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Homiletics

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HOMILETICS

Archaeology and Preaching

With this issue **CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY** begins a new series of articles in the area of homiletics. During the past year sermon suggestions have been presented for each Sunday of the year. During the coming year this section will supply brief essays on various aspects of the homiletician's task together with a sermon that will provide some illustration of the thrust of the article. The year's sequence is not yet complete, and readers are invited to express their own conclusions about an aspect of the preaching task in a brief article and to submit it with an illustrative sermon for consideration by the editorial staff.

During the next months articles will develop the implications of ordination over against the task of proclamation, and the significance of the geographical understanding of "parish" over against the subjects treated in the pulpit. Other essays will discuss the pro and con of the writing of sermons in manuscript form prior to delivery and will supply examples of both the extemporaneous sermon and the sermon delivered from a written manuscript. The development of a new lectionary in the Roman Catholic Church will be cited to illustrate the relation of the sermon to the lessons of the day, and the issues of the day and of the nation will be discussed in their relation to Sunday preaching.

The sermon in this issue was delivered by Prof. Arthur Carl Piepkorn in a service of Holy Communion held in connection with the symposium on archaeology and theology at which the articles included in this issue were first presented. It is noteworthy for one thing because of its sharply contemporary frame of reference — not necessarily to be expected of a sermon that makes its starting point in archaeology, nor always to be anticipated in contemporary sermons we are accustomed to hear based on texts taken from the ancient manuscripts included in the Sacred Scriptures. "Whether we like it or not" — to quote the sermon's phrase — men preach today to citizens of quite a different world from 25 years ago, and it is fascinating to hear that fact so sharply accented from the stance of the archaeologist. Equally compelling is the fact that to the men engaged in the study of the past whose attention has been sharply brought to the immediate present, it is the Gospel of Jesus Christ which is proclaimed as the continually effective answer to the real questions of life which still remain man's problems. The formulation of the kerygmatic facts, simply as a matter of homiletic interest, are worth close attention. "This series of historical facts that by a mystery we cannot fathom are decisive for all mankind" in this sermon are skillfully asserted for the specific audience listening and for us who read so that "we discover [them] to be decisive for us and our own relationship with our Maker." That is what preaching in the church always attempts to achieve.

GEORGE W. HOYER

THE QUESTIONS ARE THE SAME— SO ARE THE ANSWERS

A homily delivered by Arthur Carl Piepkorn at the Eucharist held on the Eighteenth Sunday After Trinity, October 5, 1969, in connection with the Symposium on Archaeology and Theology.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Quite by accident, of course, the Biblical propers for the 18th Sunday After Trinity in our rite confront us with a fairly varied assortment of Biblical issues. "Reward them that wait for Thee, O Lord," the Introit begins, "and let Thy prophets be found faithful. Hear the prayer of Thy servants and of Thy people Israel." This Introit antiphon is from Ecclesiasticus 36, which is in the Alexandrian but not in the Palestinian

canon. Thus it raises in a sense the very basic question of canonicity. The psalm of the Introit, Psalm 122, two verses of which reoccur in the Gradual, is a song of ascent, and this opens the whole issue of the composition of the hymnbook of Israel. The Deuteronomic historian climaxes his account of events in chapters 8, 9, and the beginning of 10 when he instructs us today about the nature of God and the nature of the ethical demands that commitment to His covenant imposes (10:12-21). The Epistle is exceptional in that it is taken not from Ephesians, as the Epistles for the preceding and following Sundays are, but from 1 Corinthians. It is a passage that is significantly lacking in Old Testament allusions, but it registers most of the themes in Biblical theology that the letter will investigate — the given and gratuitous nature of grace, enrichment in speech and knowledge, the confirmation of the testimony of Christ in the congregation, charismatic gifts, the apocalyptic self-disclosure of Christ, the Day of the Lord, the sustaining power of God to the very *telos*, the faithfulness of God, the divine vocation, and the *koinōnia* of God's Son. The Gospel provides ample opportunity for reflection on synoptic problems by giving us precisely the Matthean version of the logion on the first and greatest commandment and of the quotation of the 110th Psalm in answer to the question about David's Son. Indeed, it is only the alleluia verse from Psalm 117 that is fairly uncomplicated!

