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Homiletics

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HOMILETICS

Introduction

With this issue CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY begins its publication of homiletic helps for the 1966—67 church year. The texts selected are taken from one of six series included in the *Perikopenbuch* of the Evangelical Church in the Province of Saxony, first published in 1842. The series is included in *Biblical Texts*, compiled by Paul W. Nesper (Columbus, Ohio: The Wartburg Press, 1952). The texts to be presented for the coming year are known as *historic-didactic* selections and consist of texts from both the Old and the New Testaments used interchangeably.

There will be considerable variation in the textual treatments of this sequence. The staff invited men from the colleges and seminaries of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and from the theological faculty of Valparaiso University to prepare the various texts for preaching. Each faculty man was asked to draw together a small group of colleagues to work with him on the development of the homiletic helps, and each group was urged to feel free to abandon traditional approaches to sermon development if their discussions suggested new avenues. The format of the materials they would provide was left up to the groups themselves. The results will be stimulating, although it is probably true that not everyone will agree with each group as to the value of their particular approach.

The material for the four Sundays in Advent has been developed by a group of men teaching at Concordia Senior College in Fort Wayne, Indiana. Professor Roddy L. Braun involved professors Merlin D. Rehm and Herbert C. Spomer in his group and makes the following comment on the approach and the results:

"Within the limited space allotted to us we have tried to provide material that pastors would best be able to utilize. Since our assigned texts were all from the Old Testament, we have tried to provide them with the necessary historical background and textual study on which they may construct a truly

textual sermon. We have listed for them the central thought of each text as we see it, related this central thought to the propers for the day, and indicated the manner in which we believe the text to be applicable to the New Testament Christian. We have not included outlines, because of lack of space, the realization that the use of an Old Testament text is a highly individualistic thing, and the tacit understanding that most parish pastors are probably better able to do this work than we."

There may be parish pastors who dislike the construction of outlines just as much!—but this sequence does make a neat series for Advent, and the insights and phrasing of significant thoughts in each study fairly cry out for inclusion in sermon titles and for shaping into outlines.

Preach the Word!

ADVENT I: GOD COMES WITH FORGIVING GRACE

JEREMIAH 31:31-34

Historical Background and Context

Called to be a prophet about 627 B.C., Jeremiah had the difficult task of proclaiming God's Word to a people whose destruction and exile were at hand, but who insisted on believing their deliverance was near. In such a situation Jeremiah prophesied the worst: The country was doomed; it would fall to the Babylonians. The prophets who prophesied otherwise were false prophets (Jer. 28). Jeremiah even encouraged those who had already been deported to be content with their situation in Babylon. (29:4 ff.)

Destruction and exile were certain. However, this was not to be the end of God's people. Jeremiah had hope for the future, even though that hope lay beyond the exile. This text, which should probably be dated either shortly before or after the fall of Jerusalem, is part of a collection of oracles (Chs.

30—31 or 30—33) that speak of that hope. The oracle must have been uttered at a time when Jeremiah believed the fate of the nation to be sealed and her covenant with Yahweh shattered beyond hope of repair. Israel's hopes for the future lay entirely in God and His miraculous intervention on behalf of His people. Jeremiah viewed this in terms of the establishment of a new covenant between God and His people; Ezekiel very similarly as the creation of a "new heart" within man; Isaiah as nothing less than a new creation itself (Is. 65:17). All are agreed that only by God's power will this amazing new deliverance be accomplished.

Textual Notes

V. 31. *The days are coming.* These words are a characteristic introduction to prophecies which deal with the end time. Thus our text pertains to the consummation of God's purpose in history, to the new age for which His people hope.

I will make. The initiative remains, as always, in the grace of God, who chose Israel to be His people only because He loved them. Jeremiah in particular sees man without God as corrupt and hopeless. (Cf. 17:9)

A new covenant. The particular terminology is found only here in the Old Testament, although the concept is more frequent (cf. Jer. 24:7; 32:36-41; Ezek. 11:17-21; 36:22-32; Hos. 2:16-20). Jeremiah sees the Old Covenant as broken, hence God in His grace will establish a new and better one; Isaiah, on the other hand, sees God's grace in His refusal to disavow the covenant *in spite* of Israel's failure to keep its statutes. (Cf. Is. 50:1)

With the house of Israel. The New Covenant is no less concerned with *all* of the people of God than was the Old. God makes His covenant with a community.

