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EVANGELISTIC PREACHING AND THE
MISSOURI SYNOD

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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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of Purpose and Procedure

Just about every Lutheran pastor who takes the Holy Scriptures seriously agrees that winning souls for Christ is the mission of the Church. In what has become known as the Great Commission, Jesus Christ was very explicit in stating that His followers should "make disciples of all nations."¹ Some Lutheran pastors, though not denying the importance of the Great Commission, are nevertheless lacking in enthusiasm when it comes to doing evangelism. Still others have the enthusiasm but are greatly frustrated in seeking ways to motivate and train their parishioners. I confess to being in the latter category.

A few years ago a new program for doing evangelism was introduced in Lutheran circles. It is popularly known as the Kennedy Evangelism Program. The heart of the program is on-the-job training whereby a new trainee observes a trained evangelist in action. The presentation is divided into three parts. During part one, the introduction, the evangelist seeks to establish a rapport with the prospect as he moves from secular to religious matters. After a personal testimony is given by the evangelist, he asks two key questions. The first question seeks to determine if the prospect is certain of eternal life. The second question seeks to determine on what the prospect is basing eternal life.

¹Matt. 28:18.

During part two, the Gospel is presented simply and clearly. It is pointed out that God is gracious and offers eternal life as a gift. It is emphasized that man is a sinner and cannot earn eternal life. Though God is just and should damn the sinner, yet God is also merciful and wants to save the sinner. In His mercy, God sent Jesus Christ to die for our sins and purchase a place in heaven for us. The evangelist explains that we receive the gift of eternal life by saving faith which is defined as trusting Jesus Christ alone for salvation. Part three is known as the commitment. The prospect is encouraged to accept the gift of eternal life, making Jesus his Savior and Lord. A prayer of commitment follows after which assurance is given on the basis of those Gospel passages which had been used earlier in the presentation.

For the most part, Missouri Synod Lutherans have had no quarrel with Kennedy's Gospel presentation. But a few Lutheran eyebrows are raised by the third part of the presentation, namely, the commitment. Somehow it does not seem right to seek an immediate response from the prospect. The main criticism seems to be that the work of the Holy Spirit is disregarded in connection with conversion. It is argued that man does not have within him the power to choose for Christ and that any such assumption falls into the theological category of synergism.

I myself have been involved with the Kennedy Evangelism Program for the past four years, and I also have some misgivings about the personal commitment which is sought from every prospect. On the other hand, these misgivings have been tempered by a startling discovery. From time to time we have made calls on Lutherans, active members and marginal members. We have discovered that many of them are not certain of their

salvation and do not know the way of salvation. They have heard the Gospel but somehow have missed its specific application to them. They evidently have never said a personal, meaningful yes to what Jesus has done for them on the cross. To be sure they have said this yes through their participation in corporate worship as they joined in reciting the Creeds and other parts of the liturgy. To be sure they already said yes through their sponsors on the day of their baptism, and they again said yes on the day of their confirmation. It is not for me to judge if they were sincere on the day of their confirmation. I only know that they are not presently sure of their salvation and that is why I question if they have ever re-affirmed their baptism covenant with a personal and meaningful yes.

It therefore occurred to me that many who sit before me on Sunday morning may not be saying yes to the Gospel. Perhaps the Gospel, including saving faith, has not been carefully explained to them. Perhaps no one has shown them how one becomes a Christian. Perhaps no one has ever spoken to them in such a way that they were inwardly forced to examine whether they are Christians. All along, there may have been the assumption on the part of their pastors that every person in the pew is already a Christian and needs only to be led towards a greater sanctification.

The more I thought about my own preaching and other preaching which I have heard in the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, the more I had to agree with a statement in one of our theological journals which

described our preaching in these words, "It is Biblical, it is eminently orthodox, it is evangelical though it is not necessarily evangelistic."²

I decided, therefore, to look further into this matter of evangelistic preaching. What is evangelistic preaching? After arriving at my own definition of evangelistic preaching, I want to determine if evangelistic preaching, so defined, has Biblical precedent. I also want to determine how my definition squares with Lutheran theology on conversion. Based on my definition, I want to develop criteria for evaluating Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod preaching as to its evangelistic nature. Using these criteria, I propose to study sermons written and preached by Missouri Synod pastors.

Some of the sermons in this study were solicited from pastors who are presently serving parishes. They were asked to submit sermons which they themselves consider to be evangelistic in nature. Because I promised that they would remain anonymous in the body of the thesis, there are no footnotes in those sections. Serious researchers may secure further information from the author of this thesis. Sermons from the Concordia Pulpit were chosen at random and no effort was made to look for an evangelistic sermon. In the case of the various Lenten series treated in this paper, an effort was made to single out those with a particular evangelistic emphasis.

²Erdman W. Frenk, "A Critique of Contemporary Lutheran Preaching," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXI (October 1950), 722.

Because of the limited exploratory nature of this thesis, no attempt has been made to guarantee statistical validity.

Evangelistic Preaching Defined

Various attempts have been made to define evangelistic preaching. Robert Coleman offers this definition: "Evangelistic preaching is the proclamation of the Gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit with the aim of a clear decision for Christ in the hearers."³

David Breed would concede that "every sermon in which the Gospel is proclaimed is an evangelistic sermon." And yet he more narrowly defines the evangelistic sermon as "one which seeks to promote the conviction of sin and to lead men to an immediate decision for Jesus Christ."⁴

A famous evangelist of our day is Leighton Ford, son-in-law to Billy Graham. He defines evangelistic preaching as the kind of preaching which has a verdict of some sort in mind. Writing in a humorous vein, he says,

The average pastor today would be rather shocked if the congregation cried out at the end of his sermon, "What shall we do?" His homiletics class would not very likely have prepared him for this situation. I can imagine a typical reply: "Well . . . let us all consider this very carefully to see if there is anything at all that one or the other of us would want to do now or some time in the future."⁵

³Robert Coleman, "An Evangelistic Sermon Checklist," Christianity Today, X (November 5, 1965), 27.

⁴David Breed, Preparing to Preach (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1911), p. 401.

⁵Leighton Ford, The Christian Persuader (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 118.

Bryan Green incorporates the emotion of the preacher into his definition of evangelistic preaching. He writes,

There is a struggle on, a deep spiritual struggle; some answer must be given to the offer of Christ; the preacher is concerned that the answer shall be "Yes." It is this sense of the seriousness in the business of preaching, that the message is either a savour of life unto life, or of death unto death, that gives the quality of urgency to such preaching and makes it, in the real sense, evangelistic. There is nothing of the take it or leave it attitude.⁶

Arthur Vincent, a Missouri Synod professor, defines evangelistic preaching thus:

Evangelistic preaching is preaching toward faith goals. It seeks to direct the Holy Spirit's power, through Law and Gospel (as highlighted or summarized by a text and its parallels) into hearers, so that they accept Christ as Savior for the first time, or re-accept Him, reaffirm their faith in Him, have a stronger faith in Him.⁷

Evangelistic preaching is not easy to define and every person who writes on the subject seems to have a little different dimension to his definition. It is tempting to examine a sermon you already believe to be evangelistic and then frame your definition from that sermon.

I am going to be somewhat arbitrary, therefore, in setting forth my own definition. I will first state what it is not. Evangelistic preaching is not any special type of a sermon or method of preaching. It is not just talking about conversion. What is it? Evangelistic preaching, as referred to in this thesis, is the setting forth of the Law and the Gospel so clearly that each individual hearer will know this applies to

⁶Bryan Green, The Practice of Evangelism (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), p. 76.

⁷Arthur Vincent, "Evangelistic Preaching." Unpublished manuscript.

him personally. In addition, the hearer will be forced to examine whether he is a Christian, whether he truly accepts what God has done for him in Jesus Christ. There will be no question in his mind that saving faith means acceptance of what has already been accomplished for him in Jesus Christ. He will see forgiveness and salvation as God's free gifts. He will be given an opportunity to express his assent either through some special rite or through the liturgy. Although the non-Christian will be the main target, the above applies also to the Christian in the pew.

I realize full well that no pastor can preach an evangelistic sermon Sunday after Sunday. It will depend in part on the text being used. Some sermons will have evangelistic emphases to a greater degree than others. Yet, even a random sampling of sermons ought to show that the way of salvation is spelled out clearly. A random sampling ought to show that the preacher did not always pre-suppose that every person present was already a Christian. And finally, a random sampling ought to show that also the Christians in the pews are challenged to re-affirm that they are trusting Jesus for their salvation. The Kennedy question, "Are you certain of eternal life?" ought to be stated implicitly if not explicitly from time to time.

CHAPTER II

BIBLICAL BASIS FOR EVANGELISTIC PREACHING

Evangelistic Preaching in the Old Testament

One does not normally think of the Old Testament in connection with evangelism. God chose His people Israel and they were told to keep themselves separate from the Gentiles. You do not find them going into all the world to proclaim the grace of Yahweh (the Lord). And yet, Israel was in effect the Church and it was through Israel that others came to know the true God.

Israel itself had often deserted Yahweh (the Lord). It was the duty of the prophets to call them to repentance. We would therefore expect to find some examples of evangelistic preaching in the prophets. And so we do.

Consider the prophet Isaiah. Prophesying during and after the fall of the northern Kingdom and prior to the fall of the southern Kingdom, Isaiah upbraids the people for their hypocrisy. Their sacrifices have become an abomination to the Lord. But then Isaiah extends this beautiful invitation: "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."¹

After foretelling that the Messiah would be a Suffering Servant upon whom the Lord God would lay the iniquity of us all (for all we like

¹Is. 1:18.

sheep have gone astray),² Isaiah extends this invitation: "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money, come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." And a few verses later he writes, "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."³

Another fine example is found in the prophet Joel.

"Therefore also now, saith the Lord, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning. And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God; for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil."⁴

Again and again throughout the Old Testament, God's people are urged to confess their sins and forsake them. They are urged to turn back to Yahweh (the Lord) who will have mercy on them and pardon them. For example, in Proverbs we find these words, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper, but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy."⁵

Israel was presented with Law and Gospel in such a way that each person could see his sins. The entire sacrificial system made it even

²Is. 53:6.

³Is. 55:1, 6-7.

⁴Joel 2:12-13.

⁵Prov. 28:13.

more personal. And this same sacrificial system provided a way to express assent to the grace of God.

Before considering evangelistic preaching in the New Testament, it ought to be pointed out that there is an evangelistic relationship between the two testaments. God chose a particular people, namely Israel, for a time, so that in the fulness of time He could offer the Gospel to all people. The prophets foretold the day when the Gentiles would come to Zion.⁶ In the New Testament, the apostles assert that the words of the prophets have now come to pass.⁷

Evangelistic Preaching in the Gospels

Was Jesus an evangelistic preacher? Someone might object at this point that Jesus' hearers were for the most part Jews who had not yet accepted Jesus as the Christ and were therefore still outside the Kingdom. How then can we compare Jesus' preaching to that which takes place in a Christian congregation today? This question will be dealt with more fully in the next chapter. For now I would limit myself to a determination of whether Jesus sought a personal commitment from His hearers.

Charles Templeton feels strongly that Jesus was an evangelistic preacher. He writes,

In every sermon he preached and in most of the conversations he held, he was seeking a verdict. To the Samaritan woman, after a discussion about the relative merits of Jerusalem and other places for worship, he spoke, not only of "living water,"

⁶Isaiah 2.

⁷Romans 15.

but the price of it--a proper marital relationship. The plain inference was, "Choose! Decide!" To Peter, after the resurrection and the early morning breakfast on the beach, he said, "Lovest thou me more than these?" If so, then choose! Decide! To the Rich Young Ruler, in response to his query how he might find eternal life, he made the issue clear: possessions or discipleship. Choose! Decide! . . . The point is that, whether implicit or explicit, in all Jesus' sermons and conversations there was a "watershed of decision."⁸

In the Gospel according to St. Mark, it is said of Jesus that He "came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.'⁹ Here Jesus calls for a definite commitment. His hearers are to repent and accept the Gospel.

And then there was that occasion in Caesarea Philippi where Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do men say the Son of Man is?" After the disciples had given various answers, Jesus asked them point-blank, "What about you? Who do you say I am?"¹⁰

John records an incident where many of Jesus' followers turned back and would not go with Him anymore. So Jesus asked the twelve, "And you-- would you like to leave also?"¹¹ In other words, Jesus sought a personal commitment from them. He wanted to hear their response. He wanted to know where they stood.

⁸Charles Templeton, Evangelism For Tomorrow (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), pp. 138-139.

⁹Mark 1:14-15.

¹⁰Matt. 16:13-15.

¹¹John 6:67.

In the parable of the Prodigal Son, the son reaffirms his commitment to the Father by getting on his knees and asking for mercy.¹² In the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican, the Publican smites his breast saying, "God, be merciful to me a sinner."¹³ The emphasis in both stories is on a very personal act of commitment, a very personal response to God which was manifested in a word, an action or both.

Faris Whitesell lists several examples of Jesus ministering personally to individuals.¹⁴ In some of these situations, Jesus asked for a personal response of sorts. The nobleman was asked to go on home without Jesus and to believe that his son would be healed.¹⁵ Peter, James and John were asked to leave their boats and fishing nets and to follow Jesus.¹⁶ The infirm man at Bethesda was asked to take up his bed and walk, something he had not done in thirty-eight years.¹⁷ Jesus asked the two blind men, "Do you believe that I can do this?"¹⁸ He sought a personal response from them before He proceeded to restore their sight.

¹²Luke 15:20.

¹³Luke 18:13.

¹⁴Faris Whitesell, Basic New Testament Evangelism (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1949), pp. 107-108.

¹⁵John 4:46-54.

¹⁶Luke 5:1-11.

¹⁷John 5:1-9.

¹⁸Matt. 9:27-31.

Jesus asked the man born blind, after his sight had been restored, "Do you believe in the Son of man?"¹⁹

None of the examples cited in the foregoing paragraphs are intended to show that Jesus was a Billy Graham, seeking decisions after every sermon. Also, it is admitted that some of the examples cited are a call to greater sanctification rather than a call to initial faith in Jesus as Savior. But the examples do demonstrate that Jesus was interested in seeing or hearing some kind of personal response. The inner response was to be expressed. And so we need to offer our hearers opportunities to express their inner response.

Evangelistic Preaching in Acts and the Epistles

The synagogue provided a special opportunity for evangelistic preaching among the Jews. Furthermore, the synagogues attracted a number of Gentiles.

Let's consider Paul's sermon to the Jews at Antioch in Pisidia.²⁰ According to Michael Green, the address has three parts, "each marked by an appeal to the attention of the listeners."²¹ The first part deals with the history of God's people up to the coming of the Messiah. The second part shows that Jesus is the Messiah who has fulfilled the prophecies and lays particular stress on His death and resurrection. The

¹⁹John 9:35.

²⁰Acts 13:16-41.