We are discussing the relation of archaeology and theology — both of them somewhat broadly construed — during these days. Archaeology in the strict sense does not make a direct contribution to the solution of any of the specific problems that confront the student of the divine Word as he reflects on the liturgical propers for today. Nor does archaeology provide a clear supplementary word to the preacher who must proclaim and apply them. But archaeology broadly thought

of, in concert with the historical and human subdisciplines associated with it, has radically altered the whole framework of these passages and the total situation within which all Christian proclamation takes place. It was a framework and a situation that the whole Christian tradition took for granted down to only a little more than a hundred years ago. Then, the total Biblical time frame was limited to a cozy six thousand years, more or less. Six thousand years is admittedly vastly longer than a human lifetime. But after all it is brief enough that the septuagenarian whom the 90th Psalm describes could see some kind of calculable relationship between his own personal history and the history of the world. Admittedly a human lifetime of seven decades was only a little more than one percent of the total span from creation in 4004 B.C. to the end-of-the-world week that is the very explicit frame of reference for, say, Martin Luther's *Supputatio annorum mundi* of 1541 and 1545. But the relationship was still imaginable. This comfortable time span had its parallel in the cozy universe that contained some astronomical problems for mathematicians and cosmologists and astronomers to argue about, but that still remained comprehensible and susceptible of being reduced to conceptual and even mechanical models. No less cozy was the size of the human family. Humanity was fairly numerous. Yet forecasts that spoke of Abraham's progeny in terms of the sand which is on the seashore were, as everybody knew, hyperbolic. Ultimately the size of the human family was at least theoretically numerable, computable, and conceivable. For at least a large part of the years between the first Adam and the second, as men calculated the Biblical chronologies, the *qabal Yabweb* had been giving institutional form to God's community. Meanwhile a continuity of worship stretched back to the third human generation, sustained by a tradition that had had

to pass through fewer than half a dozen hands from Enosh to Moses.

That world is irretrievably gone. In its place — whether we like it or not and whether we personally agree with it or not — is a world-picture where the backward sweep of history to the first *homo sapiens* is no longer measured in centuries or in millennia, but in thousands and thousands of thousands of years. In this world-picture earth is no longer the center of the universe but a tiny planet in a minor solar system in only one of uncounted galaxies scattered over a space that defies measurement even in light-years. In this world-picture the number of human beings that lived and died before the writing down of the first Biblical document is beyond computation. Similarly, the *qabal Yahweh* and a documented tradition of worship of the God who is identifiable with the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ spans only a tiny fraction of the years of human history before our era, and other traditions of worship and other gods existed not by the handful but by the hundreds and the thousands.

It was not archaeology alone that stripped away the comforting and sustaining furniture of past historical models, but archaeology has helped mightily to do so. While the bulk of the process can be accounted for as the result of other historical and human subdisciplines, archaeology has not produced anything that is inconsistent with the outlines of the larger picture as it has emerged or that would render the larger world-picture incredible.

Precisely how seriously theology in the Catholic tradition has really taken this development is arguable. Whatever some theologians have bravely done in accommodating themselves to this new world-picture, it is no exaggeration to say that others have made only the barest adjustments in views that still fundamentally reflect the now discarded image. Even where theological reflection has tried to come to terms with the full implica-

tions for contemporary faith of the revolutionary situation that has developed, it has made almost no impact at all upon the public worship of the church and relatively little more upon the church's ventures into Christian education. We have not, for instance, taken into serious account in our formularies of public worship the incontestable fact of the lengthening time span that has intervened since our Lord's day.

Yet amid all these changes we have discovered something quite important and even astonishing. In our day-by-day service in and to the church and, in the case of those of us who have been called into the sacred ministry, in our day-by-day proclamation and application of what we have found to be indeed the Word of God in preaching and in counseling and in teaching and worship, in our day-by-day administration of the sacraments for the dispensation of which God has made us responsible — we have discovered that the real questions have not changed in substance and that the effective answers to those questions have not changed.

The crucial question for faith has still turned out to be the one asked in the Gospel for today: "What do you think of Christ? Whose son is he?" This is still a question that has to be answered in such a way that he is seen to be both David's son and David's Lord.

