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CONTINUITY OF FIDELITY IN PREACHING

Abstract. Fidelity in preaching is part of a preacher's identity. The paper aims to present the importance of fidelity in current times. It analyses the recommendations of the last three popes to priest preachers. The first part focuses on identifying the main influences that shape attitudes of fidelity in the preaching ministry. The second part examines the environment in which the preaching ministry takes place while testing a preacher's faithfulness. The conclusion of the paper offers specific recommendations for preachers.

Keywords: preacher; fidelity; proclamation; pope; new situations.

In his exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis describes the preaching ministry in more detail. In 24 points, he answers questions about homiletic teaching and practice. He explains the words that Pope St. John Paul II wrote in the exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis*: “The priest is first of all a minister of the word of God. He is consecrated and sent forth to proclaim the good news of the kingdom to all.”¹ In a specific way, this is manifested in the homily. Pope Benedict XVI wrote that the homily should update the biblical message in a way that guides the faithful to discover the presence and impact of God's Word in their current lives.² The recommendations of popes are the foundations of the preaching ministry. At the same time, they are tested by tendencies that question or reject them. Preachers today, as they

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¹ John Paul II, Apostolic exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis*, www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_250_31992_pastores-dabo-vobis.html 26, accessed: 15 February, 2022.

² Benedict XVI, Apostolic exhortation *Verbum Domini*, 59, www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20100930_verbum-domini.html, accessed: 15 May, 2023.

have throughout history, must remain faithful to their mission. This paper is an analysis of the recommendations of three popes with a view to practical help to today's preachers.

1. A PREACHER'S IDENTITY

A preacher's fidelity is part of his identity. St. John Paul II outlines three main lines of a preacher's identity: openness to the mystery of God, the thought of Christ, and love for the Church.³

1.1 A preacher is open to God's mystery

In the first place, a preacher's faithfulness is manifested by his openness to the mystery of God. A proclamation can only be called Christian when it allows God to appear. This revelation is aided by a preacher's personal union with God. It dynamizes and changes the reality in which the listeners find themselves. A preacher is subject to Jesus' words from the book of Isaiah, which he spoke in the synagogue of Nazareth: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord" (Lk 4: 18-19; Is 61:1-2). A preacher who is open to God and preoccupied with him becomes, according to St. Paul, God's true collaborator (cf. 1 Cor 3:9).⁴ He resembles Moses, "who entered the tabernacle time and again, remaining in dialogue with God, so that when he emerged he could be at the service of his people."⁵ This will allow him to reveal to his listeners the power of God's love and make his words convincing.⁶ Listeners are entitled to hear the word of the living God from a preacher's mouth.⁷ Living the mystery of God not

³ John Paul II, Apostolic exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis*, 26, accessed: 15 February, 2022.

⁴ Cf. Rolf Zeffass, *From aphorism to preaching* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Poligrafia Salezjańska, 1995), 23-25.

⁵ Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, 7, www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xviii/en/cyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est.html, accessed: 15 May, 2023,

⁶ Congregation for the Clergy, *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Priest*, 45, www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccclergy/documents/rc_con_ccclergy_doc_31011994_directory_en.html, accessed: 10 May, 2023.

⁷ Second Vatican Council, Decrees *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_presbyterorum-ordinis_en.html, accessed: 10 May, 2023,

only sanctifies a preacher but also affects his proclamation. St. Paul wrote: “We speak, not as trying to please human beings but rather God, who judges our hearts” (1 Thess 2:4). If God’s Word penetrates a preacher’s thinking and feeling, then the desire for God’s Word will be transferred to God’s people.⁸

Opening up to God means that a preacher, before becoming an orator, must be a listener. Before he can open his mouth on the ambo, his ears must receive God’s word. It must become a message to him.⁹ He must open himself to the Word of God, which he will proclaim to others. He is to be grasped by God’s word, and the degree of understanding will be the measure of the action of God’s word in those to whom he proclaims it. They will hear not only what he has learned about God’s word, but above all what he has personally experienced with God. There must be no conflict between the word and a preacher’s life. Otherwise, he would resemble the Jewish missionaries criticized by St. Paul: “Then you who teach another, are you failing to teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? You who forbid adultery, do you commit adultery? You who detest idols, do you rob temples? You who boast of the law, do you dishonour God by breaking the law?” (Rom 2:21-23).

