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THE WORD OF GOD AND PREACHING

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A Thesis Presented to the Faculty  
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
Department of Practical Theology  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Sacred Theology

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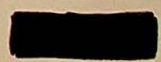
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June, 1957

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In this paper I propose to defend the thesis that the concept Word of God refers not only to the revelation of God for man's salvation through the sacred Scriptures, but also to God's continuing revelation of Himself to man through the spoken Word. In other words, this paper intends, on the one hand, to defend the ultimate authority of the Scriptures against those who equate the concept Word of God so exclusively with the activity of God as to deny any identification of the Word of God with the Scriptures. On the other hand, I attempt to show that it is equally incorrect to equate the Word of God so exclusively with the Scriptures as to deny that God can and does reveal Himself to men through the spoken Word.

The problem of this paper, then, lies in arriving at a satisfactory definition of the term Word of God. In the theological literature of our church, we have maintained that the Bible is the Word of God. We have been content to say that the sacred Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments represent the Word of God. Section two under the doctrine of Holy Scripture in Pieper's Christian Dogmatics reads: "Holy Scripture identical with the Word of God."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, translated from the German and edited by Theodore Engelder, John T. Mueller, and Walter W. F. Albrecht (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), I, 213.



There are, however, those who hold that this absolute equation of the Word of God with the Bible is not altogether accurate. To relate the Word of God only to the Scriptures is limiting too severely the scope of this concept. Cleland, for example, says:

It is not essentially accurate to talk of the Bible as the Word of God. The Word of God is the activity of God, in constantly seeking to bring men into such relations with himself that man understands that this is what gives sense to his life on earth.<sup>2</sup>

Caemmerer puts the matter this way:

'Word of God' means not merely sayings of God, but God Himself as He acts and as He unfolds Himself in His actions to human beings.<sup>3</sup>

The identification of the term Word of God with the Deus loquens, with the continuing activity of God in bringing men to faith, has led some to deny any identification of the Word of God with the sacred Scriptures. Sittler, for example, says: "Revelation is not a thing; it is a continuing activity. It is not static, but dynamic...."<sup>4</sup>

Similarly Brunner argues:

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<sup>2</sup>James T. Cleland, The True and Lively Word (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1954), p. 24.

<sup>3</sup>Richard R. Caemmerer, "A Concordance Study of the Concept 'Word of God,'" Concordia Theological Monthly, XXII (March, 1951), 172.

<sup>4</sup>Joseph Sittler, The Doctrine of the Word (Philadelphia, The Muhlenberg Press, 1948), p. 11.



Diving Revelation is not a book or a doctrine; the Revelation is God Himself in His self-manifestation within history. Revelation is something that happens, the living history of God in His dealings with the human race.<sup>5</sup>

Karl Barth, too, denies that the Biblical Word is eo ipso the Word of God. His classical phrase is: That is God's Word, "das mich findet."<sup>6</sup> For Barth the Word only becomes the Word in the activity of God through the Word.

Summarizing the attitude of modern theologians toward the doctrine of the Word of God, Engelder says:

The leading theologians of today are asking us to throw the idea that the written Word of Scripture is the Word of God to the moles and bats and to operate with a 'Word of God' which has no definite and lasting form.<sup>7</sup>

The point of view maintained in this paper is that the sacred Scriptures are indeed the Word of God, divinely inspired by God the Holy Spirit and normative for the Church in all matters of faith and life. However, the concept Word of God includes more than the Scriptures. The Word of God is the revelation of God to man for man's salvation. In point of time the Word of God antedates the Scriptures. Centuries before the Scriptures were first written, the Word of God came to men through the oral Word. During the gen-

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<sup>5</sup>Emil Brunner, Revelation and Reason (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1946), p. 8.

<sup>6</sup>Theodore Engelder, The Scripture Cannot Be Broken (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1944), p. 384.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.



erations between Adam and Moses, the oral Word was passed on from generation to generation. In the Old Testament era God communicated His Word through the voice of the prophets. The fullest revelation of Himself God gave mankind in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. In a pre-eminent sense, therefore, Jesus is the Word. Since the time of Christ, God has continued to give His Word to men through the living voice of preaching. The culmination of God's revelation will be in eternity, when we shall see Him face to face and know even as we also are known of God. This will be the last Word of God to His own.

In other words, the concept Word of God is not static but dynamic. It is God's revelation of Himself to man for man's salvation.<sup>8</sup> For us, divine revelation is to be found in the Scriptures. At the same time, the Word of God continues to come to us through the preached Word. To put the matter another way, the concept Word of God includes both the Deus locutus and the Deus loquens. The Word of God is doctrine; but it is at the same time God Himself in His revelation here and now to the soul. Faith is assent to doctrine;

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<sup>8</sup>Robert Preus says that the dogmaticians of the seventeenth century distinguish between inspiration and revelation. "Revelation is narrowly and by virtue of its name a manifestation of something unknown and hidden, and can be made in many and various ways, namely, either through external speech or through dreams and visions. Inspiration is an act of the Holy Spirit whereby the actual knowledge of things is communicated supernaturally to the created intellect,..." Robert Preus, The Inspiration of Scripture (Mankato: Lutheran Synod Book Company, 1955), pp. 29 f.



but it is at the same time also the response of the heart to God the Spirit who calls through the Word.

I propose to defend this thesis, first of all, by examining the various uses of the expression Word of God in the Scriptures themselves, with a view to showing that the expression refers to God's revelation of Himself through Word and deed for man's salvation. Moreover, I shall try to show how the term is used to describe God's continuing revelation of Himself to the hearts of men through preaching.

Furthermore, since some have been reluctant to accept the Scriptures in their totality as the Word of God, I attempt to show that the Scriptures are indeed the Word of God and that only as preaching is oriented in the Scriptures can it be called the Word of God.

The fourth chapter, entitled "Luther's View of the Word of God," finds its justification in the charge that Luther never accepted inspiration in the sense in which the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod understands it. Furthermore, the chapter attempts to show how Luther consistently identified the Word of God with the preached Word.

In the concluding chapters I attempt to show the implications of the idea of the Deus loquens to preaching today, pointing out especially the goal of the sermon, the role of the preacher, and the character of his message, and the demand for preaching for a response.



## CHAPTER II

### THE TERM WORD OF GOD IN THE SCRIPTURES

When one makes a semantic study of the use of the term Word of God, he is persuaded that the concept is employed to convey a number of meanings. When the various meanings are categorized, they fall into two large groups: those passages which use the term to signify God speaking and those which connote the activity of God.<sup>1</sup>

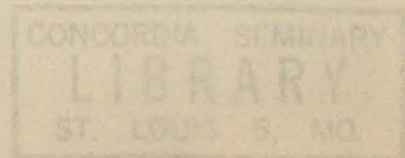
Among the passages which use the concept Word of God in terms of communication we find a large group of passages, especially in the Old Testament, in which God gives his people instructions which they are to heed. In John 8:47 Jesus, for example, says, "He that is of God heareth God's words; ye therefore hear them not because ye are not of God."<sup>2</sup> Time and again in the Old Testament the Lord communicated His will to the prophets, who in turn related to the people the instructions, prefacing their remarks with the words, "The word of the Lord came unto me saying...."<sup>3</sup> Frequently,

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<sup>1</sup>cf. Richard R. Caemmerer, "A Concordance Study of the Concept 'Word of God,' Concordia Theological Monthly, XXII (March, 1951), 171 f.

<sup>2</sup>cf. also Acts 10:36; Ps. 119:57.

<sup>3</sup>Jeremiah 1:4; 2:1; et al.





too, the term is used to denote a specific promise of the Lord. We hear Simeon pray: "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy Word."<sup>4</sup> That the term is used also to signify the threats of God is attested by passages like: "The Lord hath done that which he had devised; he hath fulfilled his word that he had commanded in the days of old: he hath thrown down, and hath not pitied and he hath caused thine enemy to rejoice over thee, he hath set up the honor of thine adversaries."<sup>5</sup> Both the promises and the threats are the Word of God which those who hear are to heed.

A large number of passages seem to refer the concept Word of God to the corpus doctrinae, the whole body of Christian doctrine. Representatives of this class are the following: "Preach the Word."<sup>6</sup> "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."<sup>7</sup> "If any man teach otherwise and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is ac-

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<sup>4</sup>Luke 2:29. cf. also Ps. 119:58; Ps. 119:116; Ps. 138:2; 2 Sam. 7:21; Jer. 17:15.

<sup>5</sup>Lamentations 2:17. cf. also Ps. 148:8; Jer. 25:13; Matt. 26:75.

<sup>6</sup>2 Timothy 4:2.

<sup>7</sup>2 Timothy 2:15.





ording to godliness...."<sup>8</sup>

It is significant to know, too, that in a number of instances the term Word of God is used in the Old Testament as a synonym for God's covenant of grace and in the New Testament for the Gospel: "He hath remembered his covenant forever, the word which he commanded to a thousand generations."<sup>9</sup> In the New Testament we come across expressions like the following: "...the word of truth, the Gospel of our salvation..."<sup>10</sup> "...the word of the truth of the Gospel..."<sup>11</sup> "For unto us was the Gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them..."<sup>12</sup> "...this is the word which by the Gospel is preached unto you."<sup>13</sup> In the book of Revelation St. John speaks of "...the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ..."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>1 Timothy 6:3. Cf. also 1 Tim. 5:17; Col. 1:25; Phil. 2:16; Luke 1:2; Mark 13:31; Mark 8:38; Acts 4:29; Is. 2:3; Ps. 119:67; Ps. 68:11; Ps. 138:4; Ps. 107:11; Matt. 4:4; Rev. 20:4; Rev. 6:9; Rev. 3:10; John 17:14; John 17:8; John 17:6; John 14:23,24; Psalm 19:7; John 8:47; Acts 10:36.

<sup>9</sup>Psalm 105:8. Cf. also Deut. 33:9; Jeremiah 11:2.

<sup>10</sup>Ephesians 1:13.

<sup>11</sup>Colossians 1:15.

<sup>12</sup>Hebrews 4:2.

<sup>13</sup>1 Peter 1:25. Cf. also Romans 10:8; Hebrews 6:5.

<sup>14</sup>Revelation 1:2. Cf. also Revelation 12:11.



There are also many passages in which the term Word of God is used to describe the activity of God. First of all, there are the texts which speak of God's creative activity by the word of His power. The Psalmist says: "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth."<sup>15</sup> The writer to the Hebrews speaks the same language when he says: "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God."<sup>16</sup> The apostle Peter links the work of creation to that of preservation and attributes both of these acts to the activity of the word of God. "For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old.... But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men."<sup>17</sup> The Psalmist describes God's sending forth of the ice and snow and then adds, "He sendeth out his word, and melteth them...."<sup>18</sup> Similarly, the writer to the Hebrews describes the work of preservation when he says, "...he upholds all things by the word of his power...."<sup>19</sup> Describing the infinite majesty of

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<sup>15</sup>Psalm 33:6.

<sup>16</sup>Hebrews 11:3.

<sup>17</sup>2 Peter 3:5-7.

<sup>18</sup>Psalm 147:15-19. Cf. also Isaiah 55:8-13.

<sup>19</sup>Hebrews 1:3.



God manifested both in the course of history and in nature the prophet Habakkuk says: "Thy bow was made quite naked, according to the oaths of the tribes, even thy word. Selah. Thou didst cleave the earth with rivers."<sup>20</sup> God is described as slaying "by the words of his mouth"<sup>21</sup> those who forsake Him: the word of the Lord tries Christians as it did Joseph,<sup>22</sup> but when they cry unto Him in their distresses He sends His word and delivers them from their destruction.<sup>23</sup> In order that they may never forget the good things God has done for them, the children of God are urged to see the word of the Lord.<sup>24</sup> When those possessed with a devil were brought to Jesus, we are told that He "...cast out the spirit with His word, and healed all that were sick."<sup>25</sup>

Interestingly enough, there are some passages which speak of the word and work of God synonymously. For example, Jesus says: "...the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself; but the Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Habakkuk 3:9.

<sup>21</sup>Hosea 6:5.

<sup>22</sup>Ps. 105:19.

<sup>23</sup>Ps. 107:19.20.

<sup>24</sup>Jeremiah 2:31.

<sup>25</sup>Matthew 8:16.

<sup>26</sup>John 14:10. Cf. also James 1:25; 1 Sam. 3:1; Amos 8:12.



In a most unique way Jesus Himself is referred to in the Sacred Scriptures as the Word of God.<sup>27</sup> The designation of Christ is most apt, first of all, because God has spoken to us by His Son. "God, who at sundry times and in diverse manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son...."<sup>28</sup> The Son of God in His earthly life revealed God to man. "No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared Him."<sup>29</sup> In Christ "...we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."<sup>30</sup> Not only did God speak to men about Himself through Christ, but He also acted through Christ, for "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them."<sup>31</sup> In the person of His Son, God carried out the great redemptive act of restoring mankind to His favor. "God commendeth His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us."<sup>32</sup>

Furthermore, the term Word of God is used to signify the medium for the continuing activity of God in the world. He has not only acted in accomplishing the redemption of the

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<sup>27</sup>Rev. 19:15; 1 John 1:1; John 1:1-14.

<sup>28</sup>Hebrews 1:1.

<sup>29</sup>John 1:18.

<sup>30</sup>John 1:14.

<sup>31</sup>2 Corinthians 5:19.

<sup>32</sup>Romans 5:8.



world through Christ Jesus, but He also continues to act in the saving of men's souls. There are a number of passages which equate the Word of God with this saving activity of God. The word is identified with the sword of the Spirit;<sup>33</sup> it is called the quick and powerful word.<sup>34</sup>

It is compared to a hammer,<sup>35</sup> a shepherd's staff,<sup>36</sup> a scepter,<sup>37</sup> incorruptible seed,<sup>38</sup> a fire,<sup>39</sup> rain and dew,<sup>40</sup> and a lamp giving light.<sup>41</sup>

God assures us that His Word shall not return unto Him void.<sup>42</sup> It quickens;<sup>43</sup> it sanctifies and cleanses the Church;<sup>44</sup> through it men are led to know the truth;<sup>45</sup> men are born again

<sup>33</sup>Eph. 6:17.

