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The Pastor and the Pastoral Cure of Souls

As the pastor of today surveys the scene presented by life in twentieth-century America, the setting in which he must practise his profession, he cannot but be impressed by the increasing magnitude of the task set for him. This task is indeed many-sided. It includes the functions of the public ministry, the preaching of the Word and the public administration of the Sacraments; it includes the teaching functions of the ministry in the educational activities of the Church; it includes administrative tasks as executive head of a rather complex organization; it includes missionary activities and frequently service in synodical offices; it includes a prominence in the community at large, particularly when moral issues are at stake; and it includes the maintaining of delicately balanced social relationships with all types and classes of men. But the pastor's task certainly includes the cure of human souls, the personal healing ministry to the sin-sick souls of the individuals whose spiritual health and well-being he is obligated to foster and to promote. This task has in all ages been the most difficult of accomplishment of all the tasks imposed upon the ministry; but its difficulties have been immeasurably increased by the changes which have taken place in American life within the memory of generations now living.

These changes include particularly the accelerated pace at which modern life itself is moving today, the continuous change of behavior patterns in every relationship of life, and the resultant stress and strain upon the nervous and emotional system of the individual. Modern inventions and techniques, the fierce competition of an overindustrialized, socially maladjusted age, the curtailment of the productive span of man's life, the urbanization of rural areas through advanced means of communication,—these and many other factors have caused the currents of life to flow with almost incredible swiftness in the world of today. Even casual

observers will note that people everywhere are always busy. Every one seems to be perpetually in a hurry. There is an endless hustling and bustling about. Everything and everybody is incessantly in a state of flux. Momentous changes, upsetting all balances in industrial, business, and social organization, are continually impending. Thus men everywhere are exceedingly preoccupied with the pressing affairs of their daily lives and all too often have little time or energy to spare for spiritual interests.

Moreover, the accelerated pace at which life is moving today has produced friction at many points, as speed always will. People generally are nervous and emotionally unstable; they are easily irritated and aroused to resentment and anger. There is a tremendous increase in diseases which affect the nervous system and the mind of man. Observers have noted that men seem to be losing the ability to think clearly and dispassionately and that they seem increasingly reluctant to concentrate their attention upon subjects demanding abstract reasoning. These impatient, nervous, busy, practical men are not apt to give leisurely, respectful attention to their pastor when he seeks to minister to their souls, and they are more and more inclined to resent his admonitions and exhortations.

Other changes have occurred in the social and cultural life of man which profoundly affect the work of the pastor of today. Modern means of transportation and communication have broken down the walls which formerly isolated people in their group relationships. The spread of universal education has widened man's mental and cultural horizon, but has also exposed his mind and heart to many influences which are destructive of Christian ideals. The radio, the cinema, the newspaper, the illustrated magazine, the modern novel, — all these and many other productions of this age have done their share in crowding out of man's life the ideals of religion and in imposing upon the mass of Christians and non-Christians alike the moral code of Hollywood and the ethical standards of the underworld. The automobile and its growing offspring, the trailer, have in a measure succeeded in disrupting communal and family life and have created increasingly serious problems of a social and moral nature. The disintegration of family life alone, with its implied weakening of parental authority, its coarsening of emotional fiber, its loosening of the ties of moral restraint, has profoundly affected and magnified the task of the pastor. The repeal of prohibition with the amazing resurrection of the old-time saloon in a more attractive and hence more destructive guise, the alarming increase of the drinking habit in both men and women, the many problems that grow out of intemperance in every form, — all these have created new perplexities for the faithful pastor. The present laxity of the code of business ethics, the evils

of instalment buying, the loan shark, political corruption, the complex questions affecting the relationship of capital and labor,—Christian people are touched and influenced by all these momentous issues. All add new strands to the tangled web which makes up life in twentieth-century America. The pastor must deal with all these and with many other influences in his work of ministering to the souls of men. He cannot take men away from these environmental factors; men must live and work in the midst of them; so he must meet them, and somehow he must succeed, despite all obstacles, in his task of commanding the attention of men that he might minister to their immortal souls in their ever-increasing needs.

