

Hans Joachim Iwand (1899-1960)

By Gerhard Sauter

Hans Iwand was a leading Luther scholar and theologian of the "Confessing Church" in the German church struggle from 1933 on. After that, he was theologically close to Karl Barth, although he also criticized Barth, reminding the theological community of Martin Luthers distinction between law and gospel. In 1935, Iwand was dismissed from his teaching position in Riga. He then educated theologians of the "Confessing Church" in an illegal seminary. Forbidden to speak in public, Iwand was arrested and later served as a pastor in Dortmund until the end of the war.

In 1945 he was called to Göttingen as Professor of Systematic Theology, and in 1952 to Bonn. In 1945, he founded the "Göttingen Sermon-Meditations" ("Göttinger Predigt-Meditationen"/GPM). These printed resources were to help the pastors who had lost their books during the war or, through being forced to flee, were searching for a new spiritual Orientation. Iwand—who was himself a charismatic preacher—believed preaching to be the most important and most difficult task of the church: the preaching of the promise and the directive of God to guide the Christian community in the spiritual and political Situation of this time. Iwand understood his "sermon-meditations" as guides for preaching. The sermon-meditation is founded on a short exegesis and is explicated as a thorough systematic-theological (dogmatic and ethical) reflection. It then makes suggestions for the shaping of worship, not to remove the responsibility of the pastor for preparation but to enable the pastor to be theologically responsible in his or her preaching. The historical-critical exegesis is accompanied by practical devotional exegesis. The meditation reflects the biblical text in its theological context and perceives it as God's address to the people. The sermon-meditation is therefore not founded on psychological techniques of soul-searching and contemplation, nor does it strive to provide the listeners with a religious experience. Rather, it reflects on the text's own character, which leads to its proclamation. Therefore the sermon-meditation concentrates on what the text has to say (narrating, teaching, encouraging, and warning) and on that which God wishes to mediate to the people of today with the "Word within the words."

The biblical texts to be meditated upon are from the designated lectionary for the German Protestant Church. The bond with the lectionary favors "text-preaching" as opposed to "theme-preaching," in which an attractive motto is linked to a chosen text. The preference for text preaching goes back to dialectical theology's critique (Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann, Emil Brunner) of the theme-preaching of liberal theology. In dialectic theology, all theology is in itself a way from text to sermon. It is a combination of theological exegesis, insights from church history, systematic theology, and practical theology. This theological integration is concentrated in the sermon-meditation as Iwand understood and promoted it.

Iwand could create the sermon meditation because of the consensus in the theological faculty of the University of Göttingen. The department at that time (Gerhard von Rad, Günther Bornkamm, Joachim Jeremias, Ernst Wolf, Otto Weber) was totally committed to dialectical theology. Thus, a noteworthy theological unity was reached in the early issues of the preaching-meditations, which enabled Iwand to call on his colleagues in the department. Later those making contributions to the preaching-meditations were expanded to include numerous theologians who were close to this concept of theology and preaching: Hans Walter Wolff, Walther Zimmerli, Ernst Käsemann, Hermann Diem, Helmut Gollwitzer, and others. The list of contributors to the GPM is still representative of the kerygma-oriented German Protestant theology today. Iwand had worked since the end of World War II for the overcoming of politi-

cal divisions, especially for the reconciliation of the Germans with their eastern neighbors. Therefore, he also attracted contributors from Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Estonia.

From 1954 on, the GPM was distributed in the German Democratic Republic, the only theological journal that could legally reach through the iron curtain.

Iwand welcomed this as a symbol of theological Cooperation Crossing political borders and as a political sign. "We hope that the meditations will help to strengthen our old program—the unity of the message of the one gospel in the flux of state and society forms." Later difficulties led to the parallel publication of an East German journal Protestant Sermon-Meditations (published in East Berlin), in which particular articles from the GPM were published. Since 1990 these preaching-meditations have again been united with the GPM.

From 1939-1960, Iwand wrote 150 sermon-meditations of which about 110 appeared in the GPM. After his death, they were collected into 2 volumes—his most important theological legacy.

Iwand, H. J., *Ausgewählte Predigten*, ed. H. Esser and H. Gollwitzer, Werke III, 1963; *Predigt-Meditationen*, 2 vols., I, 1963-1984; II, 1973.

Source: William H. Willimon/Richard Lischer (Eds.), *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995, pp. 276-277.