<sup>34</sup>Hebrews 4:12, also Luke 4:32.

<sup>35</sup>Jer. 23:29.

<sup>36</sup>Ps. 25:4.

<sup>37</sup>Psalm 45:7.

<sup>38</sup>1 Peter 1:23.

<sup>39</sup>Jer. 23:29.

<sup>40</sup>Deut. 32:2.

<sup>41</sup>Psalm 119:105.

<sup>42</sup>Isaiah 55:11.

<sup>43</sup>Psalm 119:5; 2 Cor. 3:5; Eph. 2:5; Phil. 2:16; Acts 5:20; James 1:18.

<sup>44</sup>Eph. 5:26; John 15:3.

<sup>45</sup>John 8:31.



by the Word of God;<sup>46</sup> it converts and regenerates;<sup>47</sup> faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.<sup>48</sup> It justifies;<sup>49</sup> it preserves in grace and faith.<sup>50</sup> It brings peace,<sup>51</sup> eternal life;<sup>52</sup> it is able to save souls;<sup>53</sup> it fills the heart with joy and rejoicing;<sup>54</sup> by it we are able to overcome the wicked one,<sup>55</sup> and to do the commandments of God.<sup>56</sup> It makes men partakers of the Holy Spirit,<sup>57</sup> and causes them to grow.<sup>58</sup> It is an effective Word even though some stumble at it.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>1 Peter 1:23.

<sup>47</sup>Ps. 19:8-9; Jer. 23:29; 2 Tim. 2:25; James 1:18; 1 Cor. 4:15; Gal. 4:19.

<sup>48</sup>Romans 10:17; John 1:7; 17:20; Romans 10:17; 1 Cor. 3:5; Col. 1:5-6; 2 Peter 1:19.

<sup>49</sup>Romans 3:27-28.

<sup>50</sup>1 Peter 5:10.

<sup>51</sup>Isaiah 2:3-5.

<sup>52</sup>John 6:68; 6:63.

<sup>53</sup>James 1:21; John 5:24.39; 6:69; 1 Cor. 1:21; Acts 11:14.

<sup>54</sup>Jeremiah 15:16.

<sup>55</sup>1 John 2:14.

<sup>56</sup>2 Chron. 30:1-2.

<sup>57</sup>Hebrews 6:4-5.

<sup>58</sup>1 Peter 2:2; Acts 20:32.

<sup>59</sup>1 Peter 2:8.



Very expressive of this saving activity of God in the world are those passages which speak of the word of God increasing when the reference obviously is to the success of the Gospel and the spread of the Church.<sup>60</sup>

A question of significant concern is the means by which God acts to produce these saving effects. One of the means is preaching the Word. There is an array of passages which identify the word of God with preaching. Writing to the Thessalonians Paul says: "...when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of man but as it is in truth, the word of God."<sup>61</sup> God, Paul says, "...has manifested his word through preaching."<sup>62</sup> Paul commends the Thessalonians, for, he says, "...from you sounded out the word of the Lord..."<sup>63</sup>

This accent points up the importance of preaching. Preaching is not simply telling something; it is God seeking to achieve His saving purpose in the lives of men.

It is God actively probing me, challenging my will, calling on me for decision, offering me his succour, through the only medium which the nature of his purpose permits him to use, the medium of a personal relationship....Preaching is that divine, saving activity in history, which began two thousand years ago in the advent of Christ and in His personal relationships with

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<sup>60</sup>cf. 2 Tim. 2:9; Acts 12:24; Acts 19:20; Acts 6:7; Psalm 147:15; 2 Tim. 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:1; Acts 12:24; 6:7; Isaiah 40:8.

<sup>61</sup>1 Thess. 2:13.

<sup>62</sup>Titus 1:3. Cf. also 1 Peter 1:25.

<sup>63</sup>1 Thess. 1:6-8. Cf. also Acts 4:31; Acts 4:29; Luke 5:1; Mark 16:20; John 12:47-48; John 17:20; John 15:3; Luke 4:32.



men and women, and has continued throughout the ages in the sphere of redeemed personal relationships (which is the true Church), now focusing on me, confronting me as a person indissolubly bound up with other persons at this present time."<sup>64</sup>

Through preaching God is continually revealing Himself to men, confronting men both with the revelation of His holiness by which He must punish sin and with His grace by which He forgives sin. Forsyth describes His activity of the Word as follows:

It does not swathe us and erase us, it besets us, it applies itself to us. It does not simply stand at the door, or pass and suck us into its wake, it knocks, enters, finds and saves us - all in the way of creating our moral personality and giving us to ourselves by rescuing us from ourselves. It is an active, not a static word. It moves, it works, it creates.<sup>65</sup>

When, therefore, we read the word or hear it preached, we are not simply reading or hearing about something that happened two thousand years ago. But God is at work disclosing Himself to us. In this sense every sermon is an act of God. It is a real deed. St. Paul caught this accent when he wrote to the Corinthians: "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us, we beseech you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."<sup>66</sup> Luther has this to say about the preaching of Christ:

To me it is not simply an old song of an event that happened fifteen hundred years ago; it is something

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<sup>64</sup>H. H. Farmer, The Servant of the Word (London: Religious Book Club, 1942), p. 27.

<sup>65</sup>P. T. Forsyth, Positive Preaching in the Modern Mind (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1907), pp. 228 f.

<sup>66</sup>2 Corinthians 5:19.



more than an event which happened once - for it is a gift and a bestowing that endures forever.<sup>67</sup>

The significance of this dynamic approach to the term Word of God for the preacher and for the sermon we shall endeavor to point out later in this paper.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>Martin Luther, Saemmtliche Werke, ed. Johann Konrad Irmischer et al. (Erlangen: Heyder and Zimmer, 1826-1857), XX, 114. Hereafter I shall refer to the Erlangen edition as E. A.

<sup>68</sup>Infra, pp. 43 ff.



## CHAPTER III

### SCRIPTURES AS THE WORD OF GOD

The sacred Scriptures are in a unique sense the Word of God. The mark of the divine authorship of Scripture is too pronounced to be denied. More than thirty-eight hundred times the prophets preface their remarks with the words, "Thus saith the Lord." Moreover Paul asserts, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God."<sup>1</sup> And St. Peter argues:

The prophecy came not in old time by the will of men, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.<sup>2</sup>

In Matthew 1:22-23, the Evangelist quotes Isaiah 7:14 as "...spoken of the Lord by the prophets." In Acts 4:25-26, Peter and John quote Psalm 2:1-2 as spoken of God "...by the mouth of thy servant David." Paul contends that the things he is writing the Corinthians are the commandment of the Lord.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, our Lutheran Church has asserted that the sacred Scriptures do not merely contain the Word of God. We have rather insisted that the original autographs of the several books are the verbally inspired Word of God, and that

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<sup>1</sup>2 Timothy 3:16.

<sup>2</sup>2 Peter 1:21.

<sup>3</sup>1 Corinthians 14:37.38.



not without good warrant. In John 10:35 Jesus declares, "The Scripture cannot be broken," to defend the reading of Psalm 82:5 where the magistrates are called "gods." Furthermore, Paul contends for the single word seed of Genesis 17:7 when in Galatians 3:16 he writes: "He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ." Jesus Himself declares, "It is easier for heaven and earth to pass than one tittle of the law to fail."<sup>4</sup> Paul is so sure that the words of Scripture are the Word of God that in at least two places he employs metonymy by using the term Scripture where we should expect the word God. In Romans 9:17 he says, "The Scripture saith unto Pharaoh...", while in Genesis it is the Lord that actually utters the words. In Galatians 3:8 he says, "The Scripture, foreseeing...." This fact of the verbal accuracy of Scripture led Luther to say, "Scripture has never erred."<sup>5</sup>

Similarly also do our confessions equate the Word of Scripture with the Word of the Holy Ghost. Although they contain no article setting forth the doctrine of verbal inspiration, the doctrine itself is implicit in the thinking and writing of the confessions. The Augsburg Confession, for example, declares: "Why does Scripture so often prohibit to

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<sup>4</sup>Luke 16:17.

<sup>5</sup>Martin Luther, Saemmtliche Schriften, ed. John George Walch (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1885), XV, 1481. Hereafter I shall refer to this work as Wal. A.



make, and to listen to, traditions?...Did the Holy Ghost in vain forewarn of these things?<sup>6</sup> Similarly also the Apology: "Do you think that these words fell inconsiderately from the Holy Ghost?"<sup>7</sup> Again, "They have condemned several articles contrary to the manifest Scripture of the Holy Ghost."<sup>8</sup>

The Scriptures, therefore, are the authoritative source and norm of doctrine for the church. Jesus Himself appealed to the absolute authority of the Word of Scripture. Dealing with the Emmaus disciples Jesus said, "O fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken...And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself."<sup>9</sup> He condemns the unbelief of the Pharisees with the words, "Did ye never read the Scriptures? The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner."<sup>10</sup> With equal vigor he denounces the Sadducees, "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God...But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read

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<sup>6</sup>"Augsburg Confession," Triglot Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), p. 91.

<sup>7</sup>"Apology of the Augsburg Confession," Triglot Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), p. 153.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 101

<sup>9</sup>Luke 24:25.27. Cf. also Matt. 4:4; 19:4; 22:29; Mark 9:22.

<sup>10</sup>Matthew 21:42.



that which was spoken unto you by God?"<sup>11</sup> In the familiar story of the rich man and Lazarus, Jesus points out that the rich man's brothers did not need one to come from the dead to preach to them for He says, "...They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them....If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."<sup>12</sup> Again Jesus challenged the Jews, "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me."<sup>13</sup>

In this respect St. Paul followed in the footsteps of Jesus. In Acts 17:2 we are told that when Paul came to Thessalonica, he "...reasoned with them out of the Scriptures."<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, in Ephesians 2:20 he declares that the church is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets."

Similarly also our confessions regard the sacred Scriptures as the source and norm of doctrine.

In this way the distinction between the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament and all other writings is preserved and the Holy Scriptures alone remain the only judge, rule, and standard according to which, as the only touchstone, all dogmas shall and must be discerned and judged as to whether they are good or evil, right or wrong.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Matthew 22:29-31.

<sup>12</sup>Luke 16:29-31.

<sup>13</sup>John 5:39.

<sup>14</sup>Acts 17:2. Cf. also 1 Cor. 1:25.31; 1 Cor. 4:6; Acts 3:22; 7:2; 13:33; 26:22.

<sup>15</sup>"The Formula of Concord," Triglot Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), p. 779.



Luther, too, appealed to Scripture as the basis of spiritual truth.

With anyone who denies that the Evangelical Scriptures are the Word of God, I will not argue a single word; for we should not enter into dispute with anyone who rejects the first principles.<sup>16</sup>

It is interesting to observe that while Karl Barth inveighs against the doctrine of verbal inspiration, he nevertheless is very vociferous in demanding that the church must be subservient to the authority of the Scripture. Thomas Coates summarizes Barth's position as follows:

The very existence of the church, which possesses and exercises authority, is in itself an act of obedience, of subordination to a higher authority. In this act of obedience the Church is in reality the Church, ekklesia, evocatio. Apart from this act she loses her true nature; for example, when she sets up an authority of her own, an authority immanent in herself. This 'obedience' is in effect self-rule (Selbstregierung). But here the Church is arrogating to herself a prerogative of God. This, Barth charges, is the heresy both of Roman Catholicism and neo-Protestantism. For the Church is no longer the Church when she acknowledges no higher authority than her own and when she establishes a regime of self-rule. Even though she seeks to camouflage 'self-rule' by calling it 'obedience'. Under these circumstances the church will inevitably lose her authority. She can no longer be the bearer of the Word of God. She can not long function as the Communion of Saints. She cannot command an audience to listen respectfully to her witness.<sup>17</sup>

Only as preaching is oriented in the written Word can

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<sup>16</sup>Martin Luther, Saemmtliche Werke, ed. Johann Konrad Irmischer et al. (Erlangen: Heyder and Zimmer, 1826-1857), XXVIII, 340. Hereafter I shall refer to the Erlangen edition as E. A.

<sup>17</sup>Thomas Coates, "Barth's Concept of Authority of the Bible," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXV (August, 1954), 603.



it lay claim to be the Word of God. When anyone departs from the eternal counsels of God revealed in the Scriptures, he is preaching himself, is serving his own belly, and is preaching another gospel. Such preaching is not the Word of God and is not a medium for the saving activity of the Spirit of God.<sup>18</sup>

However, when our preaching repeats accurately the counsel of God revealed in the written Word, it is truly the Word of God. This is not to say, of course, that we must reproduce word for word statements of the Scriptures. But it does mean that when in our preaching we repeat the substance of the Scriptures, even though not in the exact words of Scripture, we are conveying the Word of God to men. Every passage of Scripture which refers to the preaching of the apostles as the Word of God attests to the fact that the Holy Spirit operates through the spoken Word to convict the hearts of those who hear.<sup>19</sup> To this thought the words of the Formula of Concord are pertinent:

Concerning the presence, operation and gift of the Holy Ghost, we should not and cannot always judge ex sensu, as to how and when they are experienced in the heart; but because they are often covered and occur in great weakness, we should be certain from, and according to, the promise that the Word of God preached and heard is (truly) an office and work of the Holy Ghost, by which he is certainly efficacious and works in our hearts, 2 Corinthians 2:14 ff.; 3:5 ff.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>cf. Romans 10:17; 1 Peter 1:23; John 6:63.

