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Rhetoric and Its Practice in Medieval Sermons

Sophia Menache and Jeannine Horowitz

There is a broad consensus that Christianity begins in its preaching.¹ According to Humbert of Romans, the fifth Minister General of the Dominican Order (d. 1277), preaching has been a constant since creation, God Himself being its promoter after He created the first man.² Without inquiring into the accuracy of such a claim, we may view Christianity as essentially the *kerygma* of a message, a phenomenon of language.³ Preaching has characterized the annals of the Christian mission in general and the Catholic Church in particular since the time of the Apostles. Still, the scope of sermons and their content were modified by changing historical circumstances. By the High Middle Ages, preaching no longer focused on baptizing the gentiles, but on instructing the congregation of the faithful on the principles of the true

1. Thomas L. Amos et al., *Preacher and Word in the Middle Ages: De Ore Domini* (Kalamazoo, MI, 1989), pp. x ff.; André Vauchez, "Présentation," in *Faire croire: Modalités de la diffusion et de la réception des messages religieux du XIIe au XVe siècle* (Rome, 1981), pp. 7 ff.

2. Humbert of Romans, *A Treatise of Preaching*, trans. The Dominican Students of the Province of St. Joseph (London, 1955), p. 4. This view was shared by Robert of Basevorn; see "The Form of Preaching," trans. Leopold Krul, in *Three Medieval Rhetorical Arts*, ed. James J. Murphy (Berkeley, 1971), pp. 126-127.

3. Vittorio Coletti, *L'éloquence de la chaire: Victoires et défaites du Latin entre Moyen Age et Renaissance* (Paris, 1987), pp. 13-20.

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faith.⁴ Even among sincere believers, who in principle did not question ecclesiastical authority, dilemmas abounded and a great potentiality existed to express heterodox opinions.⁵ Preaching further met the challenge of extricating heresy--considered a sort of "cancer or leprosy"⁶--from the very heart of Christendom.

The imperative to eliminate the dangers of religious unrest at home and, in parallel, to face an intensifying process of socio-economic change⁷ induced the Church to mount an intensive propaganda campaign; the ecclesiastical elite had become well aware that doctrine could not be dissociated from its transmission, and its success could only be measured according to its reception.⁸ Thus preaching gradually went beyond its original purpose of indoctrination toward the new goal of popularization through the use of proof and illustration.⁹ The Dominican Order, the *Ordo Praedicatorum*, made its chief goal the education and training of the clergy in the accomplishment of its pastoral mission. It is mostly to the Dominicans, soon reinforced by the Franciscans, that we owe most of the theoretical manuals on preaching and the teaching apparatus.¹⁰ Under the influence of the Friars, scholastic masters, as well, counted preaching as one of the three major duties incumbent on their vocation; that is, *legere, disputare, praedicare*. In parallel, intellectual developments in Western Europe and, in particular, the increase in rhetorical education improved the clergy's access to new sources.¹¹ Based on the classical heritage, sermons and

4. John W. O'Malley, S. J., "Medieval Preaching," in *De Ore Domini*, pp. 1-2.

5. On the anticlerical mood of communal movements in France and Italy, for example, see the excellent study by Georges Lagarde, "Bilan du XIIIe siècle," in *La Naissance de l'esprit laïque au déclin du Moyen Age* (Louvain-Paris, 1956), vol. 1, passim.

6. Eckbert of Schonau, *Sermones contra Catharos*, (*Patrologia Latina* 195. 13).

7. Jacques Le Goff, "Métiers et professions d'après les manuels de confesseurs du moyen âge," in *Pour un autre Moyen Age* (Paris, 1977), pp. 162-80.

8. For a more elaborated discussion, see Sophia Menache, *The Vox Dei: Communication in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1990), pp. 41-77.

9. Jacques Le Goff and Jean-Claude Schmitt, "Au XIIIe siècle, une parole nouvelle," in *Histoire vécue du peuple chrétien*, ed. Jean Delumeau (Paris, 1979), p. 278.

10. P. Michaud-Quantin, *Sommes de casuistique et manuels de confession au Moyen Age, XIIIe-XIVe siècles* (Paris, 1966), passim.

11. P. Osmund Lewry, O.P., "Rhetoric at Paris and Oxford in the Mid-Thirteenth Century," *Rhetorica* 1 (1983): 45-63; on the influence gained by classical rhetorical treatises through their dissemination in medieval library catalogues and the frequency with which they were cited, see James A. Schultz, "Classical Rhetoric, Medieval Poetics, and the Medieval Vernacular Prologue," *Speculum* 59 (1984): 2-3.

homiletic manuals strove to achieve the dialectical maneuver of the Ancients, the *inventio* or *heuresis*, involving an organic system of discourse, the *dispositio* or *taxis*, and a shrewd attention to delivery.¹² Collections of *summae*, *distinctiones*,¹³ fables, bestiaries, and *exempla* become available to preachers.¹⁴ By the thirteenth century, pulpit eloquence reached a peak in its progress, as claimed by the contemporary dictum, *hodie maxime opus est praedicatione*.¹⁵

Out of the most prominent features of classical rhetoric--the *topoi*, ancestors of the *sententiae*--emerged the *exempla* as an original genre. These short, edifying anecdotes became one of the most useful instruments of persuasion at the disposal of preachers. As a set of basic patterns, enabling an infinite variety of possibilities, the *exempla* soon became an indispensable auxiliary of the sermon. Provocative, humorous, or frightening, they were meant to motivate the audience to accept the Church's message.¹⁶ They complemented the lessons of the Church Fathers and the *rationes*, while establishing the basic components of sermons.¹⁷ From his long experience as inquisitor in the Dauphiné, the Dominican Etienne de Bourbon (d. c. 1261) evaluates the *exempla* as

12. T. F. Crane, "Mediaeval Sermon-Books and Stories," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 21 (1883): 49-78. On the *Artes Praedicatorum* and their authors between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, see Harry Caplan, "Classical Rhetoric and the Mediaeval Theory of Preaching," in *Of Eloquence: Studies in Ancient and Medieval Rhetoric*, eds. Anne King and Helen North (Ithaca and London, 1970), pp. 110-112.

13. A very important tool at the service of contemporary preachers, the *distinctiones* were a kind of dictionary containing multiple meanings for every word of Scripture, with the rich allegorical corpus elaborated on for generations; see M. D. Chenu, "La décadence de l'allégorisation. Un témoin: Garnier de Rochefort (v. 1200)," in *L'Homme devant Dieu: Mélanges offerts au P. Henri de Lubac* (Paris, 1964), pp. 130-131; see also M. H. Rouse and M. A. Rouse, "Biblical Distinctions in the Thirteenth Century," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Age* 41 (1974): 27-37.

14. A. Strubel, "Exemple, fable, parabole: Le récit bref figuré au Moyen Age," *Le Moyen Age* 94 (1988): 241-261.

15. Dom Jean Leclercq, "Le magistère du prédicateur au XIIIe siècle," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Age* 21 (1946): 105-147; James J. Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages: A History of Rhetorical Theory from St. Augustine to the Renaissance* (Berkeley, 1972), p. 310; Alberto Forni, "La nouvelle prédication - Des disciples de Foulques de Neuilly: Intentions, techniques et réactions," in *Faire croire*, p. 19.

16. J. T. Welter, *L'Exemplum dans la littérature religieuse et didactique du Moyen Age* (Paris, 1927), pp. 66-82. On the humorous aspects of medieval *exempla*, see Jeannine Horowitz and Sophia Menache, *L'Humour en chaire: Le rire dans l'Eglise médiévale* (Genève, 1994), pp. 79-242.

17. On this development see the rich bibliography included by James J. Murphy, *Medieval Rhetoric: A Select Bibliography* (Toronto, 1972), items P1-P70.

the most useful way to spread religious truth. He further states that the *exempla* had to comply with clearly defined prerequisites: they had to be corroborated by one of the Church Fathers or by a faithful witness (authenticity).¹⁸ They had, further, to be true and succinct (credibility and conciseness). Opening clauses, like *legitur, sacra Scriptura docet, Ieronimus dicit, ut dicitur, ut verum est*, etc., were often used for this purpose, thus providing a suitable occasion for the preacher to instill chosen fragments of catechism, otherwise felt to be boring. The *exempla* had to appeal to the audience's imagination and sentiments through the use of metaphors (allegory). Finally, they would instruct in a simple, easy and, whenever possible, pleasant way (pleasure), while leaving their mark on the faithful's style of life in the long run (memoranda).¹⁹

Although the *exempla* have been the focus of much scholarly attention during the past fifty years, the link between them and the rhetorical manuals is still in varying degrees *terra incognita*.²⁰ This paper focuses on the development of the *Artes praedicandi* and the weight of rhetorical principles in regard to sermons, particularly the *exempla* from the thirteenth century onward. Following an analysis of the main principles of rhetorical theory, the oratorical features of some *exempla* will be discussed. Special emphasis will be given to the communication goals of preachers, and the strategies they employed.

