

The preaching of the laity in the light of tradition

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The themes of "lay preaching" and "the priesthood (or diaconate) of women" have one thing in common: in both cases, in the final analysis, it is the very essence of the Church that is at stake, touching on its sacramental and hierarchical constitution.

In other words, the question is whether the Catholic religion—and therefore the Church—is the product of human reflection and social action, or whether it is the creation and instrument of Jesus Christ, the divine-human Revealer and Redeemer of the world and of humankind.

In the first case, the question of women's ministries or the admissibility of lay preaching can be answered on the basis of sociological, psychological, aesthetic or other human and immanent criteria — and then, when the anthropological and socio-cultural context changes, the answer is modified accordingly and replaced by other solutions that are better suited and more likely to achieve consensus—which in the second case is simply impossible. Indeed, if the Catholic Church is the creation and instrument of salvation of the man-God Jesus Christ, the norms that govern its concrete way of life are not subject to human judgement. What the Church does and how it is done are determined, in this case, by the will of its founder and according to its essence, established once and for all by Jesus Christ. Therefore, when addressing the question of the admissibility of preaching by lay people, this principle must be taken into account first and foremost.²

In the context of the heated discussions currently taking place, it is often loudly proclaimed that the decisions of the Pope and the Curia should be inspired by their own judgement according to criteria more or less explicitly described as "pastoral concerns" — in reality, therefore, purely practical considerations. Some point to the shortage of priests, the consequent need to establish priestless worship, and the burden on overworked priests that needs to be alleviated. Furthermore, they emphasise that lay people, who live in the world, are closer to reality and that, when it comes to matters such as professional life, marriage and family, they can speak from experience and are therefore closer to their listeners. Finally, they refer to the mission and dignity of the baptised and confirmed Christian who, precisely through the sacrament of confirmation, is called and

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² The above text is an abridged version of my paper: "Laien auf der Kanzel - Anmerkungen eines Historikers und Theologen zu einem aktuellen Thema" (Lay people in the pulpit - Comments by a historian and theologian on a current topic), published in: F. Breid (ed.): *Der Dienst von Priester und Laie* (The ministry of priests and lay people) (Steyr, 1991), pp. 133-163. References can be found in my article: "Wortverkündigung und Weihe. Das Problem der Laienpredigt im Licht der Kirchen-, insbesondere der Konziliengeschichte" (Proclamation of the Word and Ordination: The Problem of Lay Preaching in the Light of Church History, Especially the *History of the Councils*), in *Annuario Historiae Conciliorum* 18 (1986), pp. 239-271.

commissioned to proclaim the message of salvation. **Provided** they have also received theological training, what prevents lay people from taking to the pulpit? And besides, are there not lay people today who are better trained in theology and better speakers than their priests? Should we not also ask ourselves how the Church could involve the many lay theologians in its pastoral ministry?

Given the shortage of priests, should it not consider new avenues, such as the preaching ministry of lay people?

Thus, psychological and sociological reasons, as well as pragmatic motives, are put forward to justify lay preaching. It is on such grounds that Rome should base its decision to authorise lay preaching – assuming that such authorisation is still to be granted.

But, precisely, this line of argument clearly expresses the Church's conception — and therefore its preaching — on which it is based. Is this not a Church conceived as a free assembly of men and women who share the same religious conviction, whose *raison d'être* is to communicate a 'meaning of life', to offer both individuals and the community a way of life and a way of being? This kind of "Church"—insofar as this kind of social organisation still deserves the name—can certainly be called "my Church" and thought of as something that can be built, shaped and realised. And we come dangerously **close** to such a conception **when** we read, for example: "The parish is not only the people of God to be cared for, it is also a differentiated social organisation, which is built up through the active participation of all and thus learns to conceive — with specific powers being preserved — effective proclamation as its business."

Can we really describe in this way the Church that Jesus Christ built on the rock of Peter and on the foundations of the apostles and prophets?

However, when it comes to the Church founded by Jesus Christ, as we have said, other laws apply than those inspired by socio-psycho-pragmatic considerations. Here, only the will of the founder is considered. That said, one will search in vain in the Holy Scriptures for a passage where the Lord either commands or forbids preaching by lay people. The same can be said of the question of women's ordination. There are many questions to which the New Testament does not provide answers because, when it was written, they did not arise.