<sup>19</sup>e.g., 1 Thess. 2:13; Titus 1:3; 1 Peter 1:25 et al.

<sup>20</sup>"The Formula of Concord," op. cit., p. 903.



## CHAPTER IV

### LUTHER'S VIEW OF THE WORD OF GOD

On the basis of the source material I have been able to read, I have come to the conclusion that when Luther spoke of the Word of God he had in mind not only the concept of the Deus locutus, the God who has spoken once for all in the Scripture, but also the Deus loquens, the God who continues to speak to and act upon the hearts of men through the written and spoken Word.

This opinion is challenged by those who want to limit Luther's view of the concept Word of God simply to the activity of God in the lives of men today. Brunner for example argues:

He who identifies the letters and words of the Scriptures with the Word of God has never truly understood the Word of God. A better witness than Martin Luther we can scarcely call in...and Luther would never have approved the opinion of later orthodoxy that everything in the Scripture just because it is in the Scriptures is equally inspired by the Holy Ghost.<sup>1</sup>

It is difficult to understand how this contention can stand when one examines the statements of Luther himself. There is abundant evidence for the fact that Luther refers to the Scriptures as the Word of God, as the following brief

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<sup>1</sup>Emil Brunner, The Theology of Crisis, p. 19, quoted in Theodore Engelder, Scripture Cannot Be Broken (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1944), p. 290, n. 241.



quotations will indicate: "You must deal with Scripture in such a way that you think just as God Himself has spoken."<sup>2</sup> "Holy Scripture was spoken through the Holy Ghost."<sup>3</sup> "The Bible is 'God's Letter' to men."<sup>4</sup> "The Holy Ghost...is the author of this book."<sup>5</sup> "The Holy Scripture is the Word of God, written and (as I might say) lettered and formed in letters."<sup>6</sup> "Scripture or the Word of God."<sup>7</sup> "...Purum Verbum Dei, hoc est, sancta Scriptura."<sup>8</sup> Pointing out the reverence that we are to have for the Word of God Luther says: "You are so to deal with it that you think that God Himself is saying this."<sup>9</sup> Even in historical and scientific matters Luther reminds us that we must "...do the Holy Ghost the honor of admitting that He is more learned than we are."<sup>10</sup> Luther's own respect for and allegiance to the very words of Scripture as the Word of God is a matter of common knowledge. His reverence for the Word of Scripture as the Word of God is

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<sup>2</sup>Martin Luther, *Saemmtliche Schriften*, ed. John George Walch (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1885), III, 21. Hereafter I shall refer to this edition as Wal. A.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., III, 1895

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., L, 1055.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., II, 566.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., IX, 1770.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., VIII, 1111, II29, XIV, 413.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., IX, 87.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., III, 21.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., III, 21.



illustrated by his famous statement: "I am bound; I cannot escape it. The text stands there too mightily."<sup>11</sup> Again he says: "One little point of doctrine is of more value than heaven and earth; and therefore we cannot abide to have the least jot thereof corrupted."<sup>12</sup>

On the basis of this evidence, Koestlin is doubtless correct when he concludes:

Luther designates the sacred Scriptures as 'the book given by God, the Holy Spirit, to His Church.' Without any discrimination, he presents as the rule of faith and practice, now the Scriptures, now the Word of God, employing the two terms as perfectly synonymous.<sup>13</sup>

Although Luther regarded the Scriptures, every word of them, as the Word of God, he at the same time viewed the Word of God also dynamically as the medium of the continuing, saving activity of God. The Word of God was for him more than a record of what God said and did in ages gone by. Through the Word, God was still speaking to him personally, confronting him, addressing him, removing doubts, cleansing from sin and empowering with faith.

...The content and the message of the Bible spoke to Luther with shattering and liberating force. He saw that what his own need had sharpened to an excruciating

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., III, 2050.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., IX, 650; cf. also D. Martin Luther, Werke, (Weimar: Hermann Boehlau, 1883 ff.), II, 279. Hereafter I shall refer to the Weimar edition as W. A.

<sup>13</sup>Julius Koestlin, The Theology of Luther (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1897), II, 223.



point was precisely the point at which God was addressing him from the Scriptures. The content of that address was that God, to whom he could not rise, had come to him; that the righteousness of God which he could not satisfy had been bestowed; that genuine freedom was a gift of God, and that in Jesus Christ that gift was proffered out of the initiative, the measureless and shocking love of God. Now that fact, that message, the whole context of mighty works, prophetic declarations and pleadings, the cries and moans and lyrical songs of the psalter through which that message moves to its fulfillment in Jesus Christ - that, for Luther is the Word of God.<sup>14</sup>

As much as Luther championed the idea that the sacred Scriptures are the Word of God, so much did he emphasize that the Word of God can be identified with the spoken word of the witness. He says: "Christ has two witnesses of His birth and government. One is the Scripture, or Word comprised in letters; the other is the voice, or Word spoken through the mouth."<sup>15</sup>

Accordingly, Luther conceives of the Word of God as coming to men both outwardly and inwardly. Outwardly it reaches him through the medium of preaching, and inwardly through the attending power of God the Holy Spirit. Luther remarks:

Since now God has sent forth His Holy Gospel, he deals with us in two ways: first, outwardly, and secondly, inwardly. He deals with us outwardly through the spoken word of the Gospel and through bodily signs, such as baptism and sacrament. Inwardly, he deals with us

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<sup>14</sup> Joseph Sittler, The Doctrine of the Word (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1948), pp. 15 f.

<sup>15</sup> W. A., X, 625.



through the Holy Spirit and faith, together with other gifts; but all this in the manner and order, that the outward part shall and must precede, and the inward come afterward and through the outward, so that he has determined to give the inward part to no man except through the outward part.<sup>16</sup>

Luther in a variety of ways illustrates that from the first God relied on the spoken Word to bring men the saving truth. He reminds us that God Himself spoke the Word, Genesis 3:15, to Adam, that Christ would come and conquer death, sin, and the devil for us. That word was Adam's Gospel, and this same word, handed down by word of mouth to Noah and Abraham, led them to faith and salvation. Moreover, this word was accompanied by an outward sign, that of fire which consumed Abel's sacrifice, Genesis 4:4. Similarly also God spoke the word to Noah and accompanied it with a sign of the rainbow. He spoke also to Abraham and gave him the sign of circumcision.<sup>17</sup>

Also from the New Testament we can learn the significance of the spoken word as the vehicle of God's saving operation. Christ Himself did not write His doctrine but He spoke it.<sup>18</sup>

It is interesting to hear Luther say, "If I had to do without one or the other - either the works or the Word of

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<sup>16</sup>E. A., XXIX, 208; XLVII, 391; XLIX, 86.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., VIII, 92.

<sup>18</sup>Wal. A., XI, 28-29.



Christ - I would rather do without His works than His preaching; for the works do not help me, but His words give life, as He Himself says."<sup>19</sup>

The apostles too wrote little. In fact, Luther remarks:

It is not in a spirit of the New Testament we write books on Christian doctrine, but everywhere there ought to be good, learned, spiritual, diligent preachers without books who draw the living word from the old Scriptures and sounds forth to the people unceasingly as did the apostles. Before they wrote, they had first preached to the people with their physical voice and converted them; that was their really apostolic work.<sup>20</sup>

The fact of the matter is that writing was resorted to largely to protect the flock against false teachers and to preserve what had been previously taught.<sup>21</sup>

So insistent is Luther upon the importance of preaching for conveying the Word of God to men that he scorns those who identify the Gospel with a good book. Quite the contrary, he says that "Gospel means a good message." He remarks:

And it, the Gospel, really is not what you find in the books and what is contained in the letters, but rather is spoken declaration of the living word - a voice which resounds, is publicly proclaimed and everywhere heard.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Works of Martin Luther, ed. A. J. Holman (Philadelphia: United Lutheran Publicity House, 1915-32), VI, 443.

<sup>20</sup>E. A., X, 366.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>W. A., XII, 259 f.



Throughout the New Testament era, Luther asserts, God is relying on the spoken word to bring men to faith. His favorite word for the Gospel is Predigt, and he delights to speak of the viva vox evangelii.<sup>22</sup>

Gospel means nothing but a proclamation and heralding of the grace and mercy of God through Jesus Christ, merited, and procured through His death. And it is not properly that which is contained in books, and is comprehended in the letter, but rather an oral proclamation and living word, and a voice which echoes through the whole world, and is publicly uttered that it may be universally heard.<sup>23</sup>

He cannot conceive of Christ being of any benefit to a person "...unless God put him into words, that thou mayest hear and then learn to know him."<sup>24</sup> Moreover, New Testament preaching is simply an extension in time of Christ's words "...which pass out of the mouth of Christ from one mouth to another."<sup>25</sup>

The preaching office, therefore, is the highest office in the church.<sup>26</sup> And Christian preachers ought not to grow

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<sup>22</sup>Jaroslav Pelikan, From Luther to Kierkegaard (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), p. 19. cf. W. A., X, 88 f. "The Gospel should not really be called the written, but the oral Word...."

<sup>23</sup>Martin Luther, Commentary on Peter and Jude, pp. 9 f., in Hugh Thomson Kerr, A Compend of Luther's Theology (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1943), p. 9.

<sup>24</sup>W. A., II, 213. Two corollary thoughts flow from this truth. One is that the object of every divine service must be the preaching of the Word. E. A., XXII, 153, 155, 255. The other is that the members of the congregation are to do their part in the proclamation of the Word. E. A., XII, 222, 278.

<sup>25</sup>E. A., XII, 300.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., XXII, 151; IX, 220; XIX, 205.



weary of preaching, but should realize the sacred responsibility they have to convey the Word of God to men. By way of encouraging every preacher to realize the importance of his function Luther remarks:

The preaching office to the end of the world will be simply this: you can bring the word no further than into the ear;...Nevertheless, the preacher should drive it in, and preach it, and stand by the person into whose soul he wants to drive it. God knows that we are weak; but however weak we be, we must proclaim the treasure, imparted to the world, and not let the devil make us idle or lax.<sup>27</sup>

Since the Word of God comes to men through the oral proclamation, the preacher has the real responsibility to make sure that the content of his proclamation is founded upon and interprets correctly the biblical revelation.<sup>28</sup>

We are bound to the chosen means, the Word and the Sacraments, for through them God gathers His Church and they bring the Spirit.<sup>29</sup> He encourages the preacher, "...plant thyself upon a clear, transparent, strong statement of the Scriptures, whereby thou canst then hold thy ground."<sup>30</sup>

Accordingly, Luther insists upon the authority of the Scriptures over against the teachings of men, and human philoso-

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., XVIII, 68.

<sup>28</sup>W. A., I, 391; E. A., IX, 230; XXXVI, 197; XLVI, 240; LXV, 170; III, 347.

<sup>29</sup>E. A., IX, 124; XII, 406; XXII, 142; XLIX, 220; L, 75ff.; XLVIII, 68, 346.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., XXVIII, 223.



phy.<sup>31</sup> We must distinguish carefully between those things delivered to us by God in the sacred Scriptures and those invented by men, no matter how saintly or scholarly they may be.<sup>32</sup> Since human teaching and Scripture can never become one, but must remain as different as fire and water, we must never relinquish Scripture.<sup>33</sup> Although God is everywhere, He has told us to seek Him in His Word. Otherwise we tempt God and commit idolatry.<sup>34</sup>

Although Luther encourages the study of the languages and the comparing of Scripture with Scripture in the interest of sound exegesis,<sup>35</sup> he warns against those who "...misuse the Word of God and gloss it to their own will for their own pride and use."<sup>36</sup> He becomes adamant in denouncing those who

...tear, crucify, beat, and plague it, until they interpret it to their own heresy, mind, arbitrariness, and finally spoil, kill, and bury it, so that it is thrust from the world and forgotten; in its place sits the whore with the golden chalice, decrees and decretals, and other rottenbuechern.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>W. A., VIII, 144, 146, 149, 345; E. A., IX, 232; XI, 7; XXVIII, 298.

<sup>32</sup>Martin Luther, "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," Works of Martin Luther, ed. A. J. Holman (Philadelphia: United Lutheran Publication House, 1915-1932), II, 261.

<sup>33</sup>E. A., XXVIII, 342.

<sup>34</sup>W. A., XIX, 492.

<sup>35</sup>E. A., LXII, 314.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., VIII, 133.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., LII, 298.



Because God's mouth is the mouth of the Church, Luther warns the preacher against false doctrine. He remarks:

He who cannot pride himself with his preaching (that it is God's Word) he had better quit preaching; for he lies and blasphemes God...The doctrine has to be straight and true, without sin. Therefore, in our churches nothing but the sure, pure, and one word of God must be preached. Where that is missing it is not the church but the devil's school.<sup>38</sup>

We must remain loyal to Scripture in our preaching especially because every corruption of the Word immediately influences the lives of people.<sup>39</sup>

As much as we are to be concerned to preach the pure Word, so much must we be zealous in preaching Christ, for Christ and the gospel are central in Scripture.

The Gospel teaches nothing but Christ; the Scriptures have nothing but Christ. He who does not recognize Christ may hear the Gospel or carry the book in his hand, but he does not have understanding. And to have the Gospel without understanding is to have no Gospel; and to have the Scriptures without understanding Christ is not to have the Scriptures.<sup>40</sup>

Because Christ is so central in the Scriptures, Lutner boldly declares that they "...contain nothing more than Christ and Christian faith."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., XXVI, 35

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., XV, 358; XVI, 101; XXVI, 35 f.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., X, 366.

<sup>41</sup>W. A., VIII, 236. In Luther's view "in the whole Scripture there is nothing else but Christ, either in plain words or involved words." W. A., XI, 223. 1 f; X. 1; LXXXI, 1 f. "...the Old Testament are the swaddling clothes and manger where He was wrapped and laid. They truly contain Him, speak only of Him, and give testimony only of Him, and are His certain signs as He Himself says, John 5, 39." W. A., X, 576. 12 ff.