The psalm, "The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple" (Ps. 118: 130), served as a source of inspiration to St. Bernardino of Siena to analyze the three rhetorical components of sermons, namely, the speaker, the speech, and the

18. Still, some theoreticians advised preachers "to be sparing in the use of authorities for the proof of words, and to avoid using so many proofs that the patience of the audience is affected." See *De modo praedicandi*, quoted by James Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, p. 313.

19. *Tractatus de diversis materiis praedicabilibus*, in *Anecdotes historiques...d'Etienne de Bourbon*, ed. A. Lecoy de la Marche, *Société d'histoire de la France* (Paris, 1877), pp. 4-5.

20. Harry Caplan, in the early 1930s, noted that "the place of *exempla* in these tracts [of preaching] is yet to be investigated." "Classical Rhetoric," p. 126. See also Cl. Brémond, Jacques Le Goff and Jean-Claude Schmitt, *L'Exemplum, typologie des sources du Moyen Age occidental*, vol. 40 (Turnhout, 1982), *passim*; Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Prêcher d'exemples: Récits de prédicateurs du Moyen Age* (Paris, 1985) and the bibliography included.

audience.²¹ The orator--who had dominated sophist rhetoric--was replaced by the Christian preacher, who had the power, indeed the mission, to announce the Word. The speech itself, the focus of classical treatises, remained central in medieval thinking--an attitude probably reinforced by the emphasis given to grammar and dialectics at the time. As for the audience, it must be prepared to listen to and to follow the preacher's instructions. Its heterogeneous nature received a great deal of attention from writers on preaching in the *Sermones ad status*.²² Ranulph Higden's *Ars componendi sermones* presents a fully developed organizational plan for sermons, containing both rhetorical construction and pastoral experience.²³

Throughout the thirteenth century manuals of *Artes praedicandi* helped establish a clear definition of preaching and the paradigms to follow. Robert of Basevorn (c. 1322) conveys the prevailing view when he defines preaching as:

the persuasion of many, within a moderate length of time, to meritorious conduct. For, when one determines questions, even theological questions, such determination is not preaching, because it is not persuasion by intent, but rather an investigation of truth. When one exhorts one person or two to goodness, that is not properly preaching, but admonition or exhortation or the like....The preacher, as far as he can do so according to God, ought to attract the mind of the listeners in such a way as to render them willing to hear and retain [the sermon].²⁴

Ranulph Higden, as well, characterizes preaching as "public persuasion performed in due time and place for the salvation of the many."²⁵ At the end of the twelfth century, Alan of Lille stressed that preaching must be public because it is done for the benefit not of a

21. Bernardino of Siena, *Prediche volgari sul campo di Siena* (1427), ed. Carlo Delcorno (Milan, 1989), pp. 141-173.

22. Zelina Zafarana has argued that by the thirteenth century, the *Sermones ad status* had reached their zenith. After a long silence, during the fourteenth century, they flourished again with Bernardino of Siena and his contemporaries; see "La predicazione ai laici dal secolo XIII al XV," *Studi Medievali*, ser. 3, 24 (1983): 265-275.

23. Margaret Jennings, "Rhetor Redivivus?: Cicero in the *Artes Praedicandi*," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Age* 56 (1989): 94-95, 111-113.

24. Robert of Basevorn, "The Form of Preaching," pp. 120, 145-146.

25. Quoted by Margaret Jennings, "Rhetor Redivivus?," 114.

particular person, but many.²⁶ Later, the Dominican *Tractatus de Arte Praedicandi*, attributed to Henry of Hesse, explains the logic of such publicity: "If it were secret, it would be subject to suspicion and would let loose heretical dogmas."²⁷ This is a clear reflection of the clergy's mistrust of secrecy, this being harbored in heretical meetings and, as such, becoming a notorious symptom of apostasy. The public nature of Catholic preaching, as opposed to the secrecy (i.e., depravity) of heretics, engendered in turn an irrefutable conviction of its beneficial influence on the faithful, their way of life, and ultimately their salvation. Preaching thus became *quoddam instrumentum quo Ecclesia Dei fabricata est*:

Of such great virtue is preaching that it recalls men from error to truth, from vice to virtue; it changes depravity to rectitude and turns rough into smooth; it inculcates faith, raises hope, gives rise to charity; it dislodges the injurious, implants the useful, and fosters the honorable. For it is the way of life, the ladder of the virtues, and the door to paradise....*Preaching is the fitting and suitable communication of the Word of God.*²⁸

The premise that preaching was the most sublime way to transmit the *Vox Dei*, justified reaching a mass audience, a goal that in turn fostered the use of the vernacular.²⁹ Although most sermons have been preserved in Latin, many of their linguistic features suggest they were delivered in the vernacular.³⁰ Maurice de Sully, Bishop of Paris (1120-1196) dictated the models for sixty-four sermons in French in order to encourage their transmission by the Parisian clergy. Samson, Abbot of Bury St. Edmund (1182-1212), preached in French and in the local

26. Alan of Lille, *De arte praedicatoria* (*Patrologia Latina* 210. 111).

27. Quoted by Harry Caplan in "A Late Medieval Tractate," pp. 53-55; on the author and time of writing, see Harry Caplan, "'Henry of Hesse' on the Art of Preaching," *P.M.L.A.* 48 (1933): 340-344.

28. *Ibid.*, [emphasis of the authors]; see also J. Leclercq, "Le magistère du prédicateur," p. 137.

29. *Councils and Synods with Other Documents Relating to the English Church*, ed. F. M. Powicke and R. C. Cheney, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1964), vol. 2, pp. 24, 96; see also Roberto Rusconi, "De la prédication à la confession: Transmission et contrôle de modèles de comportement au XIIIe siècle," in *Faire croire*, pp. 72-73.

30. John W. O'Malley, S. J., "Medieval Preaching," p. 9.

Suffolk dialect as well as in Latin.³¹ Etienne de Bourbon carefully compiled his own sermons to assure their easy lecture by preachers.³² Thereafter, preachers could take advantage of these collections and transmit their sermons quite literarily.³³ On the other hand, the adaptation of Latin sermons to the vernacular was a very difficult task, since translators had to wend their way between literal transcription and the requirements of another linguistic setting. The almost incommunicable character of a liturgical language, together with the fear of slipping into interpretation, often gave way to unintelligible translations. Moreover, the shadow of apostasy cast by the very use of vernacular--this being a practice favored by heretics--rendered the task all the more arduous. To ensure due management of the sacred, it was imperative to create what Vittorio Coletti calls a "theology" of discourse, whether in Latin or in the vernacular.³⁴ The *Tractatus de Arte Praedicandi* testifies to some of the most common problems in the transmission of the Christian message and offers its advice as follows:

in the method of using the vernacular language, the preacher should not shackle himself to the following difficulty: he should not seek to translate the words in the very and special order in which they stand in Latin. Let him translate in a better and clearer way. He must at times help his material, that is, express it otherwise than in the precise order of the words. Often he must use circumlocution, as in the passage that defines male as that which "openeth the matrix." It is not fitting to express so grossly what he should rather term "woman's vessel" or "gate of birth." And so with the like.³⁵

31. Michel Zink, "Détachement du monde et soumission au monde dans la prédication et la littérature édifiante en français du XIIe et du XIIIe siècles," in *Idéologie et propagande en France*, ed. Myriam Yardeni (Paris, 1987), p. 45. If not indicated otherwise, all translations hereafter are the authors'.

32. Jacques Berlioz, "Quand dire c'est faire dire: *Exempla* et confession chez Etienne de Bourbon," in *Faire croire*, pp. 311-313. Other preachers opted for an alphabetical order, which became dominant in fourteenth-century manuals; see Jean Claude Schmitt, "Recueils franciscains d'*exempla* et perfectionnement des techniques intellectuelles du XIIIe au XVe siècle," *Bibliothèque de l'Ecole des Chartes* 135 (1977).

