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LAW AND GOSPEL  
IN  
CONTEMPORARY LUTHERAN PREACHING

By

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## INTRODUCTION

### A. The Problem Stated

In spite of an unprecedented rise in popularity which Lutheran churches are now enjoying, the sermons that are therein proclaimed each Lord's Day exhibit a peculiar sterility when viewed from their lukewarm reception. The impact of the pulpit upon those who faithfully occupy the pew seldom is seen to result in radically changed lives. Yet the Christian gospel demands such changes as the fruits of faith. Unless it be granted that the sole responsibility for this unhappy condition belongs to God Himself, it must be concluded that the Lutheran pulpit is failing in its attempt to communicate the essential message of the gospel. Herein lies the problem, viz., the seeming failure of the Lutheran pulpit to communicate the true character of the Word of God in a manner by which visible changes in the lives of parishoners are effected. It is the thesis of this study that if the clergy themselves properly discern the law-gospel relationships inherent in God's Word and communicate those relationships to their congregations through

the sermon, the true character of God's Word will be heard. It should be noted here that the writer does not conceive this thesis to be the only possible solution to the problem; but, for Lutheran preachers, it constitutes a solution which is already encompassed within the framework of their theology.

#### B. The Problem Justified

A conception common to all of the various denominational branches maintaining any historic connection with Evangelical Christianity is that the Word of God must be a living and vital Word; it is incapable of confinement to mere doctrinal formulations or reduction to a set of dogmatic propositions. To know that Word is to experience it first-hand in the manifold complexities of human life. And yet, even a cursory view of the Christian Church today is sufficient to substantiate the conviction that, unfortunate as the case may be, the average church-member is, to a lamentable degree, dependent for his contact with that Word upon the homiletic efforts of the parish pastor.

The Lutheran Church, basing its views upon those of the Reformation leader from whence its name

is derived, has traditionally conceived of the Word of God as being addressed to men under the two-fold form of law and gospel. Such a conception may be demonstrated to provide the touchstone for the great bulk (if not indeed all) of Lutheran doctrinal formulations arising from that Word. It is not the purpose of this present study to justify the basic premise which maintains such a distinction. It will, however, become obvious to the reader that the writer is personally convinced of the validity of the principle involved herein.

For Evangelical Christianity to properly maintain this distinction between law and gospel is no facile accomplishment. However, Dr. Luther affirms the significance of such a differentiation in these terms: "This difference between the law and the gospel is the highest art in Christianity, which each and everyone who boasts or accepts the name of Christian should know and understand."<sup>1</sup> Now, if the truth of this observation be allowed, it follows that, by virtue of his function in making the Word live in the hearts and lives of his parishoners, this

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1. Reinhold Seeberg: Text-Book of the History of Doctrines, p. 246.

distinction between the two poles of law and gospel involved in the Word must somehow be conveyed to the congregation within the framework of the preacher's message.

### C. The Plan and Scope of this Study

It is therefore the plan of this study to provide a somewhat brief statement of the development within the Lutheran Reformation respecting the doctrine of law and gospel. Next the sermons of certain contemporary Lutheran preachers, having been selected on the basis recognition accorded to them by their own denominational body, will be analyzed in terms of the various components of law and gospel which they declare. This analysis will then provide the basis for the conclusions of the study. Because of the voluminous amount of homiletic material available, only selected sermons of the following preachers will be handled: Walter A. Maier; Paul E. Scherer; Edmund A. Steimle; and Martin Niemoller.

## CHAPTER I

### THE LUTHERAN UNDERSTANDING OF LAW AND GOSPEL

#### A. Introduction

In the introduction above, it was noted already that Martin Luther attached a deep significance to the Christian's competence in distinguishing between law and gospel.<sup>1</sup> Surely this conviction, so forcefully voiced, could not have been for him the expression of a fleeting sentiment. Indeed, arising as it did from his first-hand experience with the Word of God, such a statement must be sympathetically regarded as the conviction of a mature theological mind. If our modern generation has learned nothing more from an ever-increasing fund of knowledge based upon scientific investigations into the human mind, it has learned an appreciation for the fact that men, including the produce of their mental capacities, are to an appreciable degree dependent upon the environmental forces which have helped to mould their lives. The suggestion here is that, in addition to the

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1. cf. supra, p. vi.

objective record of the Scriptures, there were certain experiences in the life of Luther which influenced his theology. This is clearly the case respecting the reformer's doctrine of law and gospel. Here an attempt will be made to review some of the more significant factors which helped to produce these convictions in his own life and, subsequently, in the confessional writings of the Lutheran Church.

B. As Represented in the Life of Martin Luther

Martin Luther was born on November 10, 1483 at Eisleben, but his childhood was spent in the small mining town of Mansfield. His parents were simple peasants, thrifty and industrious. Young Martin grew up among these hard, austere surroundings protected from much that was evil by the severity of his parents. Here he imbibed the simple political and ecclesiastical ideas of the peasant folk. He learned that the emperor was God's ruler on earth, that the Church was the "Pope's House," and that the Bishop of Rome was the "house-father." He knew that in the recesses of the mine-shafts some of the men practiced witch-craft, and that one of the neighbor women was a witch feared by the priest himself. Hell, purgatory, and judgement were all familiar concepts to the youth. And, "He

shivered whenever he looked at the stained glass window in the parish church and saw the frowning face of Jesus, who, seated on a rainbow with a flaming sword in His hand, was coming to judge him, he knew not when."<sup>1</sup>

1. Luther, the Augustinian monk.

In 1501, after having studied for three years at St. George's school in Eisenach, Luther entered the University of Erfurt to begin a study of law. The preliminary studies for law students were given by the Faculty of Philosophy and by 1505 Luther had completed the requirements for the Master's degree under their tutelage. He may have begun to attend lectures in the Faculty of Law when he suddenly plunged into the Erfurt Convent of the Augustinian Eremites. The reasons for this apparently sudden decision on his part are not entirely known.

"Luther himself has told us that he entered the monastery because he doubted of himself...."<sup>2</sup>  
The precise nature of these doubts has been the subject of much speculation. But there can be little

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1. T.M. Lindsay: History of the Reformation, vol. 1, p. 194.
2. Ibid., p. 197.

question that the superstitious background of his childhood and the stern pictures of judgment he had received were major factors in his decision to become a monk. "Luther doubted whether he could ever do what he believed had to be done by him to save his soul if he remained in the world."<sup>1</sup>

Luther did not enter the monastic life in order to study scholastic theology; he entered it to save his soul. In a very real sense, although his scholarship was most impressive, the convent studies were of little help in Luther's quest for salvation; Lindsay says:

His teachers might be Augustinian Eremites, but they had not the faintest knowledge of Augustinian experimental theology. They belonged to the most pelagianising school of mediaeval Scholastic; and their last word always was that man must work out his own salvation.<sup>2</sup>

The well-known story of the rigid asceticism practiced by Luther during this time is appalling to Evangelical Christianity today. Man's goodness according to the Scholastic theology was not to be measured against his neighbor, but against God's. Pardon was to be sought through the sacrament of penance. And, although he

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1. Ibid., p. 198  
2. Ibid., p. 200.

wearied his superiors in the confessional, one writer observes:

...confronted with the goal of perfection, the divine imperative became something which withered all joy, and brought him a torment of doubt and uncertainty and guilt, an inner scepticism which ate corrosively through all the offices of consolation which were offered him.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to long periods spent in confession, of all his fellows in the convent, Luther was acknowledged to be a model of piety. Bainton reports: "He fasted, sometimes three days on end without a crumb....He laid upon himself vigils and prayers in excess of those stipulated by the rule. He cast off the blankets permitted him and well-nigh froze himself to death."<sup>2</sup> But the tension between the goal of the righteousness of God and human sinfulness stood before him as an impossible demand. All he could envision was condemnation until finally Lindsay says: "In the end, the vision of the true relation of the believing man to God came to him suddenly with all the force of a personal revelation, and the storm-tossed soul was at rest."<sup>3</sup> It had come to Paul on the Damascus road

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1. Gordon Rupp: Luther's Progress to the Diet of Worms, p. 27.
2. Roland Bainton: Here I Stand, p. 45.
3. Lindsay, op. cit., p. 203.

in the words, "Why persecutest thou Me?"; it had come to Augustine in his garden in the words, "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh"; it had come to Francis in the words, "Take no gold, nor silver, nor copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor a staff"; it came to Luther in the words, "He who through faith is righteous shall live."

Following this revelation which brought peace to his soul, Luther continued to experience the condemnation of the law of God. But he had now the gospel to comfort him, and the law assumed its rightful place in his religious consciousness. He was now simul iustus et peccator. Historians and biographers are, however, generally agreed that the peace which Luther had found in Romans 1:17 shortly before his transfer from Erfurt to the faculty at Wittenberg was for him a matter of personal implications. The full flower of reformation theology had not yet blossomed within the man.

## 2. Luther, the Evangelical Reformer.

It is to his early lectures in theology at the Wittenberg university that the reader must look for the transition of Luther from Augustinian monk to evangelical reformer. Undoubtedly the corruption he had witnessed on the pilgrimage to Rome in 1511 played

its part in the change; but Luther had returned a "...genuine monk, with no doubt of his vocation."<sup>1</sup> These lectures were largely experimental. Beginning with the fact of man's sin, they considered the possibility of reaching a sense of pardon and fellowship with God by trusting in His promises. Men were to be redeemed, apart from their own merits, by the grace of God which had been revealed in the mission and work of His Son.

The first sermon against the sale of indulgences was preached in July 1516; and "the standard of theological revolt" was raised in September of the following year when Luther wrote directly against Scholasticism. Lindsay reports of these attacks that Luther:

...declared that it (Scholasticism) was Pelagian at heart, and buried out of sight the Augustinian doctrines of grace; he lamented the fact that it neglected to teach the supreme value of faith and of inward righteousness; that it encouraged men to seek escape from what was due for sin by means of Indulgences, instead of exhorting them to practise the inward repentance which belongs to every genuine Christian life.<sup>2</sup>

With such words as these, the transformation from Augustinian monk to evangelical reformer was completed.

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1. Ibid., p. 208.  
2. Ibid., p. 212.

Luther, the theologian, was a prolific writer. These writings which span the years from 1519 until his death in 1546 do not treat of theological matters in any systematic fashion; they were, for the most part, born out of specific practical matters which confronted him as the leader of the German reformation movement. However, modern Luther scholars find little wanting from the pen of their tutor regarding any facet of Biblical theology. Certainly this is true when his writings are examined in an effort to determine Luther's doctrine of law and gospel.

In presenting Luther's views concerning law and gospel two factors must be kept clearly in focus: 1.) the relationship of law to the Old Testament and gospel to the New Testament in the thought of Luther; and 2.) both law and gospel were for him intimately bound up with the whole matter of the justification of the sinner and ultimately were not proper subjects for theological abstractions of the type here being attempted, as his own experience had demonstrated.

It is to the first factor that the attention of the reader is directed, Luther says of this: "Here we must point out that all the Scriptures of God are divided into two parts--commands and promises. The commands indeed teach things that are good, but the

things taught are not done as soon as taught."<sup>1</sup> These commands show man what he ought to do, but they do not grant the power to accomplish what they demand. He therefore concludes: "...they are intended to teach a man to know himself, that through them he may recognize his inability to do good and may despair of his powers. That is why they are called and are the Old Testament."<sup>2</sup>

It is not until a man has through the commands learned to know his weakness and has found in himself no means of justification that the New Testament may speak to him.

Here the second part of the Scriptures stands ready--the promises of God, which declare the glory of God and say, 'If you wish to fulfill the law...believe in Christ, in Whom grace, righteousness, peace, liberty and all things are promised to you; if you believe you shall have all, if you believe not you shall lack all.' For....the promises of God give what the commands of God ask, and fulfill what the law prescribes, that all things may be of God alone....Therefore the promises of God belong to the New Testament, nay, they are the New Testament.<sup>3</sup>

In another place, Luther, speaking of this same relationship between the Old and New Testaments declares:

Just as the Old Testament is a book in

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1. Luther: Works, Holman ed. vol. II, p. 317.
2. loc. cit.
3. Ibid., p. 318.

which are written God's laws and commandments  
...so the New Testament is a book in which are  
written the Gospel and the promises of God....  
For Gospel is a Greek word, and means in Greek,  
a good message, good tidings, good news, a good  
report, which one sings and tells with re-  
joicing.<sup>1</sup>

But that Luther would be the last to impose an artificial  
distinction between law and gospel on the basis of the  
division of the canonical Scriptures is made clear by  
the same passage cited above in which he illustrates the  
meaning of the word "gospel" with the "...good report  
and encouraging news" which came among the Jewish people  
after David slew Goliath; for he maintains by this  
"...their terrible enemy had been smitten and they had  
been rescued and given joy and peace."<sup>2</sup>

If in the mind of Luther there was dread and  
despair attached to the law of God because it demanded  
that which it could not accomplish, there was joy and  
peace in the gospel, not alone for the historical facts  
it involved, but precisely because it could not be con-  
fined to something written as had been the case with the  
law. In a sermon he declared:

We have often said heretofore that the Gospel,  
properly speaking is not something written in  
books, but an oral proclamation, which shall  
be cried out freely before all creatures, so

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1. Luther: Works, "Preface to the New Testament"  
Holman ed. vol. VI, p. 439 f.
2. loc. cit.

that all would have to hear it if they had ears....For the Law, which was of old...was not cried out in all the world....<sup>1</sup>

In this same sermon he affirmed that preaching was the chief work which Christ and all the apostles had enjoined upon the Church.<sup>2</sup>

Having observed that for Luther the gospel was primarily an oral proclamation of the grace of God in Christ, it might be well at this point to consider briefly the preaching style of the reformer. One writer affirms: "In almost all of his sermons Luther attempted first to inculcate the essential nature and spirit of the Law, and then he would apply the saving grace of the Gospel. This was his favorite pattern."<sup>3</sup> It was necessary that the law first be taught in its severity as he stated:

Where the law is so taught that man, threatened by the wrath and punishment of God, is outwardly held under good discipline, and restrained from presumption and carelessness, and is inwardly urged by fear and terror to feel his helplessness and misery and to recognize his own inability, where the law is so taught, the fold is rightly guarded, and the sheep cannot run away....<sup>4</sup>

But such law, rightly taught, was nonetheless powerless

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1. Luther: "Gospel Sermon for Ascension Day," Lenker ed., vol. XII, # 3, 16.
2. Ibid., 68.
3. George Beimler: Luther's Doctrine of the Law and Gospel, p. 53.
4. Luther: "Gospel Sermon for Pentecost Tuesday," Lenker ed., vol. XII, 13.

and impotent to save. For he always maintained that:  
"...the Ten Commandments, or the work of the Ten Com-  
mandments, are not and cannot be called the grace of  
Jesus Christ...."<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the preaching of the  
gospel always accompanied Luther's teaching of the law  
since it was only in this manner that men, through the  
power of the Holy Spirit, were enabled to accomplish  
the demands of the law. Of this power which accompanied  
the gospel proclamation he wrote:

This sending is accomplished by the preaching  
of the Gospel through which the Holy Spirit  
inspires us with fervor and light, with new  
judgment, new desires, and new motives. This  
happy innovation is not a derivative of rea-  
son or personal development, but solely the  
gift and operation of the Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup>

To these ends Luther preached both the law and the  
gospel: the law in order to confront men with the de-  
mands of God upon their lives and to expose the feeble-  
ness of their efforts to fulfill those commands; the  
gospel in order to proclaim the grace of God in Jesus  
Christ and by the faithful hearing of the same to bring  
the witness of the Holy Spirit into human hearts.

These remarks concerning Luther's personal  
understanding of the relationship between law and gospel  
may fittingly be concluded with an observation, taken

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1. Luther: Works, Holman ed., vol. V, p. 191.
2. Luther: Commentary on Galatians, ed. Theodore Graebner. p. 156.

from another of his sermons, concerning the necessity for a pure proclamation of the gospel:

A minister of Christ is a steward in the mysteries of God....in other words, he should preach the pure gospel, the true faith, that Christ alone is our life, our way, our wisdom, power, glory, salvation; and that all we can accomplish of ourselves is but death, error, foolishness, weakness, shame and condemnation. Whosoever preaches otherwise should be regarded by none as a servant of Christ or a steward of the divine treasurer; he should be avoided as a messenger of the devil.<sup>1</sup>

C. As Represented in the Confessional Writings

When the focus in determining a proper relationship between the law and the gospel is shifted from the theological writings of Martin Luther to the confessional writings of the Lutheran Church, the clear-cut distinctions of the former are reiterated in the latter. Lutheran confessional writings are contained in the Book of Concord, and include: the three Ecumenical Creeds; the Augsburg Confession and its Apology; the Smalkald Articles; the Large and Small Catechisms of Luther; and the Formula of Concord in both its Epitome and Thorough declarations. Dr. Luther himself is responsible only for the catechisms and the Smalkald Articles in their final form. With the exception of the

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1. Luther: "Epistle Sermon for the Third Sunday in Advent," Lenker ed., vol. VII, 23.

