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Arthur C. Repp
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

George W. Hoyer
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

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Preaching for the Church*

A Review

By ARTHUR C. REPP

IN spite of their preoccupation with preaching most pastors are not particularly interested in books about preaching. Sermon books are more promising. They can offer valuable ideas, give a few practical hints now and then, present a stimulating model, and not infrequently suggest an outline to the harried pastor. But a book on homiletics at best seems to promise a review of those principles which every seminary graduate ought to know. If he no longer remembers them, they probably were not very helpful anyway. After all, one learns to preach by preaching.

The truth of the matter is that there is much more to a good book on preaching than a collection of models and a few anecdotes and a series of how-to-do-it pointers. While homiletics is both a science and an art, it must have a sound theology to govern and direct its purposes. The recognition of this fact makes *Preaching for the Church* a welcome contribution for God's spokesmen. This new volume presents both the theology and the techniques of the Christian sermon.

Axiomatic for the book is the Lutheran principle that the pastor is handling a living Word. Hence he is not simply a dispenser of information but is God's agent called to accomplish God's purpose. His sermons are not merely to tell people about sin and grace so that they know more about them, but they are messages of a workman

for God, who is working for the hearer. Hence people are not to become enamored of the pastor's craftsmanship, or to be rebuffed by it, but they are "to be changed by it into the directions of God, from unbelief to faith, from little faith to greater faith, from little love to greater love."

The outstanding characteristic of *Preaching for the Church*, besides its Biblical orientation, is the joy tone of the proclaimer heard on all of its pages. In spite of the importance of good techniques, the author reminds the reader, the task of preaching is not to be regarded as a laborious plodding through rules and preoccupation with technical routines but as the joyful proclamation of the good news to the church and by the church and from the church.

Yet this book is valuable for its techniques from the prayer that marks the beginning of the task to the prayer that accompanies the "Amen" at the sermon's close. In his typical, straightforward style Dr. Caemmerer guides the reader through the conventional forms of the various types of sermons and the different accents in preaching. The chapters on preparation for the textual sermon and the preacher's growth are unusually rich. Four appendixes offer welcome bread-and-butter helps for frequent checking.

Dr. Caemmerer has dipped deeply into his years as parish parson, professor of homiletics, and workshop leader to preachers. *Preaching for the Church* promises to be a Lutheran classic in preaching.

* Richard R. Caemmerer. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959. 353 pages. Cloth. \$4.50.

An Appreciation

By GEORGE W. HOYER

On the jacket of *Preaching for the Church* Dr. Richard R. Caemmerer is seen through the brush of his son, Richard, now artist in residence at Valparaiso University. Over his shoulder and above Walther Arch is the "window toward the Quad" which was his vantage point when as a student he roomed in Stoeckhardt Hall in the newly dedicated Concordia Seminary (B. D., 1927; S. T. M., 1928). His was once again the window toward the Quad when he returned to Concordia in 1940 after serving as preacher and pastor to the congregation of Mount Olive Lutheran Church in St. Louis for 12 years. For 20 years he has been an academic and evangelical force in Concordia classrooms, profoundly affecting the pulpit voice of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in America and abroad and touching many a sermon in other denominations through print and lecture. His teaching has been uniquely helpful in the technique of sermon construction and delivery, so that "goal—malady—means" is "the strange device" on thousands of banners waving over the studies of young clergymen as the week's sermons go into production. But it has been by the theology—cogent and contemporary in formulation, grounded in the Greek and the grammar of the New Testament and reflecting the strength and the syntax of the Old Testament, tempered in the rugged days of a Depression ministry into which he was plunged, presented in a completeness and with an evangelical fervor that made men theologians and, even more, Christians—which he has shared in class-

room and private council, in evenings up in Dorm E and on summer vacations, that this Richard has shared "life" with his ten thousands.

"The theology and the process outlined herein are (my) own, hammered out through twenty years of teaching and thirty of preaching," Dr. Caemmerer writes in his foreword. This is a splendid way to celebrate a significant anniversary, and typical of the approach of the head of a department of practical theology, in a permanent and usable form to make this theology and technique of the Christian sermon, uniquely his own, a gift to the rest of us.

A bit of autobiography overlaying this review is unavoidable to this writer. One cannot be elevated (it's 91 steps from the parking lot behind Sieck Hall to the homiletic heights of Stoeckhardt Dormitory!) to an office opposite that of Dr. Caemmerer for five years without developing both admiration and affection for the dean of Concordia's chapel, who has made edification of the brother so much a part of his own and his students' worship life. Nor can one have undergone the appalling experience of undertaking to teach homiletics, after 10 years of a bland assumption that he knew enough about preaching to be able to preach, without appreciating how readily and abundantly this secretary to the faculty of Concordia Seminary shares his learning with his colleagues who feel the pinch of their task and put the squeeze for guidance on him—a learning which has increased by degrees, in ancient and modern history (Washington University,

M. A., 1933; Ph. D., 1944) and by a continuous study of *The Church in the World*. (Concordia Publishing House, 1949)

The blunt conclusion of this review (*infra*, "Buy it! Try it!") has its chronological origin in the sardonic comment of a now Washington reporter on the prospect of teaching homiletics at Concordia Seminary. Gratuitously and characteristically he volunteered the observation that "every man is born with his own homiletic ability, and all that a professor can do is to distort it." This sage advice having had about the same effect as a "Wet Paint" sign, I arrived on a campus where the Caemmererean technique was the basic distortion in the process of homiletic instruction. "Ask the man who owns one," they used to say, and as the present possessor of a new and valued distortion of my homiletic process, I'm answering. This review would suggest it should happen to you. "They said it couldn't be done" is today's assertion—but try it on your sermon work, and discover that more things can be wrought here, too, than a world of preachers dreams of.

Consider the volume's basic theological premise as it is first suggested in the items "For Further Thought" in Chapter One:

"Which of these analogies for the preacher of the Gospel seem appropriate:

"The preacher is the sower sowing the seed of the Word of God.

"In the atonement, God makes bare His holy arm (Isaiah 52). The preacher is

God's finger tip where the Gospel of God's atonement makes contact with the human heart.

"God saves men by His Word. The preacher is the Word of God." (Page 8)

The answer is found on page 28 (Don't thank me—the book is worth less to you now. One of its values is the series of prods to "Further Thought" at the end of each chapter.): "When the Christian preacher tells of God's act in Christ redeeming the world, in effect he becomes the extension of God's mighty arm and brings His power to bear on men."

The implication of this insight fills volumes. It fills this volume. And this volume can fill pulpits, too, fill them with increasing power, with the working Word of God. This volume will fill sermons, too, fill them with a new clarity of development, a sharper concern for people, and always and more movingly, with a clear Gospel. "First and last the preacher must face the fact that he not merely describes goals, but leads to them; that he not merely describes repentance or summons to repentance but is God's agent for working it. Entire traditions of religious thought and preaching assume that when the preacher has described what God wants and has urged to do it, the preacher is through. But then his work has just begun. He must still speak the Word of life. He must still convey the power from God that moves the hearer in God's direction." (P. 19)

Conclusion: "Buy it! Try it!"