By this thought Luther does not mean to discredit the value of the Law. On the contrary, he contends that God has instituted two ministries of preaching, the Law and the Gospel, and both of these are the words of God.<sup>42</sup> Correctly understood, the Law serves the Gospel.

When God begins to justify a man, first He condemns him, and him whom He wills to build up, He destroys; whom He wills to heal, He smites; whom to make alive, He kills.... In a word, God works His strange work, in order that He may work His own work.<sup>43</sup>

Again Luther declares:

For just as the work of God is twofold, namely, proper and strange, so also the office of the Gospel is twofold. The proper office (opus proprium) of the Gospel is to proclaim the proper work of God, i.e., grace.. ..But the strange work of the Gospel (opus alienum) is to prepare people perfect for the Lord, that is, to reveal sins and to pronounce guilty those who were righteous in their own eyes....<sup>44</sup>

However, since all of the Scriptures point to Christ, Luther feels free to make the bold declaration, "The Scriptures have nothing but Christ."<sup>45</sup>

Since the whole of revelation is bound up with Christ and His redemptive work, the Christian pastor is in duty-bound "...to most thoroughly present this article concerning the person, office, and kingdom of Christ, of which Christ also Himself speaks."<sup>46</sup> Since Christ is the bread of life

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., XI, 98. 5 ff.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., I, 540. 8 ff.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., I, 113. 4 ff.

<sup>45</sup>E. A., X, 366.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., XII, 135, 138, 141.



Who gives life to the world, all sermons which do not hold Christ before us are not the bread and nourishment for our souls, and do not help in time of need or trial.<sup>47</sup> So insistent is Luther that above all things Christ be preached that he identifies the Word with the Gospel.

You ask, 'What then is this Word of God, and how shall it be used, since there are so many words of God?' I answer, the Apostle explains that in Romans 1. The Word is the Gospel of God concerning His Son, Who was made flesh, suffered, rose from the dead, and was glorified through the Spirit Who sanctifies. For to preach Christ means to feed the soul, to make it righteous, to set it free and to save it, if it believe the preaching. For faith alone is the saving and efficacious use of the Word of God, Romans 10, "If thou confess with thy mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe with thy heart that God hath raised Him up from the dead, thou shalt be saved"; and again, "The end of the law is Christ, unto righteousness to every one that believeth"; and, Romans 1, "The just shall live by his faith."<sup>48</sup>

But preaching Christ in Luther's language is never simply the historical presentation of Christ. It is rather the proclamation of the saving benefits of Christ, His suffering, death, and resurrection pro nobis, on our behalf, not His own.<sup>49</sup>

Because it brought the treasure of God's grace, Luther conceived of the sermon as a sacrificium laudis, "a sacrifice of thanksgiving, by which we confess and thank God that we have received from Him the treasure of His Word."<sup>50</sup>

Good homiletician that he is, Luther encourages us also

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., XXI, 203.

<sup>48</sup>Kerr, op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>49</sup>cf. Philip S. Watson, Let God Be God (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1950), p. 179. n. 29.

<sup>50</sup>E. A., IV, 496 f.



to select from the manifold words of God that which meets the needs of people.

Which is the Word of God, since there are so many words of God? No one can say that exactly, for as the sufferings and evils are many, so are there manifold words of God. One word has to be said to the fearful, another to the hardhearted. These you have to make afraid, those strong. When we speak of those in whom God's will is done, that is, those who are in pains and needs, we have to use the word that strengthens as Paul did in Hebrews 12, 1.<sup>51</sup>

However important the work of the preacher is, Luther is quick to point out that his power is limited:

All preachers are nothing more than the hand which points out the way, which does no more than stand still and allow (us) to follow or not to follow the path....They are not the persons whose duty it is to make anyone pious. God alone does that.<sup>52</sup>

However, even though the preacher can bring the word no farther than the ear, he should "...drive it and preach it; and stand alone with him into whose soul you want to drive it."<sup>53</sup>

He should do that for the reason that the word preached is no mere empty symbol; it is God Himself addressing the heart of the hearer,

...For God never suffers His word to go forth without bringing fruit. He is with it, and Himself teaches inwardly what he gives outwardly through the priest.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., XXI, 197.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., XVIII, 38.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., XVIII, 68.

<sup>54</sup>W. A., II, 112.



No matter who preaches the Word, whether Judas, the Pope, or the devil, "...people would thereby get the true Word,"<sup>55</sup> because where the Word is there are Christ and the Spirit.<sup>56</sup> The Spirit "speaks to the heart" and "impresses" the word upon the heart. He "touches and moves the heart."<sup>57</sup> The Spirit enlightens "with and through the word."<sup>58</sup> The power of God is "with it and under it."<sup>59</sup> The Spirit "comes with and through the Word and goes no further than so far as the Word goes."<sup>60</sup>

We have every reason, therefore, to call the Word of the preacher the Word of God. Luther says:

You do well to call the Word of the pastor and preacher, when he preaches, the Word of God. For the office is not that of the preacher and pastor but of God; and the word that he preaches is not the word of the pastor and preacher but of God. If we knew a church in the world in which we could hear God's voice, wouldn't we run to it? But you don't hear anything less in your own church at home from your own pastor.<sup>61</sup>

Against those who want to make a distinction between the Word of the preacher and the Word of God Luther says:

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<sup>55</sup>E. A., XXVI, 40

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., IX, 275, 229, 236; XI, 35; XIV, 326; XLVII, 57, 198, 221 f.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., IX, 9. 232, 274; XIII, 184, 286; VIII, 308; XI, 206; XXVIII, 298; XLVII, 353 f.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., XIV, 188.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., XI, 131.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., III, 376.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.



Let us not concede this metaphysical and philosophical distinction and difference spun out of reason: the human being preaches, threatens, and comforts, but the Holy Ghost works; or the minister baptizes, absolves, and distributes the sacrament, but God cleanses the heart and forgives the sins. No, never, but we judge thus: God preaches, threatens, frightens, comforts, baptizes, gives the sacrament, and absolves; as Christ says Luke 10, 16; Matthew 18, 18; Matthew 10, 20. When I go into the pulpit or the podium and preach or read, I am certain that is not my word, but my tongue is the pen of a ready writer. Psalm 45, 1; for God speaks in the prophets and God's men, as Peter says 2 Peter 1, 21. There God and man should not be separated according to reason or human judgment; but one should say this man, this prophet, apostle, or right preacher and teacher, what he speaks according to God's command and word and does, that God Himself does and speaks for he is God's mouthpiece or tool.<sup>62</sup>

What is true of the preached Word is, of course, also true with respect to the sacraments.

Thou hearest indeed a man when thou art baptized, when thou usest the Holy Supper; but the Word which thou hearest is not man's, but it is the Word of the living God. He baptizes thee, He absolves thee from thy sins, He commands that thou shouldst hope in His mercy.<sup>63</sup>

Luther considers it a weakness of our flesh that when we see only the pastor we feel that we hear only the voice of a man, "...and cannot manage to say that when I hear the word I hear a thunder clap and see the world full of lightening."<sup>64</sup>

He then pleads:

Would to God we could get accustomed to this idea and put our hearts in it, that we regard the preacher's word as God's word. For there we have no angel nor a hundred-thousand angels, but the majesty of God Him-

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., LVII, 39.

<sup>63</sup> W. A., XLIII, 667. 18; XLIII, 514. 31 ff.

<sup>64</sup> E. A., XLVII, 221



self who preaches there, even if I do not hear it with the ear or see it with the eye and hear only the pastor and voice of my brother or father and see only a man.<sup>65</sup>

Not only does Luther equate the word of God with the word of the preacher, but at the same time he identifies the Word of God with the saving power of God. He says, for example:

The Word is a divine and eternal power. For even if the voice or speech vanishes, the kernel that is the understanding, the truth that is contained in the voice remains; thus if I set a cup to my mouth in which there is wine, I drink in the wine even if I do not swallow the cup with it. So is also the Word that the voice brings: it falls into the heart and becomes alive, although the voice stays outside and vanishes; hence it is a divine power. Yes, it is God Himself.<sup>66</sup>

Through, with, and under the word<sup>67</sup> God Himself is building and extending His kingdom.

That is all his power and might through which he rules and carries out everything. We should like it that he rule like emperor or kings with public pomp and power and swung his fists amongst evil men. But he does not want it so, but now rules in a hidden and invisible fashion in our hearts alone through the word and through it protects and preserves us under our weakness against all the power of the world.<sup>68</sup>

Although the Word is quickly spoken and heard, "...when it falls into the heart it is grasped by faith. It cannot fall out....The foundation of hell cannot prevail against it!"<sup>69</sup> Through the Word people are brought to faith, strength-

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<sup>65</sup>Ibid., XLVII, 221.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., LI, 377. In W. A., XI, 33. 8 f. Luther calls the Sacraments works of God.

<sup>67</sup>E. A., XIV, 188; XI, 131; XII, 300.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., LI, 160.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., LIX, 377.



ened in faith and kept with the true doctrine so that they can finally hold out against every attack of devil and world.<sup>70</sup> The Word "...works with power to sweep away the regime of the devil like the tide of the Elbe sweeping away chaff."<sup>71</sup> Wherever the Word of God is in use, there the Holy Spirit is always present "...who tells us in our hearts that we know that it is thus in the truth and not otherwise.... The Holy Spirit giveth us a witness in our spirit, so that man cometh so far that he feeleth that it is thus and that he hath no doubt at all but that it is certainly thus."<sup>72</sup>

Together with his emphasis on the role of the preacher and the activity of God through preaching, Luther emphasizes also the responsibility of the hearer.

Listen to God, God must teach thee; He must do both for thee, preach to thee and give to thee....To this there must also be added: that thou must become God's pupil; otherwise thou dost not believe, if He doth not give Word and faith.<sup>73</sup>

He has little patience with those who want to neglect the hearing of the Word on the ground that they can read it. He is enough of a student of human nature to know that if they will not hear it they will not read it either. But he adds:

...if they do, it is not as fruitful and powerful as the word is through the public preaching and mouth of the preacher whom God has called and ordained....<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>Ibid., XXVIII, 93.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., XLVIII, 205.

<sup>72</sup>W. A., XLV, 22.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., XXXIII, 165.

<sup>74</sup>E. A., IV, 401.



He reminds those who despise his preached Word that on judgment day they cannot excuse themselves by saying, "Oh, I thought it was the human word of a poor chaplain or village parson....for it is God's Word, you have heard God Himself..."<sup>75</sup>

Instead of despising the Word, man is in duty-bound to hear and meditate upon it.<sup>76</sup> And this for the reason that "the Holy Ghost works no place where he has not come as through a pipe into the heart."<sup>77</sup> Christians are therefore to prize highly the spoken Word as the Word of God and are not to "let it go in one ear and out the other."<sup>78</sup> Rather are we to experience, try, and feel the Word, "and in this experience the Holy Spirit teaches us in his own school..."<sup>79</sup>

Luther emphasizes also that the word must be apprehended by a personal faith. "...I must know and make certain to whom the Word of God is addressed....It must strike me."<sup>80</sup> In and through the Word, God confronts a man with the inescapable alternative of faith or unbelief.<sup>81</sup> It is the kind of Word that calls for a decision and a commitment. He remarks:

You yourself must decide; your neck is at stake.  
Therefore, unless God says to your heart: this is

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<sup>75</sup>Ibid., XLVII, 57.

<sup>76</sup>W. A., II, 509, 95, 112, 453; I, 698.

<sup>77</sup>E. A., XV, 415.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., LII, 287.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., XLV, 215 f.

<sup>80</sup>W. A., XXIV, 12-13.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., X, 331. 11 ff.



God's Word, you cannot comprehend it....If you do not feel it, you do not have faith, but the word merely hangs in your ears and floats on your tongue as foam lies on the waters.<sup>82</sup>

Hearers of the Word are to believe the Word because everything that the faithful teacher does "...according to God's command with teaching, preaching, comforting, reprimanding, baptizing, communing, and absolving, that all God Himself does through and in us as His tools."<sup>83</sup>

But faith for Luther is not simply the acceptance of something as true. It is rather fiducia, the response of the heart to the Word of Christ, "...so that I do not only say: 'Christ is God and man,' but I glory that Christ is mine, all that is His is mine."<sup>84</sup> Elaborating on this point Luther says:

We should note that there are two ways of believing. One way is to believe about God, as I do when I believe that what is said of God is true;...This faith is knowledge or observation rather than faith. The other way is to believe in God, as I do when I not only believe that what is said about Him is true, but put my trust in Him, surrender myself to Him and make bold to deal with Him, believing without doubt that He will be to me and do to me just what is said of Him."<sup>85</sup>

By faith a man enters into a new relationship with God. "Christ and all He has...are given to us....The Holy Ghost will give Him into your heart so that He may be your own."<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup>Ibid., X, 335, 23.

<sup>83</sup>E. A., LVII, 73.

<sup>84</sup>W. A., XI, 109, 6 ff.

<sup>85</sup>Works of Martin Luther, II, 368.

<sup>86</sup>Gospel Sermon, Pentecost Sunday (Lenker edition, XII, 16 f.), in Kerr, op. cit., pp. 67 f.



Stressing the communion with Christ that is established through faith, Luther asserts:

But the true faith makes thee and Christ almost one person (quasi unam personam), so that thou art not separated from Christ, rather that thou art vitally bound up with Him, and, so to speak, so united with Christ through faith, as to be one flesh with Him. Faith is a firm assent by which thou dost lay hold on Christ, so that Christ is the object of faith, or rather not the object, but if I may put it so -- in faith itself Christ is present.<sup>87</sup>

United to Christ by faith "...we do not live, speak and act, but Christ lives, acts and speaks in us; because what we do and say is accomplished by His acting within us and impelling us."<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup>W. A., XL, 285.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., IV, 646.



