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AN ANALYSIS OF MISSOURI SYNOD SERMONS BASED ON THE
CONTENT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT KERYGMA

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

by

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June 1952

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. A BASIS FOR DIAGNOSTIC STUDY OF PREACHING	1
II. THE UNITY AND DIRECTION OF THE PREACHING OF THE NEW TESTAMENT	4
A Message Directed to People	4
A Unified Message about the Redeeming Work of Christ	5
III. THE CONTENT OF THE PREACHING OF THE NEW TESTAMENT . .	11
An Overview of the Message	11
The Elements of the Message.	13
IV. MAJOR BARRIERS TO THE PREACHING OF KERYGMA IN THE SERMONS ANALYZED	26
V. CONTENT OF THE SERMONS ANALYZED	34
VI. DIVERGENCE OF THE PREACHING ANALYZED FROM THE MESSAGE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT	47
TABLE 1	35
GRAPH 1	49
BIBLIOGRAPHY	53

CHAPTER I

A BASIS FOR DIAGNOSTIC STUDY OF PREACHING

Diagnostic study of preaching based on a variety of norms has often been attempted. In the final analysis the norms always reflect the opinion of the person making the study as to what constitutes effective preaching. But Lutheran preaching has inherited its own inner method. The method of Lutheran preaching must be the method of the Word itself. The norms which actually give to the Word its structure dare not be disturbed by homiletical gadgets, devices, or emphases gleaming with the new varnish of the psychological laboratory. "Law and Gospel"¹ is not just a doctrine to be learned, but constitutes the Word's own form as it functions on people. If we are to search out causes for low vitality in any program of preaching, a critical study must begin by testing the preaching for a single function: does it communicate the Word of God to people? Or has some other concern of the preacher served to obscure the content of the Word as he conceives of the sermon? For example, is it possible that the very dogma which has helped to preserve the method of Law and Gospel has engendered a dogmatism in preachers which has made their concern one of articulating "doctrines," the exposition of loci strangled from the unity of the Word? Has a revolt against dogmatic restrictions, quiet rebellion against theory with a resulting trend toward

¹Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration, Article V.

non-theological practicality, led the unsuspecting rebels away from the Word as they failed to distinguish between dogma about the Word and the proclamation which is the Word? Has a passion for being interesting led to preoccupation with externals so that men forgot to say the Word? Has an earnest attempt to make the message personal finally neglected saying the message?

To conduct such a quest we have tried to answer two basic questions, the first of which seeks to determine the content of the Word. What are the elements which the apostles understood to be the content of the message they had to proclaim to the world, and in what relation to one another do these elements constitute the Word as a proclamation? Once it became clear that all the writers of the New Testament proclaimed a unified message concerning the act of God in Jesus Christ, the second question could legitimately be posed. Does the preaching of the Missouri Synod: a) proclaim the elements of the New Testament message? b) state the elements with a relevance for the people listening? To answer these questions the Concordia Pulpit was selected as the most representative printed sample of Missouri Synod preaching. The preaching of the Pulpit is not ideal. It probably represents a more careful statement of their message than the actual parish preaching of its contributors, since contributions result from the naturally careful effort of men who are aware that they write for the scrutiny of professional preachers. Furthermore contributors to the Pulpit should represent a higher proportion than normal of good preachers since they are selected by editors and requested to contribute.

Five volumes of the Pulpit were analyzed. An attempt was made to achieve a fair sampling with concentration on recent sermons. Two-

hundred-six sermons from the Church-Calendar portions of the following were analyzed: the first volume (1930), the latest volume available at the time of study (1951), and Volume X (1938); together with the first sermon of each contributor in Volume XVI (1945), and every fifth Sunday sermon in Volume XXI (1950). The types of texts represented were: two volumes on the Standard Gospels; portions of one volume on the Standard Epistles; one volume on the Wurtemberg Epistles; portions of a volume on free texts.

CHAPTER II

THE UNITY AND DIRECTION OF THE PREACHING

AND MESSAGE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

A Message Directed to People

The preaching of the New Testament is directed to people. In every sermon or condensation of preaching in the New Testament the preacher sees his task as more than repeating a body of material in the presence of incidental listeners. There is much use of the pronoun "you," and the message of preaching sweeps the hearer with it. "God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ"¹ and "Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning every one of you from his iniquities"² are typical of the New Testament's treatment of the hearer as the receiving object of the act of God in Christ. The message of the New Testament proclaims that Christ did something which bears direct relevance to the lives of the listeners. Therefore any preaching which claims to be a preaching of the Word of the New Testament must aim at more than rehearsing exegetical fine-points, more than stimulating imagination by making history vivid, more than convincing people that propositions are correct. Preaching, to be a preaching with the direction of the New Testament, must be a communication to human beings.

¹Acts 2:36.

²Acts 3:26.

A Unified Message of the Redeeming Work of Christ

The content of the preaching of the New Testament is implied in the word κήρυγμα. The word denotes the proclamation of an event,³ and focuses attention, not on the action of the preacher, but on the good tidings proclaimed.⁴ In the New Testament, the words κήρυγμα, εὐαγγέλιον, and λόγος Θεοῦ include the same content,⁵ and all of them, for the writers of the New Testament, are equivalent to the Old Testament phrase "the word of Jehovah." According to Kittel's Theologisches Wörterbuch des Neuen Testaments,

In the Old Testament we may frequently read of the Word of God coming to such and such a prophet. In the New Testament ... the expression 'Word of God' is from now on limited to the fact that God has spoken in Jesus.⁶

The apostolic writers thought of themselves as men devoted to the sole

³Archibald N. Hunter, The Message of the New Testament (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1944), p. 24.

⁴C. H. Dodd, The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments (London: Harper and Brothers, 1950), pp. 7-8.

⁵Hunter, op. cit., pp. 25-6; Alan Richardson, A Theological Word-book of the Bible (New York: MacMillan Co., 1951), p. 284.

⁶Quoted in Hugh Thompson Kerr, Preaching in the Early Church (New York: Fleming H. Revell, c.1942), p. 47.

task of proclaiming a single message: that in Christ's life, death, and resurrection God had dealt effectively with human sin. The words designating this task were virtually interchangeable.⁷

Because the preaching of the New Testament is essentially the proclamation of one act of God in history, the message is a unit. Preaching can never mean isolating segments of the story from their context, never outlining a theological system. The message of the entire New Testament is one history of the whole Christ who has lived and died and risen again to become Lord.⁸

The language of the New Testament has quite definitely but one single purpose, that of expressing that which has taken place, that which God has done in Christ. New Testament words are thus essentially like a mirror; they reflect the fact of Christ ... The words and sentences in which the message is framed are formed by men who are imbued with the fact of Christ. They never speak in order to communicate their own wisdom or any theological or philosophical ideas. Nor do they write with any aim of becoming well-known authors of famous books. Their sole purpose is that of

⁷Interchangeable expressions: to make disciples of all nations; to teach and preach Jesus as the Christ; to proclaim; this Jesus; the Christ; the Gospel; the Word of God; Jesus and the resurrection; the Word; good tidings concerning the kingdom of God; John's eternal life; Paul's Gospel; Christ crucified; the Word of faith; Jesus Christ as Lord; the unsearchable riches of Christ; Christ; Jesus; Jesus Christ; the Word of the cross; the faith; peace to you that were far off, and peace to them that were nigh; the mystery of the Gospel. Ibid., pp. 18-9.

⁸Hunter, op. cit., p. 25, quoting Fr. Kittel, Theologisches Wörterbuch des Neuen Testaments sub Kerysma.

handing on a message of a fact with which they are imbued ... The bearing witness to this act of God in history is the task of Christianity and of all Christian theology. And the more earnestly we take that into account, the more we shall find that the words and sentences of the New Testament language cease to exist for themselves and become, as it were, vessels of transparent crystal which have one sole purpose, that of making their contents visible ...⁹

Thus any preaching which claims relation to the apostolic Gospel must concern itself, not with selected facets of the story, not with the story and other things, not with morality or social reform or edifying discourse or melodious expression, but with the action of a living God dealing with human sin through the life, death, resurrection and exaltation of Jesus Christ.¹⁰ Other preaching material may be true and interesting, even stimulating, but it is not the message of the New Testament.

The preaching of the New Testament is the message of the entire New Testament. Those who distinguish between διδάχη and κήρυγμα should be conscious of the fact that the distinction concerns the form of the message and the state of its hearers, not its essential elements.

