

LUTHER THE PREACHER

On a certain afternoon of the year 1511 under a pear tree within the precincts of the Wittenberg cloister of the Augustinians, a young monk, named Martin Luther, offered fifteen reasons to his friend and superior, the district vicar, John Staupitz, why he should not be made a doctor of theology and a preacher to his brother monks. When Staupitz nevertheless insisted, the agitated monk pleaded: "Herr Staupitz, you are killing me. I won't be able to endure it for three months." The older man, who was noted for his dry humor, replied drily: "In God's name then. Our Lord has a farflung empire and can use gifted people in heaven also."

Staupitz's counsel prevailed. Shortly afterward, when he was nearly thirty, Luther preached his first sermon. He continued to preach with almost uninterrupted regularity until four days before his death. The product of these thirty-four years of preaching was an enormous one, for Luther in his most active years preached not only on Sundays but on certain week days as well, and occasionally two, three, or even four times on the same day. Of all his sermons he himself preserved and published only a small number, and those nearly all in the early part of his career. That we still possess most of them nevertheless (2300, to be exact), is owing to the assiduity of a few excellent note-takers among his hearers and the desire among them to preserve as many as possible of the words that fell from his lips. The task they set for themselves was made easier by the fact that Luther was a tardiloquous or slow speaker.

Until 1514 Luther's sermons were delivered in the Wittenberg cloister of the Augustinians, either in the refectory after meals or in the small dilapidated chapel that stood near the dormitory. Among his listeners were many people from outside the monastery, for the Wittenbergers followed the custom of other townspeople of that period, who attended services in the cloister

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churches, especially if they didn't like their parish priest's sermons. In 1514, however, the town council of Wittenberg sent Luther a regular call to assist the sickly pastor, Simon Heinze, by preaching in the parish church of St. Mary's, the parish church of Wittenberg and 13 little villages in the vicinity. His first preserved sermon before this congregation is dated Christmas, 1514. His preaching before the monks continued, though not perhaps with such regularity, up to the time of the dissolution of the monasteries.

Whenever a visiting celebrity or member of the nobility visited the little university town on the Elbe, a special service was held in the castle church, at which Luther was quite likely to appear in the pulpit. And when the cause which he was upholding demanded his presence outside Wittenberg he rarely refused to go. Thus there is hardly a year up to 1546 in which Luther did not preach several times away from home. In the first years his sermons usually were given at district meetings of his order. Sometimes they were given enroute while on a trip in the interest of the Reformation, as in 1521 to Worms or 1529 to Marburg, 1530 to the Koburg, 1537 to Schmalkalden, or 1539 to Leipsic. At other times he accepted special invitations which came to him from friends among the nobility or former students, as in 1532 when he was the guest of the recently converted princes of Anhalt at the time of a great hunt.

There are few so-called "occasional" sermons among his pulpit remains. Two for an episcopal, one for a monastic convention occur among the early sermons. It was not until 1525 at the death of Frederic the Wise, that he preached for the first time at a funeral, though he was in favor of funeral sermons, "zu Lob und Ehre dem froehlichen Artikel unseres Glaubens, naemlich der Auferstehung der Toten." There is a wedding sermon in 1528, a baptismal sermon in 1540, one for the consecration of a bishop in 1542 and one for a church dedication in Torgau in 1544.

At two different times, from 1532-34 and from 1542-43, Luther withdrew from the public pulpit and preached on Sundays to a select group of his friends in his home, not so as to interfere with the church service, however. The sermons of the first period were enlarged by Caspar Crusiger into the Hauspostille. These private sermons were the result of ill health on the part of the Reformer, to some extent perhaps also an attempt to carry out one of his pet notions of a select congregation of serious believers who would, as he states in the introduction to the German Mass, inscribe their names "und etwa in einem Hause allein sich versammeln zum Gebet, zu lesen, zu taufen, das Sacrament zu empfangen und andere christliche Werke zu ueben."

We are safe in saying that the Reformer's legacy of 2300 sermons consists almost entirely of those which he preached to the people of Wittenberg and its neighborhood, chiefly in St. Mary's parish church, on Sundays and festivals of the church year. Even the sermons of the so-called postils, which were not preached as such but written for publication, represent a summing up of what his years of practice before a congregation had taught him.

Times and Texts

A parish church such as St. Mary's in Wittenberg in Luther's time offered many more sermons in the course of a week than any of our modern churches do. This is not surprising when one considers that thirteen villages besides Wittenberg looked upon it as their church, that furthermore most of the so-called Christians of the time were woefully deficient in their knowledge of even the simplest Christian truths. Much instruction that is now given in the classroom had in those days to be imparted from the pulpit. Thus we find that the practice in Wittenberg was to have three services of a Sunday: an early one at five or six, in which one might hear a sermon on the epistle, the chief one at eight or nine with a sermon on the gospel; and another in the afternoon, in which the preacher usually spun farther the thought of

the forenoon sermon in a lecture series on some book of the Bible. After 1530 the epistle sermon was transferred from the early morning to the afternoon service.

But there were also according to old custom services on every day of the week. A particular book of the Bible was designated for sermonic treatment on each day. Mondays and Tuesdays were devoted to the Catechism, Wednesdays to the book of Matthew, Thursdays and Fridays to the Apostolic letters, while Saturday evenings (all the other weekday services were early in the morning) were reserved for the Fourth Gospel. Just how much weekday preaching Luther engaged in can not anymore be determined. Most of his recorded sermons were held, as already said, on Sundays and festival days. He was especially concerned about catechetical instruction. After the deplorable ignorance of the people had become manifest through the visitations, extra sermons on these subjects were added to the program, as Luther announced from the pulpit No. 29, 1528: "We have ordered, as hitherto has been customary with us, that the first principles and the fundamentals of Christian knowledge and life be preached four times in each year, two weeks in each quarter, four days per week, at 10 A.M." Sermons on the Catechism were also common on Sunday afternoons. These usually were given by a deacon of whom ^{there were} several in church -
Deacon= diaconus, minister's assistant.

A glance at the index in the Weimar Edition will show that Luther had certain predilections in the choice of his texts. There are three times as many from the gospels, for instance, as from the epistles and five times as many from the N.T. as from the O.T. The latter fact is easily explained when we remember that he ordinarily preached on the pericopes for Sundays and festivals. Of the Old Testamental texts, the five books of Moses, the Psalter, and Isaiah yield the greatest number. In fact there are only six texts from all the other books of the O.T. combined. This does not, of course, mean that

he virtually ignored the other books. They are represented in his quotations from Scripture within the sermon. Of these there are many, Luther, like most Medieval preachers, incidentally, showing an unusual knowledge of Bible passages that are usually not so well-known.

The extant sermons of the Reformer may from one point of view be grouped under four headings, those preserved in Luther's own manuscript, those preserved in manuscripts of others, those that appeared in contemporary printed editions, and those which were never preached as such, but originally prepared for publication. Most of the early sermons that we have before 1517 come from Luther's own hand. These manuscripts were very likely not, as one might at first think, written in preparing the sermon, but after it was delivered. Occasionally Luther may have wanted to preserve one himself, but usually when he went to the trouble of writing it out he was following the request of some friend or friends who desired a copy of a certain sermon. In later years the preacher rarely made an effort to preserve what he had preached--probably because he knew that everything he said was being taken down better than he could have done it himself.

