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## In Memory of Prof. George Mezger, D.D.

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What do we hear? "Behold, I will allure her," I will speak to her as does a lover to the chosen maiden of his heart. Because she has forgotten Me, the Lord, therefore, behold, I will woo her, I will renew My efforts to win her back to My heart and bosom. Here is the mystery of divine grace. Here is mercy such as God alone is capable of. Our sin, our apostasy, our shameful ingratitude, our vile adultery, moves Him to pity, to love us. We bow in adoration before this incomprehensible God of mercy. Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God of hosts! For He is the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, Ex. 34, 6. 7.

THEO. LAETSCH.

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### In Memory of Prof. George Mezger, D. D.

1857—1931.

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On the sixth day of November there was laid to rest in the land of his birth, which he had left fifty-six years ago and to which he had returned in 1923, a man whose name deserves to be retained in loving and grateful memory within our circles. It is Prof. Georg Mezger, D. D., for twenty-seven years the teacher of Homiletics, Catechetics, and Pastoral Theology at our Seminary, for the past eight years teaching at the Seminary of the German Evangelical Lutheran Free Church of Saxony at Berlin-Zehlendorf. Mezger was a quiet, unassuming, unobtrusive person, at all times "Gentleman George," as he was frequently called. And still he exercised a far-reaching, wholesome influence, due to the thoroughness of his work, his calm, objective judgment, and his splendid gift of logical reasoning and clear presentation.

Mezger was born in Braunschweig, Germany, December 18, 1857, and came to America in 1875. After graduating from our St. Louis Seminary in 1881, he served the congregations at Waterloo, Iowa, for four years, at Okawville, Ill., for ten years, and at Decatur, Ill., for one year. During this pastorate of fifteen years under varying conditions he gathered that practical experience which he put to such good use later in the classroom and in his literary work. At the same time his pastoral work, varied and oftentimes arduous as it was, did not keep him from continuing his studies. His clear, Scriptural, well-arranged sermons, his essays at conferences, attracted the attention of his fellow-pastors to him as a man of outstanding gifts. In 1896 he was nominated and chosen for the chair of Homiletics and Catechetics at Concordia Seminary and, in September of the same year, installed in his new sphere of duties. Side by side with those men who at that time constituted the faculty — Pieper, Stoeckhardt,

Graebner, Bente, Fuerbringer, men whose names are so dear to us—he taught by word and deed, by precept and example, those sterling qualities of which, by the grace of God, he was so illustrious a model: unselfish faithfulness in the performance of duty, conscientious, prayerful preparation for the work that God has assigned, unflinching courage in professing and defending the truth of Holy Writ, and, above all, absolute submission at all times to the Word of God and childlike faith in our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.

For twenty-seven years Mezger taught Homiletics and Catechetics and for a number of years also Pastoral Theology. Practically all St. Louis graduates between the ages of thirty and sixty were taught by him the principles according to which a good sermon must be written and preached and a catechesis worked out and delivered, while hundreds of pastors of our Synod were through his faithful labors thoroughly furnished unto efficient performance of the various functions of a pastor's practical activity.

For many years Mezger was one of the most active and influential members on the Intersynodical Committee chosen by our Synod for the purpose of effecting, if possible, unity in faith and confession between the various Lutheran synods in our country. His thorough knowledge of Lutheran doctrine, his keen intellect, his unwavering loyalty to the Word of God, his gentlemanly tact, his unassuming humility, his patience, all combined to make him eminently qualified for this work. One's heart weeps at the thought that in spite of his efforts a real union on the only possible basis, unity in doctrine and practise, was not effected. May the time come when Mezger's prayer will be fulfilled that the Lutheran Church of America, even if not outwardly united into one body, will truly be one in spirit and in truth, standing four-square on the Bible and the Lutheran Confessions in all matters of doctrine and practise.

Great as was Mezger's influence as a teacher and as a member of this committee, I dare say fully as great was his influence as editor of the *Magazin fuer Ev.-Luth. Homiletik*, a position which he filled for twenty-five years, 1898—1923. In the course of these years he published not only a large number of outlines, he wrote scores of sermons, and from his ever busy pen issued no less than 136 "studies," exegetico-homiletical studies on the pericopes of the church-year.