A preacher himself is to imitate Christ to be able to say, like St. Paul: “Brothers, and observe those who thus conduct themselves according to the model you have in us” (Philippians 3:17). He should not only be a teacher but, above all, a priest who not only proclaims the Gospel, but is also able to sacrifice himself for it: “With such affection for you, we were determined to share with you not only the gospel of God, but our very selves as well, so dearly beloved had you become to us” (1 Thess 2:8). A preacher who is thus filled with the Word of God is then able to transmit it in the utmost confidence and faith (cf. 2 Cor 4:13; 5:6, 8) and filled with the Spirit of God (cf. 1 Cor 2:13). Therefore, Paul could have said, “Keep on doing what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me. Then the God of peace will be with you” (Philippians 4:9). For this, he then praised the Thessalonians: “And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, receiving the word in great affliction, with joy from the holy Spirit” (1 Thess 1:6; cf. 2 Tim 3:10).¹⁰

⁸ Francis, Apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 149, www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html, accessed: 6 March, 2022.

⁹ Cf. Michael Herbst, Matthias Schneider, *...wir predigen nich uns selbst* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2001) 42.

¹⁰ Cf. Ferdinand Klostermann, Die Träger der Verkündigung, in *Handbuch der Verkündigung*, Band I (Freiburg in Breisgau: Verlag Herder, 1970), 404-405.

1.2 A preacher has the mindset of Christ

A preacher's faithfulness is also manifested by his living in a personal relationship with Christ. He puts Jesus Christ first, not himself or his opinions. He is, in the first place, the protagonist of liturgical activity.¹¹ A preacher knows that Jesus walks with him, talks to him, breathes with him, and works with him.¹² Listeners should feel that a preacher is a person who knows Christ from within, has met him, and learned to love him.¹³ Prayer especially helps a preacher to encounter Jesus Christ and his word in a special way. He must approach him with an understanding and heart prepared in prayer.¹⁴

The awareness that to be a true disciple of Christ and to come to know the truth, the priest must remain faithful to and anchored in the Word of God and Tradition (cf. Jn 8:31-32) has always accompanied the history of priestly spirituality. Therefore, the ancient practice of *lectio divina*, or spiritual reading of Sacred Scripture, is very useful to a preacher. This consists of lingering for a long time on a biblical text, which is always read anew, as if one was chewing on it, as the Fathers of the Church say, and wanted to squeeze out of it, so to speak, all the "juice" so that it may become food for meditation and contemplation, and ultimately nourish one's everyday life like sap.¹⁵ A preacher should be the first to be addressed by the Word of God he preaches. St. Augustine says: "He is undoubtedly barren who preaches outwardly the Word of God without hearing it inwardly."¹⁶

A preacher who meditates on the Gospel often stops at images in which he sees Jesus proclaiming the word. A preacher can contemplate the power, wisdom, and depth of the Herald by looking at him. He can recognize Jesus as if from the outside and see what it meant to him to dwell in secret with God's Word. The powerful way that Jesus proclaims the Gospel of salvation evokes admiration in his listeners: "He taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes" (Mk 1:22). Listeners will learn that what Jesus taught is not just some religious platitude. His words cause miracles and overcome

¹¹ Benedict XVI, Post-Synod of the Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 23, www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20070222_sacramentum-caritatis.html, accessed: 12 May, 2023.

¹² Francis, Apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 266.

¹³ Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, *Církev jako spoločenství* (Brno: Nakladatelství PETROV, 1991), 86.

¹⁴ John Paul II, Apostolic exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis*, 26.

¹⁵ Congregation for the Clergy, *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Priest*, 45; Francis, Apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 152; *Homiletic Directory*, 27-36.

¹⁶ Benedict XVI, Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, 59.

evil spirits. Therefore, witnesses must ask: “What is this? A new teaching with authority” (Mk 1:27).