⁹Kerr, op. cit., p. 47, quoting Fr. Kittel, Theologisches Wörterbuch des Neuen Testaments sub Kerysma.

¹⁰Hunter, op. cit., p. 36.

Dodd believes that the epistles are διδαχή rather than κήρυμα because they deal with theological and ethical problems of Christians rather than with the proclamation of the message to non-Christians.¹¹ This may be true, but the message the epistles employ to discuss and deal with these problems is the message of the κήρυμα. The epistles represent detailed expansions of the κήρυμα at points which touch the everyday lives of Christians, and for this reason are a useful resource for recovering the apostolic κήρυμα, as well as for preaching material for today's pulpits. Thus, although the epistles are not in the strictest sense of the word preaching, their content is that of the preached message of the apostles, and will be utilized as such in our work of establishing the New Testament message.

As for the Gospels, they appear to represent expansions of the κήρυμα with the emphasis on the historical elements in the message.¹² It was thus that Mark, the author of the most primitive of the four Gospels, thought of his work. He opens his book by describing it, not as a life of Christ or a collection of memoirs or a list of the events which were most astonishing in the ministry of Christ, but as a Gospel, a preaching of the κήρυμα: "The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ."¹³ The evangel (εὐγγέλιον) was the same as the

¹¹Dodd, op. cit., pp. 8-9.

¹²Hunter, op. cit., p. 31.

¹³Mark 1:1; Dodd, op. cit., p. 47.

kerygma (κηρυγμα). Mark conceived of his book as an expansion of the preaching of the apostles. Examination of the outline of the Gospel of Mark reveals its correspondence with the apostolic kerygma,¹⁴ with an emphasis on the passion and death of Jesus corresponding to the emphasis on the cross in the sermons of Acts and the epistles. The other Gospels, following an outline roughly equivalent to that of Mark, represent statements of kerygma with expansions of various elements. Matthew and Luke exploit the element of fulfillment, a consistent emphasis in the kerygma, while the author of the Fourth Gospel is concerned particularly with the manifestation of the glory of Christ.¹⁵

The preaching of Jesus within the Gospels was likewise kerygmatic. Mark labels Jesus' message "Gospel": "Jesus came into Galilee preaching the Gospel of God and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God has drawn near: repent and believe the Gospel.'¹⁶

It is important for our purposes to note that the Church did not abandon the kerygma in favor of a different message for those who had been converted to the faith. With Paul, who was determined to know absolutely nothing among growing Christians except Jesus Christ "and Him crucified," the Church used the kerygma daily. Thus in creeds and liturgies we have what is perhaps a most primitive contact with the message of the apostles, preached not only to the world, but to the

¹⁴Hunter, op. cit., p. 31.

¹⁵Dodd, op. cit., pp. 52-69.

¹⁶Mark 1:14-5; Dodd, op. cit., p. 24.

Church;¹⁷

The primitive kerygma lived on. As the Church produced a settled organization of its life, the content of the kerygma entered into the Rule of Faith, which is recognized by the theologians of the second and third centuries as the presupposition of Christian theology. Out of the Rule of Faith in turn the creeds emerged. The so-called Apostles' Creed in particular still betrays in form and language its direct descent from the primitive apostolic preaching.¹⁸

Thus the primitive Church conceived of her life as a daily continuing in the "apostles' doctrine," the kerygmatic message of the atonement of Jesus Christ.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 74.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 73-4.

CHAPTER III

THE CONTENT OF THE PREACHING OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

An Overview of the Message

The preaching of the New Testament with its message of God's act in Christ had three principle heads:

1. A claim that Christ as Messiah was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (Acts 2:16; 10:43; Rom. 1:2; I Cor. 15:3-4).
2. A historical exposition of Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and exaltation (all conceived as one great act of God in Christ).
3. A summons to the hearers to repent and accept the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 10:43).¹

The same three elements may be discerned in Paul's summary of his message to the people of Corinth:² "That Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures ..." Here the message of the primitive Church (which Paul states that others too preach) is set forth as containing three heads:

1. Christ's death and resurrection fulfilled certain Old Testament prophecies (Messianic fulfillment).
2. Christ died on the cross, was buried, and rose again from the dead (historical exposition).

¹Archibald M. Hunter, The Message of the New Testament (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1944), p. 24.

²Ibid., p. 96.

3. This death was vicarious, for us, and was related to our sin (relevance to hearers is at the point of forgiveness of sin).

The same elements can be discerned in I Peter:

1. The Gospel of Christ is the fulfillment of prophecy (1:10-12).

2. Jesus suffered, died, was raised from the dead, and exalted to God's right hand according to the divine purpose and by the power of God; the judgment is immanent (2:21-4; 1:3; 1:21; 3:21; 3:22; 4:5; 4:17).

3. This work, especially His death, was for the redemption of His people from sin (1:18-20; 2:24).³

Mark's Gospel is an expansion of the historical elements of the kerygma:

1. The fulfillment of prophecy in the coming and work of Jesus Christ (1:2 f).

2. The life, passion and death, burial and resurrection of Christ (8:31-15:47).

3. Repentance (Mark is an exposition of the historical elements of the kerygma, yet he reports Jesus' appeal for repentance and faith as the relation of the Gospel to the hearers to whom it came (1:15).⁴

The Fourth Gospel presents the fixed outline of the historical section of the kerygma as we have found it in the sermons of Acts, chapters ten and thirteen. Thus the fourth Gospel too is truly a Gospel, a restatement of the kerygma in historical terms:

1. The ministry of John the Baptist, the anointing, ministry, and miracles of Jesus (fulfillment).

³Ibid., p. 34.

⁴Ibid., p. 31.

2. The arrest and trial, crucifixion, burial, and resurrection of Jesus (historical).

3. That men might have life (Jesus' own explanation of the reason for His coming).⁵

Likewise the outlines of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, with varying emphases adhere to the shape of the Message of the New Testament Church.

The three major heads contain subdivisions from which we have attempted to formulate a basis of kerygma from which to test the sermons in our study. There are eight elements as we have formulated them which constitute the message as it was formulated for Christians.

The Elements of the Message

1. Throughout the New Testament runs the assertion that the atonement is an act of God. For the writers of these books and the earliest preachers of the Gospel it was important that hearers be constantly kept aware that it was God who planned the shedding of the blood of His Son for men before the foundation of the world.⁶ Never is the New Testament §1 more freighted with urgent compulsion than when, in the Gospels of John and Mark, Jesus employs it to describe His work as God's purpose for Him.⁷ Therefore preaching should avoid picturing an inner opposition of the Godhead in the work of the atonement: God exacting a price for sin which Christ offers to pay; God pictured as pure justice and Christ as pure love. Instead description of the atonement must retain the New

⁵S. H. Dodd, The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments (London: Harper and Brothers, 1950), p. 69.

⁶Acts 2:23; Gal. 1:3 ff.; 1 Peter 1:18-20.

⁷Mark 8:31; John 3:14-6.

Testament's assertion that the work of Christ was a work plotted for Him by God.

2. The person and work of Jesus Christ as well as the breaking-in of the ἔσχατος which accompanied His appearance all happened in fulfillment of the prophecies of the Jewish Scriptures. The forerunnership of John the Baptist, the Davidic lineage, ministry, suffering, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Christ, the defeat of the powers of darkness, the end of the "present evil age," the dawn of the new age of the Messiah, all these witnesses fulfill the Scriptures and designate Christ as the One in Whom God is to bring about the Redemption of His people.

The fulfillment theme is strong in the sermons of Peter,⁸ which assert that the events of Peter's preaching were events all the prophets had described, and that in Christ as the Seed of David, the new Davidic kingdom of the Messiah had been established. The signs and wonders of Jesus' ministry are valid credentials of the Messiah.

Likewise for Paul and the author of I Peter, the fact that the death, resurrection, and glorification of Christ happened "according to the Scriptures" is a vital element in the message.⁹ Since the work of Christ happens in fulfillment of all that the prophets have spoken, there is more to be expected. God has visited and redeemed His people. This means that the ἔσχατος, the transition point from the "present evil

⁸Acts 2:16; 2:22; 3:18; 3:22; 3:24.