²¹Michael Green, Evangelism in the Early Church (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1970), p. 195.

third part stresses forgiveness and the need for response in faith to Him. A solemn warning concludes the sermon: God's mercy is not to be trifled with.

Consider also Peter's Pentecost sermon.²² It was intended to evoke a definite response. And it did. The people asked, "What shall we do?" Peter had an answer: "Repent and be baptized every one of you."

Stephen's sermon, recorded in the book of Acts,²³ also elicited a definite response. Unfortunately, the response was not favorable. The point is, however, that if one carefully examines Stephen's sermon, he will see that it is directed in a very personal way to the audience. No one in the audience would escape the impression that Stephen was speaking directly to him and expecting some kind of response.

C. H. Dodd, in evaluating the kerygma in the book of Acts, says, "Finally, the kerygma always closes with an appeal for repentance, the offer of forgiveness and of the Holy Spirit, and the promise of salvation, that is, of 'the life of the Age to Come,' to those who enter the elect community."²⁴ As examples of this, Dodd mentions Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost and also Peter's sermon in the temple after the healing of the lame man. The same appeal is present when Peter preaches in the house of Cornelius, according to Dodd.

²²Acts 2:14-36.

²³Acts 7.

²⁴C. H. Dodd, The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962), p. 23.

As for the epistles of Paul, Peter and John, they also show evidences of a sense of urgency, namely, that men should make a decision. J. B. Weatherspoon writes,

Take for example the epistolary sections of the New Testament. They were written to Christian individuals or churches to enlighten them concerning the meaning of the gospel and its implications for Christian living, to strengthen them in Christ and prepare them to bear a true and effective witness; but all through one is conscious of an outreach toward the unredeemed world beyond the church. The preaching bore the marks of an ever-present evangelistic objective, which now and again broke through in fervent words.²⁵

Erdman Frenk, in his review of Lutheran preaching, points to the eschatological urgency of the preaching of the apostles. According to him the preaching was urgent: "Now is the time of grace. Today is the day of salvation. . . . Today harden not your hearts" (2 Cor. 6:3).²⁶

Several verses in the epistles give us an indication not only of this sense of urgency but also of the importance of making a personal commitment. Paul writes, "If you declare with your lips, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."²⁷ In another epistle, he says, "On Christ's behalf, we beg you, let God change you from enemies into friends."²⁸ It seems

²⁵J. B. Weatherspoon, "The Evangelistic Sermon," Review and Expositor, XLII (1945), 61.

²⁶Erdman W. Frenk, "A Critique of Contemporary Lutheran Preaching," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXI (October 1950), 746-747.

²⁷Rom. 10:9-10.

²⁸2 Cor. 5:21.

to me that these passages carry with them the assumption that not every person in the congregation was already a Christian.

In summary, we have seen in this chapter that there is a Biblical basis in both the Old and New Testaments for evangelistic preaching.

They were written to certain individuals or churches to encourage them to live a life of holiness and to evangelize the world. The apostles were living in a time when the church was just beginning to spread throughout the world. The apostles were not only preachers but also missionaries. They were called to go to all nations and preach the gospel to every creature. This was the command of Jesus Christ. The apostles were to be witnesses to all men. They were to be obedient to the commands of Christ and to the apostles. They were to be faithful to the gospel and to the church. They were to be diligent in their work and to be patient in their hearts. They were to be kind and gentle to all men. They were to be meek and lowly in spirit. They were to be full of love and mercy. They were to be pure in heart and in mind. They were to be without guile or hypocrisy. They were to be sincere and honest in all their dealings. They were to be self-controlled and temperate. They were to be diligent in their study and in their work. They were to be faithful to their promises and to their duties. They were to be obedient to the commands of God and to the apostles. They were to be diligent in their work and to be patient in their hearts. They were to be kind and gentle to all men. They were to be meek and lowly in spirit. They were to be full of love and mercy. They were to be pure in heart and in mind. They were to be without guile or hypocrisy. They were to be sincere and honest in all their dealings. They were to be self-controlled and temperate. They were to be diligent in their study and in their work. They were to be faithful to their promises and to their duties. They were to be obedient to the commands of God and to the apostles.

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CHAPTER III

VIEWS OF EVANGELISTIC PREACHING FROM THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

The Nature of Man in Relation to Conversion

At this point the question must be asked whether evangelistic preaching is consistent with Lutheran theology on the nature of man and his conversion. In urging the hearer towards an acceptance of God's grace in Christ, is it implied that man has within him the ability to respond to the Gospel? Is some form of synergism involved in evangelistic preaching?

Article II of the Augsburg Confession says the following about original sin and its effect on man's strength and reason:

Also they teach that since the fall of Adam, all men begotten in the natural way are born with sin, that is, without the fear of God, without trust in God, and with Concupiscence They condemn the Pelagians and others who deny that original depravity is sin, and who, to obscure the glory of Christ's merit and benefits, argue that man can be justified before God by his own strength and reason.¹

On the matter of free will, the same Augsburg Confession has this to say:

Of Free Will they teach that man's will has some liberty to choose civil righteousness, and to work things subject to reason. But it has no power, without the Holy Ghost, to work the righteousness of God, that is, spiritual righteousness; since the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, 1 Cor. 2:14; but this righteousness is wrought in the heart when the Holy Ghost is received through the Word.²

¹Triglot Concordia: The Symbolic Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), pp. 43-45.

²Ibid., p. 51.

In the Small Catechism, Dr. Luther explains the third article of the Apostles' Creed by saying, "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith."³

In a sermon on the Gospel for Trinity Sunday in 1522 Luther emphasized the truth that man contributes nothing to his conversion. "Man is not born again of his own choice and idea; but a new birth must take place through Holy Baptism, without man's contributing anything."⁴

In a sermon of 1522 on Matt. 21:1-9, Luther said, "Do you not hear that in you there is no doing and no beginning toward becoming pious, just as increase and completion are not in your power? God alone begins, furthers and completes the change."⁵

Some synergists, in an effort to make their theory more acceptable, reduced the contribution of man in conversion to an absolute minimum. But Luther countered in his letter to Erasmus saying, "Granted that they attribute very little to 'free will,' yet they teach that we are able to obtain righteousness and grace by that 'very little.'"⁶

³Ibid., p. 545.

⁴Edward Plass, compiler, What Luther Says--An Anthology (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), I, 344.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid., I, 345.

The synergists argued from the fact that man is commanded to convert himself; therefore, he must have the power to do so. In particular, they quoted Is. 44:22 where the Lord says, "Return to me, for I have redeemed thee." But in his interpretation of Is. 44:22, Luther said, "It is ridiculous to want to deduce from passages such as this that power exists in us to convert ourselves to God without grace. For God gives to those to whom He communicates this Word of His the ability to believe the Word."⁷

And yet, even though Luther strongly rejected the notion that God acts because the one person tries and the other person does not try, still he did speak about consent. "When they hear the teaching, they do not criticize and judge it but let the divine Word reform, criticize, and teach them, and they consent to it."⁸

Must evangelistic preaching of necessity involve synergism? Does the call for a personal assent to God's grace in Christ necessarily mean that the hearer can add something to conversion, that he helps "just a little"? If it is the word of God that brings a person to the point of consent and if that word has been proclaimed, could it not be that many hearers are ready to give their consent? Could it not also be that they desire to do this in some outward way?

Lutherans have by and large been skeptical of Arminian Reformed preachers who ask for a decision. We have charged them with synergism.

⁷Ibid., I, 346.

⁸Ibid., I, 344.

Such criticism is not without foundation. For example, here is a quote from Alfred Garvie, a Reformed theologian from London.

But man is not altogether passive while God alone is active; for man's receptivity involves necessarily activity, as the truth of this salvation has to be apprehended, its worth to be appreciated, and its good to be appropriated; and mind, heart, will, must be fully, thoroughly exercised to make his own what God has done and is offering. . . . However impotent man's will may be to conquer sin and secure righteousness by itself, yet it has potence enough to resist and reject, or to obey and accept the freedom which the grace of God offers. However incapable the mind of man may be to detect all error and to discover all truth for itself, yet it has discernment enough to recognise the truth of the Gospel of God's grace.⁹

And yet, other non-Lutheran advocates of evangelistic preaching seem to reject these same synergistic notions. Templeton says,

The preacher must ever be conscious that it is the operation of the Spirit of God in human life which transforms his dying words into eternal instruments and uses them to fashion the souls of men. Any effectiveness he may have is born of God's entreaties within the consciousness of the hearer. We do not call men to God in ourselves: "No man cometh to the Father," said Jesus, "except my Spirit draw him."¹⁰

Leighton Ford is also supersensitive to the charges of synergism and he vigorously denies that man has some inherent ability to respond on his own. Ford writes,

What we must beware of is making our evangelistic appeal all imperative and no indicative, or else of so dividing between the indicative and the imperative that we give men the impression that God is responsible for 50 per cent of our salvation and we for the other 50 per cent. Salvation is "all of grace." . . . God commands all men everywhere to repent and believe, but even when we make our decision,

⁹Alfred Garvie, A Guide To Preachers (New York: George Doran Co., 1906), pp. 165-166.

¹⁰Charles Templeton, Evangelism for Tomorrow (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), p. 158.

God does not leave us on our own. His grace is in His command, and His grace is in our response.¹¹

Ford cites the examples of when Jesus told a paralyzed man to stretch out his hand, something he "could not do," and of when Jesus told Lazarus to come out of the grave, again something he "could not do."¹² Though they could not do it in their own power, yet the very command of Jesus gave them that power.

Obviously, a preacher could be insensitive to the working of the Spirit and try to "force" assent before the Spirit has accomplished His work. On the other hand, should it not be assumed that the Spirit has done His work in some hearers and they are ready and even willing now to express their faith?

Didache or Kerygma?

Back in Chapter II a question had been raised about the validity of making comparisons with the preaching of Jesus or for that matter with the preaching of the apostles, also. It can be claimed that Jesus' hearers were still outside the Church; that is, they had not yet come to accept Him as the Christ. Naturally His preaching would be evangelistic in nature. The same can be said for the apostles, especially as we have record of their sermons in the book of Acts.

It is claimed that the situation for the average parish pastor today is quite different. He preaches to those who are already Christians.

¹¹Leighen Ford, The Christian Persuader (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 121.

¹²Ibid., p. 120.

They need instruction (didache) not saving Gospel (kerygma). Just how valid is this distinction between didache and kerygma? Just how valid is the argument that today's preacher should stick with didache?

In this connection, the name of C. H. Dodd once again comes to our attention. He writes,

The New Testament writers draw a clear distinction between preaching and teaching. The distinction is preserved alike in Gospels, Acts, Epistles and Apocalypse, and must be considered characteristic of early Christian usage in general. Teaching (didaskhein) is in a large majority of cases ethical instruction. . . . Preaching, on the other hand, is the public proclamation of Christianity to the non-Christian world. . . . Much of the preaching in Church at the present day would not have been recognized by the early Christians as kerygma.

The verb "to preach" frequently has for its object "the Gospel." Indeed, the connection of ideas is so close that kerussein by itself can be used as a virtual equivalent for euangelizesthai, "to evangelize," or "to preach the Gospel."¹³

Dodd maintains that we find mainly didache in the Pauline epistles.¹⁴ And yet he agrees that we can discover Paul's kerygma if we look carefully in the epistles.¹⁵ For example, he points to 1 Cor. 15:1-4. On the basis of this and other passages, Dodd summarizes Paul's kerygma as follows:

The prophecies are fulfilled, and the new Age is inaugurated by the coming of Christ. He was born of the seed of David. He died according to the Scriptures, to deliver us out of the present evil age. He was buried. He rose on the third day according to the

¹³C. H. Dodd, The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962), pp. 7-8.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 9.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 10.

Scriptures. He is exalted at the right hand of God, as Son of God and Lord of quick and dead. He will come again as Judge and Savior of men.¹⁶

Dodd argues convincingly that this is essentially the same kerygma we find in the book of Acts and in the epistles of the other apostles.¹⁷

Dodd's work has not gone unnoticed. Many theologians have commented on it and disagreed in part with it. Richard Caemmerer, while appreciating Dodd's distinctions between kerygma and didache, says, "The New Testament does not neatly compartmentalize kerygma for unbelievers, didache for believers, as two successive activities."¹⁸ He points out that Jesus went about teaching in the synagogues and preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom (Matt. 4:23; 9:35; 11:1). The Great Commission (Matt. 28:19,20) employs a similar juxtaposition. And the same can be said of the apostles of whom we are told in Acts 5:42 that both in the temple and in the houses of the Christians daily "they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ."¹⁹

Caemmerer then does a word study of both didaskein and didache, showing that they are not limited to ethical behavior but often include the ideas of training toward faith and relation to God. A similar word study of kērussein shows it to have a meaning much broader than the

¹⁶Ibid., p. 17.

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 13-14, 21.

¹⁸Richard Caemmerer, "Kerygma and Didache in Christian Education," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXXII (April 1961), 198.

¹⁹Ibid.

preaching of the Gospel. It can hardly be considered a synonym in every case for euangelizesthai as Dodd seems to suggest. Most important, it is used in many situations where Christians are being addressed. Caemmerer concludes, "From this mass of material we are justified in regarding Dodd's separation of kerygma and didache unwarranted."²⁰

Faris Whitesell says basically the same thing. After listing a number of Greek words for preaching, he says, "While these Greek words for preaching do have a basic difference in meaning, we doubt that it can be demonstrated that some of them mean to preach evangelistically while the others do not."²¹ Indeed, Whitesell points out that the word kerussein itself is used some fifty-two times and many of these usages are found in the epistles, which according to Dodd are mainly didache.

Bryan Green not only argues that didache and kerygma must be kept closely linked, even as they were in the epistles, but he goes so far as to assert that the results might be quite unexpected at times.

The response is not always what the preacher expects. It can often happen that a teaching sermon, for example, on the prayer life, addressed to the faithful may result in the conversion of someone else who happened to be listening. . . . On the other hand, a message of the Gospel directly specifically to those outside, and aimed with a clear missionary purpose, may by its truth edify and strengthen a genuine Christian.²²

²⁰Ibid., XXXII, 201.

²¹Faris Whitesell, Basic New Testament Evangelism (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1949), p. 102.

²²Bryan Green, The Practice of Evangelism (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), pp. 73-74.

Just how someone will be converted by a lesson on prayer is a bit hard to see, but I would assume that this lesson included the Gospel.

Although I respect Dodd's scholarship and helpful insights, I too feel that his distinctions between didache and kerygma are too ironclad. The New Testament record forces me to conclude that kerygma must be preached to a Christian congregation. They must be reminded often of how Jesus Christ fulfilled the promises, how He overcame sin, died for our sins and rose again the third day for our justification. Two purposes will be accomplished. The non-Christian will be converted and the Christian will have his faith affirmed, such affirmation serving as a powerful motive for sanctification.