Contemplation also helps a preacher overcome the many obstacles that are part of his ministry. Preachers often realize that it is not easy to proclaim God’s Word in our times. In a world saturated with various sensations, serving the gospel has become challenging. A preacher can often feel like the prophet Jeremiah rebelling against the role God assigned to him and wanting to escape it. This role has turned him into a man who is alone and strange in other people’s eyes. Jeremiah, nevertheless, “lifted” the burden of the word and fulfilled God’s wish.¹⁷ Pope Francis mentions the temptations that can befall a preacher when listening to the words of the Lord. The first temptation is to feel limited, fed up, and blocked. The second is to reflect on what the text says to others, but not to oneself. The third is the temptation to look for excuses and dilute the specific message of the text. The fourth is the conviction that God wants more from him than he can fulfil.¹⁸

Contemplation makes it easier for listeners to accept a preacher as an authority. Authority is closely tied to the spiritual practices of a preacher. They prevent a preacher from acting arrogantly, manipulatively, or in a patronizing way. Authority stems from the authenticity of the one who bears it. A preacher must not be ashamed of his weaknesses because he is being himself, he is working on himself, and so are the listeners. Meditation helps a preacher to accept himself as he is, in the presence of God and among his listeners. This not only brings him closer to the listeners but also makes him more acceptable as an authority, which is not always easy to hold nowadays.¹⁹

1.3 A Preacher is rooted in the Church

A preacher’s faithfulness should harmonize with his mission as a representative of the Church. The foundation of this mission lies in the sacraments: baptism, confirmation, and the priesthood. The formal expression of the mission is a special mandate – the *misio canonica*, confirming that the proclaimer of God’s word has been called to this ministry by ecclesiastical authority. As St. Paul puts it: “And how can people preach unless they are

¹⁷ Cf. Benedict XVI – Joseph Ratzinger, *Zasiahnúť neviditeľným* (Trnava: Tdobrá kniha, 2006), 59.

¹⁸ Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 153.

¹⁹ Cf. Klaus Müller, *Homiletik: ein Handbuch für kritische Zeiten* (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 1994), 143-144.

sent?” (Rom 10:15). This happens at the ordination, when he receives a commission to preach the Gospel and thus shares in the prophetic authority of Christ and the Church. To be sure that throughout his life he transmits the Gospel intact and that he transmits it to the faithful, he is called to develop a special sensitivity, love, and openness to the living tradition of the Church and her Magisterium, which help the Word of God to preserve its correct interpretation and true meaning.²⁰

He should see his mission as serving the Church and not as being a Church employee. The Council expresses this by stating:

Thus the divinely established ecclesiastical ministry is exercised on different levels by those who from antiquity have been called bishops, priests, and deacons. Priests, although they do not possess the highest degree of the priesthood, and although they are dependent on the bishops in the exercise of their power, nevertheless they are united with the bishops in sacerdotal dignity. By the power of the sacrament of Orders, in the image of Christ the eternal high Priest, they are consecrated to preach the Gospel and shepherd the faithful and to celebrate divine worship, so that they are true priests of the New Testament.²¹

A preacher is sent by the Church. Mission is an essential element of the preaching ministry. It is a mandate for a preacher that his activity is not based on his power, but on the power of Jesus Christ and his Church.²² By accepting the mission and receiving the message of the Gospel, the Church herself can send heralds of the Gospel. She puts words of salvation into their mouths, she interprets to them the good news of which she is the guardian, she gives them the command she has received, and she does not send them to preach themselves or their fabrications, but the Gospel. Neither the Church nor the heralds are absolute masters to dispose of the Gospel at will; being custodians, they must transmit it to others as faithfully as possible.²³ Therefore, the proclamation must be authentic and in harmony with the faith of the Church, which is the guardian of the truth about God and man.²⁴

²⁰ John Paul II, Apostolic exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis*, 26.

²¹ Second Vatican Council, Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 28, www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html, accessed: 10 May, 2023.

²² Cf. Herbert Simon, *Kaznodzieja jako teolog*, in *Sluga Słowa* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Poligrafia Salezjańska, 1997), 131.

²³ Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*, 15, www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html, accessed: 15 May, 2023.

²⁴ Congregation for the Clergy, *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Priest*, 62.

A preacher's fidelity to the Church helps to fulfil the desires of Popes St. John Paul II and Francis for the Church to always be a good mother. St. John Paul II wrote: "The Church becomes herself a mother by accepting God's word with fidelity." Like Mary, who became the first believer by accepting the word of God revealed to her at the Annunciation and by remaining faithful to that word in all her trials even unto the Cross, so too the Church becomes a mother when, accepting with fidelity the word of God, "by her preaching and by baptism she brings forth to a new and immortal life children who are conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of God." This "maternal" characteristic of the Church was expressed in a particularly vivid way by the Apostle to the Gentiles when he wrote: "My children, for whom I am again in labour until Christ be formed in you!" (Gal. 4:19). These words of Saint Paul contain an interesting example of the early Church's awareness of her motherhood, linked to her apostolic service to mankind.²⁵ Pope Francis affirmed that "the Church is a mother, and that she preaches in the same way that a mother speaks to her child, knowing that the child trusts that what she is teaching is for his or her benefit, for children know that they are loved."²⁶

