

*The Sermon  
and The Propers*

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*by*

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## *Introduction*

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### *The Liturgy and the Reformation*

RENEWED INTEREST in liturgical matters is apparent in all branches of Christendom. This revival is to be encouraged among Lutherans, for a more intensive study of the Liturgy can result only in a deeper appreciation of our priceless heritage. The Church of the Augsburg Confession did not originate in the sixteenth century but is the continuation of the Church founded by the Apostles and merely restored and purified by the Reformation. One link with historic Christendom is the Liturgy, first transmitted in the vernacular when Martin Luther introduced the German Mass to the Wittenberg congregation on October 29, 1525. This link has been maintained against seemingly overwhelming odds. From the beginning of the Reformation the Lutheran churches of southern and southwestern Germany did not follow Luther's lead in liturgical matters and yielded in varying degrees to the Reformed spirit of neighboring Switzerland and France. In 1536 the first church order of Wuerttemberg eliminated everything that even remotely reminded of the Roman Mass, except the Epistles and the Gospels. Faithful Lutherans like Erhard Schnepf and Erasmus Albers gave the service a plainness far more Reformed than Lutheran by doing away with the chanting of the Verba, the entire altar service except the communication, and all eucharistic vestments. Johann Brenz and Andreas Osiander, in 1553, reduced the service to a bare Latin introit or German hymn, sermon, hymn and benediction, with a monthly Celebration. In the course of time state churches were formed, various governments attempted to "unite" the Lutherans and the Reformed, and ancient forms and vestments were abolished by civil law. Also Rationalism, Pietism, and Deism strongly opposed retention of the ancient Liturgy.

*Lutheran Liturgy in America*

In America the Church of the Augsburg Confession faced liturgical problems different from and far more complex than those of any other denomination. The prevailing atmosphere of Calvinistic Protestantism was most unsympathetic to the establishment of a liturgical church. Furthermore, the immigrants from a dozen countries of Europe brought their own peculiar version of Lutheran liturgy in their native tongue. Some of these versions resembled only faintly the historic forms. The liturgical confusion resulting from the retention of the various church orders was only partially relieved, even among the German immigrants, by the appearance of the first American Lutheran Liturgy by Henry Melchior Muhlenberg in 1786 and of the *Agenda for Evangelical Lutheran Congregations U. A. C.* by the Synod of Missouri in 1856 and 1866, the latter combining old Saxon church orders. With the transition to the English language the *Common Service* of 1888, based on German church orders of the sixteenth century, became the accepted Lutheran Liturgy in America. We have it also in *The Lutheran Hymnal* of 1941. The new *Service Book* of the Joint Commission on the Liturgy is based on the *Common Service*. The ancient Liturgy of historic Christendom appears to have become the permanent possession of the Lutheran Church in America, and there remains only that we learn to appreciate it in ever fuller measure and make the proper use of it.

*The Purpose of the Liturgy*

The Liturgy is worship. The Church exists for the glory of God, and worship is the center of her life. Her every interest centers in her worship, the service of formal praise, adoration, thanksgiving. Worship is the inner movement of the soul, and the Liturgy is its outer manifestation. Through many centuries the Church has found the Liturgy an excellent form of giving expression to what all believers think and feel. However, the Liturgy not only expresses what the faithful think and feel, but it also teaches what they ought to think and feel. Doing or performing the Liturgy together renews the sense of belonging to the Communion of Saints, of the individual believer being a member of Christ's mystical body and of the Ecclesia established by the

redemptive acts of God. Corporate worship enhances the sense of brotherhood, of being a member of the community or society that possesses and administers holy things. The thought of fellowship with all believers readily suggests itself to the mind and heart of Lutherans when they do the Liturgy, because the rediscovery of communion in the Lord's Supper is one of the greatest positive contributions of the Reformation.