But the Lord sent **the** Holy Spirit to his Church so that he might "guide her into all truth." That is why, through the answers to questions that have arisen over the centuries, we find the will of her founder, Jesus Christ, in the authentic tradition of **the** Church, which is not limited to doctrine alone but also includes the concrete life of **the** Church. It is not uncommon for us to recognise Tradition not primarily in the texts of the Magisterium or canon law, but in the actual way of life of the Church, a behaviour that is often not even explained verbally. How can we understand this? Quite simply, before the Church proclaimed dogmas, even before there was a New Testament, the Church lived and acted. And since the Spirit, breathed into her by the Father and the Son, lives in her—the mystical Body of Christ—as her soul, as her inner principle of life, she is, by nature,

indestructible. She cannot die until the Lord comes. But this also means that she cannot lose her identity as founded by Jesus Christ.

That is why, when she proclaims authentically, acts sacramentally — thus fulfilling her mandate — and transmits it in her sacred ministries, she can only do so guided by the Holy Spirit. Even if, too often, she falls far short of Christ's moral demands.

In the case that concerns us, we can give a precise explanation: if the Church, in the course of its two thousand years of history, despite the frequent and profound changes that have marked its socio-cultural environment, has never, ever conferred the sacrament of ordination on a woman and has therefore never given her a share in the hierarchical priestly ministry, this is not due to historical contingencies; this tacit but obvious behaviour expresses the Church's conception of itself; it knows that each of its sacramental and hierarchical ministries is essentially a *re-presentation of Christ the Head*. This is why the decisive norm of the Church's faith and action is not only the Tradition she teaches, but also the Tradition she lives out in practice, even if it is not expressed verbally. For this reason, **among** others, there can never be a female priesthood that corresponds to the will of Christ, **nor** a sacramental diaconate for women. And now, what about the preaching of the laity, according to these criteria?

It is often said that the ban on lay preaching imposed in 1234 was essentially motivated by socio-historical circumstances. While it may be argued that this ban was inevitable at the time in order to preserve the faith of the Church, which was threatened by separatism, secret meetings and heresy, it now seems possible and, in many respects, necessary to reconsider without prejudice the objective conditions that led to this decision.

In short, this means that, firstly, this prohibition on lay preaching has only existed since 1234 and, secondly, it was motivated by circumstantial factors. Considering that these circumstances no longer exist, as the situation is no longer the same, this prohibition could – and should – therefore be abolished.

This assertion, born of a profound ignorance of history and theology, must be vigorously rejected in its entirety.

It should be noted that the Church has never authorised lay people to preach: on the contrary, this practice was expressly prohibited from very early on, for fundamental dogmatic reasons. This prohibition was based on the Church's awareness of the essential relationship between preaching and ordination—a concept expressed in all the texts and facts we know from the history of ecclesiastical law. The evidence and clues that have come down to us from throughout the centuries are abundant in confirming this. However, it is not possible to present them all here and now, so we will content ourselves with mentioning a few particularly explicit examples.

The first example we will cite is that of Pope Leo the Great, who had the opportunity to speak about the power to preach. Not only did he have to compel the followers of Nestorius and

Eutyches to recognise the doctrine of the Council of Chalcedon, but he also had to oppose the rebellious monks of the Near East who were actively involved in Christological controversies. On this subject, we have three letters, written in 453, in which the Pope clearly and categorically pronounces himself on the question of preaching by monks – that is, by lay people. The specific occasion for this was that Bishop Thalassius had, in one way or another, authorised a monk named Georgius to write and preach. And, in his letter of 21 March 453 to Bishop Julian, Leo the Great expresses his astonishment, firmly reminding him that it is the responsibility of the episcopal authority to expressly prevent episcopal and priestly powers from being usurped by monks – that is, lay people. What is striking here is that the Pope describes the authorisation to preach granted by Bishop Thalassius to the monk Georgius as *praedicandi aliquam contra fidem licentiam*, i.e. authorisation contrary to the faith. Thus, he rejected this authorisation to preach granted to a monk, not only as pastorally inappropriate or contrary to canon law and custom, but also as contrary to the faith.

One cannot help but compare this letter to Bishop Julian with another from the same period, addressed by Leo the Great on 2 April 453 to Bishop Maximus of Antioch, which refers to the same case of a monk preaching per nefas. The last paragraph of this letter once again deals with the question of "lay preaching". It reads: "We ordain that no one, except the priests of the Lord, whether monk or layman, shall presume to teach or preach, even if he can boast of a certain scientific training." Even if it is desirable that all the sons of the Church be well informed about the true and sound faith, this does not mean, he emphasises, allow anyone who is not a priest to assume the role of preacher, for order must reign in the Church of Christ, so that in the one Body of Christ, the higher members may perform the functions formally entrusted to them and the lower members may not disobey the higher members. A month later, on 25 June 453, the Pope echoed this sentiment when, as in a *ceterum censeo*, he concluded a letter to Bishop Theodoret concerning certain monks by noting: "And I enjoin in particular that, apart from the priests of the Lord, no one dare preach, whether monk or layman, even if he can boast of a certain scientific training." With this last statement, the Pope clearly shows that if it is not appropriate for lay people to preach, it is not because of a lack of theological knowledge but because of a lack of ordination.