## CHAPTER V

### GOD'S ACTIVITY THROUGH PREACHING

It may be well at this juncture to describe briefly just what it is that God is seeking to accomplish in His encounter with man through the spoken Word of the preacher. For if we understand clearly what objectives God has in view for man through the preached Word, we will see clearly what the goals of the sermon really are.

In a word, the design of God through preaching is to give Life to those who do not possess it and to sustain Life in those who do. Although man was originally created with life so that he might live in a harmonious relationship with God and man, yet the fact of history is that man by sin rebelled against the rule and Lordship of God in his life, and death came by sin.<sup>1</sup> The stark fact of the matter is that Adam's rebellion diseased the human race with sin. As a consequence death passed upon all men. Paul says this in so many words in Romans 5:15: "Wherefore as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."

This condition of death in which men are by nature manifests itself in a number of ways. First of all, man by nature

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<sup>1</sup>Genesis 2:17.



is without a true fear, love, and trust in God as Lord. In fact, "...the carnal mind is enmity against God."<sup>2</sup> Under the curse of death, man is spiritually impotent, so that he cannot restore himself to fellowship with God.<sup>3</sup> Utterly incapable of obtaining Life for himself, man left to himself is subject to eternal death, eternal separation of his body and soul from God.<sup>4</sup>

Now the glorious truth of the Gospel is just this that God, prompted only by His grace, acted again in history to restore man to His fellowship. He carried out this work of supreme love through His Son, the Word made flesh.<sup>5</sup> Jesus, the very Son of God, for us and for our salvation was born under the law, and though tempted as we are, yet fulfilled the Law of God perfectly for us.<sup>6</sup> But more, as the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world, He redeemed us from the curse of the Law by being made a curse for us.<sup>7</sup> As the great High Priest He once and for all entered into the holy place and poured out His life's blood as a cover-

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<sup>2</sup>Romans 8:7. Brunner says: "Sin is not a state of absence of relation, but it is a negative relation, the negative of an original positive relation to God." Emil Brunner, Revelation and Reason, trans. from the German by Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1946), p.26.

<sup>3</sup>I Cor. 2:14.

<sup>4</sup>Isaiah 66: 24; Mark 9:43 ff; Matt. 25:41 ff.

<sup>5</sup>John 1: 1-14.

<sup>6</sup>Romans 5:19; Gal. 4:4.

<sup>7</sup>John 1:29; Gal. 3:13.



ing for the sins of the world.<sup>8</sup> Signalling His acceptance of the sacrifice of Christ by raising Him from the dead, "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them."<sup>9</sup> Jesus, therefore, by His life and death and resurrection abolished death and brought life and immortality to light.<sup>10</sup> He lived true to the purpose of His mission. "I am come that they might have Life and that they might have it more abundantly."<sup>11</sup>

Now this Life which Christ brought to light God offers and gives to men through Word and Sacrament. The Word together with the Sacraments are the means of grace through which the Spirit gives life. Paul declares: "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth."<sup>12</sup> Similarly the apostle Peter declares: "Being born again not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible by the Word of God which liveth and abideth forever."<sup>13</sup>

The Word of preaching, then, is the very Word of God<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Hebrews 7:26-27; Hebrews 9.

<sup>9</sup>2 Cor. 5:19.

<sup>10</sup>2 Tim. 1:10.

<sup>11</sup>John 10:10

<sup>12</sup>Romans 1:16.

<sup>13</sup>1 Peter 1:23.

<sup>14</sup>1 Peter 1:25; 1 Thess. 1:8.



through which God the Holy Spirit gives life to men. This is his activity in the world today; this is His work through the Word. Through the Word the Spirit of God is ever at work convicting the world of sin, righteousness and of judgment.<sup>15</sup> Through the word He shines in men's hearts to give them the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.<sup>16</sup> He restores them to fellowship with God, makes them sons of God, and heirs of eternal life. He works in them that faith by which they acknowledge Christ as Lord.

Once the Holy Spirit has worked this faith in a man's heart, he is a new creature.<sup>17</sup> He has passed from death to life. He is now dead to the life he lived before his conversion and his life is now hid with Christ in God.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> John 16:7-11.

<sup>16</sup> 2 Cor. 4:6. Various words are used to describe this activity of the Spirit: *δηλοῦν; γνωρίζειν, λαλεῖν, φωτίζειν.*

<sup>17</sup> Brunner, therefore, is doubtless correct when he declares: "Faith, therefore, is not merely 'believing something' but faith is a real happening which grips the whole person: coming into fellowship with the Redeemer, a genuine participation in His resurrection life. Faith means to be born again to a new life, to walk in the Spirit, to become implanted in Christ, to become a member of His body. Faith is, therefore, a genuine alteration of a person; indeed a transformation of the person." Emil Brunner, The Divine-Human Encounter, trans. from the German by Amandus W. Loos (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1943), p. 152.

<sup>18</sup> Col. 3:13.



Christ now lives in him and his body is the temple of the Holy Ghost.<sup>19</sup> This faith which he receives is not a dead thing, but a living, active thing. He now desires out of love for God to seek the glory of God and the welfare of his neighbor.<sup>20</sup> Although the converted man is in Christ, yet the remnants of the old life remain. He is, to use Luther's phrase, simul justus et peccator. Life for the Christian is a battle ground between the flesh and the spirit.<sup>21</sup> The business of the Christian life, therefore, is the putting off of the old man and the putting on of the new man.<sup>22</sup>

But the Holy Spirit is also at work through the Word in those that believe. Christ gave His disciples the assurance that He would not leave them comfortless, but that he would send the Holy Spirit to guide them into all truth. The process by which the Holy Spirit works in the heart of the regenerate is called edification, or as Luther terms it Besserung.<sup>23</sup> Through the Gospel the Spirit causes us to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>1 Cor. 6:19; Gal. 2:20.

<sup>20</sup>2 Cor. 5:14-17.

<sup>21</sup>Gal. 5:17-26.

<sup>22</sup>Col. 3:1-17; 1 John 2:15-16; 1 Peter 5:6-9; Eph. 4:25-5:16; 6:12.

<sup>23</sup>Romans 14:19; 15:2; 1 Cor. 14:3,26; 2 Cor. 12:19; Eph. 4:12,29. For a good discussion of the concept of edification see Martin Reu, Homiletics, trans. from German by Albert Steinhäuser (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1924), pp. 98-128.

<sup>24</sup>Eph. 4:15; 1 Peter 2:2; 2 Peter 3:18.



On the one hand, the Spirit leads us to a fresh appropriation of Jesus as Savior and Lord so that the bond of our fellowship with Christ is strengthened. On the other hand, He causes us to grow in the expression of our love to God and man. This activity within the Christian the Scriptures term growth.<sup>25</sup>

This then is the goal of God's activity through the word of preaching: the overthrow of the reign of death in a man by the giving of Life in communion with Christ and the sustaining of that life of faith in the child of God. Paul in 2 Corinthians 2:15-16 gives his definition of preaching when he says: "I live for God as the fragrance of Christ breathed alike on those who are being saved and on those who are perishing, to the one a deadly fragrance that makes for death, to the other a vital fragrance that makes for life."<sup>26</sup> If this is the objective of the Spirit, it must be the goal also of Christian preaching. The sermon must remain the medium through which this saving activity of the Spirit of God may work. How this works out in the sermon itself we shall endeavor to discuss in the following pages.

At the moment, however, it is well to point out that

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<sup>25</sup>2 Cor. 9:10; Eph. 4:15; 1 Thess. 3:12; 1 Peter 2:2; 2 Peter 1, 5:3.18.

<sup>26</sup>The Bible, trans. James Moffatt (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950). It is interesting to note that 2 Corinthians 2:12-6:10 is a magnificent exposition of the preacher's task.



preaching dare not be sidetracked to follow other goals. The danger of doing just that is more real than imaginary. The social Gospel movement, as identified in Rauschenbusch and Gladden, is a glaring evidence of the shift away from implanting the Life in Christ in men's hearts to a discussion merely of social, political, and ethical problems. Shailer Matthews correctly observes: "A danger to which Protestantism in America is exposed is that its churches shall become mere agents of social service."<sup>27</sup> Reu points out the fatal weakness in turning the sermon into a discussion of political, social, or psychological problems:

When this is done, man usurps the place of God, human wisdom the place of divine revelation, Law the place of Gospel, human merit the place of grace, the temporal the place of the eternal, the body the place of the soul. What remains is but natural religion and natural morality, so that one might well inquire why Christ needed to come or to send out His apostles into the world.<sup>28</sup>

Preachers of the Gospel must, therefore, ever remember that the goal of the sermon is the redemptive deed, the implanting of Life with Christ in hearts of men dead in trespasses and sins. Their business is not to reform politics but to reform the politicians, not to reform society but to make social leaders who have the mind of Christ. To use Mrs. Browning's homely phrase, "We are not seeking to move humanity to a cleaner style."<sup>29</sup> The goal of the sermon is not mere reformation but regeneration.

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<sup>27</sup>Reu, op. cit., p. 51

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>29</sup>Paul Scherer, For We Have This Treasure (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1944), p. 117.



That's what Christianity is for. It was never a philosophy. It was never a code of ethics. It was always the offer of power, you took it or you left it. Precisely at the point where you liked the old least, you could have the new. Up and down the streets for twenty centuries the Gospel has been hawking its wares. That is what it's about. And it is about nothing else.<sup>30</sup>

Inveighing against the social Gospel, is, of course, not the same as denying that the Gospel has social implications. The Word of God has much to say about the relationship of husbands and wives, parents and children, employers and employees, and citizens and government.<sup>31</sup> And the preacher in his sermons has the responsibility to spell out for people what God expects of Christians in social relationships. The evil of the social Gospel is that it does not preach the Gospel of redemption as the means to remake men's lives. The Christian Gospel, on the other hand, has as its goal the regeneration of the individual through the Word of God.

Once one catches the vision of the sermon as the medium for the remaking of men's lives and of the preacher as a partner with God in this activity, preaching itself will never be dull, but a thrilling privilege to which the preacher cannot but give his best efforts.

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>31</sup>e.g., Eph. 4-6; Romans 13.



## CHAPTER VI

### THE PREACHER AS HERALD OF THE WORD

Certainly everything that has been said about the Word of God thus far should speak directly to those who have the task of being bearers of the Word of God to men. Perhaps one of the great needs today is, to use Farmer's expression, "the rediscovery of preaching."<sup>1</sup> Farmer voices this judgment:

...The preaching in our church is so often much more foolish, much less effective than it need be because preacher does not...work with that maximum concentrated purpose which would insure the results from the perception that in preaching God may be seeking an encounter with men and women of an unspeakably critical kind, that in it the whole historic, saving purpose of God is seeking temporarily to focus itself.<sup>2</sup>

If the sermon is the medium through which God is seeking to establish a living relationship with men, then the man behind the sermon assumes a strategic significance. In discussing the role of the preacher it is well to avoid either of two extremes. On the one hand, we should not so over-emphasize the work of the Spirit as to discount the personality of the herald nor the message which he brings to men in his sermon. On the other hand, we must guard against stress-

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<sup>1</sup>Herbert H. Farmer, The Servant of the Word (London: Religious Book Club, 1942), p. 32.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.



ing the techniques of preaching to such an extent as practically to deny the operation of the Holy Spirit by making the sermon merely a human encounter and its success dependent upon human powers of persuasion. Here we must maintain both the value of the preacher as voice and the value of the Spirit as the divine power operative through the Word.

Certainly the Scriptures do not minimize the role of the preacher. Throughout the Old Testament era God used men, Moses and the prophets, to reveal Himself to men. Their "thus saith the Lord" was the instrument of God Himself by which He revealed Himself to men in His judgment and mercy.

Similarly also the New Testament stresses the importance of the preacher as the mouthpiece of God in His saving address to men. After training His disciples Jesus sent them forth with the command: "Ye shall be witnesses unto Me."<sup>3</sup> As witnesses they were to testify to the saving activity of God in their own lives. He sent them forth as heralds of God to proclaim to all the world the message of the kingdom: it has come, it is coming, it will come. What they had heard in secret they were to shout from the rooftops. Their business was to preach repentance and remission of sins in His Name.<sup>4</sup> Paul himself describes the strategic importance of the preacher when he says: "Now then, we are

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<sup>3</sup>Acts 1:8.

<sup>4</sup>Luke 24:47.



ambassadors for Christ...,<sup>5</sup> men commissioned by Christ Himself, representatives of Christ to men, with all the authority of Christ behind them. Moreover, he adds, "God has committed unto us the Word of reconciliation."<sup>6</sup> Their task was to lodge in men's hearts the Word that not only declares men reconciled, but which at the same time reconciles men to God. As God's plenipotentiaries they were to beseech men "...as though God did beseech you by us,...be ye reconciled to God."<sup>7</sup>

This is still the role of the Christian preacher today. He is God's middle-man, channeling the treasures of God's grace to needy men. Preaching is in the words of Phillips Brooks "truth through personality."<sup>8</sup>

Pastors are not merely letter carriers, simply repeating what has been written more than a thousand years ago. They are ambassadors, called to make God's Word a living event in the contemporary context of life.<sup>9</sup>

Like Ezekiel of old the preacher is to take the roll and eat it and out of the abundance of the strength which he has received from it, he is to minister to others. He is to become so familiar with the treasures of God's grace that as he

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<sup>5</sup>2 Cor. 5:20.

<sup>6</sup>2 Cor. 5:19.

<sup>7</sup>2 Cor. 5:20.

<sup>8</sup>Phillips Brooks, Lectures on Preaching (London: H. R. Allerton, 1904), p. 8.

<sup>9</sup>H. T. Lehmann, Heralds of the Gospel (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1953), p. 70.



preaches, his very words will be the instrument of the Spirit to lead others to see as he sees, to feel as he feels, to find Life as he himself has found it.