The pastor of today is further handicapped in his pastoral work by the low esteem in which he and his office are often held by the world and, alas, also by all too many Christians of this generation. The pastor of yesterday was indispensable to his people in every relationship of life. He was their friend, counselor, and guide. The guidance and comfort of religion were vital necessities to the mass of Christian people. Yesterday's pastor found an open door for his ministrations almost everywhere, and he was privileged, as a rule, to attend to his pastoral labors with a deep sense of satisfaction and joy. To many church people of today the pastor is no longer a counselor and guide in the affairs of life. It is his business to preach, and he is heard with a degree of patience when in the pulpit. But his pastoral attention, his personal ministry, is sought only in days of illness or distress by a considerable number of his members. Many call for his services only on the occasion of baptisms, weddings, or funerals. Even some of his most faithful members no longer regard the pastor with the reverence and respect common in Christians of an earlier age. They accept his ministrations with a new air of good-fellowship, of critical appraisal, of employerlike good will. It is not surprising that the pastor of today, being all too human, frequently goes about his pastoral duties with a heavy heart, that he is sometimes tempted to question the worth-whileness of his calling, that he is often oppressed with a sense of futility, a consciousness of defeat.

Yet definite signs of the dawning of a new day of opportunity for the Christian ministry are not wanting. The gods of materialism, so ardently worshiped by the world and all too many Christians in the days of prosperity, have not given longed-for happiness and satisfaction to their devotees. The day of disillusionment has come for many who in more prosperous days had turned away from the service of God to the service of Mammon. The dizzy days of the third decade of the twentieth century, with their prevailing "success" philosophy, are gone. Books on "how to succeed" are no

longer best sellers. Self-hypnotism as a substitute for an adequate, satisfying philosophy of life has had its day. The closing days of the third decade, with the collapse of man's pet schemes for self-enrichment and self-aggrandizement, definitely ushered in a new day, when men, bankrupt in wealth and assurance, once more seek comfort and peace in the realm of religion. True, in the world at large this new approach to religion is all too frequently not along the lines well established in the Law and Gospel; it all too often expends its energies fruitlessly in the fields of philosophy, sociology, metaphysics, and psychology; but it does indicate the dawn of a new day of opportunity and blessed service for the Christian minister and for the Christian Church in every department of Christian work. Men have become conscious of a great void in their hearts and lives, a void which can be adequately filled only by the truths and comforts of Christ's religion. The Church has never had more glorious opportunities than she has in this age of man's disillusionment. There was never a greater need for consecrated men to devote their lives to the Christian ministry and to bring to the longing hearts of men the comfort and peace of the Gospel through faithful missionary and pastoral work. And the Lutheran pastor of today, equipped with unshaken faith and profound love for souls, bearing the unadulterated Gospel of God's salvation, must realize that in God's providence he has been made a "keeper of the wells of salvation" in one of the most critical periods of human history, and both in his missionary and in his pastoral work he must eagerly seize every opportunity to minister to the dying souls of sin-sick men. He will find that the people of his flock, to whom he is primarily obligated, also have been affected by the many influences in the world of today which are destructive of Christian faith, that they are no longer the simple, unsophisticated, pious folk to whom his predecessors were privileged to minister, that the "cure of souls," always a delicate and difficult work, has grown to be a more difficult task with each succeeding year, that his work is all too often not appreciated even by his own people. He will often be compelled to go about his pastoral work with a heavy heart; but he must go about it nevertheless and do his work with undiminished faith and love. Conscious of his high calling, he will, he must, be spurred on by greater needs to greater efforts. And as his people, sin-sick, weary, disillusioned in life, again turn to him and his ministry for comfort and strength, he will rise to new heights of glorious achievement in his pastoral office.

To do this, the pastor will require a special measure of God's grace in these troublous times. After all, God's work is accomplished "not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." Paul, facing ever-increasing difficulties, thought

that the removal of his "thorn in the flesh" would make for greater effectiveness in his ministry; but the Lord knew and understood his needs better than he. "My grace is sufficient for thee; for My strength is made perfect in weakness." The faithful pastor will come to an ever-increasing realization of his own inadequacy, his shortcomings in his pastoral work, as conditions in the world grow increasingly evil; but this realization will not drive him to despair. His sense of personal inadequacy will, on the contrary, drive him to a new assurance of, and a new reliance upon, the grace and mercy of God in Christ, and he will say with St. Paul: "I can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth me."