V. 32. *Not like the covenant.* Many points of distinction could no doubt be made. The text, however, concentrates on only one, which is then expounded in vv. 33-34.

My covenant which they broke. This is no doubt the primary reason for the necessity of the New Covenant: the Old had failed to work because the people had failed to be obedient to its statutes.

Though I was their husband. The Hebrew terminology is significant and may be translated "although it was I who was her Baal," i. e., it was not the Canaanite deity Baal, but Yahweh, the God of the Exodus, who was really Israel's spouse. Hosea 2 is a lengthy exposition of this same theme. Similar terminology is found in Is. 26:13 and 54:5.

V. 33. *My law.* The content of the New and Old Covenants is identical, God's *Torah*. It means basically "instruction" rather than the more conventional "law," however, and in a context such as this should be interpreted as everything God has revealed to man, i. e., both Law and Gospel.

In their midst . . . upon their hearts. Unlike the Sinaitic law, which is commonly pictured as "set before" the people (cf. Jer. 9:13). The heart was for the Hebrew the center of both will and intellect. Jeremiah has a great deal to say about the heart; in particular the phrase "the stubbornness of their evil hearts" occurs frequently. Cp. also Jer. 17:9. Ezekiel, too, sees the necessity for a basic change in the heart of man. (11:19; 36:26-38)

I will be their God. This is the essential meaning of the covenant. The phrase occurs again and again. (Cf. Ex. 6:7; 19:5; Jer. 7:23; 11:4)

V. 34. *They shall all know me.* This is the real significance of the New Covenant. Each person will have God's revelation within his own heart, regardless of race or origin. The word *know* commonly means not only to have an intellectual apprehension of, but to experience, or, as we would say, to "really know." It seems that in Jeremiah, as in Hosea, it approaches obedience (Cf. especially Jer. 4:22; 22:16; Hos. 4:1, 6). It might not

be far from the truth to say that it is a close parallel to faith. (Cf. the use of *know* in John 17:13!)

For I will forgive their iniquity. The New Covenant has its basis in the forgiving grace of God, in that "divine amnesia," by which God chooses to remember His own mercy rather than man's sin. The same is true also of the Old Covenant, of course. (Ex. 34:9)

Hence the unique feature of the New Covenant is that its essence has been fully revealed in Jesus Christ. The Spirit now inscribes the Covenant on man's heart and on his intellect and will. He knows God, that is, has faith in Him and does His will.

Central Thought

God's forgiving grace causes us to know God.

The Propers

The text coincides very well with the propers for the day. The Gospel tell us, "Behold, your King comes," and this coming of Christ is the basis for the New Covenant. The Epistle exhorts us to wake up from our sleep — to do away with the old and prepare for the new. The entire text can be looked upon as the answer to the plea of Introit and Gradual, "Show me Thy ways, O Lord," since the New Covenant results in the perfect knowledge of God. The Collect can be taken as our prayer that God's New Covenant take its place in our lives and thus work forgiveness of all our sins.

The Application

If one follows the general sequence of thought proposed in this Advent series, Advent I should lay the foundations for the particular emphases of the following Sundays: Comfort, Victory, Joy. As we prepare to celebrate the coming of our Lord in the flesh at Bethlehem, we think of His coming to us daily in Word and Sacrament and of His final coming victoriously to establish His

kingdom. To the degree that we fail to show the characteristics of the New Covenant, we remain "B. C." Christians. Christ's first coming is the basis of the New Covenant, sealed by the sacrifice of His blood; Word and Sacrament are the means by which we enter that covenant; His final coming will mark its realization in all its glory.

Fort Wayne, Ind.

RODDY L. BRAUN

ADVENT II: GOD'S ADVENT BRINGS COMFORT

ISAIAH 40:1-5

Historical Background

Isaiah 1—39, with some exceptions, is today usually considered to be the work of Isaiah of Jerusalem, ca. 742—700 B. C. With Isaiah 40 there is an abrupt change, and it is agreed by all that this chapter and those which follow, at least until Ch. 55, refer to the time when Israel was in the Babylonian exile (587—538 B. C.), for Jerusalem is assumed to be in ruins (44:26); Cyrus the Persian is on the rise (44:28; 45:1); Babylon is about to fall (Ch. 47); and Cyrus will soon release Israel. (45:13)

Textual Notes

V. 1. *Your God.* The God of Israel is speaking, and He speaks of Israel as "My people." These are covenant terms that remind the reader of Ex. 6:7. They indicate that God has not forsaken His people; He still remembers the covenant He made with them. (Cf. Jer. 31:31-34, which speaks of the Old Covenant as broken.)