Pope John Paul II elaborated on the personalistic vision of the Church developed by the Council: Man is the way of the Church. Benedict XVI upheld this view but added a theocentric view. He encourages the world to dare again to experiment with God. God is to be placed first again. Love is the way of the Church. Pope Francis adds another dimension to the previous ones. The mission of the Church is to "go toward...." In connection with the Church, he often uses the phrase "go out and move." This phrase gives the Church a new vitality. If the Church does not move, following the example of its Founder, it will remain behind closed doors, gradually becoming sickly and foul. However, life in motion also brings difficulties and traumatic events. The Pope prefers the Church after having experienced a traumatic event rather than a sick Church.²⁷

²⁵ John Paul II, Encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, 43, www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031987_redemptoris-mater.html, accessed: 15 March, 2023.

²⁶ Francis, Apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 139.

²⁷ Krzysztof Pawlina, *Kościół Franciszka – mój Kościół*, www.bkaznodziejska.pl/Archiwum/2014/maj-czerwiec-2014/FORUM-HOMILETYCZNE/Kosciol-Franciszka-moj-Kosciol/, accessed: 5 March, 2022,

2. TESTING A PREACHER'S FAITHFULNESS IN TODAY'S WORLD

Preaching takes place in concrete realities, whether cultural, social, or religious. Today, preaching occurs in a secular environment that has some distinctive manifestations. These include the loss of the influence of religion on the lives of individuals and society, life in the virtual world, and the gender issue in all its variants growing daily, which has become the main ideology of the Euro-Atlantic civilization. Even in these circumstances, a preacher must show fidelity to the mission and respect for all people.

2.1 A preacher in the secular world

Secularization is a gradual process of liberating social and cultural aspects of life from the influence of religious institutions and symbolism. It contributes to the desacralization of society and shifts religion into the private sphere. Especially in the Euro-Atlantic civilization, secularisation has gained legitimacy with its specific autonomy, rules, and privileges, but also with its responsibilities and internal limitations.²⁸

There are many positive aspects of the secularization process. Above all, it helped Christianity free itself from the socio-political relations that made its mission difficult. Secularization also fulfils a critical function, pointing out the many inappropriate manifestations that Christianity has failed to respond to. Secularization processes facilitated the differentiation between the realm of the "emperor" and the realm of "God." They also helped rationalize the life of a person who lacked a balance between the mundane and the sacral. Secularization helped to change the concepts of philosophy, theology, and natural sciences, especially in terms of developing their new methodologies. Its processes helped to understand that the development of society, especially in the fields of science, technology, politics, and art, is not a negative or destructive phenomenon, but a testimony to the possibilities facing man and the world. Secularization helps believers to better understand the sacralization of life taking place in new conditions. It can provide the believer with an experience of purification.²⁹

²⁸ Cf. Michael Novak, *Boha nikto nevidí* (Bratislava: Post Scriptum, 2014), 304.

²⁹ Cf. Leszek Szewczyk, *Głoszenie słowa Bożego w środowisku zsekularyzowanym* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2019), 68-69.

Recent popes have also been critical of the negative effects of secularism. St. John Paul II says that “one encounters a sort of secularist interpretation of Christian faith which is corrosive and accompanied by a deep crisis of conscience and Christian moral practice. The great values which had significantly inspired European culture have been separated from the Gospel, thus losing their very soul, and paving the way for any number of aberrations.”³⁰ Similarly, Pope Benedict XVI was critical of secularism.³¹ Pope Francis sums up his predecessors’ remarks by stating:

The process of secularization tends to reduce the faith and the Church to the sphere of the private and personal. Furthermore, by completely rejecting the transcendent, it has produced a growing deterioration of ethics, a weakening of the sense of personal and collective sin, and a steady increase in relativism. These have led to a general sense of disorientation, especially in the periods of adolescence and young adulthood which are so vulnerable to change.³²

Secularism and the Church’s communication with it have been important topics discussed and written about since the Second Vatican Council. The eminent European atheist Jürgen Habermas, who is also known for accepting the invitation in 2004 to a public discussion with Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, at that time head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and asked some questions about this great project. Habermas asked: After so many generations of contempt for religion, do most secularists have the tools or moral strength to engage in frank, respectful dialogue? Are secular men and women prepared to admit that tolerance must always be reciprocal? Is there enough moral strength among secular people to overcome the underestimation of religion?³³

Relativism is also part of the secular process. According to Pope Francis, the consequence of this crisis is truth. He explains that,

in contemporary culture, we often tend to consider the only real truth to be that of technology: truth is what we succeed in building and measuring by our scientific know-how, truth is what works and what makes life easier and more comfortable. Nowadays this appears as the only truth that is certain, the only truth

³⁰ John Paul II, Apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa*, 47, www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_20030628_ecclesia-in-europa.html, accessed: 16 May, 2023.