⁹I Cor. 15:1 ff.; I Peter 1:11; 1:20; 3:18-22.

age" to the "age to come," has arrived. Believers were already delivered out of the old age and were beginning to live in the Messianic age. Christ is Lord of this new age and angels, principalities, and powers are subject to Him. But more, at the consummation of the new age, He will come again as Judge and Savior. This too would happen in fulfillment of prophecy.¹⁰

Similarly the Gospels are concerned with picturing Christ's work as fulfillment of prophecies. Mark's Gospel records the ministry of Jesus in order to present Jesus' miracles and preaching as fulfillment. As the prophets had declared these things to be signs of the age to come, Jesus of Nazareth fulfills them. Peter's confession, "Thou art the Messiah," represents the summary of the impression the record of Jesus' ministry has been attempting to fix in the reader.¹¹ Matthew is especially concerned with tracing for the reader the fulfillment of prophecy in the events of Jesus' life, and the Gospel of John with its witness to the Messiah through John the Baptist, its designation of Christ as the λόγος of the Old Testament, its portrayal of the miracles as "signs" of the age to come, which manifested the glory of God in Christ, also underlines the important function of the theme of "fulfillment" in the message of the New Testament.

3. A serious attempt to bring people to recognition of sin, its nature as rebellion against God, its consequences in terms of guilt, and the necessity for removing this guilt in order to bring about fellowship with God: this is a major emphasis in New Testament preaching and writing.

¹⁰Dodd, *op. cit.*, pp. 13 & 44.

¹¹*Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

This is a point at which the relevance for the hearer of the Message of God acting in Christ is made explicit.¹²

Those who have not been brought to repentance are pictured as actually offering worship to devils to whom they belong, impervious to the stimuli of God and His Spirit, inimical to God and to the message of Christ's work on the cross, in a condition of guilt before God in which it is impossible to please God or to bring about a state of guiltlessness by observing the Law of Moses.¹³ The man who does not know or refuses to obey the Gospel of Christ is in a condition of death, sin, and is abandoned by God to destruction.¹⁴

The peculiar situation of the Christian is quite different. He is a man redeemed from sin. But the New Testament doesn't omit the preaching of sin to Christians. The condition of the man in Christ is fraught with tensions. He is free from sin, redeemed, ransomed, yet he is to look for the complete results of his redemption in the future. The victory of Christ over this world and its princes is final and irrevocable. Judgment has already been pronounced. Yet the devil still rules in the lives of men and evil still works havoc even in the Church of God. It is to the final manifestation of victory that the Christian is to look, to the judgment at which Christ will completely destroy all the works of evil, and God will reign alone in the lives of His people. For the present, the Christian is faced with a battle. In Christ he belongs to God, yet evil still surrounds him in a hostile world. He has been brought into the new age, yet remnants of the old age still cling to him. All of the

¹²Hunter, op. cit., p. 114.

¹³I Cor. 10:20-2; 2:14; Phil. 3:18,19; Acts 13:38-42.

¹⁴John 3:36; II Thess. 1:8,9; Rom. 5:8; Eph. 3:1-3; Rom. 1:18,19.

New Testament confronts this conflict realistically. Christians are constantly to be aware of the working of evil upon themselves.

The world, the present age or aeon¹⁵ with its concerns can choke the Word out of the heart of the Christian. Because the believer is not of the world, but of Christ, he can expect the same destructive resistance the world offered to Christ. His status on earth is that of a pilgrim while his life is hidden with Christ in God. But his members are in the world and he is apt to let himself slip into the world's pattern of living, to feel once more as though he holds citizenship in it.¹⁶

Because the Christian remains in this present aeon he finds that a part of him which belongs to this age and is, properly speaking, his no longer still attempts to influence his life and to return him to the old aeon. It is variously described as flesh by St. Paul,¹⁷ the lusts of the flesh by St. Paul, the author of Hebrews, St. James, and the author of I Peter,¹⁸ and the old man or the outward man by St. Paul.¹⁹

¹⁵The figure is used by Matthew, Mark, Paul, John, Hebrews, and I John.

¹⁶Matt. 13:22; Mark 4:19; John 15:18-9; 16:33; 17:14-5; Rom. 12:1-2; Col. 3:1-2; I Peter 2:11; I John 5:4-5.

¹⁷Gal. 5:19-21; I Cor. 3:3-4; Rom. 7:7-23; Rom. 8:5-13; Gal. 5:16-25.

¹⁸Eph. 3:14-8; Col. 3:1 ff.; Titus 2:11-15; Hebrews 12:1-4; James 1:13-5; 4:1-5; I Peter 2:11-12.

¹⁹Rom. 6:6-14; Eph. 4:21; II Cor. 4:16; Eph. 3:14-18.

It is thus that the New Testament is enabled to deal seriously with sin in the Christian without disregarding the uniqueness of his condition. It never assumes that the believer is unredeemed or totally sinful,²⁰ nor does it simply present doctrines of original and actual sin for the sake of review. Instead it recognizes the acute problem of the Christian hearer with his dual nature, delineates it, and attempts to deal with it by means of the message of God condemning sin in the flesh of Christ.

The element of the message which seeks to make hearers aware of sin in themselves is termed law by St. Paul. He delineates the function of this element for people. It is to be applied to make men aware of their condition of sin and need, to render people sensitive to the wrath of God for sin, and in short to render men conscious of their compelling need for God in Christ.²¹ Thus Walther sought to make this element axiomatic in Lutheran preaching. He quotes Luther who describes the function of the Law as that of creating in men a thirst for the Gospel.²²

It is not difficult to find this element of kerygma, the establishing of a conviction of sinfulness in the hearer, throughout the New Testament.

²⁰Walther was warning against this preaching when he wrote: "Thesis XVIII. In the fourteenth place, the Word of God is not rightly divided when the universal corruption of mankind is described in such a manner as to create the impression that even true believers are still under the spell of ruling sins and are sinning purposely." C. F. W. Walther, The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel, translated from the German by W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1929), p. 318.

²¹Rom. 3:19-20; 4:15; 5:20,21; 7:7-14; Gal. 3:19-24; I Tim. 1:8-11.

²²Walther, op. cit., p. 22.

Jesus spoke of sin and need to His hearers, calling them evil, unprofitable servants, and regularly pointing out in them specific sins.²³

The sermons of Acts invariably include a preaching of sin: "Him ye have taken and by wicked hands crucified and slain."²⁴

We have already shown how the epistles describe the sinful condition of Christians who find themselves influenced by the forces of the old aeon even though they no longer belong to the old age.

4. The death of Christ on the cross is an element of the message which is always accorded utmost importance. The sermons of Acts record it without exception. The Gospels place heavy emphasis on the narrative of the passion and death of Christ, corresponding to the emphasis given the cross in the Acts sermons. Mark devotes one-fifth of his narrative to the passion history, Luke about one-sixth, and Matthew about one-seventh.²⁵ For the writer of the Fourth Gospel the passion and death of Christ are critical as the hour of His glorification, and the judgment of this world.²⁶ The entire Epistle to the Hebrews speaks of the

²³Mark 7:14-20; Mark 10:19; Luke 17:7-10. Hunter, op. cit., pp. 91-2.

²⁴Acts 2:22-3; 37; 3:13-9; 4:10-12; 5:30-2; 7:50-4; 10:42,43; 17:23; 17:29-31; 24:25.

²⁵Dodd, op. cit., p. 52.

²⁶John 3:19; 12:31; 17:31.

sacrificial death of Christ, and I Peter proclaims the shedding of His precious blood.²⁷ St. Paul's summary of his Gospel in I Cor. 15 asserts that Christ died. He reminds the Galatians that Christ Jesus was publicly placarded before them as crucified.²⁸

5. That the death of Christ had to do with human sin is also integral to the message.

Once again, on this connection between the death of Christ and sin, our witnesses are unanimous. The New Testament writers had a common conviction that the death of Christ was for human sin.²⁹

The sermons of Acts declare that the forgiveness of sins is preached in His name.³⁰ For Paul it was an essential part of what he had delivered to the Corinthians.³¹ The death of Christ was a sacrificial death in which Christ suffered and died "on behalf of" (υπέρ) human beings in order to bring about reconciliation with God.³² Jesus

²⁷I Peter 1:19.

²⁸Gal. 3:1.

²⁹Hunter, op. cit., p. 103.

³⁰Acts 2:38; 5:31; 10:43.

³¹I Cor. 15:1 ff.

³²Rom. 3:24; I Cor. 5:7; Eph. 5:2; I Peter 1:2; 3:18; I John 2:7.

proclaims His death "on behalf of" (ὑπέρ) men: "This is my body which is given for (ὑπέρ) you;³³ "the Son of Man came to ... give His life a ransom for (ὑπέρ) many."³⁴ For Paul, Hebrews, and the Fourth Gospel, Christ's atonement is a representative act in which Christ suffers in the place of His people.³⁵ Thus justification must be an act of God's free grace, not a work of man.³⁶ The fruit of Christ's death for man is life, forgiveness, reconciliation, access to God, citizenship in the new aeon, fellowship with God and Christ.