Arguments In Favor Of Evangelistic Preaching

One would naturally expect to find the greatest support for evangelistic preaching among the Arminian Reformed. Of all the works consulted by me, only one or two which supported evangelistic preaching were by Lutherans.

I do recall a business machines salesman in one of my Bible classes who said, "Pastor, if I made a pitch and then did not offer an opportunity to sign on the dotted line, I would go broke." His point, of course, was that we ought to offer people the opportunity to say yes to Jesus in a personal way. George Sweazey put it this way, "To stir

people religiously without giving them anything they can do about it leaves them far worse off than they were before.²³

One Lutheran pastor and professor who definitely supports the idea of evangelistic preaching is Arthur Vincent. Voicing his disagreement with Dodd's distinctions between didache and kerygma and especially that the latter should be proclaimed to non-Christians, Vincent says,

However a parish pastor can and should preach evangelistic sermons to his members and known Christians. He need not wait for or seek to create a situation where many visitors are present before he plans an evangelistic sermon. The same Gospel which will bring a person to faith will also preserve and fortify that faith! Evangelistic sermons are for Christians as well as for unbelievers.²⁴

Vincent is here putting the emphasis on the need for Christians to re-affirm their faith often. This is a good Lutheran emphasis. We speak of the Christian as simul justus et peccator. Because he daily sins, he needs to renew his baptism through a daily repentance. Evangelistic preaching will remind the Christian of the need to give a personal assent to the Lord Jesus over and over. At the same time the evangelistic sermon can be the instrument by which some unbeliever in the pew is brought to faith. That unbeliever can well be a member of the congregation.

It might be good to ask at this point if the preacher should single out particular individuals as he preaches his evangelistic

²³George Sweazey, Effective Evangelism (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953), p. 173.

²⁴Arthur Vincent, "Evangelistic Preaching." Unpublished manuscript.

sermon. For example, should he say, "Now I want to address a few special words to those of you who might not be Christians and those of you who need to re-affirm your faith"? Most advocates of evangelistic preaching would oppose this except when it comes time for some special rite whereby opportunity to express assent is given.

One who disagrees with this advice, however, is Andrew Blackwood.

He offers these pointed words:

In the public utterances of our Lord, the stress often falls on one sheep, one coin, one son. Even amid a multitude of outcasts today, God still saves and transforms sinful hearers one by one, enlisting them for service and preparing them for eternal life. "Whosoever will!?" In our day, perhaps more than ever, pulpit work tends to ignore the one sinner for whom the Redeemer died, and the one saint with a grief-stricken heart. Especially near the end of a message from God, why must His interpreter keep saying "we"? Is he addressing himself and other believers or the hearer most in need of God? "Thou art the man!"²⁵

Arguments Against Evangelistic Preaching. Abuses Noted.

Although one might not expect it, some of the strongest advocates of evangelistic preaching do not hesitate to point out the abuses. For example, Templeton cites abuses which are often found in fundamentalist camps. In a chapter entitled, "From Such Turn Away," he writes:

It is frequently asserted that we need an "old-fashioned revival," by which assertion the speaker usually means a return to nineteenth century revivalism. But this is precisely what we do not need.

.....

²⁵Andrew Blackwood, "Five Marks of an Evangelical Preacher," Christianity Today, VIII (May 8, 1964), 43.

We do not need (as is often stated) "another Moody" or "another Finney"; what is needed is twentieth-century Christians with something of the same commitment and evangelistic passion of these men, but with the added insights that have accrued to our generation through the increased understanding of theology, psychology, sociology, and other fields of human knowledge.²⁶

He then becomes more specific in citing abuses. "The world is divided (by some fundamentalists) into 'the saved' and 'the lost,' the individual transferring from one group to the other upon 'confessing his sin' and upon 'accepting the Lord Jesus Christ as personal Savior.'"²⁷

Templeton quotes C. S. Lewis in this regard and the quotation is worth becoming a part of this thesis.

The world does not consist of 100 per cent Christians and 100 per cent non-Christians. There are people (a great many of them) who are slowly ceasing to be Christians, but who still call themselves by that name; some of them are clergymen. There are other people who are slowly becoming Christians, though they do not yet call themselves so. There are people who do not accept the full Christian doctrine about Christ, but who are so strongly attracted to him that they are his in a much deeper sense than they themselves yet understand.²⁸

C. S. Lewis is correct. The congregation before us on Sunday morning cannot neatly be divided into "saved" and "unsaved" as though there were only these two categories. And much evangelistic preaching considers its job done if the "unsaved" are now "saved." Such abuses must be guarded against. I have seen these same abuses in various evangelism programs where the emphasis is on mere statistics. "How

²⁶ Templeton, pp. 65-66.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 68.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 69.

many decisions for Christ were made tonight?" As I said above, the "saved" person is simul justus et peccator, ever in need of renewal.

We should also beware of another abuse. Some would have us believe that the mere repetition of phrases such as "you must be born again" and "accept Jesus as your personal Savior" is equivalent to preaching the Gospel. Elmer Kettner shares a comment he once heard which went like this: "What do you think a Christian to be? Well, I want to tell you that to be a Christian you've got to believe in Jesus Christ. How can you be saved if you don't believe in Jesus?" What's the problem here? Kettner says,

Instead of offering the Bread of Life freely to anyone who will accept it, this is demanding a price for the purchase of a chance on a meal which--so it must seem to the unconverted--may never materialize. It is a failure to grasp the nature of faith. Whether we preach a pastoral sermon to the faithful, or an evangelistic sermon aimed principally at the unconverted, we shall never weary them if we preach the Gospel as an offer of God's grace and love.²⁹

Dr. Martin Scharlemann expresses the same theological concern in an evaluation of Billy Graham. Calling the words "repent" and "believe" evangelical imperatives, he says, "they were not intended to be an appeal to the human will as though it were capable of making a decision for Christ."³⁰

²⁹Elmer Kettner, "Are We Really Preaching The Gospel?" Concordia Theological Monthly, XXIV (May 1953), 321-329.

³⁰Martin Scharlemann, "Looking Back At Billy Graham's New York Campaign," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXVIII (December 1957), 934.

Generally speaking, we Lutherans are going to have some problems with the kind of evangelistic preaching advocated by the revivalists. For one thing, we put a major stress on infant baptism as a means of grace. Ask a good Lutheran when he became a Christian and he will most likely speak of his baptism. For us, baptism is the washing of regeneration. At that time the Holy Spirit effected a new birth and created saving faith within us. In contrast, the revivalists speak of believer's baptism which can be administered only after the candidate publicly expresses his faith (or makes a decision for Christ, as they put it).

Then, too, we Lutherans stress that the Spirit works through the Word of God. That is why our service lays such a heavy emphasis on the Word. In the readings, in the sermon, in the entire liturgy, the people hear the great acts of God for our redemption. The Spirit of God works, as He will, through the Word as a means. Emotion and feeling must take a back seat to the Word. The correct order is notitia, assensus, fiducia. To base salvation on feeling or emotion is a very dangerous thing as our feelings betray us.

We Lutherans are very sensitive to a proper distinction between Law and Gospel. So often the revivalist will put forth the Gospel very nicely, but will then bring in Law when it comes time for commitment. He will say things like, "Are you ready to serve Christ? Are you ready to put away sin? Are you ready to love others?" In so doing, sanctification has been put before justification. The implication is that we can and do become perfect when we are "saved." Here again, the simul justus et peccator principle is ignored. And the results are disastrous.

The poor sinner is not sure of his salvation because he looks at his life and does not yet see this perfection.

In evangelistic preaching, we must be careful to distinguish between man's ability to cooperate in sanctification and his inability to cooperate in justification. We must stress the work of the Spirit and follow the Biblical pattern: "Turn thou me and I shall be turned."³¹

³¹Jer. 31:18.

CHAPTER IV

CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING EVANGELISTIC PREACHING IN THE MISSOURI SYNOD

In the introduction to this thesis, I offered my own definition for evangelistic preaching. The criteria for evaluating Missouri Synod preaching as to its evangelistic nature are naturally derived from that definition.

In applying all criteria, the sermon will be considered in the setting of its occasion and intended audience. The criteria are as follows. First, the sermon will be judged by its presentation of the Law and the Gospel. Are they set forth in a clear and personal way? Second, the sermon will be judged on the basis of whether it explained saving faith. Third, the sermon will be judged on the basis of whether it sought some kind of a personal response. Before analyzing sermons, I want to look at these matters in greater detail.

The Occasion and the Intended Audience

In the Lutheran Church, a great emphasis is placed on the Church Year. For every Sunday and even for most weekday services, there is a specific Bible truth to be stressed. Texts are carefully chosen to present that particular truth. In evaluating the evangelistic nature of sermons, therefore, it will be important to ask questions such as these: When was this sermon preached in the Church Year? What was the particular text? Was it preached on Sunday morning to the regular congregation or was it preached on Christmas Eve when many visitors might be expected? Was it a funeral sermon? Was it an evangelism festival?

Let us assume that the sermon was preached on a Sunday morning to the regular congregation on the first Sunday after Epiphany. The text is the journey of the Wise Men. One would expect an emphasis on reaching the Gentiles with the Gospel, and the preacher would no doubt talk about the duty of every Christian to spread the Gospel. If the preacher stops at that, he is missing an opportunity to preach an evangelistic sermon. He should not assume that there are no "Gentiles" before him on that Sunday morning. He should urge the non-Christian as well as the Christian to journey to Bethlehem and kneel before the Savior.

On the Second Sunday after Epiphany, the same preacher might use the text from John 2 where it is recorded that Jesus turned water into wine. His aim is to show that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God. The evangelistic tone might be weaker but still present. In this sermon the hearers can be confronted with the question, "Have you said yes to Jesus as the very Son of God, the only one who can save you?"

During one of the many Sundays after Pentecost, the preacher might choose a text from Ephesians 5 with the aim of speaking about the family. At first glance, no evangelistic emphasis seems called for by the text. But then the preacher comes across the phrase, "as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it." He might talk like this: "You won't know what it means to love your wife until you have experienced God's love in Christ. Have you experienced God's love? God loved you so much that He sent His Son Jesus to die on the cross for your sins. Yes, your sins are paid for. Accept God's love. Accept His forgiveness. Then ask Him to empower you with the same love for your wife."

Although the Gospel must be brought into every sermon, yet it is to be admitted that some texts will not lend themselves so well to the evangelistic sermon. Texts in which the main thrust is sanctification, the Christian life, will provide opportunity to stress Jesus as Lord. However, such texts demand that you speak mainly to born-again Christians with less emphasis on the non-Christian in the pew.

Pastors who serve rather stable congregations, that is, having few visitors from Sunday to Sunday, would do well not to use the expression, "If there are any here who have not yet accepted Jesus Christ and what He has done for them." At least they should not use this expression too often lest the Christian members of that parish begin to wonder if there is something they must yet do to be considered Christians. Of course, the pastor will try very hard in any evangelistic sermon to make it clear that we do not do anything. God has already done it for us in Jesus Christ.

The so-called occasional service such as a funeral or a wedding should in my mind always contain evangelistic features. The assumption can in most cases be safely made that non-Christians are present. The Church Year does not dictate the text. The audience and the occasion dictate the text. Funeral texts and wedding texts should be sought out which give ample opportunity to present the Law and the Gospel to the non-Christians. And they should be challenged to think through their relationship to God. At least inwardly they should ask, "Do I assent to this?"

Perhaps it is only fair to say something about emotionalism at this point. Certain occasional services, in particular a funeral or an

evangelism rally, lend themselves to emotionalism. How valid are conversions when they take place in an emotional setting? We cannot deny the dangers that the "conversion" is momentary and based on feeling rather than the clear Word of God. And yet Jesus Christ does stir the human emotions. It is not for us to say whether a conversion made in an emotional setting is real or not. Of course, we dare not "push" for a conversion on the basis of emotionalism alone. We must be sensitive to the Holy Spirit who deals with each person in a different way and on a different schedule.

Law-Gospel Considerations

In any evangelistic sermon, the Law and the Gospel must be presented clearly and in a personal way. The Hearer must recognize that he is a sinner and damned for those sins. But the hearer must also see clearly that his sins have been paid for in Christ's death and resurrection. His salvation is completed by Christ. There is nothing to add.

Nothing excites Lutherans more than a confusion of Law and Gospel. Here we think of Walther's classic, Law and Gospel.¹ Here is just one thesis from this book:

The Word of God is not properly divided when the preacher appeals for faith as though a person could make himself believe or at least cooperate in coming to faith instead of preaching faith into a person's heart by proclaiming the promises of the Gospel. (Thesis 13)

¹C. F. W. Walther, Law and Gospel, translated from the German by W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia, 1929).

When is the Law properly proclaimed in an evangelistic sermon? Many fundamentalist preachers are fond of reciting long lists of sins. The danger in this is that we might not find our particular sins on his list. Sin must be presented as a lack of fear, love and trust in God above all things. Sin is trusting and loving self more than God, putting self before God. Of course, such an attitude results in active rebellion as well. Therefore, it is proper to describe some forms of this active rebellion.

As stated above, there is the ever present danger that the hearer will not find his particular sins in the preacher's list. Another danger when sin is merely presented in terms of specific wrongs is that some sins are made to sound more damning than others. It is very easy to sit in the pew and agree with the preacher that the world is filled with such terrible sins and yet fail to see that I also am a sinner and my sins are just as damning. As one author has put it, "It is not the sin but the sinner that he (the preacher) is talking about."²

Templeton warns against a conviction of sin which is little more than an emotional catharsis. The quotation is long but well worth studying.

The problem arises from an improper emphasis by the preacher. Much contemporary evangelism consists of the denunciation of specific sins and the announcement of forgiveness. This oversimplified and negative approach to the problem of sin induces a sense of guilt in the hearer. Stimulated by this sense of guilt (usually related to some particular reprehensible acts in his past) the hearer responds, is prayed with, given assurances of

²Robert Coleman, "An Evangelistic Sermon Checklist," Christianity Today, X (November 5, 1965), 27.

pardon, and told that, as a result of his willingness to "accept Jesus Christ as his personal Savior," he has become a Christian. At this point he usually experiences a feeling of release which he interprets as the evidence of God's presence in forgiveness.³

But should not such a preaching of the Law in an evangelistic sermon also speak about God's judgment and hell? Indeed it will. John Bunyan put it this way, "In my preaching of the Word I noticed that the Lord led me to begin where His word begins--with sinners; that is, to condemn all flesh and to state clearly that the curse of God is upon all men as they come into the world, because of sin."⁴ And Whitesell says, "The severe doctrines of hell and judgment find a place in apostolic preaching, but were even more prominent in the teaching and preaching of Jesus."⁵

Jonathan Edwards was a good example of an evangelist who was not afraid to talk in terms of judgment. His most remarkable sermon was entitled, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." In this sermon he represented God as holding sinners in this life only so long as it suits His purpose, but He holds them on slippery ground, on the edge of a pit where they cannot stand alone without His gracious help. The close of the sermon was in these words, "If we knew that there was one person, and but one, in this whole congregation that was to be the subject of this misery, what an awful thing it would be to think of." Speaking specifically of

³Charles Templeton, Evangelism for Tomorrow (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), pp. 148-149.