God addresses some unnamed group with the command, "Comfort ye." It is possible (this is the theory of H. W. Robinson, Muilenburg, Wright, Cross, et al.) that He is addressing His heavenly council. Such a council also seems to be the scene in 1 Kings 22, Is. 6, Job 1—2, Ps. 82:1. The members

of the council are variously called seraphim, sons of God, or simply gods (Ps. 82). The divine council usually has a judicial character. It was here that Yahweh announced His controversy (*rib*) with Israel (cf. Hosea 4:1); but He could also announce a verdict of forgiveness, as He does in our text.

Israel's prophets had access to the heavenly council. Thus in our passage the prophet listened in (cf. Jer. 23:18, 22; Amos 3:7) as God gave His command to comfort Israel. He then went forth to announce the message that he had heard God proclaim in the divine council.

V. 2. The first part of this verse reads literally, "Speak (imperative plural) to the heart of Jerusalem." Jerusalem is a term of endearment for Israel in exile, and to speak to her heart means to speak consolingly to her (cf. Gen. 34:3; Judg. 19:3; Ruth 2:13). It is synonymous with "comfort" in v. 1. This command is also addressed to the divine council. The message that Israel should hear is divided into three parts, each introduced by *ki* (=that) in Hebrew and having its verb in the perfect (=completed action).

The first part of the message states: "She (Jerusalem or Israel) has fulfilled her warfare" (the Hebrew demands making "she" the subject, contra RSV). The word (*sābā'*) rendered "warfare" in the RSV also means "army" or "time spent in military service." Here it has reference to the long captivity that Israel spent in Babylon. This has now been "fulfilled" or "ended" (RSV).

The second part of the consoling message reads: "Her iniquity is pardoned." The literal translation is: "Her iniquity has been accepted" (niph'al perfect). Israel had been guilty of sinning against the covenant, and as punishment she was sent into exile. Now God forgives Israel's sin, and she may return home. No explanation for this sudden forgiveness is given. It belongs to the mysterious love of God for an undeserving people.

The third part is: "She has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins" (RSV). The Hebrew word *kiplayim* ("double") is not to be taken literally but rather as "the equivalent or appropriate amount." In God's judgment Israel had suffered enough in exile and may now return home.

Vv. 3-4. *A voice cries*. The scene is no longer within the divine council itself (vv. 1-2), but now a messenger from the council goes forth to report what he has heard there, and he is heard by the prophet, who in turn relays the message to the people.

The RSV is correct in placing "a voice cries" outside of the poetic structure. Consequently the wilderness is not the place where the voice was speaking, but it is rather the locality where the "way of the Lord" was to be built.

The "way of the Lord" and the parallel expression "highway for our God" allude to the Exodus from Egypt. The return from Babylon would be a new Exodus. Here, however, the emphasis is not on the people but on Yahweh. He is the one who will travel over the highway; He will return to Zion (cf. Ezek. 11:23, where the glory of Yahweh left the temple). It is of course implied that Yahweh's people will follow Him on His victorious march through the wilderness. Although the New Testament (Matt. 3:1ff.; 11:10 ff.; Mark 1:2 ff.; Luke 1:76; 3:4 ff.; John 1:23 — cf. Mal. 3:1; 4:5) applies this passage to John the Baptist and his preaching of repentance, it is in its original setting part of the total glorious picture of Yahweh's triumphant march to Zion.

V. 5. Here we get the reason why the people are to take comfort — namely, because the "glory of Yahweh" shall be revealed (niph'al waw-consecutive perfect). His glory had left the temple (Ezek. 11:23) quickly and quietly at the time of the fall of Jerusalem. Now it will return as a glory that saves

God's people and leads them home in triumph.

