

Preaching and Living the Gospel

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Teresa of Ávila enucleated the task of Christian evangelization with the simple exhortation: “We must all try to be preachers through our deeds.”¹ In the Spring of 2019, with the gracious inspiration of our keynote speaker, Mary Catherine Hilbert OP (Professor of Systematic Theology, University of Notre Dame), *Lumen et Vita* invited students from graduate schools of Theology and Divinity across the United States to reflect on our common duty to proclaim the good news. The conference sparked discussion about the role of preaching and prophetic discourse in the ministry of the Church, the necessity of pairing preaching with the inculcation of practices, and the viability of different forms of Christian living. The following papers represent a cross-section of the themes that emerged:

In “The Orations of the Cappadocian Fathers on Lepers,” **Carlo Calleja** draws inspiration for contemporary homiletics from the examples of Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa. How might their preaching on leprosy serve as a model for social justice preaching today? While the Cappadocians’ rhetorical style and use of pathos is important, the effectiveness of their preaching springs from their commitment to solidarity with those who present themselves as irredeemably different. “While exhortation to the virtue of solidarity is important, nothing cultivates it as much as practice.”

In “To Evangelize the Poor,” **James E. Kelly** performs an exegesis of Jesus’ own preaching in Luke 4:18-19. While Jesus’ adopting of Isaiah’s manifesto “to bring good news to the poor” is normally interpreted as a call to social justice, the passage received different treatment during the Patristic period. Origen interprets the Lucan text as a fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy in the person of Jesus, and as a model for the interpretation and preaching of the whole Bible as centered on Christ. “Origen prepares his hearers to consider how Jesus speaks when the Scriptures are read aloud within every church.”

Matt Kershaw offers a fresh interpretation of the phrase “doers of the word” (James 1:22) in “Poetry as Antidote to Toxic Certainty.” Just as the best poetry resists ideological categorization when it attends to the vagaries of lived experience, good preaching arises from life and is not quick to pursue disembodied polemics. The Incarnation, Kershaw submits, provides a model not only for a way of living, but a way of speaking. “The ground of primary

¹ Teresa of Ávila, *The Way of Perfection*, §16.6.

truth does not lie distributed among absolute binaries of certainty, but rather assumes the primary reality to be individual lived experience.”

Austin C. Kopack examines the relationship between Christian belief and practice in “A Christian *Habitus*.” Drawing on insights from James K.A. Smith and Ludwig Wittgenstein, he argues that Christianity is an activity before it is a teaching or creed. Educating the next generation in the faith will require not simply the transmission of knowledge but the inculcation of behaviors and practices. “What it means to be religious is not simply to *have* a particular set of beliefs, but to live within an integrated religious form of life held together by a whole web of communal practices.”

Kaylie G. Page probes the significance of Christian life in the light of the resurrection in “Raised Imperishable.” Following Thomas Aquinas’ attempt to envision an ethics founded on an anticipation of the life to come, Page asks how our understanding of the resurrection informs our actions as Christians. Both on the level of worship and on the level of social justice, meditation on the resurrection starkly reveals our halfway state in this present life and fuels our desires for perfect praise and perfect peace. “By shaping our lives according to the resurrection of the body, we experience our own weakness and we receive glimpses of future glory.”

In “The Art of Dying Well” **Dominika Sieruta** finds a model for Christian living in the *ars moriendi* literature of the early modern period. Focusing on Erasmus of Rotterdam and Teresa of Ávila, she locates the practice of meditation on one’s own death within the horizon of the imitation of Christ, whose life leads to Calvary. Following Christ means not only accepting a final death at the end of life, but also accepting the ongoing “death” of self-sacrifice and renunciation. “Reflection on the transience of life leads way to meditation on that which is eternal.”

— The Editors