⁴As quoted by Bernard Brunsting, "Evangelistic Preaching," Christianity Today, VII (November 9, 1962), 17.

⁵Faris Whitesell, Basic New Testament Evangelism (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1949), p. 103.

hell, he said, "And it would be a wonder if some that are now present should not be in hell in a very short time, before this year is out."⁶

As a Lutheran pastor, I am not comfortable with this kind of Law preaching and yet I must lament the fact that so little is said about judgment and hell these days, including my own sermons. Unless God's judgment is proclaimed, repentance will be little more than an emotional catharsis, getting a few sins off our chest, so to speak.

Because the preaching of the Law alone will not lead to repentance, the preacher must proclaim that which frees us from fear and bondage, namely, the glorious Gospel. Our main purpose in preaching is the salvation of man. The sainted John Fritz put it this way:

Finally, most important of all is the purpose which preaching is to serve, to wit, salus hominum, the salvation of man. There is no greater blessing that can come to man than the assurance that he is a child of God and an heir of eternal life. The salvation of the sinner is the one purpose for which the Son of God became man, put Himself under the law, and suffered and died (John 3:15).⁷

How shall the Gospel be presented? Is it enough to recite John 3:16, over and over? Shall the preacher merely talk about the love of God and the grace of God? In preaching to basically the same congregation week after week, the preacher might weary of repeating the same facts.

⁶As quoted by David Breed, Preparing to Preach (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1911), p. 405.

⁷John Fritz, The Essentials of Preaching (St. Louis: Concordia, 1948), p. 62.

Although it is not necessary to recount the entire story of salvation from Gen. 3:15 to Pentecost every Sunday, yet the Gospel preacher must make his hearers aware of the Old Testament Heilsgeschichte and the important facts in the life of Jesus Christ. It is especially important to speak about the Cross and the empty tomb.

In preaching on the Cross, we often use expressions such as "redemption" and "atonement" and "reconciliation" and "God's righteousness." It certainly is not wrong to use these rich expressions, but they should not be taken for granted as though every person present understood them. It is true that the Gospel should be presented with a variety of terms. Our problem is not that we repeat the Gospel too often, but that we have not learned how to enrich this presentation through variety of expression and illustration.

Just as with the Law it was important to make it personal, so also with the Gospel. It is possible for your hearers to listen intently as you recite the facts of Christ's life, death and resurrection. But you are not preaching the Gospel until they understand that all of this was for them. You are not preaching the Gospel until they are able to substitute their own name for "the world" in John 3:16.

Equally important is an understanding that their salvation is an accomplished fact. There is nothing to add. It is not dependent on whether they believe it or not. It is wrong to say, "If you believe, Christ will forgive you." Christ has already forgiven us, and it is only for us to accept this free gift.

Thor Hall grasps the issue neatly when he writes:

The genius of the Christian faith is its glad affirmation that salvation is sure; its foundation is already laid; the work is already accomplished. The call to salvation takes the form of a clear apostolic testimony to Christ, and Christ alone, as the foundation for our salvation, and the invitation is issued to all and everyone on behalf of God himself: Return to him who is your salvation; make him your own in faith! Here is salvation preached as a fact, and not merely as a possibility. Here is redemption offered as a very present gift and experience, and not merely as a promise and a hope.⁸

Explaining Saving Faith

The hearer must understand the meaning of saving faith. The word faith is easily used in our religious conversation but is so seldom understood. The Kennedy Evangelism Program points out that saving faith is much more than an intellectual faith.⁹ Even the Devil has that kind of faith. Nor are we talking about the faith of a Christian whereby he overcomes all kinds of obstacles in life, confident that God will be with him in those moments. Kennedy refers to such a faith as a "temporal" faith. It could also be described as a moral quality of trust within a person.

What then is saving faith? Kennedy defines it as "trusting Jesus Christ alone for your salvation."¹⁰ Thor Hall speaks of it this way:

⁸Thor Hall, "The Call to Salvation," Duke Divinity School Review, V (Spring 1964), 122.

⁹James Kennedy, Evangelism Explosion (2nd edition; Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1970).

¹⁰Kennedy, p. 58.

Faith is not really to be spoken of as man's "way" to salvation at all; for in so doing one is still caught in the old understanding of salvation as the result of some human qualification. The "new way" of salvation, that which is presented as the "gospel" and which took the place of the old covenant of works, is a covenant of grace, a way of salvation by which God comes to man where he is, in spite of his sin, enclosing him--even in his rebellion and open opposition to God--in grace long before he even has faith. The right expression of the Protestant gospel, then, is found in the full phrase of our tradition, "justification by grace, through faith." The new way of salvation is the way of grace, and the true nature of grace is that it is unqualified, unsolicited, unearned.

What, finally, will this concept of grace do to our understanding of personal faith? First, it will make the preaching of faith as a requirement for salvation obsolete. . . . It will throw us back to the necessity of re-discovering the nature of faith as pure passivity, sheer receptivity, and simple responsiveness to God's saving grace. And that is good indeed! For it is here that contemporary man is in most desperate need of help. He needs to know what it is to let go of himself, to let his sin as well as his sanctity be swallowed up in the grace, mercy and love of God.¹¹

In seeking a response, in seeking a personal commitment, the preacher will beware of turning faith into a good work. Expressions such as "yield yourself to God" and "take Jesus into your life" can be very misleading for they can suggest that there is still some spiritual struggle which the hearer must undergo if he would be right with God.

Calling For A Personal Response

How important is it that an evangelistic sermon issue some kind of a call for response? Robert Coleman puts it this way:

To stir people to great aspirations without giving them something that they can do about it leaves them worse off than

¹¹Hall, V, 124.

they were before. Consequently, once the Gospel is made clear, the evangelist must call to account each person who hears the message.¹²

What is meant by calling each person to account? As Lutherans, we would reject all notions that the hearer can make his own decision for Christ. Yet, a sermon is hardly evangelistic unless the hearer is forced to examine whether he is a Christian, unless the hearer is challenged to express his assent to the Gospel in some way, inwardly or outwardly, during the sermon or after.

Of course, it should be pointed out that a personal commitment is not to be "wrung out" of the hearers. Seeking a verdict "is not strong-arming," according to Leighton Ford.¹³ He points out that Jesus did not run after the rich young ruler when he walked away from the Lord.

In that part of the sermon where the preacher, having explained saving faith, now calls for some kind of personal response, should he appeal to the emotion or the intellect? Arthur Vincent says that "the content of the sermon will have appeals to both reason and emotion."¹⁴ As examples of appeals to reason, he lists: "logical outline, testimonies of God in Scripture and men who have experienced the Truth, use of statistics, evidence of authorities." In speaking about the appeals to emotion, he cautions against manipulating people. Yet he sees a legitimate role

¹²Coleman, X, 28.

¹³Leighton Ford, The Christian Persuader (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 122.

¹⁴Arthur Vincent, "Evangelistic Preaching," Unpublished manuscript.

for emotion and sets forth the relationship between intellect (reason) and emotion in this way:

Revivalism has abused emotional appeals . . . But God made man an emotional as well as volitional and rational being. The Holy Spirit uses our instruction to point them toward the goal and our emotions as His avenue for moving them toward the goal. We may legitimately appeal to the drive for self-preservation, for the desire for love and affection, for example. These emotions find their true satisfaction in the Christian faith.¹⁵

Are we talking about the emotions of the preacher or the emotions of the hearers? The answer is both. Through his own emotions (as well as his choice of words), the preacher appeals to the emotions of the hearers.

It will be difficult to analyze Missouri Synod preaching for its emotional content on the basis of printed manuscripts alone. Thus, I will say little about it in the next chapter where I examine various sermons. Let it simply be said here that emotion plays a legitimate role, but it is also loaded with much danger. Assurance of salvation must be based on the clear promises in God's word.

Before leaving this chapter, it would be good to ask what opportunities for expressing assent to the Gospel ought to be given. Ours is a liturgical church and we normally do not like to disturb the printed order.

It has been pointed out that our liturgy already offers many fine opportunities for expressing one's personal assent to the Gospel. For example, we sing the "Create In Me" just after the sermon. We confess

¹⁵Ibid.

our faith in the words of the various creeds. And then there is the Sacrament of Holy Communion. By going forward to God's altar we are in effect expressing our assent. We are saying, "Jesus, I accept what you have done for me."

Some Lutheran Churches have experimented with an altar call on certain Sundays. I myself have had no experience with an altar call. In addition to the practical question of whether Lutherans would accept such an innovation, there are theological considerations. Will those who came forward be under the impression that their coming forward is a work which merits God's praise and forgiveness? Will those who don't come forward feel that because they never have done such a thing, their relationship with God is incomplete? The dangers of synergism are definitely present, the idea that I can make a decision here and now for Christ. On the other hand, if it can be clearly explained that the coming forward is simply a way of expressing an assent already in the heart, then it might have some merit.

I am not saying in this thesis that some special rite, during or after the sermon, must be provided for the expression of assent to the Gospel. In the sermons I evaluate in the next chapter, I will have no way of knowing whether such an opportunity was provided or not. I do feel, however, that we should make the liturgy more meaningful by taking the time to explain on occasion what our chanting and what our speaking signifies. In addition, the Lutheran Church should not be so insistent on one set form of worship that it never innovates in any way. Various possibilities

exist for providing the hearers with special ways to express their assent to Jesus. Arthur Vincent lists a number of these as follows:¹⁶

1. Silent, inward response. Brief periods of "directed silence" at points of the sermon for the Spirit to work His answer.
2. Overt action and vocal response as a seal of the inward decision has values. It may become a joint witness which encourages all those present; it may strengthen the new faith or resolve.
 - a. "The Offertory" can be structured as a conscious response by action (stand) and voice to declare their positive response toward the goal of the sermon and service.
 - b. The Lord's Supper: "The liturgy prescribes that the faithful respond joyously and gratefully by proclaiming the central redemptive act, the Lord's death, by eating the bread and drinking the cup." (F. H. Lindemann)
 - c. Hymn: Immediately at the conclusion of the sermon, rise and sing a hymn with words related to the goal.
 - d. At end of sermon, have all kneel/stand for confession, absolution, and praise specifically worded to reflect the Law and Gospel, malady and means, of the sermon.
 - e. Kneel/stand and renew vows of one kind or another, such as the confirmation vow. Use printed or verbal promptings.
 - f. Rise and say one of the ecumenical creeds. Structure by urging people to confess the faith to those directly in front of them and at same time listening to the voices behind.
 - g. Commitments for evangelism or other service by signing card or detachable part of program.
 - h. Sealed pledges brought forward and placed on the altar in the service.
 - i. Have all present sign the attendance card and call attention to the various responses they can register in this way.

¹⁶Ibid.

- j. "The Story of My Christian Life" with response of confession and dedication (Advance, November 1955, p. 38).

Some of the above suggestions seem to have little to do with expressing assent to the Gospel, but all of them do put the hearer in the position of having to get involved in some way.

This has been a lengthy discussion of criteria for evaluating evangelistic preaching in the Missouri Synod. I have already stated that I will not be able to judge things such as emotion and opportunities for response since I was not present at any of the services when the sermons to be evaluated were preached.

In summary, the sermons will be examined according to occasion and intended audience. They will be judged on the basis of how they present Law and Gospel. They will be judged on the basis of whether they explain saving faith. They will be judged on the basis of whether they sought some kind of personal response. As for the latter, I will have to put myself in the role of the hearer and ask myself if this sermon caused me to make at least an inward response such as, "Yes, I do accept Jesus as my Savior. Yes, I do accept His forgiveness. Yes, I am sure of heaven." I shall also want to comment if the preacher did not give due regard to the work of the Spirit, but rather made it appear that unconverted man has within himself the ability to choose Christ as his Savior.

CHAPTER V

EXAMINATION OF SOME SELECTED SERMONS PREACHED IN THE MISSOURI SYNOD

As I evaluate these sermons, I in no way expect every one to measure up to all the criteria established in the last chapter. My own sermons would not do this either. No preacher can preach a fully evangelistic sermon week after week. But I am hoping that my random sampling will demonstrate to what extent any kind of evangelistic preaching is being done at all. How often are the preachers faithful to any of the criteria established in the last chapter?

When I speak of a certain sermon as lacking in evangelistic qualities, I do not mean to offend that preacher as though he were not a good preacher and did not write a good sermon. My task is limited and I am looking at only certain aspects of the sermon. As a matter of fact, most of the preachers whose sermons I examine might not agree with me that we should preach evangelistic sermons to our congregations. Again, my purpose is only to see if this kind of preaching is being done at all.

Sunday Morning Sermons

Sermons solicited from the field

When evaluating sermons preached on a Sunday morning, I do not expect that the preacher will put as great an emphasis on the non-Christian in the audience. Yet, neither would I expect him to assume that all his hearers are Christians. Also, he should recognize that the Christian

members of his parish need to re-affirm their faith in Jesus as Savior on a regular basis.

The first sermon is entitled, "Two Ways Of Looking At It," and is based on Luke 18:31-43. The occasion is the Sunday before the beginning of Lent. The text is the story of blind Bartimaeus. The theme refers to the fact that the world sees life from an outward perspective only, but God has another perspective. He looks upon the heart.

The first two-thirds of the sermon is directed at Americans in general. Such an approach is fallacious since it is not really possible for a nation to repent collectively. In the latter third, the Law is directed in a more personal way to the hearer. For example, "He (God) knows the facade of religion; he knows the lust of your heart, the habit that's gripped you." That sin separates us from God and brings us under His judgment, namely, damnation, is not specifically dealt with.

How does he handle the Gospel? Is salvation seen as an accomplished fact through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ?

For me to stand up here and proclaim that Christ Jesus died on the cross, that He rose again; and that if you believe it and accept Him, it will change your life and give you eternal life is idiotic to the man of the world.

It would appear from this quotation that salvation is presented as an accomplished fact although the hearer might wonder what is meant by the phrase, "if you accept Him." The hearer might wonder if he must yet add something to the finished work of Christ.

In another place the Gospel is presented as the power to change lives.

God has put His power locked up in the secret of the Cross. That's why every Church has a Cross. That's why the Cross is the symbol

of Christianity. Because faith in the forgiveness of sins earned by Christ who died on the Cross to rid you of sin is the power to change your life.

Just what is meant by "faith in the forgiveness of sins"? Saving faith is not explained. Is faith or Christ the "power to change your life"?

After informing the hearers that God knows their hypocrisies and lusts and tensions, he states, "and yet He (God) says, "I love you. I want to forgive you, I want to help you. I will stop whatever I am doing and listen to you no matter who you are.'" Perhaps it would be better to place the emphasis on the fact that God does forgive us rather than "I want to forgive you."

