

MEDIEVAL THEOLOGY

Topic: Bishops and Preaching: Historical, Theological,
and Hagiographical Perspectives
Convener: Gregory F. LaNave, Dominican House of Studies
Moderator: Marie Anne Mayeski, Loyola Marymount University
Presenters: Edmund J. Mazza, Azusa Pacific University
Michael Sirilla, Franciscan University of Steubenville
Suzanne Hevelone, Boston College

In the founding of the Dominican Order, the Church in the Middle Ages created and formalized the ministry of apostolic preaching, giving to the friars what had previously belonged to the bishops. The rise of the Waldensians and Albigensians was attributed in part to the failure of the bishops in their preaching ministry. Yet, later Dominicans did not lose sight of the connection between episcopal ministry and preaching.

Edmund Mazza (“Dumb Dogs and *Domini Canes*: Bishops, Friars, and the Twelfth-Century Pastoral Vacuum”) set the historical stage for this development. “Dogs” was an epithet commonly applied to the bishops, who in their teaching and preaching office were to be watchful guides for the flock of Christ, and to ward off the wolves of heresy. The failure of bishops to exercise this office led to their being named “dumb dogs,” a reference to Isaiah 56:10: “Dumb dogs not able to bark.” Mazza cited Alan of Lille’s analysis of the pastoral malaise in the late twelfth-century: the bishops failed because of (1) episcopal pride, a lack of personal holiness and a desire for worldly gain; (2) their refusal to submit to the rigors of intellectual formation; and (3) “the sin of the Pharisee,” whereby they lay heavy burdens upon people which they refuse to shoulder themselves. Such failures, in the view of Alan and others, including Innocent III, precipitated the Waldensian and Albigensian crises. Mazza recounted Innocent’s meeting with Bishop Diego of Osma and his canon Dominic Guzman, and the commissioning of the latter to preach among the Cathars. Dominic’s virtues of (1) personal sanctity reflected in poverty, (2) love of learning, and (3) preaching in word and deed would repair the three root vices identified by Alan of Lille. Mazza gave evidence of the vindication of Dominic’s mission, by the pope and Church councils, both local and universal (Lateran IV). Mazza argued that Dominic’s activity was always associated with the pastoral mandate of a bishop, and that what was most novel about this new movement was a *permanent* delegation of the bishop’s responsibility to ordained religious.

Michael Sirilla (“The Primacy of the Teaching Office for the Bishop in Aquinas”) noted that the focus for study of the episcopacy after the council of Trent was its sacramentality, but that following Vatican II greater attention was given to the episcopal teaching office. Aquinas may be said to be a precursor of this shift, as he insists that teaching is, for the bishop, the most important office of all. Sirilla began by laying out the way Aquinas differentiates the bishop’s teaching from that of the theologian, the priest, the deacon, and any baptized person. The theologian, unlike the bishop, teaches in a scholastic mode. Any baptized person may undertake an initial evangelization, while the priest and the deacon have particular care for

teaching the rudiments of the faith. It belongs to the bishop to instruct in the profound mysteries of faith and the perfection of the Christian life. The aim of episcopal teaching is the spiritual perfection of believers. To explain why Aquinas holds that the bishop's teaching, thus defined, is his most important office, Sirilla cited the influence of Pseudo-Dionysius's *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, in accordance with which Aquinas argues that the episcopacy is a "state of perfection." The episcopal ordination rite constitutes the recipient in an external state of perfection that ought to be characterized by a profound understanding of divine revelation that he is supposed to attain and confer on others. The end of this is beatitude, for Aquinas says that "there is no salvation except through the knowledge of the truth" (*In 1 Tim.*, c. 1, lect. 2). By teaching, the bishop leads others to the contemplation of the most profound mysteries, which arouses in them the most perfect charity, and thus leads them to beatitude.

Suzanne Hevelone ("A Bishop of Virtue: Jacobus de Voragine on St. Nicholas, Bishop of Myra") turned from reflections on preaching to the example of preaching provided by the late-thirteenth-century Dominican Jacobus de Voragine. She examined Jacobus's portrayal of the early Christian bishop St. Nicholas of Myra, in the *Golden Legend* (which contains a *vita* of the saint) and in five extant sermons. The *Golden Legend* recounts the miraculous character of Nicholas's election as bishop, and a story that indicates the spiritual authority of the bishop over the temporal authority of the emperor (*viz.*, a miraculous intervention on behalf of three innocent men, against the judgment of Constantine). In his sermons on Nicholas, Jacobus focuses less on the miraculous and more on the saint's virtues. Hevelone gave a detailed account of the content of these sermons—"model" sermons, which would have been delivered primarily to clerics, who would have used them in their own preaching to lay audiences. She concluded that Jacobus wanted to present his audience with those virtues that he regarded as essential to the episcopacy, such as justice, generosity, and constancy. Moreover, she noted that Jacobus devotes considerable attention to the election process surrounding bishops, advocating certain virtues appropriate for that process.

The ensuing discussion focused on (1) the possibilities for lay preaching raised in the Dominican movement and (2) Aquinas's account of the importance of an inward principle—the work of the Holy Spirit—in the salutary reception of preaching.

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