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Preaching and the Recovery of the Church

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Preaching and the Recovery of the Church

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In the first section, we dealt with the language of preaching.¹ Can it be understood? Does God speak and act in it? In the second we dealt with the method of finding and conveying Biblical truth in preaching.² Have current Biblical studies a contribution to make to the pastor as he sets about on his task of preparing and delivering sermons? The third article does not turn away from these questions and processes, but it locates them in their setting: the Christian church. Ours is a time of rediscovery of the meaning of the church. Interestingly enough, in keeping with the fields through which we have been moving, this rediscovery has taken place as Christians have realized that they are dealing, in the church, not just with a physical institution but with an assembly of God's people speaking God's Word and that as they speak it so, they do the one thing possible to make it believable and

perceptible to the world that is around them: they witness to it.

I. THE MUTUALLY NURTURING MEMBERSHIP

To talk about the rediscovery of the doctrine of the church may cause uneasiness. Hasn't the Christian church steadfastly confessed throughout the ages: "I believe in . . . the holy Christian church"? Are not Lutheran clergymen especially conscious of the heritage of the Reformation which recaptured the dynamic of the church, and are they not peculiarly committed to preserve it through their subscription to the Lutheran confessions?

A helpful answer to these questions is given by surveying the experience of the Christian church in history. W. A. Visser 't Hooft gives a thumbnail summary of the subject which he closes with the words:

These illustrations suffice to make it abundantly clear that this task of renewal of the Church is its own worst enemy. Like other institutions it seeks the security of the status quo. And almost imperceptibly it slides back from the open, dynamic life into which the Holy Spirit pours His gifts to the closed, introverted life of self-perpetuation. But we have also seen that this need not be its final fate. For if it allows the Word of God to do its creative work, there is always hope for its renewal.³

¹ Richard R. Caemmerer, "Current Contributions to Christian Preaching," *CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY*, XXXVII (January 1966), 38—47.

² Richard R. Caemmerer, "The New Hermeneutic and Preaching," *CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY*, XXXVII (February 1966), 99—110.

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³ W. A. Visser 't Hooft, *The Renewal of the Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1957), p. 84, concluding Ch. 4 on "The Renewal of the Church in History."

When we see the processes of erosion and decay which beset the church repeatedly, we can understand the need for constant renewal. Just in our own time the doctrine of the "invisible church," a concept found neither in the Scriptures nor the Lutheran Confessions, although incorporating a helpful repudiation of specific institutional or political ingredients as essential to it, has often produced the unrealistic optimism that the church is perfect, "holy" in the sense of "sinless," needing no efforts to unify it, no conscious energy to proclaim its message. Or the doctrine of an exclusively "visible church" has sometimes distorted the words of the Augsburg Confession to imply that the sole task of the church is to gather about the pure preaching of the Word and the correct administration of the sacraments,⁴ the result is an indoctrinating pastorate and a listening laity. Historically the doctrine of the church hung on disputes concerning the authority of bishops; or in trying to divest itself of any institutional quality it made itself mystical, without a function in which men share.

In our time the renewal of the understanding of the church stems from the studies, in which Biblical experts have shared, concerning the nature and essence of the church which were prompted by the efforts especially of the Protestant churches of the Reformed tradition to understand one another in preparation for closer

⁴ AC VII 1—2; *The Book of Concord*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), p. 32. For another view of this statement, cf. the present author's "Church Unity and Communication" in *Christian Unity in North America*, ed. J. Robert Nelson (Saint Louis: Bethany, 1958).

unity.⁵ A review of the original church is essential in this process, and the great lexicographical and exegetical studies⁶ have been central contributions. Into this stream of literature the great accents of the Biblical study of the kerygma have fitted smoothly. The preaching of the church has thus come to be studied not as a complex of utterance or a catalog of dogmatic truth but as the function of the church.⁷