Ecumenical Creeds all of the documents in the Book of Concord were the products of concrete historical situations encountered by the German reformers during the course of their struggles with the Roman Church. When interpreted in the light of those historic occasions, these confessions are accepted by Lutherans today as the presentation of a true understanding of Christian theology contained in the Biblical record, and may therefore be designated "evangelical."<sup>1</sup>

It will be impossible in this study to treat every statement contained in these confessions which speaks to the subject of law and gospel. As noted above<sup>2</sup> for Luther the realm of law and gospel was intimately related to the whole matter of justification which ultimately became the heart of the controversy with Rome. For this reason, the confessions which abound with references slanted toward arriving at a proper understanding of justification, quite naturally are filled with implications reflecting the law-gospel relationship. The Apology of the Augsburg Confession and the Formula of Concord treat most systematically of all the writings the specific subject of law and gospel. The most extended passages occur in the latter document.

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1. cf. Webster: Collegiate Dictionary, "...2. Belonging to, contained in, agreeable to, or in the spirit of, the gospel...."
2. cf. supra, p. 8.

1. The place of law.

In the Apology, written by Philip Melanchthon, a definite confirmation of Luther's thesis that Scripture should be divided into two distinct parts is stated thusly:

All Scripture ought to be distributed into these two principal topics, the Law and the promises. For in some places it presents the Law, and in others the promise concerning Christ, namely, either when in the Old Testament it promises that Christ will come, and offers, for His sake, the remission of sins, justification, and life eternal, or when, in the Gospel in the New Testament, Christ Himself, since He has appeared, promises the remission of sins, justification, and life eternal....in this discussion, by Law we designate the Ten Commandments, wherever they are read in the Scriptures.<sup>1</sup>

This article further affirms that human reason naturally understands the law and is attracted to it as a means of justification, but that the law is never satisfied, since reason does nothing except certain works of civil righteousness, and, "...in the mean time, neither fears God, nor truly believes that God cares."<sup>2</sup> After condemning as "false" and "dishonoring Christ" the idea that men do not sin, who without grace, keep externally the commandments of God, the article concludes: "The Law is made for the ungodly. For God wishes those who are carnal to be restrained by civil discipline, and to

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1. Apology of the C.A.: Concordia Triglotta, p. 121.  
2. Ibid., p. 127.

maintain this, He has given laws..."<sup>1</sup>

Article VI of the Formula of Concord catalogues three uses of the law that are compatible with an evangelical point of view. "...first that outward discipline might be maintained against wild, disobedient men...."<sup>2</sup> Luther designated this use of the law as usus politicus.<sup>3</sup> Elert observes that this is in harmony with the Old Testament concept of theocratic government. By "law" here is meant the Decalogue. This use of the law arises out of the fact that, in this life, there are interpersonal relationships resulting from the natural order of creation. These relationships have a claim on us. "They are categories of being....(which) remind us that we are responsible before God for others."<sup>4</sup> It is within the power of man to destroy these relationships by a violation of any one of the laws of the second table of the Decalogue, e.g. the fratricide of Cain destroyed the order of brotherhood, adultery destroys the order matrimony, etc. And so, it is imperative that these relationships be protected by the civil authorities with force if necessary. This use of the law "...safeguards earthly life, earthly existence--no more but also no less."<sup>5</sup>

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1. loc. cit.
2. Formula of Concord, op. cit., p. 805.
3. Werner Elert: The Christian Ethos, p. 69.
4. Ibid., p. 67.
5. Ibid., p. 69.

Consequently, there is little vital connection between this use of the law and the Christian gospel.

The second use of the law according to the Formula of Concord is: "...that men thereby may be led to the knowledge of their sins...."<sup>1</sup> This is the usus paedagogicus of the reformers; the use that leads a man to see himself for what he really is by demanding what in his fallen state is impossible for him. Luther, the Augustinian monk, had tried this way of obedience to the divine law as an avenue to justification and was led to despair. To this law, Paul denies any possibility of reconciling man with God.<sup>2</sup> Because of the wickedness of the flesh it has become the instrument of retribution and demands the death of the sinner.<sup>3</sup> In the depths of his despondency Luther realized this fact and discovered a Christ not to be found in the Pelagianism of the Roman Church. As a direct consequence of this, the whole doctrine of justification by faith was given renewed emphasis in the Lutheran reformation.

But there remains a third use of the law which was the subject of much discussion among the reformers themselves. This is the so-called usus didacticus,

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1. Formula of Concord, op. cit., p. 805.
2. cf. Romans 3:20.
3. cf. Romans 6:23.

which is concerned with the place of the law in the life of the regenerate man. The reformation emphasis on justification by faith alone implied that the new life of faith was free from the demands of the law. The Formula of Concord qualifies this so far as it applies to the justified man while in the flesh (simul iustus et peccator), and, following Melanchthon, speaks of a tertius usus legis.<sup>1</sup> This third use of the law is described here as serving the purpose "...that after they are regenerate and the flesh notwithstanding cleaves to them, they might on this account have a fixed rule according to which they are to regulate and direct their whole life." The purpose of this, of course, was to prevent Christians from falling into fleshly security.<sup>2</sup>

However, the Formula of Concord was most careful in its formulations concerning this third use of the law. It declared that: 1.) the regenerate had been exempted from the "curse and coercion" of the law, but the purpose of their redemption was to enable them to live within the law. 2.) Therefore, the law should be preached to true believers as well as unbelievers.

. . . . .

1. Formula of Concord, loc. cit.
2. It may be noted here that this constituted for Calvin and his followers, as well as for Melanchthon, the primary function of the law, and led, contrary to their intentions, into a legalism which ultimately denied a purely forensic justification and made room for another form of work-righteousness.

3.) Because sanctification is not completed in this life, the law is necessary to subdue the "Old Adam." 4.) And, in distinguishing between works, those works which are "extorted from man by urging the punishment and threatening of God's wrath" are works of the law and not fruits of the spirit. 5.) Instead the fruits of the spirit are the works performed by the spirit dwelling within the regenerate and arising from a spontaneous desire to do the will of God. 6.) Therefore this section concludes:

...the Law is and remains both to the penitent and impenitent, both to the regenerate and unregenerate, one Law, namely the immutable will of God; and the difference, so far as concerns obedience, is alone in man, inasmuch as one who is not yet regenerate does for the Law out of constraint and unwillingly what it requires of him; but the believer, so far as he is regenerate does without constraint and with a willing spirit that which no threatenings of the Law could ever extort from him.<sup>1</sup>

Although written after the death of Luther, this is still quite within the spirit of his understanding of the law. To condense the teachings of the Formula of Concord in its own words: "...the Law is properly a divine doctrine, which teaches what is right and pleasing to God, and reproves everything that is sin and contrary to God's will."<sup>2</sup> Therefore, whatever reproves sin belongs to the preaching of the law.

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1. Formula of Concord, loc. cit.  
2. Formula of Concord, op. cit., p. 801.

2. The place of gospel.

Stated with equal clarity are the teachings of this confession concerning the gospel. After three introductory statements it declares the gospel to be:

4.) such a doctrine as teaches the condemned under the law what to believe, "...namely, that Christ has expiated and made satisfaction for all sins." 5.) But the term "gospel" is used in the Holy Scriptures in both a broad and a restricted sense. 6.) And, if defined by contrasting Christ with Moses (the restricted sense), it is not a preaching of reproof or repentance but "...properly nothing else than a preaching of consolation, and a joyful message." 7.) However, gospel is nonetheless also more broadly defined in Scripture, as the confession declares:

...(because) the veil of Moses hangs before the eyes of all men as long as they hear the bare preaching of the Law, and nothing concerning Christ, and therefore do not learn from the Law to perceive their sins aright, but either become presumptuous hypocrites as the Pharisees, or despair like Judas, Christ takes the Law into His hands, and explains it spiritually. And thus the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all sinners, how great it is; by this means they are directed to the Law, and then first learn from it to know aright their sins....

8.) Yet so long as this message proclaims God's wrath, it is still not properly a gospel message and constitutes a foreign work of Christ whose chief office is "...to preach grace, console, and quicken."<sup>1</sup>

. . . . .

1. Formula of Concord, op. cit., p. 803.

This is clearly the New Testament meaning of gospel. But an even greater problem than the academic distinction between law and gospel is thereby raised. For men cannot by their natural reason comprehend such a gospel.

D. Relationship of Law and Gospel to Justification

Men understand the law by nature. It is written on their hearts as a part of the divine image in which they were created. This is not the case with the gospel. It is only after a man has been brought to the knowledge of his true nature through the law that he can know anything of the gospel. And still, insofar as a man remains a child of sin, he is attracted to the law as a means of offering his own righteousness to God, in return for which he expects justification. The situation is further complicated because of a problem in terminology raised by Melanchthon's use of the word "regenerate" as differentiated from its use in the Formula of Concord.<sup>1</sup> In its restricted sense it means a "person who is reborn of the spirit and liberated from the reign of the law." In this sense the regenerate is no longer under the law; but is under the gospel; and the law no longer applies to him in any form.<sup>2</sup> Melanchthon, fearful lest this liberty be abused and become license, wished to introduce the law again into

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1. cf. Elert, op. cit., p. 298.

2. loc. cit.

the regenerate life; the law, which properly is applied to the "flesh" was to be applied, wrongly, also to the "spirit." Properly speaking, according to the Formula of Concord, the regenerate, as those who walk in the spirit, have no need of the law because they have been made free by the Son of God, "and therefore do freely of themselves what God requires of them without any foreign impulse...."<sup>1</sup> Elert notes: "That is the decision against Melanchthon (and Calvin) who had made it the special task of the law to instruct the just as such."<sup>2</sup> However, the Formula of Concord also recognizes that the "regenerate," while they have been humbled under the law and have experienced the forgiveness of God, have yet not attained perfection while in the flesh. Therefore it teaches that "because of the passions of the flesh" still experienced in this state "they need not only daily instruction and admonition through the law...but frequently its punishments...."<sup>3</sup> Since this is identical with the second use of the law, a third use becomes superfluous.

From this it may be observed, also, that the regenerate Christian treads a perilous path. For what is undertaken as a work of the spirit can become a work

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1. Formula of Concord, op. cit., p. 963.
2. Elert, op. cit., p. 299.
3. loc. cit.

of the law and come under the judgement of the law.<sup>1</sup> The moment a Christian's gaze is shifted from the love of Christ and he views his activity as a personal accomplishment for which he can claim distinction or reward, his work is no longer within the realm of grace, but is in the realm of law, which he has still not kept perfectly and must therefore stand condemned. No one perceived this truth more clearly than St. Paul. In Galatians his spirit is distressed because the Christians there made this fatal mistake. They had been set free from the law by the gospel he had preached; but, in their desire to perform a pious work, they had submitted again to the yoke of slavery. Some of them were receiving circumcision after they had accepted the gospel of Christ. Paul saw this for what it was, a return to the legalism of Judaism and declared: "I testify again to every man who received circumcision that he is bound to keep the whole law."<sup>2</sup>

#### E. Summary

And so, the Christian, until he has arrived at perfection, stands within the dual framework of being both regenerate and sinner; and, therefore, it is necessary, as Luther declared "...that the old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance, be

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1. For an excellent presentation of this insight cf. Regin Prenter, *Spiritus Creator*.
2. Galatians 5:3.

drowned...and, again, a new man daily come forth and arise, who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever."<sup>1</sup> It is furthermore the function of the evangelical pastor by clearly distinguishing in his preaching the dual emphasis of God's word through the commands to convict sinners of their guilt and to impose upon them the necessary restraints, and at the same time through the promises to direct sinners unto the perfect righteousness that may be theirs by faith in Christ. It will be the major concern of this study to determine the manner and the efficaciousness that have characterized fulfillment of that function.

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1. Luther: Book of Concord, p. 551.

CHAPTER II  
ELEMENTS OF LAW AND GOSPEL  
IN CONTEMPORARY LUTHERAN PREACHING

A. Introduction

It is the plan of this chapter to examine in some detail certain representative sermons of Lutheran preachers who have been generally acknowledged by their denomination to be outstanding men of the pulpit. The men having been thus chosen for this portion of the study include: Walter A. Maier, Paul E. Scherer, Edmund A. Steimle, and Martin Niemoller. A fourfold purpose has characterized the development of the material in this section. First, by a theological analysis of the sermons the writer has sought to discern the various elements of law and gospel contained therein. This has admittedly, and quite naturally, constituted the bulk of not only the present chapter but of the entire project. Second, on the basis of the above analysis the writer has sought to discover the manner in which the sermons distinguished (if at all) between these two foci of the Word of God. Third, arising from a discovery of the manner in which the various preachers have maintained the distinction

between law and gospel, the writer has ventured his own conclusions concerning the prominence of this Lutheran doctrine in the contemporary Lutheran pulpit. And fourth, this analytical section has provided the material for the conclusions of the present study.

At the outset the reader is cautioned to remember two significant facts which bear heavily upon the validity of the procedure involved in this chapter.

1.) It would be impossible to present here all of the material encompassed in the pulpit careers of the men under consideration. The writer has necessarily been selective, but he hopes that such selectivity has been guided by the desire to present objective data.

2.) Sermons depend for their total effect upon much more than the words which preachers employ to convey any particular idea. Working from published sources as he has been forced to do the writer is well aware that a significant obstacle has been placed in the path of re-creating the experience of those to whom these messages were first directed. The reader likewise should be cautioned to take cognizance of that fact.

#### B. Selected Sermons of Walter A. Maier

Dr. Walter A. Maier was for the greater part of two decades the radio preacher of the Lutheran Hour, a world-wide program presented by the Lutheran Church--

Missouri Synod. Members of his own denomination knew him as Professor of Old Testament Interpretation and History at the Concordia Theological Seminary in Saint Louis, Missouri. But the sermons he preached on the International Lutheran Hour were heard by an audience of over 600,000,000 persons annually.<sup>1</sup> Nearly all of the sermons heard on these broadcasts have been published.<sup>2</sup> In order to avoid needless repetition, for the purposes of this study, all of the sermons by Dr. Maier included here were selected from the same series of broadcasts and have been published under the title, The Airwaves Proclaim Christ. For the purpose at hand there is no difference between this series and any of Maier's other volumes of sermons.

1. Elements of law.

In Chapter I two different usages of the law were seen to have theological validity. It may be profitable in this discussion of Dr. Maier's preaching to orient the material around these theological perspectives. Therefore, first will be considered those elements of law which would tend to restrain the unregenerate man.

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1. Walter A. Maier: Airwaves Proclaim Christ, jacket.
2. cf. Bibliography.

In a sermon entitled "Wondrous Love that Welcomes All" Maier has these accusing words to describe the general lawlessness which he observes:

Nations devote much of their money, time, and effort to create new means of killing greater numbers. War profiteers, in bloated pride, wade through streams of blood, which their greed helps to swell. Conquerors, as beasts, rape women and destroy children. Husbands and wives laugh at purity. Lieutenants of lust make tainted money by corrupting the morals of youth. The world, stained by savage sins, curses and rejects the all-loving God....where men's cursing and profanity are louder and longer than their praises and prayers to God...<sup>1</sup>

Again in another sermon, "Begin Life Again With Jesus," as a refutation of the argument that men do not need the Word of God to restrain their natural tendencies, the preacher cites the example of an island group isolated from Christian influence which he calls "isles of iniquity" where "mass debauchery, practiced by natives, has made a veritable hell on earth."<sup>2</sup> One additional citation may serve to illustrate Maier's application of law in a general sense to the chaotic conditions of human life. In "Fire! The Whole World on Fire!" he thunders:

All the millions of murders men have committed, their billions of bloody killings in unrighteous wars, their trillions of terrible transgressions,

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1. Ibid., p. 29.
2. Ibid., p. 129.

their quadrillion crimes of lust and vice, rape and ruin, the immeasurable myriad times myriad thoughts, words, and acts of unbelief, blasphemy, profanity, disrespect of parents, disloyalty to husband or wife, falsehood, perjury, and covetous desire-- all these combine to make the holy God wipe out the world. Sinner, when you sneer at the Almighty; when you willfully rush into sin, you are not only ruining yourself, you are bringing the day of doom closer to your family and your fellow men.<sup>1</sup>

Each of the above examples is typical of almost every sermon of Dr. Maier. He minces no words in his strong description of lawlessness and chaos which the world experiences because of the unregenerate condition of its inhabitants. The reader will have observed however that in none of the above examples was a specific commandment of the Decalogue singled out for particular emphasis. In the numerous occurrences of such passages, although Dr. Maier has clearly in mind these specific ordinances of the Ten Commandments as the ground for his pronouncements, the statements themselves are put forth within the context of his exposition of the sermon text.