³¹ Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum caritatis*, 77.

³² Francis, Apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 64.

³³ Cf. Novak, *Boha nikto nevidí*, 280-286.

that can be shared, the only truth that can serve as a basis for discussion or for common undertakings. Yet at the other end of the scale we are willing to allow for subjective truths of the individual, which consist in fidelity to his or her deepest convictions, yet these are truths valid only for that individual and not capable of being proposed to others in an effort to serve the common good. But Truth itself, the truth which would comprehensively explain our life as individuals and in society, is regarded with suspicion. In the end, what we are left with is relativism, in which the question of universal truth – and ultimately this means the question of God – is no longer relevant.³⁴

Relativism comes with three major issues. The first is that relativism is unable to satisfy the mind's innate hunger for truth. This can cause spiritual and mental frustration. The second risk is that relativism promotes the growth of radical individualism and thus causes division among people. It is the objective truth that unites people. The final undesirable effect of relativism is violence. When reason is put aside and the truth is seen only as a power game, then all that remains is force. It is used when tensions rise, and arguments are lacking. Force manifests itself as physical combat, but more commonly in indirect ways, such as censorship and aggressive silencing of opponents. There is growing concern about the excessive political correctness that has engulfed universities and other forums of public debate. Any agreement on what is true and false seems impossible.³⁵

The mission of the homily is not to mourn the fact that secularizing tendencies have occupied for themselves the immediate entrances into human spheres. Although people who represent aggressive secularism seem perfectly self-confident and despise Christians for their opinions and status, they should not be feared. Preachers should know that they are in conflict with a belief system, not a group of people. Contemporary humans are victims of postmodernism rather than of its creators. In this world, the gospel is much more of a deliverance from prison than a struggle.³⁶

2.2 Acceleration of change

Current changes have a profound impact on the lives of both individuals and society, including Christians. Time brings not only new events, but also

³⁴ Francis, Encyclical *Lumen fidei*, 25, www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20130629_enciclica-lumen-fidei.html, accessed: 12 May, 2023.

³⁵ Cf. Robert Barron, *Obnovme si nádej* (Trnava: The Good Book, 2021), 367-376.

³⁶ Cf. Timothy Keller, *Kázeň* (Bratislava: Slovenské evanjelizačné stredisko, 2017), 127.

new challenges and threats. They have an equal influence on a preacher and the listeners of homilies.

There is no need for God anymore

Religion is also undergoing major changes. With the development of modern society, it gradually became common to talk about all aspects of life without the need to mention God. The more the empirical perception of the world began to assert itself, the more difficult it became to find the work of God in it. The world does not view itself as God's creation, but only as nature. Society gradually moved away from the idea that governance comes from God's will. A government is simply elected by and for the people. When everything can be explained without reference to God, it is becoming increasingly difficult to notice God's activity in the world and the impact of transcendence on the meaning of existence. The world finds all meaning in itself without the need for God. Nature, social life, economy, politics, and culture exist "down here" where God intervenes only occasionally or not at all. People have lost their sensitivity to divine activity in the world and turned their attention to ordinary life. This development has caused a shift in the relationship between the secular and divine realms. They no longer interact with each other, and the two realms are far apart. God is relegated to heaven, far from ordinary life. A personal God has ceased to be associated with many aspects of life.³⁷ Modern man has decided to eliminate God in order to feel liberated and free of fear.³⁸

This is one of the reasons why religious traditions are crumbling and all things sacred are being privatized. Religion has become a marketplace where people choose what suits them best. They confuse church affiliation with individual religion. In people's minds, traditional religious confessions fell into a crisis, and other forces entered this vacuum. Institutions and practices have quickly grown to meet people's religious needs. We are witnessing the decline of organised religion.³⁹ Great popularity is gained by "green mysticism," in which the forces of nature are deified. Man is to appropriate the power of the stars, trees, cosmic oscillations, flowers, and water. In meditation, he is to discover himself as part of the entire universe.⁴⁰ Many will also

³⁷ Cf. Edward McCormack, *Finding God in Our Secular Age: Ignatian Insights*, www.hprweb.com/2021/06/finding-god-in-our-secular-age-ignatian-insights/, accessed: 25 February, 2022.

