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The Sermon and the Propers*

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A Review

THERE are at least three major considerations connected with this noble work of Pastor Lindemann which should be shared at the outset with the reader of this review. They are (1) the liturgical church (especially the Lutheran Church) needs these volumes; (2) the worship of the church will be blessed by the use of the material in them; and (3) these volumes represent a living gift which one, who now is with the saints triumphant, wished with all his heart to bequeath to the church on earth.

"The purpose of these volumes," says the author, "is to encourage preaching according to the church year and in harmony with the appointed Propers." There are four volumes with the following subtitles: Vol. I, Advent and Epiphany; Vol. II, Pre-Lent to Pentecost; Vol. III, Trinity Season — First Half; Vol. IV, Trinity Season — Second Half. The Advent, Epiphany, Pre-Lenten, and Post-Easter seasons are prefaced by explanatory notes which the author, in the manner of an organist, employs as a prelude to prepare his audience for a great concert.

As the propers (the Introit, the Collect, the Epistle, the Gradual, the Proper Sentence, the Gospel, the Proper Preface) for the various Sundays and feast days are explained, woven together and given focus and application in either a sermon or a sermon outline (epistles and gospels are both treated), the reader becomes caught up in the devotional warmth and the clean, clear simplicity of the message of the day. There is no evidence of striving for effect, no fluffy rhetoric anywhere, but always concern with man's ultimate needs, with his need for forgiveness and salvation. One finds no trace of intellectualism or moralism, but only that which presents the redemptive act of God and aims at faithful acceptance. The

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focus of Christian faith and worship is: "This is My Body given for you; this is My Blood, shed for the remission of your sins. He who believes these words has what they say and express, namely, the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation."

In the section entitled "The Holy Communion" and included for each Sunday during the festival half of the church year, the author is at his best, as the following example will bear out: "The Propers for the Second Sunday in Advent are explained and developed with the conclusion that the message of the Second Sunday is: 'Your King is coming again, visibly and in power and glory, to deliver His own from all evil!'" Pastor Lindemann then says in part in his notes on "The Holy Communion": "Down the ages the Church has always connected the invisible Coming in the Holy Communion with the visible Advent in Glory, the Supper in the Upper Room with the Great Marriage Supper in heaven, the Coming to His Bride in the Holy Sacrament with the Coming of the Bridegroom to take her home. . . . The Lord's Supper is the Bread of Pilgrims, the sustenance on the way through this world to the Kingdom of God, the sustaining, strengthening food on the way from time to eternity, from here to yonder. . . . In the Celebration we lift our hearts far above this poor earth to the throne of Him who died and lives forevermore. Yes, Christ will come to us according to His promise. . . . The Lord Jesus comes in His Word of promise, communes with us, unites Himself with us, to live in and with us. He companies with us once more. Soon He will come to take us home. Yes, He will come! Even now His Presence is not a matter of distance but only of seeing what the eyes of faith always behold. . . . So the faithful pilgrims celebrate the Lord's death. So they keep alive and strengthen the hope that is in them. So they join the saints of all ages in the prayer of unshakable hope, 'Amen! Come, Lord Jesus! Maranatha!' and proclaim the Lord's death until He comes."

In developing the propers and giving them focus and application in "The Holy Communion," the author proceeds upon the premise that the Lutheran *Hauptgottesdienst* is the Order of the Holy Communion. To him, and his case is properly posited, the chief Sunday service should begin with the Introit and end with the Thanksgiving. Therefore the notes on "The Holy Communion" will prove

most helpful to the preacher in connecting the sermon and the Holy Communion. It should be noted that Vols. III and IV have no such notes on "The Holy Communion." It was the author's conviction that the pastor who used Vols. I and II understandingly would become able, if not already so, to relate the sermon and the propers to the Holy Communion.

There is another consideration which the author notes in his introduction to Vols. I and II: "The application of the thought of the day to the Holy Communion is most desirable, at least until the people have learned to look for more in the Holy Sacrament than the assurance of forgiveness and to understand when the Catechism states that not only forgiveness but also life and salvation, eternal blessedness, are given. For a time it may be necessary to direct attention to the blessed fruits of forgiveness, until the faithful have learned to make practical and comforting applications without assistance." (P. 9)

If one is to use these volumes fruitfully, he should read faithfully the introductions in which Pastor Lindemann discusses the relation of the liturgy, the sermon, and the Holy Communion. In Vols. I and II the introduction suggests that the sermon should be in harmony with the chief thought of the day if the service is to constitute a well-rounded, purposeful whole. The author comments: "Many regard the sermon as a thing set apart, independent of, and unrelated to, the forms of worship that precede and follow it. A sermon that enlarges upon and applies the chief thought presented by the Propers, including the Epistle and the Gospel, is not independent of the Liturgy. It [the sermon] belongs not to the preacher but to the people, as part of their worship. . . . Like the prayer of the Church, the sermon must be corporate, the faithful must receive it and make it their own. It is an integral part of the Liturgy, and liturgy is the worship of and by the people. . . . If, then, the sermon is a part of worship [an act of corporate devotion], it should be in harmony with the general tone of devotion struck by the Propers." (P. 5)