33. L. J. Bataillon, "Les instruments de travail des prédicateurs au XIIIe siècle," in *Culture et travail intellectuel dans l'Occident médiéval* (Paris, 1981), pp. 197-198.

34. V. Coletti, *L'Eloquence de la chaire*, p. 17.

35. Harry Caplan, "A Late Medieval Tractate," p. 75.

Preaching in the vernacular thus required not only restatement into a language comprehensible to the audience but also the clarification of the terms, events, and personalities known to the Latin-speaking elite but of which the common people were ignorant. In the vernacular, the preacher emphasized and clarified the meaning yet endeavored not to deviate from the main subject.³⁶ One should further note that the Latin language itself was affected by the vernacular jargon, which accelerated its degeneration and was clearly felt throughout the sermon. Some grammatical structures and popular idioms, difficult to transpose in Latin, drove the preacher to keep them *tels quels*, preceded by the expression, *gallice*.³⁷

At an early stage, therefore, medieval rhetoricians became well aware of the delicate problems of translation; that is, not only the substitution of one language by another, but also the transmission of messages from the *culture savante* to the *culture populaire*. But ecclesiastical theoreticians still had to cope with a more difficult challenge: namely, the prevailing indifference of the faithful to the message they sought to transmit. Men and women came to the sermon not always in a pious mood, and they quite often chatted, played, or simply availed themselves of the peaceful atmosphere of the church building to yield to the arms of Morpheus. Theoreticians of preaching expressed concern at this situation and, from an early date, legitimized rhetoric invention, variety of style, and figures of speech to gain and maintain attention. St. John Chrysostom (347-407) had long previously admitted that style could help relieve an audience's boredom through variety:

When we care for the sick, we must not set before them a meal prepared haphazardly, but a variety of dishes, so that the patient may choose what suits his taste. Thus we should proceed in the spiritual repast. Since we are weak, the sermon must be varied and embellished, it must contain comparison, proofs, paraphrases, and the like, so that we may select that which will profit our soul.³⁸

Aware of the spiritual weaknesses of the average person, Chrysostom --himself a gifted orator as his nickname, "golden mouthen," indicates

36. Michel Zink, *La Prédication en langue romane avant 1300* (Paris, 1976), pp. 142 f.

37. Hervé Martin, *Le Métier du prédicateur en France septentrionale à la fin du Moyen Age* (Paris, 1988), pp. 560-62.

38. St. John Chrysostom, *De Prophetiarum Obscuritate* (*Patrologiae Graeca* 56. 165); see also his *Expositio in Psalmos* (*ibid.*, 55. 155-158).

--justified stylistic invention; it allowed the faithful to follow the argument and to select, according to their individual aptitudes, from among the constituents of God's message. For all their rich metaphors, however, Chrysostom's words hint at the many obstacles that plagued the transmission of the Christian faith to an inattentive audience or, even worse, not yet disposed to renounce ancestral pagan traditions.

St. Augustine (354-430), too, posited stylistic variety as a means to gain and maintain attention, though without losing a distinctively Christian rhetoric based on Scripture:

We should not assume that it is against the rules to mingle these various styles; on the contrary, every variety of style should be introduced so far as is consistent with good taste. When we keep monotonously to one style, we fail to retain the listener's attention, but when we pass from one style to another, the discourse is more graceful, even though it extends to greater length.³⁹

Pope Gregory the Great (540-604) corroborates this opinion, explaining that "according to the quality of the listeners so ought the discourse of teachers be fashioned, in order to suit each and all in their various needs, and yet never deviate from the art of common edification."⁴⁰ Preaching experience eventually increased the theoreticians' sensitivity to the different levels of receptivity of the various social strata. In the view of the humanist John of Salisbury (c. 1115-1180), "he who adapts his words to the requirements of his theme and the occasion observes and controls the rules of all eloquence."⁴¹ The historian and autobiographer Guibert of Nogent (1053-c. 1124) advises the utilization of illustrative material in sermons.⁴² James of Vitry (1180-1240), Bishop of Acre and Cardinal Bishop of Tusculum, goes one step further. A gifted orator, he justifies the variety of style not only on rhetorical grounds but, mainly, on the different skills of the audience, which he

39. St. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, iv, 22, trans. J. F. Shaw, in *Augustine*, ed. Robert Maynard Hutchins, vol. 18 (Chicago, 1952), p. 693.

40. Saint Gregory, *Pastoral Rule*, in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 2nd series, ed. and trans. Henry Wace and Philip Schaff (N.Y., 1890-1900), vol. 12 (1895), p. 24.

41. John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, ed. Clement Webb, 2 vols. (1909, reprint Frankfurt; 1965), 2: 140.

42. *Liber quo ordine sermo fieri debeat*, in *Proemium ad Commentarios in Genesim (Patrologia Latina* 156. 23, 29).

classifies into one hundred and twenty categories.⁴³ Moreover, this diversification of language was to be observed not only among the laity, but among the clergy as well; the preacher should not deliver the same sermon to both educated prelates and simple priests or to seculars and regulars.⁴⁴ The *Liber exemplorum ad usum praedicatorum*, an anonymous thirteenth-century Franciscan manual written for preachers, encourages them to modify their stories when problems of religious morality were involved in order to prevent criticism of the clergy and to avoid “loosing face” before the laity. This advice, however, was not aimed at ecclesiastical audiences, who had to be fully aware of their own vices.⁴⁵

Given the preachers’ responsibilities, the question arose as to the required skills to meet the task at hand. The answer given by rhetorical manuals is unconditionally categorical: The good preacher is one able to combine the pleasant and useful while taking care to avoid idle, obscene, or shameful words. He must keep a balance between stylistic preoccupations and his primeval care for edification. Geoffrey of Vinsauf (d. 1210) emphasizes that preachers should, as a rule, speak a simple language, to which people were accustomed and sensitive, since

the superficial embellishment of words is of no importance without weight of meaning,...for an ornamented surface of words, unless it is enriched by a sound and commendable significance, is like a worthless picture which pleases one standing far away from it, but displeases one looking more closely. So the ornamentation of words without ornamentation of meaning pleases the listener, but displeases the careful thinker.⁴⁶

43. James of Vitry, *Bibliothèque Nationale MSS. Lat. 17509*, fo. 1-2; James of Vitry’s collection, written in Rome between 1229 and 1240, consists of four parts: sermons *de tempore, de sanctis, ad status, and feriales vel communes*.

44. James of Vitry, *Sermones Vulgares*, in *Analecta Novissima*, vol. 2, ed. J. B. Pitra (1888, reprint ed., 1967), p. 346.

45. *Liber exemplorum ad usum praedicatorum saeculo XIII compositus*, ed. Andrew G. Little (Aberdeen, 1908), p. 93.

46. Geoffrey of Vinsauf, *Instruction in the Method and Art of Speaking and Versifying*, ed. and trans. Roger P. Parr (Milwaukee, 1968), p. 60; on Geoffrey’s attempt to join the *ars dictaminis* – the art of composing correct and decorous prose, chiefly in letters – and the *ars poetriae* in a single, unified, and comprehensive art of written discourse, see Martin Camargo, “Toward a Comprehensive Art of Written Discourse: Geoffrey of Vinsauf and the *Ars Dictaminis*,” *Rhetorica* 6 (1988): 167-194.