³⁸ Cf. Karl Josef Wallner, *Aký je Boh?* (Bratislava: PostScriptum Publishing House, 2015), 95.

³⁹ Cf. Matthew Fforde, *Desocializácia – Kríza postmodernity* (Bratislava: Lúč, 2012), 179-180.

⁴⁰ Cf. Wallner, *Aký je Boh?*, 59.

express this mysticism by choosing not to have children. They see this as a moral obligation due to an environment threatened by overpopulation. At the same time, they enjoy a relatively carefree lifestyle unburdened by the responsibilities associated with raising children.⁴¹

Pope Benedict XVI commented on this reality by saying that the serpent is constantly attempting to make people believe that, for them to become great, God must disappear; that God interferes with our freedom and that is why we must get rid of Him. Yet, a man who pushes God aside does not make him great but takes away his dignity. He who blames God also blames man. It is faith in God that defends man in all his weaknesses and shortcomings.⁴²

Saint Paul, who teaches how to speak about God in an unfavourable environment, can be seen as a model for today's preachers. In the First Letter to the Corinthians, he wrote: "When I came to you, brothers, proclaiming the mystery of God, I did not come with sublimity of words or of wisdom. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:1-2). St. Paul speaks of the reality of his life, not of some philosophy he has adopted. He speaks of the God who entered his life, of the true God who lives, who has spoken to him and will talk to us. Paul does not seek himself; he does not want to create a crowd of admirers, does not want to enter history as the head of some prominent intellectual school, but rather he proclaims Christ and wants to win persons for the true and real God. To speak of God, then, is to make room for him who has made himself known to us, who reveals to us his loving face; it means "dispossessing" oneself and offering oneself to Christ, knowing that it is not we who win others for God, but that we only submit others to God and pray for them.⁴³

The digital world

Today's man has been called a "digital native." He has his home in the digital world of modern information technologies. He is constantly online on all types of social media.⁴⁴ Benedict XVI called today's world a "digital continent" in which Christians should be "digital witnesses."⁴⁵ Pope Francis

⁴¹ Cf. Novak, *Boha nikto nevidí*, 297.

⁴² Cf. Benedict XVI, *Drahí bratia kňazi* (Zost. Peter Juan Pablo Bako, Nitra: Kňazský seminár sv. Gorazda, 2017), 114.

⁴³ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Můj duchovní testament* (Praha: Portal s. r. o., 2013), 71-72.

⁴⁴ Cf. Manfred Spitzer, *Digitálna demencia* (Bratislava: Citadella, 2018), 168-169.

⁴⁵ Benedict XVI, Ministry in a Digital World: New Media at the Service of the Word, *Message for the 44th World Communications Day* (24 January 2010), www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi

gives the people of this generation yet another name. He calls them “social hermits,” “who can dramatically alienate themselves from the real community. They form a crack that cannot be ignored.”⁴⁶ A virtual tyranny arises that unilaterally and relentlessly dictates its laws and rules.⁴⁷ Digital culture has irreversibly changed the understanding of space and time, as well as people’s language and behaviour.⁴⁸

The emergence of artificial intelligence is closely linked to the virtual world. It will increasingly bring dramatic changes to people’s lives. Artificial intelligence offers extraordinary opportunities in terms of strengthening social coexistence and personal comfort, it increases human capabilities and facilitates more economical and effective ways to perform many tasks. However, there is no warranty for these consequences. The changes that are currently taking place are not only quantitative but above all qualitative. They affect how tasks are performed and how reality and human nature will be perceived. Artificial intelligence will influence mental and interpersonal interactions.⁴⁹ The Church must consider how to contribute to the use of artificial intelligence technologies for the good of the entire human community. Pope Francis explains: “My criticism of the technocratic paradigm involves more than simply thinking that if we control its excesses everything will be fine. The bigger risk does not come from specific objects, material realities or institutions, but from the way in which they are used.”⁵⁰

Gender ideology

Gender ideology is a direct consequence of moral relativism. It shifts all truths of faith and moral norms into the private sphere and evaluates them based on situational ethics. It sees certain values as products of history that

/en/messages/communications/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20100124_44th-world-communications-day.html/, accessed: 6 March, 2022.