The crucial question for ethics is still, from the same Gospel: "What is the greatest precept in the Torah?" It must still be answered in the awareness that every document in the canon of the Old Covenant depends on the injunction that a human being must love Yahweh our God with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his mind and that beside this great and first command is a second of like import, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

The crucial question for our stance and our posture and our attitude is still the rhetorical inquiry of the Old Testament lesson:

"Now, Israel, what does Yahweh your God require of you but to hear Yahweh your God, to walk in all His ways, to love Him, to serve Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of Yahweh as His spokesman once commanded for the good of his hearers?"

This is not to say that our faith or the life that it engenders involves an unhistorical commitment to a set of timeless truths. On the contrary, as probably more Christians in the last century have become more acutely aware than ever, we stand committed to the irremissibly historical nature of the divine intervention in Christ that we see as the indispensable condition for our rescue and our safety. The crucial point is precisely that although heaven and the heaven of heavens belong to Yahweh our God, together with the earth and all that is in it, Yahweh inexplicably set His love upon our spiritual fathers, the patriarchs, and chose their descendants after them above all peoples. It is precisely that in doing this God invaded space and time. It is precisely that He did prepare for Himself a race, a people, and a family, and that finally in the Theotokos, the woman that gave birth to God, He prepared for Himself a person that would be the instrument of His climactic personal involvement in our world of men and of things. It is precisely that for us human beings and for our salvation the second hypostasis of the Godhead, by the will of the Father and through the cooperation of the Holy Spirit (as one old eucharistic collect puts it), came down from heaven and became a human being out of the Holy Spirit and Mary the Virgin, and was even crucified for us while Tiberius reigned in Rome and Pontius Pilate represented the Basileus in Jerusalem, and was executed and was buried and rose again from the dead three days later according to the Scriptures.

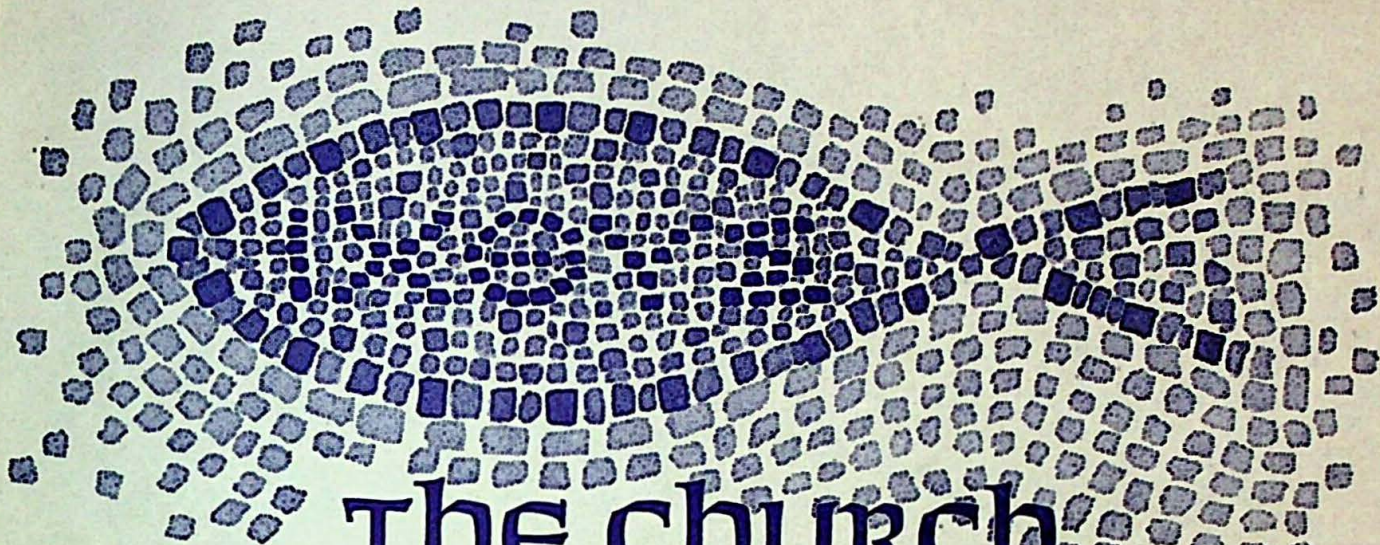
Here is where the questions and the an-

swers finally focus — in this series of historical facts that by a mystery we cannot fathom are decisive for all mankind and that we discover to be decisive for us and our own relationship with our Maker.

