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Homiletics

Book Review

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HOMILETICS

INTRODUCTION

"What kind of men are being graduated from the seminary these days?" That was the question asked by the Rev. George Loose in his introduction to the baccalaureate sermon addressed to the 1969 graduating class of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, on May 30. His own answer was, "Able ministers of the New Testament." This issue of *CTM* suggests that the answer is equally "able preachers."

In the next pages we print a sermon by a student of the class of 1969 and a sermon by a professor of Concordia, St. Louis.

The sermon titled "Easter Kind of People" is the work of Harvey von Harten III, a graduate of 1969 who now serves his first parish in Georgia. It was prepared for Homiletics III, delivered before an audience in Godfrey, Ill., and discussed before a tape recorder by a group of Christians who had heard his message. The sermon and the taped discussion were then presented for class discussion, a jury of his peers, 12 good men. The reactions varied from legalism to enthusiasm (in the sense of hearty approval).

The second sermon is the work of Prof. Martin Franzmann. His sermon was preached before the final spring quarter assembly of students in the chapel of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, which he addressed prior to taking up new duties for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in England. It is printed here not only for the interesting comparison with the sermon of his student colleague, but equally for its fascinating commentary on the contemporary scene. Beards, moustaches, and long hair were present in the procession at graduation last May, and some of them are being reacted to in parishes across the continent and across the waters this fall. This sermon does a kind

of "let him who is without moustache cast the first glance into his own life" sort of thing to all of us, although that is not its chief point. It works the work of the Gospel, and with a Word and in words that are moving and delightfully literary. It is printed here chiefly for the opportunity such publication provides to recognize with deep appreciation the preaching and teaching work of Martin Franzmann, which has enriched students and faculty since his arrival in 1946. It is fitting that even if our sending him to England is a kind of coals to Newcastle sort of thing, we are sending the most English-speaking of all our faculty to speak the good Word at Cambridge.

GEORGE W. HOYER

EASTER KIND OF PEOPLE

1 COR. 5:6-8

Leaven, lumps or loaves of bread, Passover lamb, roast dinners — what's the connection between all these ancient things and you, me and Godfrey, Illinois, in 1969? The connection is Easter. For these are Paul's Easter words to you and me. As a matter of fact, 1 Corinthians is very probably Paul's Easter letter to the Christians in Corinth from Ephesus, an Easter letter in which Paul urges the Corinthians to be "Easter people," using the picture language of the Passover holiday and *unyeasted* bread. The Passover, you recall, was a special religious festival or celebration for the Jews. By having a roast lamb dinner and by retelling the story of the first Passover in Egypt, the Jews would join their ancestors — a sort of time machine effect — in receiving from God the new life and new freedom away from Egypt. The Passover festival was the Jew's way of being reassured each year that God was smiling at him. The Passover symbolized "being in God's good graces." However, before the

celebration of the Passover could begin, the bread for the meal had to be baked—unleavened bread. Normally when the Jews baked bread they kept a piece of yeast-filled, uncooked bread on the shelf for the next baking. By the time they were ready to use it the yeast had fermented and multiplied, and they mixed it in with their new loaf of dough where it spread out and made the whole lump rise. Yeast or leaven then reminded them of anything that can work its way into something and corrupt it and get into every part of it, much like cancer does today. When the Jews thought of a loaf of bread as a group of people, they naturally thought of yeast in the bread as a thing that could corrupt and ruin the group. Sin was a primary example of bread leaven. The Passover, then, means God's new life, the bread is God's people, and the yeast or leaven is sin.

When Paul warns the Corinthians that "a little leaven leavens the whole lump," he is saying something like we say today—one bad apple can spoil the whole barrel. Paul knew what we also know: people are not compartmentalized. What we are in one part of our lives, we will be in other parts of our lives. How we are at home is affected by how we are away from home. If security is our god at work or at school, then security will be our god in marriage or in our court- ing. If race is important to us, then appearances will count in our church as well as our school. If there is a woman who just can't be trusted on the job, will you be able to trust her in the neighborhood?