Relying and wholly depending upon the grace of God in Christ, the pastor will not only be imbued with new courage and faith in the performance of his pastoral work, but he will also be fired with a new determination to overcome his inadequacies and shortcomings through diligent labor and intelligent application lest he hinder the workings of God's grace both in himself and in those to whom he must minister. He will again and again begin a sincere self-examination and an examination of his human equipment for the purpose of increasing his knowledge and understanding of man's needs and of God's grace. He will again and again critically appraise his pastoral work, its spirit and its techniques, in the light of the Word of God in order not to fail his people in their need. And we believe that such "stock-taking" will lead the pastor of today to certain conclusions, a few of which we shall attempt to outline.

The first of these conclusions is this, that to minister intelligently and effectively to the souls of men, the pastor of today must know and understand the contemporary world and the peculiar needs of men in this age. It is true, fundamentally the world and the needs of men have not changed. Life is still marred and corrupted by sin, and men still need the grace of God in Christ for their salvation. The faithful pastor must still denounce and expose sin and lead sinners to faith in Christ in his personal work among men. There is still the same hardness of heart, the same disinclination to be humble, the same unbelief, which have caused servants of the Word so much concern since the days of the prophets. Sickness, poverty, reverses, and troubles of every kind, the infirmities of old age and death, are still as of old the great destroyers of human happiness. All this is true. But it is also an undeniable fact that the patterns of life and of man's behavior have changed greatly since the days of our fathers. Life is today undergoing continuous changes before our very eyes. Every one will agree that the world in which we are living today is an infinitely more complex world than was the world of yesterday.

Sin appears today in ever new guises and in ever cleverer disguises, the ills that have plagued men of old have today produced broods of offspring even more vexing than their begetters; men have grown more weary, more sophisticated, more calloused to sin, more enamored of the world, more resistant to the grace of God in these latter days. The pastor of today must understand and properly evaluate these changes if he would minister effectively to the men of his generation. He must comprehend the peculiar psychology of the times, the preoccupation of men with their business affairs, the nervous tension under which men are living, the fear complex which characterizes this age. He must appreciate the tremendous "pull" which the seductions of the modern world exert on a generation of Christians surfeited with the precious Word, a generation which has never had to pay for its blessings, which never had to bleed and die for its faith. He must realize the new subtlety of sin and worldliness; even earnest Christians often wonder just where the line between good and evil must be drawn. The pastor must know a good deal about the problems which men engaged in business and industry, in the arts, sciences, and professions, must face in these days; for all of them have far-reaching moral and spiritual implications. Perplexed men will look to him increasingly for guidance in these matters. Men are beginning to discover the fact that the wisdom of the world has not been equal to the task of creating a social order in which men may live peacefully with a good conscience. The bankrupt world is increasingly looking to religion, to religious leaders, for guidance, and justly so; for Christianity has long proclaimed that "all other things" shall be "added unto" those who seek "first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." Those who assert that "godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come" dare not disappoint men who plead with them to answer questions of every-day life and to lead them in the way of godliness.

The pastor of today must moreover be no stranger to the thinking of the poor and disinherited, that vast, seething mass of underprivileged humanity which must exist on the dole in one form or another from cradle to grave, which is denied the chance to work and to live a satisfying life in an overorganized world, and out of which will probably come the answer, and it may be a violent one, to many of the social and economic riddles of today. The gradual disappearance of the middle class in American life is pressing our Lutheran people into this "modern poor" class in increasing numbers, and it is the pastor's business to watch over the souls of those who are slipping in their social scale, lest they also slip in their Christian faith and life. The pastor of today must also

be able to understand and properly evaluate the effects upon his people of universal education, of scientific thinking, of the rationalistic interpretations of divine truths so common today, and of a thousand and one phenomena in the contemporary world, which all profoundly affect the great work he is attempting to do by God's grace, "curing" the sin-sick souls and the sin-marred lives of men with the medicine of the Word of God. Certainly these reflections will cause the pastor, on the one hand, to become a man given to much reading and study, not only in the field of theology, but in almost every other field of human endeavor, and, on the other hand, to lead him to seek the acquaintance of men in every walk of life in order that he may constantly grow in his knowledge of life and in his understanding of the specific needs of all his people.