Preachers were expected to be effective rather than sophisticated, and to refrain from ornaments that might obscure the moral lesson of their message. They had to emphasize the Christian moral even to the detriment of rhetorical requirements. This predication created a growing gap between the freedom formerly bestowed on the classical orator and the boundaries imposed on the Church communicator.⁴⁷ In principle, the classical orator had free choice of proposition, and the only check upon his arguments was their inherent probability, though the best orators were also prompted by moral choices. In contrast, homiletic preaching was expected to be a projection of Scripture, not a display of eloquence.⁴⁸ Preachers had to present the laity and the illiterate with a simple, clear doctrine, close enough to daily experience so that it might be comprehended. This design was further suggested by the clause *sicut evenit* at the opening paragraph of many sermons. Summing up the whole concept, the *Tractatus de Arte Praedicandi* states:

the preacher should speak complete words, intelligibly and slowly. He should not repeat a thing two or three times, or change the words. Multiplying words in this fashion does not sound good; rather, it often creates tedium and laughter among the listeners, unless, for the sake of better impressing difficult or unusual material, it is at times necessary to reiterate or repeat.⁴⁹

Reiteration, indeed excessive repetition, is of course a legitimate rhetorical tool when difficult ideas or concepts are at stake; but preachers were never supposed to promote rhetorical embroideries that might obscure the meaning of the sermon and, consequently, dampen the faithful's attention. On similar grounds, Robert of Basevorn deplors the lack of clarity of some sermons, the content of which is occasionally

47. Evans and D'Avray see in the "sharp break with the classical tradition" a characteristic trend of the *Ars Praedicandi* at the High Middle Ages; see Gillian Evans and David D'Avray, "An Unusual *Ars Praedicandi*," *Medium Aevum* 49 (1980), 26. Margaret Jennings, on the other hand, claims that during the second period (1275-1350), the *Artes Praedicandi* included at least four of the major structures prescribed in the classical *dispositio*; see Margaret Jennings, "*Rhetor Redivivus?*," pp. 92, 97. On the influence of the classical heritage on medieval invention, see also Harry Caplan, "Rhetorical Invention in Some Medieval Tractates on Preaching," *Speculum* 2 (1927): 284-286.

48. George A. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* (Chapel Hill, 1980), p. 137.

49. Quoted by Harry Caplan, "A Late Medieval Tractate on Preaching," in *Of Eloquence*, p. 73.

so subtle and hidden that it scarcely can be examined, so that to a large extent art seems to hide art, as though it would be beneficial to stay hidden. Detected art ought to be modest. Hence it happens that the things that give mental delight to those who understand and observe the cleverly hidden elements of art burden rather than delight the ears of those who pay no attention, and, as if with a confused and inordinate noise, beget a wearied boredom for those who listen unwillingly. And we must add that just as this method should be used only with the intelligent, so it should be used only by the intelligent, because an orderly arrangement of words does not become a foolish man, and because a foolish man does not accept the words of prudence.⁵⁰

Indeed, a sly preacher might sin against his mission; that is, against the faithful, whose salvation he endangered if they did not understand--through him--the word of God. Furthermore, Christian preachers were not expected to take pride in their eloquence--a grave sin of vanity. Generations of preachers admonished against such a tendency. Before each sermon, St. Bernard of Clairvaux prayed to God not to let him fall into that temptation; sometimes, he interrupted a sermon as self-punishment when he took too much pleasure in his eloquence. In fact, there was a prayer, *oratio ante praedicationem dicenda devote*, that placed special emphasis on the humility necessary to the moral exercise of preaching.⁵¹

Theoretical manuals further develop in detail the complex requirements of preachers in the due accomplishment of their mission. Alexander of Ashby (c. 1200) advises: "In every written work and speech what is needed first is the intention of the wise man that he should render his readers or hearers docile, well disposed, and attentive."⁵² To achieve these meritorious goals, divine *elocutio* also involved instructions about memorizing (including mnemonic exercises), advice on how to gain control of "stage-fright," and proper gesture. Thomas Waleys, a master at Oxford in the first half of the fourteenth century, urges new preachers to train by seeking out some secret, out-of-sight place, where they could practice voice and gesture without fear of

50. Robert of Basevorn, "The Form of Preaching," p. 210.

51. J. Leclercq, "Le magistère du prédicateur," p. 137.

52. *De modo praedicandi*, quoted by Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, p. 312.

ridicule.⁵³ Humbert of Romans does likewise, noting that "it is ... desirable that the preacher have a voice with a definite resonance, otherwise he will lose much of the fruit of his sermons, for the weakness of his voice will prevent his words from being heard clearly."⁵⁴ Being sensitive to nonverbal communication, medieval rhetoricians also pay great attention to body language and stress the importance of proper gesture, both to impress and to compel respect.⁵⁵ Not satisfied with professional requirements alone--competent eloquence, training in grammar and Holy Scripture, clear and precise address--the Franciscan Bonaventure (c. 1217-1274) elaborates the ideal *curriculum vitae* expected of preachers: they must be, at least, about thirty years old, strong, without physical deformities, boyish neither in their appearance nor in their habits; they should also display an irreproachable style of life, and be industrious, prudent, and not contentious.⁵⁶

Beyond their moral and psychological validity, these instructions hint at the intimacy of preaching, dictated by the absence of *media* in their technical sense. Alongside their rhetorical skills, preachers had to impress by their personal example, since their behavior and emotions were constantly and directly exposed to their public. Moreover, given the close contact between communicator and audience, there was a marked tendency to identify the validity of the sermon with the personal image of the preacher. The text of Luke, VI, 36, "Be merciful as your Father is merciful," served John of Saint Gilles to condemn the shameful gap between the ethical lessons of sermons and the outrageous behavior of some members of the clergy:

There is a growing criticism against those priests who condemn innocents; against them it is written in Exodus: "and the innocent and righteous slay thou not" (XXIII:7). They offer a bad example, when they accumulate prebends, extort their parishioners'

53. Thomas Waleys, *De modo componendi sermones cum documentis*, quoted by Th. M. Charland, *Artes Praedicandi* (Paris-Ottawa, 1936), pp. 339-340.

54. Humbert of Romans, *Liber de eruditione praedicatorum*, in *Maxima Bibliotheca Veterum Patrum*, ed. M. de la Bigne (Lyons, 1677), vol. 25, p. 249; see also Simon Tugwell, O.P., "Humbert of Romans's Material for Preachers," in *De Ore Domini*, pp. 105-111.

55. Jean Claude Schmitt, *La Raison des gestes dans l'Occident médiéval* (Paris, 1990), *passim*.

56. Bonaventura, *Opuscula ad Ordinem Spectantia: XIII, Determinationes quaestionum circa Regulam FF. Min., pars II*, in S. Bonaventurae, *Opera Omnia*, ed. Collegii S. Bonaventura, vol. 8 (Quaracchi, 1898), pp. 360-361.

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inheritances, ...acquire money and honor, deprave and corrupt the little people, that is, the laity.⁵⁷

The fourteenth-century Dominican, Jean Gobi also illustrates the dangers inherent in the adage of "do what I say but not what I do":

People comment about (dicitur) the story of a prelate who would not eat meat, but was well known for spoiling, extorting, and doing all sort of wrongs. Once, after he confiscated the property of a widow, she affronted him: --"Sire, you do not eat any meat, dead or cooked, but you do eat living meat, for you have unjustly plundered us. So finish what you have begun. Here are my two sons, eat them!" Suddenly grasping her grievance, the prelate was confused and, filled with remorse and contrition, returned to the widow her possessions.⁵⁸

Such an exemplum testifies to the preachers' readiness to use bold, provocative imagery, with a touch of irony, to convey a contrario the many requirements of preaching. This further fostered quotation of the all-too-famous satirical pun, enjoyed by the ecclesiastical elite and often repeated by the Church's critics, "pasce oves meas, noli devorare eas." Based on the parody of Christ's request of Peter to lead his flock (John 21: 17), this pun actually suggests the deplorable contingency of nefarious ecclesiastics who misused their privileged status to exploit, and thus mislead, the flock of God.

Notwithstanding the imperative to criticize and thus improve prevailing behavior patterns, especially of the clergy, the *Liber exemplorum* warns against allusions to contemporary politics susceptible of scandalizing the faithful.⁵⁹ In a metaphorical manner, the *Tractatus de Arte Praedicandi* sums up the logic of such delicate situations:

As a wounded horse does not willingly permit touching his wound, so, by nature, sinners dread being corrected, since every virtue is natural and every vice is against nature, according to the blessed Bernard....The preacher should also note that correction

57. Quoted by Marie-Madeleine Davy, *Les Sermons universitaires parisiens de 1230-1231* (Paris, 1931), p. 44.

58. "De abstinencia," Jean Gobi, *Scala coeli*, trans. M. A. de Mercoyrol (Ph. D. diss., Paris, 1984), no. 20.