However, in order to more sharply define the legal element in his preaching, examples may be cited wherein Maier applies the principle of the first use of the law to every commandment of the Decalogue.

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1. Ibid., p. 167.

In an exposition of II Chronicles 16: 7-9 Dr. Maier observes that the difficulties of Judah during the reign of King Asa were in large measure because of idolatry. Noting that Asa had trusted in his own ability to handle the situation (rather than in the ability of his God) and that he had allied himself with "godless Syria" whose pagan population "ridiculed the Most High," Maier affirms that this violation of the first commandment was the reason for Judah's unfortunate military fortunes.<sup>1</sup> And applying this to his own generation, declares: "...we can understand why masses believe that we will win any war without the Lord, as long as we have men, money, production, science, and powerful allies....self-reliance is the surest way to start World War III."<sup>2</sup>

In another sermon Dr. Maier has occasion to deplore the consequences of any violation of the commandment concerning the sanctity of God's name. A class of school children in Yugoslavia are reported to have prayed for cookies first to God, after which prayer they waited unsuccessfully, and then to Tito whose soldiers stationed outside the door immediately appeared in answer to their requests. By such flagrant

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1. Ibid., pp. 5-7.  
2. loc. cit.

violation of the proper use of God's name the preacher remarks that children are led to doubt His very existence or at least His necessity in their lives.<sup>1</sup>

Concerning the commandment on worship in one place Maier exclaims: "Don't say in that too-frequent excuse, 'I can worship God in nature, outside the church, better than I can inside!'"<sup>2</sup> And again in an exposition of II Peter 3: 7-9 he has these words to describe the price by which an unrestrained society purchases release from God's injunction to worship Him:

Do we see the widespread apostasy and false worship predicted as evidence of the world's end? In England every large Protestant denomination decreased in membership during the war. For every adult Briton in church on Sunday thirty-three attend the motion pictures. Throughout our own country...we witness alarming increase of atheism, mushroomlike growths of man-made creeds, backsliding and backbiting among churchgoers..."<sup>3</sup>

In this same sermon which develops Maier's concept of the final destruction of the world, the title of the first section is "Its (i.e. the destruction) Horror Shows God's Punishment for the Ungodly."<sup>4</sup> And numbered here among the ungodly to be so destroyed the reader will find those who unrestrainedly disrespect their parents in violation of God's explicit commandment.

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1. Ibid., p. 142.
2. Ibid., p. 64.
3. Ibid., p. 174.
4. Ibid., pp. 166-177.

The commandment intended to safe-guard human life receives much attention from Dr. Maier especially in the light of world conflict. He urges the restraint of God's law against the wholesale murders of war in these terms:

Though two World Wars have proved cultured men beasts, practicing mass murder in atrocity camps, glorying in the wholesale massacre of civilians, including babies and women, yet leaders of unbelief still repeat: "We don't need to be saved. We are all right as we are. The world is getting better."<sup>1</sup>

And, lest his American audience consider themselves immune from the necessity for such restraint he has pointed out elsewhere:

When the atomic bombs dropped on Japanese cities, a new, but not pleasant, page in the American record began. Our military authorities served notice that their bombs would fall where they pleased. It might be too bad if civilians' houses, orphanages, hospitals, old folks' homes were struck as entire cities were wiped out--the good with the evil, the God-fearing with the godless; but we must kill and kill until our enemies beg for peace...<sup>2</sup>

Likewise, the restraint of this commandment is urged by Maier against those who would legalize the practice of euthanasia in these words: "You need not be a follower of Christ to recognize that mercy murder is altogether wrong; for the very thought...is abhorrent from a purely human point of view."<sup>3</sup>

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1. Ibid., p. 71.
2. Ibid., p. 49.
3. Ibid., p. 23.

Many references could be produced to demonstrate Dr. Maier's clear-cut application of the commandment intended to preserve the sanctity of the marriage bond, perhaps one illustration will suffice. In the sermon "Jesus Christ in Your Home" after having viewed with alarm the growing "divorce orgy" and immorality in this country during the post-war years he proclaims:

The almighty does not recognize hundreds of selfish excuses for which lax laws permit breaking marriage ties....Keep that in mind, you who are planning to discard your life-mate, or you who have actually secured a legal separation from one whom you promised to love and honor all you life! You may try to justify yourself by mentioning leading families and their domestic scandals or by pointing to modern fiction and entertainment which often glorify the violation of nuptial vows; but for your soul's sake turn to the Lord, whom you must finally face, and recognize that according to His clear Word you are guilty of a damnable sin!<sup>1</sup>

Against the crimes of theft Maier also raises the prohibition of God's law. In "God or Gold" he says: "American citizens see waste, fraud, gross dishonesty, graft, corruption, and bribery....," all of which "truly scream to high heaven" in defiance of holy law.<sup>2</sup> Maintaining the necessity for the restraint of that law to be made known, in the same sermon, he cites the 15 billion dollar annual crime bill of America and

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1. Ibid., p. 90.  
2. Ibid., p. 109.

pathetically points to the cashier who when arrested for embezzling \$600,000 smilingly replied: "You're wrong. It was \$750,000."<sup>1</sup>

The commandment against bearing false witness in Maier's preaching receives the least attention of any part of the Decalogue with respect to its restraining influence upon unregenerate society. But even this is not totally lacking. In his more general applications of the first use of the law, perjury is frequently catalogued among other sins to be held in check by Divine decree.<sup>2</sup> It seems however, that in a broader context, Dr. Maier has placed a positive emphasis upon the divine injunction to honesty in his appeal for intellectual honesty on the part of the unbeliever confronted with the truth of the Christian religion. His audience is frequently encouraged to "be wise" or to "open your eyes."<sup>3</sup>

If specific applications of the commandment against false witness are wanting, however, there is in Maier's preaching an abundance of material related to the commandments against avarice and covetousness. The following quotation from "Gold or God" may serve amply to illustrate. Speaking of the fact that many of men's

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1. loc. cit.
2. cf. supra, p. 29.
3. cf. e.g., p. 289.

difficulties and all of their wars have been attributable to violations of these commandments he urges the restraint of law in these terms:

Yet as different--and often as trivial--as these causes of conflict may be...(every one) ultimately has been prompted by the desire for more power, more territory, more commerce, more money. Indeed...(this desire) is history's No. 1 reason for man's present-day inhumanity toward his fellow men, the evil which has wrecked many American homes, disfigured American business, corrupted America's courts, poisoned parts of American political life. Far more fatally avarice and greed are tearing some of you from Heaven's blessings and directing you to hell.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout all of the above examples from Dr. Maier's sermons the reader will have observed both in a general way and in more specific terms the manner by which Maier through his preaching applies the law to the unregenerate life. In this study such application of the Decalogue has been termed the "first use" of the law. However, Maier's sermons do not confine themselves exclusively to this treatment. The second use, to convict men of their sins and to lead them to Christ is equally prominent in his pulpit presentations. According to this treatment of the law, all of the above citations have equal validity for members of the Church and for the admittedly unregenerate world, since it will be remembered that the Christian, in this life,

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1. Ibid., p. 103

is simul iustus et peccator. And it is in this sense that Maier sometimes directs his preaching of the demands of the law specifically toward these members of the Christian community. The following evidence is intended to corroborate this point of view.

In the exposition of II Chronicles 16 cited above,<sup>1</sup> besides applying the restraint of the law to those unregenerate people in the world, Dr. Maier draws instruction for the members of the Church. Having observed King Asa's zeal for the reform of Judah's worship and the loyalty which he professed for God, Maier notes that Asa nonetheless failed in a time of crisis. The preacher explains that Asa's failure was because of his basically idolatrous nature, and then, confronting the audience with God's demand for obedience, Maier questions:

Is not this the same disloyalty many of you show? Your heavenly Father graciously stood by you in every need; yet, when sudden affliction came, you pushed Him aside, preferring earth's support to Heavens, man's counsel to your Creator's.<sup>2</sup>

And again in the same context he continues:

Do you churchgoers use the time which should be devoted to hearing the Savior's Word, bringing sinners to His grace, building our national righteousness, for catering to your

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1. supra, p. 30.
2. Ibid., pp. 4-5.

lusts, listening to blasphemy, serving evil,  
and heaping up our national guilt?<sup>1</sup>

Thus he denounces by the law the sin which separates  
religious people from Christ.

"Christ, Keep on Cleansing our Churches!", a  
Reformation Sunday sermon, exposes to his audience five  
sins which in Dr. Maier's view are most prominent  
within the Church, viz.: 1.) a "pretense of piety" on  
the part of churchly hypocrites; 2.) "sham-believers"  
who offer externally lavish worship; 3.) the "grasping  
commercialized spirit" which is often employed to fi-  
nance the outreach of the Church; 4.) the seeking of  
"money power, political power, organization power"  
which results in a dearth of faith; and, 5.) the "Class-  
consciousness" of some Churches.<sup>2</sup> Concluding this ex-  
posure of sin within the Church, and branding it as  
being contrary to the law of God, the preacher enjoins:

Then behold with sorrow the socially active  
but spiritually idle groups, in which the line  
of separation from the unbelieving world is  
being steadily erased! Those divorced con-  
trary to God's Law are publicly remarried;  
those whose daily conduct is condemned by  
Christ's clear preaching remain members in  
good standing; those who join organizations  
in which the truth of our Savior's redemp-  
tion is contradicted are permitted to  
continue unrebuked. These circles find time  
and dollars for soft music but not for hard

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1. Ibid., p. 7.
2. Ibid., pp. 64-69.

work, for socials but not for self-sacrifice, for recreation but not for repentance, for feasting and playing but not for fasting and praying.<sup>1</sup>

Not alone by proclamation, but likewise by carefully selected analogies and illustrations, Dr. Maier seeks to expose the violations of holy law within the Church. One example may here suffice. In describing the hypocrisy and pretense he has observed in the Church, Maier relates the following:

Sometime ago, the Boston Board of Health discovered that rotten salmon was being sold in the city. Decayed parts had been disguised with red paint, first brushed over the fish and then baked into it. Painted salmon or painted character, which is worse? Do not most men try to disguise their defects by a false veneer, pretend they are saints when in truth they are lost sinners, condemned by Christ's verdict...<sup>2</sup>

One final piece of evidence is offered in this attempt to demonstrate the second use of the law Dr. Maier has evidenced in his preaching. The following paragraph has been selected from "Begin Life Again With Jesus!". Speaking now to Church members he says:

You and I, although we may differ in a thousand respects, have this in common with all men, that "born of the flesh," we too are "flesh." The best of us have "sinned and come short of the glory of God." "All our righteousnesses," our trumped-up virtues and so-called good deeds, in God's sight "are as filthy rags."

. . . . .

1. Ibid., p. 69.  
2. Ibid., p. 134.

In our transgressions we are under this sentence: "The soul that sinneth it shall die." In our rebellion against God envy, lust, selfishness, greed, blasphemy, falsehood, cheating, pride, hatred, control our lives and direct our desires; and just as it is impossible for a stick thrown into a mighty river to stop the rushing torrents, or for a skeleton in a museum to move its bony frame, so none of us by our own strength can lift the evil from our souls and begin the new, better existence.<sup>1</sup>

In each one of the above examples it will have been noted that the appeal of the preacher to his audience was based upon God's law. Whether the relationship of that appeal to the divine decree was specifically indicated by the preacher or whether it was only implied, the reader cannot have failed to be aware that here he was dealing with what God had said to His creatures. Only in the final example above, with its insistence upon the fact of man's incapability to save himself, is there any hint of a righteousness available because of God's activity on behalf of mankind.

## 2. Elements of Gospel.

This activity of God upon behalf of men whereby they may become righteous is centered in God's revelation through the person and work of Jesus Christ. In

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1. Ibid., p. 130.

Chapter I His "chief office" was described as "the gospel" (i.e. the preaching of grace, the offering of consolation, and the granting of life.)<sup>1</sup> If the sermons of Walter A. Maier contain elements of the legal focus in God's Word, these same sermons present with equal clarity the element of gospel.

During the course of a Reformation Sunday sermon Maier has occasion to pose the question, "What is the Gospel?" The answer he provides is characteristic of the gospel's meaning for him. He says:

"What is the Gospel?" you ask....Here it is, in simple words of one syllable which any child can understand although the greatest mind can never begin to explain its mercy: You, each one of you, were lost in your sins; yet God, who is full of grace, loved you and sent His Son to save you, to take your place as He paid the full debt for your sins, to shed His own blood and cleanse you from their guilt, stain, and curse, to give His life on the cross for yours, to die in your place, and rise from the grave, so that you, through faith in Him, God's Son, can have--with no charge, or price--the new life in heaven, which will have no end.<sup>2</sup>

Here Dr. Maier has not only kept his promise to use words of one syllable, he has presented in summary fashion the heart of the gospel. It will be admitted that certain of the terms employed, viz., "paid the full debt" would tend to emphasize a particular theory

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1. supra., p. 20.
2. Ibid., pp. 77-78.

of the atonement which all Christian theologians would not accord such central significance.<sup>1</sup> However, one cannot fail to recognize here the essential harmony between this statement and the definition of "gospel" in Chapter I.

Nor, does Dr. Maier always speak of the gospel in so summary a fashion. In each of his sermons certain significant areas of the gospel message receive special emphasis. To facilitate the presentation of these elements of gospel, although some overlapping is unavoidable, the material is here organized around those significant terms of the Formula of Concord; grace, consolation, and life.

Emphasizing particularly the graciousness of God in providing so great a salvation, Maier has this in "Wondrous Love That Welcomes All":

You feel that your sins are too many, too injurious to your neighbor, too depraved and vicious, to let you even crawl to Christ. You hear preachers proclaim salvation by character, as though heaven were open only to the best. You know that some churches contradict God's guarantee, "He died for all," by maintaining that the Savior sacrificed Himself only for a few select believers; you

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1. In this regard it is fitting to remark that in the author's view this theory of the atonement is characteristic of Maier's theology. Throughout all of his sermons there is much emphasis upon the penalty which Christ paid to God's justice in process of procuring man's salvation.

begin to wonder whether you have a chance to be saved....Take God at His Word! For you, the changeless, errorless Teacher of truth promised, "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out!"<sup>1</sup>

Again referring to this same grace, in "Might or Mercy?" he says:

This is the message of mercy for you. Whether you have ever heard it before or not, the Holy Spirit now gives me the privilege of telling each of you: Jesus Christ was crucified for you, not simply as a Martyr, not merely as an Example of self-sacrifice, not only as a Pattern of non-resistance, but as your divine Redeemer.... because He loved you more than His own life, He gladly gave Himself...<sup>2</sup>

One further example of how Dr. Maier brings out the graciousness of a loving God as an element of the gospel may be noted in "Fire! The Whole World on Fire." Having proclaimed the fact of a judgment at the end of time, and having described the consequences of that judgment for the sinner, Maier explains God's grace in these terms:

Because Christ cherishes us more than all the world and its treasures, He postpones executing His Judgments to give us another chance, and another, and still another, in His almost endless mercy. He delayed with Israel when century after century His people forsook Him and came back to Him only when their enemies bled them white in brutal wars. He is delaying now with our own beloved country, blessed as no other nation, yet filled with unbelieving,

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1. Ibid., pp. 35-36.
2. Ibid., p. 53.

ungrateful, ungodly multitudes. He has delayed repeatedly with many of you....Why? To give you more time to repent...<sup>1</sup>

The reader cannot have failed to observe that in each of these three examples, regardless of the context from which they were selected, in the preaching of Dr. Maier nothing is allowed to obscure the love of God which resulted in Christ's activity upon man's behalf. Whether the proclamation of that truth arises from the preacher's view of man's sinfulness or merely from the announcement of certain historical facts, the same element of grace in the gospel is equally prominent.