6. The proclamation of the resurrection of Christ is another indispensable element in the message of the New Testament. Christ's resurrection is an act of God by which He declares Jesus ruler of the new age through the power of His death.³⁷ In the resurrection Christ is glorified; His deity is plainly manifested. As Lord and God He will return visibly in His glory to judge the earth and to bring to consummation the redemption of His people.³⁸ For the apostles the resurrection

³³I Cor. 16:23 ff.; Mark 14:22 ff.

³⁴Mark 10:45

³⁵Rom. 5:10; II Cor. 5:14; John 11:50-2.

³⁶I Cor. 1:18-31; Luke 18.

³⁷Acts 2:33-6; 3:13; 4:11; 5:31; I Cor. 15:1 ff.; Rom. 10:8-9; Rom. 14:9.

³⁸Acts 10:42; Romans 14:10; II Cor. 5:10; Gospel stories of the Judgment.

was the event which had converted the tragic death of Christ into an εὐαγγέλιον. They couldn't forget it; it was decisive. Its potency as a proclamation that Christ was Victor over sin made them think of their preaching as a message concerning "Jesus and the resurrection."³⁹ To preach the Gospel was, for the apostles, to preach the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

7. Now in the new age which Christ has brought about by His atoning death, the redeemed live a new life of love through the presence of Christ or His indwelling Spirit. The preachers of the New Testament thought of themselves as living in the age of fulfillment. This was the age the prophets had foreseen in which the promises of God were to be actualized. The death and resurrection of Christ had ushered in the ἔσχατον: the last age, the Messianic age.

At first they expected the immediate return of Christ to bring the ἔσχατον to its consummation. As time went on, however, the conviction began to grow in the Church that the return of the Lord was not so immediate as they had at first expected. Thus His people, citizens of a new age while still waiting in the old for full fruition of their citizenship, had to be different people, living a new kind of life. Christ, their Lord in the new age, was working this new way of life by the presence of His Holy Spirit. The ethic of the New Testament message is rooted in this ruling presence of Christ's Spirit in the lives of men.

³⁹Acts 1:22; 4:33; 17:18.

In the preaching of the apostles the age of fulfillment has dawned,⁴⁰ and the early believers are already in possession of the supernatural blessings foretold by the prophets. The Christian experience in the fellowship of the Church manifested them daily.⁴¹ For Paul, the Holy Spirit or the indwelling Christ was the source of all knowledge, faith, hope, love, the unity of the Church, and the guarantee of the final perfection of the resurrected life.⁴² The eschatological has begun here and now (realized eschatology).⁴³ For the Fourth Gospel too, the Spirit of Christ in men is the basis of the new nature of love and those who have it love God, trust and obey Him, and love all those whom He loves.⁴⁴ The Johannine epistles too point to the believer's life with Christ as the source of love.⁴⁵ The God-like quality of the new life of His people is a direct outgrowth of the redemption.⁴⁶

8. When people hear and use the powerful message of the Gospel Christ comes to dwell in His people to work through them the life of the new age with its ethical and religious fruits. Jesus preached the Word

⁴⁰Acts 2.

⁴¹Dodd, op. cit., pp. 57-62.

⁴²1 Th. 3:14-21; Phil. 2:3 ff.; Col. 1:23-9.

⁴³Dodd, op. cit., p. 65.

⁴⁴John 10:11-15; 15:13-7; 14:23-24; 13:34-35. Dodd, op. cit., p. 68.

⁴⁵1 John 4:12-16.

⁴⁶Dodd points out that the setting forth of detailed descriptions of the new life are no longer pure kerygma, but rather didache. This distinction may be useful for some purposes, but should not leave the reader with the impression that the two are antithetical or even separated. The didache of the New Testament is only an expansion of the element describing the Lordship of Christ over men's lives by the power of the redemption.

of the Kingdom and said that it bore fruit in the lives of men.⁴⁷ In the Gospel of John, Jesus makes the Word the power for working everlasting life and even identifies His Words with the Spirit. His Word has power to sanctify the Church, to bring about discipleship in believers, to cause love, and to make the branches dwelling in Christ fruitful.⁴⁸ It is as the Gospel is said to men in the sermons of Acts that the Holy Ghost comes upon men.⁴⁹ In his summary of the Gospel, I Corinthians 15, St. Paul reminds the Corinthians that the process of their salvation is being worked in them by this message if they continue to use it. The Word for St. Paul has the power to build and strengthen men in Christ, to do battle with the evil one, to cause the Holy Ghost to come to the hearer, to accomplish a change inside men, and to combat ungodliness and worldly lusts.⁵⁰ It is this Word which, according to the author of Hebrews, is "quick and powerful," and speaks to us to signify the removing of the old age.⁵¹ For the author of I Peter, new

⁴⁷Matt. 13:19-23.

⁴⁸John 5:24; 6:63; 17:15-17; 8:28-32; 14:23-24; 15:1-3.

⁴⁹Acts 10:44.

⁵⁰Acts 20:32; Rom. 1:16,17; Eph. 6:13-17; Col. 3:16-17; I Thess. 1:5; I Thess. 2:13; Titus 2:11-15.

⁵¹Hebrews 4:11-13; 12:22-9.

birth by the Word of God produces pure souls and works love. The Word is here identified as the Gospel, and it causes its listeners to grow into spiritual adulthood.⁵² In I John, it is the keeping of the Word which causes perfection of the love of God in man.⁵³

Referring to the dynamic of the message of the kerygma, Walther urged Lutheran preaching to utilize the message to accomplish changes in the lives of hearers:⁵⁴

The Gospel makes you do God's will without goading yourself at all. You seem to walk in His way of your own accord. It is foolish to preach law to change the manner of life of your hearers. A change of heart and love of God and one's fellow-men is not produced by the Law.⁵⁵

⁵²I Peter 1:20-5; 2:1,2.

⁵³I John 2:5.

⁵⁴Walther, *op. cit.*, p. 386.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, p. 385.

CHAPTER IV

MAJOR BARRIERS TO THE PREACHING OF KERYGMA IN THE SERMONS ANALYZED

As we proceed to an examination of the 206 sermons in our study, we shall begin by noting the characteristics in the sermons analyzed which actually erected barriers between the New Testament Message and the hearers. The preaching studied showed that it was not only necessary to discover whether or not preachers were saying the elements of the kerygma, but whether there was a tendency to say it without reference to the hearer, or to say other things which actually negated and disrupted the message of the New Testament for listeners. We shall see that the sermons studied often enunciated the message outside a framework of helpfulness to the people listening and that they had characteristics which seemed to block the impact and meaning of the message itself.

The reader can readily understand that it is possible to say the entire kerygma without allowing the message to be a message to the people listening. Thus even in sermons where the kerygma was said, it happened often that it was articulated in such a manner as to render it nearly meaningless to hearers.

One of the most common methods for deflecting the message past the hearers was the temporary assumption that all the hearers were unbelievers. Thus sermons written to be preached to congregations of Christians stated the kerygma in terms suited only to unbelievers, hypocrites, and candidates for evangelism. Some of the devices most often employed for this were the

exhortation to self-surrender which assumed that the hearer did not yet have faith in Christ; the preaching of Law to indicate that the hearer was standing under the impact of the wrath of God; preaching about the terrible state of unbelievers in contrast with the blessedness of true believers implying that many listening are not really Christians though they pretend to be in Christ. All of these techniques can cause the Christian hearer to believe that the message has no relevance for him, since he is already saved. In twenty-nine cases entire sermons were directed to hypothetical unbelievers, while in eighty sermons the Law element, the portion of the message designed to make hearers aware of sin in themselves, was directed to a condition only possible in non-Christians. Together with the omission of the Law entirely from many sermons, this demonstrated that one of the basic characteristics of New Testament preaching was drastically abbreviated in the sermons we studied: relevance to the life of the hearer. The direction of the message past the condition and needs of the Christian hearer actually renders useless much of the material from the kerygma which was included by causing hearers to assume that the Gospel has value only for unbelievers.