This growing understanding of life and people will, we believe, not only broaden the sympathies of the pastor and aid him in preserving patience and good will, upon which the pastor of today must daily draw in his pastoral work, but it will lead him also to the developing of new techniques in his approach to both human problems and his people. It is an undeniable fact that the relationship between pastor and people in the world of today has been profoundly affected by the temper of the times. There was a day when the pastor's word was "law" to his people. His authority was unquestioned. He was able to denounce evil and chastise men for their sins in the fashion of the prophets of old. His "Thus saith the Lord" settled all disputes and ended all arguments. It is, alas, no longer thus. The faith of all too many Christians has been vitiated by worldliness, their love to God has grown cold. There is no longer that close acquaintance with, and that deep reverence for, the Word of God which distinguished Christians in the days of our fathers. Ours is an age marked by skepticism, and our Christian people have not escaped its influence. The "scientific method," implanted even in schoolchildren, teaches man to question every assertion and the authority of every one. The significant stock phrase of this "debunking" generation is the vulgar, but expressive "Oh, yeah?" and the observant pastor of today will not fail to note that this skeptical spirit has invaded also his people and has affected their attitudes in the realm of religion to a considerable degree.

This being true, it follows that to be successful in his personal ministry, to "break through," the pastor of today must in many cases use a new method of approach. Men laboring in other fields of human endeavor have made the same discovery. And out of their thinking has come what is known as the "psychological approach," a method of approach based on new knowledge of the

psychology of men. Medicine recognizes the effectiveness of this approach, it has been developed in legal practise, business uses it particularly in the field of salesmanship. Trained social workers of today no longer approach problems in social case work exclusively from the sociological angle, but also through the channels of psychology. Modern educational methods are built on better knowledge of child psychology. And so men laboring in pastoral work in the world of today are discovering that a psychologically sound approach will in many cases bring favorable results when the more direct method has failed. It must be admitted that blunt and unsparing denunciation of sin, particularly "wholesale" or general condemnation of some form of sinful pleasure, will no longer command respectful attention, particularly on the part of our younger members. They are simply not impressed by it, as many a pastor has discovered to his sorrow. Solemn warnings on the part of the pastor to beware of lurking dangers to the soul in some popular form of amusement, in the practises that prevail in the social life of schools and colleges, etc., result all too often in charges of "old fogyism."

Even the truths of God's Word, expressed in the vigorous, blunt, dogmatic fashion of another age, are heard all too often with visible lack of interest even by a great many of our own Lutheran people. These are facts, and pastors must face them; for they enter very deeply into every activity of the ministry. No doubt these conditions are much to be lamented; without question they are signs of decaying spiritual life among our people and of the increasing worldliness of church-members. But it certainly is without purpose merely to bewail the evils of this age without proceeding to seek ways and means by which unfavorable conditions may be overcome. It is indeed a simple matter vigorously to condemn present trends, to insist sternly that it is the duty of a faithful pastor never to deny the truth, to denounce those who press for an adaptation of techniques in pastoral work to conditions as they exist in every-day life in this age, and then to complain, somewhat resentful of the success of others, that somehow God's Word does not seem to be prospering at our hands, that for some reason missionary prospects do not seem to be attracted to our Church, that without apparent reason even loyal members are growing impatient, unsympathetic, and critical. Let every pastor recall that our Savior Himself did not by any means employ the same method of approach in His dealings with different types of men, that St. Paul, the most effective instrument of God in the building of His kingdom, was willing to be made "all things to all men" that he might "by all means save some." St. Paul's methods of approach were always adapted to the situation and the needs

of the men among whom he ministered. Surely the pastor of today can do no better than to follow his example.

Lest we be misunderstood, let us emphasize the fact that a proper and effective approach in pastoral work does not imply that the pastor must on occasion condone sin and error or that he must vitiate the sweet message of the Gospel by making it more palatable to human reason. But it does imply that the pastor of today do not offend by a bluntly denunciatory manner, that he take into account the temper of men in this day, that understanding patience, sympathy, compassion, love, be registered in his attitude rather than offended righteousness, stern dogmatism, and unsparing wrath against sin or sinners. Remembering his own infirmities, the frailty of man, and the temptations and tribulations of the present world, the understanding pastor will ever strive to strike the right note in his dealings with individual members of his flock. Yes, we realize that this is not a newly discovered truth, that tact and pastoral wisdom were advocated by our fathers, even though they employed other terms in describing these desirable traits. But we believe that it is possible for us to come to an even better understanding of the importance of the proper approach in pastoral work in our day, and the observation that the work of so many faithful pastors is obviously not registering with their people because of their unwillingness to vary their method of approach may serve as sufficient reason for touching upon this subject.

