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Homiletics: Outlines on C. F. W. Walther's Evangelien Postille

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HOMILETICS

(Except for the extended study of the text for Ash Wednesday, which is by the Rev. Robert H. Smith, Chappaqua, N. Y., the outlines which follow were abstracted and translated from C. F. W. Walther's *Evangelien-Postille* by Prof. Alex W. Guebert, St. Louis, Mo. The notes on the "Hymn of the Week" are by Arno Klausmeier, St. Louis, Mo.)

QUINQUAGESIMA SUNDAY

LUKE 18:31-34

On Mars Hill in Athens St. Paul pointed out that God made the world and continues to sustain it. All that is good flows from His hand. God either hinders evil or checks it; He uses it either to further His gracious will or to carry out His judgment against sin. A Christian therefore firmly believes that God controls everything that happens. Yet he is puzzled by the question why God let His holy, innocent Son, Jesus Christ, enter into glory through suffering and death. The Gospel for today answers that question. At the beginning of the Lenten season I invite you to dwell on

The Importance of the Fact that the Suffering and Death of Christ Was Prophesied by the Old Testament Prophets

- I. *The suffering and death of Christ was ordained by God Himself*
- II. *It was necessary for our salvation*
- III. *It was sufficient for all time*

I

A. In the opinion of some people Christ was the victim of circumstances. He espoused doctrines which the leaders of His day could not accept. The natural consequence was bitter opposition, persecution, and death.

B. But these views do not agree with Christ's words in the text (v. 31). Christ's sufferings came as prophesied, but came only when He wanted them to come. (Cf. Luke

4:27-30; John 8:58, 59; 18:6; Acts 2:22, 23). Christ's suffering and death was no chance happening. God had planned it so.

C. Do not suppose, however, that God must be blamed for the cruelty that Jewish and heathen courts inflicted on Christ. God, indeed, chose to save men through the suffering and death of His Son, but He did not cause the vicious cruelty of Christ's enemies. He used the enemies to carry out His eternal purpose.

II

A. Christ's suffering and death was necessary for our salvation (cf. v. 31 b). In calling Himself the Son of man Christ is pointing to prophecy concerning Himself beginning in Genesis and ending in Malachi. Since He is the Son of man He must fulfill prophecy and suffer and die for the world.

B. The bitter need for Christ's Passion is emphasized in these Bible passages: Matt. 26:39; 26:51-54; Luke 24:25, 26; Mark 14:2.

C. The need for Christ's Passion teaches us this twofold truth: (1) God is not merely a loving, considerate Father. He is holy, just, One who hates sin, who could not let one sin slip by unpunished, who sacrificed His Son so the sinner could find grace before God's throne. (2) Men are foolish if they suppose they can live in sin and at the same time obtain grace from God. No man can trample God's Son into the dust of the ground and at the same time hope to escape the horrors of hell. Therefore do not trifle with sin.

III

A. Christ's Passion is sufficient for all time and offers much comfort. God promised Adam and Eve and their descendants a Savior. All prophetic utterances in the Old Testament are based on this first promise of

grace. Therefore Christ spoke as He did in the text. (Vv. 32, 33)

B. God spoke with such clarity through the prophets so as to enable Old Testament saints as well as New Testament Christians, who look back to fulfillment of prophecy in Christ, to be certain of forgiveness, grace, and salvation.

C. All the prophecies fulfilled in Christ are shouting a powerful message of sufficiency and comfort to us (1 Cor 15:3; 2 Cor. 5:18-20). Christ Crucified is standing in the center of world history as the Lamb of God who bore the sins of the world.

D. Therefore search the Scriptures daily in this Lenten season. Find in them the riches of God's love and grace which takes away your sin, and rejoice in the power of the words Christ spoke to the blind man in the text: "Receive thy sight. Thy faith hath saved thee."