The definition which the renewed study of the church has given to it centers on the difference between the kingdom of God, God ruling among His people, and the church as the people among whom God rules. The people are those in whom God, beginning with their baptism, is setting up His rule. God gave His Son to die for the sins of the world and through the Gospel of Christ and Baptism moves into men to claim them for the rule of Christ so that they share in the death which He died for them and rise in the resurrection by which God leads Him before them as the firstfruits. The structure of the church

⁵ Illustrative of this literature and especially valuable are: R. Newton Flew, *Jesus and His Church*, 2d ed. (London: Epworth Press, 1943); Daniel Jenkins, *The Strangeness of the Church* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1955); and Paul S. Minear, *Horizons of Christian Community* (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1959).

⁶ The chief articles in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1932 ff.), are βασιλεία, by Karl Ludwig Schmidt, in Vol. 1; ἐκκλησία, by Schmidt, in Vol. 3; and κοινωνία, by Friedrich Hauck, in Vol. 3.

⁷ On the relation of the ecumenical movement to preaching, cf. Theodore Wedel, *The Pulpit Rediscovered Theology* (Greenwich, Conn.: Seabury Press, 1956); Truman B. Douglass, *Preaching and the New Reformation* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956).

is fluid; two or three people are sufficient for it in any given place, and this is the way Christ fills the world. The Holy Spirit is the gift of Christ to His church, and the preached Gospel is the way by which the Spirit keeps on bringing all things to the remembrance of God's people.⁸

A special dimension of the church which is unusually momentous for Christian preaching is that it is the mutually nurturing community.⁹ Not as amply treated in the literature as it should be, this is the hinge especially in the epistles of St. Paul through which the Gospel of Jesus Christ is made an activity, and not simply the content of belief, of God's community. This is the concept of the "fellowship of the Gospel" (Phil. 1:5-6), a good work which the Holy Spirit Himself began in Christian people and which He Himself brings "to completion by the Day of Christ Jesus" (NEB). The preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the proclamation that through Jesus Christ God has redeemed the world and through that preaching proposes to draw it into communion with Himself, is not the prerogative of pro-

fessionals only but one in which every Christian joins. St. Paul goes so far as to say that saving faith is always a profession of the lips as well as a confidence in the heart (Rom. 10:8-10). He states it as the function of the special servant of the church (apostle or pastor) to be not the sole preacher but the one through whom the people of the church are equipped for their mutual service of strengthening against error and building up for life in the body of Christ (Eph. 4:11-16) by speaking that message themselves.

Historically two situations have tended to weaken this insight. The one has been the assumption that the business of preaching the Gospel belonged exclusively to the special servants of the church and that they in turn possessed that business through an authority setting them over the others. The other, current especially in our own time, is the assumption that the Gospel of the atoning work of God in Jesus Christ is to be directed to unbelievers; and after they are believers and members of the church, the church's teaching to itself is not the Gospel at all, but instruction in the fruits of the Gospel.¹⁰ Splendidly explicit are the descriptions of St. Paul to Titus (Titus 2:11—3:8) and of the writer to the Hebrews (10:19-25) of the full-fledged affirmation of the atoning work of Jesus Christ as the impulse which

⁸ Biblical references for this paragraph are: Matt. 12:28; John 18:36, 38; Rom. 14:17; Rom. 6:3-11; Col. 1:9-23; Matt. 18:15-20; Eph. 1:22-23; John 15:26—16:15; John 17. Cf. "The Church in the New Testament," in Richard R. Caemmerer and Erwin L. Lueker, *Church and Ministry in Transition* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1964).

⁹ A painstaking treatment is Lionel S. Thornton, *Common Life in the Body of Christ* (London: Dacre, 1942). This is the special concern of the present writer's *The Church in the World*, rev. ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961); and his *Christ Builds His Church* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963). For a summary article, cf. his "The Body of Christ," *CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY*, XXXV (May 1964), 261—270.