Prompted originally by the case of the monk Georgius, Pope Leo the Great, in three letters written in quick succession, did not content himself with strictly forbidding preaching by lay people, but asserted that such preaching was contrary to the faith.

Leo formulated this prohibition as a general principle and very expressly. The concluding formula of the letter: *Quas tamen litteras pro utilitate universalis ecclesiae (...) ad omnium volumus pervenire notitiam* — "We want this letter to be communicated to all for the good of the whole Church" gives his statement enormous magisterial weight.

The synod of 692, which owes its name of Synod in Trullo to the domed hall of the imperial palace in Constantinople where it took place, was extremely important for the canon law of the Byzantine Church; on the question of preaching by lay people, it summarised the evolution of the Church on this matter. In its canon 64, it defined that no lay person could assume the authority to teach, teach publicly, or even simply discuss matters of faith in public. On the contrary, lay people had to obey the order established by the Lord, listen attentively to those who had received the grace of teaching, and allow themselves to be taught by them in all matters concerning divine things. The text of this canon concludes with a formal reminder of the diversity of members and their tasks in the Church—a teaching that dates back to Saint Paul.

Let us now consider the early Middle Ages. The rapid spread of the phenomenon known as the "mendicant movement" — a name that **does not** fully capture a phenomenon that led lay people and clerics from all walks of life to feel radically attracted to the ideal of the *vita apostolica*, encouraging them to break away from their social attachments in order to *follow Christ* in poverty and preaching—was in particular a distant consequence of the Gregorian Reform. No doubt the reformist circles of the Roman Curia had long wished to put this lay movement at the service of Gregorian ideals. But **after** a while it became apparent that the anti-clerical tendency adopted by some of them was unacceptable from a theological and ecclesial point of view. It was at this time and in these specific circumstances that, in a letter addressed to Cinthius, Prefect of Rome, Peter Damian recalled that, during the previous feast of the Epiphany at St Peter's, *prout divina clementia suggerba*, they had both addressed the people — *concionaremur ad populum*. On that occasion, Cinthius would not have spoken as a prefect but as befitted a priest. As for himself, he had been hampered by difficulties with his voice. The speech given by Cinthius was, in Peter Damian's opinion, an exercise of the general priesthood of the faithful (he quotes the Apocalypse and 1 Peter on this subject, and then encourages him: *servata mensura tui ordinis, in ecclesia salutiferae exhortationis verba depromens* — "insofar as, within the limits of your [lay] status, you utter words of holy exhortation in the church") in the service of the people as much as his judicial and administrative activity. In this sense, he was also to hold ecclesiastical trials *in quantum tui ordinis facultas suppetit* — "as far as your lay status allows" — so that Rome could call him *pater patriae et Ecclesiae defensor*. It is **worth** examining more closely the terms: *exhortationis verba* – "words of exhortation" that Peter Damian uses in reference to Cinthius' speech at St Peter's; these terms would enable Innocent III, a good hundred years later, to give a theological definition of Waldensian preaching. At the same time, Damian's two references to the limitations imposed on Cinthius by his lay status are important. It is within the limits of this status that the exhortation of the prefect of Rome must be placed.

At the end of the 12th century and the beginning of the 13th, the lay movement that arose in the wake of the Gregorian Reform gained increasing independence and gave rise to well-known heretical movements that have been the subject of much research: reducing them to the Waldensians

and the Cathars is a gross and superficial simplification. Many individuals and groups travelled throughout the countries, preaching repentance and conversion, love of neighbour and enemy, and occasionally even heretical and absurd doctrines; and frequently these people made a strong impression by their strictly ascetic lives as well as by their preaching. Among these movements, the most important was that of the Waldensians, founded by Valdo, a merchant from Lyon. Absolutely credible in their early days, and in no way cultivating anti-hierarchical sentiments — they had even set themselves the goal of combating the heresy of the Cathars — the Waldensians, represented by a delegation led by Valdo himself, addressed Pope Alexander III in March 1179, during the Lateran Council, to ask him to approve their *vita apostolica* and authorise them to preach under dispensation from canon law, which did not allow lay people to preach. The provisions from which they asked the Pope to exempt them were found in the *Decretum Gratiani, Distinctio 23 c. 29*. In essence, they were identical to those of the Synod of Carthage of 398 and the Apostolic Constitutions, which state: *Laicus praesentibus clericis, nisi ipsis probantibus, docere [!] non audeat (...) Mulier quamvis docta et sancta viros in conventu docere non audeat* — "Let no lay person presume to teach [!] in the presence of clerics, unless with their consent (...) Let no woman, however learned and holy she may be, presume to teach in a meeting [of the community]."