The first requisite for the minister of Christ, therefore, is that he be a saved man. The genius of apostolic preaching lay in this that the apostles were men who had encountered Christ and whose lives had been changed by Him. Their whole ministry was nothing more than a sharing with others of the benefits they had received from that encounter. St. John describes his ministry as a witness to the saving activity of God in his own life when he says:

Of what existed from the very beginning, of what we heard with our ears, of what we saw with our eyes, of what we witnessed and touched with our own hands,... we bring you word, so that you may share our fellowship; and our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.<sup>10</sup>

So closely did Paul identify himself with his message that he frequently referred to his message as "my Gospel."<sup>11</sup> So captivated were the apostles by their message that even in the face of threats of persecution they cried out with a boldness born of faith: "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>1 John 1:1-3, The Bible, trans. James Moffatt (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950).

<sup>11</sup>e.g., Romans 2:16; 16:25; 2 Tim. 1:8.

<sup>12</sup>Acts 4:20.



The apostles were not made preachers by theology but by a personal act and the experience of it, by a new life and not a new creed, a new power and not a new institution. There was indeed a new society, but it was made by the new power.<sup>13</sup>

The spirit of the apostles must be that of the minister of Christ today. He is to witness to men the things that he has seen and heard. Scherer emphasizes this point when he says:

I wonder at times if anything more is needed to catch the wistful stare of men and women in our generation, anything but the sure sound, as if one had been off on a journey and returned with news.<sup>14</sup>

He and his message must become identified. The preacher therefore is no neutral party. He cannot maintain the cold objectivity of a modern newscaster. He is an unabashed partisan to the saving revelation of God. In his preaching he is to witness to the condemning power of the Law and to the saving power of the Gospel. His deliberate intention must be to persuade men to be reconciled to God as he himself is.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>p. T. Forsyth, Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1907), p. 10.

<sup>14</sup>paul Scherer, For We Have This Treasure (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1944) p. 30.

<sup>15</sup>Illion T. Jones, Principles and Practice of Preaching (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956), p. 44.



To be thus taken command of so that our testimony when we go out to speak of Christ it is not ours at all but Christ's self-testimony - this is our vocation and the hope of our ministry.<sup>16</sup>

George Wharton Pepper, one of the few laymen invited to deliver the Yale lectures on preaching, points out that when the pew recognizes that all is not well with the man who is exhorting them, the message will have lost its penetrating power.<sup>17</sup> When asked what type of pastor was needed for a certain parish, Carlyle replied: "What this parish needs is a man who knows God otherwise than by hearsay."<sup>18</sup> And Nietzsche cried out: "These Christians must show me that they are redeemed before I will believe in their Redeemer."<sup>19</sup>

The preacher, therefore, must be infinitely more than a mere craftsman, a theological technician. His life must be a worship before it can be a ministry. He must know the deceitfulness of the other law in his members; he must know that the law kills and damns; but he must know for himself the grace of God in Christ that pardons sin, that comforts in sorrow, and that gives life and hope forever. He must not simply know about theology; he must know theology and the Christ who stands at its heart. Emil Ludwig, the noted biog-

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<sup>16</sup>James S. Stewart, A Faith to Proclaim (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), p. 47.

<sup>17</sup>George Wharton Pepper, A Voice From the Crowd (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953), pp. 23 f.

<sup>18</sup>Ilion Jones, op. cit., p. 60.

<sup>19</sup>Stewart, A Faith to Proclaim, p. 47.



rapher, once said that if an author hopes to make his subject live, he must "live with him, think with him, eat with him." He went on to add, "Unless you have a certain mad, furious and passionate relationship to your subject, you can never make him live in the minds of others."<sup>20</sup> Pointing out that a minister cannot afford to live on a fides non formata,<sup>21</sup> Forsyth declares:

The real archbishops are the archbelievers. If the church has not its chief believers in the pulpit, it is unfortunate....If the church is to be saved from the world, it is the ministers that must do it; and how can they do it but as men pre-eminently saved from the world? And no man has the seal of that salvation on him except by action - by thought and prayer which become moral action....If another than the minister carry that stamp in any church, he is its true minister.<sup>22</sup>

All that has been said points up the necessity for continuing study of the Word on the part of the minister of Christ. Praelat Issler's contention is correct that "humanly speaking, a smug 'I-have-already-attained' attitude on the part of the preacher means death to his message."<sup>23</sup> Rich as was Paul's knowledge of Christ Jesus, he nevertheless came to God like a beggar pleading:

...I count all things but loss for the excellency of

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<sup>20</sup>Ilion Jones, op. cit., p. 22.

<sup>21</sup>Forsyth, op. cit., p. 135.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., pp. 129 f.

<sup>23</sup>Praelat Issler, "Christ Speaks Through the Ministry," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXIII (July, 1952), 486.



the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His suffering....<sup>24</sup>

With this same desire for spiritual growth and power must every minister study the Word, all to the end that men may through his preaching come to know the Christ whom he knows and loves.

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<sup>24</sup>Phil. 3:8.10.



## CHAPTER VII

### THE WORD MADE RELEVANT<sup>1</sup>

It goes without saying that the sacred Scriptures must remain the basis for the sermon. And that for a number of reasons. First of all, the Scriptures are the revelation of God to man.<sup>2</sup> They reveal God to man in the series of individual revelations of God to men, culminating in the supreme revelation of His will in Christ Jesus, the Word made flesh.

Moreover, He has bound us to His Word. His command to us is: "If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed, and ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."<sup>3</sup> It is significant that in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, Jesus puts into the mouth of Abraham the words: "They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them; for if they hear not Moses and the prophets neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>This expression is taken from Edmund A. Steimle, "Preaching is the Word Made Relevant," The Lutheran Quarterly, VI (February, 1954), 16 ff.

<sup>2</sup>This concept has been discussed more fully supra, pp. 17-23.

<sup>3</sup>John 8:31.

<sup>4</sup>Luke 16:31.



Furthermore, the divine Word is the power of God unto salvation, the sword of the spirit, the medium through which men are born again unto a lively hope.<sup>5</sup>

Proper preaching, therefore, begins with the exposition of a text of Scripture. It is significant that when Luther restored to the Church the sola Scriptura principle, expository preaching returned to the pulpit.<sup>6</sup> And if we hope to confront men with God, ours is the task of going back to the source of God's revelation in the Word. We cannot hope to convert and strengthen men in the faith by any other means than by the revelation of God itself.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Romans 1:16; Hebrews 4:12; 1 Peter 1:23.

<sup>6</sup>"As is well known from a study of the history of preaching, the essay sermon has its origin in the 18th century when the syllogism of Aristotelian logic began to displace the evangelical venture of faith in theology. A rational rather than existential approach to the throne of God found its way into the services of worship and into the pulpit. This theological displacement was accompanied by a shift in homiletical emphasis from the textual to the thematic sermon form in preaching. In the 18th century and to a degree to the present, this resulted in a priority of the preacher's thoughts over the content of the text. The message of the text was made subservient to the preconceived theme or 'idea' of the preacher." H. T. Lehmann, Heralds of the Gospel (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1953), p. 43.

<sup>7</sup>Knox points out the following four elements in biblical preaching: 1) Biblical preaching is preaching which remains close to the characteristic and essential biblical ideas; biblical preaching presents these ideas not as mere ideas, but in the concrete context of the Church's life and tradition; 2) biblical preaching is concerned with the central biblical event, the work of Christ; 3) biblical preaching answers to and nourishes the essential life of the Church; 4) biblical preaching will be preaching in which the event is in a real sense recurring. John Knox, The Integrity of Preaching (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957), pp. 19-23.



Having selected a text, the preacher is bound to take reason captive and to hear the text out on its own terms. He is to try to think himself into the thought forms of the text by examining the words and by studying the relationship between ideas expressed in the text. In short, he is to try as best he can to ascertain precisely what the intended sense of the Holy Spirit is in his text.

In addition, the preacher has the added task of making the Word of God relevant to men's lives today. Our work is to make the timeless message of the Word of God timely in the lives of men. The sermon must continue to interpret the Word of God in terms of the lives of people. The searchlight of God's truth must cast its penetrating rays on the sores, ills, hopes, and fears of men's lives today. The timeless truth must leap the centuries and become a part of our time. The eternal Word must become a contemporary Word. It must come to men with the freshness of a first class letter that calls for a response. It is at that point that the eternal truth of God meets head-on a human need that a sermon is born.

This endeavor to help people solve their spiritual problems is a sermon's only justifiable aim. The point of departure and of constant reference, the reason for preaching the sermon in the first place, and the inspiration for its method of approach and the organization of its material should not be something outside the congregation but inside. Within a paragraph or two after a sermon has started, the wise preacher is tackling something which is of vital concern to them. ...One way or another, they should see that he is engaged in a serious and practical endeavor to state fairly a problem which actually exists in their lives and then to throw what light on it he can.



Any preacher who even with moderate skill is thus helping folk to solve their real problems is functioning. He never will lack an audience. He may have neither eloquence, nor learning, but he is doing the one thing that is a preacher's business. He is delivering the goods that the community has a right to expect from the pulpit as much as it has a right to expect shoes from a cobbler. And if any preacher is not doing this, even though he have at his disposal both erudition and oratory, he is not functioning at all.<sup>8</sup>

The danger to neglect the needs of the hearers in the sermon is more real than imaginary. There is a way of preaching doctrine for doctrine's sake instead of for the people's sake. Speaking of the tension that exists between preaching to people and preaching to doctrines Brunner remarks:

The preaching of the Word which demands obedience can never take place without correct theological doctrine, nor without correct doctrinal ideas; but this is not sufficient. Indeed, there is a certain tension between preaching as a form of personal witness that aims at preaching to the hearts and wills of the listeners, and the expansion and reformulation of doctrinal ideas. The more doctrine is emphasized, the less can it become a personal challenge. The overdevelopment of theology, in the shape of scholasticism, is always a sign that the personal character of the revelation is no longer rightly understood, but that, at bottom, the "Word of God" is being misunderstood in an overemphasis on the intellectual aspect of religion. The error of confusing orthodoxy, revelation, and doctrine, and also that scholasticism which carries theological analysis to an almost infinite extreme, are mistakes for which the Church has to pay.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Harry Emerson Fosdick, "What is the Matter with Preaching?" in Lionel Crocker and Louis Eich, Oral Reading (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1947), pp. 217 f.

<sup>9</sup>Emil Brunner, Revelation and Reason, translated from the German by Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1946), pp. 154 f.



In preaching to a doctrine, the goal of the preacher is the elucidation of a subject instead of the edification of the hearer. The end of the sermon is to demonstrate that a certain proposition is true, and the hearer is invited to assent to the truthfulness of the word spoken. It is more interested in a subject than in an object, more in eloquence than in edification, more in the utterance of the preacher than in the response of the audience. Such a sermon misses the mark because it is aimed only at the mind. It resembles a work of art which may be exact in its every feature, but which is cold as ice. In this type of sermon, truth becomes an end in itself instead of a means. Such a sermon informs but does not move the heart. Preaching in this fashion will always be a dreary monologue and not the dialogue between preacher and audience that it ought to be.

In his rather humorous style Halford Luccock tells the following story to illustrate the point that the sermon must begin with people's needs:

In his Life of General Sherman, Boyd Lewis records an incident in the battle of Shiloh where a teamster was struggling to drag a gun carriage up through the mire of a river bank. A wandering evangelist seized on that strategic moment to do some evangelistic work. He said to the teamster in a sepulchral voice, "Do you know who died on the cross?" Without looking up, the teamster replied, "Don't ask me any riddles; I'm stuck in the mud." A great many people are stuck in the mud these days, straining at loads beyond their immediate power. There is no lifting power in riddles and crossword puzzles.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Halford E. Luccock, Communicating the Gospel (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1954), pp. 87 f.



To show that the Word has relevance to life is therefore the ceaseless challenge of the preacher. Reinhold Niebuhr says that the problem with Christianity today is no longer whether it is credible or not, but that it merely seems to be irrelevant. Farmer is correct when he says that the major difficulty in preaching "...is the sheer remoteness of the Biblical world and the incapacity of most people to discover that it has any pungent or deep-going relevance to the present day."<sup>11</sup> In his recent book, The Cross and the Common Man, Dr. H. W. Gockel begins his first chapter with the account of a question a young actress raised. She said:

Pastor, I've heard you say again and again that Jesus died - and that, because He died, our sins have been forgiven. What I don't get is: what's the connection?<sup>12</sup>

What's the connection? That is the question thousands of people are asking for whom religion is hermetically sealed off from the rest of life. People have a right to know what the answer is, and we are preaching only when we show them the connection. Forsyth puts it this way: Our task "...is largely to assist the church to a fresh appropriation of its own Gospel."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Herbert H. Farmer, The Servant of the Word (London: Religious Book Club, 1942), p. 106.

<sup>12</sup>H. W. Gockel, The Cross and the Common Man (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955), p. 1.

<sup>13</sup>p. T. Forsyth, Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1907), p. 61.