When attention is shifted to the aspect of consolation as it appears in the gospel, examples of this emphasis are similarly available. As he describes the conditions in Judah at the time of King Jehoshaphat by which war with Syria was to be avoided, one would expect the focus to be upon an obedient response to God's demands. But even here as Maier grapples with the question, "Must We Fight World War III," is to be found the consolation of the gospel. For the contrite life of faith, while it may originate in obedience, belongs to the gospel. Therefore it is really the gospel Maier preaches when he says: "A contrite land humbled to its knees before the Ruler of the universe has more promise

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1. Ibid., p. 179.

of peace in its repentant faith than in a thousand treaties which leave no room for the Savior."<sup>1</sup> More pointedly, the consolation of the gospel is brought out in its specifically New Testament context in which the individual personally becomes the recipient of Christ's blessings. "Jesus Christ in Your Home" offers this characteristic statement:

Troubled and tortured by your transgressions, do you cry out: "I would give everything I have...(to undo past sins)." See Him in the days of His earthly ministry receiving and welcoming the worst sinners, and take comfort in the fact that He, the self-giving Son of God, loves you with heavenly devotion despite your repeated surrender to evil.<sup>2</sup>

Yet a third aspect of the gospel remains for consideration here, life in Christ. In the preaching of Dr. Maier, two central ideas seem to regulate the proclamation of this gospel truth, and the balance between the distribution of these ideas appears to be almost equal. Of course one side of the life in Christ which men receive through the gospel is eschatological in nature, eternal life in the presence of God. Respecting this, Maier says:

While Jehoshaphat foresaw the Messiah only dimly, you can look back to the fulfillment of prophecy and clearly behold Christ.... your Lord: the God of love, who sought you ages before you knew Him; the God of grace,

. . . . .

1. Ibid., p. 14.
2. Ibid., p. 91.

who in His measureless compassion gave His own holy, sinless Self...the God of salvation, who asks only that you believe Him to be assured of a prepared place in heaven; the God of life, whose rising from the grave is the seal of your resurrection.<sup>1</sup>

Quite naturally, the other side of the life in Christ received through the gospel is the new life which the believer is called upon to live here and now in the presence of his old enemies. It is this element of the gospel which provides the basis for Christian ethics. Few, if any, of Maier's sermons neglect to present this emphasis. However, it is always seen in relation to justification never as the means, only as the result of a change in status. For example, in a sermon based upon Christ's nocturnal conversation with the Pharisee, Nicodemus, Dr. Maier affirms that being "born of the Spirit" results in a "new will" and a "newness of life"; he then declares:

"Born of the Spirit," you have the Almighty's promise fulfilled, "A new heart also will I give you." The longing for revenge and the desire for fleshly lusts, the gloating over impurity and vileness, the avarice and envy which wreck our happiness and help destroy our world will be checked; and in their place will come sympathy, compassion, mercy, love for your fellow men. All your emotions, your whole outlook on life are changed; you say with the Apostle, "Behold, all things are become new."<sup>2</sup>

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1. Ibid., p. 16.
2. Ibid., pp. 137-138.

Having presented these excerpts from Dr. Maier's sermons which were intended to illustrate the various elements of law and gospel which have characterized his preaching, it remains to comment upon the relationship of these elements.

3. Relationship of law and gospel.

Dr. Maier's sermons assuredly are characterized by both of the essential foci within the Word of God. Certain of the theological relationships between law and gospel will already have been noted in the illustrative materials presented above from his preaching. Perhaps his own description of the proper relationship between these two elements of law and gospel will be helpful. Dr. Maier conceives of the Church of Jesus Christ as "the dwelling place of the Almighty....where His Word is constantly uppermost."<sup>1</sup> In the light of this fact he maintains:

Therefore every church should resound, first, with the Lord's holy Law. The coaxing, coddling, cunning sermon which sidesteps sin and the horrors of hell must stop....Then--thank God!--comes the promise of pardon and peace in Jesus which must be proclaimed as never before. If the churches are to be houses of God, in His name let them send forth the saving message of Christ's Cross with all the fervor they can muster!<sup>2</sup>

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1. Ibid., p. 76.  
2. loc. cit.

Taking his cue from this theology, Dr. Maier has developed a somewhat unique homiletic technique for the presentation of his messages. The reader is reminded that his preaching is done through the medium of the radio. Therefore, the entire sermon is pointed in the direction of those admittedly outside the pale of Christianity. Because of this, each sermon is carefully divided into two sections; the first section expounds law and the second section is devoted primarily to a presentation of the gospel. Further, in the context of these sermons the second use of the law predominates; wherever the first use is applied it serves a secondary function in relation to the whole discourse.

Illustrative of this technique is the sermon, "Christ, Open Our Eyes!"<sup>1</sup> The two sections are subtitled: 1.) "Too Many are Blinded by Unbelief"; and 2.) "Thy Light Can Make Us See." The sermon itself is an exposition of II Corinthians 4: 4-5. In the first (legal) section these following are treated as false gods which are worshipped by the world contrary to the clear command of God Almighty: gold, lust, power, and human reason. Each of these false gods is examined carefully in its relation to the Holy God's demand for absolute allegiance from men. The second (gospel)

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1. Ibid., pp. 279 ff.

section then presents the "Glorious Gospel of Christ" in terms of: Jesus Christ the Lord, Jesus Christ the redeemer, Jesus Christ the consolation of believers, and Jesus Christ the illumination necessary for new life.

Similarly, the sermon, "Wondrous Love That Welcomes All,"<sup>1</sup> is typical of this same homiletic technique by which Maier develops the intimate relationship between law and gospel. Section one, "It Permits Sinners To Come To The Savior," characterizes the sinful condition of men and proclaims their condemnation according to the law. Section two, "It Promises That No One Who Comes Will Be Rejected," declares that no one, regardless of his past life, is excluded from the promises of Christ through faith in Him.

Finally, the relationship of law and gospel in Maier's preaching may be said to arise naturally from his exposition of a Scripture text. Every sermon has for its text at least one complete verse of a Biblical book; many have longer texts. But never does Maier preach on the basis of an isolated phrase or clause taken out of context in the manner generally referred to as "topical" preaching. Yet, whether the text is an Old Testament passage as is the case with "Might or Mercy" based upon II Kings 6: 21-23,<sup>2</sup> or a New

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1. Ibid., pp. 22 ff.
2. Ibid., pp. 1 ff.

Testament passage such as "Christ Keep On Cleansing Our Churches" based upon Matthew 21: 12-14,<sup>1</sup> both elements of the Word, law and gospel, are equally prominent thereby supporting Luther's doctrine of the proper division of the Word.

C. Selected Sermons of Paul E. Scherer

When God Hides and Facts that Undergird Life are the two most prominent volumes of sermons produced by Paul E. Scherer. These were published during his tenure as pastor of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Manhattan. For more than the past decade Dr. Scherer has been associated with the faculty of Union Theological Seminary as the Professor of Homiletics. Since assuming that position, his published writings have tended to be of a philosophical and theological nature instead of sermonic in character. Therefore, in this section of the study the author has been dependent upon sources which are not, strictly speaking, contemporary. Since their publication during the 1930's, our world has experienced rapid and manifold changes. Nonetheless, both volumes did appear within the lifetime of this writer; and, since the foci of law and gospel are being considered in relation to Reformation theology,

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1. Ibid., pp. 60 ff.

perhaps the reader will not become offended by the designation of "contemporary" which has been applied to these sermons.

By comparison, the preaching of Paul Scherer is quite a different kind of sermonizing from that of Dr. Maier. This will become immediately obvious from the examples presented. Unlike Maier, Scherer seldom relates explicitly the elements of law to specific commandments of the Decalogue. This does not mean that such elements of law are entirely wanting in his sermons.

1. Elements of law.

In the sermon, "God's Challenge to Man,"<sup>1</sup> Dr. Scherer has the following descriptive section:

...there are always the people who don't seem conscious of any special perplexities in the world around them. They are aware of their own all right, and quite vocally aware. They speak out loudly enough when any shoe pinches them. But the condition of the poor, and the chaotic inequities of modern society, and the jealousy of nations, and the tragic misery of millions of disadvantaged lives--these things surely are no responsibility of theirs.<sup>2</sup>

Here is no finger-pointed indictment of such people for having violated the holy commandments of God. But one

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1. Paul Scherer: Facts That Undergird Life, pp. 18-23.
2. Ibid., pp. 18-19.

cannot fail to discern in this characterization the preacher's condemnation of an unregenerate element within society, a class of persons who need to feel the pressure of the law against their ungodliness.

Implying the validity of legal restraint against unrighteousness, this time from a more positive approach, in "The Peril and The Promise of the Unusual" Dr. Scherer observes:

There is a useful and necessary tendency in human nature that makes for some kind of conformity. We couldn't live together without it....We are bound to have certain standards in thinking and feeling and practice, or we never should get by without anarchy!<sup>1</sup>

Such "certain standards" clearly imply the usus politicus of divine law.

But perhaps the clearest allusion to the first use of the law in Scherer's preaching is to be found in "Hath God Indeed Said?"<sup>2</sup> In this sermon, as the title suggests, the preacher is pleased to answer that question by which the serpent beguiled Eve in Eden. He observes that: "...there is no broader hint made in our day than this: that the ideas of right and wrong which we happen to cherish are not God-given at all...."<sup>3</sup>

Expanding upon this idea Scherer declares:

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1. Ibid., p. 37.
2. Ibid., pp. 81-87.
3. Ibid., p. 81.

If tomorrow we should find that over night covetousness, or theft, or adultery had somehow lost their disintegrating effect on human personality, we'd change our statute-books in a jiffy! And no superstitious reverence for God...would stand in our way!...Unfortunately there seems to be something called sin in the world, and it's far more than wrong-doing.... And the sense of guilt that goes with it is not just the sense of having offended against the welfare of the race. At the very heart and core of it is the sense of having offended against One in whose face is everlasting holiness.<sup>1</sup>

By such sarcasm Scherer exposes, as contrary to the facts of human life, any "modernist" notions about sin. The idea behind his condemnation of such notions seems little different than the one expressed by St. Paul in Romans 1: 19-21.

When the sermons of Dr. Scherer are considered with a view to illustrating the second use of the law, i.e., to convict men of sin and to lead them to Christ, this pedagogic element is scarcely more explicit than the politic aspect of law. He speaks of the necessity for men to see themselves as they really are in the light of God's Word. In "Jesus Christ in a World of Cults"<sup>2</sup> he exposes as inadequate the pictures of mankind presented by those overworked philosophical concepts, goodness, truth, and beauty. The "cult of the beautiful" he particularly attacks. Having related how

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1. loc. cit.

2. Scherer: When God Hides, pp. 54-66.

Catherine II of Russia was deceived by her officials concerning the living conditions among her subjects, Scherer observes:

We are all like that...erecting lovely asylums for the insane and beautiful hospitals for the crippled, and then thinking ourselves much better off than India, for instance, who leaves hers on the streets where folk can see and pity them! We prefer...false fronts....And so we whitewash war with lies that often take the form of parades....Why don't they let the shell-shocked march sometime, and the maimed, and the widows....And we whitewash economic disaster...and international relations....<sup>1</sup>

instead of properly evaluating such conditions on the basis of God's Word which declares these conditions to be morally wrong.

Frequently this concern for accurate self-analysis is expressed in the contrast between the "old man" and the "new." In these characterizations of the old man, may be seen most clearly Scherer's application of the second use of the law. "On Living With Yourself," a homiletic treatment of the parable of the prodigal, explains that there is a good bit of this "Mr. Hyde--Dr. Jekyll" in everyone.<sup>2</sup> Every man, when he comes to himself like the prodigal did must feel unworthy; and so, Scherer says:

Not worthy....It's the way you're bound to feel, if you have anything in you at all,

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1. Ibid., p. 59.

2. Scherer: Facts That Undergird Life, p. 68.

when suddenly you come up with God; and then have to turn and face your own past, which has come sneaking into the room with you, and stands with its back against the door!....And folk try to run away from it in their cars, or to the tune of popping corks and clinking glasses; others jump into ill-considered marriage, or let themselves turn acid, and bite at life vengefully.<sup>1</sup>

With such descriptive language he characterizes the "old man" in the light of law. In yet another place, Dr. Scherer speaks of this old man as "the first challenge" which God must break down or "get around somehow" in order to confront men with His essential character.<sup>2</sup>

God's demand for absolute loyalty from his creatures is the one commandment of the Decalogue which receives any appreciable emphasis specifically as law, at Scherer's hand. This concern he expresses in such terms as:

Here is nearly the sum total of modern life: Business, and Science, and the State. Say what you please, here are the average citizen's loyalties. Unless he stands himself sturdily in their face they become his ultimate gods, on whose altars he kindles the tiny flame of his daily sacrifice.<sup>3</sup>

And, even here, the broader context of the sermon emphasizes not the legalistic demands of God, but the personal fellowship of a man with his God whereby the

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1. loc. cit.
2. Ibid., p. 25.
3. Ibid., p. 48.

man may become a "man plus" instead of one whose failure to take God into account has reduced him to the status of a "man minus."<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps the strongest expressions of the element of law in Scherer's sermons are to be found in his descriptions of the ineffectiveness of law for the justification of sinners. He is constantly on the alert to expose the deficiencies inherent in anything apart from the Christian gospel for securing salvation. Typical are these remarks concerning the futility of man's hope in science for ultimate deliverance:

I heard one of our multitudinous news-commentators talking the other day about the poor chap who was brought back recently from the Orient in the iron lung; and he closed his announcement with this brave assertion: "So does Science step into our world bringing its message of hope." Whereupon I suppose everybody leaned back and felt better! ...Science doesn't bother much with motives, and unless there's something in this world that will, Science too lies under threat of death!....For no other reason than this: that men have such a stubborn fondness for running off after some poorer counsel than God's.<sup>2</sup>

Again in "The Third Mile," as he commends people who are willing to commit their lives to a prescribed code of conduct without ever deviating from its narrow path, Scherer says: "Grimness like that will always wear its

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1. Ibid., pp. 45-50.
2. Ibid., pp. 84-85.

medals somewhere, and have its flags, and hear the shouting; but it is not the gospel....It is not enough."<sup>1</sup> Or yet again, in "On Creative Living," he recollects having been approached by a group of social, financial, and civic leaders who were seeking support for a campaign to promote Christianity through advertising media.<sup>2</sup> After describing the content of the proposed campaign Scherer concludes:

It had come to this: Christianity, as it was put to me very frankly, was to be hawked about to help maintain an order that may conceivably need changing; it was to be promoted partly because of its economic value as a kind of burglar protection....<sup>3</sup>

Here plainly the moral values inherent within the Christian religion were to be inculcated into people merely for utilitarian purposes. Scherer explains that such an incident needs to be told because "It's just one more illustration" of the "fundamentally selfish and thoughtless" way in which the world looks about for redemption.

Finally, this selection from "Man's Challenge to God" which illustrates most plainly Scherer's own regard for the law and the manner in which he preaches that law, will conclude the presentation of this element.

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1. Ibid., p. 96.
2. Ibid., p. 106.
3. loc. cit.

Again it will be observed that his emphasis is upon the ineffectiveness of law to justify sinners. He says:

...everything we do, which we believe to be in accordance with God's will, can become a barrier to keep our souls from him: the money we give, the service we render, the kindness we show....You can hold up your poor attempts at being good, the zeal you show for righteousness and the Kingdom of God, your growing passion for economic justice and a thirty-hour week--you can hold it all up in front of your conscience while you sneak away...from the... reality of God!<sup>1</sup>

Law for Scherer, serves little place in life. One cannot escape the suspicion that the preacher feels it has actually only frustrated the advance of the gospel.

## 2. Elements of gospel.

Of unquestionably greater prominence than the element of law in the preaching of Dr. Scherer is this element of gospel. As was the case in presenting the gospel focus of Walter A. Maier, the material here has been organized about the ideas of grace, consolation, and life which are inherent in the gospel itself.

By way of pointing up the extremities into which the grace of God pursues His lost children, Scherer affirms:

I think it's a good thing for us that we can count on God's doing it. He'll be unusual.

. . . . .