The Hymn of the Week — "Let Us Ever Walk with Jesus" (*The Lutheran Hymnal*, 409)

This hymn serves admirably as the Christian's response to the Gospel for the day's "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem" and the Introit's "for Thy name's sake lead me." Sigismund von Birken, author of some 52 hymns, only few of which have survived, was born in a parsonage in Wildstein, Bohemia, May 5, 1626. During his infancy his family was forced to flee to Germany. At Jena he studied both law and theology, but his real gifts were poetic; on account of them Emperor Ferdinand III made him a count palatine and imperial poet laureate. The text was first published in J. M. Dillherr's *Heilige Karwochen*, Nürnberg, 1653. Von Birken died in 1681. The translation in *The Lutheran Hymnal* is the work of Missouri Synod Pastor J. Adam Rimbach.

The author intended the hymn to be sung to Johann Schop's tune, *Sollt' ich meinem Gott nicht singen* (LH, 25), a practice which

might well be revived. Our hymnal sets it to a tune of Georg Gottfried Boltze, written in 1788 and published in 1790, for the text of *Sollt' ich meinem Gott* in Kühnau's *Choral-Buch*.

ASH WEDNESDAY

MATT. 6:16-21

By Robert H. Smith

The text for us has two contexts: the one is exegetical and historical, the other is liturgical. The pericope from the heart of our Lord's Sermon on the Mount is appointed for Ash Wednesday, the door to our Lenten commemoration.

I

Lent is the Holy of Holies both in the Christian calendar and in the Christian experience, to be entered only with fear and trembling. The church has always taught that there can be no easygoing flippancy here, no blurring of the line between the holy God and sinful man. We can only stand in deepest reverential awe before Him who "died for our transgressions and was raised up for our justification." (Rom. 4:25)

Customs come and customs go. Fasting, which Luther called a good external discipline, is nearly a dead letter in the Lutheran Church today. But the text is important nonetheless. It pronounces against merely going through the motions of being pious, whether that piety expresses itself in fasting or in attendance at midweek services and the stuffing of a special Lenten envelope.

Lent means more than taking up space in church. It cuts deeper even than meditative, pious reflection on the Passion history. It summons us to see in Jesus our Savior, and that means that it calls us to suffer and die and rise again with Him. Lent spells the crucifixion and renewal of the whole man and his whole life by reinvolvement in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

II

In the Sermon on the Mount the Messiah makes a total and unremitting claim on the lives of His disciples. In the middle portion of the Sermon (Matt. 6) Jesus addresses His disciples in terms of the three chief acts of worship practiced in Judaism: alms (6: 2-4), prayer (6:5-15), and fasting (6:16-18). The trio is ancient. The apocryphal book of Tobit declares, "Prayer is good when accompanied by fasting, almsgiving, and righteousness" (12:8). To this day the Jewish liturgy says, "Repentance [the outward expression of which is fasting], prayer, and good works dissolve the evil decree." (H. Wouk, *This Is My God* [Garden City: Doubleday, 1961], p. 94; cf. *Psalms of Solomon* 3:8 f.)

The subapostolic church encouraged fasting (on Wednesday and Friday to avoid the Jewish fast days), prayer, and almsgiving (*Didache*, 8:1 ff.). The three works of piety continued as a unit even into Reformation times. The Apology of the Augsburg Confession states that "good fruits like true fasting, prayer, and charity have His command." (XII, 139, 143)

And yet Jesus is not instructing His disciples in a set of liturgical practices. In His words on the familiar works of the religious man, Jesus gives to the piety of His disciples "a new heart and a new face" (M. H. Franzmann, *Follow Me* [St. Louis: CPH, 1961], p. 51). No longer is piety practiced "to dissolve the evil decree." Rather the accusation against man has been set aside for the sake of the suffering and death of Jesus the Servant-Messiah, and man has been adopted into the house of the Father. And therefore, "since the life of the disciple is the life of a child with his father, the piety of the disciple has as its characteristic token the unself-consciousness of the child. Pose and pomp are banished." (Ibid., p. 52)

Elsewhere Jesus sets aside fasting and mourning as belonging to the pre-Messianic

time of hope and waiting. Now that the Bridegroom is present, the wedding guests feast with joy (Mark 2:18 ff.). From now on fasting can only be a sign that man turns with profound and holy joy and bends to the will of His Father, who has already turned to man in Jesus Christ. The inner and outer mark of such fasting is a joyous spirit in a joyous body.