All in all, the Gospel is certainly present. The fact that Jesus died on the cross is mentioned several times. It could be a bit more clear just what saving faith is all about. For example, a statement like the following would be improved by clarifying faith: "But when you come by faith as a little child to receive Christ." How does one receive Christ?

Is there a call for a personal response? Consider the following statements:

You can have that right now by letting go of that which perishes and clinging to Him who alone can save! Let Him touch your life and change you and give you a reason for living! Let Him give you the fulfillment and the certainty that you have been searching for! So that when you leave here you won't leave alone! Christ goes to live with you, back to the same old address, the same old crowds, the same old street. But it will all look new after you have met Jesus Christ. . . . To all who sincerely plead, "Lord that I might see," He gives the certainty of a Job.

There certainly is a personal appeal involved here. Each person in the pew is challenged to do something. It should also be pointed out that this appeal was immediately preceded by a reference to the jailer

at Philippi to whom Paul said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." Reference is also made to the jailer's baptism.

I don't mean to sound repetitious, but again I think that his appeal in the foregoing quote would be greatly improved had he spelled out more clearly what it means to cling "to Him who alone can save."

The second sermon to be examined is entitled, "What Shall I Do With Jesus--His Claims?" and is based on John 5:24-27. It was prepared for the Fourth Sunday after Epiphany when there is an emphasis on the divinity of Jesus Christ. In this particular text Jesus confronts the Pharisees with the claims that He speaks and acts for God and is deserving of the same honor and glory extended to the Father.

Is the Law presented in such a way that the hearer is aware of his lost status before God? It seems to me that the proclamation of the Law is missing from this sermon altogether. The author stresses that we need a place to stand in this life, but he does not tell us why we need a place to stand.

Is the Gospel presented clearly? The familiar John 3:16 is quoted in several places, once to show that Jesus is God's Son and again to stress the importance of faith. A good sentence is this one: "It is to see a God who cared so much that He gave His Son. It is to see Someone who cares so much that He is ready to die so that we might have life."

Saving faith is explained when he quotes John 3:16 and then adds, "To believe in Him means to accept His claims." In other words, saving faith is accepting all that Jesus claimed about Himself in relation to the Father and accepting His death on the cross. The author is obviously

being faithful to his text when he emphasizes the claims of Jesus to be the Son of God. However, it would not be an imposition on his text if he were to emphasize also the purpose of Christ's coming and the meaning of His death on the cross. Otherwise, one could get the impression that it is more important to accept who Jesus is than what He has done. In all fairness, I must mention that the author introduces his sermon by saying it is the first in a three part series. On another Sunday he will deal with Christ's cause. It may well be that the second sermon would be more evangelistic in nature, and I do wish I had a copy of it also.

His call for a personal response is quite good. He says, "Test it. Live with it a year. Read the Gospel accounts, even just John's Gospel, and operate as though they were true, though you may still have doubts. . . They (disciples) came to know. So can any man."

The third sermon to be examined is entitled, "Christ is the Righteous Judge of All," based on John 5:30-38. It was prepared for the Eighth Sunday after Trinity and has also appeared in the Concordia Pulpit. This text presents Jesus as doing the work which the Father has committed to Him, including that of judgment. Jesus speaks of the hour when all in the graves will be resurrected and judged.

There is some excellent preaching of the Law even as such a text on judgment demands:

This means: without exception He will bring His sentence of condemnation upon the guilty and will in all justice acquit the innocent.

Does this plain statement frighten you? After all, we are conscious of transgressing the holy will of God. We confess that the Scriptural inclusion of all men under sin surely fits us.

When we look at our own record of life on the basis of the Ten Commandments, and then remember that Christ is our righteous Judge, who must condemn the guilty, we tremble in fear.

Some people ought to be afraid, for such as do not repent of their sins and do not believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior are yet in their sins and will stand in their unbelief as guilty before the righteous Judge. For such there is no escape: "He that believeth not shall be damned."

Is there any comfort held out to those who heard the above words?

Indeed there is.

However, we are afraid only until we remember in repentance and faith that this same Jesus is also our Savior who has cleansed us of all sins in His precious blood and covered us with His own righteousness; for He who knew no sin was made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor. 5:21). When we, who have been baptized into Christ and who have put on Christ, stand in repentance and faith before our Judge, He will not condemn us, because in His righteousness we are innocent. . . . This we Christians believe, and we are not afraid of Christ, the righteous Judge of all.

And there is a definite call for personal commitment.

If there is anyone in this church this morning who has not accepted the evidence of the Holy Scriptures concerning Jesus Christ and God's gracious plan of salvation for sinners in Him, permit me to say to such a person: the judgment and condemnation of Christ, the righteous Judge, is hanging over you like a dark, threatening cloud. Repent before it is too late, for today is the day of grace, now is the time of salvation for you.

Oh, that we all would be the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus!

This sermon is an excellent illustration of a good Law-Gospel message with calls for a personal response. The only possible improvement I could see in order for it to be truly evangelistic in nature would be the addition of a sentence or two which clearly explain what is meant by repentance.

The next sermon to be examined is interesting from the standpoint that it was preached by the same pastor who preached the above sermon on

Christ as the Righteous Judge. The second sermon is entitled, "Resurrection--Fearful Doubts Or Exciting Faith?" and is based on John 20:1-9. It was prepared for Easter Sunday.

In the introduction to this thesis, I acknowledged that no preacher can preach an evangelistic sermon Sunday after Sunday. And yet I do feel that Easter Sunday is one time when an evangelistic sermon is a must. Not only does the theme for the day strongly suggest such a sermon, but the presence of visitors and marginal church members demands it.

To my amazement, the meaning of Christ's death and resurrection are not even mentioned, except for one short sentence which says, "but we will live strong Christian lives in the full assurance that our Redeemer lives and that in His resurrection we can celebrate our own victory over sin, death and Satan." That sentence is a good beginning, but unfortunately it is not followed up. Of course, it may be that this particular congregation is small and faithful and that Easter Sunday provided no particular opportunity to reach the unchurched. Yet, our own members need to have it spelled out for them on Easter Sunday how the empty tomb is related to God's entire plan of salvation. I remain puzzled why this sermon was submitted to me as an example of evangelistic preaching.

The next sermon to be evaluated was preached on the occasion of a church's mission festival, although foreign missions was not the main emphasis. The sermon is entitled, "Love Leaves No Choice," and is based on 2 Cor. 5:14. In this text, the Apostle Paul speaks of that one man, Christ, who died for all. The love of this Christ constrains us to live for Him.

The kind of Law which convicts the hearer and makes him see his lost condition is missing even though this is a mission festival occasion. He does say, by way of inference, "The purpose of Christ's dying for all people, and that includes you and me, is not only to save us from sin and judgment . . ." There is also this statement, "For all men have need for unlimited forgiveness and guilt cleansing." In neither case is the point pursued that we are sinners, under God's judgment for our sins.

As for Gospel, there is a strong emphasis in this sermon on God's love and Christ's love. God loved us in Christ. He had to do it. His love left Him no choice. But it is not spelled out anywhere just what Christ was doing for us on the cross in terms of atonement. In other words, God's love is not tied directly to our salvation from the consequences of sin. In this sermon, Christ is presented more as Lord and Master than as Savior. He died to affect our lives, that we might be more loving. This was the preacher's stated purpose, but I question this for a mission festival. I also question his use of the text when one considers that it occurs in a context where substitutionary atonement is emphasized and where the call to response is given, "Be ye reconciled to Christ."

The call to personal commitment in this sermon is not so much a call to accept Christ as one's Savior, but rather a call to accept Him as Lord, to love others as He loved us. The preacher wants to make the point that our lives play an important role in evangelism, and he is correct about that. But evangelism is much more. It is verbalizing the saving Gospel.

This sermon brings to mind the danger of stressing the Lordship of Christ and the third use of the Law as the primary use. In so many

Calvinistic-inspired evangelism programs, the emphasis in commitment is on doing this and doing that. "Are you ready to serve Christ? Are you ready to put away sin?" And so one ends up with a lot of moralizing.

In fairness to the author of this particular sermon, I am not saying that he is guilty of this by any means. But his emphasis on the Lordship of Christ rather than on Christ as Savior in an evangelism sermon does bring this danger to mind.

The next five sermons are all by the same preacher, a Lutheran pastor who has a special interest in evangelism. He preaches on the subject often and has a challenging evangelism program in his parish.

His first sermon is entitled, "One Way To Change The World," and is based on Rom. 1:14-16. It was preached during the Trinity season in early September. This particular sermon (like the other four) strongly exhorts his members to do evangelism but seems to assume that all of his hearers are already Christians. The text concludes with Paul's words about not being ashamed of the Gospel of Christ.

There is some wonderful Gospel in this sermon. He says:

Yet the message of the church is that God views people through the person of Jesus Christ, that God's anger and wrath towards our sin was taken out on Christ and now the arms of our God remain open to receive His children. Jesus Christ finished the job of earning eternal life. Jesus Christ appeased God's anger by suffering enough. God finished His job of opening the gates of heaven, but our job has just begun. We must get the message out.

There is no question about it. The Holy Spirit will certainly work through such Gospel on the hearts of the listeners, and all kinds of inward response are possible.

The sermon does bother me just a bit in that motivation for witnessing seems Law-oriented rather than Gospel-oriented. Witnessing is presented too much as a duty. Not to witness is sin. Both of these statements are true; but without the love of Christ constraining us, we won't witness at all.

His next sermon is entitled, "How To Stop Evangelism Overnight," and is based on Matt. 13:24-25. This text is the parable of the enemy who sowed weeds among the wheat. The sermon was prepared for a Sunday in Epiphany, a time when evangelism is frequently emphasized in our church body.

I will not evaluate this sermon except to say that I found it totally lacking in all criteria for an evangelistic sermon. Once again, there is the assumption that all hearers are already Christians. They are urged to witness but are not told how one comes to be a Christian. If I were in the pew, I don't think I would be led to examine myself to see if I was in the faith. The hearers are never asked if they themselves have given assent to God's free gift in Jesus Christ.

The third sermon is entitled, "Catch a Vision," and is based on Acts 2:17-18. It was prepared for Pentecost Sunday. The text is a segment of Peter's sermon on that first Pentecost, in particular, Peter's reference to the prophecy of Joel about the outpouring of the Spirit in the latter days.

Sin is discussed somewhat in terms of psychological consequences as follows:

If there is not a vision in your life today, if you are not set out on a course to serve God today, if you are confused

and bewildered on where you are going in life, then there is no question about it, sin is clogging up your vision.

As for Gospel, Christ is presented more as a Lord and Master who can change your life than as a Savior from sin. Perhaps this emphasis needs to appear in more Lutheran sermons, but, as said previously, it dare not exclude the emphasis on atonement.

The challenge to personal commitment follows this emphasis on Christ as Lord and Master. The challenge is to have a well-integrated life and live for Christ.

You too can learn the secret of a well-integrated life, a life which is driven by a single motive and focused on a single purpose. You too can learn to live for only one thing, for Christ. . . . Your vision for this life will be made clear when your life is wrapped up in Christ.

He later speaks about being "wrapped up in Christ" and says that this clears the sin away, takes the guilt away. How so? When is one wrapped up in Christ?

All in all, there is a lot of Jesus talk in this sermon, but very little clearly-spelled-out Gospel.

The fourth sermon is entitled, "Come Help Change The World," and is taken from Matt. 28:18-20, the Great Commission. It also was prepared for a Sunday in Epiphany, most likely evangelism Sunday.

In this sermon, the big sin is the failure to witness, which the preacher attributes to unbelief, a refusal to believe the Gospel.

The Gospel is presented well. Eternal life is stressed as a gift already paid for by Jesus.

God became man. He died on the cross and was raised from the dead to save men from their sin, and to give eternal life to all who receive him. . . . Your problem may very well be that you do not know the source of life, Jesus Christ. Maybe you

have not been converted. Maybe you are still in your sins and you yourself are a Mission Field in need of a missionary. If so, then listen. There is good news for you today. God offers you freely eternal life and that life has been paid for by His Son. God offers freely a complete forgiveness of all your sins and your guilt. He offers to change you and make you a new person, freely. This may all be yours by receiving Him into your life as Savior and Lord of your life. If you receive Him and He is your God, then listen to what Christ says, "Go into all the world."

The last paragraph is interesting. Not only is the Gospel spelled out clearly but there is the challenge to a personal commitment on the part of the hearers. Here there is no assumption that all are already Christians. Those who may not be Christians are urged to receive Christ as Savior and Lord. It is not known whether the pastor offered any special opportunity to his listeners whereby they could express their assent to Jesus Christ. But the Holy Spirit no doubt led many of them to an inward response.

The final sermon by this pastor is entitled, "What On Earth Is The Church Doing," and is based on 1 Cor. 9:16. It was written for the Epiphany season where the evangelism theme often predominates in the Lutheran Church.

In this sermon, there is an all too common fault of presenting the Law only in the third person.

Jesus told very clear stories of the coin, the sheep, and the son. The common factor was that they were all lost and that the real problem with sin is not so much that it makes you bad as it makes you lost. . . . Though every man is away from God, he can be brought back; though he is dead in his sins, he can be made alive; though he is lost, he can be found; though he is perishing, he can be saved.

The above quotation is very good from the standpoint that it speaks about God's judgment for sin. Sin means you are dead and perishing. But I personally feel it would be more effective in the second person.

Again and again, he mentions the Gospel of Christ. He refers to Christ forgiving the paralytic. He refers to the lost coin, sheep and son. When he finally does speak about the cross, he says only:

The total reminder that Christ went through all that agony and all the suffering just because He was thinking of me, thinking that He wanted me to live with Him forever, when I am again reminded of that, then His love just makes me want to serve Him.

It is not clear here just what the cross is all about. namely, that on the cross Christ paid for all my sins.

This particular sermon, though preached in connection with an evangelism emphasis and using an evangelism text, does not call the hearer to any pointed evaluation of his own relationship to God in Jesus Christ. That is, the hearer is not challenged to ask himself, "Am I a Christian? Have I given assent to what Christ has done for me?"

We now move on to another preacher. This pastor chose as the theme for his message, "The Conversion of Saint Paul." The text is Acts 9:1-19. The occasion was in fact that day in the church year when the conversion of Paul is remembered.

In general, the preacher uses the conversion of Paul to urge his hearers to be the Church, to "write no one off," to witness and share the Gospel with all. There is no attempt to compare the blasphemous life of Paul before his conversion to the blasphemies in our own lives as we put self before God, even though we may outwardly be very religious.

As for the Gospel, it is very good, especially when he says:

"And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus!'" Oh, do you get the tug of that? I am Christ, Son of God, your Maker indeed. But, Saul, what I want you to think on now is the spikes, the spit, the scorn, the awful weariness, the murder of Calvary. It's right. You've been correctly informed. I took all that. . . . I took all that for you, Saul. Isaiah 53 is fulfilled in Me: "Surely He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows." You know it, Saul, well! I took that for you.

