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THE object of preaching and teaching in the Church is, quite simply, to move men. We preach in order that men may be stirred into newness of life; and we teach in order that men may continue, in the Spirit-moved pulsation of repentance and faith, to grow, to increase, to live and move under the continued and inevitable forward tension of the grace of God that dare not be received in vain. This is a commonplace, and there is nothing startling about it; the startling thing is that so many of our sermons (good sermons, carefully constructed sermons, and not altogether unedifying sermons) themselves are not in motion, do not go anywhere. They hover statically above the living and moving text, like a helicopter above a torrent, at a safe remove from the stream's rapid and rapacious onflow, unaffected by its persistent din, and unflecked by its cool and stinging spray. This is bad psychology: our wandering wits leave the preacher for little side excursions into trivia with the comfortable assurance that they can come back any time and find the preacher where they left him; there is no sense of urgency that compels us to stay with him.

But it is bad theology also. This is not a criticism of the "doctrinal" sermon; for unless our Lord's promise of a Spirit that would lead men into all truth was a mockery and unless His Apostles' prayers that men might grow in knowledge are a pious phrase, the doctrinal sermon is the very lifeblood of the living, loving, testifying, and missionary church. The cure lies not in less doctrine but in more; it lies in a more perfect reflection and re-echoing on our part of Biblical reality, in Biblical terms; for the Word of God is quick and powerful, both in content and in manner.

Doctrine involves knowing; and while all of us have had contact with the special *nosse cum affectu et effectu* in the doctrine of election, it is doubtful whether we are fully aware of what the full scope of "knowing" in the Biblical sense is; our ideas of knowing and reality are, whether we realize it or not, deeply influenced by Greek conceptions: the idea of knowing which excludes as far as possible all subjective elements and thinks of reality as most purely grasped when seen in the long perspective of passionless contemplation, reality being thought of as the ἀεὶ ὄν, the timeless forms and form-giving principles which persist through all temporal coming-to-be and passing-away. The Hebraic-Biblical idea of knowledge is the extreme opposite of this: knowing is not so much a mode of seeing as a mode of hearing; it is a contact and a confrontation rather than a withdrawal and a contemplation. A thing is "known," not when it is intellectually grasped or established by definition (how few definitions there are in Scripture!), but when its significance for the knower and its claim upon the knower is grasped and becomes effective in him. To this the Biblical conception of reality corresponds: reality is what happens in time, not, however, as a casual series of events or even a causally connected course of events, but as God's action, His dealings with men and men's reaction to those dealings, in faith or unbelief, in obedience or revolt. Consequently the people of God have never had a science, and the ideal of the contemplative life is foreign to God's people under both covenants.[1] God is not the object of static contemplation.[2]

He is not merely to be contemplated; He is not primarily Eternal Being; He is eternally active. His omnipresence is ubiquitous activity; as Luther says, God in His action is present in leaf and blade:

> Gott ist an keinen Ort gebunden, er ist auch an keinem ausgeschlossen. Er ist an allen Orten, auch in der geringsten Creatur, als, in einem Baumblatt oder in einem Graeslein, und ist doch nirgend. Nirgend, verstehe, greiflich und beschlossen: an allen Orten aber ist er, denn er schafft, wirket und erhaelt alle Dinge.[3]

God's creative speaking has never ceased: "Er spricht noch immerdar." Luther sees all history in His hands: "Gott hat ein schoen, herrlich und sehr stark Kartenspiel von maechtigen, grossen Herrn wie Kaiser, Koenigen, Fuersten usw. zusammengelesen, schlaegt einen mit dem andern."[4] When God tells His people, "was Gott

sei, was seine Natur und Eigenschaft sei," He speaks of His deeds, "dass er wohltue, erloese aus Gefaehrlichkeiten, und helfe aus Noeten und allerlei Widerwaertigkeiten." [5]

Luther's conception of God is Biblical, for the God of the Bible is quick and powerful. The God of the Old Testament is the Living God, and power and might are His. The bitter irony of Elijah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah over against the idols of wood and stone, the toilsome products of men's hands, the solid incarnations of impotence, are triumphant confessions to the quick and powerful God who can and does assert His will among men, the God of the mighty arm and the high hand that led His people out of Egypt and will lead them amid jubilation out of Babylon. When an Israelite cries out "My God!" he cries out as one who has known and felt the hand of God in his life: "The Lord is my Strength and Song, and He is become my Salvation: *He is my God.* . . . The Lord is a man of war; the Lord is His name. . . . Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power; Thy right hand, O Lord, hath dashed in pieces the enemy." (Ex. 15:2 ff.) [6]