#### *The Relation of the Sermon to Preceding Parts*

If the Liturgy is to serve its purpose of giving expression to what the faithful think and feel and of teaching what they ought to think and feel, the sermon must be regarded as an integral part of the liturgical action. It must, therefore, bear an integral relation to the parts that precede. When it is divorced from its proper context, it is no longer an integral part of the Liturgy. The reading of the Epistle and of the holy Gospel precedes the sermon, and the two must be integrally related. The subject or theme of the sermon dare not be foreign to the pericopes, if the purpose of the Liturgy is to be accomplished. The Epistle and the holy Gospel present to each and all some specific redemptive act of God in Jesus Christ. As a part of the Liturgy, the sermon penetrates behind the day's pericopes to the central redemptive act, the death and resurrection of the God-Man. The sermon extracts the essential core and content of the Scriptures which have been read 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.

#### *The Relation of the Sermon to Following Parts*

As an integral part of the Liturgy, the sermon must be integrally related also to what follows. The Liturgy prescribes that the faithful respond joyously and gratefully by proclaiming the central redemptive act, the Lord's death, by eating the Bread and drinking the Cup. The essence of worship is the proclamation of the Gospel and the response of the congregation to the particular truth presented in the Lessons and the sermon. When the Lord's Supper does not follow the sermon, the faithful cannot respond as

the Liturgy intends, and there can be no integral relation to what follows in the Liturgy. The art of liturgical preaching has been lost 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. Except on high festivals, the sermon usually has no relation to the pericopes, and only occasionally can it be related to the Lord's Supper. The Roman Church has a liturgy without preaching, the Calvinists have a liturgy with preaching but without the Holy Communion. Within the framework of the ancient and historic Liturgy both these types are impossible.

#### *Nonliturgical Preaching May Become Intellectualism*

The Liturgy provides for the proclamation of the Gospel and the response of the congregation to the particular truth presented in the Lessons and the sermon. The purpose of the liturgical sermon is to renew in the individuals the consciousness that they are members of the Ecclesia. 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. One direction is that it becomes intellectualism. This degeneration is obvious in the Lutheran orthodoxy of the seventeenth century, an arid intellectualism which had the quite laudable aim of conveying sound doctrine and securing intellectual assent. We may look for something similar in our day, for we have accustomed ourselves to divorcing the sermon from its liturgical context, and we are content with only an occasional response in Holy Communion. Our sermons usually are not related to the pericopes of the day. Even when, occasionally, the Holy Communion follows upon the sermon, the preaching seldom presupposes and aims at the believing response in the Lord's Supper. However, there is frequently a zeal for intellectual presentation of dogma and a sense of achievement when there is intellectual acceptance. This type of preaching may result in the kind of knowledge that enables members to answer all questions mechanically and by rote according to some acquired formula. But it does not build up the Ecclesia, does not produce a congregation of

priests who humbly respond by joyfully accepting the proclaimed truth in faith and by offering praise and thanks, yes, their very selves in the communion act of Christ's mystical body.

*Nonliturgical Preaching May Become Moralism*

Another direction in which nonliturgical preaching may degenerate is that it becomes moralism. To a degree, preachers are encouraging the world to believe that Christianity is a system of ethical and moral rules, that when one is "good" one is a Christian. Some such conception is not rare. A certain pattern is evolved and accepted. If we are baptized and confirmed, go to church regularly, communicate occasionally, identify ourselves with some form of activity, give a fair proportion of our income to the church, we are good members. This false conception of Christianity is encouraged when the preacher constantly appeals to the will, exhorts to do this and not to do that. If his words fall on good soil, he produces moral individuals, but he does not edify the Ecclesia. The liturgical sermon presents a redemptive act of God. It aims at faithful acceptance. It anticipates the response of the faithful, the declaration of faith and trust by eating the Body and drinking the Blood. Within the context of the Liturgy, the sermon will not be moralistic, for it will recall to the consciousness of the faithful a redemptive act of God and look forward to the response of the congregation, the declaration of acceptance in faith and of confident trust in and reliance on the redemptive act emphasized and the central redemptive act of Christ's death.