¹⁰ This is the burden of the otherwise valuable studies of Charles H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments*, 2d ed. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950), and *Gospel and Law* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951). Note the present writer's "Kerygma and Didache in Christian Education," *CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY*, XXXII (April 1961), 197—208.

preaching is to lodge in the minds of Christians to produce their good works—and this preaching is to be done by the professional minister and the worshipping Christians alike.

The pastor's pulpit preaching thus becomes a table of contents, an initial act of training, through which the hearers as members of the body of Christ in that place are guided on their own expedition of mutual nurture in their families and their callings. But more: the parish sermon, inasmuch as it speaks the Gospel of God in answer to the actual needs of the people and for the forgiveness of their sins, is a process in which they themselves are sharing the Word of life with one another. Just as in the prayers of the pastor spoken during the service all Christians present feel themselves speaking to God, and as all regard themselves as proclaiming the Lord's death to one another as they share in the body and blood of the Lord (1 Cor. 11:26), so in the pastor's preaching all members of the church present should feel themselves addressing each other for their mutual improvement in faith and life.¹¹

¹¹ Cf. Martin Luther, "Sermon at the Dedication of the Castle Church in Torgau, Oct. 5, 1544," *Luther's Works*, 51, ed. and trans. John W. Doberstein (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), 343: "For when I preach, when we come together as a congregation, this is not my word or my doing, but is done for the sake of all of you and for the sake of the whole church. It is only that it is necessary that there be one who speaks and is the spokesman by the commission and consent of the others, who, by reason of the fact that they listen to the preaching, all accept and confess the Word and thus also teach others. Thus, when a child is baptized, this is done not only by the pastor, but also the sponsors, who are witnesses, indeed, the whole church. For baptism, just like the Word and Christ himself, is the common possession of

II. THE CALLED CHURCH AT ITS CALLING

Complementary to the description of the church as "the body of Christ" is "the called-out company." This is the etymological meaning of the word ἐκκλησία employed by St. Paul (Rom. 9:22-26) and St. Peter (1 Peter 2:9-10) for the people of God, the lineal descendant of the *qahal*, the assembled people of God in the Old Testament.

For our purpose the word in the heart of the concept is the important one: κλήσις, "call." It is a summons from God that makes a person into an agent and servant for God. That summons is carried out through God's action in Jesus Christ and through the Word of Jesus Christ as it is repeated and proclaimed by God's agent (2 Tim. 1:9-11). That call gathers men out of the surrounding world, out of the kingdoms of this world, into the people of God and the kingdom of His dear Son (Col. 1:12-25). It is in that way, we said, that men become members of the body of Christ and nurture each other mutually. But the call continues to function; it becomes the food by which they nurture each other. The call is not merely the Word of God which they keep on hearing and which steadies them for their purpose under God, but it is a word on their own lips which they speak in order to steady one another and to nurture the body of Christ.

all Christians. So also they all pray and sing and give thanks together; here there is nothing that one possesses or does for himself alone; but what each one has also belongs to the other." Cf. also P. T. Forsyth, *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind* (London: Independent Press, 1960), p. 68. This is my accent in *Preaching for the Church* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959).

The Luther renaissance, among other impulses, has contributed in our time to the rediscovery of Christian vocation. Frequently the literature on the subject has stopped short of expressing itself as radically as the New Testament does on this subject, and we may believe that here we are in the eye of the hurricane of rediscovery of the church, and more will come. Our Lord employed the picture of Himself as light being reflected by His disciples as the light of the world (Matt. 5:14-16; cf. John 8:12), and St. Paul repeats the picture of his own Gospel ministry (2 Cor. 4:4-6). Jesus described Himself as being sent by the heavenly Father and in the same manner sending His disciples with the Word through which men believe on Him (John 17:6-9, 14-22). St. Paul describes people of his time—women married to pagan husbands, Jewish Christians, slaves—as living in a situation from which they might wish to escape but in which they were agents for the benefit, the relating to God, of the people among whom God had placed them, and he says, “Stay in”—we would say, at—“your calling” (1 Cor. 7:13-24). He describes the special servants of the church—apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers—as gifts through whom all Christians would be fitted out to “truth”—to cause the faithfulness of God in bringing His redemptive plan to pass to become the property of—their fellow Christians (Eph. 4:1-16), and he sets this activity into the context of the Christian’s walking in his calling. In ways not employing the term “call” a similar program of speaking the Word of life to the next person is set before us, in the conveying of the forgiveness of sins, the activity which builds the