59. *Liber exemplorum*, pp. 59-60.

has a threefold state. Spiritual correction is one thing, that of the noble another, that of the common still another.⁶⁰

When applied to the laity, the corrective goals of sermons thus require a careful selection of motivating factors. Robert of Basevorn details some of the most successful practices to achieve a doctrinal impact:

One way is to place at the beginning something subtle and interesting, as some authentic marvel which can be fittingly drawn in for the purpose of the theme....Another way is to frighten them by some terrifying tale or example....Pertinent to the same topic are the different stories that teach how Christ appeared to some hardened sinners, extending His palm full of blood taken from His side....The third way is to show by an example or story that the devil always tries to hinder the word of God and the hearing of it. The fourth way is to show that to hear the word of God is a great sign of predestination. To this are reduced those ways which show that other benefits, earthly or heavenly, such as the fertility of the earth, the disposition to penitence, and the like, accrue to those who listen willingly. The fifth way is to show that the preacher intends only to convert them, and not immediately after that to start begging. He should draw them to the love of God, to the fear of evil, to the honor of God, lest, if it is a principal feat, it may lack due honor. Then he should put the listeners into the right disposition for the indulgence, which is granted to those who listen to the word of God, and preach like things by which he rightly deems to win over the listeners according to their condition.⁶¹

One may therefore conclude that by the late Middle Ages, preachers had a rich rhetorical corpus at their disposal, embracing not only the theoretical principles of classical oratory, but also practical experience in the Christian arena. Similarly, the theoretical manuals show an increasing tendency to legitimize the use of *exempla* as a popular means of simplification. Alexander of Ashby, for example, acknowledges the advantages of illustration when appealing to mixed audiences:

60. *Tractatus de Arte Praedicandi*, p. 74.

61. Robert of Basevorn, "The Form of Preaching," pp. 146-148.

There are some observations to be made about proof when preaching is addressed at the same time to both unlearned and learned men....Occasionally [preachers have] to present a charming allegory or tell a pleasant story (*exemplum*), so that the learned may savor the profundity of the allegory while the humble may profit from the lightness of the story.⁶²

These words hint at the meeting point between theoretical treatises and daily experience, preachers being able to enrich homiletic theory while implementing rhetorical principles in practice. The *exempla* were presented as a rhetorical means that suited the needs of both the learned and the non-learned, provided that suitable rhetorical tools were chosen. As one of the four interrelated levels of interpretation, allegory was often used to convey a scale of meanings from the basic verbatim to the topological anagoge. The intellectual elite would be delighted with the sophistication of the allegory, whereas the *illiterati* would be impressed by the simple narrative. Myths and parables were endowed with similar potentialities. James of Vitry supports the use of fabulous stories, which could not only edify simple people, but also stir them and rekindle attention.⁶³ That was the real power of the imager, in some cases the "jocular" image, as defined by Walter Nash.⁶⁴ The *trope* or *exemplum* was less valued for itself than for its expository capacity to enhance persuasive rhetoric, to make certain implications available, or to enforce certain inferences. Practically, it was left to the preacher's discretion to choose the optimum balance between fable and moral for the greater benefit of his audience.⁶⁵

Though *exempla* eventually received the blessing of theoreticians, their use was ultimately validated by daily experience. Both the large number of illiterate and the general scarcity of books imposed upon preachers the heavy responsibility of being the main source of education. Since they could not rely upon their listeners to read material that would help clarify the message, their discourse had all the more to be clear, and to have immediate impact. Against the models of ancient rhetoric, medieval sermons were thus appraised, first and foremost, by

62. *De modo praedicandi*, quoted by James Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, p. 313.

63. James of Vitry, *Bib. Nat. MSS. Lat.* 17509, fo. 2.

64. Walter Nash, *Rhetoric: The Wit of Persuasion* (Oxford, 1989), p. 100.

65. On the common moral trend of *exemplum* and fable and their place in medieval discourse, see A. Strubel, "Exemple, fable, parabole: le récit bref figuré au Moyen Age," *Le Moyen Age* 94-3-4 (1988): 350-358.

their results. Such was the case when women would throw off their rich garments and jewelry and donate them to the poor after listening to a sermon on the virtues of poverty; or, no less important from the Church's perspective, the number of those who enlisted in the army of God and took the cross after attending a sermon on the spiritual value of the "pilgrimage *outramer*."⁶⁶ A good sermon, therefore, played on multiple chords of the listener's sensitivity; it was endowed with the dynamism to cause people to change their behavior. James of Vitry reports a curious episode from his own experience:

When I once preached the crusade...one man was unable to hear the sermon since his wife locked him at home. Out of curiosity, he listened from his window to my sermon so he heard that whoever takes the cross earns an indulgence equivalent to nine years of hard penance without fasting or wearing the hair-shirt...Hearing that for a *minor labor*, penitence in this world as well as purgatory in the next would be remitted and the kingdom of Heaven earned, the man felt himself full of great contrition and, inspired by God, though fearing his wife,...he slipped out of the window and was the first to receive the cross. Moved by his example, his neighbors followed him massively, so that his own merit became still greater.⁶⁷

With some help from Providence, a good sermon thus produced the motivation needed to overcome the sneers of a domineering wife and all kinds of material obstacles. Within affective rhetoric, the addressee is to become involved in the preacher's persuasive procedure. Promises of indulgences were always a good incentive, all the more as they turned the Crusade into a mere minor labor. If not really lying, James of Vitry was here at least dimming the reality that might have made the bargain less attractive. If persuasion were to be achieved through rhetorical means, the *exemplum* was certainly a most effective strategy, with its highly colored narratives, sly tricks, maneuvers, and staging. Such a manner of adjusting truth, together with the excessive praise heaped on the first crusader--he only prompted mimesis in the audience with his gesture--illustrates the essence of Church rhetoric, which combined the

66. Bernard de Clairvaux is an example of a great success as a preacher of the Second Crusade; see J. Zulliger, "Bernhard von Clairvaux und Kommunikation: zur Bedeutung von Briefen, Sekretären und Boten," *Cîteaux* 1-4 (1993): 19 ff.

67. James of Vitry, *The Exempla or Illustrative Stories from the Sermones Vulgares of James of Vitry*, edited by Thomas F. Crane (New York, 1971 [1890]), no. 122.

psychology of the addressee with technical performance. This “adjustment” was part of the basic rhetorical tooling, familiar to those who deal with mass communication.

Clever strategies were occasionally also used to discredit behavior condemned by the Church. Skilled preachers often played on a variety of feelings: they could arouse shame in some and laughter and mockery in others, all the while strengthening the solidarity of the righteous against the sinners. Caesarius of Heisterbach reports the *exemplum* concerning one priest who, to bring a usurer to repentance, proposed to him a seemingly easy bargain:

Today we are going to defeat the devil. All that I am asking from you is first and foremost that you will confess before me your sins, that you will abandon any intent to repeat them ever again, and that you will follow my directions from now on. In compensation, I promise you the remission of your sins and eternal joy.

Misled by the well-elaborated *quid pro quo*, the usurer confessed and made due penance.⁶⁸ A logician would have had a simple task in objecting that the argument was vicious--the premises do not unavoidably lead to the conclusion and, moreover, do not necessarily corroborate the opening clause. But such popular dialectics had their own dynamism and charm. It was believed that appeals of this kind would frequently lead to the correction of vices; as such, their use was strongly encouraged in the *Tractatus de Arte Praedicandi*: “The form of correction should be used in every sermon so that sins committed not be deemed likely to prove other than evil, and not be defended as though they were lawful.”⁶⁹ Ultimately, the eschatological ends were to transcend mere dialectics. Still, there was some debate surrounding the question of whether preachers should tell “white” or “pious” lies to achieve a transcendent goal and to encourage confession. Gerald du Pescher, for example, counted any lie--whatever its aim--as a mortal sin; whereas the canonist Thomas Chobham, author of the *Summa Confessorum* (c. 1215), regarded lies as an ineluctable necessity if one is

68. Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus Miraculorum*, iii, 52, ed. J. Strange (Cologne, 1851), vol. I, p. 169.

69. *Tractatus de Arte Praedicandi*, p. 67.

to obtain a reluctant confession (i.e., a worthy end justifies the means).⁷⁰ The question remains, however, to what degree did the use of *exempla* put rhetorical advice into practice and suit the criteria set down in the manuals of *Artes praedicandi*?