If the sermon is to be directed to meet needs, it is important for the preacher to understand what the needs of man are. Educational psychologists are generally agreed that the needs of men fall under five heads: the desire for status (the desire to be recognized as a person of worth), of security, of affection, of independence, of achievement."<sup>14</sup>

In an interesting survey, Dr. Harold Ruopp collected the expressions of interest from some four thousand church attendants. His survey reveals the following: 48.7% were concerned with problems of the individual and his inner self. The problems they felt concerned the feeling of futility, disharmony, frustration, insecurity, fear, anxiety, loss of a sense of significance, life decisions about education, vocation, marriage, personal moral problems (arising from jealousy, hatred, greed, anger, sex, alcoholism, misfortune, death, suicide); 21.2% of the responses indicated problems with the individual in relationship to the family; 16.7% dealt with problems of the individual in his relationship to larger social groups and society; 13.4% were con-

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<sup>14</sup>Glenn Myers Blair, et al., Educational Psychology (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1954), p. 44. It is worth noting that educational psychologists interpret behavior in terms of the individual's attempt to satisfy his felt needs by either acceptable or unacceptable conduct. Life to the educational psychologist is a daily struggle to satisfy needs. The business of education becomes the task of helping the individual to resolve his needs in a socially acceptable and personally satisfying manner.



cerned with problems of the individual in relationship to God and the universe.<sup>15</sup>

Halford Luccock lists the following as the needs of the hearer: an impressive sense of insignificance felt by many; a sense of insecurity, of anxiety, and fear; a sense of emptiness; a sense of the futility of life and the absence of hope.<sup>16</sup>

James Stewart finds that people today are living in a state of tension between disillusionment and hope, between escapism and realism, between skepticism and faith.<sup>17</sup>

Although the wise preacher will deal in his sermons with the felt needs of people, he will at the same time recognize that people have needs which they either have never felt or have not been able to articulate. Knox is quite correct in declaring that the man who approaches the Bible only to find answers to problems people feel is in serious danger of being irrelevant. In this type of preaching, he declares:

The Bible is made to answer only our questions - that is, the questions we are consciously asking - and is prevented from answering the questions which are in the first instance its own but which, having been asked, prove to be our own deeper questions also. The points where the Bible is most relevant to the twentieth century are precisely the points where the original Christian message was most relevant to the first - but these are not for the most part points of agreement and conformity, but points of difference and confrontation.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Batsell Barrett Baxter, The Heart of the Yale Lectures (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1950), pp. 282 f.

<sup>16</sup>Luccock, Communicating the Gospel, pp. 75-102.

<sup>17</sup>James Stewart, Heralds of God (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1946), pp. 13-57.

<sup>18</sup>Knox., op. cit., p. 28.



When Jesus spoke with Nicodemus he aimed squarely at a need which Nicodemus had not felt when he said: "You must be born again."<sup>19</sup> Similarly Paul at Athens made it his business to show the Athenian philosophers the need they had never felt of knowing "the unknown God."<sup>20</sup> In fact, a large part of the preacher's task today is uncovering for people their underlying needs of which their felt fears and hopes are only surface symptoms. Among these needs which we must reveal to men through preaching is the need for repentance, the need for forgiveness, the need for using faith as a power.

But now the question of crucial concern arises: How can we preach so that the Word will be relevant? How shall we frame the content of our message so that the Word we preach will be the medium for the saving activity of God in the lives of men?

If preaching is viewed as God's address to man, then preaching itself must reflect the two-fold manner in which God confronts man: as the holy and just God and as the God of mercy and grace. This is just another way of saying that the staples of Christian preaching must be Law and Gospel.

Through the Law God confronts man. There He presents the attitudes and actions which He demands of His creatures. "Ye shall be holy as I the Lord your God am holy" is His

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<sup>19</sup>cf. John 3:1-15.

<sup>20</sup>Acts 17:23.



unyielding demand.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, in His Law God reveals Himself as a holy God, who must punish sin because He is holy. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die," is His verdict upon the sinner.<sup>22</sup>

The function of the Law, therefore, is, first of all, to reveal sin.<sup>23</sup> Through the Law God unmasks the hypocrisy of the man who presumes that by his own works he can merit God's favor. Moreover, it multiplies sin in the sense that it reveals to men as sin thoughts, words, and deeds which they never before conceived to be sin.<sup>24</sup> It forces every man to realize that before God there is none righteous.<sup>25</sup>

In addition, it brings him to the realization that because of sin he deserves death, the wages of sin. Offering him no hope in himself, the law finally drives a man to despair. Paul declares that when the Law came in he died.<sup>26</sup>

The Law, therefore, is the means by which God prepares the heart of man for the Gospel. Without first being made conscious of his need, no man will realize the significance of the grace of God in Christ Jesus. Before any man will want to see God in His grace, he must have seen God in His justice and holiness.

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<sup>21</sup>Leviticus 11:44.

<sup>22</sup>Ezekiel 18:4.

<sup>23</sup>Romans 7:7; 3:20.

<sup>24</sup>Romans 7:7; James 4:17.

<sup>25</sup>Romans 3:23; Psalm 14:3.

<sup>26</sup>Romans 7:9.



The Law, therefore, must remain the starting point, the point of departure, in preaching. This was the pattern of apostolic preaching, as Peter's Pentecost sermon demonstrates. Without attempting to tone down the awful truth, he charged his hearers with having crucified the Lord of glory. Once this indictment was driven home and had entered into the consciousness of his hearers, they cried out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"<sup>27</sup>

It would be a grave mistake to imagine that only unbelievers need the preaching of the Law. For even Christians have the symptoms of godlessness in their nature.<sup>28</sup> The Christian life is a struggle between the old man and the new man. The Christian too, therefore, needs the preaching of the Law in order that he may realize his sinfulness and be led to repent. In forceful language the Formula of Concord declares:

The Old Adam, as an intractable, refractory ass, is still a part of them, which must be coerced to the obedience of Christ not only by the teaching, admonition, force, and threatening of the law, but oftentimes by the club of punishments and troubles until the body of sin is entirely put off and man is perfectly renewed in the resurrection.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Acts 2:37.

<sup>28</sup>Romans 7:14-25.

<sup>29</sup>"The Formula of Concord," Triglot Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1925), p. 969.



In preaching the Law two cautions must be observed. One is that we do not speak of sin in such general terms that the individual cannot see his personal involvement in it. A mere preaching of national sins of corruption, shame, and vice will have doubtful value as a means of confronting the individual church member with sin. Sin is personal, and Christians must be confronted with sin in their own situation. David did not catch the significance of the story Nathan was telling him until the prophet said: "Thou art the man."<sup>30</sup> Because Peter involved his hearers in his preaching of the sin of crucifying Christ, they cried out: "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"<sup>31</sup> Similarly also must we speak of sins which our people commit. Vernon Boriac gives us a sample of such preaching:

We are sinners because we lose our tempers, quarrel with our wives or husbands and children. We are sinners because we cannot live in harmony with our fellow church members, even though we may pray for peace between the United States and Russia. We are sinners because we talk about our friends and neighbors and colleagues and competitors behind their backs and get a kick out of doing so. We are sinners because we bear grudges. We are sinners because we fudge on our income tax payments just a little. We are sinners because we eat too much, talk too much, drive too fast. We are sinners because God just does not enter into most of our everyday routine....<sup>32</sup>

Such direct preaching of the law will help people to realize, as Forsyth puts it, that "...we are not even stray

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<sup>30</sup>2 Samuel 12:7.

<sup>31</sup>Acts 2:37.

<sup>32</sup>Vernon Boriack, "Modern Preaching Toward Communicating the Gospel," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXV (December, 1954), 898 f.



sheep or wandering prodigals merely; we are rebels taken with weapons in our hands."<sup>33</sup>

Furthermore, in preaching the Law the preacher should beware of a carping, censorial tone. It is doubtful whether a critical tone and manner will lead anyone to repentance. Rather must the hearer sense that the preacher through the Law is diagnosing a spiritual condition which the hearer is to flee as he would the plague. The preacher's manner in preaching the Law must be that of the shepherd who wounds that he may heal, who rebukes that he may save. This was the characteristic of Paul's preaching. Although he spoke sharply to both the Galatians and the Corinthians, the overtone of his reproof was love.

If this be the attitude of the preacher, he can hope that his preaching of the Law will be the means by which the Spirit will convict the hearers of their sin and lead them to repentance.

Preaching the Law and driving man to self-despair without offering him the redeeming message of the Gospel is monstrous truancy in the pulpit. As concerned as we must be with diagnosing man's spiritual condition, so much more must we be concerned to offer him the one remedy for his malady, Christ and Him crucified.

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<sup>33</sup>Forsyth, op. cit., p. 38.



What moral realism finds at the dregs of life is guilt. And as yet the only effectual secret of guilt's treatment is the cross. The reality of life in Christ - and not Christ's beauty, pity, or self-sacrifice, but His love as God's holy grace, His moral mercy, His moral judgment, moral atonement, and moral victory of redemption. To that we must return if all the world go on and leave us.<sup>34</sup>

Man in his sin needs more than a pat on the back; in the depths of his own moral bankruptcy he needs God in His grace to forgive and restore him.

This proclamation of the gracious God in Christ is pre-eminently the message of the Savior and of the apostles. In all of his "I am's" Jesus confronted men in their need with Himself as the only and all-sufficient remedy. Paul preached like that, too. In Romans 3, after establishing the fact of man's inability to save himself, he confronted his hearers with the saving grace of God in Christ.<sup>35</sup>

Apostolic preaching and all true preaching of the Gospel is comprised of a number of facets. The theology of redemption begins with God. It is the story of the grace of God. In the human situation of sin and guilt and death God acted in Christ Jesus. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself."<sup>36</sup> "When the fulness of the time was come God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law."<sup>37</sup> It is important to emphasize the fact that God is the author of man's

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 128.

<sup>35</sup>cf.. Romans 3:21; 8:39.

<sup>36</sup>2 Cor. 5:19.

<sup>37</sup>Gal. 4:4.



salvation lest the preacher unwittingly create the impression that God was involved in man's atonement only after Christ offered Himself to God for us. This view, of course, is a denial of the fact that the just and holy God did not deal with us after our sins nor reward us according to our iniquities.<sup>38</sup>

Together with the theme of the God who acted, we must preach also the Christ who acted by giving His life a ransom for us. A right preaching of the Gospel is always a preaching of Christ Who died the just for the unjust that He might bring us to God.<sup>39</sup> From the lips of Christ and of the apostles we hear again and again the accent of the vicarious nature of Christ's life and death.<sup>40</sup> "He loved me and gave Himself for me,"<sup>41</sup> is the Gospel according to Paul.

Closely allied with the proclamation of Christ's redemptive deed must be the preaching of the resurrection. In apostolic preaching these two thoughts are invariably joined.<sup>42</sup> This is understandable, for the resurrection is the vindication of every claim Christ made to divinity. Moreover, it

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<sup>38</sup>Psalm 103:10.

<sup>39</sup>1 Peter 3:18.

<sup>40</sup>Gal. 3:13; Rom. 8:32; 1 Peter 3:18; Matt. 20:28; 18:11; John 10:11.

<sup>41</sup>Gal. 2:20.

<sup>42</sup>Acts 2:23-24; Acts 3:15; Acts 4:10; Acts 5:30-31; 1 Cor. 15.



is the certification of the Father upon the work of Christ. It is the guarantee that the enemies of man, sin, death and hell, have been conquered once for all and that the world is once for all time reconciled to God. Furthermore, the resurrection proclaims the fact that we have a living Lord, Who lives to die no more, to rule in grace over His Church which is His body.

The Gospel proclaims not only the truth of the God Who acted once for all in Christ, but also the God Who continues to act through the very Gospel proclamation upon the hearts of men. The Gospel, therefore, must not only be told in the past tense but also in the present tense. For in the preaching of the Word, God Himself is active through His Spirit giving men the gifts which Christ won. The supreme gift He gives is the new life of faith.<sup>43</sup> Through faith we are new creatures in Christ Jesus.<sup>44</sup> By faith we enter into communion with God.<sup>45</sup> This fellowship gives us peace with God and continual access into the grace in which we stand.<sup>46</sup> It gives us security.<sup>47</sup> It delivers us from the bondage of fear.<sup>48</sup> It gives us life everlasting.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>John 10:10; John 20:31.

<sup>44</sup>2 Cor. 5:17.

<sup>45</sup>1 John 1:3; 2 Cor. 6:16; John 14:23; 15:1-8; Col. 3:3.

<sup>46</sup>Romans 5:1-5.

<sup>47</sup>Romans 8:31-39.

<sup>48</sup>Romans 8:15.

<sup>49</sup>John 3:16; 11:25; 6:47; Titus 3:7; Romans 2:7.



This is just another way of saying that when the Gospel is preached, God is at work creating faith and strengthening faith. That is why the sermon is really an act of God; it is God Himself regenerating and renewing.

However, in order that the preached Word of the Gospel may be a Word of God to man, the preacher has the responsibility of relating the truth of the Gospel to the needs of men. He must turn the searchlight of the Gospel upon the ills of humanity so that people see the connection between their need and the Gospel. Precisely here is the challenge of preaching. Here preaching either succeeds or fails. Our constant task as ministers of the Gospel is to learn to preach like Paul. Luccock says of him:

Paul did "sector preaching"; he dealt with the varied circumstances of life in the Judean and Graeco-Roman world - family life, the care of children, eating and drinking, the treatment of slaves - but from the circumference he drove a wedge of thought deep to the center, to the unveiling of God in Christ.<sup>50</sup>

The closer the rapport between the need of man and the riches of God's grace, the more will the sermon be a channel for the saving activity of the Spirit of God in the life of man.

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<sup>50</sup>Halford Luccock, In a Minister's Workshop (New York: Abingdom-Cokesbury Press, 1944), pp. 39f.



## CHAPTER VIII

### PREACHING FOR A RESPONSE TO THE WORD

If the sermon is an encounter between God and man, then the sermon must evoke a response to the Word on the part of the hearer. In the sermon the hearer is not a passive object, but a responsible subject. The sermon; therefore, must have the character of a knock on the door which calls for a response. In this way the sermon differs from the essay. The goal of the essay is to inform; its appeal is to the mind. The goal of the sermon, on the other hand, is the alteration if not the transformation of the human personality. Bearing this thought in mind the preacher like Paul must travail till Christ be formed in his hearers.<sup>1</sup> He must concentrate his attention deliberately on those techniques which will make his sermon a better vehicle for the Holy Spirit to edify those who hear through the Word. It is the purpose of this section of the paper to center attention on certain of these techniques which help to bring the Word as God's address to the hearer.