The thought may occur here to the minds of some readers that we are requiring more of the pastor of today than God's Word requires. Is it no longer true that faithfulness is God's great and only requirement of men in the Christian ministry, that the consequences attending our faithful work are "none of our business," but are God's business, that "we can only sow the seed, God must give the increase," that God's Word is in itself a power of God unto salvation, and that it does not depend for its effectiveness on the manner of presentation? 'Tis true, all that is required of the pastor by God is that he be found faithful; but faithfulness in the pastoral office includes also the full employment of reason and the diligent acquisition of such skills and techniques as will make his pastoral work more effective. God's Word certainly is "a power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth"; but it is an undeniable fact that the pastor may do much to hinder that power by the lack of an understanding, loving spirit. True enough, we can only sow the seed, God must give the increase; but the increase God will give will depend in a measure upon the manner of sowing. The careful planning of his method of approach in each case, taking into account the many factors involved in every situation, will cer-

tainly not lessen the faithful pastor's sense of dependence upon God and His blessing if he strives at the same time to come ever closer to God in prayer and meditation of His Word.

There is, however, a very real danger that a busy pastor may more or less subconsciously acquire and reveal a spirit and an air of what is known as "professionalism" in his personal ministry. It is true, when engaging in pastoral work, the minister is acting in a professional capacity; but the slightest indication that he is thinking of his work in terms of what social workers call "case work," that his work in dealing with a member is a routine "job" in his professional life, will surely detract from the effectiveness of his personal ministry. Nor does it add to his "dignity." Men today do not think professional airs on the part of the physician, the lawyer, the pastor, particularly impressive. Professionalism smacks of hypocrisy to the modern mind. Since the cure of souls is the most intimately personal service any man may engage in, and since a primary condition of success in personal ministrations is confidence and trust in the heart of the person to whom he is ministering, the pastor's approach must always be marked by frankness and sincerity, by those qualities which we seek to express in the terms *natural* or *human*. The erring member must be able to sense the real, personal concern for his soul's welfare in the heart of the pastor who is admonishing him. The sick member must be impressed by the very real personal interest the pastor is taking in his physical and spiritual condition and which is revealed in every conversation, in every prayer at his bedside. Youth must feel that its problems are the pastor's problems; age must know that its burdens are the pastor's burdens. Thus the pastor may and will enter deeply and effectively into the life of every one of his members, and they will in the end love, honor, and respect him, even in this frivolous age, as a real pastor, a real shepherd of their souls, as one of God's choicest gifts to His children.

Among Lutherans the very real dependence of the pastor of yesterday, today, and tomorrow upon the Word of God need surely not be emphasized. The Word of God has been, is, and always must be the Lutheran pastor's inspiration, guide, and tool in every activity of his ministry, including particularly also the cure of souls. From the Word the pastor draws his commission to "cure" the souls of men, in the Word he finds a catalog of the diseases which afflict his charges, into the Word he must ever penetrate, as into a divine pharmacopoeia, for the effective remedies which alone can "cure" the sin-afflicted souls and sin-marred lives of men. But the pastor of today must above all himself really be at home, really live, in the Word of God if he would minister effectively to the souls and lives of men in these troublous times. For the Lord

Himself, whose servant every faithful pastor would be, lives in the pages of the Word, and whosoever is at home in the Word is at home with the Lord. It is the abiding presence of the Lord in his life which is the pastor's protection against the sins which mightily assail him in his pastoral office; it is his nearness to the Lord which is his defense against discouragement and unfaithfulness; it is his life in the Lord which blossoms forth daily in new victories achieved for the Kingdom. Really to live in the Word means to use it not merely as a quarry from which to hew texts for the sermon or as a depository of comforting sayings from which to cull readings at sick-beds or as a treasure-house of truth from which to construct a dogmatic system of religious teaching. To live in the Word means to make use of it as a thirsty man will make use of a spring of clear water, as a starving man will make use of a loaf of bread, as a sick man will make use of a healing remedy, as a dying man will make use of a new lease on life. The ability—or let us rather say the grace—to use the Word of God in this fashion, is, after all, the *sine qua non*, the chief, the one indispensable requirement of him who would minister to the souls of men. Even the most brilliantly endowed, the most learned, the most eloquent, the most sympathetic-minded pastor who does not live his life in the Lord will fail in his attempt to "cure" the souls of men.