Let us look a little closer at his method of sermonizing. A study of Mezger's sermons will at once impress us with the fact that they are based on thorough exegetical study of the text and its immediate and farther context. Never does Mezger degrade the text to the position of a mere pretext. The text is expounded and applied, applied in a masterly manner, by a man who, from personal experience in a fifteen-year pastorate and from close observation, knows his age, its peculiar dangers and temptations, the wonderful opportunities

which our time offers. The thoughts taken from the text are not loosely strung together in haphazard fashion; no, Mezger scrupulously observes in every one of his sermons those sound laws of homiletics which he so ably taught to his students at the Seminary. Here we have unity of thought; one will not find an irrelevant thought in Mezger's sermons. Every sentence, every phrase, serves either to emphasize some point of special importance in connection with the theme, or to clarify it, or to illustrate it, or to guard against a possible misunderstanding, or to carry on the one main thought of the sermon, which is constantly kept before the mind of the hearer. Here is logical progress of thought and clarity of outline, which renders it so great a delight to follow him and almost forces the listener or reader to remember what has been said on the text. Here again is the absence of all hollow phraseology and high-sounding, yet empty catch-words. As in his entire life, so, true to his character, Mezger in his sermons says what he means and means what he says. True, Mezger was not a brilliant orator, he did not excel in flowery language; his language and style was like himself, simple, quiet, unassuming. But his sermons are thorough, Scriptural, textual, Christocentric. And for that very reason they are not only truly edifying, but truly beautiful. Can there be language more beautiful than that employed by the Creator of language in His own book, the Bible? Can there be a sermon more beautiful than a sermon filled with Scriptural thoughts, expressed in Scriptural language, embellished with Scriptural illustrations? The closer to Scripture, the more beautiful the language and style of a sermon.

Mezger's sermons are, above all, as already stated, Christocentric sermons, every one of them. The great Apostle Paul writes to his Philippians: "To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe," Phil. 3, 1. Walther in his *Pastorale*, p. 94, impresses on every Lutheran preacher that every single sermon preached by him must contain so much of the order of salvation that any person hearing only this one sermon may from it learn the way to salvation. Mezger walked in the footsteps of Paul and Paul's great disciple, Walther. First and above all, salvation through the atoning vicarious sacrifice of Jesus, the Son of God.

The same conscientious preparation which characterized Mezger's sermons is evident in the many outlines which in the course of twenty-five years were published by him in the *Magazin*. Of outstanding merit are his series of outlines on books of the Bible. From 1901 to 1907 he published ninety-one outlines on the Pentateuch, followed in 1909 to 1913 by seventy-two outlines on selected texts from the Book of Acts, and in 1920 nineteen outlines on the Book of Joshua. His series on the Pentateuch is especially noteworthy. I do not hesitate to recommend these outlines for two years of preaching in the morn-

ing service. In a masterly manner, Mezger here covers practically the entire range of doctrine and life. Two years of preaching along the lines indicated here by the experienced pastor, the thorough exegete, the accomplished homiletician, cannot but bring splendid results. The outlines on the Book of Acts again show the remarkable versatility of the man. Acts is preeminently a book on the subject of missions, yet he succeeded in bringing out not only its missionary precepts, but also its rich doctrinal content, which after all must motivate all our church-work. He not only avoids monotony, but, in strict accord with the text, presents a series of outlines which cannot fail to interest and edify the preacher and his congregation.

Mezger's chief achievement during his editorship of the *Magazin* were undoubtedly his many "sermon studies" published by him during the twenty-five years. He was not the only one nor the first one to offer such studies. Especially Dr. Stockhardt had written quite a number of them during the years preceding Mezger's editorship. While Stockhardt in these studies dug deep and discovered rich veins of purest gold where other men would hardly have looked for them, his entire manner necessitated individual conscientious and sometimes difficult work in order to prepare this splendid material for pulpit use. Mezger's studies, like Stockhardt's, were based on close scholarly study of the text and a keen understanding of present-day conditions in the world, in the church at large, and in our Synod in particular. His studies hold a happy middle way between a completed sermon and a meatless skeleton of purely linguistic or exegetical annotations. They furnish food for thought and stimulate independent study. At the same time, many paragraphs are presented in so complete and polished a form that one can hardly resist the temptation of incorporating them verbatim in the Sunday's sermon. These studies have proved, and to this day prove, a real boon to the busy pastor who does not want merely to preach a sermon written for him by some one else, but at the same time because of the stress of his work must look for some help and aid in the preparation of a good sermon.