church (Matt. 16:18-19; 18:15-22; John 20:21-23). A major gift of the Holy Spirit, whose παράκλησις, or “oncalling,” is the Spirit’s nurture of the church, to His people is that some of them—and all of them should earnestly desire the gift—have the gift of “speaking out” or prophecy (1 Cor. 14:39), and St. Paul regards this the great purpose of the Spirit’s παράκλησις that we might convey that παράκλησις also to others—but it is always παράκλησις, oncalling, in Christ. (2 Cor. 1)

The Biblical theology of vocation needs more acutely to recapture this central element: that the call with which we have been called becomes our chief word to our fellowmen, that is our purpose of existence.¹² Our time has sought to dignify the meaning of vocation by enhancing the significance of labor and the secular, sometimes to the point of obscuring the opportunity to sound out the call of God and to do “all in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Col. 3:17). The name of Jesus is one to be called out loud, not to be hidden or obscured.

The preacher stands before his people, therefore, as one who is uniquely “at calling.” But as he preaches and repeats the sound of God at work in Christ and refreshes the Spirit’s παράκλησις in the brain of his listeners, he sets in motion that call in all to whom he is speaking. As their shoulders tingle to each other’s

¹² Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), s. v. κλήσις, pp. 436 to 437, reflects reluctance to treat 1 Cor. 7 consistently. Of all works on vocation, most positive in this direction is W. R. Forrester, *Christian Vocation* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1953). Note also the essay by Paul S. Minear in *Work and Vocation*, ed. John Oliver Nelson (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954).

touch, as they eye each other with knowing smiles, as they repeat the gist of the message during the week, the call from the pulpit moves on through the community.

The church is the company of the called and calling ones. This hoists into prominence an element of contemporary Biblical studies, joined in by the sociologists of the church, which is completely explicit and pungent: the renewal of the doctrine of the church as laity. Even the Roman Catholic revival is centering largely in this point.¹³ For our purpose the huge literature can be summarized through a notable example.¹⁴ Even during the Middle Ages with their proliferation of secular and religious clergy, lay initiative was abundant. The late Middle Ages saw an enriching of lay activity, and the Reformation flowered into the doctrine of the universal priesthood of believers. In the 19th century Protestantism developed numerous lay activities separate from the organized churches. Currently the ecumenical movement and the device of centers or academies¹⁵ have fostered the function and importance of the laity. Biblically, *κληρος* and *λαός* denote the same people; but in East and West the church developed a difference of levels between them. Kraemer feels that the stress in the Reformation on

the importance of the preaching of the pure Word produced a clerical elite. America initiated congregational polity and a greater responsibility of laymen in the government of the individual church. The church, in all its orders, is mission and ministry; nevertheless an obsession still prevails that the ordained ministry is a higher mode of service in the church.¹⁶

In this and other reviews of the laity of the church as *διακονία*, it is noteworthy that the ministry of outspeech and *παράκλησις* does not receive the explicit articulation that would be expected from the validation by the servanthood of Christ. God has called out the company of His people by the Gospel which we preach. He has called it out to preach that self-same Gospel. That is the power that preserves the church, for it is the forgiveness of sins spoken from person to person that keeps the gates of hell from prevailing over the church.