It is the Living God of the Old Testament who is at work in the New, the living and therefore the only true God who begets men again unto a living hope. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is not a God who can be described by placid predications; where this God is, there is no gray world of abstractions, theories, principles, formulas, and definitions, but the green and burgeoning world of action. St. Paul, to take but one example, has no sooner ascribed "attributes" to Him — "the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort" — than he proceeds to translate those attributes into concrete divine action: "Who comforteth us in all our tribulation. . . . God which raiseth the dead; who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver; in whom we trust that He will yet deliver us." (2 Cor. 1:3 ff.) And the best commentary on "God is Love" (1 John 4:8) is the following verse: "In this *was manifested* the love of God toward us because that God sent His only-begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him." To "know" this God, the living, active, working God that confronts man and asserts His claim upon him, that lays His right hand on man and bids him fear no more, to "know" such a God is in the last analysis "to be known" by Him (Gal. 4:9; 1 Cor. 8:2-3).

At every turn the vitality, the active, determinative character of God confronts us: the supreme reality in the Bible is what "is" in God's eyes, in His judgment, ἔμπροσθεν, ἐναντίον, ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ. Moses is "a God to Pharaoh" because God has declared him such. (Ex. 7:1; 4:16.)[7] God counts, decisively, at every point in man's existence, at every turn of the history of the world. He does not sit back and watch in the purely contemplative activity that Aristotle ascribes to his god. This is no mere final cause of a god, no "careless god" of Epicurus; His very waiting is an activity, an exercise of His grace; His forbearance and long-suffering work to lead man to repentance (Rom. 2:4); "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise . . . but is long-suffering to usward, not willing that any should perish. . . . Wherefore . . . account that the long-suffering of our Lord is salvation." (2 Pet. 3:9, 15.)

As God is, so His Word to us is: quick and powerful. The first thing St. Paul says to the Romans about the Gospel to which he has been separated is that it is God's, θεοῦ. And, as Schlatter says,[8] a great deal depends on how we classify that genitive. If it is an objective genitive, the Gospel contains very valuable and authoritative information about God and can be contemplated. But the character both of εὐαγγέλιον and of θεός as we learn it from Scripture itself demands that it be a subjective genitive: then the Gospel is a divine action and confronts and calls us into His grace. It is quick and powerful in virtue of the God who speaks it. We see it plainly in Jesus' answer to John the Baptist: "The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the *Gospel preached* to them" (Matt. 11:5). The preaching of the Gospel is in a series of actions and is the climax of the series. The Word has power, it works and creates what it says: the Messianic age as foretold by Isaiah has dawned.

The Gospel is not a mere record, though it is that too; not merely a collection of stories about Jesus Christ, though it is that too; it is a living force, on the move and at work in the world. In the barest outline of the Gospel the *pro nobis* is not omitted (1 Cor. 15:3 ff.); the Gospel concerns us; it *is* redemptive action, and where it goes, it cuts a furrow between life and death (2 Cor. 2:15-16).

God calls men through the Gospel, calls them into salvation and glory (2 Thess. 2:14); the Gospel everywhere is bringing forth fruit and growing, is effectually operative (Col. 1:6); it destroys ancient enmity and brings Jew and Gentile together into one new household of God (Eph. 3:6). The Gospel is not "full" until it has done its work (Rom. 15:19), and its work is to bring men deliverance (Eph. 1:13): to create and sustain faith (Rom. 1:16; Phil. 1:27); to bestow peace upon them (Eph. 6:15); to give men new life (1 Cor. 4:15; 1 Pet. 1:23); to bring life and immortality to light (2 Tim. 1:10); to unite the present with the future in the certainty of hope (Col. 1:23). It is the breaking forth of the light of the glory of Christ (2 Cor. 2:15-16).