*Nonliturgical Preaching May Become Emotionalism*

Still another direction in which nonliturgical preaching may degenerate is that it becomes 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. St. Paul remarked long ago that, for instance, by speaking in tongues a man may edify himself but not the Church. The temptation to become emotional is minimized when the preacher regards the sermon as an integral part of the Liturgy and strives to accomplish the purpose of the Liturgy. This purpose is not to create and rouse feelings, but to

renew and build up faith, to edify the Ecclesia. Preaching that is intellectualism or moralism or emotionalism is individualistic and leaves the individual in his isolation. It does not draw him anew into the Ecclesia. The individual may be "edified" in the popular, non-Biblical sense of the word, but he goes home as an individual; a better person, we hope, intellectually, morally, emotionally, but still an individual. The purpose of the sermon in the Liturgy, however, is to renew in the individual members the sense that they are members of the Ecclesia.

*Liturgical Worship Is Sacramental and Sacrificial*

In striving to recapture the art of liturgical preaching, we might be distracted momentarily by voices declaring that people should come to church not to get but to give. We are told that coming to get is man-centered, humanistic, subjective, in other words, that it smacks of selfishness and self-seeking, but that coming to give is God-centered and objective; in other words, that it has the odor of selflessness and unselfishness. We may give the appearance of favoring the sacrificial aspect when we speak frequently of liturgical worship as the gathering of the Royal Priesthood for the offering of praise and thanksgiving, and of our eucharistic response as the offering of our own selves. However, the Liturgy is first of all sacramental and only then sacrificial. Sacramental means that God is doing the giving and we the getting. The pericopes and the sermon tell us anew what God has done, is doing, and will do. The Lord's Supper is a memorial and application of God's acts in Christ Jesus. What have we to give? We have nothing to offer but ourselves. All else, our praises and thanks and material gifts of the hands, can be only a token of ourselves. All things belong to God, and we cannot give Him what is already His. Only man was lost. We can offer God only ourselves. But we cannot offer ourselves to God as we are by nature. All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags before the holy God whom we worship. We cannot come trusting in our own righteousness but only in God's manifold and great mercies. In the end, of course, worship is giving, but before we can give, we must get, get the righteousness that is by faith, that righteousness which is Christ Himself. Only then can we give. Only then can we offer ourselves. Worship is a two-way

traffic, not only from heaven to earth nor only from earth to heaven. The Liturgy leads us to recall God's redemptive acts and gives us opportunity to respond faithfully to His love by offering praise and thanksgiving, yes, our very selves in and through Jesus Christ.

*The Mass of the Faithful in the Early Church*

The fact that in post-Apostolic times the Church distinguished between the Mass of the Catechumens and the Mass of the Faithful will not serve as precedent for eliminating the Lord's Supper from the Liturgy. In the early Church the faithful did the entire Liturgy, and only the unbaptized and the penitents not as yet restored to good standing were dismissed before the Mystery of the Lord's Table was celebrated. Our Liturgy is intended to be done by the faithful in its entirety. It would seem unthinkable that when the Liturgy and its purpose and aim is rightly understood, a member of Christ's body should withdraw after the sermon and before the Holy Communion. To invite nonmembers to depart before the Lord's Supper is not practical in modern circumstances. Luther already was disturbed by the presence of the *neugirig Volk*, the curious, but saw no way to separate members from nonmembers and resigned himself to the hope that what the nonmember heard and saw of Christian blessedness might awaken in him the desire to become a partner. This consideration seems to have reconciled him to incorporating the sermon in the Liturgy, as he did in 1526, whereas in his Latin Mass of 1523 and his German Mass of 1524 he preferred the sermon before the Mass, "for the sermon calls to God's Supper, and the Mass is for those who have followed the call, the faithful." Concerning the post-Apostolic era we dare not ignore the fact that the Church did only one Liturgy and that the Mass of the Catechumens and the Mass of the Faithful were parts of one and the same Liturgy for the faithful. The Lord's Supper was not the only Mystery withheld from nonmembers. The Mystery of the Faith, the Creed, was imparted to the catechumens in its entirety only shortly before their Baptism and only after long and careful instruction. This was true also of the Mystery of the Our Father. Some scholars hold that the catechumens were permitted to remain for the reading of the holy Gospel only after a long period of



preparation and testing. It appears that the Liturgy of the early Church at no time provided for a separation of the Service of the Word from the Holy Communion.