This brings us to the second group of sermons, those preserved in manuscripts by other hands. One of the most interesting aspects of the sermonic picture in Wittenberg were these note-takers, sincere admirers of the Reformer, who attended every service in which he preached during their stay in Wittenberg and took down as many of his words as they could in the crude Latin shorthand of the time. The chief names among them were those of Agricola (John Schneider--later court preacher in Brandenburg, and famous also in the Scandinavian countries--I understand he is honored next to Luther among Germans in Sweden), Stephen Roth (later city clerk of Zwickau), Poliander (Johann Graumann--later preacher in Prussia) Caspar Cruziger (professor at Wittenberg U.) Anton Lauterbach and Geo. Roerer, both deacons in the church at Wittenberg, and in

the early years Melanchton. These men and others also, took notes directly from the speakers or copied from the notes of others to form versions for themselves. In some instances, as in young Melanchton's, they seem to have been prompted by pure admiration. But most of them wanted copies for use in their own work or preaching or publishing later on. Agricola and to some extent Stephan Roth seem to have been motivated by a not altogether unselfish desire to achieve fame by publishing something by an author whose name would be sure to create sales. None of these penmen, however, were ^so faithful and assiduous as George Roerer, deacon of St. Mary's and chief editor after Luther's death of the first complete edition of his works, who for twenty-four years, Sunday after Sunday, took notes in abbreviated Latin of the messages of his honored master in theology.

His original notes were lost for nearly four hundred years until Buchwald, one of the chief editors of the Weimar edition, rediscovered them in the library of the University of Jena in 1893. The value of these notes as a check-up becomes evident when we realize that most of our present versions of Luther's sermons, such as one finds in the St. Louis edition, for instance, are not Luther's own at all, but have been recast, often expurgated, and sometimes added to by those who prepared them for print. Fortunately also, there was one period from 1528 to 1532 when there were three and sometimes four of these note-takers at work at the same time. Bug^henhagen, the head pastor was absent on Reformatory tours in north of Germany during part of this time and Luther stepped in as "Luckenbusser." We are thus able to compare their notes and gain a reasonably authentic picture of just what Luther said as shepherd to the flock during that time. In fact, Buchwald, the Weimar editor I mentioned, by including the material of three and sometimes four notetakers for the same sermons and then modernizing the language has published a work containing 200 sermons which come as closely as anything we

have to the spirit and content of Luther's preaching.

The next two divisions of his sermonic legacy bring us to the fascinating story of the printers. About thirty printers in twelve different cities were publishing books that contained sermons by Luther. Most of the printers of Germany sided with the new doctrine from the beginning. That their conversion may not have been altogether a matter of the spirit is indicated by the fact that nearly two thousand of Luther's writings were published between the years 1517-25 alone, and that the richest men in Wittenberg during the Reformation period were the printers and booksellers, 11 of them in all. The only reward the Reformer received for supplying them with manuscripts was a free copy of the book whenever he wished to present one to a friend and the satisfaction of seeing his teachings disseminated through the length and breadth of the land with unexampled celerity.

The lucrative character of the printer's trade at that time led to lively competition and sharp practices, especially in the early days of the Reformation, from many of which Luther suffered. Some of his early sermons were printed without his permission by his friends or by the printers themselves. There was of course no such thing as a copyright. Such pirated editions often induced him to prepare his own version for print, versions which nevertheless were just as far from the sermon he had given on the pulpit as the revision of others.

The composition of the third group of those never preached, originally prepared for print came about in this way. In 1519 the Elector sought to divert his famous doctor from the "bitter and story^m polemical writings" that followed the Leipsic Disputation to more peaceable studies by suggesting to him that he write expositions for the Sunday and festival pericopes of the church years. Luther himself was eager to supply his fellow preachers with some homiletical aids in place of the "irrelevant fable of the sermon-mongers,"

"welche Christum mehr vertreiben als treiben." He began the job but did not finish his first 8 sermons on the gospels and epistles for the Sundays in Advent until in 1521. They were written in Latin. During his enforced stay at the Wartburg he again returned to his project and wrote (this time in German), the Weihnachtspostille, 16 sermons on the lections of the Christmas season, which were a continuation of the 8 mentioned before. However, instead of translating the latter, he wrote 8 new ones, the so-called Adveⁿtspostille, for the Advent Sundays. Both of these groups, sometimes called the Wartburgpostille, were published in 1522. The postil for the whole year or Kirchenpostille, was not completed until 1527. Luther himself added one other part, the Fastenpostille, while his friend Stephen Roth compiled the Sommer- and Festpostille from his notes during the following two years.

Thus it took ten years to complete this single series of sermons for the church year. It must be remembered that the sermons were not really to serve as models but to supply theological materials for ministers, - nicht Musterpredigten, sondern Materialsammlungen. Most of them are long, one actually covering nearly 200 pages in the W.A.. They are not samples of the preacher's pulpit discourses, but rather of his method of exegesis, of his choice of topics, and of his doctrinal emphases. The postils have had an incalculable influence on Protestant preaching. They crowded out all the older sermon books and appear most often among Luther's works in the average minister's library today.

Preparation, Delivery, Presentation

Luther's preparation for his sermons was a matter of hours or of years depending on what one understands by that term. He of all men spoke from the fullness of his heart. Long years of intense religious struggle and intensive university training had made him the possessor of a vast store of inner experience and knowledge, so that by the time he took over the parish pulpit

of St. Mary's he had arrived at the stage where a short period of concentration and a few jottings on a piece of paper were all he needed to hold forth for an hour before the congregation.

All the evidence seems to indicate that Luther never wrote out a sermon before he preached it. He did, however, feel it necessary always to prepare a Konzept or outline beforehand. Often he was vexed in his sleep by dreaming that he had to preach and had no Konzept. A few of these Konzepts have come down to us. They are in Latin for the most part and are not what one would call well-arranged outlines, but rather meditations or summaries. In two of them there is a mere listing of catchwords. More often there is a notation of the chief thoughts, one or the other of which may be developed at considerable length. "In my sermons," he often said, "I try to take one theme or statement and stick to it and show the people so plainly that they can say: This was the sermon." But there was another factor in the making of a good sermon besides the preacher's efforts over the outline, and that was the assistance of God through prayer. The real Konzept came from God. "Unser Herrgott will allein prediger sein." And Luther goes on to tell how his Konzepte often vanished into thin air when he came on the pulpit and how he involuntarily became the mouthpiece of a message he had not originally planned to utter. Of course it wasn't always inspiration from on high but rather his own tendency to discursiveness that accounts for a good many long-winded passages or sudden changes of topic within his sermons. He often admitted right from the pulpit that he had drawn out his "Gewaesch" longer than he had intended to. On the other hand, this was modesty in most cases, because actually Luther always held the attention of his hearers and rarely went beyond the single hour that was considered a norm for sermon length in those days. The headpastor of the Wittenberg church after 1523 was Bugenhagen, who often tested the patience of his hearers by preaching to them for two hours or more. Once Luther actually walked out on him.