1. Ibid., p. 28.

He won't strike an average anywhere, and offer his pardon and himself only to the soul that's up on John's level, for instance, or Matthew's, or down here on the level of Judas. He'll get out of bounds and meet you on any level with his patience and his love, like that father Jesus told of, standing there at the gate with his arms around a tramp, making motions to the servants about a robe and a ring and shoes for those weary feet! He won't be moderate ever!<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps the first sentence of this section is open to the charge that it could lead sinners to presume upon the grace of God. However, nothing could be farther removed from the context. "The Peril and the Promise of the Unusual" repeatedly emphasizes the necessity of faith's arising, like that of the prodigal, from a genuine appraisal of one's own circumstances in life.<sup>2</sup> And, as if to underscore the fact that men dare never lose sight of His divine holiness in the light of that seeking love, Scherer states elsewhere: "He (God) was confident we need not leave our awe behind us and all our humility just because He came among us once so simply, without any islands or any stars on his mind, but only Peter and Mary and you and me."<sup>3</sup> Likewise, lest some receive the erroneous impression that, because of His grace which comes to a man at any level, everyone is to be on the same plane in God's kingdom,

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1. Ibid., p. 41.
2. Ibid., pp. 36-41.
3. Scherer: When God Hides, p. 40.

Scherer maintains:

Jesus of Nazareth had nothing to do with building that kind of world; he lost his life in it! He was not the champion of the under dog who wanted to get on top. He was the champion of human personality wherever it happened to be, which is an amazingly different thing....Artificial distinctions were nothing to him....Genuine distinctions ...were everything. His whole kingdom was an aristocracy...of spiritual stature! There were lordships and degrees of nobility. "Thou hast been faithful over a little, I will make thee ruler over much."<sup>1</sup>

Grace does not mean equality for him.

Dr. Scherer has the notion too that grace in the gospel must be regarded in terms of a reciprocating love between God and man. Speaking to the side of this relationship most frequently emphasized, the love of God for men, he is moved to view the mystery of the cross as the embodiment of love. He declares:

The mystery of it is that two thousand years ago one Man did say something by dying; and there's still nothing else to be said! The night before, in Gethsemane, he trembled; and it wasn't at death....He was no coward ....It isn't human weakness you stumble on in prayer he prayed, Father, if it be thy will let this cup pass from me; and in the sweat that was like great drops of blood ....it's the tortured knowledge of God standing on the brink of its own appalling leap to get under the farthest estate to which any soul can fall!<sup>2</sup>

Emphasizing the love of God in Christ again, Scherer

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1. Ibid., p. 48.
2. Scherer: Facts That Undergird Life, pp. 171-172.

explains it was only on account of such love that the incarnation could become a reality; he says:

He (Christ) went with the promise of God's favor and God's power out where the ruins were, and there was no loyalty, and there was no obedience, and there was only a little love left, struggling up through the crevices of a hundred broken commandments; and to that little love he gave himself, bearing its guilt and its grief, asking to be taken in, and saying that nothing was impossible for him.<sup>1</sup>

But there is also in Scherer's presentation of God's grace the idea that man's love for God complements His own divine love. This is manifest by the manner in which man's love for Christ finds expression. In his sermon, "The Third Mile", Dr. Scherer poses the question, "What was there in the life of St. Paul which enabled him to 'sing doxologies at every turn the road takes' and thereby become a blessing to multitudes?"<sup>2</sup>

In answer to this question he submits the following:

If you ask what it is that is holding him so, I think he will tell you. It is love, and there is a far-away look in his eyes: his love for a man who lived so cleanly, spoke so gently, died so gladly; and that man's love for him! You see, Jesus was an hourly reality to Paul....<sup>3</sup>

Because St. Paul reciprocated God's love in his life, divine grace was extended beyond one soul into many hearts.

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1. Scherer: When God Hides, p. 43.
2. Scherer; Facts That Undergird Life, pp. 96-98.
3. Ibid., p. 97.

Consolation, another facet of the gospel message, is also proclaimed in the Scherer pulpit.

Responding to the myriad queries, "Why should I care what happens to me?" this preacher maintains that there can be only one legitimate answer. That answer lies in the realization thus phrased: "...that since Christ there is more surely than ever something in the world that keeps taking off its hat in your presence...."<sup>1</sup>

Or again, as Dr. Scherer emphasizes the danger of a too pessimistic outlook upon the human situation, he says:

The time Elijah ran off and hid in a cave-- you remember how he complained that he was the only one left who had not bowed the knee to Baal?...The prophet was out in his estimate by some 6999! There are a number of things about your condition...that are quite encouraging. One of them is that God's in it with you....Keeping pigs is bad enough; but it isn't the whole story when Christ is telling it! And the liabilities...aren't going to have it all their own way! There is something here besides swine, and a dirty renegade; there is a human soul, with its incalculable powers of recovery, and a Father, and somewhere yonder a home!<sup>2</sup>

However, consolation, in the gospel sense, does not leave off with man's passive reception of a new dignity according to Scherer. There are also victories of faith to be won because of the confidence which the gospel imparts. This is plainly the case when he says in

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1. Ibid., p. 50
2. Ibid., p. 59

"Strength Made Perfect in Weakness":

...Christ, with the world still on his heart, isn't asking of us strength....Since the time when Israel sent out her spies from the wilderness, the call never has been for giants who could spread themselves around through the Promised Land with their thumbs in their armholes! But for a people yonder...bewildered, in their own sight as grasshoppers, if only they will lift up the hands of faith without fear and go in to possess it!<sup>1</sup>

In order to receive consolation through the gospel Scherer thus maintains the necessity for activity on man's part.

Most prominent of the three facets of the gospel in Dr. Scherer's preaching is his repeated emphasis upon life in Christ. And here too, the emphasis is distinctly one-sided. The sanctified life in which the regenerate share here and now receives far more attention than their prospects for eternal life. The closest Scherer ventures during the course of a typical sermon into this concept of eternal life is such a statement as the following from "The Mysteries of the Cross":

Calvary just doesn't make sense until you come to call it a victory! You can begin to piece it together then....(Christ) wasn't losing anything that day, not even his life: he was winning something--and something that men have gone away with in their hearts ever since....<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps his reticence to speak about eternal life is

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1. Ibid., p. 141.
2. Ibid., p. 173.

best explained by Scherer himself when he offers this statement:

"Knowing that he was come from God and went to God." Will you let that too be true for lesser lives? I have fallen out of love with all our curious questioning about the form and circumstance of that life which is to come. Most modern disbelief owes its origin to some attempt at picturing the modes and conditions of existence on the other side of death.<sup>1</sup>

He continues to explain that, by the very nature of human experience, any knowledge of eternal life is as yet unintelligible. The grounds for Scherer's personal belief in eternal life are: his faith in God, his belief in "the value of his neighbors life," his belief in "the preciousness of his own best moments," and the existence in the universe of a "dependable Factor" revealed as "my Father in Jesus Christ."<sup>2</sup>

Happily, however, Dr. Scherer does have much to say in almost every sermon about the sanctified life which the new man is called to live in Christ. "Creativity" and "freedom" are key terms in these sections of his messages. Emphasizing the idea of creativity on the basis of Christ's words: "He that loseth his life

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1. Scherer: When God Hides, p. 27.
2. loc. cit.--One cannot surpress the feeling that it is truly unfortunate so vital a part of the Christian gospel has been thus obscured in the sermons of a man whose reputation as a proclaimer of the gospel stands virtually unquestioned.

for my sake will find it," Scherer says:

There's no dearth of possibilities. It may be you can sink that self of yours so deep in someone else...that you can forget it into a kind of splendor, and men coming to look for you will find it hidden away like some cleansing, healing memory in a score of other lives --as one finds Boswell in Johnson, or Elizabeth Barrett in Robert Browning. Or perhaps you can sink it deep in one of God's great plans for the future, the justice he's trying to set up among men, the poverty and dishonesty and crime he's trying to wipe out, the peace he's trying to bring on earth....You may keep tinkering and looking all you please; but you'll never find another road into the undiscovered country of your own soul!<sup>1</sup>

This same sermon continues to describe the freedom which must accompany creative devotion. Such a good life as the Christian seeks to live does not consist of restraint, following rules, obedience, loyalty, or "even the daily imitation of Christ" according to Scherer. Instead he says: "...the ultimate secret of the good life is in ...the freedom of a high and unbridled devotion."<sup>2</sup> Continuing to speak in the same vein, and perhaps explaining somewhat the brashness of that last statement, Dr. Scherer notes that in the past few years much has been heard about how "out of date" Christian morality has become, especially in the light of the historical background which produced the Sermon

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1. Scherer: Facts That Undergird Life, pp. 91-92.
2. loc. cit.

on the Mount and the Decalogue. He then proclaims:

The trouble with such careless statements is the failure of those who make them to realize that all morality which is purely traditional is always out of date! Christian conduct, when it becomes Christ-like, is creative.... That's the centre and heart of the gospel: Christ, and the harmony which he and he alone can bring about between our lives here and the loving, eternal, creative will of God!<sup>1</sup>

In his somewhat less radical treatments of the Christian life Scherer seems almost willing to allow external guideposts for man's direction. He develops the idea that the "second mile" was "just a starter."<sup>2</sup> He declares: "The cross...was Christ's last bid...for the whole man--not the outside only, where we do justly, but the inside too, where we love mercy and walk humbly!"<sup>3</sup> But he seems to have an inexhaustible well of words from which to draw forth the "creative-freedom" concept upon which note this section concludes. The illustration is from "On Living With Yourself." Following his description of Jacob's wrestling experience and the blessing which the patriarch obtained, the preacher says:

And that's precisely the service which Jesus offers to render every living human soul.... there's something in his face which it isn't possible for a man to disbelieve. Until Paul begins to talk of an old self that's crucified with Christ, and dashing the tears of

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1. Ibid., p. 108.
2. Ibid., p. 95.
3. Ibid., p. 28.

bitter recollection from his eyes, moves through life with the hilarity of a triumphant crusade. Luther cries out at a figure nailed fast and dying: "Thief, murderer, adulterer--my sins in thy body on the tree!" Down through the centuries comes this line of freed men into the kingdom of God, and at the portal of that kingdom their Statue of Liberty is a cross! It's the eternal symbol of a dead past that's dead, and a future that's in the creative hands of this carpenter and builder of souls!<sup>1</sup>

In his preaching these characteristics of the gospel message nearly always predominate.

### 3. Relationship of law and gospel.

Unlike Dr. Maier, Paul Scherer has provided in his sermons no explicit statement of his regard for the doctrine of law and gospel. He has only defined what constitutes in his view the "centre and heart" of the gospel.<sup>2</sup> But by implication he has left mute testimony to the place which for the purpose of preaching he accords this doctrine. Before venturing to evaluate that testimony perhaps, in addition to the theological analysis of law and gospel in Scherer's preaching, some observations of a more general character are in order. Two facts especially come to mind.

First, these sermons were preached to the congregation of the Lutheran Church of the Holy Trinity

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1. Ibid., p. 70.

2. supra, p. 65.

near Central Park west. This congregation has been established for some years and is not without the reputation of being sophisticated in the truest sense of that word. Because of these circumstances, that the sermons were preached to church members who are thereby presumedly in process of sanctification, and that the sermons were preached to a somewhat worldly-wise congregation, it may be possible that Dr. Scherer's strong emphasis upon the sanctified life is explained. His sometimes almost philosophical pulpit style may have been dictated by the social and intellectual climate of his congregation. In this manner, by such preaching he may well have been endeavoring to meet the needs of his flock as a true shepherd.

A second fact which must be taken into account is more directly related to Dr. Scherer's homiletic technique. There are no sermons of an "expository" character in his published works. Almost every sermon is fashioned upon the idea behind a scriptural clause or single sentence, e.g., "Then said the Jews unto him..."<sup>1</sup> or, "Blessed is he, whosoever is not offended in me."<sup>2</sup> This does not mean that Dr. Scherer fails to interpret the scriptural context of

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1. Ibid., pp. 24 ff.
2. Scherer: When God Hides, pp. 37 ff.

the passage however. Recognizing the first of these examples as a challenge to Christ's authority, the sermon which proceeds from this text describes certain challenges with which people confront God today and then shows how God takes up these challenges in the same way that Christ, so long ago, took up His cross. But in spite of the reverence with which he handles Scripture, it seems to this writer that, by the very nature of the texts he selects, Dr. Scherer virtually precludes any serious law-gospel consideration of his subject. It is hardly possible on the basis of such an abbreviated text to present the broader scriptural context to the congregation. Without this type of contextual background it becomes impossible to detect the two-fold foci of the Word. For, as has already been observed, the character of a word or an act might seem to indicate one facet of this polarity while the motivation for that word or act would clearly place it within the realm of the other.<sup>1</sup>

In the main, the relationship between law and gospel in Paul Scherer's preaching is quite one-sided. There is far more of the gospel element to be discerned in his published sermons. Further, where elements of law are observable, as this analysis has

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1. cf. supra, pp. 22-23.

shown, they are seldom explicitly related to the specific injunctions of the Decalogue. The most prominent treatment of the legal focus in the Word of God which these sermons present is in their portrayal of the utter impotence of law as a means for effecting salvation.

Even the element of gospel receives a somewhat out-of-balance presentation from Dr. Scherer. While he says scarcely anything at all about eternal life in his sermons, almost every discourse contains an abundance of material related to the new life of the believer in this world. This idea is characterized by a presentation which becomes at times metaphysical, especially when the preacher speaks in terms of "creativity" and "freedom."

#### D. Selected Sermons of Edmund A. Steimle

Dr. Edmund A. Steimle is currently the Hagan Professor of Practical Theology at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. Prior to the acceptance of this post in 1952 he had served pastorates in Jersey City, New Jersey and Cambridge, Massachusetts. Only since 1955, following his debut on the National Broadcasting Company's "National Radio Pulpit," has Dr. Steimle's reputation as a communicator of the gospel been established. And so, of the preachers selected

for this study, he has the most recently gained widespread recognition for his preaching ability. One volume of his radio sermons has been published. The National Council of the Churches of Christ through its Broadcasting and Film Commission and the United Lutheran Church through its Department of Press, Radio, and Television have provided additional materials to make this section of the study possible.

1. Elements of law.

Surely Dr. Steimle is not reluctant to preach the law in order that the excesses of unregenerate men may be restrained. In "Prayer's Lost Dimension" he finds occasion to deplore the "easy-going" familiarity with God of "those outside the churches." Contrasting with this attitude the wonder and awe which should properly characterize the relationship of all men to their Creator, he concludes:

And so they sing--and we sing along with them --their sentimental ballads about the man upstairs and "I believe" and speak blandly and comfortably about the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. And we handle without thought the coins and lick the stamps on which is printed the name of God--a name once held in such reverence and awe by the ancient Jews that they would not even dare to let it pass their lips.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Edmund Steimle: "Prayer's Lost Dimension," April 13, 1958.

With these, and similar words, he urges upon the world the fear of a holy God who demands loyalty and obedience from men.

However, the first use of the law is more precisely to be seen in those sermonic warnings against flagrant immorality both as it is practiced by nations and by individuals. To cite only one example of the former, Dr. Steimle declares that it is impossible for the Western world to ignore the moral consequences of scientific research. In "The Reluctant Prophet" he says:

You only have to look back a few decades.... Scientists were going merrily about their research, probing into the secrets of electronics and energy, soberly declaring that their responsibility was limited only to research and discovery, not to the moral consequences of...their discoveries.... Nothing must interfere with the scientific conscience in its search for "truth" ....So it went in our world until a cloud ...appeared over the horizon in the shape of a mushroom...And suddenly they were not merely enemy Japanese, those 100,000 burned and twisted bodies, they were persons with names.<sup>1</sup>

So, as a direct consequence of the failure to exercise any moral consciousness in the national scientific program, a clear commandment of God was shamefully violated.

The focus of his sermons upon the need for an individual moral consciousness is equally clear.

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1. Steimle: Are You Looking for God, pp. 86-87.

Steimle observes that there is a certain "crowd-consciousness" about the present age which, unlike Christ's reluctance to go along with the multitude, today is allowed to determine morality. While he notes that this tendency may be of little moment in such matters as the color a man prefers when selecting a shirt, he concludes:

...in religious matters it is downright perilous. Christian morality, for example becomes no more than the level of morality for the majority of a people and makes a mockery of God. Divorce takes one marriage in four these days and though you hear some clucking of tongues divorce can't really be so bad as the church paints it because so many nice people get divorced. Betting on the races can't be so very wrong because the crowds at the track are not all thugs.... Demon rum must be greatly overdrawn because some of the most celebrated people get roaring drunk and their friends think little of it. Chastity must be an old-fashioned virtue because so many have extra-marital relations as Mr. Kinsey pointed out in some detail.<sup>1</sup>

With such biting words Steimle caustically rebukes a modern morality that is pleased to contradict the standards set by God.