Anyone who has read Ezra and Nehemiah knows that the actual return of Israel to Palestine in the years following the fall of Babylon to Cyrus in 539 B. C. was far less glorious than Isaiah's predictions concerning it. Therefore the ultimate fulfillment of the prophecy of the tremendous impact of the revelation of God's glory will not be attained until the eschatological age. Only at the end of time will it be true that "all flesh shall see it (God's glory) together."

For the mouth of the Lord has spoken. The prophet refers to the fact that he has heard God Himself proclaim Israel's release in His heavenly council. Hence it must come to pass.

Central Thought of the Text

God's exiled people can take comfort in the imminent appearance of God's glory, which will lead them back to their own land.

Provers for Advent II

The Introit says, "Thy Salvation cometh," reminding us of Is. 40:5. As Israel of old was to be comforted, so the Introit bids us to have "gladness of heart," and the Epistle reminds us how the Scriptures (also Is. 40!) give us "hope."

The theme of preparation in 40:3-4 is reflected in the Collect: "Make ready the way of Thine only-begotten Son."

In the Gospel the eschatological note of our text receives expression. The Son of Man's coming in a cloud with power and great glory will be the final fulfillment of the appearance of the "glory of the Lord" in Is. 40:5.

Application

We, too, live in a kind of exile—often we feel alone, separated from God. Then the Gospel comes to remind us that God's glory has been revealed in the incarnation

of his Son (John 1:14), who both in this life again and again rescues us from our self-made exile and will come again at the end of time to fully reveal His glory and to give us the final victory. Because of this advent of Christ's glory we are comforted.

Ft. Wayne, Ind. MERLIN D. REHM

ADVENT III: GOD'S ADVENT GIVES VICTORY

HAGGAI 2:7-10

Historical Background and Context

Israel's prophets had spoken of a glorious return from exile. When the troops of Cyrus the Persian marched into Babylon in 539 B. C., and Cyrus proclaimed an edict permitting the Jews to return home (Ezra 1:2-4; 6:3-5), the stage seemed to be set for the fulfillment of their hopes.

The returning exiles began their work with great zeal, and under their leader Sheshbazzar (probably the son of Jehoiachin) the foundation of the temple was laid (Ezra 5:16) about 537 B. C. But soon initial enthusiasm began to fade before the hard realities of life. While the Babylonian empire had been a strong one, the Persians who supplanted it were well on their way to establishing the most gargantuan reign yet known. Opposition arose on the local level from the Samaritans, who must have viewed the returning exiles as trespassers on their territory. The material aid mentioned in Cyrus' edicts no doubt failed to materialize. A succession of bad crops must have been the final blow to the morale of a struggling people. Work on the temple ceased in the face of "more practical" concerns.

Such was the situation when the prophet Haggai addressed his first prophecy to the Jews around Jerusalem in 520 B. C., the second year of the Persian king, Darius I. His message was a brief one: Get to work on the temple! And while many have seen in Haggai a lack of spiritual depth—a man

concerned only with externals — Haggai knew that the erection of a temple by a people in danger of being swallowed up by its pagan environment was no adiaphoron. It signified nothing less than the intention of the people to resume their covenant fellowship with Yahweh and to have Him dwell in their midst. The failure to be concerned with the temple, on the other hand, clearly indicated the people's preoccupation with themselves and the common tendency to bargain with God: We'll build Your temple when You take care of us! Haggai reverses the logic: Your present situation is the result of your failure to build the temple (1:7-11). His word bears fruit, and work on the temple is resumed.

Textual Notes

In Haggai's second prophecy (2:1-9), of which our text forms the conclusion, initial enthusiasm has once again waned and Haggai encourages the people by directing them to the nearness and magnificence of their goal.

V.1. *The seventh month.* This is some two months after the rebuilding began. The date is significant. It would have been the seventh day of the Feast of Tabernacles, the festival commemorating God's protection during the 40 years in the wilderness and giving thanks for the harvest of the past year (Lev. 23:33-43). On such an occasion the contrast between the ideal and the actual situation of the people was painfully apparent.

V.2. *The remnant.* This is the true Israel, in whose fortunes the destiny of the kingdom of God is to be determined!

V.3. *Who is left . . . is it not as nothing?* Perhaps a few remained who had seen Solomon's temple, which had been destroyed some 66 years before. Compared to that magnificent edifice the present one would have seemed almost a disgrace. It could make strong men weep. (Ezra 3:12)

V.4. *I am with you.* The real significance of the covenant: God dwells with His people

in blessing. There can be no valid reason for discouragement.