*The Service of the Word Related to the Holy Sacrament*

The Liturgy is to be done by the faithful and includes the Service of the Word and the administration of the Holy Communion. There is a close relation between the two. Our Lord instituted two sacraments to take the place of the Circumcision and the Passover. The Lord's Supper was instituted in connection with the Passover. The observance of the memorial meal of the Old Testament was invariably preceded by a discourse relating the meal and its elements to the saving events of the deliverance from Egypt. Before thanks were offered to God for the mighty acts of the Exodus, the participants had these events brought to mind. The earliest Christian liturgies show that the Church of the New Testament followed a similar procedure regarding the Lord's Supper. The reading of the Scriptures, and probably some form of discourse, recalled to mind the saving events of Jesus Christ and related the redemptive acts of the past to the Memorial Feast. The early Church seems to have had a eucharistic prayer which recalled these events. Our present Liturgy summarizes them all in the words of the Narrative: that our Lord Jesus Christ gave His Body and shed His Blood, in which we include every redemptive act from the Conception and the Incarnation to the Death, the Resurrection, the Ascension, and the Parousia. The mighty acts of God in Christ are the material and basis of our worship. The only way to worship God in spirit and in truth is to come before Him rehearsing these mighty acts; therefore the congregation is first confronted anew with these acts before it makes them the material of its worship.

*The Service of the Word and Holy Baptism*

The early Church regarded each Lord's Day as a minor or little celebration of Easter and the Resurrection. The great Paschal Eucharist was the chief Eucharist and the norm of all others. The Easter observance began with the Baptism of the catechumens and culminated in the Lord's Supper. On other occasions, when Holy Baptism was not administered, the function of the sermon was to

reach back to the Baptism of the assembled members, to renew in them the sense of membership in the Ecclesia, and to lead forward to the liturgical action of the Eucharist. To be truly liturgical, modern preaching still serves this purpose and has this aim. The reaching back to Holy Baptism and the rising with Christ to a new life need not be done expressly and stated in words, but this function of the liturgical sermon should be in the preacher's mind and thought as he approaches his task. Holy Baptism is the ground of the Church's existence, the Eucharist is the ground of her continuance. A service ending in a sermon which is related neither backward to Holy Baptism nor forward to the Holy Communion is not the Liturgy.

*The Practice of the Primitive Church*

To justify the practice of doing the Liturgy up to and including the sermon and of eliminating the Lord's Supper, some have adduced the record of the Book of Acts: "Day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes. . . ." This is said to show that the Service of the Word was originally separate from the gathering of the Ecclesia for the celebration of the Holy Communion. The first Christians, former Jews, continued to attend the temple day by day. Now, however, they attended together, probably gathering in some hall of the building. It would have been only natural that they spoke of the Christ and the redemption and atonement wrought by Him. No doubt, they preached and proclaimed His salvation, also to non-Christians who joined their group to inquire and investigate. But they did not celebrate the Holy Communion in the temple. This they did in their homes. The service of the synagog and the distinctly Christian observance were separate. The Service of the Word and the Holy Communion were not included in one and the same Liturgy. However, all this cannot justify the elimination of the Lord's Supper from our Liturgy. The celebration of the Holy Communion was not added to the Jewish service in the Jewish temple, under the very eyes of the hostile and intolerant temple authorities. The liturgy was probably that of the synagog worship. Furthermore, this was a temporary arrangement and soon abandoned as impractical. The Christians soon combined the service of the synagog with the celebration of

the Lord's Supper. Our Liturgy today still contains elements of the former. Again, there is no indication that the primitive Church in Jerusalem did not combine the Service of the Word with the Lord's Supper when the Christians gathered in their homes to break bread.