With all the emphasis upon the first use of the law which Steimle's sermons present, they still employ, in an equally uncompromising manner, the law's second use. In this aspect of his message, and by definition properly so, the main concern is to expose the sinner to his sinfulness. Continuing to develop

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1. Steimle: "Bucking the Crowd," July 27, 1958.

the idea that it is difficult for the present generation to recapture something of the awe and fear in the face of God's holiness,<sup>1</sup> he notes that such a deplorable condition exists in spite of the unprecedented numbers which crowd modern American places of worship. And so, he raises the question:

How can we understand the God who appears to Isaiah: "I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up...." And what could Isaiah say? God bless America? Hardly. "I am undone...." I wonder if we can begin to understand our Lord's reticence about speaking of God as "Abba," Father. For he speaks not of a different God but the God of...Isaiah, the God who is outraged by injustice, self-righteousness and pride.<sup>2</sup>

By the example of the prophet as well as his own explanation of the reverence in which Jesus presumed to speak to God, Steimle tries to place in clear relief the image of a holy God, the God of the first commandment.

Pointing up some of the evils in modern society which are outright contradictions of God's law, Steimle mentions teen-age delinquency, income tax evasion, corruption in civic government, discrimination against minority groups, the traffic in narcotics. These represent conditions which this generation regards "customary," to be accepted. They constitute

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1. supra, p. 70.

2. Steimle: "Prayer's Lost Dimension," April 13, 1958.

"blind spots" in a people which seeks to escape its own evil by a preoccupation with worldly concerns. But the preacher labels all of these things "sin" according to the law of God from which there can be no escape save in the perfect righteousness of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

More specific employment of the second use of the law is found in Steimle's sermon "Words Are Not Cheap," as he reminds his audience of their accountability for every idle word which proceeds from their mouths. Relating this thought directly to the commandment against false witness he says:

...a man can do everything a good man is expected to do: fulfill every jot and tittle of the law, attend to his church-going, give to his charities, entertain generously--and yet lend his tongue to a vicious rumor. And by his words shall he be condemned for they reveal the pettiness in his soul even though his deeds may be above reproach.<sup>2</sup>

On this basis men are urged to acknowledge their failure in achieving righteousness.

As corporate communities the churches too have not always fulfilled the positive demands of God's law; they have failed to express love for all mankind. With such words as these Steimle calls their attention to this fact:

But what of us within the churches? We, too, are always open to the peril that, just

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1. Steimle: Are You Looking for God, pp. 34-37.
2. Steimle: "Words Are Not Cheap," June 29, 1958.

because we are good religious people, others may be considered not quite as good as we are-- even potentially. Else why do churches pick up and move out--"relocate" is the fashionable word for it; run away is more accurate--because the neighborhood has become "undesirable"?<sup>1</sup>

And so, the institution of the Church must be humbled by the very law which it proclaims in order that it may also be redeemed.<sup>2</sup>

One final illustration may serve further to show the manner in which Dr. Steimle utilizes the pedagogic proclamation of law. He notes the prevalence of literature which purports to reveal the "secrets" of spiritual power; and, in contradistinction to this, he calls attention to the thorn in the flesh which was given to St. Paul. Comparing these two facts he says:

...I suspect that you and I have some such thorn in the flesh too, if we have the grace to see it. It may be....some nagging temptation which never seems to leave us alone: lust, perhaps, or a driving ambition, or impatience with others, or a well-nursed grudge...<sup>3</sup>

Of course the instrumentality by which men become aware of such thorns and are thereby humbled to the will of God is nothing less than divine law.

However, Dr. Steimle is no less aware of the ineffective nature of the law as a vehicle to make men

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1. Ibid., p. 91.
2. loc. cit.
3. Ibid., p. 73.

righteous than are the other preachers under consideration. In "This Is the Life!" he warns against such a legalistically conceived righteousness with these words:

...here is a man whose religion is bounded north, south, east, and west by "thou shalt nots." He picks his way cautiously and successfully through life, avoiding all the scarlet as well as the petty sins. He doesn't commit adultery or swear, doesn't steal or play golf on Sunday, doesn't lie or tell dirty stories. And then, congratulating himself on avoiding these and other hazards, trips and falls flat on his face over the worst hazard of all-- self-righteous pride.<sup>1</sup>

Nor are the clergy, for all their theological knowledge, immune to this hazard of self-righteousness according to Steimle. Like Naaman, he says, some clergymen feel that they must approach God in a manner which will "impress" the deity, particularly "...if we are even a little impressed with ourselves."<sup>2</sup> The "ecclesiastical embroidery" and "hocus pocus" which have crowded into some clergymen's approach to worship have become for them, he declares, like the law of the Medes and Persians. The fatal consequence of which is an obscuring of God behind the exhibition of a man.<sup>3</sup>

Still, perhaps one of the clearest and most pointed expressions of Steimle's insight into the essentially lethal character of the law is contained in

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1. Ibid., pp. 114-115.

2. Ibid., p. 4.

3. loc. cit.

"What Makes a Man Good" where he declares:

It is always astonishing to me how this caricature of goodness lingers on in the minds of so many people. As if a man by observing a whole list of thou shalt not's --thou shalt not drink, dance, smoke, gamble, commit adultery, plus a few thou shalt, thou shalt go to church every Sunday, say your prayers every day and give 10% of your income to charity--could somehow make himself into a good man! Why, he may observe all the rules in the book and still be the orneriest, unkindest, most unloving man in the whole community!<sup>1</sup>

From this and kindred expressions it may be emphatically concluded that Steimle fails to find an avenue to justification within the confines of a legalistic religious life.

## 2. Elements of gospel.

Although individual sermons by Dr. Steimle may be found in which the element of law is relatively inconspicuous, he never fails to proclaim the grace, consolation, and life of the gospel. Frequently an entire sermon is devoted to the elucidation of a particular facet of the gospel. When this is the case such other elements as may be included serve only to sharpen the preacher's focus on the gospel message he expounds. Such a sermon is "God's Judgments--and Ours." At the

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1. Steimle: "What Makes a Man Good," June 8, 1958.

beginning of this sermon Steimle notes briefly that the standards by which men judge one another operate on a horizontal plane; (this is actually the first use of the law). But most of the sermon develops the idea that God's judgments are "invariably" based upon vertical standards which take into account, not so much results, as individual motives and opportunities.<sup>1</sup> The entire tenor of this sermon is conditioned by the proclamation of God's grace which in the preacher's view, accounts for the difference between His judgments and the judgments of men.

To demonstrate the manner in which Steimle often proclaims the grace of God more succinctly than by using an entire sermon, he says in one place that men become good in response to the love of someone else.<sup>2</sup> Just as loving parents mould the character of their children, he notes, so God likewise loves men before He makes demands of them. Developing this theme, Steimle remarks:

It is instructive for us to remember that the Ten Commandments were given after God had demonstrated his love and care for the people of Israel by delivering them out of slavery in Egypt. God's love is prior to his demands --always!--. First he gives us the unquestionable assurance of his love and care--which

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1. Steimle: Are You Looking for God, pp. 23-29.
2. Steimle: "What Makes a Man Good," June 8, 1958.

also includes discipline--and then, even as human parents, hopes that his children will respond. This, of course, is why so many churches place a cross on their altars: the constant reminder to us that God so loved the world--first! And that means you --and me.<sup>1</sup>

Besides God's grace occupying first place in His concern for men, Steimle proclaims the all-embracing nature of that grace. Another sermon expounds the meaning of Christ's claim to be the truth incarnate and concludes with this note of grace:

What a relief, then--if you dare it!--to come into the presence of him who is the truth, to whom "all desires are known, from whom no secrets are hid." No need to pretend here; no need to play games. He sees us exactly as we are, in a way we are often unwilling even to see ourselves and, wonder of wonders, accepts us as we are.<sup>2</sup>

Surely such acceptance of men is embraced in the idea of grace as it relates to the gospel.

Dr. Steimle's concern with the idea of grace as it is embodied in the gospel is to be seen perhaps more sharply than anywhere else in his remarks about the prayer of Jesus, "Father, forgive them..." Here it is that he affirms the indomitable character of God's love. Having quoted those words of Jesus from the cross he proclaims:

You cannot defeat that! It keeps coming back, no matter what you do to it, to forgive you.

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1. loc. cit.

2. Steimle: "Check Point," June 22, 1958.

And there is nothing you can do about it. Love never fails; it always wins out in the end. That is why the New Testament keeps talking about love....It's not the miraculous cures of the sick that are central; not the prophecies and their fulfillment; not the sermon on the Mount or the parables and teachings of Jesus. But the cross! That is central because it opens the door and lets a man look into the very heart of God to see there the love which never fails.<sup>1</sup>

In such unequivocal terms the preacher maintains that it is this gracious character of God which constitutes the kernel of the Christian message.

Consolation in the gospel message occupies an equally vital place in Dr. Steimle's preaching. He frequently is moved to emphasize it following the second use of the law. For example, in "When God is Deaf," after having avowed the necessity for humility in the presentation of claims to God, Steimle offers the joyful consolation of the gospel in his declaration that God does not reward men according to that which they have merited.<sup>2</sup> Similarly he announces that, in spite of the barriers which men through their sinfulness erect between one another, God has interfered and provided a basis for reconciliation in Christ.<sup>3</sup>

The consolation which Steimle preaches is as much concerned with this world as with the next. He

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1. Steimle: Are You Looking for God, p. 126.
2. Ibid., pp. 52-54.
3. Ibid., p. 118.

does not proclaim that through the power of gospel men will become strangers to suffering; but he does declare that because of the changed perspective which accompanies the reception of the gospel, men will view suffering in a different manner.<sup>1</sup> Again pursuing this idea, he maintains that: "...this whole vast stream of human history...with its eternal conflict between good and evil, makes little or no sense except on the basis of one man...Jesus Christ."<sup>2</sup> It is because of the centrality of the cross that a chaotic world can become for faith an ordered universe.

It is because of the centrality of the cross too that people are assured of God's concern for them individually. This is accomplished when they experience divine forgiveness about which Steimle affirms:

And this (forgiveness) is what draws men constantly to the cross, for in its shadow there is a strange peace. Here a man can know that he is accepted. That is what forgiveness, in its simplest terms, means: acceptance. Not because of your brains, your wit, ...or even because you may be "better" than somebody else, but simply because you are... infinitely worth-while in the eyes of God.<sup>3</sup>

In all of his declarations about the consolation and peace available to those who accept the gospel, the preacher never fails to anchor his message firmly upon

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1. Ibid., pp. 60-61.
2. Ibid., pp. 16-17.
3. Ibid., p. 37.

this redemptive activity of Christ.

Concerning the third aspect of the gospel message to be considered, life in Christ, Dr. Steimle has much to say. Not unlike Paul Scherer, Steimle's tends to place his focus upon Christian life in process of sanctification rather than upon the hope for an eternal life. However, eternal life receives a stronger and more positive treatment from Steimle than from Scherer.

The prospect of eternal life for believers is proclaimed as a reality in Steimle's sermons. He does feel though that speculations about heaven, as a place, can not have very great significance. In "The Church in the Graveyard" he affirms this by saying:

There's not much point in trying to picture heaven because time-bound as we are, we cannot get away from pictures which invariably suggest an endless amount of time: an eternity of singing hosannas or playing harps.<sup>1</sup>

In the next paragraph, however, he declares that Easter is for Christians the assurance that "tears, ugliness, and pain" shall pass away. The joy which they experience now is "but a token of all that God has in store" which is to be eschatologically revealed.<sup>2</sup> A not unrelated thought in another place points to the host of men in history who have belittled the Christian hope

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1. Steimle: "The Church in the Graveyard," April 6, 1958.

2. loc. cit.

as mere wishful thinking, powerless to protect; and, concluding his argument against such notions Steimle says:

Let them tell that to Stephen dying of the stones they threw at him for his faith in the Resurrection! Let them tell that to Dietrich Bonhoeffer facing a Nazi firing squad just before the end of the war because he would not budge from his faith in the Resurrection! Let them tell that to nameless Christians...(throughout the history of the Church).<sup>1</sup>

In the preacher's view, all of these have been able to face the end of life on earth with serenity because of their confidence for a new and better life to come.

At least one sermon uses that idea for the touchstone from which Steimle can proceed to a consideration of the new life which the regenerate are now living on earth. "Putting Worry in its Place" proceeds from the Christian hope for eternal life to a consideration of that life in process of sanctification by these statements:

For the Christian, the ultimate tomorrow, the ultimate anxiety, the day of death, is no longer unpredictable and uncertain. Death holds no more terrors for him. And with that tomorrow sure, he can take each day as it comes with confidence. This is why Paul, after that tremendous affirmation of his about the Resurrection, comes down to earth with a bang: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord....<sup>2</sup>

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1. Steimle: Are You Looking for God, p. 142.
2. Steimle: "Putting Worry in its Place," April 27, 1958.

And so, for Steimle, the fact of the resurrection life becomes the gateway by which men can begin to comprehend what is involved in the life of sanctification.

It has already been suggested that Steimle's sermons reflect a greater preoccupation with the life of a Christian in this world than with his life in eternity. This preoccupation is expressed from two almost paradoxical points of view--obedience and freedom. He describes the former frequently amidst the ordinary and often discouraging tasks of life. Job's "yet will I trust Him," Peter's "nevertheless I will let down the nets," the woman's persistent "yet even the dogs eat of the crumbs," and Christ's own "nevertheless, not my will," all belong to what Steimle terms the "royal succession of those whose faith could not be shaken" which accounts for the fact that they "threw their lives after" their trust in God.<sup>1</sup> Reaffirming the necessity for this kind of simple trust in the daily life of any who dares call himself a Christian, Steimle says again:

It mattered not a bit how Jesus felt. Unquestionably he did not feel like the Son of God out there in the wilderness. He was tired, weak, hungry, and tormented....But ...He simply trusted and obeyed. Nor does it matter how we feel. You will say that

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1. Steimle: Are You Looking for God, p. 54.

you don't feel very much like a child of God with your hands in the dispan or up to your elbows in car grease....If religion were dependent upon how you feel, it would be full to the brim one moment and empty the next.<sup>1</sup>

Only therefore by persevering in obedience to the will of God, even when everything seems to be hopeless, can the Christian receive light from the Lord amidst his wilderness existence.<sup>2</sup>

Nor does Dr. Steimle abandon the believer to his own devices; he is careful to present the means by which that light becomes operative. In one such passage, having described how Paul as well as other of the Apostles received divine insights by which to direct their lives, he says:

We, too, are given the assurance not only that God cares for us but that he is present with us. It is well for us not to look too hard for any "feeling" of that presence. Our emotions can play strange tricks on us and we can make ourselves feel pretty much what we want ourselves to feel. Better to take our Lord at his word: "He that willeth to do my will shall know...." Those who follow in obedience and trust will find God's reassuring presence along the way. This is the essence of faith.<sup>3</sup>

Thus is the Christian to discern guidance for the life which he has been called to live as a new man in Christ.

With regard to his emphasis upon the freedom of believers, it may be observed even from the above

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1. Ibid., pp. 46-47.
2. loc. cit.
3. Ibid., p. 71.

illustrations that Steimle astutely avoids the advancement of calculated prescriptions by which the new life may be developed. This is not because he fails to appreciate the radical change which accompanies a man's acceptance of the gospel. For he declares that the Christian must be ready, if the time should come, with the aid of the Spirit to courageously defend the principles of the gospel by which he lives:

It was Christ alone--against the world if need be. An it is still the same. It is you or I--against the world if need be! It's a willingness to go it alone no matter what others are saying or doing.<sup>1</sup>

Steimle does not prescribe the details of this new life because he takes quite seriously the liberating power of the gospel. He observes the dangers which attend any attempt to plot out the route of a sanctified life. Contrasting what men have made of His life to Christ Himself, the preacher says:

Good sincere churchmen...have frequently pared down Christ's abundant life to a petty, puny kind of existence. They have taken the broad sympathies of Christ and narrowed them down to a provincial concern for respectability. They have taken his magnificent faith in the Father-God and compressed it into the sterile acceptance of orthodox catch phrases. They have taken his high morality and chopped it down to the petty, negative virtues of abstaining from certain varieties of indoor sports. It is an insidious and

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1. Steimle: "Bucking the Crowd," July 27, 1958.

deadly heresy because it warps and twists the full, sweeping grandeur of the Christian faith....<sup>1</sup>

Such passages expressing his concern for the freedom of individual believers to respond to their Lord in an almost existential fashion are as characteristic of Steimle's sermons as is his emphasis upon a life of obedience.