Another significant barrier for hearers was the preoccupation of preachers with other things to the extent that they neglect listeners completely. In sixty-five sermons, the preacher was almost totally preoccupied with considerations exclusive of the hearer. For example in one sermon the preacher described the process with which John the Baptist applied the death of Christ to his hearers long ago, and totally omitted the preaching of forgiveness for the sins of the people to whom the sermon was addressed. This use of the Word (unknown in the preach-

ing of the apostles) happened when preachers became exclusively pre-occupied with the text and its exposition, with the use of vivid illustrative material, or with a concern for expounding a particular dogma.

In sixty-two sermons there was such an apparent lack of clearly defined objectives for the listeners that it would have been virtually impossible for hearers to carry away a unified impression of the kerygma from any of these sermons. Usually this scattering of goals resulted from the use of unrelated elements in the text, as for example, from the story of Jesus' circumcision, the following goals for listeners are set up: 1) resolve to defend infant baptism and to see that all unbaptized infants in our midst are baptized soon; 2) feel secure in the knowledge that Jesus' name has divine origin; 3) set up in our homes unquestioning obedience to the divine will; 4) look for security in the meaning of the name Jesus; 5) take stock of ourselves this New Year; 6) distinguish our conduct by gratitude to Jesus for what He has done for us; 7) defend the name of Jesus when it is attacked; 8) worship Him by attending Church; 9) pray that we may surrender our lives and obtain the guidance of the Holy Ghost.¹ The profusion of unrelated aims represented here left the impression that hearers would be incapable of finding help in such sermons for want of unified, direct proclamations of the Gospel, and would rather be impressed with the vague notion that the preacher was "reaching" for applications and the text was not fruitful.

¹The Concordia Pulpit for 1951 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), XXII, 42-50.

Clearly discernable in the sermons studied was the influence of dogmatism. Two sermons discussed the doctrines of Law and Gospel in a very learned fashion without once relating the law and the Gospel to the people listening.² The time-honored assumption gleaned from some ecclesiastical tradition and relegated in preaching to the rank of doctrine that there are hypocrites in every congregation makes itself felt as men say, "In all probability there are some in this congregation to whom the glory of Christ is a mystery."³ This assumption makes it possible to preach comfortably the relatively uncomplicated theological description of the state of unbelievers. We have already noted this trend. Likewise completely traditional is the assumption in one of the sermons that the martyred infants of Bethlehem went to heaven: "For these first martyrs in the cause of Christ it was an honor to give their life, and we may be certain that their reward in heaven shall be great because of the manner of their death."⁴ Preaching aims designed to produce in the hearer agreement to doctrines were exemplified by the following: proving that the Pope is the antichrist;⁵ the use of the

²The Concordia Pulpit for 1945 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1944) XVI, 271-281. The Concordia Pulpit for 1951 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), XXII, 69-75.

³Ibid., p. 73

⁴Ibid., p. 55.

⁵Ibid., p. 86.

parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus to prove: 1) there is no purgatory and no "dormant" state of the soul until the resurrection; 2) the soul passes to heaven or hell immediately after death; 3) all Scripture is to be used for getting to heaven, since the entire Bible is the means of salvation (no discussion of the atoning death of Christ);⁶ the assertion that the Truth Christ promises with the advent of the Holy Spirit is correctness in doctrines, --- all doctrines.⁷ There was thus evident the unmistakable mark of overconcentration on the dogmatic systematization of the kerygma at times obscuring the story itself by submerging it in loci. Note the dogmatic, non-kerygmatic form of this analysis of righteousness:

In this kingdom, righteousness is preached, a) objective righteousness procured for us by Jesus through His active and passive obedience, b) subjective righteousness, that "we as the children of God lead a holy life according to" the Word of God. In this kingdom this objective righteousness is appropriated by faith, and subjective righteousness is the object of conscious striving.⁸

Another area in which the preaching of the kerygma became blocked was the point in preaching at which the preacher felt it was necessary to urge action on the part of his hearers, but was unable to state a really useful program of action for them. The result: hearers were

⁶The Concordia Pulpit for 1930, edited by Martin S. Sommer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1929), I, 123-8.

⁷The Concordia Pulpit for 1951 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), XXII, 204-5.

⁸The Concordia Pulpit for 1932, edited by E. J. Friedrich (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1938), X, 4.

urged and cajoled to open their hearts, pray, and make resolutions rather than utilize the Gospel power which works the transition in men from the old to the new aeon. Eighteen sermons actually represented prayer as the action necessary on the part of the hearer to bring about the change discussed in the sermon. This to the exclusion of the Gospel. A sermon on temptation offers this solution to the problem of temptation without mentioning the atonement:

The true child of God will not venture to get along without prayer for a short time, for he knows that his flesh is weak. Distrusting himself, but trusting Jesus to the uttermost, he will daily come to Jesus for encouragement, counsel, protection, strength, and help ... And especially when the temptations become alluring and fascinating and he realizes that his will-power is breaking down, will he turn to the Friend of his soul with the heart-felt prayer: Hymn 409, 1.2. Rising up from his knees, he will be a stronger and more consecrated Christian, because with the help of Jesus, he gained the victory over the Tempter...⁹

Demands for surrender of self to God, exhortations to believe, pressure upon Christians to believe more sincerely, all were devices for supplying something to "do." This is the diametric opposite of the function of faith in the New Testament message.¹⁰ There faith was the expression of the apostles for saying, "you don't do anything, you only receive a gift." Twenty-seven of the sermons exhorted the hearer to faith without supplying any discussion of the atonement for creating or nourishing faith. When faith is supplied, with any of the above

⁹The Concordia Pulpit for 1910, edited by Martin S. Sommer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1929), I, 83.

¹⁰G. F. W. Walther, The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel, translated by W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1929), p. 79.

expressions, as a suggestion for a program of action to achieve the goals of preaching, faith becomes a small human work in contradistinction to the gift of God:

It is not enough for Christ to communicate His peace to man through the Gospel; man must also accept it. This is done by faith ... As long as man refuses to believe the Gospel of peace, he will be without peace...

Unbelief is the only sin that shuts out the peace of God from the human heart ... But the moment the sinner believes, the Holy Spirit enters his heart, and as one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit there will be peace, ...¹¹

A phenomenon most difficult to explain in a Lutheran preaching tradition which has always regarded the preaching of the death of Christ as an indispensable factor of the message of any sermon was the embarrassment at saying the atonement which was evident in many of the sermons studied. A reluctance to devote space or effort to the phrasing of the atonement gave rise to a singular sameness in the pattern of expressions used to discuss the death of Christ for human sin. More often than not these expressions were restricted to a narrow set of metaphors and many times the one- or two-line statement of the atonement was so obviously a falling back on habits of phrasing that it seemed to be mere genuflection to a homiletical tradition with which the preacher wished to comply, but without spending much thought. Of course many sermons did not state the atonement for the hearer at all. But even when some reference to it was made, in forty-three sermons there was no statement of the atonement beyond a definitely worn-out, hackneyed phrase of the Catechism or a Bible passage. Most popular phrases were some slight

¹¹The Concordia Pulpit for 1930, edited by Martin S. Sommer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1929), I, 91.

variations of: "Not with gold or silver but with His holy precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death" (in fifteen out of the forty-three phrases excerpted); "sins washed away in the blood of the Lamb;" "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world;" "justification by faith;" "fulfilled the Law for you." Predominant emphasis was on the blood metaphor. One of the most used devices for avoiding direct discussion of the atonement was the quoting of one or more Bible passages describing it, then passing on to the rest of the sermon with no further preaching about the atonement. If this indicates a trend toward latent reluctance in preachers to engage in direct discussion of the atonement, we have uncovered a major barrier to the edifying use of the kerygma in the preaching of the Missouri Synod. Is it possible that this is one of the reasons for the apparent truth in the oft-repeated observation that new Church-members are far more "alive and sincere" in their religion than life-long Lutherans? Doubtless the pastor engaged in mission work uses the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins freely. If he finds himself unable to continue feeding confirmed Christians on the food with which he first engendered life in them, couldn't this partially explain the phenomenon of contrast between some "old" Lutherans and some "new" members?