It would be wrong to claim that the lay preaching movement in the Middle Ages found itself in a legal vacuum, as the question of lay preaching had not been decided on its merits. Given the overview we have just given of the position of the early Church on this subject, it is unacceptable to claim that the provision adopted more or less accidentally in Gratian's Decree, which included a possibility of exception in the expression *nisi rogantibus sacerdotibus*, was the only canonical provision relating to this question. In any case, it is certain that the position of the early Church was clearly negative. Furthermore, in provision 23 c. 29, which we have quoted, there is also mention of women teaching. One cannot but agree with Rudolf Zerfaß when he says that, for Gratian, a lay person preaching was "as inconceivable in practice" as a woman preaching. It is therefore all the more incomprehensible – because it is contradictory – to see him assert that, fundamentally, canon law had not settled the question of lay preaching. Yet Alexander III, who otherwise received the Waldensians warmly and with great kindness, strictly adhered to the letter of the decree by authorising them to practise itinerant preaching subject to the condition set out in that decree: *rogantibus sacerdotibus* – "at the request of priests"; but, to do so, he referred them to the authorisation or invitation of the local hierarchy. The examination to which Alexander III subjected them by a commission of the Curia focused primarily on their orthodoxy, and less on their training; This is evident from an account by Walter Map, an English member of the Curia responsible for this examination: one after another, they were questioned on the articles of the Apostles' Creed. It is likely that, in the case of the Humiliates, who had also presented themselves, such an examination had a negative outcome, which is why they were forbidden to preach.

In any case, in 1180, the Waldensians swore to an orthodox *creed*, at the same time that Alexander III approved their *propositum*, that is, their form of religious life. Now, one may well wonder whether Alexander III had in mind the same thing as the Decree of Carthage that we have quoted. The latter refers to *docere*, teaching given by a lay person, which was only authorised in the presence of clerics and at their request. There is no doubt that this referred to catechetical instruction given by the *didaskaloi*. There could be no question of preaching in the strict sense, of authentic and authoritative proclamation. On the other hand, for the Waldensians and the Humiliates, it was not a question of catechetical instruction but of a call to repentance and conversion, an invitation to the *sequela Christi*, in the form of itinerant preaching. We must therefore assume that Alexander III drew an analogy by applying the restriction *nisi ipsis rogantibus*, which originally referred to catechesis, to the itinerant preaching of the Waldensians in order to take into account their religious zeal, which he had otherwise recognised as orthodox.

Thus, by authorising "preaching" by the Waldensians, Alexander III created a new, circumstantial right. However, probably under pressure from the opposition of many priests to their itinerant preaching, the Waldensians increasingly linked their preaching mission directly to God and, thus disregarding the hierarchy, most of them strayed into a heretical – because spiritualist – conception of the Church, which led to their rejection. This development, and especially the experiences of the Cathars and other similar groups, inevitably led to the Decree of Verona of 1184, which excommunicated both any preaching that was not officially authorised and any doctrines that deviated from the doctrine of the Church. Admittedly, this decree does not expressly refer to preaching by lay people, i.e. it is not justified by the lay status of the preacher, but such preaching is nonetheless effectively prohibited. At this synod in Verona – or, one might say, at the meeting between Pope Lucius III and Frederick Barbarossa – the aim was to find a practical solution to the problem of heretics, which was then taking on frightening proportions.

What had been only a partial success under Alexander III—that is, reintegrating groups of itinerant preachers into the Church—was achieved with great success by Innocent III. His goal was to use the zeal of the Waldensians to combat the Cathar heresy. First, the Pope succeeded in reconciling the Humiliates who had been excommunicated by Lucius III. Innocent III had taken a step towards them by largely approving their *propositum*, which placed great importance on preaching. But on this point, we need to examine the texts more closely. It appears that, in fact, what was at issue with regard to the Humiliates was their special Sunday assemblies which, unlike the common assemblies, were held not in a church but *in loco idoneo* — 'in a suitable place'. Before such assemblies and in such places, and with the authorisation of the diocesan bishop, certain brothers of proven faith and religious experience were allowed to give exhortations relating to Christian life. However, they had to refrain from discussing articles of faith and expressing their views on the sacraments. This means that they were specifically not allowed to preach in the sense