This must be our own personal discovery if we are to profit by it. To that end Christ made a further excursion into history and created as a body on earth for Himself a historical institution, the church, that each link in the chain of generations might fortify itself with the common and mutual witness to Him and to God's reconciling act in Him.

In that church He established a historically concrete agency and office of service, and to that church He gave a historically concrete company of servants to whom through the laying on of holy hands He imparts the charisma of the Holy Spirit to equip them for their task. Through them He hallows and governs His community. Through these His representatives He reconciles alienated men and women with His Father through Holy Baptism, He reunites them with His community through Holy Absolution when they stray, and He imparts to them, as He imparts to us this morning, in the Sacrament of the Altar His very body and His very blood—the body that He took from His mother and that as priest-victim He offered on the cross and the blood that is the very life of sacrificial obedience to His Father.

It is there—in that incarnation for us human beings and for our salvation, in that death on our behalf, in that resurrection that destroyed the power of death over Him and over us, in that outpouring of the Spirit of life and of new life—that all history centers. It centers there for *all* human beings, whether they know it yet or not. It centers there for *us*, whom God has made alive together with Christ—by grace we have been saved—and has raised us up with Him, and has made us sit with Him in the heavenly places with Christ Jesus.



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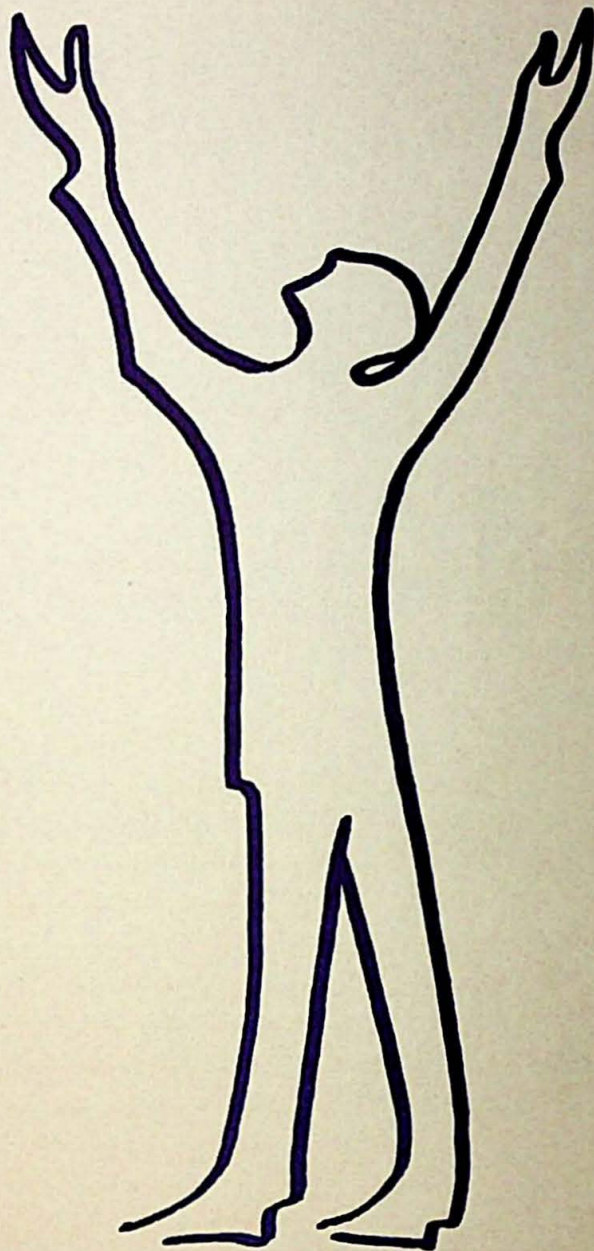
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