III. THE COMMUNITY WITNESSING TO THE WORLD

The church does not exist in the world merely to preserve itself. Actually it cannot. As in the desert the first generation of the children of Israel died off in 40 years, so the most protected and self-contained group of Christians in the world cannot last beyond one generation. Its first mission is to the children of the church and to the nurture of its own families, the church in the household; and here the renewal of the Biblical insight into the meaning of the family as a basic component of

¹³ Augustin Cardinal Bea, *Unity in Freedom* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p. 85.

¹⁴ Hendrik Kraemer, *A Theology of the Laity* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1959).

¹⁵ A useful summary of the German academies is Lee J. Gable, *Church and World Encounter* (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1964); of the "center" type, Francis O. Ayres, *The Ministry of the Laity* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962). Ayres is the head of the Parishfield Community in Michigan.

¹⁶ This is Kraemer's conclusion, and he quotes the Niebuhr-Williams-Gustavson study on ministerial training as an illustration of this prejudice.

the church is important.¹⁷ Through this inner nurture the extension of the church is assured.

But Christ's Great Commission (Matt. 28:20) concerned mission to families and individuals, communities and nations that never knew Christ. Much of the renewed understanding of the church has come from the mission fields where the urgency of the mission and impatience with the sluggishness and secularism of Western Christianity fostered an ecumenical Christianity and a restudy of the meaning of the Christian witness. The western world, in turn, facing the dominance of the scientific method and the erosion of secularism, has had to study the practical dimensions of the Christian communication to the non-Christian world.

From sociologists of religion has come the attack upon the sterility of parish life, the ossification of churchly institutions, the loss of meaning for the church in its own culture.¹⁸ While some of these studies propose to scuttle the congregation as a mode of witness to the world altogether, others indicate that, subject to modification for its environment and for the sake of its intrinsic message of the Gospel, it still has a place in God's plan.¹⁹ We are not inter-

¹⁷ Cf. *My Christ Builds His Church*, pp. 51 ff.; and Rom. 16:5, 23; Col. 4:15-16; 1 Cor. 16:19; Philemon 2.

¹⁸ Gabriel Vahanian, *The Death of God* (New York: George Braziller, 1961); Peter L. Berger, *The Precarious Vision* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1961); Martin E. Marty, ed., *Death and Birth of the Parish* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964).

¹⁹ Note, e.g., Frederick A. Shippey, *Protestantism in Suburban Life* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1964); Langdon Gilkey, *How the Church Can Minister to the World Without Losing Itself* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964). Still useful is Paul Rowntree Clifford, *The Mission of the Local Church* (London: SCM Press, 1953).

ested per se in the debate on the validity or essentiality of the local congregation, but we are concerned about preaching. And that continues to be central, albeit under the kind of attack that makes refreshed study of the church gathered about the Gospel basic.

Here the Biblical studies of the Christian witness are helpful. Some arise from the impulse of the mission field.²⁰ Others are the voice of the ecumenical movement.²¹ The Biblical accent, which Jesus Christ puts into the "words of institution of the sacrament of preaching," Luke 24: 44-48, raises witness to the position of a major ingredient in the confrontation with the world. It comprises a dual function: To speak out forthrightly but meekly and to speak of that which the witness himself knows from personal experience. Much of the sluggishness of the evangelism of the church has arisen from the effort to bypass this element of personal concern and personal experience by the use of mass media²² or to substitute for it the prestige or manipulation of power structures of society by the church.

At this point our concern is to emphasize that the preacher's address to his people can be simultaneously the spiritual starter and impulse and the instructional

²⁰ Thus Max Warren, *The Christian Imperative* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955); D. T. Niles, *The Preacher's Task and the Stone of Stumbling* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958); and especially Hendrik Kraemer, *The Communication of the Christian Faith* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), proposing a combination of *kerygma*, *diakonia*, and *koinonia* in many modes of outreach.

