preached. But is real service done to the religious force of these accounts if they are presented simply as instances of God's dominion over nature or to establish Christ's divinity or perhaps confirm his message or present Christ as a compassionate faith-healer? In the Gospels themselves the miracles are not motives for belief but the very opposite; they occur within a human context in which Christ first of all challenges his listeners, confronting them with the possibility of faith out of the existential and moral situations of their own lives. For those disposed to believe that God is at hand, the miracle occurs as a kind of bringing to expression symbolically (i.e., in the figures of earthly realities) of that faith. Thus only those who believe "see" the miracle, the others go away unchanged. It would seem that the miracle stories can be "translated" so as to confront contemporary man with the question of what exactly it does mean to believe in God in the radically altered life-situations of today. Other similar examples abound: Is it true preaching to represent God as a cosmic deity, a sort of Zeus manipulating human affairs in arbitrary fashion—is not this in fact to encourage looking upon God as in Proudhon's phrase, "the Intruder, the Antagonistic One at odds with man's endeavors"?—or to present the Infancy narratives as literal history which mythologizes the Christ-event and seemingly puts it at a considerable remove from anything possible to present experience; or to preach the Resurrection as if it were an empirical event, something like the resuscitation of a corpse rather than revelation? Of course, one may fail not only by neglecting to re-interpret but by re-interpreting falsely or badly: by preaching a God despoiled of his godness, or reducing the Infancy narratives to mere poetry, or viewing the Resurrection as only the inner experience of having decided for Christ. A further cautionary note: faith is surrender to the unconditional claims of God involving the overthrow of the will's sovereignty, indeed of all human kingdoms and institutions. No amount of demythologization, then, renders the faith act merely spontaneous and automatic. J. B. Metz for one (against some overzealous disciples of Rahner) has drawn attention to this by insisting upon the unbelief

which always lies at the heart of belief and needs to be constantly overthrown.

A second example—this time in view of preaching that is moral rather than doctrinal: does not preaching issue in incredulity if the demands of God upon us are presented without reference to the historicity of man and the fact that human freedom exists only as culturally conditioned? God's present summons to Christian love in the domain of sexuality is not heard today by us as it was by Augustine in the early fifth century for whom the attendant pleasure was in itself illicit and justified only for the sake of procreation, nor as it was by Aquinas in the thirteenth century for whom the pleasure is in itself good, but only to be sought in a prior intending of the procreative act. The contemporary preacher must make credible how the living out of one's sexuality can be in fact the loving of God, as well as how in fact it can fail to be such. Once again, is it true moral preaching to fail to make clear in, for example, the areas of world peace and social justice (and surely *not* to preach these is to fail the demand made on the minister of the gospel by the Sermon on the Mount) that morality is not individualistic in kind, that the Church does not have ready-made solutions and in some cases has only provisional ones, that those who make up the Church are nowise untouched by the scars of sin?

THE ORIGINS OF RE-INTERPRETATION

How, in actual fact, should the preacher approach this task of Kerygmatic Re-interpretation? I have only two clues—one intellectual, the other religious: first, in dependence upon theology; secondly, by undergoing personal conversion. Preaching is a charismatic act and not a theological act, still theology remains constitutive for preaching, something more than a prerequisite. If faith is impossible without hearing, hearing is impossible without understanding, which is to say God's Word to men is intrinsically intelligible. First of all, there is the necessity of acquaintanceship with the tradition. If, as the theologians of hope would have us say, the voice of God comes to us out of the future, still that can only be by way of the past. To not know the tradition is the easiest way of running the risk that the Word of God collapses into what is only the word of men. More than this, God's

Word is unitary and has about it a "logos" character, it is necessary to establish the objective continuity between that Word as articulated in the past and its distinct resonances in the present. Much more proximate to the preacher's task, however, will be theology in a quite distinct phase, one which after having sought enlightenment in the way the Word was spoken in the past, now seeks to witness to it in direct confrontation with the religious issues of the day. This means speculative theology, not in the sense of dogmatics (which explores meaning), or systematics (which structures such meaning into synthesis) but as pastoral theology. But it is hardly audacious to say that this today remains a *terra incognita,* and stands in serious need of development. Possibly this could be begun along the lines of what Lonergan calls the eighth functional specialty of theology: "Communications."[19] Here the proper work of theology is the derivation of categories which will allow the kerygma to come to rich expression as present reality. This would mean far more than the mere coinage of new words, which after all would be nothing more than novelty; it would be more a putting of ancient words and concepts into a new context from which there arises genuine newness of meaning. But this derives from a new appropriation by understanding of the mysteries themselves as present soteriological reality, as "modes of Christian existence." Also, this will mean less the appropriation of

[19]Cf. *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972), esp. pp. 127-32; 355-68. "Applied" theology suggests too much the direct imposition of the conclusions of systematic theology upon the domain of life and practice. "Pastoral" theology carries the connotation of "techniques," i.e. of practical considerations of *how* to deal with people rather than substantive questions of *what* to do and say, especially in the U.S. where pastoral theology tends to diversify into multiple specializations modeling themselves overly much on secular disciplines such as sociology, psychiatry, etc. "Theology of practice" perhaps better conveys what is intended here, i.e. a strictly theological reflection not on texts or doctrines but on what believers actually do by way of bringing their faith to authentic expression. Such a theology could profitably be considered as belonging within the broader perspective of "Communications," not in the sense of transposing a meaning already possessed, but in the sense of discovering needs and achievements that would provide the starting point for appropriating new practical truth. Such a theology, for example, while necessarily dependent upon Systematics, would at the same time put demanding question to the latter.

existing language to communicate what is already understood in a prior act than the spontaneous emergence of language as the embodiment of experienced meaning. Clearly, this activity will have a strong empirical basis; its matrix will be the direct experience of God at work among the people he forms as his own. The preacher should live among and close to those he is called to serve, without losing his identity as "one set apart for the Gospel."