One feature that lengthened the sermons of the Reformation period was the habit of including in them the announcements and special admonitions. That had been the practice of the late Middle Ages in Germany. The priest who couldn't preach very well used to end his sermon proper in ten or fifteen minutes and then spend the rest of the time on the pulpit in calling the attention of his congregation to the saint's days during the coming week and to the benefits they could obtain if they said the necessary number of prayers, came to the mass on those particular days or gave a certain amount of alms. Or he would scold them for something he thought they had done amiss and admonish them to do better the next time. Luther continued this practice, at least to some extent. The announcements and special admonitions were part of the sermon. Usually they came at the end, but not always. They often occurred at the beginning or in the very middle of the sermon, just as the spirit moved him, I suppose. Now one finds nothing of this in the sermons that we have in print in the well-known collections. Naturally, who ever prepared them for print would leave out all these things as having no permanent value. Even the notetakers rarely put these things down. But they did leave empty spaces or place a brief remark in their notes, "hier redete er von der Visitation, oden neuen Predigten, von den Schuetzen (military drill) von dem Sieg der Tuerken, etc. The sermon in the Reformation period was still to some extent a news distributing agency. People had no newspapers, no bill or bulletin boards to say nothing of our modern inventions which enable every one in the most remote hamlet to know what is going on in the other end of the world. The traveling preacher of the late Middle Ages supplied a genuine need. He could always be sure of having a crowd of listeners in the marketplace, not only because he might be an able preacher, but because he had been to places and had seen things. He rarely disappointed his hearers. Quite a few travelers passed through Wittenberg after it had become famous and were always welcome

at Luther's residence, especially if they had news about conditions in foreign countries. Thus the sermons of the year 1529 in which the Turkish danger was most imminent show constant reference to this topic sometimes in great detail: "Der Tuerke ist nicht ein solcher Herr der sich begnuegt mit dem Siege ueber Koenigreiche, wie die Perser und Roemer. Da hat man der Weiber und Kinder verschont...aber der Tuerke hat auf einmal mehr als tausend Frauen zerhackt. Er fuehrt nicht Krieg wie unsere Fuersten, sed hat Streifer die laesst er aus^rweisen mit zehn-zwoelf Pferden. Als wenn er Wittenberg belagern wollte, laesst er einen Tag 20 Meilen streifen und pluendert das Land. Also hat ers zu Wien gemacht, 90,000 weggefuehrt, Greise und Juenglinge getoetet. Die andern macht er zu Sklaven, gibt ihnen ein Raenftlein Brot, zieht ihn^en die Kleider aus und verkauft sie wie Tiere. Da muss man tun, was er will, oder flugs tot gestochen" and so on.

If any good Lutheran of today could put on that magic hat of which Carlyle speaks, a hat that will take you instantly to any time in history that you wish to be in, and if he could wish himself in Wittenberg for one of Luther's sermons on a Sunday morning four hundred years ago, he would witness a good many things quite unlike what he had usually considered the normal Lutheran service... In the first place he would be surprised to find a liturgy that reminded him much more of what we see in a Catholic or Episcopalian than in a Lutheran church today. There would be a profusion of choir boys. Some would help the priest in his ministrations. A large number dressed in gowns would sing with a few older regularly salaried male singers in the choir. The officiating priest and his deacons, for he always had helpers, would be dressed in colored vestments. There would be incense and bowing. The bread and wine would be elevated. The latter custom was put away somewhat unwillingly by Luther in 1542. Then our visitor would be surprised also at the large amount of Latin and of singing by the choir.

A traveler who described the chief service in Wittenberg in 1535 remarked that it was mostly in Latin. The choir still did most of the singing. The second hymnbook containing Lutheran hymns prepared by Luther and his friend, the musician Walther, in 1525 was intended for choirs. Of course, it was his intention that the people should eventually learn to sing all the hymns; nevertheless the choir was still responsible for most of the musical part of the service. Our visitor would feel more at home when he saw the preacher ascend the pulpit. The sermon then as now came near the middle of the service. Up to 1524 Luther always wore his monkish cap and garment, but after that year he appeared in the pulpit in his professorial gown--without white bands by the way--which from a distance would look pretty much like our modern ministerial gown. Just before the text was read our visitor might notice quite a few people thumbing their New Testaments. Some of the more serious at least, seem to have brought along their Bibles or Testaments, judging from a remark or two that Wittenberg preachers included in their sermons. "Setzt die Brillen aut" Luther once says before reading. Bugenhagen: "Ich wollte ^{den} ihr alle hättet euer N.T. in ^{den} HÄnden." During the earlier years of the Reformation our visitor might have been surprised to hear the preacher recite the whole text from memory and perhaps in Latin at that. After 1517, especially if Luther preached, the text would be read, as he hated anything which gave the preacher a chance to show off, and there was a good bit of vanity in reciting the text from memory. John Staupitz once got stuck in attempting to recite the whole of Matthew 1 by heart. He ejaculated: "Thus is pride punished" and turned to the pages of his book.

As concerns the Reformer's delivery, a listener would be surprised to find how slowly he spoke. The slow speaker or tardiloquus seems to have been regarded as the ideal in the 15. and 16. centuries. All the books on homiletics urged their students to speak slowly. Luther himself was praised for

being a slow speaker. Certainly he could not have gone at a very great speed, if certain listeners could take the copious notes they did. But if his speech was slow, it was also marked by animation, by picturesque presentation, by a skillful use of the rhetorical devices of suspense and climax, and most likely by gestures. Certain sentences seem to have required the latter. "Was sind die Verfolgungen aller Tyrannen gegen diesen Mann? Nicht ein Fingerklipplein." Outside of the message of which I will speak later, the listener would have been held by the speaker's skill in presentation. There was always a certain unpredictability about what Luther said. The complaint that one often hears about the average preacher that one knows exactly what he is going to say and how he is going to say it before he opens his mouth could never be applied to him. Not by studied affect but by instinct he knew that attention flags very easily and that the speaker must work hard to uncover new, original phases or facets of his topic. Thus there are few passages of, let us say, ten lines in Luther's sermons that do not contain at least one arresting feature. It may have been a colorful, idiomatic phrase which he learnt, "indem er den Leuten aufs Maul gesehen hat." He speaks of "dem Pabst weidlich in die Wolle greifen," or "ihm ein Pfloeklein vor die Zunge stecken," the disciples he says, "wollen mit dem Kopf hindurch." "Sie nehmen das Messer bei der Spitze nicht beim Heft." "Der Eva bekam das Disputieren mit der Schlange wie dem Hunde das Gras." Occasionally he has innocent but effective exaggerations: "Wenns gleich ohne Unterlass Tuerken, Paepste und Kaiser schneite und regnete, sie sind doch nur mit ihrer Macht wie ein Staeblein." Die Unglaebigen "sind blinde Narren und sehen die Auferstehung an wie die Kuh ein neues Tor." "Alle Schaetze aller Koenige in der Welt (sind) wie eine Tote Laus." Sometimes the tone becomes abusive "Es sind vergiftete Schlange, Verraeter, Verloffer, Moerder, Diebe, Stroeter, Tyrannen, Teuffel, und alles Unglueck, verzweifelt, unglaeubig, Neidhardt und Hasser." Cf. Matthesius' account and