⁴⁶ Cf. Francis, *Message of the Holy Father 53rd World Communications Day* (2 February 2019), press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2019/01/24/190124b.html/, accessed: 6 March, 2022.

⁴⁷ Francis, Apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 56.

⁴⁸ Congregation for the Clergy, Instruction *The pastoral conversion of the Parish community in the service of the evangelising mission of the Church*, 8 (20 July 2020), press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2020/07/20/200720a.html/, accessed: 6 March, 2022.

⁴⁹ *Pápežská akadémia pre život, Výzva na etiku v oblasti umelej inteligencie* (28 February 2020), www.kbs.sk/obsah/sekcia/h/dokumenty-a-vyhlasenia/p/dokumenty-vatikanskych-uradov/c/vyzva-na-etiku-v-oblasti-umelej-inteligencie, accessed: 15 May, 2023.

⁵⁰ Francis, Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, 166, www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html, accessed: 14 May, 2023.

are losing relevance. Moral relativism regards nothing as definitive and final. It affects both man and the structures of the entire society.⁵¹

Pope Francis notes that “this ideology leads to educational programmes and legislative enactments that promote a personal identity and emotional intimacy radically separated from the biological difference between male and female. Consequently, human identity becomes the choice of the individual, one which can also change over time.”⁵² The biggest issues presented by the activists of social justice are homosexuality, feminism, race, and transsexualism. They are seen as human rights issues, as part of an effort to prevent further injustice. Activists are trying to stir up divisions among citizens and provoke them to agree with something that cannot be trusted. There is practically nothing that cannot be disputed anymore. Rhetorical traps are lurking everywhere, and people need to be careful with language. There is a concern that the free exchange of ideas is being undermined, even eliminated. A public confession to the new paradigm must be made at every opportunity. The foundations on which the world stands are gradually being torn down.⁵³ Marriage and sexuality are no longer moral categories, but a matter for the state. They have shifted from the private and moral spheres to the realm of politics.

It is the mission of today’s preachers to proclaim the integration of morality and law, united with reason and directed towards God, who unites the earthly with the divine through the Incarnation.⁵⁴ Preachers should encourage the faithful, in the spirit of Pope Francis’ words, to learn to accept their bodies,

as God’s gift is vital for welcoming and accepting the entire world as a gift from the Father and our common home, whereas thinking that we enjoy absolute power over our own bodies turns, often subtly, into thinking that we enjoy absolute power over creation. Learning to accept our body, to care for it and to respect its fullest meaning, is an essential element of any genuine human ecology. Also, valuing one’s own body in its femininity or masculinity is necessary if I am going to be able to recognize myself in an encounter with someone who is different.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Szewczyk, *Głoszenie słowa Bożego w środowisku zsekularyzowanym*, 88-89.

⁵² Francis, Apostolic exhortation *Amoris laetitia*, 56, www.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf, accessed: 6 March, 2022.

⁵³ Cf. Douglas Murray, *Šílenství davu* (Voznice: Nakladatelství LEDA, 2021), 14-19; 290-291; 309.

⁵⁴ Cf. Scott Hann, Brandon McGinley, *Je to dôstojné a správne* (Bratislava: Ladislav Hanus Fellowship, 2020), 82-83.

⁵⁵ Francis, Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, 155, www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html, accessed: 12 May, 2023.

2.3 Maintaining fidelity to the mission as well as respect for people

In Greek, the word for fidelity is the same as the word for faith (*πίστις*). A preacher's faithfulness lies in the fact that he does not try to adapt the faith to the fashion trends of the time. Jesus Christ has the words of eternal life, and He must bring those words to mankind. Such fidelity is not static; it is creative. The Lord reprimands the servant who hid the share of the property entrusted to him in the ground in order to avoid any risk. Loyalty is not fear. It is inspired by love and its dynamics.⁵⁶

A preacher's faithfulness is manifested in evangelical radicalism. However, he should make sure that the evangelical radicalism in his words does not turn into fundamentalism or fanaticism. Some preachers lack the courage to stand firmly on the side of God and Christ's angels and unmask expressions of idolatry, pointing out their harmfulness to human freedom. However, preaching the Gospel in this day and age can lead a preacher to the other extreme, which is a protest against the present day. This kind of radicalism, which says "no" to the contemporary culture as a whole, is not supported by the attitudes of Jesus Christ. He never radically refused the socio-religious reality in which he lived, nor did he sacralise it. He only refuted the situations that threatened people's salvation. In dialogue with Nicodemus, he said that "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him" (Jn 3:17).⁵⁷