### *The Record of the Book of Acts*

The description of the primitive Church in Jerusalem tells us also: "They devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching and the fellowship, the breaking of bread and the prayers." The first Christians continued steadfastly in the *Didache* of the Apostles, the instruction in Christian ethics and doctrine imparted to the new converts; in the *Koinonia*, the new relation to each other established by the Holy Spirit; in the breaking of bread, which united them with Christ as members of His mystical body and with one another as members of the same body whose Head is Christ; and in the prayers, the formal and common intercession and thanksgiving. In the original, all four things to which they devoted themselves have the definite article. Without being fanciful, we may assume that all four were integral parts of the Christian service. The Apostles' teaching and instruction was the Ministry of the Word. They practiced fellowship in uniting in praise and giving of thanks, in worshiping together. They entered anew into the fellowship with Christ and with one another by breaking the Bread. They devoted themselves to the prayers, the intercessions and thanksgiving in connection with the Eucharist. In this connection the conclusion of the First Letter to the Corinthians is significant. We have ground here for the surmise that the letters of the New Testament were not only intended to be read at the gatherings of the Christians but were actually so framed as to lead into the performance of the Liturgy. "Greet one another with a holy kiss," suggests the kiss of peace immediately preceding the prayer of thanksgiving. "If anyone has no love for the Lord let him be anathema," reminds of the word of the *Didache*: "If any be holy, let him come; if he be not, let him repent," and of the phrase in later liturgies: "Holy things to the holy." "Maranatha! Our Lord, come!" is a petition for the coming of Christ in the Holy Communion in anticipation of the Parousia. "The grace of the Lord

Jesus be with you," is the salutation introducing the dialog before the prayer of thanksgiving. All this would indicate that the Service of the Word, the reading of the Epistles, was part of the Liturgy that included also the Lord's Supper. In the twentieth chapter of the Acts we read: "On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them." Even if "to break bread" should not mean that they gathered to celebrate the Holy Communion but the Agape, we know nevertheless that the Holy Sacrament was always celebrated in connection with the Love Feast. When the Christians gathered on the first day of the week to break bread, St. Paul preached, prolonging his speech until midnight.

*Liturgical Preaching Is Kerygma only Incidentally*

Several types of preaching are readily discernible in the New Testament. When our Lord commanded His disciples to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation, He had in mind the missionary preaching to the unconverted. We call it Kerygma. It proclaims an Event and a Person, the Event and Person who is Jesus Christ, the appearance of Christ in the flesh and His death and resurrection as the supreme and final redemptive act. The purpose of this proclamation is to bring men face to face with the Person proclaimed and with the Event He is, and to declare that all was wrought by God for men. The aim is not to secure intellectual acceptance of the historic facts but to evoke faith, to bring about a personal encounter with the Person that issues in full reliance on and trust in what Christ did in men's stead. This type of preaching is only incidental in the Liturgy, only a means to an end. As part of the liturgical act of the Royal Priesthood, the liturgical sermon addresses itself to men and women who have had their personal encounter with Christ, have accepted Him as their Redeemer and Lord, and by faith have come into possession of all He purchased and won for them. It deals with people who in Holy Baptism have been joined to His body as members and now live in Him as He lives in them. Since Kerygma is addressed to the unconverted and does not take for granted the individual's membership in the Ecclesia, it should be employed sparingly in the Liturgy, merely as background and basis.

*Liturgical Preaching Is Not Evangelistic*

What has been said above applies also to the type we speak of as evangelistic, the preaching that is addressed to the outsider and aims at decision and conversion and surrender. There is need for this type of preaching, but the doing of the Liturgy by the Royal Priesthood of God is not the occasion for dealing with the unconverted. Evangelistic preaching should not be accompanied by the Liturgy, for the Liturgy is unintelligible to the outsider and, when used as the prelude to evangelistic preaching, it is inevitably mangled or expunged or edited. This procedure is fair neither to the Liturgy nor to the potential convert.

*Liturgical Preaching Is Not Instruction*

Another type of preaching discerned in the New Testament is the instruction of the new converts and the already baptized in Christian ethics and doctrine. This type of the Ministry of the Word should not be employed in the Liturgy, for the purpose of the sermon here is not instruction. Teaching is not the direct and immediate aim of the liturgical sermon, but proclamation and the response of faith. The aim of teaching is to secure understanding of the doctrinal, ethical, and devotional implications involved in that response of faith. Teaching may be, and normally is, an indirect by-product of the liturgical sermon, but it can never become its primary objective without so changing the character of the discourse that it is no longer an integral part of the Liturgy.

*Proclamation by Eating and Drinking*

Parenthetically another type of proclamation may be mentioned. St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians that "as often as you eat this Bread and drink the Cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (*kataggellete*). Luther translated, "sollt ihr des Herrn Tod verkuendigen." Since, however, this preaching is done by the faithful communicating, it does not enter into consideration as we attempt to define liturgical preaching in the pulpit.