III

The paragons of piety in Jesus' day reveled in their open self-deprivation, enjoying the awestruck acclamations of the crowds at their carefully stage-managed evidences of piety.

Fasting

Fasting was a common Jewish practice (see G. F. Moore, *Judaism* [Cambridge: Harvard, 1927], II, 55 ff., 257 ff.; J. Behm in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* [Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1942], IV, 925—935). The Jews had very few fast days prescribed by Law. The only one in pre-exilic times was the Day of Atonement. The restoration community remembered the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple with public fasts. But in every age fasting was a well-known personal practice.

Fasting among the Jews had nothing in common with Hindu ascetism. Pious Jews were not yogis attempting to augment and enlarge spiritual power by the flagellation of the body. Nor was fasting to liberate the soul from bondage to carnal lust and passion. The Jews were not metaphysical dualists.

Fasting was an outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible disposition. From ancient times it was a sign of mourning and of exceptional devotion to the deceased. It was also practiced as self-imposed penance for sin, supposedly possessing expiatory value.

The dominant note, however, is one of humiliation before God. In the Old Testament and among the rabbis "afflicting oneself" and "fasting" are synonyms (Ps. 35:13;

Is. 58:3). Humility before God, expressed in fasting, reinforced a man's prayer (see Matt. 17:21; Acts 13:2; 14:23). Therefore the Mishnah says that if a congregation has solemnly but unsuccessfully prayed for rain, fasting is in order, "as becomes men that suffer God's displeasure." Fasting in this case means that "they are forbidden to work, to wash themselves, to anoint themselves, to put on sandals, or to have marital intercourse; and the bathhouses are shut-up" (Taanith 1:6. H. Danby, *Mishnah* [London: Oxford, 1933]). The Jewish community still observes these abstentions which comprise "afflicting one's soul." (Wouk, 87)

Grand public ceremony accompanied a community's fasting in Judaism. "They used to bring out the Ark into the open space in the town and put wood ashes on the Ark and on the heads of the President and the Father of the court; and every one took of the ashes and put them on his head. The eldest among them uttered before them words of admonition: 'Brethren, it is not written of the men of Nineveh that 'God saw their sackcloth and their fasting,' but 'And God saw their works that they turned from their evil way'; and in his protest the Prophet says, 'Rend your heart and not your garments.'" (Taanith 2:1)

Hypocrites

In Jesus' words "hypocrites" are a foil to the truly pious. The word ὑποκριτής originally designated a stage player. Every religion, whether Jewish, Christian, or pagan, has had and still has its actors who assume roles or characters not really their own. The Pharisees themselves, whom Jesus elsewhere names hypocrites (Matt. 23:13 ff.), were aware of the distinction between true and feigned fasting; they read and knew such passages as Is. 58:3-7, and they could be extremely harsh with dissimulating members of their own party. The Palestinian Talmud lists seven varieties of Pharisee, all but one

of which disgrace the name. "They are the 'shoulder Pharisee,' who packs his good works on his shoulder (to be seen of men); the 'wait-a-bit' Pharisee, who (when someone has business with him) says, Wait a little, I must do a good work; the 'reckoning' Pharisee, who when he commits a fault and does a good work crosses off one with the other; the 'economizing' Pharisee, who asks, What economy can I practice to spare a little to do a good work? The 'show me my fault' Pharisee, who says, Show me what sin I have committed, and I will do an equivalent good work (implying that he had no fault); the Pharisee of fear, like Job; the Pharisee of love, like Abraham. The last is the only kind that is dear (to God)." (Moore, II, 193)