Granting the work of the Holy Spirit, which remains anonymous, there is a religious dimension to the experiences of all men, which experience is spontaneously articulated into language. But the contemporary Western world is radically secular and so affords on every side language which has the effect of supplying an interpretation of the experience in an irreligious and godless way.[20] Thus, the preacher of the gospel is called upon to supply language categories which enable the believer to interpret his concrete life situations as instances of God's working within him. The Church can be viewed dynamically as self-constituting—indeed constituting itself as the *communitas Verbi,* as those who hear the Word—and the minister of the gospel then is a catalyst in this process, he is one in whom the process becomes conscious. Practically speaking, there is no question here of any sort of technical language; the concern is rather with ordinary language, but a religious use of ordinary language. Left in its secularity, ordinary language simply lacks "carrying power" for the Word, and in many cases must be rejected as banal. This concern with living language raises the question as to whether, in his formal capacity as "one sent" to announce the good news, the preacher should give expression to his own opinions and seek to motivate programs of social and political action. Seemingly, these are better left as resonances of the Word within believers themselves, after the self-communication of God in proclamation—i.e., resonances of the Word as it is addressed to their freedom as responsible Christian members of society in the making.

Secondly, there is the need for conversion. By this is meant not justification, i.e., the turn from sin and acceptance of first grace, nor

[20]This thesis has been explored convincingly and in detail by Langdon Gilkey in *Naming the Whirlwind* (Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969).

the special type of once and for all conversion such as that undergone by Newman in 1816, but an ongoing and continually renewed surrender to God's love operative in the world. It is religious in kind and will quite naturally give rise in its turn to moral conversion, but what is more significant here, it can very well be the source of intellectual conversion as well, as Lonergan contends in his most recent writing.[21] Here the love of God, which is always a grace, moves the heart first, occasioning a shift of religious horizons, and creating a world of personal decision and existential commitment, out of which the intellect is led to understand, in an intuitive act of insight, something hitherto undisclosed. Spontaneously, this seeks to come to expression as proclamation. St. Thomas gives theological expression to his own version of this in his teaching on the intellectual gifts of the Holy Spirit, i.e., in terms of the docility of the intelligence to the illuminative power of the *Paraclete,* by way of the prior union of charity.[22]

At this point, perhaps a cautionary distinction should be made: if a minister of the Word feels himself not to be fully converted to the love of God, if he is aware of his own failure to live up to all the injunctions of the gospel, that does not mean that under plea of unworthiness he is justified in not preaching the gospel in its entirety, in all the demands it makes upon men. To think otherwise is to be guilty of a subtle form of Donatism. This is not inauthenticity, which would rather be to preach without sincerity, to preach that of which one is not fully convinced—this would, of course, rob the proclamation of its saving efficacy.

Ideally then, a theology of preaching should coalesce these two elements, the intellectual and the religious, into a conscious reflection on how in actual practice (i.e. within the existing, culturally conditioned, religious situation) meaning "comes to pass," and incarnates itself in the words and deeds of the preacher. Preaching is

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[21]*Method in Theology,* esp. pp. 101-24. Some reservation may be legitimately felt here concerning Lonergan's understanding of how the strictly intellectual categories proper to theology can in fact arise out of prior religious conversion, but the preaching act lies much closer to conversion of heart, to the personal appropriation of the gospel, and here no such hesitancy need be felt.

[22]*Summa Theol.,* I-II, q. 68; II-II, qq. 8, 9, 45, and 52.

thus the release of a twofold efficacy that is indigeneous to meaning itself—for meaning is at once communicative and constitutive. It is communicative, that is to say its occurrence has the effect of drawing others into the ambit of meaning achieved. And it is constitutive in the sense that it structures community founded on the common understanding (of goals etc.) made available. Thus viewed, preaching induces conversion in its hearers whereby they surrender to the building power of the Word, achieving in this way self-transcendence—or contrariwise, allowing for the refusal of conversion, and thence alienation, and the deterioration of authentic meaning into ideology. Once again, the concern is less *how* to preach than *what* to preach.

The Word we preach is God's answer to the question posed by human existence. Yet we speak much of the silence of God in these latter days, and this is certainly true at least in the sense of a cultural eclipse of God. This may be due partly to God's will that those called to preach be delivered over to experiencing the sinful condition, one resistant to the Word—as the Incarnate Word was "made sin" for our sakes and delivered over to the cross. It may also be God's way of urging upon us the mission of the Church, i.e. the re-appropriation of the saving dimensions of that Word for ourselves and our generation.

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