A preacher should do his best to infuse God's reality into the reality in which people live. Adaptability in proclaiming God's message does not rule out, according to St. John Paul II, cultivating a faith that critically aligns with contemporary culture and resists its allures. In this way, Christians can effectively impact their cultural, economic, social, and political environments. At the same time, they can continue to pass on the faith to the young generation and build a Christian culture capable of evangelizing the multi-layered society in which we live.⁵⁸

Some say that if a homily is to appeal to contemporary people, it should resemble entertainment or media productions.⁵⁹ Some preachers are tempted to bring elements of modern culture into preaching and turn it into an experience similar to media events. Others experience a fear of media competi-

⁵⁶ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Drahí bratia kňazi*, 100.

⁵⁷ Stanisław Hareźga, *Radykalny kaznodzieja*, www.pastores.pl/2018/81-4-2018/1250-spis-tresci-jaki-Radykalizm-81-4-2018, accessed: 5 March, 2022.

⁵⁸ John Paul II, Apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa*, 50.

⁵⁹ Francis, Apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 138.

tion; they suffer from a kind of preacher's "Christophobia." They do not want to end up like St. Paul in Athens (Acts 17:32). A preacher can be inspired by media practices. However, he should not identify with their values and criteria, such as amusement, success, popularity, and performance.⁶⁰

Pope Francis instructs preachers to above all proclaim a synthesis of the Gospel message, not an assortment of isolated ideas. "Where your synthesis is, there lies your heart. The difference between enlightening people with a synthesis and doing so with detached ideas is like the difference between boredom and heartfelt fervour."⁶¹ The power of the Gospel is best manifested when a preacher does not strive to create some neutral language, a kind of theological Esperanto that anyone can speak. A preacher is supposed to stand up for what he believes, even if it may create tension with others. He is meant to represent Moses, whom God commissioned to free the people from slavery in Egypt and lead them into a new land (Exodus 3:7-8). Preachers, too, are sent to invite people to a wide and spacious landscape, to cross the narrow confines of all restrictive ideologies, just as the Good Shepherd leads his sheep to God's pasture: "The sheep hear his voice, as he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out" (Jn 10:3).⁶²

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Even in difficult times, preachers should realise that proclaiming the Gospel is far greater than simply proclaiming God's Word to a group of people. It is part of Christ's sacrifice for the salvation of the world. It is a priestly act in which Christ's sacrifice is present in the way they preach.⁶³ This is the greatest reason for them to faithfully fulfil the preaching mission. Even in this part of salvation history, the following words are valid: "Behold, now is a very acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor 6:2). Pope Francis stated that the world is calling for evangelists who would speak of a God whom they know and are familiar with, as if they were seeing him.⁶⁴ Thanks to this, they can offer sacrifices for their faithfulness, in the spirit of the words written by St. Paul to the Romans: "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things,

⁶⁰ Gerard Siwek, *Osobowość kaznodziei dzisiaj* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Homo Dei, 2014), 130-138.

⁶¹ Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 143.

⁶² Timothy Radcliffe, *Prečo chjodit' do kostola?* (Zvolen: Vydavateľstvo Domimikáni, 2013), 79.

⁶³ Viliam Judak, *Kňazi dneška* (Nitra: Gorazd n. f., 2017), 219-220.

⁶⁴ Francis, Apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 150.

nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (8, 38-39).

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CIĄGŁOŚĆ WIERNOŚCI W GŁOSZENIU

Streszczenie

Wierność w głoszeniu jest częścią tożsamości kaznodziei. Praca ma na celu przedstawienie jej znaczenia nawet dzisiaj. Przeanalizuje zalecenia ostatnich trzech papieży dla księży-kaznodziejów. Pierwsza część skupi się na poznaniu głównych linii, które kształtują postawy wierności w służbie kaznodziejskiej. Druga część zbada środowisko, w którym odbywa się służba kaznodziei, sprawdzając wierność kaznodziei. Zakończenie pracy będzie zawierało konkretne zalecenia dla kaznodziejów.

Słowa kluczowe: kaznodzieja; wierność; głoszenie; papież; nowe sytuacje.