On a few occasions Dr. Steimle does become somewhat more specific in characterizing the sanctified life. One sermon, for example, declares that God is engaged in an "indefatigable campaign to reverse our ordinary scale of values."<sup>2</sup> On the basis of this assertion he affirms that Christians will no longer measure a man by the size of his salary or the extent of his responsibilities.<sup>3</sup> However, even here, the primary purpose for having included these ideas is to advance the main thrust of the sermon which is designed to point up God's concern for seemingly insignificant individuals.<sup>4</sup>

3. Relationship of law and gospel.

If there is in Edmund Steimle's homiletic treatment of the Word of God a generally followed

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1. Steimle: Are You Looking for God, pp. 113-114.
2. Ibid., p. 96.
3. Ibid., p. 97.
4. Ibid., pp. 95-101.

pattern for presenting the law-gospel relationship, this writer has failed to discern it. Perhaps it is because his sermons seem to be very much like what Harry E. Fosdick has been pleased to call "life-situation" preaching that this is so. The titles of Steimle's sermons themselves suggest such an approach, e.g., "Are You Looking for God," "God's Judgments--and Ours," "The Peril of Ordinary Days," "When Religion is a Burden," "The Empty House," "The One Talent Man," etc.<sup>1</sup> Surely these sermons are Biblical. Each one proceeds from a Scripture text which is usually a paragraph or more in length. But because of his homiletic style, Steimle does not develop that text in any systematic fashion; the needs of his audience alone are allowed to determine the organization of his material. Consequently the law-gospel relationship, which might otherwise be more prominent if the text itself had been allowed this function, tends to become overshadowed.

By this the writer does not intend to minimize the vital significance for Dr. Steimle of law and gospel in the Word. He testifies to the importance of this concept himself when in one sermon he says of Christ:

In this man who divides the calendar of the Christian world we believe God has acted to

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1. Ibid., p. v.

disclose that which is at the heart of this vast universe--the love which at once judges men and nations and also saves those who follow him in obedience and trust.<sup>1</sup>

Such judicial activity requires law just as surely as such salvation is possible via the gospel alone. Testifying again to the importance of the law-gospel relationship in a Christian's life are these words by which Steimle characterizes true religion:

Christianity is not a set of principles for living derived from the Sermon on the Mount; it is not the Golden Rule, the Ten Commandments or the parable of the Good Samaritan. It is a way of life incarnate or wrapped up in a person who is not dead these many centuries but who is alive here and now.<sup>2</sup>

Although not stated in so many words, here is the implicit affirmation that all the law, whether in the New Testament or the Old, constitutes a "foreign work" of Christ.

At least one of his sermons may be considered a detailed exposition of the doctrine of law and gospel. In "What Makes a Man Good" Dr. Steimle answers the question posed by his title with the declaration that no law can accomplish this end. He affirms that churches "keep hammering away" at the Decalogue for the purpose of "holding evil in check" and also in order "to remind us of all that God requires."<sup>3</sup> But men

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1. Ibid., p. 17.
2. Steimle: "Check Point," June 22, 1958.
3. Steimle: "What Makes a Man Good," June 8, 1958.

really become good in response to God's love when, by the testimony of the Spirit, they are enabled to see that love in Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup> Much of the phraseology of this sermon is borrowed not only from the Scriptures themselves but from Lutheran formulations which express the law-gospel relationship.

To conclude, it may be noted that while the law-gospel relationship is a theological reality for Dr. Steimle himself, and further that that relationship may be readily discerned in his sermonic endeavors; nonetheless, this relationship is seldom ever allowed to determine the development of his message. The relative emphasis or omission of either aspect of the Word in his preaching is almost always determined by the concrete situation to which the preacher addresses himself.

#### E. Selected Sermons of Martin Niemoller

Following World War I during which he served as a German submarine officer, Martin Niemoller studied theology and was ordained to the gospel ministry. The courageous stand which he as vicar of the Berlin-Dahlem parish took against the Nazi movement to deify the German state during the 1930's won for him the respect

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1. loc. cit.

of the entire Christian world. Pastor Niemoller was arrested for "political agitation" and "treason" in June, 1937; and, although he was acquitted of the charges against him by the People's Tribunal, he was nevertheless interned in a concentration camp by the personal order of Hitler. Besides selected sermons which span the entire period of his opposition to National Socialism, the last twenty-eight sermons delivered before his arrest are also available in English translation. The former collection has been published under the title, Here Stand I which has been translated by Jane Lymburn. Miss Lymburn has also provided the translation for the latter volume, God Is My Fuehrer. These collections have served as the source material for this section of the study.

1. Elements of law.

If one can sympathetically appreciate the conditions under which German congregations were assembled to hear Pastor Niemoller preach the Word, perhaps one can also understand Niemoller's lack of emphasis upon the first use of the law. Thomas Mann reports that many of these sermons were delivered under the surveillance of secret police.<sup>1</sup> Amid such conditions

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1. Martin Niemoller: God Is My Fuehrer, "Preface," p. 5.

it seems quite unlikely that those whose very lives were jeopardized for attending these services would be the kind of people who needed repeatedly to hear the restraint of God's law proclaimed against their "wild, disobedient" natures. Surely it must be for this reason that in Niemoller's sixty-odd sermons translated into English the only occurrences of the first use of the law are related to the function of the state as God's agent for preserving order in society. It is plainly in this spirit that Niemoller remarks:

That is why God's word declares so clearly that the authority of the ruling power is based upon God's ordinance and that its real and permanent duty consists in God's mandate to administer the law in his name and to protect the work of the good man and resist the actions of the evildoer.<sup>1</sup>

Beyond this recognition of the first use of the law, Niemoller does not venture.

However, he frequently employs the pedagogic use of law. Niemoller declares in the following words the sinfulness of all men:

"Rioting and drunkenness, chambering and wantonness, strife and envy"--these are the works of darkness. Behind it all...waits the evil desire which destroys our being, which destroys everything; even though we do not admit it, we cannot deny or refute it.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Martin Niemoller: Here Stand I, p. 121.
2. Niemoller: God Is My Fuehrer, pp. 68-69.

Although the quotation is from a New Testament source, its purpose is clearly to expose the sins of mankind.

Especially idolatry in any form is rebuked by Niemoller. He even observes that many of the churches in his day which are collaborating with the policies of the Nazi regime in order to remain open and continue their ministry, have in fact violated the first commandment. He declares of them that: "Such work has no promise and is already condemned."<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the individual Christian must come, in spite of the government's claims, to the recognition of God's supremacy in his life. Of this Niemoller proclaims:

"Render unto God what is God's." What belongs to God? We ourselves belong to Him, we, totally and wholly! God's command is still: "I am the Lord, the One whom ye shall fear, love and trust above everything else!"...He is the Lord, we are His property and His alone.<sup>2</sup>

Involved in this recognition is the struggle between the "old Adam" within a Christian and the will of God which is expressed in His law. Frequently the preacher makes such statements as: "...we have to deal with our natural heart, which defies the will of God and is secretly afraid of itself; and we have to deal with the ...law (imposed) upon us."<sup>3</sup> Such "dealing" confirms

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1. Ibid., p. 40.

2. Ibid., p. 49.

3. Niemoller: Here Stand I, p. 186.

the opinion that, in God's sight, man cannot redeem himself, and it thus directs the sinner to Christ.

But even in declaring the judgments of God upon man's sin, the preacher's tone is more loving than stern. For instance, in expounding the parable of the barren fig tree, Niemoller reminds his congregation that they too must "stand as penitents" before God having "justly deserved" God's judgment; he declares that the "great danger of this moment" is for devout Germans to feel that "the call to repentance" does not concern them.<sup>1</sup> Or again, as he draws attention to a specific commandment, the preacher cannot separate entirely God's loving concern from His righteous judgment; for he says:

...to the divine commandment to "honor thy father and thy mother" love is added to parental authority and confidence to childish obedience....The only danger is that we may easily fall into thinking that the authority of the parents...is based upon our human trust instead of on God's ordinance and commandment as it...inviolably remains.<sup>2</sup>

It may also be observed that, although Niemoller frequently employs the second use of the law, he seldom castigates specific acts of immorality. Instead, his concern is to lead individuals into the admission that, for all their piety, they remain sinners apart from faith in Christ. This becomes most clear when one

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1. Ibid., p. 114.  
2. Ibid., p. 121.

observes the manner in which Niemoller relates justification to the law.

It would serve little purpose to introduce at this point the volume of material from his sermons which declares the impotence of law as an instrument for meriting justification. In "Heirs of Salvation" Pastor Niemoller says:

...we are constantly being driven hither and thither by the commands: "Thou shalt!" and "Thou shalt not!"--so that we think, over and over again, that we must save ourselves by work and worry, by walking and running, and yet in the end find ourselves standing before the portals of death and know that all our efforts were in vain!<sup>1</sup>

Kindred statements characterize almost every sermon; e.g. he expounds such notions as these: left to themselves, men can only despair;<sup>2</sup> the law is totally ineffective for justification;<sup>3</sup> Christ's righteousness alone can supply man's need.<sup>4</sup> From these ideas it is a short step to the exposition of the gospel.

## 2. Elements of gospel.

One might suspect that because of the circumstances under which his sermons were prepared they would tend to exhibit a proclivity for the element of gospel

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1. Niemoller: God Is My Fuehrer, pp. 88-89.
2. Ibid., p. 67.
3. Niemoller: Here Stand I, p. 64.
4. Ibid., p. 134.

instead of law. The sermons themselves confirm this suspicion. From the standpoint of mass alone, in the collection of data for this study of Pastor Niemoller, illustrations of the gospel emphasis recorded more than doubled the legal notations.

When his concern is with the idea of grace in the gospel, Niemoller is sometimes moved to describe that grace in such far-reaching terms as:

The Lord Jesus Christ is not parsimonious or niggardly with His gifts. All of us--but not only we, even all those who blaspheme His name and fight against Him--even those who do that today--have from youth onward partaken of His fulness and have been protected from many a devil and perhaps even freed from some devil or other...<sup>1</sup>

Here he implies within their hearing that the grace of God has been extended even to such men as the gestapo agents sent to report his "treasonous" preaching.

Pronouncements of so wide a character are possible for Niemoller because of his intimate experience with the grace of God. It is a reality which confronts him anew each day. In "Unless Ye Repent" he testifies to this by observing that the very existence of a Christian community in his nation "after Pilate's cruelties have been repeated" is no proof that those who remain unmolested are better than the others; but he

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1. Niemoller: God Is My Fuehrer, pp. 164-165.

says, "...it is a proof that God's patience and mercy toward us are not yet at an end, and that God is once more giving us an opportunity" to acknowledge His love.<sup>1</sup> So he proclaims that each day of life on earth granted to men is itself an out-pouring of divine grace.

Niemoller declares that if this work of grace has begun upon the foundation of complete surrender to God's will, then God will see it through to completion, which fact in itself is another manifestation of graciousness in His dealings with men. Therefore the preacher declares: "We must, like Paul, be confident that he will complete his work."<sup>2</sup>

It is characteristic of God's grace in the preaching of Niemoller that the Lord not only provides a continuity for its operation, He in fact initiates it in the beginning. The preacher declares:

...God finds us! And yet, dear friends, God has found us! Because we cannot bear to look upon His holiness, His mercy comes to meet us in another form, in Jesus Christ...He bears our sin and our shame. And this love bears all, this love is victorious over the terror and defiance of the human heart, and it makes us no longer fear Him and take to flight, but turn to Him.<sup>3</sup>

Niemoller continues to describe this grace of God which seeks out sinners as the result of Christ's sacrifice

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1. Niemoller: Here Stand I, p. 115.

2. Ibid., p. 129.

3. Niemoller: God Is My Fuehrer, pp. 58-59.

upon the cross.<sup>1</sup> In another place he says of the cross:

It is the free act of love of him who says...  
"the good shepherd giveth his life for the  
sheep." And if we hear this message of the  
cross....Then the words "crucified, dead and  
buried" will hold a miracle which will not  
let us go, yea, the miracle of all miracles,  
of which the poet sings: "...Behold, the  
master has let himself be slain for his  
servant."<sup>2</sup>

For Pastor Niemoller, it is only at the foot of the  
cross that believers can come to see best the grace of  
God. The last sermon preached before his arrest re-  
iterates this as he observes: "...the gospel says that  
it is just at this point (the cross) that the love of  
God triumphs and reveals itself to the faithful."<sup>3</sup>

The aspect of consolation in the gospel mes-  
sage, as one might suspect, receives the preponderance  
of Niemoller's attention. "Judge Me, O God" is one of  
many sermons in which he addresses himself to the in-  
evitable "why" of life that even the faithful raise.  
The conclusion of this sermon affirms:

Where faith wakens and comes to life the in-  
justice which is done us loses its power to  
tempt us....it is but a little cloud and will  
soon pass....The light and the truth of God,  
which are present in Jesus Christ, have a com-  
pelling force. We trust in them and, as a  
church of the gospel, we will testify to them  
in spite of distress and persecution, aye, in  
the midst of distress and persecution.<sup>4</sup>

. . . . .

1. loc. cit.
2. Niemoller: Here Stand I, p. 148.
3. Ibid., p. 225.
4. Ibid., p. 143.

It should be noted, however, that this consolation is not unconditionally guaranteed to everyone; throughout his sermons the preacher announces that such consolation becomes a reality only "where faith awakens."

Niemoller declares that when faith does awaken it opens the possibility of life even in the midst of persecution because the believer knows that Christ is "for" him as a personal advocate;<sup>1</sup> and, having this confidence, the church too can "wait in patience and steadfastness until it pleases God to give it peace."<sup>2</sup>

Not only is Christ "for" the believer according to Niemoller's proclamation of consolation, He is with the believer. In one place he maintains:

We are not saying too much, I am convinced, when we claim that the Lord Jesus Christ has again returned to our midst. He is somehow nearer to our nation than he has been for some years, and people are speaking of him and fighting for him with a passion which we had scarcely thought possible.<sup>3</sup>

Obviously, in this passage Niemoller refers, not to the warfare of the German nation, but to the battle waged by the faithful against Nazi idolatry.

Continuing to express the consolation which believers receive from their personal union with Christ, in another place Niemoller says:

.....

1. Ibid., p. 167.
2. Ibid., p. 183.
3. Ibid., p. 136.

...Jesus of Nazareth...is the only one who can really help us....we may come because the love of God has been revealed in Him. And that is no mere pious phrase....He has come....Happy are we if we learn that truth; happy are we if we learn it again and again and believe it...<sup>1</sup>

And the corollary of Christ's presence with believers, whereby an additional source of consolation becomes effective in their lives, is the real presence of Christ within the church which Niemoller declares sustains the lives of its members.<sup>2</sup>

Before concluding these observations concerning Niemoller's manner of presenting the consolation of gospel faith, it should be noted that he never proclaims the possibility of finding joy and peace for which men long apart from the fact of the resurrection. Declaring: "...the fact that he is risen and lives means that God has frustrated our human actions," the preacher then concludes: "We are at peace with God; for God himself has spoken the last word."<sup>3</sup>

Frequently, it is on the basis of such pronouncements as this last that Niemoller is led to declare the gospel message of eternal life. In his preaching, the consolation of believers and their prospects for eternal life are two sides of the same

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1. Niemoller: God Is My Fuehrer, p. 33.
2. Niemoller: Here Stand I, p. 127.
3. Ibid., p. 82.

coin. Thus he says of the Easter message:

For shall we not now joyfully proclaim, "We bid you hope"? Death is not the last word even with regard to the individual human life. There is a personal, eternal life of perfection, free from all earthly toil and travail, a life of which the Bible tells us...<sup>1</sup>

That this Biblical message of eternal life is no vain dream concocted by ancient writers, Niemoller declares

when he says: "...corresponding to the promise of a new world...there is a reality, because at one point God has actually broken through the ring of death..."<sup>2</sup>

And, although Pastor Niemoller concedes that the fact of eternal life cannot be scientifically investigated, it is nonetheless as real for the faithful today as it was for those first disciples.<sup>3</sup>

But, even confronted with the immediacy of the situation he faces in which the prospect of eternal life could momentarily become a reality, like the other preachers in this study, Niemoller expresses more concern for the gospel emphasis upon the sanctified life than eternal life. Unlike the other men, however, he almost never characterizes that life with "catch-phrases" or stock expressions. For Niemoller it is enough to remind Christians that they are engaged in

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1. Ibid., p. 152.