*Liturgical Preaching Is Paraklesis*

Finally, there is a type of New Testament preaching that is addressed to the already converted and baptized, and aims to renew

and deepen the apprehension of the Kerygma. It is Paraklesis. This word included the idea of supporting, comforting, consoling. In speaking of liturgical preaching we are dealing with a type of preaching that conforms to Paraklesis. When the faithful are assembled to do the Liturgy, of which the Holy Communion is a part, the sermon has the purpose of renewing in their consciousness what they already know and of deepening their apprehension of what they have already accepted in faith. It aims to apply familiar truths that they might give the faithful additional strength, comfort, and reassurance.

### *The Time and Occasion for Teaching*

The fact that liturgical preaching does not aim to instruct in no way implies that no instruction, no explanation, no exegesis is to be incorporated. Possibly the reading of the Lessons could be sufficient proclamation of the Word. However, many parts of Scripture are difficult to understand. Like the Ethiopian eunuch, many members need some one to guide them, to explain the meaning. Unless they have made the Bible the subject of prolonged study, they will find much beyond their comprehension and fail to see many less apparent truths. Yet, teaching and explaining is not the chief aim of liturgical preaching. If it were, the preacher would ultimately be unnecessary, for people would progress sufficiently in knowledge no longer to require exegesis in a sermon. Furthermore, the preacher who aims chiefly or only at teaching would be confronted with the difficulty arising from the varying degrees of intellectual capacity, spiritual experience and knowledge among the members. Since it is an integral part of the Liturgy, the sermon is addressed to the whole body of the assembled faithful with the intention of producing the same response in all. The proper place for exegesis is the church school, the classroom, the group meeting, and private admonition. On nonliturgical occasions the explanation of difficult passages in Holy Writ can be adapted to the needs of the individual or the group concerned, and to the level of their intellectual, moral, and spiritual attainments. In the Liturgy, exegesis is only incidental. It has a liturgical purpose only in showing the relationship of the Epistle and the holy Gospel to the central event of God's redemptive work. All the saints assembled for

worship are sinners, even the most spiritually and intellectually advanced. All come to church as the poor in spirit, who hunger and thirst after righteousness.

### *The Cult of the Relevant*

Some may protest that they do not preach liturgically because sermons should be relevant. The word "relevant" is extremely popular in theological circles today. Preachers declare that their one and only aim is to preach the truth. According to Kierkegaard "truth is subjectivity," so they insist on being subjective and relevant in their preaching. The usual argument is that the Scriptures speak to a situation of the past and the preacher's function is to bring the Word out of the past and relate it to the needs of the individuals. The sermon must be subjective, it is said, for a statement is not true unless it can be made true to the individual, and it cannot be true to him unless it concerns his existence and has an answer to the problems his individual life poses. No one will deny that a false objectivity must be avoided, also in liturgical preaching. The value of a sermon that relates the truth of the liturgical lessons to the needs of the congregation dare not be underestimated. The Gospel is not being preached at all if it is preached as an abstraction right over the heads of the people. A preacher need not regard as evidence of having missed the mark when occasionally some member thanks him for having said just what he or she needed personally.

### *Liturgical Preaching Is Concerned with Ultimate Needs*

However, that kind of relevancy and subjectivity is not the purpose of liturgical preaching. If that is what the members are looking for, there will always be many who leave the church saying that the sermon contained no message for them. If the primary purpose is to satisfy the needs of the individual in this way, anyone could declare that there is no point in his going to church at all, since the preacher never has any message for him. The sermon is part of the Liturgy. The preacher speaks to members of Christ's body to edify, sustain, strengthen, renew, and increase faith. His aim is that the hearers recall and accept the redemptive event emphasized in the day's Lessons as having occurred for them. Therefore the preacher cannot be preoccupied with the immediately

and directly relevant. The Gospel is concerned with man's ultimate needs, with his need for forgiveness and salvation. As a preacher of the Gospel, the man in the pulpit belongs to the cult of the ultimate and only incidentally to the cult of the relevant. He need not preach to make men conscious of their immediate needs, their need for security, for deliverance from anxiety and frustration, for the attainment of social acceptance and the like. When performing the Liturgy, the Church need not compete with the psychiatrists on their own level and to offer the kind of "comfort" and "release" looked for in needs that are less than ultimate, need not trim down the Gospel to the measure of these needs. In the Liturgy the objective is not the people's temporal needs but the Gospel in its fullness. This Gospel may expose their needs as trivial and even false, and reveal to them in stark reality that they have an ultimate need, a need exposed only when they stand naked at the Last Day before the judgment seat of God.