²¹ Most useful is Suzanne de Dietrich, *The Witnessing Community* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1958).

²² Martin E. Marty, *The Improper Opinion* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961).

sample and catalyst that sends them on their way to their world — provided that it is always the Gospel of Jesus Christ, that it, too, is steadily the witness that our Lord asked His disciples to give. Ample studies are at hand to buttress the method and concreteness of the process.²³

Christians have customarily wrung their hands at the imperviousness of the world to their Gospel. We have said that the living witness of Christians with the word of the Gospel on their lips, conveyed to people in the situations of their own existence along the channels of the Christian calling, impelled by the mutual edification of the witnessing congregation and the preaching of the pastor, must bridge this barrier. Currently a compound of sociological, philosophical, and theological doctrine has seized upon the imagination of churchmen, particularly because its exponent is himself a witness in the full sense of martyr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer. This is the doctrine that our contemporary world has "come of age," that it has outgrown dependence on the church, that it is honestly and whole-heartedly irreligious; that the one way that the Christian religion can intersect with this world is that it becomes "religionless." This is not just a matter of language, of clothing the language of faith in the syllables of sense. But this is a transformation of attitude to the world alto-

²³ Harry A. DeWire, *The Christian as Communicator* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960); Warren H. Schmidt, "The Churchman and the Social Sciences," in *Toward Adult Christian Education*, ed. Donald L. Deffner (River Forest: Lutheran Education Association, 1962); broad in scope and slightly mediating is F. W. Dillistone, *Christianity and Communication* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957).

gether; a recognition that the life of the world is good and the Christian man is to engage in it; that he is to abandon himself utterly to it and not try to be different from it, and if it means that he is to suffer, then that is the way of sharing the sufferings of Christ.²⁴

Some avant-garde theologians have suggested that this gives a mandate simply to stop preaching the Gospel altogether, to do what comes naturally, to have the shepherd in search for the sheep dress in sheep's clothing. This is probably not Bonhoeffer's intention. Bonhoeffer recognizes the validity and cruciality of the church of Jesus Christ and sees it as a refuge for the man in the world.²⁵ The ultimate in the design and destiny of the Christian is that he stand in faith toward God through the reconciling Christ. But Bonhoeffer is impressed with the importance of the penultimate, as he calls it, the situation in which the Christian man in his existence under the mandate of God lives in the world in such a way that the reality and the supernatural quality of God is apparent to man, at the

²⁴ This is particularly to be found in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Prisoner for God: Letters and Papers from Prison*, trans. R. H. Fuller (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1954). A useful commentary is in Theodore Wedel, *The Gospel in a Strange, New World* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), pp. 35 ff.; and in Franklin H. Littell's "Bonhoeffer's History, Church, and World" in *The Place of Bonhoeffer*, ed. Martin E. Marty (New York: Association Press, 1962). This entire collection is valuable.

²⁵ *Life Together*, trans. John W. Doberstein (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954), is a touching and powerful description of the mutual function of Christians in their community strengthening through the Gospel. *Ethics*, a posthumous compilation by E. Bethge (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1955), gives detailed account of the mechanism of the nurturing Christian community.

cost of suffering where necessary.²⁶ The Gospel must be a message that is not separated from man's earthly existence but must operate with the proper distinction and connection between Law and Gospel. Bonhoeffer is not primarily a Biblical theologian, but his systematic insights contribute to the preacher's will to speak the Gospel to his people for their world as they find it today and for one another as they prepare themselves to make their sortie into the world.

As we traverse these accents, we realize that the fellowship of the Gospel, the church as a community sharing the out-speech of the Gospel, needs to be that and to engage in that fellowship as much in the witness to the outside as in the nurture of the church, whether in the family or in the congregation, in its inner dimension.