CHAPTER V

CONTENT OF THE SERMONS ANALYZED

As we discuss the content of Concordia Pulpit sermons, we shall be noting the presence in the sermons of the ⁸(nine) basic elements of the New Testament message for Christians. We shall not be pointing merely to the amount of space devoted to these elements, but to the fact of their presence in relation to the probable hearers of the sermons. Thus even if a sermon engaged largely in a discussion of the necessity for avoiding temptation, but the relation of this goal to the work of the indwelling Christ or the Holy Spirit was shown, and all of this was presented as flowing out of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in response to the sinful condition of the hearer, the sermon was essentially a preaching of the essential elements with the new-life section expanded and the remainder of the message spoken in a few sentences. However if the relation of the ⁸(nine) elements was so obscured as to leave the impression that the message was one thing and the attainment of the new way of life something else; that the Gospel was indeed a story about God's act, but that the life objectives for the hearer were divorced from the work of the indwelling Christ who works through the Gospel, the presence of Gospel elements in any quantity was largely obscured. That is why it will be important for the reader to note not merely the presence or absence of certain elements, but to bear in mind that the absence of some of the elements can render the entire message virtually useless as a preaching of the New Testament kerygma.

TABLE 1

Distribution of the Kerygmatic Elements in 206

Missouri Synod Sermons

0 elements	42 sermons
1 element	35 sermons
2 elements	41 sermons
3 elements	24 sermons
4 elements	21 sermons
5 elements	18 sermons
6 elements	18 sermons
7 elements	6 sermons
8 elements	1 sermon

A glance at Table 1 will show the heavy tendency in the sermons examined to omit or obscure the elements of the kerygma. The mean number of kerygmatic elements per sermon for the 206 sermons tested was 2.5. This figure was reached by utilizing the eight elements of the Gospel we identified earlier. Hereafter we shall call these elements the kerygma, bearing in mind that by this term we are designating the preaching of the New Testament to Christians, and that a few of the elements of the kerygma to Christians differ in form from the elements of the message to non-Christians in the kerygma of the Book of Acts.

Once more, these are the eight basic elements as we discovered their form for Christians: 1) The work of Christ originated in God's plan; 2) Christ is fulfillment of prophecy; 3) Hearers are made aware of the presence of sin in their lives; 4) Christ died on the cross; 5) Christ's death in a deliverance from sin; 6) The resurrection is God's declaration that Christ is alive and by virtue of His atonement now rules His people in glory; 7) The new age or the new life in Christ comes to people

by the Holy Spirit or by the indwelling of Christ; 8) Hearing the Gospel or utilizing the death of Christ as atonement for sin causes the presence of the Spirit and the achievement of the new life in Christ.

1. Christ's Work Originated in God's Plan

Although the New Testament preachers were concerned with identifying the work of the atonement as the plan and work of God, the sermons examined were not. One-hundred-forty-five of the 206 sermons in the study did not include this element at all, some of course in favor of the picture of God as the offended Creditor Who exacts a price for sin and by the death of Christ is appeased. Other variants of this metaphor of the atonement, together with simple lack of interest in discussing the atonement with all its implications, combined to leave the impression that the preaching studied was not forceful in causing hearers to think of God as having a vital interest in the redeeming work of Jesus Christ. Only thirty percent (sixty-one) of the sermons mentioned or alluded to the atonement as the work of God in Christ.

2. Christ is Fulfillment of Prophecy

In spite of the fact that the Advent and Christmas seasons as well as the long Epiphany season, offer liturgical preaching countless opportunities for discussing the element of fulfillment in Christ as Messiah, only forty-one of the sermons (nineteen percent) seized upon the opportunity to preach fulfillment in the terms of the New Testament. The preaching values of the Messianic Age as the new aeon in which believers live under Christ as Lord, the significance of the ἔσχατον which will be consummated at a final redemptive return of Christ, the use of Old

Testament eschatological material to enrich the concept of the Church for hearers today, these were conspicuous by their absence from the sermons studied.

Occasionally the fulfillment of prophecy was misused as proof for the absolute inerrancy of Scripture¹ and for "strengthening our faith."² The apostolic preaching of course never draws inferences such as this from the fulfillment preaching in its kerygma.

3. Hearers Still Have Sin in their Lives

The element of sin in the hearer is one of the factors most vital to the integrity of the New Testament message to Christians. It is exceedingly difficult to imagine a serious attempt to discuss the New Testament message of redemption without discussing sin, since it is with sin that the redemptive work of Christ actually dealt. We have pointed out how carefully the New Testament strives to keep Christians aware of the subtle operations of sin on themselves even in the life of the new age, since without this element the relevance to the hearer of the entire message of the kerygma is seriously impaired. Yet the sermons we analyzed had a serious lack of discussion of sin in the life of the hearer. Fifty-five percent (113) of them had absolutely no discussion whatsoever of sin or need in the hearer. Sixty-five percent (134) of the sermons did not

¹The Concordia Pulpit for 1951 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), XXII, 54.

²loc. cit.

show that the sins (immoral acts) they were discussing represented a deep-seated lack of the life of the new age, an affinity to the old aeon, the presence of the flesh, the old man, the carnal mind, etc., as the New Testament does when preaching sin to Christians.

Some of the devices by which preachers avoided discussing sin were common to many of the sermons. An emphasis much used when the preacher was dodging the discussion of the hearer's present condition of need was the emphasis on his former condition. The preacher confined the discussion of sin to describing the state of the hearer when he was in the condition of "natural man" before Baptism. This, in many sermons left the assumption open to hearers that there was little wrong with their present condition which the preacher, the Gospel, or God wanted to correct or help. Another substitute in many sermons for the preaching of sin in the hearer often proved to be achieved by lengthy descriptions of the sin of the Pharisee in the text, the Jews at the time of Christ, Peter at his denial, or the unbelievers who were not attending church.³ When discussion of sin did not devote careful attention to the present sin of the hearer, the neglect only rendered more difficult the possibility of making Christ's redemption, which is a redemption from sin, meaningful to him.

4. Christ Died on the Cross

As we have pointed out, the death of Christ on the cross is one of the indispensable elements in the New Testament message. The space the

³The Concordia Pulpit for 1930, edited by Martin S. Sommer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1929), I, 170-4.

← Gospels devote to the proclamation of His passion and death, the centrality of this portion of the kerygma in the sermons of Acts, the repeated use of the death of Christ in the epistles all are potent witness to the central position of the cross in the preaching of Christianity. It is entirely unnecessary to demonstrate the emphasis Lutheran preaching has traditionally assigned to the crucifixion. Nevertheless in the sermons of our analysis, only about half proclaimed it in any relation whatsoever to the hearer's life. Only forty-nine percent (100 sermons) preached the death of Christ to people, and many of these employed the trite, thoughtless, tradition-emptied phrases we discussed in Chapter IV. It even happened occasionally that a sermon on forgiveness and faith omitted any discussion of the death of Christ.⁴ Another sermon mentioned it, but only in connection with a warning to the hearer to avoid false prophets, since the death of Christ is one of the elements false prophets don't teach.⁵ Not uncommonly it was listed as part of the message Christians should proclaim to the world.⁶ In various other ways preachers isolated the death of Christ from its relation to the life of the listeners. Even when the death of Christ was preached, and when the proclamation succeeded in avoiding worn language, the proportionate amount of space devoted to it was infinitesimal compared with the space it occupies in the preaching of the

⁴The Concordia Pulpit for 1951 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), XXII, 168-73.

⁵Ibid., pp. 254-5.

⁶Ibid., pp. 300-5.

New Testament.

5. The Death of Christ was for Human Sin

Only forty-eight percent, a total of ninety-nine of the sermons studied, announced the fact that Christ died for the forgiveness of sin in the hearer. When preachers did not establish a condition of sinfulness and need in their listeners there was often a corresponding reluctance to connect the death of Christ with the forgiveness of sin. With no actual need for forgiveness in the sermon, it was only logical that realistic discussion of Christ's death as for sin was nearly impossible. Conversely, if a condition of sin and need was set up, or if there were any goals for the hearer to reach at all, and the death of Christ for redemption was omitted, it was impossible to avoid legalism (i.e. providing works by which the tension between the present condition of the hearer and the goals of the sermon could be resolved).⁷ The dogmatic locus, the obedientia activa, made it possible in several sermons, to avoid discussion of Christ's death for the forgiveness of sin. Significantly, it cannot be shown that the New Testament ever discusses the so-called active obedience of Christ apart from His death for sin. Actually all of the work of Christ is, for the preachers of the New Testament, the work of the redemption. Preaching like the following tended to omit the death of Christ and the heart of the kerygma and the New Testament has no parallels for it:

Holy Scriptures teach us to look upon Christ's fulfillment of the Law as being vicarious; therefore also His conduct

⁷Ibid., pp. 97-103.

as a citizen in the kingdom of man is vicarious. He was the ideal Citizen for us. He rendered perfect obedience to the Fourth Commandment as our Substitute. Our many failings as citizens in the kingdom of man were thus made good.⁸

The sermon which included the following never mentioned the death of Christ or the forgiveness of sins:

The Son of God, in His twelfth year as a human being and the world's Substitute, obeyed Mary and Joseph as His human parents. He obeyed as part of His great Messianic mission. He obeyed in our stead and for our sakes. He perfectly fulfilled the Fourth Commandment in our place.⁹

This trend in the analysis was a good example of the influence of dogmatism on preaching: here was an emphasis which the New Testament does not know. Yet it is the content of a dogmatic locus and was therefore preached apart from the rest of the kerygma as a unit. Meanwhile, the message of the New Testament, which depends for its meaning and value upon the significance of the cross for the hearer, was by this one mission nearly neutralized as a force in human lives.