In terms of eliciting a response to the Word from the hearer, clarity is of first importance in the sermon. Paul had little patience with those who prided themselves in the gift of tongues. Here is his word of advice to the Corinthians:

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<sup>1</sup>Galatians 4:19.



If even lifeless instruments, such as the flute or the harp, do not give distinct notes, how will anyone know what is played? And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for the battle? So with yourselves; if you in a tongue utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said? For you will be speaking into the air.<sup>2</sup>

So also today, the sermon is no place for the preacher to exhibit his gift of tongues. The sermon demands intelligible communication. Short sentences, the use of nouns and verbs and the avoidance of too many adjectives, the concrete over the abstract, the use of the active voice instead of the passive, clear transitions, clear progress of thought - these are the qualities of style which ought to characterize the sermon.<sup>3</sup>

In the second place, the preacher must give considered attention to the factors which sustain interest throughout the sermon. One of the first laws of learning is that people learn only what they want to learn. In the light of this law it is of the utmost importance that the preacher select as his theme a goal which will be significant for his hearers. Any obscurity or irrelevance here will not elicit the interest of the hearer.

In the second place, if he hopes to hold his audience

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<sup>2</sup>1 Corinthians 14:7-9. Revised Standard Version (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1946).

<sup>3</sup>cf. Rudolph Flesch, The Art of Plain Talk (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1946).



the preacher must seek to establish common ground with his hearers. Often the preacher succeeds admirably in establishing common ground in his introduction, but between the introduction and the body of the sermon there is a great divorce. In the body the preacher goes his solitary way through exegetical niceties of the text. He expounds the doctrine of the text, but alas! often only to himself, because the people fail to realize the connection between the word of the sermon and the goal established by the preacher. The cure for this fault lies, of course, in reinforcing the goal of the sermon by showing the relevance of the word proclaimed to the theme.

Furthermore, the preacher must constantly seek for variety in his preaching if he hopes to elicit the response of his audience to the word. The bane of all preaching is sameness. Dullness is the sin against the Holy Ghost in the pulpit. Janice Pries declares:

Much of it (our over-simplification in preaching) has become a matter of utterance and re-utterance of spiritual cliches - a repetition of truths which no Christian doubts and which, generally and humanly speaking, would bring no unchurched, deeply thinking individual to the recognition that the church really has something to say - the most important thing that needs to be said in our time.<sup>4</sup>

Spurgeon declares that he owed his success more to variety than to profundity. Although books of rhetoric offer stand-

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<sup>4</sup>Janice Pries, "The Intellectual and the Artist in the Church," American Lutheran, XXVII (February, 1954), 11 f.



ard methods to secure variety,<sup>5</sup> yet, when all is said, the key to variety for the preacher lies in seeing the infinite variety of the Word itself. Sameness in the presentation of the Word results from a failure to see the peculiar angles from which the Word is presented in any given text. To find the niceties of thought contained in the text takes labor; and unless a preacher is willing to labor with a text, he is going to pay the price of triteness and ineffectiveness.

In the process of persuasion the preacher himself plays a vital role. His bearing, his tone of voice, the pitch of his voice, his gestures - all of these either attract or repel the hearer. Even a good sermon delivered ineffectively will not elicit the response that the Word of God deserves. The first requisite for the preacher, therefore, is utter sincerity of purpose. People will listen to the man who gives the impression by his whole bearing and manner that he is concerned to help them. At the same time, people will listen to the message if the preacher manifests the enthusiasm for it that conveys the impression that he himself is persuaded that the Word is vital, the answer of God to the need of man. The preacher will do well to heed the words of a man who succeeded in moving thousands, Adolph Hitler:

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<sup>5</sup>cf. Lloyd M. Perry and Faris D. Whitesell, Variety in Your Preaching (Westwood: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1954).



Only a storm of burning passion can turn people's destinies, but only he who harbors passion in himself can arouse passion.<sup>6</sup>

Again, Hegel declared: "Nothing great in this world is accomplished without passion."<sup>7</sup>

In discussing the subject of persuasion we must consider in addition to the personal proof of the speaker himself also the value of logical and emotional proof. Logical proof has value in the sermon in establishing whether a point is true or false. Jesus used logic devastatingly to answer the charges of the Pharisees. Paul too used logic extensively. For example, in Romans 1-8 he carries his reader along on the wings of logic as step for step he proves justification by faith. Certainly there is a place for logical proof also in the sermon. The preacher must by argumentation not only establish the truthfulness of the point which he is making, but, at the same time, he must counteract all contrary opinions.

But so far as preaching the Word with persuasive power is concerned, logical proof has its limitations. By logical argument we can only establish whether a point is true or false; we cannot through an appeal to reason move people to do that which they can be convinced is right. Hitler knew this, for in Mein Kampf he declares:

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<sup>6</sup>Adolph Hitler, Mein Kampf (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1940, p. 137, quoted in Webb B. Garrison, The Preacher and his Audience (Los Angeles: Fleming h. Revell Company, 1954), p. 219.

<sup>7</sup>Garrison, op. cit., p. 217.



Wrong conceptions and inferior knowledge can be abolished by instruction, but never obstacles of sentiment. Here solely an appeal to those mysterious forces themselves can be effective.<sup>8</sup>

Jones is correct when he says: "No message has a chance of exerting real influence unless it touches the emotional life of those to whom it is addressed."<sup>9</sup> This truth explains why many sermons are lacking in persuasive power. They are written merely to demonstrate that something is true. The goal of such sermons is merely doctrine for doctrine's sake. They fail in the measure in which they fail to link the doctrine to the saving activity God intends through the Word.

However, if we hope to call forth a response on the part of our hearers we must in addition to logical proof employ also emotional proof. For it is in the emotions that we make most of our decisions in life; it is in the feelings that we live, move, and have our being. There we make our response to the Word addressed to us.

We can reach the feelings of people, first of all, by indirect suggestion. In indirect suggestion we do not come out bold-faced and tell the hearers what they ought to do; we rather hint at the change in attitude or conduct which we desire to effect. It is here that illustrations in the sermons have such tremendous value. Through the use of ill-

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<sup>8</sup>Hitler, op. cit., p. 706 quoted in Garrison, op. cit., p. 214.

<sup>9</sup>E. Winston Jones, Preaching and the Dramatic Arts (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1948), p. 4.



ustrations we appeal to the imaginations of our hearers. We project virtues and vices into life situations and give the hearers an opportunity to react to them in terms of their own feelings. This was the method of Jesus. He was forever putting the truths He wanted to teach into people or into situations. Witness His frequent use of the expression: "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain man...." Certainly none will doubt that the parables of Jesus are far more effective in influencing conduct than are the Proverbs of Solomon.

Similarly must we, if we hope to speak persuasively, give people an opportunity to see with their imagination what they hope to become. Someone has said that a child goes outside to see what he can see and then becomes what he sees. It is interesting to observe that in treating the mentally ill, therapeutic psychologists seek to create mental images in the mind of the listener and seek to get him to respond to them.<sup>10</sup> All of this argues for the use of indirect suggestion through the use of illustrations.

As valuable in persuasion as the use of indirect suggestion is, there is also a place for direct suggestion. In this type of suggestion we tell the hearer precisely what change is expected of him on the basis of what has been said. John the Baptist, Jesus, Peter on Pentecost, Paul in speaking

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 19



with the jailor of Philippi all employed direct suggestion.<sup>11</sup> Normally this type of suggestion is used in the application of the sermon. It is presumption to preach a sermon and to let the application up to the Holy Ghost. Rather is the preacher to outline the pattern of change which the word of the text calls for. Focalizing the burden of the argument upon the hearer, he is to show the consequent alterations in Christian character which the word calls for. Here the preacher must be on his guard that his applications are actually warranted by the text. In addition, his watchword here ought to be "intensify rather than amplify."

Furthermore, in using direct suggestion, the preacher ought to suggest ways and means by which the duties suggested can actually be carried out. The plain fact is that people often do not know how to carry out in a practical way the duties of the Christian life. The disciples knew all right that they should pray, but yet they came to Jesus with the request, "Lord, teach us to pray."<sup>12</sup> People today realize what they ought to do, but at times are at a loss for a program to follow in doing what they ought to do. It is our task to show them how.

However, it is still true that a person may know what his duty is and how to perform it, but still fail to carry

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<sup>11</sup>Matthew 3:2.8; John 3:5-6; Acts 2:38; Acts 16:31.

<sup>12</sup>Luke 11:1.



it out. "Sheer exhortation is not the preacher's most effective emotional challenge."<sup>13</sup> But how shall we get people to surmount the lethargy of their flesh and actually to determine to do what they know they ought to do? Garrison suggests that to lead a person from his accustomed way of responding to a new path of response to the Word the preacher must present a vivid contrast between two courses of action.

"Distress of mind," says W. MacNeile Dixon, "is the great awakener of mind." It is when a person faces conflict in his own attitudes that he becomes a potential 'convert' to some new position. Emotional challenge is religion's most powerful tool for the awakening of a sense of crisis in the individual.<sup>14</sup>

In other words, for eliciting a response to the Word on the part of the hearer, the preacher must present alternatives with the plea that the individual adopt the right course of action. Lenski lists the following sets of alternatives which are employed in Scripture and which the preacher too can use in an effort to persuade people to do what they ought to do:

1. That which is of religious value is always to be preferred to that which is not of religious value.
2. Greater religious value is always to be preferred to lesser religious value.
3. That which is real in religious value is always preferred to that which is not real.
4. Condition must yield to person.

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<sup>13</sup>Garrison, op. cit., p. 227.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 226.



5. Person must yield to a great cause.
6. To prefer religious values to non-religious values is always to be commended.<sup>15</sup>

The New Testament rather consistently employs the love for Christ as the supreme motive for a change in attitude and conduct as opposed to every other love a person may have. Urging the Romans to live sanctified lives Paul says: "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service."<sup>16</sup> In 2 Corinthians 7:8 he writes: "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." When Paul urges the Corinthians to gather funds for the needy in Jerusalem he persuades them with the Word: "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor that ye through His poverty might be rich."<sup>17</sup> St. John too appeals to the love of Christ when he says: "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another."<sup>18</sup>

The apostolic method of preaching the Word must also be ours if we hope to elicit a response to the Word from those who hear. The Word of God must remain for us the means to

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<sup>15</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, *The Sermon* (Columbus: The Lutheran Book Concern, n. d.), pp. 262-286.

<sup>16</sup>Romans 12:1.

<sup>17</sup>2 Corinthians 8:9.

<sup>18</sup>1 John 4:11.



accomplish the goals of regeneration and edification. Ours is the task to use the message of the Word, the story of our God who acted once for all in Christ and who continues to act upon the hearts of men. Through this Word itself God will, as He has been doing through the centuries, fashion and nourish the kingdom of God in the hearts of men.



## CHAPTER IX

### SUMMARY

What is the Word of God? It is God at work revealing Himself to men through Word and deed, seeking to woo and win and keep for time and eternity the souls of men. Long before a word of Scripture was penned, the Word was. God was already then revealing Himself by direct Word and through the Word conveyed to men through the prophetic Word. The Scriptures themselves, inspired by the Spirit of God, are the record of God's saving activity in the past. But they are more. They are the medium through which God continues to act, convicting men of sin, righteousness, and judgment and guiding them into all truth.<sup>1</sup> When the oral Word reproduces the kerygma of the written Word, it is indeed the Word of God, whether it is spoken by the mightiest preacher or by the humblest Christian. Through that Word God is Himself at work.

The sermon, then, is not simply something said, not a mere recital of something once done. It is God at work in the world refashioning men's lives. Through preaching God is at work beseeching men to be reconciled to God.<sup>2</sup> He there confronts men with Himself in His holiness that they may see

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<sup>1</sup>John 16:9-13.

<sup>2</sup>2 Cor. 5:20.



their sin and in His grace that they may find Life. Through Word and Sacrament He gives Himself so that those who hear can say, "...of His fulness have we all received and grace for grace."<sup>3</sup> Knox is quite correct when he says:

The preaching of the Gospel is itself a part of the gospel. The true biblical preacher is not merely discussing events of the past (like a history professor), nor is he merely drawing edifying lessons out of life (like a moral guide or philosopher). In his inspired words the past event is happening again. True preaching is itself an event - and an event of a particular kind. In it the revelation of God is actually recurring.<sup>4</sup>

The fact that the Word of the preacher is the Word of God when it reflects the revelation of God in the Scriptures emphasizes the importance of the role of the preacher as herald and his responsibility both to God and to his hearers. Since it is generally true that the only Christ people will know is the Christ the preacher knows, the herald of the Gospel has as his first responsibility to God and man to meditate upon the Word that he may come to know better the love of Christ. Furthermore, he ought to be keenly conscious that through his preaching God is seeking an encounter with the hearts of his hearers. If he is, then he will give diligent concern to the content, the style, and the delivery of the sermon. Conversely, a failure adequately to prepare for the supreme moment of utterance is truancy of the worst sort.

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<sup>3</sup>John 1:16.

<sup>4</sup>John Knox, The Integrity of Preaching (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957), pp. 22 f.



The recognition that the preparation to preach is the preparation of an offering to God will put in true perspective the importance of that preparation. One does not merely manifest a certain contempt for one's hearers when one comes into the pulpit unprepared; one is guilty of the grossest irreverence toward God Himself.<sup>5</sup>

At the same time, the assurance that the Word of the preacher is the Word of God is reassuring to the preacher. When we are especially conscious of the fact that our own efforts are all too poor, we can find strength in the promise that God beseeches men through us. No preacher of the Gospel should forget the word of Christ to His disciples that the Holy Spirit would be in them and work through them. We have God's promise for it that if we plant and water, God will give the increase. Empowered by the assurance that God is at work through us, we can confidently heed the command of the Lord to His Church, "O Zion, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!"<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>6</sup>Isaiah 40:9.



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