As for personal commitment, he says, "and now I come pleading, you claim it. Who could stand unimpressed beneath such? Can you? Paul asked direction: 'Sir, what wilt thou have me to do?' He yielded himself, the lifelong, willing captive of this Jesus, the Christ. Won't you?"

The personal appeal is very good but could have been improved had the preacher explained in greater detail how one yields self to Christ. When you simply ask someone to "yield" to Christ, the mistaken notion could be gained that the hearer must do something in order to be saved.

The next sermon is entitled, "Our Christian Faith Has A Solid Foundation," and is based on 2 Peter 1:16-21. It was prepared for a Sunday in Epiphany where the emphasis is on accepting the child of Bethlehem as God's Son.

This sermon is a good example of an appeal to reason, the purpose being to evoke confidence that the Christian faith is true. I will limit my comments to the last full paragraph:

Most important of all the Word of God gives you the answer, the only answer, God's answer to the most important questions. How can I get right with God? How can I get forgiveness for my sins? Now can I get to heaven? Here in this book you are told how God in His infinite love sent Jesus into the world, and how He took your sins and laid them on Jesus--and how by His perfect love Jesus suffered and died for you and me on Calvary's cross to redeem you

from all your sins, so that if you but believe in Him, you are accepted as His child with full forgiveness. We can be certain of this. Will you not accept this gift of salvation? You do well to pay attention to it. Believe it. Make Christ your personal Savior.

In this long paragraph we have several ingredients of a truly evangelistic sermon. The hearers' needs are highlighted. The answer is given in Jesus and what He did on the cross. The hearers are encouraged to accept the gift of salvation and to make Christ their personal Savior. Faith is partially explained in terms of accepting the gift of salvation.

The next two Sunday morning sermons are by the same preacher. The first of these was preached on Reformation Sunday, normally a good opportunity to proclaim the way of salvation clearly. It is entitled, "Beating The Devil," and is based on Luke 8:37-39. This sermon is very deficient in both Law and Gospel. The way of salvation is not spelled out. How Christ overcame Satan is not discussed although Christ is called the victor over Satan in several places. Our own victory over Satan is referred to in sentences such as, "Christ's victory over death and the devil is our victory. . . . Christ is the Victor over Satan and we triumph with Him by faith in Him." But it is never explained how we share in Christ's victory, just the vague word "faith" again.

As for personal commitment, it is lacking. This sermon is a good example of the standard conclusion which begins with the words, "Let us." In other words, it is very general. The call is not to faith in Christ who won victory over Satan through His atoning sacrifice and resurrection. The call is not to faith in this Christ as one's personal Savior. Rather,

it is a general call that the hearers would "pray the Lord to be a truly Christian congregation in our worship and evangelism and Christian education and fellowship and service."

The second sermon by this same preacher is entitled, "Bread From Heaven," and is based on the text, Ex. 16:14-15. It was written for the last Sunday in September, possibly Christian Education Sunday, although the author does not specifically say so.

This sermon does not mention the damning nature of sin. In fact, it mentions only once that the hearers are sinners. "And the same spiritual manna from heaven is needed by the pastor, by the officers of the church, by the whole congregation because you see, we're all sinners and we all have need for the same one Savior, the Lord Jesus."

As for the Gospel, this sermon is much better. There is much talk about Christ, His life, preaching, death and resurrection. The final paragraph of the sermon is quite pointed. It reads:

So what will your verdict be my friends? Will you cry "Hosanna" on Palm Sunday, become confirmed, and then soon forget about your Lord and Master's spiritual food, only too willing and ready to cry on Good Friday, "Crucify Him; Crucify Him"? Or will you continue to turn your attentions to Him who wants to feed you with His body broken for you on that cross, His blood shed for you, dripping from His wounded sides, for the forgiveness of your sins? He is the living bread; He is your strength; He is your Savior; He is your God. He has spread His table before you. He invites you by saying, "Come, for all things are now ready." Let's eat.

This concluding paragraph nicely combines the Gospel with a call for personal decision. He might have made it a bit more clear just how one eats this Bread of life. For example, he could have said something like this. "Jesus has spread His table before you. The table is filled with such delicacies as forgiveness for all your sins and the gift of eternal

life. All is ready. Come and eat. Accept Jesus as your Savior. Accept His forgiveness and His gift of eternal life."

This may sound a bit "picky" but people need to know that the blessings are free, that they have been paid for by Christ and that we need only accept them.

The personal element is also brought out nicely in this sermon by sentences such as these: "Do you know Him or do you say, 'Manhu'? Do you know Him in your hearts? Do you hunger for Him as the bread of life, as the very Word of God made flesh, spelled with a capital W?"

Concordia Pulpit sermons

The next several sermons were taken from the 1954 edition of the Concordia Pulpit. There is no particular significance in choosing that year. Rather, an attempt was made to choose Sundays and texts within that year which on the surface at least would appear to lend themselves to evangelistic preaching.

The first of these was prepared for the Third Sunday in Advent. It is given the title, "John the Baptist Prepares the Way of the Lord," and is based on Luke 3:3-14.¹

During Advent the emphasis, among other things, is on repentance. This particular text offers a splendid opportunity to convince the hearers of their sins by preaching some pointed Law. Yet I could not discover the kind of Law preaching in this sermon which makes the hearer see his

¹The Concordia Pulpit, MCMLIV (St. Louis: Concordia, 1953), 13-19.

lost condition without Christ. The Gospel is presented, but not in atonement language. It is not clear that Jesus Christ died for my sins. Saving faith is not explained.

This sermon is another prime example of taking terms for granted. I have already made reference to terms like "faith" and "repent" which are so seldom explained in sermons. Another such term is "Gospel." For example, in this sermon we have the sentence, "In doing the latter, he preached the Gospel, showed them how their sins could be washed away and blotted out from God's remembrance (compare 'Is. 43:25)."² But what is this Gospel? I assume it has something to do with sins being washed away. How are sins washed away? Still another example of using terms without explaining them is the following: "Through the Gospel of redeeming grace in Christ and through the 'washing of regeneration' He brings them to faith in His forgiveness, raises their crushed spirits and makes their hearts His abode."³ There is no attempt to explain "redeeming grace" or "washing of regeneration."

In another place he speaks about the importance of being "kept in saving faith," but does not explain saving faith or how one is kept in it.⁴

References in the third person can be effective but should not entirely replace the second person. For example, the following sentence

²Ibid, MCMLIV, 16.

³Ibid, MCMLIV, 15.

⁴Ibid, MCMLIV, 15.

might be much better in the second person: "Again, they [italics mine] must come to the realization that they daily transgress every Commandment of the Law in thoughts and desires, words and deeds."⁵

The next sermon was prepared for Epiphany Sunday and is entitled, "Have You Seen the Light of the World?"⁶ It is taken from Matt. 4:12-17.

Epiphany is a time to emphasize missions and evangelism, and indeed this particular text certainly stresses evangelism. The final verse of this text has Jesus saying, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Let's see how this sermon fares as an evangelistic sermon.

The preacher of this sermon wants to talk about sin as being in darkness. He wants to talk about Jesus as the One who brings light into that dark situation. He uses the following illustration:

Jesus was never more appreciated than by a murderer sitting in the death cell, awaiting execution. Let the Christian chaplain come to him with the Word of life. . . . See how everything that was dark and gloomy becomes light and is reflected in the murderer's shining eyes. To see the Light of the world you must be in darkness. You must know that you are a sinner, subject to eternal death. You must feel conscious of the wrath of God upon you. Then the warm sunshine of God's love in the person of Jesus will fill your soul with light.⁷

The illustration is very good. The hearer is made to see that because of his sins, he also is on death row, God's death row. But he is also made aware of God's love in Jesus. In other places, our need for this love is put in sharp focus. For example:

⁵Ibid., MCMLIV, 15.

⁶Ibid., MCMLIV, 43-47.

⁷Ibid., MCMLIV, 45.

We see the perfection of Jesus, His unselfishness, His kindness, His helpfulness, His self-sacrifice. We recognize that we are not like that. We love neither our heavenly Father nor our fellow men like that. That is our sin.⁸

And the Gospel, God's love in Jesus, is put into sharp focus when he says, "When we have seen Jesus not only born for us, as we saw Him on Christmas Day, but crucified for our sins and raised again for our justification, then the light of God has begun to stream into our darkened souls."⁹

The big disappointment in measuring up to an evangelistic sermon is the failure to call upon the hearers to examine their own hearts. He comes close when he ends the sermon on this note: "Have you seen the Light of the world? . . . God grant us His Holy Spirit that we may walk in that light until we by its revelation walk in the light that is eternal."¹⁰ I can only wish that he might have urged them to examine if they had accepted Jesus as their Savior from sin. In other words, they need to be reminded once again what it means to walk in "the light that is eternal." The impression could be given by his conclusion that Jesus is some kind of an Illuminator for making the decisions of life.

The next Concordia Pulpit sermon is entitled, "When Men Say 'No' to God," and is based on Matt. 23:34-39.¹¹ It was prepared for the fifth Sunday in Lent.

⁸Ibid., MCMLIV, 47.

⁹Ibid., MCMLIV, 47.

¹⁰Ibid., MCMLIV, 47.

¹¹Ibid., 127-133.

Since this is a Lenten sermon, one would expect to see a more than average amount of Gospel talk related to the cross of Christ. But I saw absolutely no reference to the cross at all. In one sentence he speaks about the modern world's opposition to the "preaching of the Cross,"¹² but he himself does no preaching of the Cross. In still another place he speaks about the lost and says, "That is the reason why so many are lost--they will not accept the Gospel tidings. If men are saved, they owe their salvation to the grace of God; but if they are lost, it is altogether their own fault."¹³ Unfortunately, there is no explanation of what it means to be saved, to be lost. Nor is there any explanation of the "Gospel tidings."

The main thrust of the text is the world's opposition to the Gospel. It seems to me that the preacher must cause his hearers to examine if they themselves have accepted this Gospel. One could argue that he comes close to this in the concluding paragraph. But keep in mind as you read this that the Cross has not been mentioned up to this point.

But to those who repent and turn to Him for grace, no matter how black their past crimes may have been, He still extends the arms of His love and compassion. Turning to Him in faith, we repose under the shadow of His wings for time and for eternity.¹⁴

¹² Ibid., MCMLIV, 129.

¹³ Ibid., MCMLIV, 130.

¹⁴ Ibid., MCMLIV, 133.

The words repent, grace and faith are not explained. Grace is not tied to Jesus Christ and His atoning sacrifice. Again, there is the assumption that the hearers know the details well.

The next sermon is a Pentecost sermon entitled, "Our Attitude Toward Jesus Determines Our Pentecost Joy," and is based on John 6:60-71.¹⁵

This preacher does not assume that every church member is a Christian. He addresses himself in places to those who have not yet accepted Christ as Savior.

How modern that sounds in every way! People do that today. They want to go to church, and they desire to be members, but suddenly they are confronted with a public decision which will either reveal a humble faith in Jesus as the Savior or an open rejection of him for materialistic reasons. They perhaps never have really believed in Jesus and thus never have received the Pentecostal gift of the Holy Spirit, but it never became evident until a crisis is reached where they must plainly confess Jesus or turn away and walk no more with Him.¹⁶

The Gospel in this sermon is clear on who Jesus is but not so clear on what He has done for us. Bread of Life, as Jesus refers to Himself in John 6, is not really defined by the preacher.

As for personal commitment, the need to make such a commitment is definitely stressed. There are only two choices, two ways. "Now will you also go away? Remember there are only two ways to go: the beaten path to hell without Jesus or the rugged way to heaven with Him. . . . This Pentecost Day, then, is the day for us to pray. . . ." ¹⁷ He goes on

¹⁵ Ibid., MCMLIV, 199-204.

¹⁶ Ibid., MCMLIV, 202.

¹⁷ Ibid., MCMLIV, 204.

to quote two verses of a Pentecost hymn. One can only assume that this hymn was later sung and served as a vehicle for personal commitment.

The next Concordia Pulpit sermon was prepared by a preacher who had also submitted a sermon directly to me, one discussed on a previous page of this thesis. His published sermon is entitled, "Accept No Substitutes For God's Prescribed Reconciliation," and is based on Matt. 15:1-9.¹⁸ It was written for the Sixth Sunday after Trinity. In this text Jesus challenges the Pharisees for their hypocrisy and their legalism.

In his introduction he already states man's basic problem, namely, alienation from God. This is our greatest need, to regain God's favor. He has an excellent use of Law. He hits mere formalism and so much that we call "religion" in our lives. "I believe you will agree with me that in a day when the Church to many has become little more than 'the society of the respectable' there are people in the churches who are Pharisees of the first sort, the baser sort."¹⁹

He speaks of the need for changed hearts. "And in Jesus Christ he finds his only hope. Jesus Christ, from Bethlehem, through Nazareth, and all the way to Calvary, and His bloody death paid his debt."²⁰ He notes also references to important events in the life of Christ.

He addresses himself to those who are not yet Christians and prays that they might have new hearts. Although saving faith is not clearly

¹⁸Ibid., MCMLIV, 247-252.

¹⁹Ibid., MCMLIV, 249.

²⁰Ibid., MCMLIV, 251.

defined, yet the appeal to Christ and His Cross is frequent enough to leave the impression that getting right with God is a matter of turning to Christ and away from self and rules.

We call ourselves Christ-men and Christ-women. Is He in our hearts? Does He hold full sway there? Ah, then we shall be observing the rules, God's and some of men's, but always against the background of Jesus Christ. No saving of ourselves by observing rules. But Christ-thanking and Christ-glorifying thereby for having saved us.²¹

He goes on to state quite clearly what it means to have Christ in our hearts. Above all, it means to trust always what He has done for us on the Cross. Although it is not evident that the preacher actually asked for some kind of visual or verbal response, yet his approach was such that every hearer was forced to question his relationship to Jesus.

Another sermon by this same preacher is entitled, "Cleaning Up A Life," and is based on Matt. 15:10-20.²² It was prepared for the Seventh Sunday after Trinity. The text stresses the importance of a clean heart.

The preacher effectively bursts the bubble of those who would trust in their own pious deeds and mere church membership. "The heart must be changed. That will take something radical, something superhumanly powerful. For your heart and my heart is wicked."²³

Is the Gospel clear? Would the hearer realize that his salvation is an accomplished fact through the shed blood of Jesus Christ? Listen.

²¹Ibid., MCMLIV, 251.

²²Ibid., MCMLIV, 252-257.

²³Ibid., MCMLIV, 254.

God's story is the story of Calvary and His Son spiked to a Cross there for you. That story renders you honest. You see Him at Calvary, with spit in His face, mockery flung at Him, intense physical agony, loneliness such as none has ever known; you hear a strange cry of "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" that speaks of pain and you can neither fathom nor get anyone to explain. And God says all this is but a payment on your heart. . . . He (Mr. Christ-man) knows he needs everything Jesus Christ earned for men at the Cross.²⁴

The language is very vivid and will certainly catch attention. It could be, however, that the listener who is not a Christian will still not perfectly understand what Jesus was doing on the Cross for him. For example, what is meant by "all this is but payment on your heart"? And what did Jesus earn "for men at the Cross"?