Jesus' attack upon the hypocrite is two-pronged. The hypocrite's devotion is only halfhearted (6:16-18). And he is paralyzed by doubt, that is, he does not really believe the eschatological promises of God, and his heart is ultimately set on this age rather than the coming age. (19-21)

Treasure in Heaven

The whole Sermon on the Mount is eschatologically oriented. Blessed is the disciple, for God will reward him. The New Testament speaks without blushing of treasures in heaven with which God will reward the faithful. (Matt. 6:1, 4, 6, 18, 21; 19:21, and parallels)

What is the nature of that reward? It is His goodness (Matt. 20:1-15), His grace (Rom. 4:4), His kingdom (Matt. 5:3, 10; Luke 12:32), His approval (Rom 2:7, 29; Matt. 25:34 ff.), sonship (Matt. 5:9). God is finally His own Reward. He dare not be sought as a means to any other end. Any behavior which seeks man's approval and applause in the name of God, which attempts to use God, is branded hypocrisy.

G. F. Moore reports (II, 91 f.) the instructive story of Monobazus, king of Adi-

abene, in the middle of the first century of the Christian era. In years of famine the king distributed all his inherited wealth to the poor. His relatives accused him of being a wastrel: "Your fathers laid up treasures and added to the treasure of their fathers, and you have come and squandered your own wealth and that of your fathers!" He replied, "My fathers laid up treasures for below (this earth), but I have laid up treasures for above (Ps. 85:12); they laid up treasures in a place over which force may prevail; I in a place over which no force can prevail (Ps. 89:15). My fathers laid up treasures which bear no fruit (interest); I have laid up treasures that bear fruit (Is. 3:10). My fathers laid up treasures of mammon; I have laid up treasures of souls (Prov. 11:30). My fathers laid up treasures for others; I, for myself (Deut. 24:13). My fathers laid up treasures in this world; I, for the world to come (Is. 58:8)."

As Jesus uses the conception of treasure in heaven, it does not mean acquiring merit before God by one's deeds. It is the same as being rich toward God (Luke 12:16-21). And it is the opposite of the practice of the foolish, whose only store set aside for the Last Day by their concentration on corruptible things is the destruction of their flesh. (James 5:1-3; 1 Tim 6:17, 18)

The Father Sees the Heart

Ostentatious religiosity, acting with one eye fastened on God and the other on our fellows, is roundly denounced. The text drives past all externals to the heart. The real malady is that we are always willing to serve God and mammon. Our heart (will) is not pure.

Jesus is not contending for the internal as against the external. He is not calling for a religiosity void of all external expression. He contends for total commitment as against the partial devotion of the divided heart. He calls for the elimination of our religious

schizophrenia and demands a singlehearted service to God. What He wants is no less than that purity of heart which is to will one thing. (Søren Kierkegaard)

IV

Did ever a man keep the law of total obedience to God? Who has not been afflicted with that double-mindedness which makes the best of us waver between God and mammon? Who has ever devoted himself totally to the great enduring realities, in spite of the fact that they seem so puny and soft alongside cold, hard cash? Isn't this just one more case of an impossible demand spoken by Jesus, who was given to Oriental hyperbole with its drastic, exaggerated expressions? Who can or has kept such laws? No one! Except One: Jesus Himself. He prayed and loved and fasted in secret (6:4, 6, 18). He is the One of whom Isaiah spoke, "He will not cry or lift up His voice or make it heard in the street" (Is. 42:2). And that One is the Servant who is obedient and suffers for the many (Is. 52:13—53:12). He served His own by offering His life a ransom for them. And His Father, who sees in secret, raised Him from the dead. He is our Righteousness, and only because of Him can we whose devotion is piecemeal stand before the Father.