There comes to mind the well-known touching legend which relates that the Apostle John once demanded of a presbyter information concerning a certain young man whom the apostle had committed to the presbyter's care. The presbyter related sorrowfully that, alas, the young man had fallen away from Christ and was now living in a mountain fastness far away as a much-feared highwayman. Instantly the holy apostle was astir with solicitude for this erring soul. Despite discomfort and danger he sought out the young man, and when he had found him, he fell at the feet of the youth and would not rise until the backslider had given heed to his entreaties and returned to the fold. "That attitude," says a commentator, "was worthy of the friend who had lain on Jesus' bosom, who drank in the Master's spirit."

So the pastor of today who lives in the very presence of the Lord will ever bear all his people in his loving heart. He will identify himself with them in their joys as well as in their sorrows. He is enriched when his people are blessed with gifts from God; he suffers poverty when his people suffer reverses. He offers thanks to God when one of his charges manifests the grace of God in his life; he is dismayed, regarding himself as lacking in faithfulness, when another falls from grace. He watches over one member with anxiety, fearful lest he suffer the loss of his faith

in some adversity; over another lest he be weaned from his faith by his success in life. He endeavors to strengthen the feet of the young that they may walk in the paths of righteousness; he upholds the hands of the aged that they may not falter in their trust. He is ever ready to sit at the bedside of a stricken member and ever at hand to accompany the dying to the very gates of eternity. Like Paul he says to all his members: "I will very gladly spend and be spent for you," even though he, too, is often constrained to add with the apostle: "though, the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved."

For it is truly not to be loved or respected or rewarded in any fashion that the faithful Lutheran pastor of today, like his forebears, ministers to all his members in their varied needs. It is rather the love of Christ which constrains him to be faithful in the "cure" of souls. Tasting and experiencing that love in his own life day after day, he cannot but express it in his personal attitudes and in his pastoral work.

Buffalo, N. Y.

H. F. WIND

Kleine Gesefielstudien

4. Der gute Hirte, Kap. 34

In der Inhaltsangabe und Einteilung des schwierigen, aber ganz herrlichen Buches des großen Propheten Gesefiel ist schon hervorgehoben worden, daß, während er zuerst destruktiv gewirkt und die falschen Hoffnungen Israels begraben hat, er von Kap. 33 an konstruktiv wirkt und die große Hoffnung Israels aufrichtet. Den Wendepunkt bildet, wie ebenfalls schon bemerkt worden ist, die Nachricht, W. 21, daß Jerusalem gefallen ist, daß also der Prophet durch die Erfüllung seiner bisherigen Weissagungen und symbolischen Handlungen als wahrer Prophet erwiesen worden ist. Er verkündigt von jetzt an denen, die sich durch die Gerichte Gottes, wie sie sein prophetisches Wort angekündigt hatte, zu wahrer Buße hatten leiten lassen, den Betrübten Israels, das Heil, zunächst zeitliches Heil, daß Gottes Volk in der Babylonischen Gefangenschaft nicht untergehen, sondern zu der von Gott bestimmten Zeit in sein Land zurückkehren werde, aber dann vor allem geistliches Heil durch den rechten Knecht David, den König Messias, Kap. 34, 23. 24; 37, 24. Diese Heilspredigt wird eingeleitet durch das Wort Kap. 33, 11: „So wahr als ich lebe, spricht der Herr Herr, ich habe keinen Gefallen am Tode des Gottlosen, sondern daß sich der Gottlose belehre von seinem Wesen und lebe. So belehret euch doch nun von eurem bösen Wesen. Warum wollt ihr sterben, ihr vom Hause Israel?“ Und der Höhepunkt der ganzen Weissagung ist dann die wunderbar schöne Stelle von dem