

New Morality—An Attack On The Church?
RICHARD J. SCHULTZ

Can Expository Preaching Still be
Relevant In These Days?
MARK J. STEEGE

As New-Born Babies
HAROLD H. BULS

The LWF At Evian—Some Observations
JOBST SCHONE

Preaching
HENRY J. EGGOLD

Falling From Faith In Christ, Of The
Church, And Of The Lutheran Reformation:
An Article On The Ordination Of Women
WOLFGANG BUSCHER

Theological Refractions

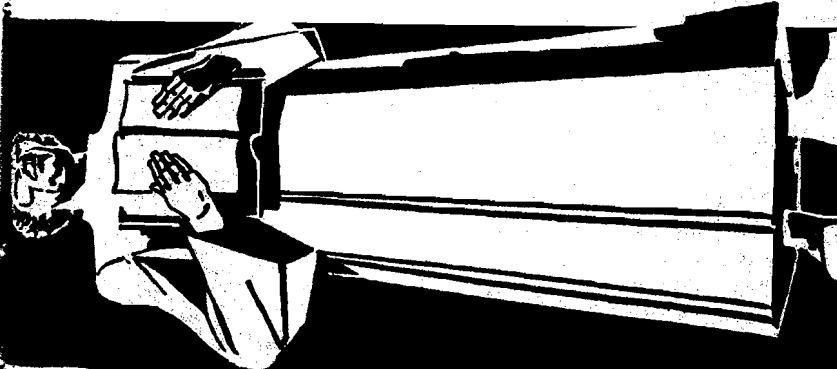
Book Reviews

Index, Volume 34

the springfielder

VOL. XXXIV • NO. 4

MARCH, 1971



Preaching

HENRY J. EGGOLD

PREACHERS CAN EASILY become discouraged with the task of preaching either from expecting too much or too little of it. The man who expects too much of preaching expects the sermon to do everything in the life of the congregation and becomes discouraged when changes in the lives of people do not become immediately apparent as a result of a sermon. This pastor fails to see the sermon as but one part of a configuration of activity designed to equip the saints for their ministry. The sermon is always supportive of evangelism, stewardship, pastoral care, and any other activity of the parish. The brother who becomes discouraged with preaching because he expects too little of it feels that preaching is only words, his words, weak and halting, and fails to see it as a mighty act of God who through the foolishness of preaching saves those that believe.

What is a sermon? A definition is helpful: A sermon is the public proclamation of the Word of God by the called minister of Christ for the edification of God's people.

The first accent in this definition is that the sermon is the public proclamation of the Word of God. This statement tells us, first of all, that the Word of God, the sacred Scriptures, are the source of the sermon. The pulpit is not a rostrum for the airing of private opinions. Nor is the source of the sermon a contemporary event or a problem of man. While the sermon may and, in fact, probably should address itself to a contemporary event or a problem of man, the source of the sermon is always the Word of God contained in the Sacred Scriptures. "Thus saith the Lord" must always be the characteristic note of authority in preaching, for God says: "He that hath my Word, let him speak my Word faithfully" (Jeremiah 23:28). The sermon that wins the hearts of men is one which makes the inspired Word of God a contemporary Word.

When we say that preaching is the public proclamation of Word of God, we are saying more than that the Bible is the source of the sermon. We are saying that preaching is the Word of God. Paul makes this bold assertion when he says I Thessalonians 2:13: "When ye received the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received not as the Word of man, but as it is in truth, the Word of God." Luther loved to speak of the preached Word as the *viva vox evangelii*. Listen to this high view Luther has of preaching:

You do well to call the Word of the pastor and preacher when he preaches, the Word of God. For the office is not that of the pastor and preacher, but of God; and the word that he preaches is not the Word of the pastor and preacher, but of God. If we knew a church in the world in which we could hear God's voice, wouldn't we run to it? But you don't have

anything less in your own church at home from your own pastor.

(E.A., III, 376).

Jesus Himself makes this identification of the Word of the preacher with the Word of God when he says: "He that heareth you, heareth me; he that despiseth you, despiseth me, and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me" (Luke 10:16).

What a great privilege it is that the Word of God should as it were be incarnated in us, earthen vessels. This is what gave Paul the temerity to say: "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ; as though God did beseech you by us, we beseech you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20).

But our claim for preaching is even more than this. We do not only say that preaching is the Word of God, but also that preaching is the deed of God. Preaching is not only words, but God at work through our words in the hearts of men. This is how the *Formula of Concord* puts it:

Through these means (namely, the preaching and hearing of the Word) God is active, breaks our hearts and draws men . . . the Word which is heard and preached is an office and work of the Holy Spirit whereby he assuredly is potent and active in our hearts.

(FC, SD, II, in Tappert, pp 531f.)

The whole Scripture is replete with passages which describe this dynamic character of the Word of God. The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth (Romans 1:16). The Word is quick and powerful (Hebrews 4:12); it does not return void (Isaiah 55:11); it sanctifies and cleanses the church (Ephesians 5:25); through it men are led to know the truth (John 8:31); men are born again by the Word of God (1 Peter 1:21); faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10:17); it is able to save souls (James 1:21); it causes us to grow (1 Peter 2:2).

Now all of this ought to be most encouraging to us who Sunday after Sunday stand up to speak for God. Much more is happening as we preach than our speaking; God himself is at work. That's why we do not give up on preaching. With Paul we can say: "We have its treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us" (2 Cor. 4:7).

We have said that God is at work through preaching, but what is God trying to do in the lives of men through preaching? In a word, He is trying to bring men to faith and to preserve them in it. In its utter realism the Bible describes man by nature as in a state of death (Romans 5:15), which is separation from God. In this state of rebellion against God, natural man actively opposes God and the rule of His grace. The very remedy, the preaching of the cross, is foolishness to him. This man is the object of God's concern. Through the preaching of the Law God is endeavoring

to bring him to the shock of recognition of himself as a sinner before God. Through The Gospel God is endeavoring to bring him into a faith relationship with himself.

But God is also concerned in preaching with the Christian. God through the Word is busy edifying him, building him up in his faith and love. Through the Law God always alerts us to the symptoms of death in us which must daily be mortified through contrition and repentance. Through the Gospel he empowers us to crucify the flesh; through it he leads us to a firmer grasp on the promises of God, and inspires us to greater deeds of Christian love.

The preacher ought to keep his goals in preaching consistent with God's goals. Good preaching is always goal centered rather than subject centered. There is surely nothing wrong with preaching doctrine; if we are not preaching doctrine, we really have nothing to say. But doctrine always has work to do when we preach. We use it to accomplish the goals of preaching, the conversion of sinners and the edification of the saints. This is another way of saying that preaching always operates between two foci, the truths of the Word of God and the needs of men. To preach one without the other is faulty preaching. To preach only the doctrines of the Word opens the door to irrelevance. To preach only the needs of men opens the door to detailed analysis of need without supplying answers to needs. Good preaching combines both the truths of God's Word and the needs of men.

In this encounter between man and God that preaching is, the preacher assumes strategic importance. We are God's middlemen, handing the treasures of God's grace to needy men. We are not mere newscasters; we are witnesses, men whose eyes have seen the King. Like John we stand before our people, saying: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and our hands have handled of the Word of life . . . that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us . . ." (1 John 1:1-3). Now this tells me that I must spend time in the quiet of my study meditating on the truths of God's grace. The beginning of a good sermon is always in the praying and meditating of the preacher.