of his brusqueness on pulpit, No. 12 (p 59). Sometimes it is in bad taste according to our modern standards: (Im Himmel) "wird aus dem Vater, Christus und den Bruedern ein Kuchen, a picture which occurs in one of his less well-known hymns also. When he wants to make clear why certain people at the foot of the Cross should have wilfully twisted Christ's word "Eli, Eli" into "Elias, he says "Als ob ein Kind schrie: Mutter! Mutter! und ein Boesewicht schrie Butter! Butter!" Proverbs occur frequently in Luther's sermons, and some are quite racy: "Das sind schaendliche Huehner, die daheim essen und anders Eier legen." "Es reimt sich nicht: Drei Wirte in einem Hause; zwei Haehne auf dem Mist." "Ein Oefchs waere gern ein Hengst." At other times we have metaphors of Luther's own invention, which illuminate deep truth in a single happy picture: "Das ist der Christen Lehre, dass sie wissen zu unterscheiden zwischen Hand und Herz. Die Hand machen wir nicht frei, sondern legen ihr viele Gesetze auf. Aber das Herz weiss von keinem Gebot, weil es allem abgestorben ist. or "Wir machen den Worten immer eine Nase und lenken sie nach unserm Duenkel."

He liked to state truths in sharp, brilliant paradoxes, or in startling heroic statements that must often be taken with a grain of salt. "Du mu⁵st der Vernunft die Augen aus⁵stechen und sie in den Abgrund der Hoelle setzen, aber Gottes Wort mus⁵t du lassen recht sein." "Things never stood better with the church than when many preachers were killed." "Thu kein Werk das du fromm werdest." Usually in the same breath he so modifies these statements that his presentation of the matter becomes correct. Many of his followers, however, heard only the heroic part of the statement and actually went even farther in what they said and did. Enemies too sometimes turned these statements against him.

Luther held the attention of his audiences by constantly dramatizing his material, thus enlisting their sympathies, in fact making them vicarious

actors in it. Questions and dialogue abound as do the pronouns of the second person, though the preacher was always quick to include himself in his criticisms. "Da haetten wir eine Lektion," he says, "daran wir etliche Jahre studieren sollten und syllabieren doch kaum darueber." or "Setz dein Vertrauen nicht darauf, spricht Gott, und schlage mich nicht in den Wind, als ob du meiner Werke nicht beduerftest." or "Gott spricht, Lass mich sorgen, arbeite du. Und wir drehen's um: Ich will sorgen; du Gott, magst arbeiten."

Abstract evils are often personified: We hear of "Junker Fleisch, Junker Duenkel" "Junker Adam und Satan sizten in unserer Haut." Human reason is Frau Isabel or Frau Holdemit der Polznase. He has a long list of blunt but telling names for certain kinds of people: a carnally minded person is a Hans Sauruessel or a Bauchknecht; an unbeliever a Hans Narr, a grober Ruelz, a Meister Kluegling; Ecclesiastical big shots are the Grosse Hannsen, a noble is Junker Hans, a farmer, Heinrich Filzbauer, the pope: umbra and larva (a shadow and a fake). In this connection it might be well to state that he never mentions names or becomes what one might call personal in the pulpit. Er wollte niemand mit Namen durchhecheln. There are a few exceptions to this rule in the case of public enemies who were at some distance from his parish, like Duke George of Saxony, Dr. Eck, or the pope. When he is praising a virtue on the other hand he does sometimes mention the name, Meister Phillipus, Kurfuerst Johann, or a forgotten inhabitant of Wittenberg, a woman at that, a certain Reuterin, who embraced the Lutheran faith on her deathbed.

Luther's enthusiastic and animated manner of presentation would also account for sudden shifts from one topic to another, for treating one phase of the subject at greater length because it just happened to appeal to him at the time and for little confidential remarks to the audience like the following: "Dies ist ein Evangelium, das nicht sonderlich dient fuer das

gemeine Volk, weil es ein wenig zu hoch ist und geht wenig zu Herzen. Darum wollen wir's mit kurzen Worten handeln, auch wegen der Widrigkeit der Luft." "Dies Evangelium hoert ihr jedes Jahr und ist ein leichtes Evangelium. Darum wollen wir's wegen der Hitze nur kurz ausstreichen." "So weit die Epistel. Ich mag nicht davon predigen, sondern wollen weiter vom Gebet reden, ist ein wenig besser als Jacobi Epistel." "Das ist genug dieses Gewäsch⁴es." "Dieweil ich von Schwachheit geplagt bin und der Kopf will's nicht leiden, kann ich nicht lange predigen."

Many of these expressions make the modern listener smile. That raises the question whether Luther ever consciously aimed at humor in his sermons or whether his audience regarded certain statements humorously. The answer is both yes and no. People four hundred years ago were simpler, more child-like, less sophisticated and also less refined than we are today. Much that strikes us as quaint or outspoken was accepted as natural in those days, just as it is still done in primitive or sequestered communities. I remember happening on a sermon in a Catholic church in Bavaria one Sunday morning ten years ago, in which the priest was giving good homely forthright advice to his parishioners and using some language that could only be called "derb." It made me smile, but the people were listening seriously and occasionally nodded their heads in approval. I am also reminded of a sermon by one of our missionaries among the Apaches which appeared in the Northwestern Lutheran at least a dozen years ago. In it the plan of salvation was compared to the parts of a Ford car. To me it seemed a joke or an instance of bad taste, but to the Apaches I have no doubt it would be enlightening and uplifting.

But we do find humor in Luther, humor which must have been recognized as such by his audience. The women who worry about the stone on the grave on Easter morning: Sind gute, alberne Dohlen. Speaking of the Corinthian games (I Cor. 9, 24) he explains: Das ist genommen vom Spiel, wie man hier

aber einer schießt ihn ab. Wenn ein Schuetze will
nach dem Vogel

sagt vom Vogelschiessen. Viele schiessen nach dem Vogel, schiessen und rueckwaerts sehen, so wird er den Vogel langsam treffen." or in urging his Wittenbergers to pray he tells them: "Not ist genug da. Wo nicht, so geh vor den Spiegel und schau hinein." or "Da stoest Christus dem Fass den Boden, Zapfen und Reifen aus." In these and many other instances there is without doubt intentional humor. There is no law that forbids humor in a sermon. Rightly used it can also serve the preaching of the gospel. In fact, if the preacher presents conditions vividly and accurately there will invariably be some humor connected with it, because humor attaches to life as closely as the hair to the head. Please do not misunderstand me to advocate telling funny stories or jokes in the pulpit. No, not even to keep people awake to to wake them up, as the medieval preachers occasionally did. I simply mean to say that if a preacher is what one calls "volkstuehmlich," close to life and to the language of life that occasionally there will be a vein or a background of humor which will intensify the situations he describes and thus further his message. Thus we have seen that Luther's sermons, as far as delivery and presentation are concerned, besides having a dash of humor, were vivacious, earthy, concrete, colorful, informal, dramatic, blunt, discursive, the very opposite of the strictly logical, rather conventionalized sermons which many of his followers have thought are safest and best in the church.