*Preaching on the Doctrinal Epistles*

The letters of the New Testament were addressed to people who had accepted the apostolic preaching of Jesus Christ as the Redeemer. The Epistle for the Day then is not Kerygma but assumes a knowledge of God's redemptive acts and from this assumption proceeds to expound the doctrinal and ethical implications. When the Epistle is doctrinal, it is not to be treated as a series of revealed statements proposed for consideration or acceptance, but an endeavor to draw out and present the implications of the surrender to Christ mediated by the Kerygma. The preacher's task is to penetrate behind the doctrinal argument to the Kerygma whose implications are being set forth, so that the hearers might renew their response to it in faith, preparatory to the liturgical action of eating and drinking in memory of Christ's atoning death. The Apostle Paul follows this procedure most admirably in 1 Corinthians 15. He is dealing with problems in connection with the resurrection of the dead. In answering the questions that were agitating the Christians in Corinth, he does not formulate new and unknown propositions but reminds them of what he had originally delivered to them and deduces from this Kerygma its implications for the problem in hand.



*Preaching on the Ethical Epistles*

When the Epistle for the Day is ethical, the exhortations are not categorical imperatives revealed from heaven but spring out of the new relation with Jesus Christ into which the believers were brought, a relation resulting from their hearing and accepting the Kerygma and being made children of God in Holy Baptism. An example of this procedure is St. Paul's treatment of slavery. He does not lay down a regulation that all slaves are to be emancipated at once, nor does he speculate about their "rights" in the abstract. He starts with the new relation into which Christian slaves and masters were brought. Both are servants of the same Master. The slaves' service to their earthly masters is to be seen as a parable and a means of their service to God in Christ. The masters' treatment of slaves is controlled by the knowledge that they, too, have a Master. Slaves and masters alike are called to obedience to Christ, who purchased them by a real act of redemption. St. Peter proceeds in the same way when he gives injunctions to Christian slaves, starting from the new relation with Christ into which the Kerygma and Holy Baptism have led them. The Christian slave reproduces in his own behavior the pattern of Christ's deportment as the Suffering Servant, bearing our sins in His body on the tree, 1 Peter 2:18-25. In this way a consideration of the slaves' duties leads to the heart of Christ's atoning death. Here is no flat moralism but an ethic that springs direct from the redemptive act of God in Christ and its proclamation in the Kerygma. Ethical Epistles are not to be used for little moralistic exhortations. The preacher penetrates behind the specific ethical admonition to the Kerygma it presupposes and confronts the congregation with that Kerygma, so that it may occasion a renewed encounter with Jesus Christ and indicate the kind of behavior that encounter will imply in the daily lives of baptized people. Incidentally, this is why the New Testament is so disappointing as a handbook of Christian ethics. It passes over so many of the burning issues that beset the modern world. For Christian morality consists in giving effect within human relations to the divine love which is the glory of God disclosed in the work of Christ. The ethical injunctions of the New Testament letters are simply illustrations of the way in which that divine love should operate in terms of human relations.