What is true of the Gospel we find confirmed by any of the Gospels. The first sentences of Matthew plunge us into the running and turbulent stream of the history of God's redemptive dealings with His people, from Abraham to the highest glory of the Kingdom, from David and Solomon to the apparent death of Israel's hopes in Babylon, and from Babylon to Jesus, who is called the Christ; and throughout the Gospel things happen: an angel appears to a carpenter; a Child is born to a virgin; prophecy is fulfilled; Magi follow a star; a family flees to Egypt; a king kills a village full of children; a family returns from Egypt; the voice of one crying in the wilderness is heard, and John the Baptist proclaims the coming of the Kingdom of God and calls men to repentance and to Baptism; Jesus appears, is baptized that He may fulfill all righteousness; the heavens are opened, the Spirit of God descends; the voice of God is heard; the Son of Man faces the concentrated assault of Satan and triumphs with the Word of God — all this, and we have not yet traversed four of the Gospel's twenty-eight chapters. St. Luke's summary of his own Gospel, "All that Jesus began both to *do* and to teach," could be written over any of the Gospels. St. Matthew's is peculiarly the Gospel of the kingdom of the heavens, and the Kingdom "comes," "draws near." The theological movement of this Gospel is as quick, as incessant, as intense as the actions of the characters in it. St. Matthew prefers to speak of it as the kingdom of the heavens, thereby emphasizing the active element in the term, indicating that this is the sway, the reign, the ruling of God; that it comes by the direct and mighty intervention of God from

heaven. The active, dynamic character of the Kingdom is apparent everywhere. It is seen, for instance, in the fact that the disciples of Jesus are bidden to proclaim the Kingdom in word and deed (Matt. 10:7-8); it is seen, moreover, in the parables that illustrate its working. Things happen: a sower goes out to sow; a mustard seed grows from the smallest of seeds to a mighty tree; leaven penetrates and does its work; the dragnet brings in its haul; a king prepares a marriage feast and sends repeated and insistent invitations to his guests; a man builds a vineyard and works it; a mighty lord generously forgives a huge debt. It is seen also in the fact that again and again the Kingdom is practically equated with Christ Himself, the ever active, restlessly ministering Christ.[9]

And when we turn from the historical to the doctrinal books, there is no real change in quality. Things are happening here too. Take a book that most nearly resembles a treatise, the most "expository," certainly, of the Pauline Epistles, *Romans*. What do we find? God at work; God calling and "separating" an Apostle as He had taken men to be His mouth of old; God promising and making good His promise; God making "saints" of men by His active, redeeming love; God's Son entering into mankind, literally, actually, historically, as the seed of a Jewish king, David; God's Son declared the Son of God with power in virtue of His resurrection from the dead, a resurrection that begins and guarantees all resurrections; God uttering good news that is a power to deliver man; God revealing, actively and effectually, His righteousness; God "revealing" His wrath, actually and in deed, upon a mankind that refused and denied Him — "God gave them up" in fearful judicial surrender; God judging; God forbearing and leading men to repentance; God praising and rewarding; God entrusting His oracles to His people; God setting forth His Son in propitiatory power, a mercy seat sprinkled with the Son's own blood, vindicating His righteousness and acquitting the believer; God able to perform what He has promised; God raising Jesus from the dead; the grace of God abounding, conquering sin, and reigning through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ; God dealing with man in Baptism, killing the old man and transplanting the new into a life that is a whole, living communion with Himself; God predestinating, God calling, God justifying, God glorifying His elect — it is a song of

songs on the resistless energy of God's redemptive purpose and the triumphant progress of its carrying out.

It is the same wherever we turn in Scripture; we speak for convenience of Biblical, or New Testament, concepts. But "concept" is too pale and weak, too static to designate the cluster of energies found in such words as "faith," "love," or "grace." Faith has been called *"lauter Heilsbezogenheit,"* mere and pure relatedness to redemption and so, of course, to God; it excludes all doing on man's part, "giving glory to God." God has His glory when He is seen, felt, manifested, and acknowledged as what He is, *"non pro idolo sed pro Deo";* the classic passage on faith, the fourth chapter of *Romans,* leaves no doubt as to what sort of God God in His glory is. Abraham believed, out of his desperation and in hope against hope, in the God who can do what no man can do, justify the ungodly; in the God who does where all human doing ceases, the "God who quickeneth the dead and calleth those things which be not as though they were," even as we "believe on Him that raised up Jesus, our Lord, from the dead." And so faith, the most passive of man's experiences, becomes paradoxically a living, active, and busy thing "which worketh by love" (Gal. 5:6), for it taps divine potencies and must work or die. (James 2:26.)