SUMMARY REFLECTIONS

Advantages

1. Whether in the philosophy of Heidegger or the analysis of Ramsey or the theology of Barth or the hermeneutics of Kaehler or Bultmann or von Rad or Ebeling, a remarkable unanimous voice speaks to the Christian preacher of today: let faith be faith. This is a good Lutheran emphasis, but it easily gets away from the contemporary preacher. For he has to deal with people living in a scientific world and in a materialistic culture. As he senses their slowness to react to his glowing affirmations from Scripture concerning God and everlasting life, he may feel constrained to make things logical, to use phrases like "it

is only natural that," "how can we do otherwise than," "can you not feel in your heart that you must." The answer is that it is anything but natural, it is easy to do otherwise, I don't feel anything in my heart. As the preacher promises to strengthen the faith of people or even to arouse faith in God which they do not have at all, how wonderful that he is promising something which neither preacher nor hearer but only God can do. How wonderful if the preacher can stand before his listener as a man who sees with horror and pity the tragedy of unfaith and distance from God, who reflects the serenity and certainty of a man in whom God, not logic or demonstration or evidence but God through the word of the work of Jesus Christ, has wrought the faith which he wants to share as a matter of life instead of death.

2. Many Christian preachers may quail at some of the criticism of the Bible apparent in contemporary studies. But he can afford to be patient in seeing the results of it. The critic may bewilder with the sources which he surmises for the Pentateuch or for the Gospels or with the variations from the traditional authorship which he proposes or with the suggestions that certain forms of literature are poetic or epic rather than prose history. But one thing the critic in the new Biblical studies is doing: he is reading the Bible, sometimes much more productively than the person who is accepting it all without reading. As the Old Testament scholar seeks the thrust of the Old into the New, as the New Testament scholar acknowledges that we are dealing with a Christ who is more than a figure that can be capsuled into human history and yet one that appeared

²⁶ Note the valuable essay of George W. Forell, "Realized Faith, the Ethics of Dietrich Bonhoeffer," in Martin E. Marty, *The Place of Bonhoeffer*, pp. 199 ff.

in human history, he is giving the preacher life and power for his message to his people. More: he is sending the preacher into his own study of the Scriptures and binding him to a Biblical method that is the cure for his shallowness and fatigue.

3. The new studies of the church help the preacher realize that he must preach with compassion, since there is no such thing as perfect people in a perfect church, but that he must preach also as a spokesman who is helping the members of the body of Christ speak to one another the great word of the Gospel, by which they sustain one another in faith and prompt to love and to good works. The moment of preaching is not the end but the new beginning of the drama and the signal for the people to move out into their callings and launch that same word about the crucified and risen Jesus Christ into the minds and lives of many other people, in their families and in their work and play. The new studies in the church help the preacher respect every other Christian whom he sees at work, and he opens his lips to edify him and aid him in his task, even as that man has an edifying word to say to the preacher. The new vision of the church does not allow the preacher to be afraid of his task or menaced by a fancied loss to his own prestige, but he is grateful for every Christian as a gift of the Spirit, for he will corroborate the preacher's word and work for the good of all.

4. The new Biblical studies in the meaning of the church place a premium on the living witness of the preacher. They emphasize that the pulpit is not a proper exercise ground for the esoteric or the hysterical but a place where a man who has found the meaning of Christ crucified

for his own life is trying to share that meaning with others. The pulpit becomes open on all sides, it blends smoothly into the landscape of counseling and pastoral care and the administration of the church and the propelling of other Christians into the witness of their callings. The preacher's message becomes more direct, and his attitude to his own work is relieved of boredom and anxiety as he makes his own witness paramount in his words.²⁷

Lags

1. On the deficit side of the ledger, the current studies are apt to retard the impulse and excitement of preaching the Gospel as their preoccupation with faith versus reason verges on the brink of denying any supernatural setting of the Gospel. When the Christian has come to find the power of the Gospel at work in himself and many another Christian, it comes with poor grace that he attempts to palliate elements in the record of Jesus as inventions of a later pious age which sought to enhance credibility through miracle. Indeed, the miracle was not intended to provide rational proof. But the denial of the miracle is apt to negate God's way of being at work in Jesus Christ. Discounting any assertions of Jesus that He was the Messiah fits into this category. The Gospel,