of an official proclamation before the assembly, in the church, and more specifically in the context of the liturgy. It is particularly important to consider the justification given for this authorisation to make spiritual exhortations before the community alone: the Spirit must not be stifled, as the Apostle says, and therefore the bishops had no right to prevent these exhortations. In the same vein, Innocent III justified the mandate he gave to the "Poor Catholics" to fight against heretics by presenting them as men who, dressed in poor clothing but animated by a burning spirit, went out to the despised. We can thus see the theological definition that Innocent III gave to this *exhortatio* of the Humiliates or to the activity of the "Poor Catholics": for him, it **was** a charismatic and prophetic witness which, undoubtedly, did not have the character of an authentic proclamation, but which, as a witness of spirit and strength, could awaken and foster spiritual life. This is most likely one of the reasons why Innocent III decided to extend his authorisation to preach, which had hitherto been restricted to within the community, to a large number of Humiliates in the diocese of Milan, and to allow them to preach in public places and churches.

The Pope adopted an identical position towards the Poor Catholics of Durand de Osca, who, coming from Waldensian circles that had meanwhile become anti-ecclesiastical and heretical, had found their way back to the Church. It should be noted, however, that this group was largely composed of educated clerics, a fact that is often overlooked. Once their orthodoxy was no longer in doubt, they received from the Pope, as a community, the power to preach in such a way that their members no longer **needed** a mandate from the local ordinary. They were therefore required, in principle, to recognise the need to have received a canonical mandate in order to preach; in fact, **once** they had returned to the fold of the Church, this no longer bothered them. Similarly, when Bernard Prim's *Pauperes reconciliati* – again, mostly clerics – addressed Innocent III, the Pope adopted the same attitude. Like the Waldensians, they had preached against the Cathars and sought the Pope's protection **when** they were accused of heresy. They had undoubtedly believed themselves authorised, in practice, to celebrate the Eucharist without a priest, but they solemnly undertook to reintegrate themselves into the sacramental and hierarchical structure of the Church. On 18 June 1210, their movement **was** recognised by the Church **and** they were authorised to preach to clerics and lay people in order to teach them what was necessary to convert the Cathars.

Once again, we can only agree with Zerfaß who, after carefully analysing the relevant texts, notes: "From Innocent III's perspective, at no point in the negotiations was there any question of entrusting the ecclesial ministry of preaching to lay people, but rather **of** institutionalising new forms of witness to the faith, which until then had been exercised exclusively in private. It is not an old ministry that is being extended to an additional class of ministers, but rather a new ministry that is being created within the Church. *The exhortatio*, the witness of faith of pious lay people, becomes a pastoral instrument recognised by the Church. In this context, it is misleading to speak of preaching, insofar as one might think that the ministry of preaching (which is, in itself,

predetermined and remains unchanged) had been extended to the laity, as if Innocent III had simply entrusted the ministry of preaching to the laity, limiting it to the moral sphere. In reality, he established a new type of proclamation, and precisely by making it theologically derive from the *adhortatio*, he wanted to conceive and recognise it as a new form of witness.

However, reconciled groups and "beggars" were not the only ones to make their "exhortations" heard in the streets and public squares; there were also, as before, fanatics and heretics. This explains the provision of canon 68 of the synodal statutes of Bishop Odo of Paris († 1208), according to which no one was to be allowed to preach unless they were an *authentic person* or had been commissioned by the bishop or archdeacon. This restriction applied not to lay people but to clerics, as evidenced by a variant of this text that has come down to us, which expressly states that no cleric is authorised to preach unless he fulfils these conditions. Canon 92 of these same statutes may have been aimed at lay preachers, insofar as it strictly forbade priests from authorising strangers, whether trained or not, to preach anywhere. At the same time, priests were required to forbid the faithful, under penalty of excommunication, from listening to such "preachers". The reason for this was the danger of spreading heretical doctrines.

This was the situation that the Fourth Lateran Council had to deal with. It should be noted that the purpose of the canons adopted by this assembly was not the preaching of lay people per se, but the regulation of preaching in general. The aim was to prevent heretics from spreading their false doctrines. To begin with, the council prohibited, under penalty of excommunication, any preaching not authorised by the Church; then it formulated positive provisions to encourage preaching in general. To do this, it was able to draw on a series of synodal statutes adopted the previous year in the south of France, where very active preaching had made it possible to counteract the heresy that was spreading there.