6. Christ's Resurrection

One of the most consistent themes of the New Testament message was almost totally ignored in the preaching analyzed: the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Ordinarily in the New Testament, the Resurrection stands as a divine underscoring of the significant facts that the redemp-

⁸The Concordia Pulpit for 1930, edited by Martin S. Sommer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1929), I, 196.

⁹The Concordia Pulpit for 1951 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), XXII, 68.

tion is complete, and that Christ is alive and now rules as King in the lives of His people. In the sermons analyzed only thirty-five out of all 206 even so much as included a mention of or allusion to the resurrection of Christ. This means that only seventeen percent (most of which were for the Easter season) were concerned with the message of the living Christ. The emphasis of New Testament preaching received its most glaring neglect at this point. Here was the most conspicuous indication of a grave shift away from the message of the apostles in the sermons we examined by the preachers of the Missouri Synod. Even a sermon on the resurrection of human beings at the Judgment managed to omit the resurrection of Christ.¹⁰ If this was an indication of the significance of the fact of the living, reigning Christ in the thought of the preachers, the sign is alarming.

The glory of Christ was demonstrated in events other than the resurrection in fifteen percent (thirty-two) of the sermons. One of the emphases in the New Testament, along with the Resurrection, for preaching the fact that Christ is the glorified Lord, Who while His glory was hidden on earth, revealed it through many of His works and will eventually manifest it fully at His appearance to judge the nations is the manifestation of this glory through miracles, fulfillment of prophecy, death, and the proclamation of a future judgment.

7. The Life of the New Age is Achieved by the Presence of the Holy Spirit in Man

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 294-300.

One of the most serious breaks away from the tenor of the preaching and teaching of the apostles was the tendency in the preaching analyzed to assume a cleavage between the proclamation concerning Christ and the moral or ethical goals the preacher desires to achieve in the lives of his hearers. In the New Testament, the connection is established through the working of God's Spirit or the glorified Christ coming to man because of the forgiveness of sins by the redemption. Only twenty-eight percent (fifty-seven) of the sermons suggested the slightest connection between the goals of the sermons and the work of the Holy Ghost or of the indwelling Christ. Instead, preachers relied on the bare assertion that the hearer ought to follow Christ's example, that he should read his Bible and there discover these goals for himself as God's will, while some sermons were pure moralism.¹¹ All this suggested that the hearer need but resolve to change in order to do so. The following excerpt from a sermon which omits any connection of goal with the kerygma is an example of moralism:

Our daily jobs should be performed with joy. Our tasks are not to become slave labor done under the lash of the whip. The successful man or woman does not work in that state of mind (italics mine) ... So the student at the school, the man in business, the worker in the factory, though they toiled all the night, are willing to wash the nets in the morning. Let us use our intellect, our skill, our time and labor for the joy of having a job well done. (italics mine)¹²

There is little in working for the "joy of having a job well done" which is specifically related to the Christian message of God in Christ.

¹¹The Concordia Pulpit for 1950 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1949), XXI, 253 ff.

¹²The Concordia Pulpit for 1951 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), XXII, 240. 239

§. The Gospel is the Source of Power to Achieve Goals

Finally the problem of pointing the hearer to a constructive program for the achievement of the moral, ethical, or religious goals of the sermon proved to be an occasion for a number of emphases not part of the New Testament message. We have already showed how the New Testament points to the Word of God, the Gospel, as the source of power by which God continues working out the goals of salvation and new life in Christians. Any sermon which desires to set up a program for achieving goals should, to be New Testament preaching, point out the Gospel or the work of Christ as the source of supernatural aid toward living the life of the new age. This is the Lutheran doctrine of the Means of Grace. Yet a bare twenty-nine percent (fifty-nine sermons) of the cases in the study related the achievement of preaching aims to the death of Christ, the Gospel, the Word, including the Sacraments. It is difficult to explain how Lutheran preaching, which possesses the resources of the Lutheran theology of the Word, and the Means of Grace, could allow itself to neglect so patently this element of the New Testament message to Christians. At times the sermons were pure proclamations of kerygma for forgiveness of sins. Then the preached message itself worked faith and there was no program of changed living suggested. In such sermons, there was no proper use of the emphasis necessary. However, these sermons were rare as the rest of the study has shown. In most cases, when preachers by-passed the Means of Grace as the suggested program for reaching the aims of the sermon, the fault was not mere omission,

but attempts were made at motivation which were contradictory to the Christian message. One of the most common was that of reward promised for living the ethics suggested (no discussion of the atonement):

Children should therefore learn from this lesson, should be subject to their parents. Take these lessons seriously and ponder them. Following this lesson and the example contained therein will bring prosperity and blessing here on earth and eternal salvation in the life hereafter.¹³

Note this legalistic motivation for good works:

By preaching otherworldliness, eternity, judgment, etc., Church improves conditions on earth. The man who lives with eternity in mind will for this very reason lead a different, a better life than if he did not believe this.¹⁴

With no elements of the kerygma at all and after the exhortation to give liberally, the motivation to give follows thus:

God's commands ought to induce the Christian to give ... Or do we want to be classified with Judas, with Ananias and Sapphira?¹⁵

One of the worst examples of threat-motivation is the following discussion of giving:

We should make diligent use of every opportunity in this life to hear and heed the Word of God. We should do all the good we can with our money because we shall have no chance for that afterward. You cannot take it with you. There will be no poor in heaven to help. You will have to give while you live. You will have to give from what you have now ... It is well sometimes to think of the horror and torment of hell, where the rich man went; and

¹³The Concordia Pulpit for 1930, edited by Martin S. Sommer. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1929), I, 27.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 73

¹⁵Ibid., p. 154.

think of the glory and beauty of heaven, where Lazarus went. Such considerations should prompt us to use all the opportunities that God gives us for the salvation of our soul. Amen.¹⁶

Christian love, which according to St. John is the result of Christ's dwelling in us through His death and the forgiveness of sins, is made to be the manifestation of gratitude. The New Testament knows nothing of this isolation of gratitude from the work of the Holy Spirit as a motive:

Love is the manifestation of gratitude on our part for the many good things that God has done for us.¹⁷

When you and I manifest abounding love of men, are we not evidencing our gratitude for Heaven's abounding love as revealed in the Savior's wounds?¹⁸

Also common were the attempt to urge that a response from man was the only possible natural reaction to the great gifts of God,¹⁹ and the intimation that living the goals was the way to inherit the blessings achieved by the death of Christ.²⁰

¹⁶The Concordia Pulpit for 1951 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), XXII, 220.

¹⁷The Concordia Pulpit for 1930, edited by Martin S. Sommer, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1929), I, 137.

¹⁸The Concordia Pulpit for 1951 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), XXII, 284.

¹⁹The Concordia Pulpit for 1939 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1938), X, 36-41.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 107-14.

CHAPTER VI

DIVERGENCE OF THE PREACHING ANALYZED FROM THE MESSAGE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

We have tried to demonstrate at what points the preaching examined in this study corresponded with the preaching of the apostles. At points where serious divergences occurred we attempted to present the evident reasons for the divergences and, if possible, the preaching emphases tending to replace the missing elements of the kerygma. Now it may be well to construct a concise statistical picture of the preaching of a pulpit which we shall designate as the average Missouri Synod pulpit. Actually we can still only conjecture about the preaching of the average pastor in the Missouri Synod, since no study of this type has assumed dimensions large enough to give us data about the average. However, as we said in the first chapter, theoretically at least the data in our study, based on the preaching of the Concordia Pulpit should include the best efforts of some of the best preachers in the synod. It is possible for that reason for us to hazard the conjecture that the average Missouri Synod preaching program would contain no more perhaps considerably less of the New Testament message than the average represented by the data in the study.