In all fairness to the preacher, this text has a stronger emphasis on commitment to Christ as Lord than it does to Christ as Savior. The preacher was faithful to the text in that this commitment to Christ as Lord comes through very well.

The next sermon from the Concordia Pulpit is one for the Twenty-First Sunday after Trinity and is entitled, "Jesus Solves Our Problems."²⁵ The text is John 5:1-9a, the healing of the man at Bethesda.

This sermon starts out with a definite evangelistic intent. In fact, the preacher bluntly says in one of the introductory paragraphs, "I know that I can help you to heaven if you will let Jesus solve that problem for you."²⁶

²⁴Ibid., MCMLIV, 255.

²⁵Ibid., MCMLIV, 330-336.

²⁶Ibid., MCMLIV, 330.

His use of the Law almost reminds me of the Kennedy Evangelism Program.

We have the great problem of our sin. What can we do about the guilt that lies heavy upon us on account of the many sins that we have committed? We know that we have sinned. Of course, we are not thieves and gangsters and murderers, and we are not indecent people. But we have sinned, every one of us, against the will of our holy God. What can we do about it? How can we get rid of that burden of guilt that lies upon us? For if we die and our soul appears before God with that sin, we shall be lost.²⁷

His use of the Gospel is quite clear on the substitutionary aspect of Christ's death for our sins.

That is your problem. What will you do about it? Jesus, our Savior, is the Solution of that problem; the one, single, perfect and only Solution. For He came to the cross on Calvary, and He bore all the world's sins, hence also yours and mine. He shed His blood as an atonement for the sins of all men. And "whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life." He shall have the forgiveness of his many sins.²⁸

And again, addressing himself to the problem of death, he says,

Jesus has the solution for that problem too. He gives us the assurance that the soul of every believer will go to heaven, and that on Judgment Day all our bodies will be made alive again, and all believers will be with Him in heaven forever.²⁹

Notice the emphasis on believers and believing. There is a tendency to take such terms for granted as though the hearers understand saving faith. I have discovered again and again in making evangelism calls that people do not understand saving faith. They don't understand that it

²⁷ Ibid., MCMLIV, 333.

²⁸ Ibid., MCMLIV, 333.

²⁹ Ibid., MCMLIV, 334.

means to believe in Jesus as Savior. In fact, they very much associate faith with a moral quality in themselves.

This sermon started out with an evangelistic intent. How does it end? Is there the appeal for giving personal assent to the Gospel? Perhaps the closest he comes to this would be the following sentences: "If we will only cling to our Savior, if we will only say in our mind and heart, 'I know that I have a Savior who saved me from sin. I need Jesus. I must have Jesus. I have Jesus. He is in my Bible. I will believe my Bible!'"³⁰

Perhaps there is a slight danger in such talk. Faith in the Bible could be exalted above faith in Jesus Himself. Aside from that, the preacher is stressing the importance of a decision on the part of each hearer. Wouldn't this have been a wonderful sermon to follow with some kind of an evangelistic commitment such as a silent prayer, the singing of a special hymn or the filling out of a commitment card?

Occasional Sermons

Sermons solicited from the field

Only two sermons solicited from the field were of the occasional variety. The first of these was preached to a camp for high schoolers at Lake Okoboji, Iowa. It is assumed that many of the teens belonging to the congregation are only nominal members, and it is further assumed

³⁰Ibid., MCMLIV, 335.

that many of them have brought guests. The sermon is entitled, "What You Can Do To Bring Christ To Others." The text is Rom. 1:16.

There is no question that the damning effects of sin are presented in vivid language. Consider the following:

Think of syphilis, which is spreading all over America because of immorality. In the advanced stages there is absolutely nothing that a doctor can do but talk and watch the person break out in sores, become weaker and weaker, and then die. But just think about it--sin is much, much worse than any cancer or syphilis. Sin is the worst of all diseases. Sin is the cancer or syphilis that kills the soul. Sin causes the victim to die in this life and to suffer forever in hell.

Is the Gospel presented as the only solution to man's away-ness from God, man's lostness? How is the Gospel spelled out for the hearer?

Now we ask "What is that Gospel?" The word gospel means good news. It is the Good News that Jesus Christ, God's Son, kept every one of the commandments perfectly for us who failed so drastically. That Christ also was the perfect Sacrifice for us when He suffered and died on the cross to remove the guilt and punishment of our sins. His resurrection proves that His doctrine is true, and that God the Father has accepted the sacrifice of His Son for our forgiveness.

As for commitment, the preacher says,

Let's join together this very moment to recommit ourselves to Jesus Christ as Savior, Lord and Master of our lives. And if any of you did not have Christ as Savior when you came up here, may you now reaffirm that faith that you now have in Jesus Christ as Savior, Lord and Master.

This is the first sermon examined by the writer in which the preacher specifically asks for a recommitment. Not only that, but the preacher of this occasional sermon gives opportunity for the expression of such recommitment. He says, "Let us pray. I will pray a phrase and then you repeat that prayer of commitment." A prayer follows which includes confession, acknowledgment of Christ as Savior and as Master, and commitment to Christ.

The second occasional sermon solicited from the field is a mission sermon which went out over the radio. It is entitled, "Have a Good Day Today--And Pass It On." The text is 2 Kings 7:9. This is the story of the four lepers who came upon the deserted camp of the Syrians and were about to plunder the camp when they realized that they should not keep this good news to themselves.

The approach in this sermon is to use the Apostles' Creed as a way of pointing to Christ. In the Second Article, he does a good job of detailing the life of Christ with emphasis on the Cross and the fact that Christ died for our sins. In the Third Article he makes it clear that faith comes only by the Holy Spirit working through the Word.

More specifically, he speaks of sin as "destroying us in death."

On the matter of forgiveness, he says,

These are tremendous truths. Here we are saying that we believe that God forgives us all our sins--not just because He is kind and good, but because He made it possible through His Son; and the result is that there is nothing to stand between us--nothing that this holy, righteous, and just God is going to hold against us. He has nailed our sins to the cross. He has buried them in the depths of the sea.

Therefore we know that we will spend eternity with God. We're going to die some day--we don't know when; but to know that our God will accept us, to know that He loves us, to know His promise that He will make all things work together for our good to bring us to the goal for which He redeemed us, that gives us a new dimension to life.

As for commitment he asks, "Friend, are these your convictions? Are you at the point in your life where you can say with assurance, 'I know whom I believe and I am persuaded that he has forgiven me all my sins and will take me to heaven?' You can have that certainty." Then he challenges

his hearers in these words, "Take what Christ wants to give you. Don't let this GOOD NEWS pass by without taking it into your heart."

Although he does not launch into a detailed explanation of saving faith, he comes close when he says, "Take what Christ wants to give you."

I feel that this is an excellent evangelistic sermon. The Gospel is clear. Salvation is presented as an accomplished fact. It is God's gift. We need only take it by faith. This sermon will cause those hearers who are already Christians to evaluate their relationship with God and to count their blessings. They will be strengthened in their assurance of salvation. The possible non-Christians in the pews will know the way of salvation.

Concordia Pulpit sermons and other published sermons

"How to Survive," is the title of a confirmation sermon based on Prov. 3:5-7.³¹ The preacher goes through each of the Ten Commandments and reminds the students in the confirmation class along with their parents that we have all failed to keep the commandments. He quotes the Prophet Isaiah, "We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." (Is. 64:6) Then comes the Gospel, of which the following is a sample:

We have therefore the Gospel. You have been taught the precious truth that God has provided a remedy for sin and evil. This He has done by sending His only-begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, into the world, who has revealed the true God to us in His love,

³¹Ibid., MCMLIV, 388-394.

who suffered and died on the cross in our room and stead, and who brought a perfect and complete atonement for all men.³²

After quoting Luther's explanation to the Second Article of the Creed, he explains saving faith in these words,

You know the answer to the soul's paramount question, "What must I do to be saved?" namely, the simple but essential directive, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ" as your only all-sufficient Savior.³³

In another place he speaks of the Gospel as that "which tells you that you need Christ and are lost without full and complete faith in His atoning blood."³⁴

There is something especially beautiful in his paragraph on the Sacraments. He speaks of the cleansing "waters of forgiveness," and the "body and blood of Christ, with which He has purchased your redemption."³⁵

Normally, one would presuppose the presence of delinquent members and even non-Christians for a confirmation service. However, this preacher does not take advantage of the occasion to call parents and visitors to a renewal of their faith. There is no call to a personal commitment to Christ as Savior. It is more a reminder of what it means to be a Christian and the privileges that ensue. Certainly, the Holy Spirit can work through such a message to convince the non-Christians who might be present.

³²Ibid., MCMLIV, 390.

³³Ibid., MCMLIV, 391.

³⁴Ibid., MCMLIV, 393.

³⁵Ibid., MCMLIV, 392.

On the other hand, confirmation seems like a ready-made occasion to challenge the listeners to examine whether they do indeed affirm all that Christ has done for them.

Another confirmation sermon is entitled, "Going His Way," and is based on Is. 30:21.³⁶ Isaiah, speaking as God's prophet, says, "And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, 'This is the way, walk in it,' when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left."

Speaking of sinful man, the preacher exclaims, "Man is a creature and has no bargaining rights with his Creator. Because he has fallen under the just wrath and condemnation of God, he deserves no consideration whatever."³⁷ Just a few lines further he says, "So, then, if we would go God's way, we must say as did the Prodigal, 'I have sinned. Pardon me for Jesus' sake.'"³⁸

His Gospel goes something like this. "It is the story of Jesus, of His suffering, death, and resurrection for you and for me. It is the announcement to all the world that in Christ Jesus man has the forgiveness of his sins."³⁹ But why? Why is there forgiveness in Christ Jesus? How does this relate to the Cross? What really happened there? We are not told.

³⁶Ibid., MCMLIV, 385-388.

³⁷Ibid., MCMLIV, 386.

³⁸Ibid., MCMLIV, 386.

³⁹Ibid., MCMLIV, 387.

Saving faith is presented in these words, "You are going His way when you trust His Word implicitly for your soul's salvation."⁴⁰ This is good because it directs the listener to God's word and not to vague feelings. In so many evangelism programs the prospect is led to base assurance on either emotion or else on the fruits of faith (good works). Assurance must always be based on God's word, the promises of God to forgive our sins in the name of Jesus Christ.

The next occasional sermon from the Concordia Pulpit to be examined is entitled, "Personal Soul Winning," and was intended for a mission Sunday.⁴¹ The text is Acts 1:8, which records Jesus informing His disciples that they are to be His witnesses.

Although the subject of this sermon is personal soul winning, yet nowhere is the listener confronted with his own sin and his own salvation. Once again, it is assumed that every listener has accepted Christ as Savior. Once again it is assumed that the hearers understand terms like "redemption." The preacher says that it is our task to tell the significance of Jesus' life and death. This significance is clearly explained in a sentence like the following one. "He is the eternal Son of God, who assumed the human nature in the fulness of time, lived under the Law for us, fulfilled it for us, and paid the penalty of all transgressions."⁴² It is less clearly stated in a sentence like this one. "Christ left the

⁴⁰Ibid., MCMLIV, 387.

⁴¹Ibid., MCMLIV, 428-434.

⁴²Ibid., MCMLIV, 432.

glories of heaven and went down into the agonies of hell for every individual who is born into this world.⁴³

If all the hearers in the church are Christians and if they know the basic of the Christian religion well, then this is a very effective sermon which motivates them to share Christ with others, reminding them how their own needs have all been satisfied in Christ. But should someone be present who does not understand the way of salvation, then a marvelous opportunity has been wasted to show him just how he can claim Christ as his own Savior. The preacher could have given a demonstration of personal soul-winning by challenging any hearer who has not yet accepted Jesus Christ and what He has done for us, to do so today.

Funerals are excellent opportunities for evangelistic preaching. Many non-Christians are usually present. It is a time when such people are confronted with the issues of life and death. They are receptive to the question of eternal salvation. A Concordia Pulpit sermon written especially for a funeral is entitled, "Thou Also Wast With Jesus of Galilee," and is based on Matt. 26:69.⁴⁴

I do not wish to be rude, but it was very difficult to determine whether the preacher himself was with Jesus of Galilee. No non-Christian in attendance would find the way of salvation through this sermon. The Gospel is simply not spelled out at all. There is no explanation of how one obtains eternal life.

⁴³Ibid., MCMLIV, 433.

⁴⁴Ibid., MCMLIV, 436-439.

In all fairness, I must admit that there would no doubt be many such sermons, including my own, offered at the funeral of a dedicated Christian and church member. It is simply taken for granted in most cases that the people in attendance do not need to have the way of salvation explained in detail to them. But I have come to the point in my ministry where I now think this is a mistake.

Next, I would like to examine some sermons which were published by the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod's Department of Evangelism for use in connection with evangelism festivals. The 1975 edition was entitled, The Witness World.⁴⁵ There are three sermons in this booklet, one for each of the final three Sundays in Epiphany.

In the first sermon, the Gospel is stated this way: "God accepts you completely. He has forgiven every sin you ever committed. His love for you is boundless, without limitation."⁴⁶ This is good in that salvation is presented as an accomplished fact. Forgiveness is real and is available for every person. The only criticism might be that these fine words are not tied to the Cross.

As for a call to personal acceptance of what Jesus has done for us, this sentence comes close. "He expects us to count the cost of following Him and to say yes."⁴⁷

⁴⁵Keith Gerberding, The Witness World (St. Louis: Board for Evangelism, The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, 1975).

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 4.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 5.

The third sermon in this booklet does tie salvation closely to the Cross. "We look at the cross, we celebrate Easter morning, and know that in Christ our God has entered the fray on our behalf. He has rescued us and all people, forgiving our sins, promising us life and salvation."⁴⁸

The author of this sermon tries to explain saving faith. First, he cites a study showing that most Lutherans base salvation on works. Then he says, "faith is trust in Jesus, reliance upon His authority."⁴⁹ But in my estimation, this could be misleading. The hearer could be led to believe that Jesus is only an authority figure whom we must follow and emulate. It would have been better for the preacher to spell out that faith is trusting what Jesus did for us on the Cross for our salvation.

A Sermonic Bible Studies was prepared for use in connection with an evangelism festival sometime during the last decade. No date is given.⁵⁰ The study is based on John 14:17. My observation is that there is really nothing evangelistic about these sermonic studies. Keep in mind that evangelistic implies more than the mere proclamation of the Gospel. In an evangelistic sermon, the Gospel is proclaimed in such a way that the hearer is forced to examine whether he is a Christian, whether he accepts what God has done for him in Christ. The study on John 14 did contain

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 16.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 17.