2. Ibid., p. 218.

3. cf. Niemoller: God Is My Fuehrer, pp. 190-192.

living the sanctified life now without attempting to delineate its course.<sup>1</sup> It is at this point too that Niemoller becomes most dependent upon the language of the Bible in order to convey his message. Certain expressions which he once presumed to understand have, in the light of his environment, taken on entirely new significance, as he declares:

It is only during these days that I have realized...what the Lord Jesus Christ means when He says: "Do not take up the bushel! I have not lit the candle for you to put it under the bushel, in order to protect it from the wind. Away with the bushel! The light should be placed upon a candlestick! It is not your business to worry about whether the light is extinguished or not by the draught."<sup>2</sup>

By this and many similar expressions Niemoller characterizes the new significance of the Word as it unfolds the life of faith to him.

Whatever else may be involved in the new life of a Christian man, whether that life takes the course of open resistance to the world's evils,<sup>3</sup> passive submission to tyranny,<sup>4</sup> or repaying injustice with deeds of loving concern,<sup>5</sup> Niemoller declares the necessity for its daily revitalization. In one sermon He says:

It is possible to believe without seeing, but not without his living and life-creating

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1. cf. Niemoller: Here Stand I, p. 176.
2. Niemoller: God Is My Fuehrer, pp. 277-278.
3. cf. Ibid., p. 50.
4. cf. Ibid., p. 42.
5. cf. Niemoller: Here Stand I, p. 122.

presence...And that is why it is quite impossible to do without Jesus' word. For it is through his word...that the spirit works. "The Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel." And therefore we cannot do without prayer while hearing the word...<sup>1</sup>

These constitute the only guideposts by which Pastor Niemoller proposes to direct the lives of believers. The gospel which he proclaims certainly cannot fail to impress his hearers with the absolute necessity for orienting life around these principles--the word and prayer--in order to achieve a Christ-like existence regardless of individual conduct patterns.

### 3. Relationship of law and gospel.

Surely Pastor Niemoller reflects a keen awareness of the relationship between law and gospel in his sermons. Since the advent of God's Son, he declares that the law has been fulfilled. He announces:

The law is fulfilled by the coming of the Son of God, born of a woman and made under the law. The law's claim is thereby settled, and when we cling to Him as our Lord and brother, we need no longer fear any law in the world; for every law with its ordinances and commands, with its "Thou shalt!" and "Thou shalt not!" is fulfilled and robbed of its power, and the kingdom of Heaven has come.<sup>2</sup>

Only faith in Christ is necessary to insure the redemption of believers according to this. But Niemoller

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1. Ibid., p. 162.

2. Niemoller: God Is My Fuehrer, p. 91.

recognizes a peculiar danger among his people. For, although they are assured that God desires for them to stand and to "make a clear and courageous confession" of their faith against the enemy, nonetheless, he notes that in itself this constitutes a peril for men:

...in this struggle there is one danger that threatens us, and that from a side where we would never suspect it....We talk today-- everywhere--so much about faith and the nature of faith. Things are no longer the same as they were....we ought not to think that by taking sides we should have the faith for which we stand up....it is quite possible for us to be on the right side and yet fail to see that we are not fighting because of the love of God...<sup>1</sup>

And so resisting the enemy also can become a stumbling-block to faith when anything short of love for God is allowed to motivate this activity; it then degenerates into another expression of the law.

The same context of struggle in which Niemoller finds himself also gives added meaning to the gospel. He declares in one place that the gospel can be called "good news" because:

...in place of the sovereignty of the world it sets the supreme power of God and in Christ opens to us the door through which we are to enter into the kingdom of God in patience and faith.<sup>2</sup>

Pastor Niemoller always preaches his sermons on the pericope selections. Usually these texts are at

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1. Ibid., pp. 221-222.

2. Niemoller: Here Stand I, p. 189.

least a paragraph in length; some are longer. Within this framework he finds the opportunity to examine the central thought of more complete Scripture passages. In order to arrive at an understanding of the true meaning of his text, he almost never fails to demonstrate the legalistically inclined perversions of the Word which have resulted in the obscuring of its message. Having thus handled the misconceptions which men are prone to attach to God's revelation, he then expounds the true meaning of his text as it applies to the life of his congregation.

#### F. Summary

It has been the attempt of this chapter to discern those elements of law and gospel which have characterized the preaching of four outstanding Lutheran clergymen and, further, to document the manner by which that relationship has been developed. At least one of these expositors has been greatly influenced in the preaching duties of his ministry by this relationship. In addition, it may be concluded that implications of the doctrine of law and gospel are observable within the sermons of all the men considered. Three of them exhibit in their preaching a strong proclivity for the gospel focus of the Word. Dr. Maier, however, has sought to preserve a state of equilibrium between the presentation of gospel and law.

CHAPTER III  
COMPARATIVE SUMMARY AND EVALUATION

A. Introduction

Already in the presentation of those elements of law and gospel which have characterized the homiletic endeavors of the men under consideration, various points of similarity and divergence respecting their individual preaching styles have been noted. Certainly it is beyond dispute that the relationship between law and gospel has played a far more significant role in the preaching of Walter A. Maier than in any of the other men. This relationship has governed the very structure of his sermons themselves. It has also proceeded directly from those portions of the Word which he proclaims in a truly expository fashion. One is unable to surpress the suspicion that such preaching has come about, not only from his high regard for the Biblical revelation as the Word of God, but also because of the centrality which he accords the law-gospel relationship on the basis of his theological heritage.

Of the other three men considered, it appears that Pastor Niemoller and Edmund Steimle must be

accorded equal appreciation for the manner in which they have communicated the dual foci of the Word. Perhaps Niemoller, whose sermons are of a more expository nature than Steimle's, has succeeded in making this relationship most articulate. However, one cannot deny that, in spite of the somewhat topical fashion by which he declares the Word, there is implicit in each of Dr. Steimle's sermons the alternatives of life under the law or life in Christ. At the risk of sounding too harsh a judgment, the opinion is finally ventured that Paul Scherer's sermons have contributed least effectively of all to an accurate understanding of the Word of God. Doubtless this in part because of the homiletic style he has chosen; and yet, the feeling persists that, had he exhibited a greater concern for both emphases in Scripture, his sermons would have presented a more precise portrayal of the divine Word.

The remainder of this study will be occupied with remarks of a general nature concerning: 1.) the suitability of the various sermonic styles chosen by these preachers for the presentation of law and gospel; 2.) the points at which these contemporary preachers have paralleled the thought of Martin Luther; and 3.) the points which represent a departure from Luther's thought. One should be forewarned that here, as always, generalizations may easily be constructed only to be contradicted by isolated cases.

B. General Trends in the Contemporary Treatment  
of Law and Gospel

For want of more appropriate terminology the following designations have been applied to the four sermonic styles observed in Chapter II: 1.) the law-gospel sermon; 2.) the expository sermon; 3.) the life-situation sermon; and 4.) the topical sermon.

1. The law-gospel sermon.

The law-gospel type sermon as represented by the work of Walter A. Maier manifests the most emphatic treatment of the dual foci in God's Word among those contemporary preaching techniques noted in this study. This type of sermon has been described in detail above.<sup>1</sup> If the thesis that all Scripture may properly be divided between the poles of law and gospel is granted, then no other sermonic pattern could communicate that distinction more lucidly than Dr. Maier's method.

There are two primary requisites which must be taken into consideration by the preacher who would utilize the technique of the law-gospel sermon. Both these factors require equal attention in the actual sermon construction. On the one hand such a preacher

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1. cf. supra, pp. 47-48.

must be willing to become an expositor of the Word. This means that he must develop interpretative skills based upon a first-hand acquaintance with the text in order that he may determine with precision the truths contained in a Scripture passage. Without such interpretative skill the possibility for discerning the law-gospel relationships within the text is precluded. On the other hand such a preacher must be thoroughly familiar with the various relationships of law and gospel in a theological sense in order that he may communicate with precision the specific nature of those relationships. Especially in the realm of the means whereby sinners receive justification are these relationships significant since it is at precisely this point that the demands of law and the fruits of gospel appear to be identical.

Doubtless, the greatest danger which attends this sermonizing technique lies in the temptation for the preacher to read into the text relationships which the passage itself does not justify. When this is done merely for the purpose of maintaining a preconceived plan to preserve equilibrium in the development of the law-gospel relationship, the true character of the Word is already perverted. However, if both requisites are carefully fulfilled, the law-gospel type of sermon can

result in a genuine proclamation of the true Word of God.

2. The expository sermon.

In this study the expository type sermon has been observed in the preaching of Martin Niemoller. Such sermons arise from the ideas which are inherent in the Scripture passage that constitutes the sermon text. This type of homiletic technique is not primarily concerned with the maintenance of an equilibrium between the various elements of law and gospel which may be encompassed within the Biblical text. Nonetheless, properly conceived, such a sermon may present the law-gospel relationships in the Word equally as well as a sermon technique specifically designed to accomplish that purpose.

The expository sermon also confronts the preacher with two requisites. However, these requirements do not face him with equal weight. First, and of most importance for the preparation of such sermons, is the text itself. It confronts the preacher with the same challenge for study that the law-gospel sermon presents. Besides this, in the expository sermon the text alone is permitted to determine the actual construction of the sermon. Instead of only two main divisions (law and gospel), such a discourse may contain

as many parts as the predominant ideas within the text justify. Theology, the second requirement for expository preaching, is of relatively less importance. It is true that no preacher can divorce himself from his personal theology in the work of sermon preparation. But true expository preaching, like Martin Niemoller's, uses the systematic theological disciplines only as they may arise from a critical study of the text.

In view of the danger which accompanies the techniques necessary for law-gospel sermon construction, the expository method must be adjudged the best avenue to lead into Biblical truth. This approach removes the danger of making God's Word subservient to theology; at the same time it allows for the exposition of law-gospel relationships upon the basis of Scripture whence they derive.

### 3. The life-situation sermon.

This approach to preaching the Word has been illustrated in the sermons of Edmund Steimle. There are again two chief factors which guide the development of this type sermon. First, and most important, for the life-situation sermon technique is the selection of a subject. The preacher's choice is conditioned by his ability to determine specific needs in the lives of the people to whom he ministers. Having determined the need

which is to be met and having selected a topic, the factor of theology becomes operative in the manner by which the preacher addresses himself to his subject.

It has been observed that the law-gospel element was a prominent part of Steimle's life-situation sermons. This must be considered to come about, however, because of the individual preacher's facility in relating the law-gospel emphasis to the selected needs which he addresses. It must further be observed that the development of law-gospel relationships in this type of sermon occur merely to the extent that the preacher is willing to be guided by a Scripture text in the preparation of his material. For, since this sermon is not primarily dependent upon a Biblical text, there may be no precise section of God's Word to govern the presentation of law and gospel.

#### 4. The topical sermon.

Paul Scherer's sermons represent this homiletic style. As in life-situation preaching, in this technique too, the preacher, not the Word, determines the development of the sermon and its consequent emphasis or omission of law-gospel considerations. The topical sermon has been differentiated from life-situation preaching only because the writer feels that the latter style regards the actual conditions with which

people are confronted in life more objectively for the selection of subject material than the style of topical preaching necessitates. The topical sermon style utilizes key ideas and catch phrases from Scripture without making any serious attempt to communicate the thought of a segment withing the Word. One might suspect that this technique would afford an ideal vehicle for presentation of the law-gospel concern. For such topical preaching is adaptable to the expression of theological formulations which are incapable of development on the basis of single Scriptural passages. However, it will be remembered that the primary reason for affirming the distinct character of law and gospel was in order to clarify the sermonic presentation of divine truth. Therefore, topical preaching, since it is so little dependent upon the Word directly, represents the least desirable technique for proclaiming the essential character of God's revelation.

### C. Contemporary Parallels of Luther's Thought

The relationships of law and gospel which have been observed in contemporary Lutheran preaching exhibit at least two parallels to the thought of Dr. Luther. The first and surely the most important, whether in Luther's age or at the present time, concerns the intimate relationship of the law to the

subject of justification. These contemporary preachers are unanimous in their reaffirmation of Luther's insight into this matter. Even those men who contribute the least through their sermons to a proper understanding of the law-gospel relationships in Scripture strongly reiterate the evangelical doctrine of justification by faith alone. Beyond this, all of the men considered display acutely the insight that motivations, rather than specific acts of behavior, constitute the basis upon which God's judgments operate. Therefore, even those things which might seem to be the fruits of a true faith, e.g., piety, charity, morality, etc. become perverted when ideas of merit are attached to them. They proclaim that justification is possible solely upon the basis of Christ's righteousness. Only through the personal acknowledgment of sin and guilt, and confidence which expresses itself by faith in Christ do these contemporary Lutheran preachers declare the fact that God ordains men to be righteous.

A second parallel between the contemporary age and Luther is to be seen in the manner that at least one preacher has chosen to convey the law-gospel relationships of Scripture through his sermon style. For it will have been noted that the homiletic technique of Dr. Maier is remarkably similar to Luther's own pattern

described in Chapter I.<sup>1</sup>

Beyond these parallels it is difficult to venture. While it would seem that the outstanding men of the contemporary Lutheran pulpit are prepared to acknowledge theological validity in Luther's concept of law-gospel relationships, and while their sermons may be said to contain certain elements of both these foci within the word; nevertheless, that relationship which was of such great significance to Luther himself has exercised comparatively less influence upon his followers' proclamation of Scripture.

#### D. Contemporary Departures from Luther's Thought

Besides the manner of sermon construction which in the majority of cases considered represents a departure from Luther, there is another more significant point at which contemporary Lutheran preachers have departed from his example. This is more directly related to theology itself.

In their one-sided preoccupation with the sanctified life of regenerate men, the preachers considered have gone beyond the bounds set by Luther. It will be remembered that in his preaching the gospel was proclaimed primarily in terms of God's grace.<sup>2</sup> It was

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1. supra, p. 11 cf. pp. 46-48.

2. cf. supra, p. 12.

then the function of the Holy Spirit whose presence accompanied that proclamation to awaken a new life of righteousness within the hearts of those who heard. Luther felt that men were instructed already concerning the paths of righteousness by the law. The only reason they failed to achieve that righteousness was because of fleshly weakness which the gospel overcame. When contemporary preachers venture to speak of sanctification in terms other than freedom, i.e., when they add the idea of obedience--even obedience to the will of God--although they may have good ground in the Biblical revelation for so doing, they go beyond the thought of Luther. What is far more dangerous in light of the law-gospel relationships which characterize the Word of God, by this concern with the details of sanctified living, they open the door once again to legalistic ideas about salvation. In this regard these contemporary preachers exhibit more of the Melanchthonian spirit which characterized the period of Lutheran pietism (1600-1700) than the original spirit of Reformation theology which did not prescribe a way of life for the regenerate but relied entirely upon the workings of the Holy Spirit to effect the necessary transformation. In this regard, whatever faults his preaching may display, Paul Scherer by his emphasis upon creativity, has most closely paralleled Luther's thought. To the

extent that such creativity is the exclusive work of the Spirit and not a mere human achievement it belongs to the heritage of Luther.

#### E. Summary

It has been the thesis of this study that in order for the true character of the Word of God to become explicit in contemporary Lutheran preaching, the communicators of its message must convey to their audience the dual emphasis of law and gospel which permeates Scripture. Through awakened consciences men are to be convicted of sin and hearts won for Christ who will by the working of His Spirit, transform these weak human vessels into a righteous people of God.

The outstanding preachers on the contemporary Lutheran scene have all succeeded in presenting those elements of law and gospel to a greater or lesser degree. They have not always followed the example of Luther, but they have generally exhibited a concern for the proclamation of the true Word. This concern may be seen in their recognition of the bi-polarity which characterizes the Biblical record. In spite of the difficulties encountered in such a paper, especially the necessity of reducing entire sermons to fragmentary excerpts, it is the conviction of this writer arising from that intimate acquaintance which their sermons have

afforded that, to the degree in which contemporary Lutheran preachers have successfully apprehended the dual foci of Scripture, their sermons have communicated the true, living Word of God.

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