Trust in Him does not lead to relaxed efforts. Indeed, faith in Him is the one thing which short-circuits pride and hypocrisy, making possible the first stirrings of singlehearted devotion to the Father.

Devotion Whole and Secret

I. Public display and ostentation in religion command the admiration of men but fail to impress God.

A. Pious folk in every age seek and find the plaudits of mortal men.

B. We should like to imagine that hypocrites are other people, but if we are honest,

we must admit to hypocrisy and mere external observance in our own lives.

1. We love the praise of men.

2. We confess it, but we sometimes doubt the reality of "the life of the world to come."

II. Has anyone ever served God as Jesus demands?

A. He who makes the demand served God totally and secretly, and had the cross thrust upon Him by the world He came to serve.

B. God, who sees in secret, raised up Jesus from the dead.

C. Jesus is our Savior, who died for us and shares His risen life with us.

III. Faith in Jesus means daily death and resurrection with Him.

A. In Baptism the sign of the cross was laid on your forehead and breast, on your thinking and willing, on your whole existence.

B. Life in the light of the cross and empty tomb is life careless of men's opinions, and it is utter joy in the Lord and His will.

INVOCAVIT

MATT. 4:1-11

Many within Christendom today deny the existence of Satan. Yet the Bible clearly tells us about Satan's origin, characteristics, works, influence on men, kingdom, abode, present and future lot. Take the teaching concerning Satan out of the Bible, and the whole structure of Biblical revelation collapses. The Bible, however, teaches not only the disastrous depths of Satan's power and cunning, it also teaches the depths of God's love, the victory of Jesus Christ over Satan, the establishment of God's new kingdom of grace for all who believe in Christ's redemptive work.

The Gospel for today describes Christ's great victory over Satan in the wilderness.

Let us consider this victory for the strengthening of our faith. I direct your attention to

Christ's Battle with, and Victory over,
the Prince of Darkness

I. *Christ fought for all men and gained the victory.*

II. *Every believer in Christ should follow the Prince of his salvation, struggle against Satan, and overcome him through the power of Christ*

I

A. Our text describes a most remarkable battle, remarkable because God Himself arranged it (v. 1). Christ came to destroy the works of Satan. He was the woman's Seed promised to Adam and Eve in Eden. He won in this first encounter in the wilderness. Later He broke Satan's power permanently when on the cross He said, "It is finished!"

B. Christ's victory over Satan may be compared with David's victory over Goliath. Goliath sneered at David's youth and inexperience. But David met him in the name of the Lord. Satan tempted and taunted Christ with doubt, with misunderstanding of Scripture, and with pride, but Christ met each temptation with a firm, "It is written!"

C. First of all you must realize and believe that Christ fought for you to free you from your sin. Though your sins are great, turn to Christ in faith, and with Him you will be a victor over sin and hell and possess forgiveness of sin, righteousness, life, and salvation.

D. Sorry is the lot of those among you who choose to serve sin. Turn away from the army of the Philistines and come over to the hosts of the Lord. Those of you who see the danger in sin and yet are timid about backing away, look at the hellish enemy lying powerless on the battlefield. Why are you fearful? Believe in Christ, and take your place under the banner of the Cross. Sing

with St. Paul, "O Death, where is thy sting," etc. (1 Cor. 15:55-57)

II

A. This certainly is true: He who conquers with Christ, must follow Christ in fighting the battle against sin. At our Baptism we vowed that we renounced the devil, all his works, and all his ways. By faith you are in Christ. But do not forget that you are still in this world, where Satan is roaming about to find those whom he can devour. He will not overlook you. He is wherever you go, even where you pray and worship,

B. Therefore it is necessary to recognize his cunning and to know how he can be overcome. We learn both of these points from Christ's temptation in the wilderness. Satan tried to make Christ doubt that He was the Son of God. He thought Christ would not notice that he was garbling God's Word. He supposed he could fell Christ by dangling the bauble of wealth and earthly power before His eyes. Satan still uses this triad of temptations against the Christian. He tries to get through to you through poverty and doubt, falsification of Scripture, and riches and power.