Although Innocent III's legislation was formally directed only against heretical preaching by unauthorised persons, and although it incorporated into its pastoral plans the unofficial or semi-official proclamation of various groups of reconciled itinerant preachers — which also included lay people — to combat heresy, this changed with his successor Gregory IX, as evidenced by a letter he sent on 3 October 1228 to the Archbishop of Milan and the decretal *Sicut in uno corpore*. The gloss on these texts leads to the conclusion that lay people were not authorised to exercise the ministry of preaching, regardless of their status or merits. To justify this prohibition, Gregory IX relied on the concept of the diversity of gifts of grace in the Body of Christ, thus giving his argument a biblical basis, whereas in his gloss he refers to a rather socio-philosophical consideration: *Nec universitas alia poterat ratione subsistere nisi huiusmodi magnus eam differentiae ordo servaret* — "A community can only subsist through the well-ordered diversity of its members", an argument formulated in several previous letters from the Pope, and already found in the *Decree of Gratian* (Dist. 89 c. 7). As Zerfaß points out, we should certainly not assume that, in doing so, he was

"seeking to set limits within the Church. Rather, we should consider that this provision expresses a fundamental element of the constitution of the Church."

Undoubtedly, in his letter to the Archbishop of Milan and in the subsequent decretal *Sicut in uno corpore* of 1228, Pope Gregory IX abolished – insofar as it was done in public – the unofficial form of preaching that constituted the exhortation of the laity and which had been authorised by Innocent III. Undoubtedly, the clericalisation of itinerant preaching groups and Franciscans, already encouraged by Innocent III and continuing at that time, had created a different situation. But perhaps this strengthening of legislation was also motivated by the fact that the remaining lay preachers – Gregory mentions some who had appeared in Milan – who originally came from the Humiliates, had once again taken a heretical direction; now that most of the reconciled had in any case become clerics, any lay person who still preached was suspected of heresy.

Later synodal legislation confirms this interpretation. Thus, the Salisbury statutes of 1238–1244 warmly recommend preachers from mendicant orders, but clearly oppose lay preachers. No one should allow lay people to preach, even if the intention is to serve lepers.

It is in this context that the position adopted by the Council of Trent on the power of preaching should be interpreted. At its seventh session on 3 March 1547, during which it proclaimed the decree and canons *De sacramentis*, the council condemned the opinion that all Christians had the power of the ministry of the word and sacrament. Logically, this theme was also the subject of discussions concerning the sacrament of ordination. In canon 7: *De sacramento ordinis*, the Council condemned the opinion that those who *nec ab ecclesiastica et canonica potestate rite ordinati [!] nec missi [!] sunt, sed aliunde veniunt, legitimos esse verbi et sacramentorum ministros* — "who have not been ordained according to the prescribed form nor sent by regular ecclesiastical authority, but who come from elsewhere, would be legitimate ministers of the word and sacraments." The council therefore emphasises here, in a positive form, that the necessary prerequisite for preaching and for administering the sacraments is ordination — with the accompanying mandate.

The same council had to deal once again with the question of lay preaching when Augustin Paumgartner, legate of Bavaria, raised it before the assembly on behalf of Duke Albert V. Tasked with studying this problem, Charles Borromeo asked the legates present to prepare a memorandum for the Pope. For the most part, their text quoted the testimonies of the early Church that we mentioned earlier, but it also put forward a particularly timely reason for opposing lay preaching: the need to take a clear stand against the Reformation's rejection of priestly ordination. Notwithstanding this position, certain reformist circles practised lay religious discourse in their assemblies. One well-known example is that of St. Philip Neri, who made it a custom in the gatherings of his Oratory. This practice in such circles, inspired by the spirit of Trent, clearly shows how far they were from seeing it as "lay preaching".

In this context, it is worth mentioning a decision of the Synod of Bordeaux in 1624, according to which, in order to exercise the ministry of preaching, one had to have been ordained at least as a deacon.

This was in line with Church practice, as demonstrated by the particularly remarkable institution of "licenciates" in Hungary during the Ottoman occupation. The Turkish occupation and the catastrophic shortage of priests had completely destroyed pastoral care in many parishes in Hungary at that time. The solution chosen by the bishops responsible for managing this distressing situation was to set up lay pastoral assistants, commonly known as licenciates because it was the bishop who gave them licence to exercise this ministry. Most of them had no university education, and young, unmarried men were preferred. A significant number of these "licenciates" were former Protestant pastors. Even learned theologians who had returned to the fold of the Church exercised a fruitful apostolate as licenciates. But did these licenciates really preach?