⁵⁰Sermonic Bible Studies (St. Louis: Board for Evangelism, The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, n.d.).

this essential element when it said, "And when we have finished reading it, let's testify that we believe this with all our hearts by joining in a resounding amen."⁵¹

Another Sermonic Bible Studies was based on John 1:3-4.⁵² Suggested use is for the three pre-Lenten Sundays. The first study based on John 1 did not even contain a clearly defined Gospel. The second study based on John 3 fails to clarify what it means to believe in Christ (John 3:16) and fails to note what it is that Christ has done for us.

The third sermon, based on John 4, lacks every ingredient of an evangelistic sermon. In fact, it lacks the Gospel. In all three sermons there is the assumption that the hearers know the Gospel, understand it and have accepted Christ as their personal Savior.

The 1974 evangelism booklet is entitled, Won to be One to Win.⁵³ It has some very good Law-Gospel talk, and the personal element comes through in these words:

Do you have that LIFE? Do you know that God loves you? Do you believe that Jesus Christ died for you? Then you have LIFE, you have the life of God in you now and it will be forever. You are WON, W-O-N, and when you are WON, you are also O-N-E.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 7.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Erwin Kolb, Won to be One to Win, A Sermon for Evangelism Sunday, 1974. (St. Louis: Board for Evangelism, The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod).

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 8.

The 1970 evangelism Bible study was entitled, Strengthening the Congregation by Gaining and Regaining.⁵⁵ The second study in this booklet stresses the personal nature of the Christian faith. He writes,

I would like to start out by reminding you that there is something very individualistic about our Christian faith in so far as everyone must believe for himself in order to be saved. Through His Word God confronts us as individuals. He lays His claim upon us one by one. Everyone must respond for himself in the self-surrender of faith. . . . Everyone must believe for himself to be saved. . . . Whenever I say this, I should be reminded of the fact that believing is something I just do for myself, and the question should flash into my mind, "Do I? Do I really believe in Jesus as my personal Savior?"⁵⁶

That kind of talk is an important ingredient of an evangelistic sermon. The hearer must be forced to examine his heart to determine if he has really accepted Jesus Christ as his Savior. If not, he is then confronted with an immediate decision. Will he now accept what Jesus has done for him?

Finally, in view of the fact that Lent is an occasion which lends itself to evangelistic preaching, I would like to look at four Lenten books.

The first of these is entitled, Bought With A Price.⁵⁷ In this book, the author has published a few occasional sermons in addition to his Lenten sermons. One of these occasional sermons is entitled, "The Three R's in

⁵⁵ Armand Ulbrich, Strengthening the Congregation by Gaining and Regaining (St. Louis: Department of Evangelism, The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, 1970).

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 13.

⁵⁷ Arthur Graf, Bought With A Price (Springfield, Illinois: Faith Publications, 1961).

Religion." I would like to consider it because it is one of the best evangelistic sermons I have uncovered thus far.

In part one he points out how every person has been ruined by the Fall. We are all in a lost state, separated from God. In part two he speaks of our redemption in Christ. He is very clear that Christ died for us and that our salvation is complete. In part three he speaks of regeneration by the Holy Spirit, and then he comes to personal commitment in these words:

What do they mean to you? What can you do about it? You can't do anything about the first--ruined by the Fall. You can't change that. You can't do anything about the second--redeemed by Christ. Jesus redeemed us all by His death on the cross. He paid for the sins of all. You can't nor do you want to change that.

But you can and must do something about the third R, Regenerated by the Spirit. If you refuse to let the Spirit regenerate you, you remain Ruined by the Fall. . . . If you do read your Bible and do come to church to hear the Word, but refuse to believe and live it, you remain Ruined by the Fall.

Jesus redeemed also you. He says: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." He wants to come in, He wants to be your Savior. I pray you, let the Spirit of God enter in. Let the Word of God guide you in your everyday life.⁵⁸

In a Lenten sermon entitled, "I Thirst," the author again includes the evangelistic appeal for decision in these words:

For those of you who are not yet His--who for some reason or another have been putting off your day of decision, your day of salvation, He yearns with special groanings.

God forbid that I should delay in pleading with you. Jesus died for all of you, opened the gates of heaven for you aged, for you young people, for you children, for you in the balcony and you in

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 56.

the nave, for you who are members, and you who are not members. Those same arms once extended on the cross are now extended to you as the poet urges: Delay not, delay not. . .⁵⁹

Another Lenten book is entitled, The Lord's Prayer and The Lord's Passion.⁶⁰ In the first sermon he explains who can pray "Our Father." He notes that only a child of God can do this and you can only be a child of God by Jesus. Although he quotes a number of Bible verses, he does not explain sin and how it separates us from "Our Father." Nor does he mention the cross and atonement. He takes this all for granted. Though he mentions the importance of faith, he does not explain what saving faith really is. There is no call to any personal commitment to Jesus as Savior, no personal call to be a child of the "Our Father."

The third sermon in this Lenten series deals with the second petition of the Lord's Prayer. It is fairly good on sin as rebellion against God. Sin is spoken of in terms of separation and eternal death. As for Gospel, he writes, "He offered Himself to God in our stead, to remove sin, death and the power of the devil."⁶¹

He makes a good attempt to explain the meaning of faith when he writes, "God gives us righteousness when we accept Christ who lived

⁵⁹Ibid., pp. 122-123.

⁶⁰Paul Lessmann, The Lord's Prayer and The Lord's Passion (St. Louis: Concordia, 1965).

⁶¹Ibid., p. 4.

perfectly for us and then died for us that we might live at peace with God and men in Him."⁶²

The sixth sermon is entitled, "We, the Forgiven, Will Forgive." This is the best sermon in the book when it comes to spelling out that we are all sinners and that our sins separate us from God. His presentation of the Gospel affirms that the wall of separation is broken down. He writes:

The debt is paid in full. Our heavenly Father has accepted His own Son's perfect life and sacrificial death in place of our imperfect life and has spared us from the horrors of eternal death. The cross of Jesus Christ has been laid across the yawning chasm that separates us from God.⁶³

Still another Lenten book is entitled, On A Hill Far Away.⁶⁴ One of the two authors strikes me as fairly consistent in all of his sermons in trying to be very personal. The endings of most of his sermons urge a personal response. For example, in his sermon entitled, "Tied Hands," he says,

We ought to look at those tied hands of Jesus then as a warning. Have we tied His hands by our sin and unbelief? Do we by continuing that attitude of ignoring Him or denying our need for Him continue to tie His hands so that He cannot help us? If so, let us sincerely lament our sins and repent of them. Let us confess them and tell Him that we are sorry, that through ignorance and iniquity we have bound His hands.⁶⁵

⁶² Ibid., p. 41.

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 73-74.

⁶⁴ J. H. Baumgaertner and Elmer A. Kettner, On A Hill Far Away (St. Louis: Concordia, 1962).

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 95.

In another sermon entitled, "Royal Hands," he concludes with these challenging words:

Look once more at that right hand of Jesus holding the scepter. In your own heart make it a golden scepter. You can make it that by your faith, by accepting Him as your Savior and King.⁶⁶

One final Lenten book to be reviewed is entitled The Christ Men Need.⁶⁷ There is an excellent evangelistic message in this book which the author gives the theme, "The Barrier Removed," based on Matt. 27:50-51. This sermon contains a Law which shows that sin separates us from our Creator. This sermon contains a Gospel which shows the atoning sacrifice of Christ's death and which also makes clear that salvation is an accomplished fact.

The call to commitment includes an explanation of how to come to Christ. He writes,

And if you have never as yet actually received Christ into your heart and allowed Him to receive you into His embrace of love, then do so now. There is no peace without Him. You cannot get behind that dividing wall and go into the presence of God so long as the barrier of sin stands in your way and Christ is the only one who can take it away for you. So come to Him and say to Him, "Just as I am without one plea, but that Thy blood was shed for me, and that Thou bidst me come to Thee, O Lamb of God, I come." If thus each of us will speak, then the peace and blessedness of this day will be in our hearts and lives.⁶⁸

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 108.

⁶⁷O. A. Geiseman, The Christ Men Need (New York: Ernst Kaufmann, Inc., 1944).

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 66.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

Summary of Findings

Is there a Biblical basis for evangelistic preaching? Yes. Even in the Old Testament we see an emphasis on calling people to repentance and to a personal commitment, a commitment which often manifests itself in certain audible or visual expressions. Although it is true that Jesus directed His ministry to those who were still living under the Old Covenant and therefore the comparisons with a Christian congregation today are not exact, yet His ministry was aimed at a personal response from the hearer. He sought this response also from His disciples after they had been with Him for a long time. Evangelistic preaching is most obvious in the book of Acts, whether that preaching took place in the synagogue or somewhere else. And even in the Epistles, where the comparison is more exact to a Christian congregation today, we find the apostles seeking a personal response to the Gospel. Naturally, the emphasis is stronger on responding to the Lordship of Jesus. However, the challenge to accept Jesus as Savior is also present.

Is evangelistic preaching consistent with Lutheran teaching on the nature of man and conversion? Again, the answer is yes. Although the danger of synergism is present, it can be avoided if terms are properly defined and appeals are properly made. The appeal should be to accept what Christ has already done for us. If such an appeal is preceded by a clear exposition of the Gospel, there is no reason to criticize such an appeal on the basis that it suggests man's cooperation in conversion.

We further saw that the distinction between didache and kerygma is not as exact as Dodd and others would have us to believe. Even a Christian congregation needs kerygma.

We noted that the strongest arguments for evangelistic preaching come from those Reformed writers, in particular Arminian Reformed, who feel strongly about the need for conducting revival services. They argue that it is a tragedy to stir people religiously without giving them something they can do about it. They further argue that even Christians need to recommit themselves to Jesus as their only Savior from sin.

As for arguments against evangelistic preaching, the Lutherans are more vocal. They would be more ready to concur with David Breed that the pastor's first duty is the feeding and upbuilding of the Church of God. And they would also concur with Templeton who warns against dividing an audience into "saved" and "lost" as though it were a simple matter to transfer an individual from the latter group to the former group. Lutherans warn against the so-called evangelical imperatives such as "repent" and "believe," pointing out that they easily give the impression the human will is capable of making a decision for Christ. Other Lutherans warn against a confusion of Law and Gospel and the preaching of a diluted Gospel.

Developing criteria for an evangelistic sermon was difficult because if you base your criteria on a sermon you already consider to be evangelistic, you are arguing in a circle. By consulting several authorities, it was determined that one must first keep in mind the occasion. This will dictate to what extent the sermon should be evangelistic. It was also

determined that an evangelistic sermon should clearly set forth the Law and the Gospel in a personal way. The hearer must be made aware that in his natural state he is lost. The hearer must further be made aware that his salvation is complete in Jesus Christ. The details of what Jesus Christ has done for us should be spelled out. A final ingredient of an evangelistic sermon was seen to be an explanation of saving faith followed by an appeal to examine whether one really has accepted what Jesus Christ has done for us on the Cross.

It is interesting that sermons solicited from the field and selected by the various preachers because they considered them to be evangelistic were in reality not found to be any more evangelistic than those chosen at random from the Concordia Pulpit.

Generally speaking, the findings with respect to the sermons (with the obvious exception of a few) were as follows. First, the assumption predominated that the hearers were already Christians, people who had accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. Second, many theological expressions such as repent, faith, believe, redeem, Gospel, etc. were taken for granted. It was assumed that the hearers understand these terms. Third, the Gospel was not spelled out in detail in very many sermons. Details in the life of Christ were omitted. God's love and forgiveness were quite often not even tied to the Cross itself. On occasion, when the Cross was mentioned, its real significance was left unsaid. If someone did not know the meaning of Christ's death and resurrection when he entered the church, he most likely would not discover this from several of the sermons reviewed, but would rather have to determine the meaning from hymns and liturgy. Fourth, saving faith was simply not

explained. The hearer was often urged to have faith, come to faith, believe, and so on, but was not told what this involves. Fifth, seldom was there a personal appeal to certain hearers to accept Jesus as Savior today. Sixth, the appeal to reason most always outweighed the emotional appeal, though both elements are present. However, this is no doubt the way it should be. Seventh, sermons written especially for evangelism occasions had as their main thrust the motivation of the hearer to do evangelism rather than the evangelization of the hearer himself. Eighth, sermons written for special occasions, such as funerals, confirmations, Lenten services and others, often missed wonderful opportunities to speak to the unconverted person in the audience who knows little or nothing of the way of salvation. However, there were some notable exceptions among the Lenten sermons.

Personal Observations

I was told before engaging in this research that I would not find much sympathy for evangelistic preaching in The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, nor would I find many examples of it. Both predictions have proven true.

I recognize that in my examination of the various sermons I was being hyper-critical. In fact, I am confident that my own sermons could not stand up to such scrutiny. I realize full well that no pastor can preach an evangelistic sermon Sunday after Sunday to his flock. Nor is it possible to make every sermon a complete lesson in Bible history and catechism. Obviously, the preacher must present the Gospel in various

and fresh ways as dictated by the text itself. And some assumptions must be made, among these that most people in the audience do understand various theological terms.

Yet, it seems to me that a certain number of sermons preached in the course of a year must spell out the way of salvation most clearly and must keep the non-Christian more in mind. Also, a greater effort should be made to challenge those who call themselves Christians to examine themselves whether they have really accepted Jesus and what He has done for them, whether they are really trusting only Jesus for their own salvation. My random and arbitrary sampling suggests that these things are not being done with great enough frequency. Worse yet, in my judgment these things are not being done even when the preacher thinks he is doing them.

I am disappointed that not more preachers in the field responded to my appeal for sample sermons. I also feel that it would have been good to hear more sermons since much is lost when a sermon is only read. Once again, I realize that from a statistical viewpoint, my research leaves much to be desired. A much greater sampling should be taken and a large number of sermons should be solicited from each preacher.

I would like to challenge others to carry on this cause, to refine the criteria for judging an evangelistic sermon, to take a more thorough sampling of sermons being preached and to strive for greater statistical validity. I used a Concordia Pulpit from the year 1954. I would like for someone to take a more recent sampling to determine if there is a change in emphasis since programs like the Kennedy Evangelism Program have made inroads into our church body. Someone might also consider the relationship

between the fact that the Missouri Synod is not native to America where revival techniques developed and the fact that so little evangelistic preaching is done in our pulpits. And still another area for future study could be a survey of present parish practices to determine if Missouri Synod preachers are providing any kind of an opportunity for a personal response. As I said earlier, I was not able to make such a study in this paper.

Finally, I would call for a renewed emphasis on the Sunday service as a means to reach the unchurched. The service should not be seen only as a meeting time for members. Members should invite those with no church home, and the pastor should use the Sunday sermon to reach these unchurched. The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod has the Gospel. We have this great tradition of emphasizing salvation by the grace of God. We have this concern that our preaching be Biblical. There is much that we can offer to the need for more evangelistic preaching in a society groping for meaning and purpose.

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