C. The Christian can stand up before Satan and ward off his attacks only if he follows the tactics of Christ. He overcame Satan with the Word of God. So must you. The Word of God is the Sword of the Spirit. Whatever the sin is that assails you, meet it with the Word of God (Cf. Joshua 1:5; 1 John 3:8; Heb. 10:38; Mark 16:16; 1 Tim. 1:15; Matt. 11:28, 29).

D. Luther was not stubborn at Marburg in 1529, when he refused to budge before Zwingli and insisted on the simple words, "It is written: this *is* My body, this *is* My blood." Luther stood by the truth. Stay with the principle of the Lutheran Church "It is written." In that truth Christ has built His church. Hold fast that truth, and you will be with Christ.

The Hymn of the Week — "God the Father Be Our Stay" (*The Lutheran Hymnal*, 247)

Although its roots lie lost in medieval antiquity, this hymn, as we know it, was given its present form by Martin Luther, and first appeared in the 1524 *Geystliches gesangk Buchleyn* of Johann Walther. Luther replaced the invocation of the Virgin and various saints, which previously opened the hymn, with a solidly theocentric appeal to the blessed Trinity. In its original form it was sung as a litany during Holy Week or at processions during Rogationtide; current German usage assigns it to the Feast of the Trinity. However, the Introit's pleading for divine assistance, the Epistle's stress on the existential dimensions of salvation, and the Gospel's account of the temptation mark it as particularly appropriate for the first Sunday in Lent. Richard Massie's translation appeared in *Martin Luther's Spiritual Songs* (London: 1854).

The melody, which shows similarities to "In the Midst of Earthly Life" (*LH*, 590), is of 14th- or 15th-century origin. Its widespread acceptance is attested by the fact that hymnals published after 1524 did not feel it necessary to print the tune.

REMINISCERE

MATT. 15:21-28

Without striving and struggling against sin, without battling for victory over sin, there can be no Christianity. A Christian is constantly attacked by his flesh, the world, and the devil. If he does not keep up his warfare against this triple threat, he will be defeated. For he who does not fight will not obtain the crown of life. Difficult as it is for a young man to fight against the lust of the flesh, for a young woman to overcome vanity, for a mature man to stand victorious over the desire for wealth and influence, there is another battle far more difficult than the bat-

ties just mentioned. It is the battle in which the Christian contends with his God. The Gospel for today pictures this battle. Let me direct your attention to

The Christian's Victorious Battle with God

I. *God's battle with us*

II. *Our battle with God and our victory over Him*

I

A. God chose the Jewish people as His own and placed them in the center of the ancient world, so that through them He could bring His living Word to all people. Though no Jew, the Canaanite woman had come to faith through the words of the prophets. When she heard of Christ, she believed He must be the Messiah.

B. We might suppose that this pearl among heathen filth would receive immediate attention from Christ. But when she comes to Him in anguish over her afflicted daughter and pleads for help, He gives her a cold shoulder. Even the petitions of the disciples to aid the woman are of no avail. With apparent hardheartedness Christ says He was sent only to the house of Israel.

C. The first battle that God wages against His people usually lies in the area of earthly sorrow, such as sickness, death, poverty, loss of a good name, fickleness of friends, and a host of other misfortunes. In these circumstances it is difficult to grasp such Bible passages as Acts 14:22; 2 Tim. 3:12.

D. Difficult as the first battle is, the second one is far more severe. We see it in operation between Christ and the Canaanite woman. Christ meets her request with silence and then adds some angry, cutting words. This seems to take hope and trust away from her. Physical affliction is heightened by spiritual affliction. This is the way God fought against Job and David. He still fights that way against the Christian, for children of this world seem to bask in God's favor, while His real children appear to be rejected.