In their content and composition, the *exempla* present a convincing illustration of the advantages inherent in the "simple way" advocated by virtually every rhetorical manual. Opening clauses, like *rescipite, requiramus, faciatis, accipiatis, non debes oblivisci*, not only created a direct appeal to the audience but also embraced an imperative that preachers held in their capacity as communicators of the *Vox Dei*. This colloquial approach did not necessarily mean leniency. James of Vitry encouraged preachers to alternate sweet talk and vehement apostrophes, as the Apostle did (Gal. III: 1-2).⁷¹ At times, preachers opted for a more refined way and, instead of external imperatives, appealed to personal judgment. Here again, however, abstractions were banished for being beyond the reach of most of the faithful. Metaphors, in contrast, had the power to dress concepts with life. The lack of sophistication thus became a condition of acceptance, as it appears in a very *terre-à-terre* dialogue, reported by James of Vitry, between a robber, invited by a clever abbot to experience monastic life, and the monk appointed to attend him. Every day the robber was splendidly served the most delicate food while the monk ate nothing but bread and water. Having observed this, the robber asked:

- Brother, what have you done that you so afflict your body every day? Have you killed people?
- God forbid, sire, should I ever hit a man, much less kill any; I have been in this monastery since my childhood.
- Perhaps you have committed fornication, or adultery, or some kind of sacrilege?
- Sire, what is it that you say - may God prevent me from so great an iniquity. I have never touched a woman in my life.
- So what have you done that you must afflict your body in such a manner?
- Sire, I do that for God, so that fasting, praying, and doing all penance, I might repay him for His goodness.

70. Jacques Berlioz, "Le récit efficace: l'*exemplum* au service de la prédication, XIIIe-XIVe siècles," *Rhetorique et histoire M.E.F.R.M.* 92 (1980): 113-146; Thomas Chobham, *Summa Confessorum*, ed. F. Broomfield (Louvain-Paris, 1968), p. 220.

71. James of Vitry, ed. Crane, p. 12.

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At these words, the robber was filled with contrition, and after giving much thinking he called the abbot, threw himself at his feet, and besought him to receive him among the brothers.⁷²

The above *exemplum* hints at the sensitivity required to transmit a message with immediate, practical implications, without offending the audience. Employing a rather realistic approach, preachers frequently appropriating "dubious" material for purposes of edification, thus satisfying both the Church's ordinances and the enthusiasm of the faithful for profane literature. In the category of "subtle and interesting," the Church's communicators were confronted with the pervasive Arthurian fashion that had permeated almost all strata of society, clergy and monks included, notwithstanding its categorical condemnation by ecclesiastical authorities.⁷³ Etienne de Bourbon provides an original application of the Arthurian theme in an *exemplum* used to preach the crusade:

We read in Arthur's stories that the king never ate on the days he held plenary court but only after something new and marvelous had happened. Once, when he was waiting for some wonder, a boat without a pilot approached. The knights rushed out and, to everyone's surprise, they found a knight who had been mortally wounded. Looking into his purse, they found his last will, which requested that Arthur's court seek justice against the felons who had killed him. The letter incited all knights to seize arms and avenge the blood of the innocent victim.

At this point of high expectation, when the concentration of the public would have been at its peak, the Arthurian theme was interrupted and interpreted in terms of Christian morality:

Even if all these events did not occur literally, there is, however, a great similarity to Christ, our champion, Who appeared in the vessel of the cross. It was for our sake that He, the innocent, was

72. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

73. On the influence of the Arthurian legend at the time, see J. D. Bruce, *The Evolution of Arthurian Romance from the Beginnings Down to the Year 1300*, 2 vols. (London, 1919), II: 130 ff.; Roger S. Loomis (dir.), *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1959), passim; J. Horowitz, "La diabolisation de la sexualité dans la littérature du Graal au XIII^e siècle: Le cas de la Queste del Graal," *Geschlechterrollen im mittelalterlichen Artusroman*, ed. Friedrich Wolfzettel (Amsterdam, 1995), pp. 238-250.

killed by the Jews and the gentiles. This we learn from the Holy Gospels, which flowed out of His heart like out of a purse, much like the knight's letter in the Arthurian story.⁷⁴

Through rhetorical "trickery"--innocent yet manipulative, since it deceives the public's expectations while taking advantage of its concentration and willingness to comply with the model--Etienne de Bourbon endeavors to convince his audience to take up the cross and, by so doing, avenge Christ's death. This *exemplum* illustrates the tendency to prompt the faithful into taking action of their own will, as it were, according to the tactic of *captatio benevolentiae*; that is, by imputing feelings to an audience. When using profane literature, such as the Arthurian saga, the narrative clearly offered only a starting point, a metaphor that preceded the pious moral.⁷⁵ It provided a simile that, in the process, involved a transfer of content. This was powerful enough to promote, at the listeners' level, the necessary illusion of the world as a theater of meaningful activity; and, at the preacher's level, the means to employ tangible events as a pattern of the transcendent and intangible. Etienne also takes special care to make a clear transition from the Arthurian epic to the Christian moral, and leaves no doubt about what he had just said and what he was going to say.⁷⁶ He also carefully emphasizes the points at which he passes from one subject to another.⁷⁷

As to the second method suggested by Robert of Basevorn, the catechism of fear also proved a valuable means utilized by preachers. Frightening sermons were meant not only to form and inform the listeners but also to provide an emotional stimulus wherever fears and prejudices already existed.⁷⁸ Obsession with the devil was a deeply rooted fear that Church communicators turned into an integral component of everyday experience.⁷⁹ An anonymous preacher,

74. Etienne de Bourbon, *Anecdotes historiques*, pp. 86-87.

75. See the excellent article by Louis-Jacques Bataillon, "Les images dans les sermons du XIIIe siècle," *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 37 (1990): 327-395.

76. See additional examples in A. Strubel, "Exemple, fable," pp. 348-349.

77. Tellers of romances also used clear transitions. Recognizing that the audience could not glance back a few pages if it lost track of the story, they included oft-recurring lines describing what had just happened and what was coming next.

78. Jeannine Horowitz, "La Peur en milieu ecclésiastique: XIIIe - première moitié du XIVe siècle" (Ph. D. diss.: Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 1985), pp. 7 ff.

79. See for instance, the *exempla* reported by Etienne de Bourbon, *Anecdotes historiques*, pp. 258-259; see also James of Vitry, *Sermones Vulgares*, pp. 17, 67.

probably a Dominican from Arras, employed the popular image of the devil's five fingers to condemn what he regarded as the five most widespread sins of his time; namely, the clergy's simony, the knights' rapine, the bourgeois' usury, the thieves' pillage, and the merchants' fraudulence.⁸⁰ Given the mold, preachers improvised *ad libitum* on the vices they chose to condemn, since the use of *loci communes* signified nothing pejorative in the Middle Ages. On the contrary, they were favored in the preachers' panoply as offering the insurance of shared wisdom and experience.

The devil thus appears as an efficient auxiliary to bend the faithful, particularly in the field of confession. In such cases, subtle or gross threats were displayed in images, like the devil's grip on whoever withholds the tiniest sin from his confessor. The more pious the listener, the more impressed he or she might be by the infernal imagery. The *Liber exemplorum* reports the story of a pious woman who devoted her life to charity and good deeds. When she was dying, a gang of demons surrounded her bed, preventing her from confessing a sin she had perpetrated in her youth. Fortunately, her priest discovered the satanic plot and exhorted her to recall that sin, which might have had escaped her confession; painstakingly, she remembered and eventually confessed. Thus the confessor saved her from hell.⁸¹

For the same purposes, preachers often put into the devil's mouth their own sermons and made him give testimony about the fate of sinners. After all, like the Apostles and martyrs, the devil--as an angel, though fallen--was subordinated to God's justice. By turning the devil into another messenger of God, preachers strengthened the idea of God's omnipotence, which ultimately overcomes all other forces, including those of the underworld. This principle acquired much significance in view of the spread of heresy, especially that of the Cathars, who denied the principle of one almighty God.⁸²

Thirteenth-century preachers devoted a considerable number of their sermons to the issue of heresy.⁸³ To this rich corpus belongs a curious episode reported in Strasbourg:

80. Louis-Jacques Bataillon, "Les images," pp. 345, 394-395.

81. *Liber exemplorum*, p. 57.

82. For the rich bibliography on the subject, see Martin Erbstoesser, *Heretics in the Middle Ages*, trans. Janet Fraser (Leipzig, 1984), pp. 86-96; Steven Runciman, *The Medieval Manichee: A Study of the Christian Dualistic Heresy* (Cambridge, 1955), pp. 147-150; René Nelli, *La Philosophie du Catharisme: Le dualisme radical au XIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1978), pp. 8-49.