V.6. *Once again, in a little while . . . I will shake,* that is, as He did when He appeared to His people on Sinai. Very soon Yahweh will again act decisively for His people. Since the prophets envisioned the violent overthrow of the present hostile world order as necessary for the establishment of God's kingdom, it is probable that the widespread revolts that accompanied the succession of Darius to the throne of Persia following the death of Cambyses in 522 — revolts that were not put down until late in 520 — were in the prophet's mind. God was about to use the chaos of the political order in restoring the glory of His own nation.

V.7. *The treasures of all nations.* The traditional Messianic translation of the KJV ("the desire of all nations") is upheld by few, even among the conservatives, and can scarcely be defended on the basis of the Hebrew, where the verb is plural and its subject singular. The subject is a collective, "the desirable things," hence the RSV's "treasures." If this translation is correct, the import of the passage would be almost identical with the Epiphany epistle, Is. 60:1-7, where the nations bring their treasures to Yahweh's house as a token of their submission.

V.8. This would seem to confirm the translation of the previous verse.

V.9. *The latter splendor.* Because of God's act in shaking the nations, the temple will actually be more glorious than Solomon's, and in land there will be *shalom*, that magnificent condition where everything exists as it was meant to be. It would thus include peace between God and man, man and man; security, prosperity, joy, etc. Such are the joys of God's people.

Central Thought

God's great intervention for His people results in glorious establishment of His kingdom.

The Propers

The Introit reminds us that the nearness of God is the source of both our carelessness and our joy. It is His visitation which lightens the darkness of our heart. Until He comes again we are the stewards of His treasury, His Word and sacraments (Epistle). The Gradual heightens the idea of the "kingliness" of God ("O Thou who dwellest between the cherubim, shine forth . . .") The Gospel shows us the true marks of the kingdom King and reminds us of the blessedness of being a member of that kingdom.

Application

The basic connection between the text and the hearer must be that in Christ we believe this "shaking" to have taken place, and in Him the King has come and established His kingdom. God has dwelt among us too; He has, in fact, become one of us. Like the Wise Men, we bring Him our treasures, our gifts and our lives. Nevertheless, we, too, remain fearful, afraid to undertake those activities which would both result in our own blessings and hasten the coming of the Kingdom in all its fullness.

Fort Wayne, Ind.

RODDY L. BRAUN

**ADVENT IV: GOD'S ADVENT
BRINGS JOY**

ISAIAH 12:2-6

Historical Background and Context

The psalm which comprises Chapter 12 of Isaiah is regarded as an intentional insertion here, a fitting sequel to the previous two chapters, which emphasize the Lord's control of the invader Assyria. Both Israel and Judah are to feel the rod of the Lord's anger, Assyria (10:5 ff.), in Samaria's destruction and in the actual invasion of Judah and the siege of Jerusalem soon after. The eventuality of assault can be interrupted by a temporary reprieve at best, in spite of heavy tribute paid

to Assyria by the North (2 Kings 15:19), or even Ahaz's costly alliance with Assyria (Is. 7; 2 Kings 16). It is significant that the Assyrian, like the Egyptian oppression (sojourn), is subject to the Lord's indignation and intervention (10:24 f.), and the hope for the future is based on the remnant which returns (10:21, 22) under miraculous providence (11:11 ff.), and especially (11:16) — a second Exodus no less miraculous than the first! The exhortation "be not afraid" (10:24) is reasonable in view of the restoration of kingship from the line of David and the resulting Messianic age, as well as the imminent return of the remnant of His people. (Ch. 11)

This psalm of thanksgiving is certainly an appropriate utterance. At first its language may seem too general. Verse 3 of the psalm, or even the "introit" (v. 1) fail to establish the *Sitz im Leben*, although the Targum elaborates v. 1: "for because I had sinned before Thee, Thine anger was upon me, now let Thine anger turn from me and have pity upon me," suggesting a connection with the cause for individual thanksgiving in Ps. 116. However, the psalm provides an additional connection between the first and second "Exodus" through an exact parallel (12:2b) with the Song of Moses (Ex. 15:2a). The cause for thanksgiving is God's miraculous deliverance (Salvation) of His people from certain annihilation. To relate this theme to Advent, it is necessary to focus on the significance of the word Salvation.