II

A. The Canaanite woman, however, is an incomparable example of a Christian battling with God. She holds up no merit of her own before Him. She pleads only for mercy from the Son of David, the promised Messiah. When Christ apparently rejects her, her pleas become more insistent (vv. 25, 27). Finally, she wins the battle. (V. 28)

B. To gain the victory when God is fighting him, the Christian needs this threefold strategy: (1) Patience and humility; (2) fervent and persistent prayer; (3) faith that in spite of adverse experiences clings to God's Word.

C. If God attacks you through physical afflictions, accept the Bible passages Heb. 12:6; Rom. 8:28. When God lets grave spiritual afflictions sweep down upon you, let your mind dwell on these Bible passages: John 6:37; 2 Peter 3:9; Rom. 5:20. Through your threefold strategy God lets grace and joy step in. He loves to have you overcome Him. He never battles with you to beat you down, but to make you stronger in faith.

D. Christianity is a constant battle. Earnestly study Matt. 7:13, 14. And as people who wrestle with God, remember Jacob. (Gen. 32:26, 28)

The Hymn of the Week — "When in the Hour of Utmost Need" (*The Lutheran Hymnal*, 522).

The Gradual's prayer for assistance and the Gospel's example of the Syro-Phoenician woman are echoed in Paul Eber's classic hymn of faith. Born in 1511, a friend and co-worker of Melancthon, Paul Eber based his seven stanzas on a single Latin stanza of Joachim Camerarius (1500—1574), his teacher at Nürnberg. Eber, professor of Latin, physics, and Old Testament at Wittenberg University, in 1558 became Bugenhagen's successor as town pastor. He died in Wittenberg in 1569. *The Lutheran*

Hymnal contains two other hymns of Eber, "To God the Anthem Raising" (LH, 112) and "Lord God, We All to Thee Give Praise" (LH, 254). Our hymn was first published in Matthes Stöckel's *Neues Gebetbüchlein* (Dresden, 1566); our translation is an altered form of that by Catherine Winkworth in her *Lyra Germanica* of 1858.

The melody, which may have been published as early as 1540, was definitely included in the 1547 *Genevan Psalter*. It is generally attributed to Louis Bourgeois (ca. 1510—ca. 1561).

OCULI

LUKE 11:14-28

There are only two kingdoms, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. Every human being belongs either to the one or to the other. There is no third kingdom. In God's kingdom there is life and peace. In Satan's kingdom there is nothing but pain, anguish, and eternal death. It is horrid to look into the kingdom of death. However, since Christ in the Gospel for today gives some clear details of Satan, his kingdom and those who are in it, I shall talk to you about

Satan's Kingdom

and point out

- I. *The characteristics of this kingdom*
- II. *The way men can save themselves from it*

I

A. Christ says nothing about the origin of Satan's kingdom in our text. Many Old and New Testament passages give sufficient information on this point. In the beginning Satan came from the creative hand of God as a good angel. But he and other angels rebelled against God and were hurled out of heaven. Filled with hate against God, he established his own kingdom and made himself its ruler. As soon as God had created

Adam and Eve in His own image, Satan set out to destroy men. He succeeded. Now every man born of Adam and Eve is a sinner and a member of Satan's kingdom (cf. Eph. 2:1-3). Ever since the Fall Satan's kingdom has increased fast, and it will increase at a prodigious rate until the end of time.

B. True, as soon as man had fallen into sin, God promised a Savior. Christ came, and through faith in His redemptive work many millions are saved from the kingdom of darkness. Still huge numbers are lost. And sad to say, even many who call themselves Christian really are in Satan's kingdom.

C. Many are like the Pharisees of the text (v. 15). They are among Christians and have the opportunity to hear the Gospel and yet are members of Satan's kingdom. They live in open unbelief and violate their consciences through overt sin. In vain they hear or read God's Word. They remain in their sin and still hope for grace. All of this is evidence of something more than natural corruption. It is the work of Satan.