Perhaps it would be well to present Luther's homiletical practice a little more in detail. Our modern visitor is still within the walls of St. Mary's in 16th century Wittenberg. Let us imagine he is a minister or a teacher at a theological seminary, that he knows all about the best rules for constructing a model sermon, and what is more, that he believes strictly in adhering to them. I'm sure that if Luther had given one of his average sermons on that particular Sunday, the professor would not have given him

more than fair to poor in sermon outline or construction. I have given you some examples of his introductions and conclusions. Most of them were equally abrupt: "Unser Evangelium ist ein Morgenevangelium (Rom 13) und will dass wir aufstehen weil die Nacht vergangen ist, dass wir nicht laenger schnarchen und schlafen." or "Dies Evangelium ist mehr ein Schelt-evangelium als ein Lehrevangelium." The conclusion, as it was in all medieval sermons in fact, was just a sudden stop, usually without even an Amen. "What the spittle means we will save for another occasion." or "But of this I have a sermon in print. Read it there." or "Davon ^{hat} einer sein lebtage genug zu predigen." Just these short remarks, nothing more, and then proceeding with the announcement.

Instead of a neat theme with parts, our homiletician would hear nothing more than an erstens, zweitens, drittens, etc., and more than once it happened that the preacher forgot his numbering and began with drittens or went from zweitens to viertens. There might be two or three themes to a sermon. Such a thing as Ausschoepfung des Textes, if that is desirable, which I doubt, was unknown to Luther. Nor were his sermons always textgemaess. Sometimes he used his text as a mere springboard to jump to any topic he felt in the mood to treat. At other times he took one word or part of the text and treated that to the exclusion of the rest, or what was even less according to Hoyle, treated the one part in great detail and then tacked on a few sentences about the second and third parts at the end of his sermon. Well, our modern professor would very likely come to the same conclusion that Johann Gerhard came to in the 17th century when he characterized the Reformer's sermons with the phrase: "heroische Unordnung." Someone has said of our own Emerson that he was good in sentences but poor in paragraphs, meaning that his sentences were well-constructed little units of thought, but that his paragraphs were not units, merely strings of sentences. So one

could say of Luther's sermons that they were good in passages or paragraphs, but poor as whole sermons--of course, only from the strict homiletical viewpoint.

Yet all these faults were as nothing against the virtues. We may not be able to learn how to make so-called model sermons from reading Luther. We may not be able to read or preach one of his sermons to the people in the form that he gave it. There is too much in them that our modern congregations will not understand, will think funny or even offensive though the congregations 400 years ago understood it, took it seriously and with good grace. But we can learn much from Luther, and remember I am not yet talking of what he preached but only of how he preached. We can learn from him how to preach as those who have authority and yet humility. Many Lutheran ministers, especially in times gone by, have had an unpleasant authoritarian air about their sermons. "Ein wenig von oben herab," as though they wanted to say: "I am Sir Oracle, and when I open my mouth, let no dog bark." Accept what I tell you because it is I that tell you, and don't ask any questions. From Luther, furthermore we can learn how to make a sermon doctrinal, yet interesting. For doctrines are the most interesting and vital things about Christianity. And the criticism that is often levelled against Lutheran sermons that they are too doctrinal really means that the doctrines are being presented in too abstract, lifeless, and dogmatic a manner. From Luther we can also learn how to inject personality into our sermons without becoming either personal or egotistic, how to overcome the tendency to formalism, to humorless rigidity, to pietistic emotionalism. Finally we can learn from him how to present a subject popularly, in the best sense of that word, how to avoid dry repetitiousness and stale language, how to use the devices of language and rhetoric--not for their own sake, as mere ornaments or instruments of display, but as useful tools to further the message. There is nothing

besides the pure doctrine that the Reformer stresses more in theory and practice than to preach so that the least among the hearers can understand what one wants to say. In one of his outspoken comparisons, he advises the preacher to feed milk to the people in the same way that a mother suckles her child. "Ich sage das sonderlich den Predigern, dass sie anfangen bei der Krippe und lassen die hohen Spekulationen, damit man klettert unter die Engel und will Ihm "Christus" nachgehen in seine Majestaet." He himself addressed his words not to "Dr. Pommer, Jonam, or Phillipum," but to his little Henslein or Elslein.

Sincerity

Master of language that Luther was he never indulged in what one might call the solemn or exalted style. "Es lag nie eine festliche Stimmung ueber seinen Predigten." His sermon for Christmas or for the funeral of his honored Kurfuerst sounds exactly like any of his ordinary weekday sermons. This may be going to extremes, just as do his practice of omitting introductions, and transitions, which I believe is not so much due to carelessness as to his dislike for anything that is in the slightest degree artificial or ostentatious. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that his language even in the weekdays sermons is always fresh, sincere, vivid. This is the more to be admired, because Luther was a professor, and professors tend to use stilted, academic language. The same is often true of ministers too. For four centuries they have complained in Germany about the cleavage between the learned ministers and seminary professors with their intellectual language and the common people and their needs and their capacities. They didn't inherit that from Father Luther.

Social and Personal element in the sermons

In the history of the pulpit there have been some preachers like Geiler or Bernardino who used so many concrete illustrations in their preaching

that their sermons became noted as mirrors of the age. Others again achieved their fame chiefly by "preaching to the times" which was a phrase invented by the Puritans and meant preaching on the crisis of the hour. Still others observed a detached attitude and occupied themselves chiefly with topics of timeless, universal interest. All three types occur in Luther's sermons, but the last predominates. It is surprising how doctrinally objective he could be in the midst of a stirring crisis. In those famous eight sermons which he delivered on eight consecutive days to the Wittenbergers on his return from the Wartburg in 1522 or in the sermon which he delivered on the day before his departure to Worms in 1521, we find not the slightest reference to the exciting events of the day. It is not surprising, however, to learn that he preached to the times also, when one considers that the medieval church and world were being lifted out of their tracks in the early 16th century. One finds that most in evidence in his criticism of the conditions in the church in his early sermons, and in his later polemic against the papacy and the enthusiasts. At least once there was a turmoil in the congregation over something he had said, and the service had to be terminated. Even people who have read only a little of the Reformer's writing know that his tirades against his opponents form a prominent part of them. This is true even in his sermons. Sharp polemics were in the spirit of the time, used alike by Luther and his opponents. Nearly always they were exaggerated. Luther's own descriptions of conditions in the church before the Reformation, for instance do not tally half the time with what he says himself in other passages when he is in less critical moods. Conditions were bad enough to be sure, especially in certain places, but it wasn't true that "Im Pabsttum hat man ^m ^{Gebet} im ersten G^mbet an Gottes Statt den Teufel gesetzt, im zweiten Gott gelaestert, im dritten Gottes Wort abgetan, im vierten den Gehorsam abgeschafft." But on the other hand listen to what Luther says in a sermon to his own

congregation: "Wir sind alle die Schaelke; A^uesserlich heucheln wir wohl Liebe. Wir leben wie die wildern Tiere, die nicht beten." Catholics have picked out such passages to show that conditions were bad, even after Luther had preached a long while. Protestants on the other hand quote passages like the first to show that everything was rotten in the pre-Reformation church. I have heard people say that they are glad Luther spoke in such extreme terms. That is what adds spice to his sermons and writings. I suppose it does. Sharp criticism always adds spice, but it also does harm. And we might as well admit that this trait in Luther--or rather in the 16th century, for others had it exactly in the same measure--was a fault which engendered centuries of futile hatred and loveless "Kanzelschimpferer." It has taken nearly 400 years for this type of polemic to fade out of our sermons.