Their duties were precisely defined by several provincial and diocesan synods. To begin with, the Synod of Pressburg in 1628 decreed that such licences would only be granted for one year or, at most, two. The synodal decrees describe the licensees as those who, due to a shortage of priests, have received a licence from the bishops to read the word of God and prayers to the people of God. Their licence document had to clearly specify, in each case, the scope of their activity. While it is true that the statutes of the synod of Turnau in 1629 say the following about licensees: *Sermonem habeant* — "Let them preach", on the other hand, the licence document form found in the acts of the national synod of 1633 makes no mention of preaching, but rather of reading passages from the Holy Scriptures and excerpts from pious books to the assembly. However, we also know that sermons had been printed and distributed in Hungarian, so the reference to *Sermonem habeant* clearly refers to their public reading. This fact is evident from the instruction given by Abbot Grasso of Tihany in 1729, in which we read that licence holders must gather the people on Sundays to hear sermons approved by the Church and to pray from prayer books approved by the Church. While some texts do mention preaching by lay people, these seem to be isolated examples. On the other hand, there is a formal prohibition on graduates preaching, directed against certain abuses. All these concrete indications show that, even in a situation of distress, when there were "lay auxiliaries", a number of pastoral functions – such as baptism, assistance to the dying, burial, the blessing of spouses and mothers, and the service of prayer – were undoubtedly entrusted to lay people, but not preaching.

An institution identical to that of the licenciates can be found in another exceptional situation: that of the missions, particularly in the Far East, with the institution of catechists. These were assigned the same functions as the licenciates, but much more care was taken in their training and recruitment than in the case of the latter. It should also be noted that the numerous sources available to us concerning their activities – in particular synodal or quasi-synodal provisions – give us absolutely no indication that they preached.

If we now summarise the texts and historical facts from a theological perspective, we see that, in practice, all disciplinary instructions on this matter issued by the competent ecclesiastical bodies have always been based on an explicit or implicit recognition of the essential relationship between ordination and preaching. It is the very essence of preaching that makes this link necessary.

"For preaching is the demanding word of God addressed to human beings in Christ and the public communication of that word by the ordained and officially commissioned ministers of the Church (...) Insofar as preaching is in accordance with divine revelation, which is generally assured for the Church, it not only contains the word of God, but is also the word of God. The subject of preaching is God." (Viktor Schurr)

And this presupposes that the human preacher must appear as an instrument of the activity of Jesus Christ, since preaching is the word of God addressed in Christ, and that he must appear in a special relationship—an essential relationship—to Christ, since it is He who, in reality, speaks. Preaching is indeed a *loqui in persona Christi*—a word in the person of Christ. But in this case, as in that of *agere in persona Christi* — action in the person of Christ — in the sacrifice of the Mass and in the administration of the sacraments, the sacramental character of ordination is imperative, for it is this that brings about the *configuratio cum Christo* — the configuration to Christ — a necessary condition for speaking and acting in persona Christi.

The ability to preach, considered a power, therefore derives from the character with which the priest is marked by the sacrament of Holy Orders.

In this sense, preaching differs from catechesis, theological teaching, spiritual formation, witness to the faith and prophetic exhortation precisely because of the ontological sacramental dimension that enables the priest to preach. In the genre of religious discourse, the faithful speak about God; they give a discourse on God. The one who preaches does not speak in his own name, but in the person of Christ, just as he does not baptise, consecrate, forgive sins, anoint or bless in his own name, but does all these things *in persona Christi*. And this alone is the basis for the saving efficacy of what he does and says. Thus, the Second Vatican Council is entirely in line with the Council of Trent when it affirms that, "among the principal duties (*munera*) of bishops," to whom is given the fullness of priestly and pastoral power, "the preaching of the Gospel is the first" (*Lumen gentium* 25).

It is in this context that we must now consider the current regulations governing preaching by lay people, as set out in canons 766 and 767 § 1 of the *Codex Juris Canonici* (1983) and the recent *Instruction on the Ministries of Lay People*. According to these canons, "lay persons may be permitted to preach in a church or oratory if the need arises in certain circumstances or if it is useful in particular cases, in accordance with the provisions of the Bishops' Conference (...)" (can. 766).

"Among the forms of preaching, the homily, which is part of the liturgy itself and is reserved to the priest or deacon, holds an eminent place; during the liturgical year, the mysteries of faith and the rules of Christian life will be expounded in it from the sacred mystery" (can. 767 § 1). We thus find almost verbatim the terms used in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of the Second Vatican Council. And it is precisely this homily—which, incidentally, corresponds to the concept of preaching that we developed earlier—that is imperatively prescribed on Sundays and feast days in all Masses celebrated for the people. But this is something that can only be done by a priest or deacon.

It remains to be seen what constitutes "the need (which) requires it in certain specific circumstances" or "the usefulness (...) in specific cases" that would allow preaching to be entrusted to lay people in a church or oratory.