D. Other people sought a sign of Christ from heaven (v. 16). This group seemed to be ready to accept Christ. All they needed apparently was an extra push. But Christ answers them with the words of v. 23. Here is the crucial either-or. Either you are all for Christ, or you have nothing. If you are not for Christ you certainly are in the clutches of Satan.

E. Christ calls Satan a strong man who watches his palace (v. 21). His kingdom is strong, well equipped for offensive and defensive warfare. In his arsenal are sinful flesh, evil hearts filled with lust and wicked thoughts, all the evil examples and scandals of the godless, all the errors and prejudices of men, all the vanity of the world, its pleasures, riches and treasures, its honor and glory, its pomp and display, its sham wisdom. Though this kingdom is filled with hate, anger, strife, lies, slander, deception, thievery, seduction and persecution of the in-

nocent, war, murder, and bloodshed, it is a unit. The more the members of this kingdom of godlessness hack away at one another, the more undisturbed peace Satan possesses in his kingdom.

II

A. If a man is to be saved from this horrid kingdom of darkness, three things are necessary: (1) that he realizes that up to the present he has been in the kingdom of darkness; (2) that he is frightened at this fact and desires to be saved from this terrible power; (3) that he knows that Satan has lost the right to accuse him before God and rule over him.

B. No one can save himself from the kingdom of Satan, because three barriers stand in his way: (1) his spiritual blindness; (2) his natural love of sin and the things of the world; (3) his inability to forgive his own sins, to protect himself against the accusations of Satan, to strike off the chains of sin that fetter him to Satan, to change his heart and make it the throne of God.

C. Rescue from the kingdom of Satan is found only in Christ, the Son of God and Redeemer of the world. He is the Stronger One (v. 22). He forces no one into His kingdom. Yet He calls the person blessed who hears His Word and keeps it (v. 28). The Holy Spirit works through this Word and draws him who hears and believes out of the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God.

D. There are always some, like the woman in the text (vv. 27, 28) who hear the Word and are saved. You have heard the Word also. Take it, and keep it in your heart. In Holy Baptism you renounced the devil, all his works, and all his ways and promised

to be loyal to the Triune God. Renew your baptismal vow today. Happy are all of you whom God has taken into His kingdom, where you shall shine like the sun forever and ever.

The Hymn of the Week — "Lord of Our Life and God of Our Salvation" (*The Lutheran Hymnal*, 258).

The Introit and Collect for this day are summed up in this hymn for temporal and spiritual peace. It was inspired by a German original from the pen of Matthäus Apelles von Löwenstern (1594—1648). He was a man of many gifts; in addition to musical and poetic gifts, he had definite political talents, serving as councilor of state to Duke Henry of Münsterberg-Oels for many years and knighted by Emperor Ferdinand III. His hymn, *Christe, du Beistand deiner Kreuzgemeinde*, first appeared in *Haus- und Trauergesänge*, a collection of poems dedicated to the duke on the occasion of his wife's death in 1641. In 1641 an enlarged edition appeared, and in 1644 the hymn was published in Breslau in *Kirchen- und Hausmusik*. The fact that Von Löwenstern died in 1648 makes it likely that the calamitous Thirty Years' War is reflected in this prayer for peace. The English version, a very free paraphrase, was contributed by Philip Pusey to A. R. Reinagle's *Psalms and Hymn Tunes* of 1840.

Although German hymnals assign Von Löwenstern's own tune to our hymn, *The Lutheran Hymnal* sets it to Johann Crüger's Lenten tune, *Herzliebster Jesu* (LH, 143). This tune, which appeared in the *Newes volkömliches Gesangbuch* of 1640, is based on an older tune from Johann Schein's Leipzig *Cantional* (1627), and may have originated, in germinal form, as early as 1547.