In speaking of the tendency to separate Word and Sacrament and emphasize the spoken Word, the author says: "It is impossible to divide the means of grace and to separate Word and Sacrament. Justification for the amputation of the Lord's Supper from the

Hauptgottesdienst is frequently attempted by explaining that the Holy Communion consumes too much time." The author admits that "the most of us have not the grace of sustaining a worshipful spirit for more than an hour" and that "to worship is hard work, and the flesh grows weary." He suggests valid means of reducing the amount of time consumed in the Holy Communion and describes how a service "could have been shortened by at least forty minutes." (Pp. 11 and 12 of Vol. I)

In Vols. III and IV the introduction offers a very valuable discussion of the purposes of the liturgy; the relation of the sermon to its preceding and following parts ("the sermon must be regarded as an integral part of the liturgical action," p. 3); the relation of the service of the Word to Holy Baptism and the Holy Communion. The discussion moves quite properly to a distinction between liturgical and nonliturgical preaching. The former is defined as that part of the liturgy which penetrates behind the day's pericopes to the central redemptive act, the death and resurrection of the God-man (III, 3). In liturgical preaching "the sermon extracts the essential core and content of the Scriptures [the Epistle and Gospel] and relates it to the central truth and central redemptive act. In this way the sermon serves its purpose as an integral part of the liturgy by teaching the faithful what they ought to think and feel as together they worship in praise and thanksgiving" (III, 3). "The art of liturgical preaching has been lost," the author claims, "because we have acquired the habit of regarding the sermon not as an integral part of the liturgical action and therefore belonging to the congregation, but as an act of the minister, independent of the work and the Eucharistic acts of the faithful" (III, 4). Liturgical preaching is addressed to the already converted and baptized and aims to renew and deepen the apprehension of the kerygma. "In speaking of liturgical preaching we are dealing with a type of preaching that conforms to Paraklesis. . . . It aims to apply familiar truths that they might give the faithful additional strength, comfort, and reassurance." (III, 13)

On the other hand, "when the sermon is divorced from its proper context in the liturgical action and the congregation's response in the Holy Communion is eliminated, preaching is apt to degenerate in one of several directions" (III, 4). He argues that nonliturgical

preaching may become intellectualism, a case in point being the arid intellectualism of the 17th century, which had the quite laudable aim of conveying sound doctrine and securing intellectual assent. Nonliturgical preaching may become moralism. This false conception of Christianity is encouraged when the preacher constantly appeals to the will, exhorts to do this and not do that. The liturgical sermon presents a redemptive act of God and aims at faithful acceptance, anticipating the response of the faithful, the declaration of faith and trust by eating the body and drinking the blood. Nonliturgical preaching may become emotionalism. The preacher may succeed in producing all kinds of spiritual excitement by playing on the emotions and feelings of his hearers. But this excitement does not edify the mystical body of Christ. In such emphases as these Pastor Lindemann is faithful to the Lutheran doctrine of the means of grace, and he is justified in his endeavor to place the liturgy, the sermon, and the Holy Communion within the proper connection and frame.

We shall permit Pastor Lindemann to state the purpose of these volumes and recommend them to faithful and blessed use in his own words. "We are obligated to employ every means at our disposal in edifying the body of Christ and in leading the faithful always more fully into the way of faith, love, and hope. *If it will benefit the individual soul and the congregation to present God's way of salvation in an orderly manner and according to some system and arrangement, we shall shun no mental effort in the study of the Church Year and the Standard Pericopes* [emphasis ours]. If it is our earnest desire to teach the people the art of devout and profitable worship, we shall patiently explain the Propers. If we wish that our people experience the joy of intelligent worship, we shall carefully determine the chief thought of the day and develop it also in the sermon. To encourage such endeavor is the purpose and object of these volumes" (I, 14). One may understand that the title of these volumes is very well chosen. A person may also understand that he cannot very well use these volumes unless he also intends to do for his people what Pastor Lindemann affirms.

Pastor Lindemann has left a rich legacy which will be treasured by those who wish to include the Propers in their personal meditation and study. What he has written must be absorbed over the

years as with the study of the Scriptures one goes back again and again to the Propers for refreshment and inspiration and the truth of God's redemptive acts. Study of these volumes by the shepherds of God's people should result, under God, in sermons which are an integral part of the service, in the raising of the spiritual level of participation in the Holy Communion, and in the enriching of the worship of the faithful as they "proclaim the Lord's death until He come."