But the Reformer not only preached to the times. He also preached about them, pictured them, so that one can reconstruct a good deal of the life of the times in Wittenberg and Germany, yes, in Europe, just by gleaning the remarks that Luther made about it, mostly by the way, in his sermons. Thus one learns to know such things as the condition of streets and houses in Wittenberg, the character of the Elbe which flowed to the South of the city and over which there was a large bridge, furthermore, the kind of people who came to church regularly and the kind that didn't, the number and character of the services, how confession and the sacrament were observed and how liberally donations were given; how weddings were celebrated and households run, what the people were complaining about, what they worked at, how they tried to make money and how they were taking interest on their money, what crops were being raised, how trade was carried on and how the problems of poor relief, crime, sickness, law enforcement, tavern regulations were being solved. War was even more imminent in Europe then than now and the Jewish question was troubling Germany and Luther also. Much of his bitterness against

the Jews in his later years may have been due to the fact that he felt personally disappointed in them. They had hailed him as a hero at the beginning. Luther interpreted that as the prelude to their conversion and was happy about it. But the Jews had no thought of abandoning their religion. They were only hoping that their lot might become easier as a result of the social upheaval. As a matter of fact, Jews had been expelled from Wittenberg in the middle of the 15th century. Before Luther's death they were expelled from all Saxony. Luther's greatest fear was the Turks who in 1529 had advanced as far as Vienna and were laying siege to that city for five months. Nothing, not even the pope, was quite as bad as the ⁵unpeakable Turk. He would have been quite willing to fight at the side of his Catholic enemies to thrust back these heathen marauders.

As the Turks were the chief enemies of the state, so the Saxon princes were his chief hope among human agencies not only for the welfare of his Saxon homeland but for the development of Protestantism. In his earlier sermons he still mentions the Emperor as the mainstay of all who hope for peace and justice. Somehow, he just could not imagine that a man who had been exalted by God to a position of such importance could act against the best interests of God's kingdom. But the hostile position of Charles V left no room for doubt and Luther was finally won over to the position that it might even be just to wage a defensive war against the emperor, if he had broken his vow. So much the happier he is that the princes of Saxony protect him and do all in their power to further the cause. To be sure, he complains about the inclination to drinking and hunting among the nobles, and probably is thinking of the young Johann, called der Grossmuetige (the "magnanimous"), because he indulged in both. But he also has passages like this: "Wer eyn gnedigen Fursten hat, der furcht keyn ding, das unter demselbigen fursten ist, trotz darauff, rhumet und bekennet synes herrn gnad und macht." The follow-

ing reference to the fatherland may also be interesting in the light of present-day beliefs in Germany: "Wir sagen: Ganz Deutschland ist itzund Christen, darumb das die alte heidnische weysse ist nimmer drinnen; ob wol das weniger teyl recht Christen sind, wirts dennoch umb yhren willen alles Christen genennet."

But if there is far more incidental reference to the age in his sermons than one will find in those of most Lutheran ministers today, he once delivered a series on the Ten Commandments in 1516-17 which was indeed nothing less than a mirror of the times, especially of the sins and superstitions of the times. Remarkably enough, this ^sseries on the decalogue comprised the second half of a sort of twin sermon given every Sunday morning during that time, the first half of which was exactly opposite in character. For a half hour or more he spoke on the inward mystical side of religion. Then he shifted to the external aspect of Christian life, described the foibles and failings of the people and cautioned against them, the superstitions they believed in, the oaths they swore, the games they played, the crooked ways they tried to get money, the way they treated their parents and children, their ministers and teachers,--in short we have here a slice of life from the 16th century.

A few other characteristics of the founder of Protestant preaching may be noted before we pass on to the content of his sermons. He inherited much in manner and content from the preachers of the Middle Ages. Most of it was good; some of it was less desirable, even bad. It took him a long while to shake off some of the less desirable things. Thus we find relics, especially in his early sermons, of a tendency toward allegorizing: The text Ps. 60:8, Moab is my washpot--cooking pot as he read it. He interprets as follows: the pot = is the world which persecutes the saints. Its three legs are the lust of the flesh, the eyes, and the pride of life. Preachers are hunters

who hunt for new Christians, shoot, quarter, skin and then cut them up, place them in the pot where Christ stirs up the fire to make us boil (that is, suffer trials) and we do boil--rather, steam, that is, send up prayers and so on.

Another thing that both the people and the preachers of those times liked was histories of words. Thus Geiler in criticizing bishops once said that Bischof comes from Beisschaf. Others said that St. Vincent was the saint for the vineyards, because he said Vincent came from Vine. Luther has some too: "Hosia das ist Hilf Herr, lass wohl gelingen, wie die Leute in Italien sagen Vive Papa (Es lebe der Pabst). Das Na heisst auf Hebraisch Ach hilf wie Hossanna, aber nicht Susanna, ein Weibsnamen."

The preachers of the Middle Ages furthermore liked to quote a lot from books that contained old legends, fairy tales, fabulous accounts of animals and stones and plants, and you will find some of these in Luther, who liked Esop especially, and by the way made his own collection of Esop's stories and also of proverbs. He supposes that a snake has all its life in its head, that palmwood does not bend and may therefore symbolize the Scriptures, or that the hyena mimics the human voice in order to attract man to his doom. Commonest among the animals mentioned in the sermons, however, is the pig. Saeue, Sauruassel, Schweine--this animal furnished him with meat for comparisons as well as for chops and roasts.

Modern glorification of the woman was unknown in former centuries, except for the worship of Mary and certain female saints. But the average woman was always looked down upon as something sinful and dangerous. Monks especially laid all the blame for their own evil thoughts and temptations at the door of the opposite sex. Hand in hand with this aversion went a rather unhealthy treatment of sexual matters even in sermons before the people. The priests and monks who never married leaned over backward to describe to their people all the dangers of sexual temptation or how things

went on at the birth of Christ, as though they themselves had been midwives in the stable at Bethlehem. There is a trace of that still in Luther's sermons of the early period. He had not yet learned to appreciate marriage. Nor had he learned the rule which he observed in his explanation to the Sixth Commandment. This rule was known before his time and advocated by the best teachers in the church. If one wants to talk against unchastity or the sins of the 6th Commandment, let it suffice to praise chastity.

Another feature that is still very much in evidence in the sermons to the very last is the man's belief in superstition and witchery. In this he is altogether a child of his time. People simply believed then that there were ghosts and witches and that the devils went about leaving imprints of cloven hoofs. There were spirits in the air that brought on certain sicknesses; of that there was no doubt, and every spring one of the preachers of Wittenberg followed a procession outside the walls and exorcized the harmful goblins from the fields, so that the crops would be sure to grow. Yet even Luther draws the line. There are two things he tells the people which are not only forbidden, but forbidden to be believed. These are that witches can change themselves to cats at night and that they ride about on broomsticks to attend witches' Sabbaths. Queer as this belief in superstition may seem in a great man, we must say that Luther by having the courage to throw practically the whole saint worship overboard helped more than anyone else to undermine the superstition which he could not quite rid his mind of.