Textual Notes

There are three Hebrew words frequently used for Salvation: *yeshuah* (three times in Is. 12), *yesha*, and *teshuah*, all derived from the same verbal root. All three are used almost exclusively in poetry. While there is some difference in stylistic employment (*yesha*, for example, is often used in combinations as "rock, horn, joy, garments of salvation," etc.), the semantic value of the

words is practically identical. *Teshuab* occurs in some contexts implying military victory, while most uses are less explicit. The words usually designate the causative dimension of deliverance from perils of every description (v. 2a) but elsewhere can mean also the effect, that is, "health, safety, ease." Observe especially the result of Salvation in v. 2: "I will trust and will not be afraid." (10:24) This response is perfectly in keeping with the operation of God's deliverance.

In some passages Salvation is anticipated (Lam. 3:26) if not imminent and expected (Ex. 14:13). Elsewhere it is earnestly desired (Ps. 106:4; Ps. 119 passim). In other places it is newly experienced (Is. 12) or long operative. This is not to mean that for the Israelite there was a specific moment when the individual first becomes conscious that now God's Salvation is operative. Rather, the specific events in the life of the individual or nation are regarded as a continuation or a manifestation of this Salvation, which is consistent with and characteristic of God's nature. Misfortune and tragedy are subject to reversal through God's Salvation. The expression "God is my Salvation" implies more than that God authors, instigates, or presides over acts of Salvation. It means nothing less than a dramatic intrusion, an intervention in the ordinary course of affairs, a historic reversal of political, personal, and spiritual fortunes (which are interwoven and indistinguishable), accomplished by God in person or by a charismatic figure who acts at God's direction. God's Salvation is historical, direct, personal, and continuing. It is covenantal, thus it is expected and awaited as well as experienced. The result is a trust in God and an absence of fear (v. 2). The sum of these is joy, and the outward manifestations of this response is the major emphasis of the psalm.

Here ultimately lies the explanation of Christ's advent. It is a determined action, a calculated risk, a historical intervention by

God in the affairs of human history. This deliverance is Salvation from sin with its accompanying perils for all time, which produces the timeless response of joy.

Central Thought

I will rejoice in the God of my Salvation.

The Propers

The text emphasizes joy at the various manifestations of God's Salvation already experienced. The propers, one by one, emphasize the imminence of this Salvation with no diminution of rejoicing (Phil. 4:4) in the anticipation, since the Exodus, Restoration, Nativity, and many personal and collective experiences of God's deliverance are a guarantee of the imminence and accomplishment of God's complete and final deliverance. Again the note is sounded: "Have no anxiety, rather prayer (trust), and thanksgiving" (Epistle). Exchange fear engendered by the hindrances of our sins (Collect) for the fear and awe of John (Gospel) in the immediate interval before Christ's appearance. How adequately does the Collect describe the nature of this Salvation: power, great might, grace, mercy, satisfaction—all wielded to help and rescue man in his sinful state!

Application

The goal for the hearer is that he have this dual relation to God's Salvation, namely, that he has experienced it and yet eagerly awaits it. The interval is occupied with rejoicing. In terms no less specific than the oft-repeated Old Testament themes, the hearer is to be reminded of what God has done and is about to do. Above all, God's acts must involve the individual hearer who is not to be passive in the process. Just as in the past God's Salvation had an impact on His people, on their faith, and in their lives, so it should today.

While God's acts are historical, this is only incidental, then as now, to the object and

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purpose of God's Salvation. For many passed through the sea but were killed in the wilderness; many saw Christ's miracles and still demanded a sign. Thus the malady is not an imaginary one: lack of preparation, absence of trust, control by fear—all equivalent to a negation of the central thought, absence of joy.

In the usual preparation for the Feast of Christmas the believer can easily be overcome by gloom when he notes how regulated

by human effort the observance can become—from the finest detail of the Christmas program to the negotiated tightrope of a Christmas truce. And yet it is precisely here that the means to the goal asserts itself—God's power versus our puny efforts, the reversal of the world's maladies through divine Salvation, which brings lasting joy.

Fort Wayne, Ind.

HERBERT C. SPOMER