St. Paul anchors the Christian hope (itself possessed of a more confident and elastic vigor than any secular "hope," being God-centered) in the "love of God . . . shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us" (Rom. 5:5). And he assures us of this love, not by any disquisitions on the nature and qualities of God, but by pointing to an *event,* an event that is the eternally sufficient answer to all doubts: "Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). While we were without strength, ungodly, sinners, while we were yet enemies, Christ died for us; so God commends His love to us: there is the fact, the act, the deed, the event, and all our adjectives and predications on God's love are but a stammering acknowledgment of it; all our love is but the echo and reflection of it, of the divine *Agape* in its spontaneity, its uncausedness, its abundant and overflowing character, its sameness to all, be the recipient Judas or Peter, its willingness to suffer betrayal and to be *"eine verlorene Liebe."*[10]

There are no quietly comfortable concepts; grace, which is rather

a worn coin in our constant use of it, might at first glance appear such: God gives it, man receives it, and there's an end of the matter. But when we look again, we see that its quiescence is in the veil we have thrown over it, not in itself. For God's purpose, His active will, is in it (2 Tim. 1:9); we do not merely receive it; we are warned not to receive it in vain (2 Cor. 6:1); we are exhorted to grow strong in it (2 Tim. 2:1); it suffices us in our weakness, for God's strength is in it (2 Cor. 12:9 f.); we are under it as the dominant and controlling force in our lives (Rom. 6:14-15); we stand in it (Rom. 5:2); it teaches us (Tit. 2:12); we "know" it in the full Biblical sense of knowing (2 Cor. 8:9; Col. 1:6), for every phase of God's redemptive action is linked with it, from election through calling, justifying, and saving to the eternal comfort and good hope of the eschatological consummation (Rom. 11:5; Gal. 1:6; Rom. 3:25; Eph. 2:5, 8; 2 Thess. 2:16). When St. Paul says, "By the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor. 15:10), we must not weaken his words to mean, "God let me become what I am"; his words say, "The grace of God *made* and *makes* me to be what I am; when I work, it is God's grace working in me." Grace, too, is quick and powerful. Even "peace" partakes of this pulsing divine movement; when the angels sang "peace on earth," they were proclaiming redemptive action; and the peace of God "keeps," guards, men's hearts and rules in them (Phil. 4:7; Col. 3:15). And it is the God of *peace* who "shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly" (Rom. 16:20).

One might profitably pursue the investigation further; a study of the verbs of the New Testament, especially their tenses, might prove rewarding. Or one might study the structure of Scripture as a whole and the place of the historical books in it; we should probably end with a greater appreciation of the fact that the Jews classed as the Former Prophets books which we call historical. But enough has been given to show that when we are dealing with God's Word, we are dealing with life and power, with energy and movement.

The setting for our preaching of this Word is true to the nature of the proclamation as it ought to be. The liturgy moves; and for all its stately splendor is full of the lively tension that comes with the interaction between God's grace and the penitent and believing heart of man. The best of our hymnody, too, words and music, is

a supple and vivid voicing of God's redemptive action and man's response. If the sermon becomes a static "meditation," it is a foreign body in the organism of worship and thus both denies itself and slows the pulse beat of the living and worshiping church.

The Word is quick; we must let it live. The Word is powerful; we must let it work. These lines are being written in December, 1950; we are not looking now for ideas, or principles, or abstractions, not even brilliant ones. We want the quick and powerful assurance that a puissant and merciful God is in the midst of us.

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FOOTNOTES

1. Cf. Kittel, *ThW*, *s. v.* γινώσκω, I, 697.
2. In their almost ludicrous attempts to avoid calling a sermon a sermon some clergymen have drifted into such terms as "meditation." "Meditation" for a Christian sermon is either an elegant misnomer or, if it fits, an alarming symptom.
3. *Tischreden*, St. L. XXII:73.
4. *Tischreden*, as quoted by H. Bornkamm in *Luthers Geistige Welt*, p. 199.
5. St. L. III:1723, on Deut. 5:9.
6. Cf. Kittel, *ThW*, *s. v.* Θεός, III, p. 90.
7. Cp. Stauffer, *Theologie des N. T.*, pp. 121—122.
8. *Gottes Gerechtigkeit*, on Rom. 1:1.
9. Cf. Kittel, *ThW*, *s. v.* βασιλεία, I, 590 f.
10. Cf. Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, II, ii, pp. 508 ff.