83. Etienne de Bourbon, no. 83, p. 70; Nicole Beriou, "L'art de convaincre dans la prédiction de Ranulphe d'Homblières," in *Faire croire*, p. 52.

Ten heretics were apprehended in this city...they were tried by judgment of hot iron and sentenced to the fire. On the execution day, as they were brought to the pyre, someone in the public advised one of them:

- "Miserable, you are damned, do penance even now, confess thy sins so that after the burning of thy body, which is only momentary, thy soul would not burn eternally in the fire of hell!"

The heretic answered:

- "I acknowledge my errors but I fear my penance will not be accepted by God."

- "If you repent from all your heart, God is merciful and will accept your penance."

Lo! Admire the marvel! No sooner had the man confessed his perfidy, his hand recuperated its former sanity. When the penitent was called by the judge for execution, his confessor told the judge that it was unjust to condemn an innocent. Since no sign of burning was found on his hand, he was released.

The man had a wife, to whom he recounted his wonderful redemption:

- "Blessed be God who released me today of the painful death of my body and my soul," and explained to her what had happened.

She replied:

- "What have you done, oh miserable!? Why have you abjured your holy and trustworthy faith for a momentary pain? You had better suffer a thousand deaths of your body than deny just once so valid faith!"

Who would not be seduced by the serpent's voice? Forgetting the divine gift bestowed upon him, unmindful of such a visible miracle, he listened to his wife and reverted to his error. But God is not oblivious and as revenge for such an ingratitude, he tormented his hand again; since the wife was responsible for his relapsing into error, she suffered the same pain. The grief was so intense that it penetrated their bones. To avoid their cries being heard, they fled to a nearby forest, where they howled like wolves. They were found, brought back to the city and immediately thrown into the still burning fire, and soon reduced to ashes.⁸⁴

Miracles thus became an intrinsic part of divine dialectics, the medieval public being highly receptive to the supernatural. Nature was

84. Caesarius of Heisterbach, III, 17, p. 133.

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nothing but the physical token of a spiritual design, a mere representation of God's purposes. No wonder, in such conditions, that expressions of the wonderful and the prodigious could be found interwoven with puns. An example of this sort was the story about the monks of St. Victor at Marseilles who complained before a pious man about their poverty and were answered with the following allegory:

This monastery had once a benefactor who plentifully provided all the brothers their livelihood. But someone unjustly banished his companion from the abbey, in consequence of which the benefactor followed his steps and declared that he would never return until his companion should be called back. The latter was *dabitur vobis*, who exiled himself together with the banished *Date*. Should you return to your original hospitality and charity, your abbey will regain its pristine wealth, for the Lords says: *date et dabitur vobis* (Math. VI: 4).⁸⁵

Puns and plays on words were particularly praised in clerical spheres, as attested to by this *exemplum*, based on the Latin verb

do, --> in its imperative form, *date* (give)
and --> its passive future neutral form, *dabitur* (it will be given),

both allegories of Charity and Abundance, inseparable from each other and correlative. In this instance, the author followed the evangelical request, but he took special care to exemplify and materialize an abstract concept with suitable stylistic effects.

Suspense, even thrills, were proven devices for capturing and holding attention. Prevailing fears of the next world and damnation were systematically set in motion, reinforced by a series of preaching devices carefully elaborated. Thanks to the well-rooted system of symbolic correspondences, signs of all kinds were always to be read as messages from Providence, their interpretation being the sole responsibility of the Church. Such was the case reported in an *exemplum* about a fire that burst out in a grave and turned the corpse into dust, thereby signaling the hopeless fate of the buried sinner.⁸⁶

85. Etienne de Bourbon, "*hospitalitas*," no. 153, p. 131; the popularity of the anecdote is clearly proved by Caesarius of Heisterbach's compilation (IV, 48) and the *Alphabetum narrationum* (no. 372), which also reproduced it.

86. Arnold de Liège, quoting an *exemplum* of Gregory the Great, *Alphabetum Narracionum*, ed. Colette Ribaucourt, *consuetudo*.

Instilling fear through the miracles of the Eucharist, particularly the incarnation, was another strong achievement of medieval preaching. The *Scala coeli* reports an awe-inspiring *exemplum*, attributed to Caesarius of Heisterbach, about a priest who lived in sin and barely confessed his many misdeeds. Once when he was celebrating Mass, the body and blood of Christ disappeared before he had consecrated them. While he was searching everywhere, a prostitute in the audience saw a young Man descending from heaven who took the host.⁸⁷ The strong effect of this *exemplum* was assured by the manipulation of contrasts: the prostitute blessed with the vision of Christ, the unworthy priest punished by his inability to confer God's grace.

An additional, successful device was the message conveyed from the other world, either through visions or palpable scripts. To this category pertains the following *exemplum*:

I heard from a noble lady, the late Lady of Beaujeu--whose sister had been married to Philip, King of France, and from many others --that a dying person staying in Rome, in the house of a cardinal, saw before him St. Denys, the martyr and first preacher of the Franks, leading the aforesaid king....The moribund asked the saint for his deeds and received the following answer:

- "I am Dionisius Aeropagita, I come from rescuing the soul of Philip who had just passed away from this world. Demons were about to drag it into hell so I filched it from their grip. The Lord ordered me to bring him into the pain of purgatory, from which he will eventually be rescued since he used to honor saints, churches, and religious men, as well. And now, stand on your feet, you are cured, and go announce my message to your master, so that he will have prayers said for him."

These words being said, the saint left him; the sick man hurried to accomplish his duty. The cardinal wrote a letter to France reporting the vision, with the day and hour it took place. It so happens that at the very same hour, the said Philip passed away.⁸⁸

This legend about Philip Augustus, given as a family tradition, welds together a number of beliefs, such as the vision of somebody else's death that was confirmed in actual reality. We also find the optimistic

87. Jean Gobi, *Scala coeli*, "communio", no. 234.

88. Etienne de Burbon, "de sacrorum festorum violacione," no. 323, pp. 271-272.

belief that purgatory ultimately means salvation, since it is a temporary punishment. This was a message of hope, delivered to awe-stricken masses, to counterbalance the despair caused by the unbearable idea of eternal pain in the netherworld.⁸⁹ Another widespread motif refers to the fight between saints and devils for Christian souls, a common belief since the time of St. Gregory. In the present case, the mimesis of the evangelical injunction, "Stand and walk, you are cured," was expected to strengthen the authenticity of the story. In parallel, the manipulative mention of Saint Denis, the patron saint of the Kingdom of France, was meant to enhance the holiness of the Capetian dynasty.⁹⁰ With the preacher's help in the matter, the idea of Philip's salvation was here effectively corroborated, as opposed to the widespread belief that the late king was doomed for his numerous sins.⁹¹ The story also served to corroborate the mediatory role of the Church, since the king's salvation happened through the intervention of saints, whose cult--via the Church--Philip honored throughout his life. Stories of this kind aimed at encouraging penitence, not as a sacrament to be taken circumstantially, but as a way of life so that death would not catch the Christian unprepared. "For those who willingly observe the words of God, God will listen to them, but God will not listen to those who pay no heed," states the *Alphabetum narrationum*. The threat is concretely illustrated by an *exemplum* about a peasant who throughout his life was deaf to the call of his priest. On his death, when a Mass for his salvation was chanted, Christ on the crucifix was seen to shut His ears, to the great amazement of all the congregation.⁹²

According to Humbert de Romans, *nihil autem tam valet ad hujusmodi (penitentiae) accelerationem, sicut praedicatio*,⁹³ provided preaching was accompanied by *discretio*, the major quality requested of a preacher. The word of God was thus also meant to mitigate the dangers involved in

89. Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago, 1984), pp. 285 ff.

90. Gabrielle M. Spiegel, "The Cult of St. Denis and Capetian Kingship," *Journal of Medieval History* 1 (1975): 43-69; Colette Beaune, *The Birth of an Ideology: Myths and Symbols of Nation in Late Medieval France* (Berkeley, 1991), pp. 8 ff.

91. J. Levron, *Philippe Auguste ou la France rassemblée* (Paris, 1979), pp. 323-327; John W. Baldwin, *The Government of Philip Augustus: Foundations of French Royal Power in the Middle Ages* (Berkeley, 1986), pp. 315-317, 355 ff.

92. "Audientes libenter verbum Dei Deus audiet et nolentes non audiet," *Alphabetum narrationum*, no. 88, quoting James of Vitry.