²⁷ Thomas J. Mullen's *The Renewal of the Ministry* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1963) has encouraging profiles of the "equipping ministry"; John R. W. Stott, a British evangelical, in *The Preacher's Portrait* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1961), gives straightforward Biblical studies of the pastor's work; and the classic of all time is H. H. Farmer's *The Servant of the Word* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), which first appeared in 1942. Theodore Wedel, *The Gospel in a Strange, New World*, closes on a splendid encouragement to witness.

to be Gospel, needs to be the account of God intervening in human history through His Son. Indeed Jesus Christ was a man. But God was in Him, and He is God. "These things were written that ye might believe" — believe the unbelievable, indeed, not because it was unbelievable, but because it is the record of God at work in Christ, His Son.

2. Contemporary studies have not, in my opinion, come far enough in giving to the laity, or to the pastoral preacher for that matter, the mandate to speak the Gospel of God. The churches have acquiesced too readily; it does expect much of the Christian witness to speak the Gospel as something that has happened to him and is for the whole world. But the calling into which God has placed us all reaches its function only as it witnesses to Him who died for our sins and rose again that we might do His works in our world.

3. The current vogue of stressing the grace of God in nature, or general grace, or the theology of the First Article, however it may be called, valuable as the emphasis may be in compensating for past neglect, has produced a series of other distortions. Outstanding among them is the breakdown of a clear conceptualizing of "the world" in contrast to "the church." Theologians with abandon shift their terms from "the world" as the sum total of created things to "the world" of unbelievers in contrast to the company of believers; from the world as the sum total of created things in the definition of God's original intention to the situation of that same world as it is under the Fall and in need of redemption and regeneration. This results not simply in puzzles for the poor listener but in a colossal dilution of the

message of the Atonement, in a disparaging of the Great Commission to make disciples or of the mandate to be God's servants through whom the Holy Spirit makes all things new. The created universe could indeed not exist without being upheld by Christ; but this does not give the warrant to assume that the unregenerate heart is thinking the thoughts of God or that God is meeting the Christian in that person. For there is infinite distance between the βίος at work in the mind and nervous system and metabolism of the human being and the ζωή of God at work in the heart through the Spirit; whatsoever is born of the flesh is still flesh. Here the theologians need to do some sober reflecting on their Biblical sources. And more importantly for our purpose: the preachers need still to preach the atoning act of God in Christ Jesus as the one way of bringing the good heathen and the bad, the leader of the community and the plodding lesser citizen, the intellectual elite and the driven masses into relation with God. And there is but one way to make that message believable and accessible, and that is that the preacher is surrounded by Christians of every type and on every level, cheerfully bearing witness that Jesus Christ is Lord by the words that they speak of Christ, the worship in which they engage under Christ, and the life that testifies to His governance.

4. Ours is the time in which the kerygma has received fresh definition. The Old Testament scholars have given us the useful concept of reenactment, or "re-presentation," to describe the process by which the redemptive acts of God become alive for the hearer now. The little list given by Jesus Christ on the evening of the first Easter as the component of the church's

preaching—affirmed in Scripture, wrought through suffering and resurrection, told for repentance to the forgiveness of sins—has been well clarified. But much remains to be done on the basis of the Scriptural precedents to discern that this is also the list and the preaching by which believers sustain one another and by which they stimulate one another to “love and good works.” The mischievous split between kerygma and didache needs to be healed,

and preachers need to teach as well as preach the Gospel, teach it both for righteousness and for the fruits of righteousness, both for the restoration of the reach upward to God and the reach laterally to the brother. Thus we may expect the church in each community to be duly strengthened and empowered for its task of witness to the world.

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