Anyone who reads quite a number of consecutive sermons of Luther, will be struck by the fact that they are often related to each other by some common thought or topic. It was a common custom in the Middle Ages to give sermon series, and Luther followed the practice. Later on the connecting link was usually some book of the Bible. Thus he followed through most of the books of the New Testament and the Books of Moses in this way, besides preaching

various times in his life on the Psalms, the different parts of the Catechism, and the Passion history. But even apart from the Biblical texts, one notes that important experiences in the Reformer's life were often reflected in his sermons during a particular period. The report of the visitors concerning the alarming conditions among the common people, the fear of the Turkish invasion, the sacramental controversies, and lesser happenings were reintroduced several Sundays in a run. In Dec., 1516, he kept repeating the teaching about the difference between law and gospel; in March, 1521, there are variations in several sermons that one must not command a Christian, for no command affects him. Everyone knows too that Luther developed the thoughts which went into the making of his catechisms in a series of sermons about that time --it is hard to say whether sermons or Catechisms were first in each particular. Also when he lectured on a certain passage of Scripture at the University he was usually wont to treat it at the same time in his sermons. Thus the teacher and the preacher received mutual benefit.

"Es ist ein schwer Amt, das Predigtamt," he once said. "Ich habe oft gesagt; Wenn ich mit gutem Gewissen koennte herabkommen, ich wollt mich ehe lassen auf ein Rad legen oder Steine tragen, als eine einzige Predigt oder ^e Liktion tun." Part of his grief came from his seeming lack of success with the Wittenbergers. There would be trouble in the town, fights between the students and the townspeople, or a new attempt to bring in houses of ill repute. People seemed to him to be lukewarm. And he would become discouraged. The two periods when he withdrew from the public pulpit to preach in his house, were partly due to this disillusionment. Twice in his later years he wanted to leave Wittenberg, once actually going away on a trip to the dismay of his friends, who thought that he was carrying out his threat to leave the town. The great man, whom we revere as a pillar of faith, had his moments of doubt and diffidence too, just as many of his followers have them.

Theological Content of Luther's Sermons

No reader of Luther's sermons would hesitate long with an answer if he were asked this question, Is there in them any one outstanding idea which might be called the burden of his message? He illustrates the truth of the saying that to have discovered one great new idea is enough of an achievement for any single man in his lifetime. His new discovery, or rediscovery, was the doctrine of justification by faith, that central act of salvation, according to St. Paul, in which the Lord of Mercy out of the clay of human existence creates a new Adam who is worthy to dwell before Him. This great fact the preacher proclaimed with the still small voice and with words of thunder, in season and out of season, in almost endless sameness and endless variety.

How did Luther chance upon this doctrine that exerted such a revolutionary influence in the history of religion and culture? It came at the end of a long struggle which can not be understood without taking some account of the theology in which he had been trained. The theological world of declining medievalism harbored in its bosom two elements which were strikingly opposed to each other. There was first the traditional belief in the merit of good works before God, which expressed itself in many forms, such as doing works of penance, going on pilgrimages, giving money, entering the cloister and the like. At the opposite pole was the idea, held especially by the school of Occam, that God was absolute majesty and arbitrary will, unbound in the last analysis by any laws that men knew and saving whom he chose not on the basis of merit but solely by a predestining act of grace or "acceptance." It was understood that this acceptance would be granted to him who had done his best--but who could be sure that he had done his best? Thus there appeared an almost feverish activity in the direction of salvation, but never any ultimate certainty regarding it. This tension was instinctively capitalized

by the church, whose coffers were being filled in the same proportion that good people were seeking to do their best to insure their salvation.

Here then was Luther's trouble. He had been educated in the Occamist tradition. He was also going as far as the farthest along the road of good works. Yet each new turn seemed to show that he was hopelessly lost and farther than ever from his goal. He began to despair not that there was a god at all, but that God was there for him. He was tempted to hate God because of this uncertainty, but that only made the matter worse, for to hate God was the worst of blasphemies. From these qualms Staupitz delivered him by pointing to the wounds of Christ. God's mercy never shines clearer than in the suffering of Christ or in the afflictions of Christians. Let the troubled Christian look first at the mercy, not at the justice of God. Let him think on salvation, not predestination. Let him look upon the Savior's perfect work, not his own imperfect works. Under the influence of Staupitz and of the Scriptures and of certain of the church fathers like Augustine, Luther's concept of God underwent a profound change, which became complete with his discovery in the latter half of 1514 that Romans 1:17 speaks not of the condemning but of the saving righteousness of God--that which God gives. He still believed in predestination. That comes out clearly in his lectures on the Psalms in 1515 and ten years later in his book "de servo arbitrio," but somehow that fact did not bother him as it had once done. The strong man could look the matter in the face and be ready to suffer even his own damnation for the glory of God. The weaker man ought to remember only the comforting side of the picture, that God loved him and that if he was tortured by doubts about his salvation he was already saved. Since it is God's gift, we may be absolutely sure that we have salvation, and wrong is their doctrine who bid us doubt whether we are truly contrite and whether we truly have grace and forgiveness.

He was especially bitter against the idea of merit through works, and if these works were instituted by men, the matter became only the more heinous. His contact with the writings of the German mystics fortified him in this view. These mystics had already gone two-thirds of the way toward his new faith, and his early sermons show marked traces of their influence. All that was needed for him to launch the waves of his hatred against the "do-religion" was some public occasion, such as the traffic in indulgences provided. We may now turn to his sermons to illuminate this brief summary with his own words on the subject.

In a sermon for Good Friday, 1521, he gives a veiled account of the severity of his early religious struggle. He speaks of a man who is in such great anxiety that he believes himself guilty of the death of Christ and an enemy of God. It seems to such a man that one moment is a hundred years and that it is impossible to live through the terror. And as though to contradict his later enemies who sneered and said his torments had their origin in sex, he adds: "Denn was ander sunth sein, als ^(d) ebruch und dergleichen, die fallen all abe und werden fuer die geringsten geacht." When the ^h sinner feels that he is forsaken and abandoned to devils and to evil people, he says in another sermon, and that God cares for him no more, then is the real hunger and thirst of the soul--"die rechten Knoten" as he called them.

Out of this experience of despair and terror Luther developed what he later called the "theology of the cross" or the "theology from below." The word cross in this phrase does not mean the Cross or redemption of Christ. Rather it means the sufferings through which God leads the Christian on his way to heaven. "Durch Truebsal hier geht der Weg zu dir." Luther believes that he has Scriptural warrant for this belief that the way to the Kingdom of God always comes "from below" that is from the depths. Does not God in Deuteronomy say that he "will kill and make alive--wound and heal"? Was not

Christ "delivered for our offense and raised for our justification." To come up one must first go down to the depths of affliction, sorrow, trial. Both going up and going down are God's work, but Luther realizes that there is a difference, so he calls the first the opus alienum or alien work, the second the opus proprium or natural, proper work of God. Christ experienced the alien work of God in his Passion. The proper work of God was shown in His Resurrection, which corresponds in us to the birth of the new man and also to our resurrection from the dead.