93. Humbert de Romans, *Tractatus de habundantia exemplorum*, ed. J. J. Berthier, *Opera Omnia* (Roma, 1889), p. 376.

preaching through the manipulation of fears alone. To this category belongs preaching through hope, which was closely related to the theory of catharsis in confession, itself a great moment of fear. Against the prevailing tendency of heretical sects to question the validity of the Church's sacraments,⁹⁴ the *exempla* proved the quasi-magical character of confession, in erasing the evidence of evil, both morally and physically. This belief was spread by the Friars, who implemented, *verbo et exemplo*, the legislation of the Fourth Lateran Council concerning the annual duty of confession.⁹⁵ Preachers emphasized not only the necessity of periodic confession but also the imperative to confess before a priest, who had received canonical blessing and was therefore the only legitimate source of complete exoneration. This exigency is quite clear in the *exemplum* reporting the traumatic experience of a sinner who was attacked by a monster (that is, the devil in one of its guises) in a desolate area at night. Realizing that it was his sins that were subjecting him to satanic power and lacking a priest before whom he might confess, the culprit appealed to Almighty God to save him. God indeed heard the plea and defended him from the monster, but the devil's messenger did not disappear; instead, it terrorized the sinner all night. The conclusion is suggestive: even God could not replace the priest, thus further corroborating the axiom that *vera confessio facta sacerdoti, secundum ordinem ecclesie*.⁹⁶

This lesson is further emphasized by another *exemplum*, preserved in fourteenth-century French, in the compilation of *Ci-nous dit*:

It is said about one Jew that he saw the enemy [devil] kneeling with both knees toward the *Corpus Christi* when it was carried by a priest. When the priest was on his way back and did not carry the *Corpus Christi* any longer, [the devil] kneeled on one knee. The Jew asked him about his peculiar behavior, and the enemy answered: -"For it is written in St. Paul that heaven and hell kneel toward the body of Jesus, which means the angels of heaven and ourselves. Then I kneeled toward his minister in reverence for his

94. Gordon Leff, "Heresy and the Decline of the Medieval Church," *Past and Present* 20 (1961): 36-51; R. I. Moore, "The Origins of Medieval Heresy," *History* 55 (1970): 21-36.

95. Constitution 21, "*Omnis utriusque sexus*," in *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*, ed. J. Alberigo, et al. (Basel, 1962), p. 221.

96. *Liber Exemplorum*, pp. 51-53.

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office." When the Jew heard the devil speaking in this manner, he was moved to conversion and asked for baptism.⁹⁷

One may qualify this manifestation as a case of popular "religious homeopathy"; that is, the expurgation of evil (the Jew's prebaptismal state) through the good example of evil actors. Although such types of *exempla* were designed for popular audiences--evidenced by the fact that the collection is preserved in middle-French--they were nevertheless a sophisticated way of enhancing the clergy's image while amending the prevailing animosity toward its privileged status.

Following the fourth advice of Robert of Basevorn, some preachers abused the habit of deriving too much from one word. Eckhart (d. 1327), for example, gave a sermon devoted only to the word *and*. One single word, James of Vitry claimed, can be enough, with God's help, to enlighten sinners and inspire them with the love of God.⁹⁸ One word might prove sufficient, but two offer a good measure of persuasion, as evinced in the *Liber de vita et perfectione Fratrum Praedicatorum*:

One brother aspired to convert to Christ a student who indulged in luxury. For this purpose, he went to pay him a visit. When they met, the student warned the friar not to preach to him or mention God. The brother agreed to this, but posed his own condition, i.e., that he would be allowed to say two words at the end of their meeting. Before they parted, the friar asked the young man:..."Do you know what kind of bed in the other world all those who refuse to make penance in this one will have?" The answer was "no". Then the brother: "A vermins' bed."⁹⁹

This provides an excellent illustration of how a persuasive formula relying upon the technique of correlation supports the preacher's goals. The words themselves act as catalyst for the audience's reaction to the awe-inspiring idea of eternal suffering. The words, "vermins' bed," help to clarify the abstract concept of an infinity spent in pain--in itself practically incomprehensible to large sectors of the population. In such cases, rhetorical invention lies in the power of words to suggest things unspoken but of high emotional density. This was meant to impose an

97. *Ci-nous dit: Recueil d'exempla moraux*, ed. Gérard Blangez (Paris, 1980), I, no. 128, p. 140.

98. James of Vitry, ed. Crane, p. 83.

99. Jean Gobi, *Scala coeli, "de conversione,"* no. 332.

ecstatic conclusion without the listener's realizing that he or she was the object of manipulation. These methods served to sharpen and emphasize a prevailing feeling in medieval Christianity, that of fear, into which it was fairly easy to transplant any anecdote.

On the whole, repetition seems to have been one of the most striking characteristics of the *exempla*, in terms of key words and phrases appearing in the same anecdote or of similar situations depicted in different stories conceived around the same idea.¹⁰⁰ The more often a theme or a phrase was used, the more it was considered appropriate to the listeners' consciousness, especially among the *illiterati*. Preachers, therefore, felt free to make use of the same range of imagery, metaphors, and parables in patronizing and ironically pungent terms:

Brother Jordan [the third Minister General of the Dominicans] was once asked how it was that rustics more often do penance as well as *conversio* than the prelates of the Church? He answered: -"Since they are not in the habit of it, peasants get drunk more easily from good wine than nobles who, having it at their disposal, are accustomed to it."¹⁰¹

The imperatives and limitations dictated by daily practice bring us back to the major concern of this paper, namely, the interaction of the theory of preaching and its practice in medieval sermons. One may argue that the comparison between the *exempla* and the rhetorical advice found in the manuals of *Artes praedicandi* raises methodological problems from the start, for the two differ not only in their literary style, sources of inspiration, etc., but, first and foremost, in the audiences to which they appealed. In most cases, the rhetorical treatises found their inspiration in the classical heritage and the scholastic atmosphere of medieval schools and universities. Their language, Latin, proves that they were written by and appealed to the intellectual elite, though their ultimate goal was to instruct the faithful as a whole. On the other hand, though written in Latin by members of the Church, who were also part of the intellectual elite, and in many cases appealing to the clergy, as

100. For the same concept in different *exempla*, see also *Etienne de Bourbon*, no. 21, p. 29; Jeannine Horowitz, "La Peur en milieu ecclésiastique," pp. 286-324.

101. *Liber de vita et perfectione Fratrum Praedicatorum*, in Jean Gobi, *Scala coeli*, "de conversione," no. 333.

well, the *exempla* were universal in scope. They touched the fears and hopes of the faithful as a whole, since their source of inspiration was the average Christian--ecclesiastic or laic--his and her attitudes, degree of literacy, and state of mind. This occasionally led to divergences from the principles established in the rhetorical manuals. For example, the reiteration of words and ideas that characterizes the *exempla* stood in sharp contrast to the avoidance of repetition advocated in the treatises *de Arte Praedicandi*. Still, repetition became one main characteristic of modern propaganda, which, like the medieval *exempla*, appeals to the average man/woman in heterogeneous audiences.¹⁰²

In sum, a close analysis of the rhetorical treatises hints at their being influenced by the experience of preachers, who gave final shape to the theory. Reciprocally, research into the wealth of thirteenth-century *exempla* corroborates the influence of the *Artes praedicandi* manuals, at least on two central issues: the need to preach in a simple, easy manner and the parallel implementation of various, clever strategies to avoid tedium. It seems accurate, therefore, to speak in terms of a mutual influence between the rhetorician and the preacher, who together shaped the foundations of divine eloquence. In this more sophisticated delivery of the *Vox Dei*, the *exempla* functioned as a sort of "practical theology," a means of popularizing the Church's message at a time of change, when the clergy was threatened by challenges at home and abroad. True, even the most successful *exempla* could not modify the balance of forces in the socio-economic and political arena of thirteenth-century Christendom. Still, they represent one of the most vital efforts by the clergy to reinforce the ranks of orthodoxy while reaching a broad audience.¹⁰³ In fact, the sermon, with its exemplary background, constitutes the means par excellence of mass communication employed by the Church in the Middle Ages.

102. Thomas M. Lessl, "The Priestly Voice," *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 75 (1989): 194-196.

103. Jean Delumeau, *Le Péché et la peur* (Paris, 1983), p. 222.