By definition, this can only refer to cases where a lay person preaching in this way would be giving a personal testimony of faith, considered to be particularly convincing and effective, but which can never be "preaching" as defined above, namely a *locutio in persona Christi*. At most, this "need" or "special case" could arise in connection with manifestations of popular devotion.

But an episcopal conference is undoubtedly contradicting the letter of canon law and the very essence of the priesthood when it attempts to maintain the preaching of lay people—which, in recent years, has begun to be introduced into Sunday worship—despite the formally restrictive text of the CIC (1983), when it presents the homily as the interpretation given, after the reading of the Gospel, of that same Gospel, and when it then presents as possible and authorised the preaching of a lay person, in the form of a *statio* before Mass or at the beginning of Mass, before the *Confiteor*.

The numerous attempts, under the pretext of a shortage of priests, to make attendance at the "Sunday assembly in the absence of priests" compulsory and to make it the privileged place for lay preaching, are along the same lines, namely, to try to abolish the sacramentally based distinction between priests or deacons and lay people.

It is even completely absurd that, for lay preaching considered as a possibility: "if the need arises" or "in special cases", training courses and internships in lay preaching are being set up. In doing so, necessity and exceptional cases are being turned into normal circumstances. All this corresponds to an attempt to reverse Church legislation.

Looking at things from a positive perspective, we should instead emphasise more than ever that baptised and confirmed Christians have a duty to bear witness to the Gospel before those who do not yet believe or who have strayed from the true faith. The mission of the lay person sends them out into the world, to those who are outside, and not to the community of those who believe as they do.

Attempts to replace the priest in the pulpit, or even to expel him, in order to put lay people there—and why not permanent employees in the service of the Church—can only lead to error. All

those in positions of responsibility should realise that the now widely held concept of lay preaching is based on the totally erroneous theological premises that we have outlined above.

To make things clear, let us recall these positions: first, a false conception of the Church which, by rejecting both its sacramental and hierarchical essence, considers it to be the "grassroots Church", an image created by man that can only be described by sociological categories — a conception that is inextricably linked to these categories; the more or less explicit rejection of the ordained priesthood, that is, the thesis already propagated by Luther that every person raised by baptism is also pope, bishop and priest—a misunderstanding reinforced by the socialist-egalitarian and democratic-totalitarian tendencies of our time; and finally, a concept of preaching that does not correspond to the character of the Gospel considered as divine and supernatural revelation, in which we see not the word of God addressed to men and the proclamation of God made to men in Christ, but simply a process belonging to the sociology of communication and serving only to constitute or strengthen a community. This is, moreover, a necessary consequence of the fact that many no longer consider the Bible to be a revelation from God, but simply the product of ancient Near Eastern religious literature. Viewed in this light, there is no need for a mandate or supernatural power to present it. We can therefore say that anyone who bases their beliefs on such premises has abandoned not only the foundations of the Catholic faith but also those of Judeo-Christian revelation in general – even if they themselves are not aware of it.

These observations should have demonstrated with all the clarity one could wish for that the preaching of lay people is not a secondary issue on a secondary battlefield. On the contrary, we find ourselves at the heart of the battle for the true faith and the true Church. It is well known—and numerous statements to the media confirm this—that the two demands for women's priesthood (or diaconate) and lay preaching are aimed at dismantling the sacramental and hierarchical structure of the Church and transforming the Church of Jesus Christ into another Church, "ecumenical and democratic" Church designed for modern man, which they intend to achieve through the well-known and proven process of subverting institutions.

All that we have just said shows that it is necessary and urgent to strictly enforce existing law and, consequently, to punish violations of it by lay people who preach and priests who allow them to do so or even encourage them. An episcopal authority that turns a blind eye to these practices is guilty of serious negligence in its duties.

It is not surprising that respect for and application of the law, which would result from such a reorientation, would provoke a strong reaction. In addition to representatives of a certain pastoral theology strongly influenced by sociology, which should rather be described as pastoral anthropology, it is to be expected that lay theologians (who are quite numerous), lacking prospects for professional advancement and without a clear idea of what their profession is, will be plunged into uncertainty or led in the wrong direction, and will find themselves disappointed or deprived of any prospects for the future. Their numbers, which have grown steadily over the last thirty years,

represent an enormous potential for social conflict within the Church, and it is precisely on the question of lay preaching that the outcome of this conflict will be decided.

However, it is certainly not by abandoning the substance of the faith that we will be able to correct the errors that the Church may have committed in the social sphere or eliminate the tensions that may exist there; on the contrary, this can **only** be achieved by deepening the faith and placing it on a more solid foundation. This is a very serious duty: there is great urgency in accomplishing it!