Elsewhere Luther speaks in much the same sense about the deus absconditus, or hidden God, and the deus revelatus, or revealed God. Those things which we do not understand at first are the works of the hidden God. But if we search the Scripture diligently, we will find that the works of the hidden God become plain, we will understand the seemingly unaccountable fact that God chasteneth whom he loveth, that he allows the devil to plague man in order to free man from the devil. So sure is Luther that this is the plan of salvation that he believes all men must experience it to be saved. One of his objections to indulgences was that they upset God's law by trying to lessen trouble and tribulation. The truly penitent man accepts punishment, does not flee from it as the indulgence preachers urge him to do. But this belief that one can thus find joy beneath the Cross or peace in the midst of turmoil flatly contradicts human reason. It is difficult to believe that we must accept suffering as part of our salvation (even Christ exclaimed in anguish: My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me.). Wherefore it is to be looked upon as a work of God known to no man except to him who has experienced it.

This theology from below, of salvation through humiliation, seems to merge at times with Luther's Pauline theory of the law and the gospel. The underlying principle in his sermons on the Ten Commandments is that the law, by demanding perfect spiritual fulfillment, drives the sinner to despair of

himself and to resort to God. The preaching of the law is thus the alien work of God. It shows man that he is a "child of death, anger and hell." That leads to desperation and trembling; all presumptuousness disappears, deepest fear and despair enter in, and man is bruised, annihilated, and made quite humble, so he says in an Advent sermon. The ground thus being prepared, God comes with his gospel, his natural work of love and grace. He casts out the despair and gives strength for a new life. But these two works of God are simultaneous rather than consecutive. Every Christian throughout his life is sinner and saint at the same time (Luther makes much of that idea). Likewise every word of God has the double character of frightening and comforting of bruising and healing, humbling and exalting, and both law and gospel are to be preached as also each Christian is to accept, at one and the same time, the condemning and the condoning God.

The precious pearl of Reformation preaching, however, was the ⁵opus proprium, the natural work of the revealed God, and to that Luther, following St. Paul, gave the name: Justification by faith. The ultimate basis for justification is the Passion of Christ, or to go back still farther, the predestining will of God. But Luther rarely touches upon predestination in his sermons, though he does in other writings not directed to the common people, as in his Lectures on Romans. Christ's work supplies three things: satisfaction for sin, the power to put away sin and lead a clean life, and eternal salvation. But if we ask how Christ's merit is communicated to us, Luther answers: through faith. But faith is itself a gift--not the reason for the gift. It is divine illumination concerning God and His purpose with men. From another point of view it is the avenue of transmission from man to God via the Word: "Zum glauben muss ein Wort gehoeren. Der Glaub und das Wort sind ganz ein Ding und ein unueberwintlich Ding."

Now exactly what does he mean by Word? Two things. In the long run

it is identical with the Scriptures. But first and foremost it is the gospel about Christ as contained in the Scriptures and proclaimed by a living voice to the people. It is the message preached to the *Communio Sanctorum*, the real church, the "hauff Christglaubiger Leut," which is at one and the same time, a visible church--the assembly of Christians--and an invisible church--because faith, being an inner hidden quantity, God alone knows its true membership. There the preacher brings the word to the ear, God conveys it to the heart.

The heart becomes pregnant with the Holy Spirit, and Christ is born in us as he was in Mary, only spiritually. Thus faith is a new life resulting from the union of two elements, the human or passive and the divine or active. The latter in its turn is not only the single historical sacrifice of Christ, but the ceaseless working of his love in the heart of the sinner. And in the measure that a man has faith, that is, in the measure in which he has experienced and comprehended this divine activity, the latter is of value to him. "Wie er glaubt, so hat er, darumb so mag nymant wissen, das er in Gnaden sy und Got ihm guenstig sey, dan durch den Glaubn." But if faith falters, then it is time to go to the minister and receive assurance from the Office of the Keys.

Luther was often accused of preaching faith to the exclusion of works. While it is true that he frequently fulminated against the external practices of contemporary piety and that he used sharp words about works in general which might cause offense or be misunderstood, his preaching was nothing, if not ethical. "I do preach works," he says, "but such as spring from faith." He made the subject very clear in great numbers of sermons. For instance, he distinguished three kinds of justice corresponding to three kinds of works. There are first what one might call works of political justice, as that princes rule well and subjects obey in a general way and lead orderly lives.

Then there are ceremonial or humanly appointed works, which have their value if they are not used to gain merit. Then there are the works of love which arise out of faith and are done not out of fear of punishment, not because of the promise of reward, nor yet out of a subtle pride but willingly for their own sake.

At other times Luther presents his own social gospel. He points out that God requires only faith for himself. Every other expression of the Christ spirit in us belongs to the neighbor. The Christian must go out of his way to find ^{and} ~~the~~ help the poor, the sick, the frail. He must learn to associate with the stubborn, the foolish, the proud, and other unpleasant types of people. And the natural way for Christians to fulfill the works of brotherly love is within and through their callings, but not by virtue of them. That is a vital distinction. There is no extraordinary merit connected with the calling of either priests or monks or ministers or grocers or shoemakers. Only one calling as such has a status before God--the spiritual calling of those who have faith. All others are alike before him, provided, of course, that they are consistent with Christian virtue.

Luther's moral was a high one. We may close this brief discussion of faith and good works, all too brief, I know, to be fair to the doctrines, with a few sentences from one of his sermons: "God wants the heart alone--men look upon the works. Therefore when we have become united with God and believe that He has made us holy, we are to remember what we must do before the people. For though the soul is free in the sight of God, our existence belongs to our brethren. When I come away from my soul and go among the people, I am in another land where my passport is not valid and I must pay duty. In the kingdom of heaven and of the soul we have perfect freedom, but our bodies are in an alien kingdom in which it is our duty to act as it befits and benefits our neighbors among whom we live."

There were sermons and sermonizers before Luther, many of them in fact. Preaching was much more common than was formerly thought. There was also a solid body of homiletical wisdom which the Reformer inherited and utilized. What then did he contribute to the sermon? Four things stand out. First, he made the sermon Scriptural, and that for Luther meant Christocentric, in a sense it had not been before. Not the tradition of the church, the legends of the saints, the pronouncements of the pope, but Bible history and doctrine would henceforth reign in the sermon.

Secondly, he revalued and deepened the ethical, that is the moral teachings of his time. The focus was to be not only on the act but on the attitude as well. The idea of Christian love and service was to be substituted for the idea of personal merit. The dignity of the monk was to give way to the dignity of the man. Thirdly, he gave the sermon the place of honor in the service and in the life of the church. From this time on the minister was a preacher rather than a priest. Finally through his sermons, considered not so much as individual model pieces but in their entirety, he gave us a standard, an example which has rarely been equalled and never surpassed. He may truly be called the father of Protestant preaching and one of the greatest preachers of all times.

Note: Dr. Kiessling's "Luther the Preacher" was based entirely on his doctoral dissertation of 1935 (Now available from AMS Press, New York, 1971.) In addition, it served as the basis for his lectures on Luther the Preacher at the fall, 1973 Pastors' Institute held at the Seminary, which are available also on videotape.