In another respect these studies are commendable. I refer to the many quotations from Luther. Mezger studied Luther thoroughly and from personal acquaintance with his writings knew their practical value for the pastor's sermon work. His quotations are not merely space-fillers. They serve a practical purpose. Sometimes Mezger allows Luther to interpret the text, permitting him to state in his own inimitable way what, after all, can hardly be expressed in a better manner, or the quotations serve to reiterate and enforce a point of special importance or to corroborate a statement made by the author or to refute a false interpretation or to bring to the attention of the reader some especially beautiful and fitting passage of Luther. By

these quotations Mezger showed not only his thorough acquaintance with the writings of Dr. Luther, he also proved that he was not ashamed to be and remain a pupil of Luther. These quotations also serve to show the reader how marvelous was Luther's all-comprehensive grasp of the text, how masterly his interpretation, how consummate his skill in applying Scripture to the ever-varying conditions of human life, how popular his language, how gripping his style. For these reasons Mezger introduced Luther to the reader and by setting before him these choice bits created an appetite for more. Many a pastor was induced to read and study and cherish and love Luther through these quotations so frequently found in Mezger's studies.

In Vol. 24 of the *Magazin* we find a series of outlines for catechises on Luther's Small Catechism, the series comprising the introduction and the First Chief Part of our Synodical Catechism. Mezger had dictated these outlines to his classes at the Seminary. They met with such approval, both by the students and the readers of the *Magazin*, that he was induced to publish in 1902 his classic *Entwuerfe zu Katechesen*. This was followed in 1923 by *Lessons in the Small Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther*. These lessons had originally been written for the Senior Department of the Sunday-school lessons published by our Concordia Publishing House. Teachers and pastors at once demanded that they appear in book form, and the well-deserved popularity of the book has not waned. A new edition, prepared by Pastor W. H. Luke, with only minor changes, was placed on the market in December, 1931. In this connection we should also call attention to Mezger's books originally written for Bible classes, his commentaries on Matthew and on Acts, written in his usual clear and simple style. The teacher or pastor working in day-school or Sunday-school and using these books in preparing his lessons will derive real help and assistance in his difficult work. And the class taught in the manner outlined by Mezger will, like Timothy of old, be made wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus and thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

As already stated, for a number of years Mezger taught Pastoral Theology at our Seminary. The manner in which he taught this important branch may be seen from a number of articles published at various times in the *Magazin*. I mention only his articles on the "Duty of the Pastor with Regard to the Confirmed Youth of His Congregation," Vol. 25, running through six issues; "Church Discipline as Comanded by God," Vol. 30, four issues; "Bible Lessons for Our Confirmed Youth," Vol. 34, p. 278. Again, these articles show the earmarks of Mezger's simple, yet thoroughgoing method of presentation and teaching. He sets before his readers not merely a few sweetmeats that will cloy the appetite and spoil the digestion, but

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solid, substantial food, such as the young theologian needs and the old pastor relishes.

In his sermons, his outlines, his studies, his many other writings, Mezger has left to the Church he loved so well, and especially to its pastors, a precious heritage. Though written from ten to thirty-five years ago, though written chiefly in the German language, they are still of great value to this day. It would be a shame if this talent, which God through His servant has given to us, should ever be buried in the napkin of oblivion. Let us make diligent use of this talent lest the words of the Lord apply to us also, Luke 19, 24. 26: "Take from him the pound and give it to him that hath ten pounds. For I say unto you, That unto every one which hath shall be given, and from him that hath not even that he hath shall be taken away from him." God grant to our ministry the humble trust and conscientious faithfulness of our sainted Dr. Mezger!

TH. LAETSCH.

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Dispositionen über die zweite von der Synodalkonferenz  
angenommene Evangelienreihe.

Quinquagesimä.

Matth. 16, 21—23.

Der natürliche Mensch vernimmt nichts vom Geist Gottes. Bibel-  
feinde innerhalb und außerhalb der Kirche bekämpfen daher oft unter  
dem Namen der Wissenschaft das Evangelium, von dem allerdings gilt:  
1 Kor. 1, 23, aber auch ganz gewiß wahr ist: B. 24. 25. Dieses Gift  
wird ausgesprochen in den Zeitungen, über das Radio, von der Redner-  
bühne, von vielen Kanzeln. Daher die Warnung nötig:

**Wleiben wir unverworren mit dem Modernismus!**

1. Denn er redet nicht, was göttlich ist;
2. er raubt uns den Heiland und die Seligkeit.

1.

Nur und deutlich hatte Jesus sein Leiden und Sterben vorher-  
gesagt, B. 21. Damit redete er nur, was göttlich war, was Gott selber  
zuvor gesagt hatte, und war willens, sich dem Willen Gottes ganz und  
gar zu fügen, sein Wort nicht nur im Glauben anzunehmen, sondern  
nach diesem Wort auch zu handeln, es koste, was es wolle.

Ganz anders Petrus, B. 22. Er will nicht wahr haben, was  
Jesus gesagt hat. Er konnte eben nicht verstehen, warum das nötig sei.  
Jesus Leiden und Sterben paßte nicht zu seinen Vorstellungen von dem