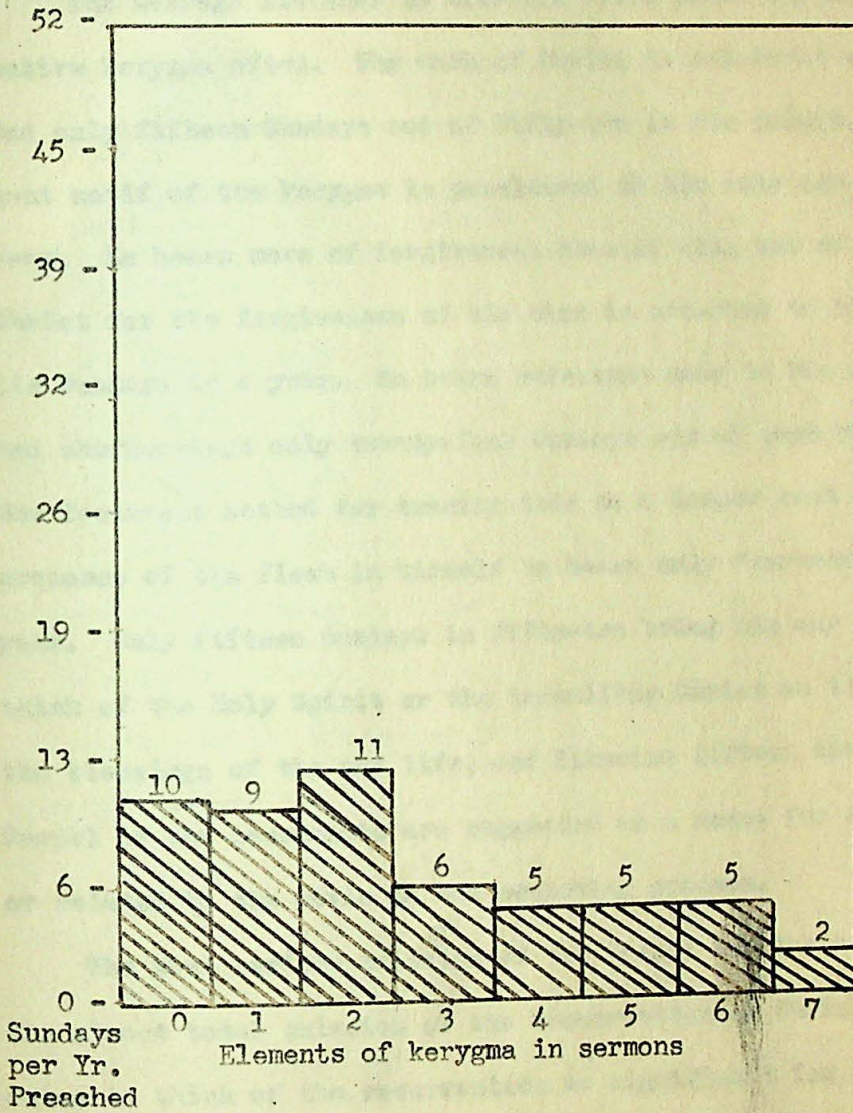
Assuming then that our conjecture is correct, the average Missouri Synod listener is in the first place asked to listen to sermons not related to himself or his situation in life. For more than seven Sundays per year he hears entire sermons preached to hypothetical unbelievers,

and probably reacts only by wishing the godless ones were present to hear the sermons. For twenty Sunday every year the average listener hears the Law preached to a condition which is not his own (unless the average listener is a hypocrite), the condition of men without Christ. For sixteen Sundays every year he is presented with a sermon in which the preacher simply doesn't talk in his direction, and thus he probably misses whatever elements of the kerygma might be preached. For fifteen or sixteen Sundays every year, his pastor's sermons are vague, have unrelated goals, and leave no definite impression of kerygma at all on his mind, even though some of the message may be enunciated in them. Of course we must bear in mind that two or more of these things may often occur on the same Sunday, leaving other Sundays open for clear, unified, direct-to-the-hearer preaching.

If we could presuppose however that the average Missouri Synod hearer could exert supreme mental effort, hurdle these barriers, grasp everything that is said in the sermon, and come away with a firm impression of the preaching aims, we should find that for ten Sundays each year he would have heard sermons containing no kerygma at all, for nineteen Sundays each year he would have heard sermons containing only one or fewer elements of the kerygma, and for twenty-nine or thirty Sundays each year, his preacher would have stated only two or fewer elements of the message. If he wanted to hear a sermon containing as many elements of the kerygma as St. Paul's brief summary in I Corinthians 15:1 ff., he would have to wait forty-two Sundays. About once in that many sermons he would hear five or more kerygmatic elements in the same sermon. The average hearer of Missouri Synod preaching hasn't heard

GRAPH 1

ELEMENTS OF KERYGMA LIKELY IN ONE YEAR'S PREACHING



a sermon with all eight elements of the New Testament Message for four years, for he would stand the chance of hearing such a sermon just about once in every 200 sermons if our data approximate the data of the average preaching schedule.

The average listener to Missouri Synod preaching does not hear the entire kerygma often. The work of Christ is set forth as the plan of God only fifteen Sundays out of fifty-two in his pulpit, and the fulfillment motif of the kerygma is proclaimed to him only ten Sundays each year. He hears more of forgiveness than of sin, but even the death of Christ for the forgiveness of his sins is preached to him only twenty-six Sundays in a year. He hears reference made to his own sins, needs, and shortcomings only twenty-four Sundays out of each year, while the New Testament method for tracing this to a deeper root such as the presence of the flesh in himself he hears only fourteen Sundays every year. Only fifteen Sundays in fifty-two bring him any opportunity to think of the Holy Spirit or the indwelling Christ as the source of all the blessings of the new life, and likewise fifteen times yearly the Gospel or the sacraments are suggested as a means for reaching goals or related to the goals in the preaching process.

The most serious omission of the Gospel for the average hearer was the almost total omission of the resurrection of Christ. The hearer is asked to think of the resurrection as significant for him only eight or nine Sundays every year. In terms of the kerygma this omission is unthinkable, for the apostles never considered their preaching a message without the resurrection of Jesus.

If the three heads of the message of the New Testament (Chapter III)

are really discernable in the form of the kerygma whenever the apostles preached Christ, then the kerygmatic content of the sermons of the Missouri Synod in our study does not correspond to the form of the preaching of the apostles. In terms of Sundays per year, here is the emphasis in the preaching of the study on these factors:

1. Fulfillment: always present in Acts sermons and in the Gospels, as well as the summaries of kerygma: in sermons studied, ten Sundays per year.
2. Historical events: the death and resurrection of Christ preached in every exposition of the New Testament kerygma: in sermons studied it was complete as a unit only nine Sundays per year.
3. For our sin: that Christ's death provided forgiveness or aid and deliverance for men was always included in the kerygma: in the sermons studied, only twenty-five Sundays per year and even there much impaired by inadequate, superficial discussion of sin in the hearer.

In the first chapter we showed how the New Testament viewed its message of God acting in Christ as a whole. The Word is unitary --- it is a story. No one can specify precisely which elements constitute the essence of the story and which can be omitted without impairing the effectiveness of the Word of God. It would not be reasonable, nor would it be in accord with the tradition of the apostles to insist that every element of the kerygma be articulated in every sermon. Some of the elements were certainly always preached (the death and resurrection of Christ, the resultant benefit to human beings). Others were probably always included in the message even though only brief reference to them may occur in some of the summaries (the fulfillment of prophecy, the indwelling of Christ for Christian hearers). Thus when the message was delivered by the apostles it was delivered as a whole. The message was a story. To split it, a unitary message, a single story of an event,

is to destroy much of its meaning and effectiveness. To attempt to present the message outside the context of human need would have appeared impossible to the preachers and writers of the New Testament. The preaching of our study has virtually omitted essential elements in the story, and it has time and again attempted to present the story outside the context of the needs of its hearers. We have learned that it included elements which are not only foreign to the kerygma, but actually contradictory to its sense and import for people. From this our picture the conclusion must not be drawn that all the preaching studied was non-kerygmatic. There was a recurrent emphasis on the kerygma among some of the contributors, as the last chapter has indicated. However on the whole the preaching examined represents a pulpit fare which, whatever its merits, cannot lay claim to close identification with the preaching of the New Testament.

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