*The Holy Gospel in the Liturgy*

In approaching the holy Gospels as bases for liturgical sermons, consideration must be given to the fact that the accounts of the Evangelists are not biographies but narrate a series of incidents. The three Synoptics use the same material, by and large, yet each arranges it as best serves his particular purpose of establishing and demonstrating his own aspect of Jesus Christ, as the promised Messiah, the Son of Abraham, as the Suffering Servant of Jehovah, as the Son of Adam and the Savior of both Jews and Gentiles. The fourth Gospel presents much distinctive material to awaken faith in Jesus as the Son of God. From this collection of recorded incidents the Church has chosen the holy Gospels of the Church Year. Each incident is an illustration of the central message of the Kerygma, each proclaims the redemptive act of God in miniature. The holy Gospels of the Nativity Cycle are prefaces to the Kerygma, testifying to the supernatural origin of Christ. Those of the Paschal Cycle, including Easter Day and Ascension Day, are parts of the Kerygma itself. All that is required of the preacher is that he relate the particular event to the Kerygma of the redemptive act as a whole. The majority of the holy Gospels for ordinary Sundays and for the Trinity Season are pronouncement stories or miracle stories or parables. The only other major class are the discourses from St. John's Gospel, from the Second Sunday after Easter to the Festival of Pentecost. The Church had a profound insight when she treated these discourses as testimonies of the risen Christ.

*Liturgical Preaching on the Holy Gospels*

In dealing with the various types of holy Gospels in the liturgical sermon, the preacher's task is to relate the pericope to the Kerygma it proclaims and then to link it with the liturgical action which is to follow. For example, turn to the traditional holy Gospel for the Later Service on the Feast of the Nativity, unfortunately not listed in *The Lutheran Hymnal*. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). The Incarnation is part of the total movement of God to man in Jesus Christ. It is not to be considered in isolation from the Kerygma as a whole. "The Word became flesh" is God's initiation of a movement which

is to culminate on the Cross. That is why the climax of the Christmas Festival is not a pretty devotion round the crib and the singing of carols, but the Christ-Mass, the Christmas celebration of the Holy Communion, in which we proceed, as the Proper Preface declares, from the commemoration of our Lord's birth, "in the mystery of the Word made flesh, Thou hast given us a new revelation of Thy glory," to the commemoration of His death, "My Body given for you, My Blood shed for the remission of sins." The liturgical sermon announces the action of God around which the whole eucharistic action is built. The faithful respond in words by offering praise and thanks in prayers and hymns, in token by presenting a material offering, and their response culminates in the offering of their person as they communicate at the Lord's Table. Frequently the divine action proclaimed in the pericope will be related to the Holy Communion as an anticipation of the Parousia. Liturgical preaching is practically impossible when the culminating response in the Lord's Supper is eliminated, for the preacher cannot point forward, and the faithful cannot look forward to the response required by the Liturgy.

### *The Minister and the Liturgy*

Every minister who contemplates the demands of the ministry of the Word must feel constrained to exclaim with the Apostle Paul: "Who is sufficient for these things?" It is easy to reply: "Our sufficiency is from God." But we can make that reply only after we have put forth our own utmost effort. Like so many things in our religion, the grace of God is always a paradox. Where men strive with all their might, there they can recognize in retrospect that it was "not I, but Christ in me." The minister's striving to be sufficient for the things required of him should take two forms, the one spiritual, the other intellectual. The focal point of his spiritual preparation to equip himself for his task will be his continuous identification of himself with the Word he is commissioned to proclaim as that Word is expressed in the Liturgy. He must himself constantly live in the Liturgy, especially in the frequent celebration of the Eucharist. In this way he will learn to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. His personal, private devotions will not be the occasion of cul-

tivating his own soul but will spring from the Liturgy and lead back to the Liturgy again. He will make the liturgical Scriptures the constant theme of his meditation. For his intellectual preparation he will strive to carry out his ordination vow and diligently read and study the Bible. This study and reading also may be linked with the Liturgy by following one of the Church's lectionaries, with its association of various books of the Scriptures with the different seasons. At the other end of the communication line, he will be constantly among his people, so that, like the Great High Priest in whose Name he preaches, he may be able to sympathize with their weaknesses.

NOTE. A number of sermons are submitted in translation from the German. The present generation of preachers generally is disinclined to read such material in the original, yet would profit by acquaintance with noted preachers of the past, although the sermonic style is poorly suited for our day. In translating, every effort was made to retain something of the original. This naturally resulted in a Germanic and often stilted type of English. The sermons by Johann Gerhard are not intended for imitation as to style or length, but they illustrate the style and method of this Lutheran dogmatician of the early seventeenth century and demonstrate how Lutherans observed Saints' Days and other Feasts two hundred and fifty years ago.