As it is with individuals, so it is with congregations. If we don't object to ill feelings and gossip traveling through our congregation, then we can expect them to grow among us. If we tolerate lack of concern for persons, if we let persons or families gradually fade away and drop off our lists with little more than casual inquiry, then we are

inviting insensitivity and lack of concern to take over in our congregation.

But as complex as we humans are, there is a certain simplicity about us. St. John puts it very sharply: "If anyone says he loves God and hates his brother, he is a liar." If we really love God, if we're really for God, we run the risk that love will creep into every corner of our lives to affect how we feel about ourselves, to affect how we feel about other people. But if we let dislike of others, prejudice—John doesn't kid around, he calls it hate—if we allow hate to remain unchallenged in ourselves or in our congregation, we risk that power eating its way through us until it becomes the way we feel about ourselves and even about God.

St. Paul and St. John knew that to tolerate sin, to live with it, is to invite it to take over. A little leaven can work its way through the whole lump. The only thing to do is clean out the old leaven. And that is just what Paul writes in his Easter letter to the Corinthians. The Corinthians had gone through a crisis period. When Paul came to Corinth the first time, he said: "What are your values, your purpose in life? How do you treat your body (food, sex, drink)? What about your future? What's most important to you? Well, I've got something important for you; something of ultimate importance. I've got something that will claim not only your thoughts but your money, your time, and your allegiance: a Jew, His name is Jesus. He died. But He's alive now and, what's more, He is going to return again, to give full life to those who believe in Him and are ready for Him when He comes." The Corinthians, then, had some big changes to make, and they had some struggles inside themselves to make those changes.

You too have had similar periods in your lives, times when you've had to make a decision, to really decide what you stand for and what your values are. Perhaps it was

when you were called to surrender yourselves or take something on faith without seeing or knowing or getting any guarantee. It is these times when it's so clear that God is asking for a choice. Perhaps that time for you was at your confirmation, or when you chose a job or a spouse, perhaps at a time of emergency or death. If you have experienced that, then you know how difficult it was for the Corinthians to throw out the old leaven in their lives. But they did, and their repentance, their turning around, meant a great deal to them; they even changed the way they treated each other! But you know how it is when you've carried a suitcase or heavy box up a long stairs or up a big hill. You want to rest at the top. That's what the Corinthians did. Once they had become Christians, once they had been through their crisis, they thought — they hoped — that they were through with repentance. Just look through the Epistle to the Corinthians and you'll see that they weren't. In spite of sexual immorality, in spite of lawsuits between the members, in spite of the fact that they had cliques, they were saying, "Say, we've got a pretty fine church here." To that Paul said, "No. Don't you know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Get rid of all the leaven."

Congregations don't seem to change much. Today we will, of course, deal with some obvious, blatant sin. But we have sort of a silent agreement that as long as things don't get above a certain level we won't stir them up. It's kind of a sin level. And I think that level is roughly equal to whatever is accepted as the general American way of life. As long as things inside the church aren't worse than outside, we won't bother to struggle with them. But, brothers, we all have faults, and we all need each other's correction. We all have weak faith, doubts, uncertainties, and we all need each other's support. We all have our own little prejudices, fences around ourselves that others can and should pull

down. We all have blind spots and immaturities so that we all need each other to grow up by and through. A little prejudice, a little doubt, a little fault can eat its way through the whole lump. Repentance is one thing, but a *life* of repentance is quite another. It's hard; it takes commitment and determination; it takes a feeling about yourself that only constant forgiveness from God can give. Because it is such a full-time job, too many of our brothers would rather let sleeping dogs lie.

But to that attitude, Paul says. "No! Cast out the old leaven so you can be a new loaf, as you really are unleavened, as you really are uncorrupted." What does Paul mean here? He seems to be saying two different things at the same time. Some who hear him say, "You really are uncorrupted," conclude that if to be a Christian means to be always forgiven, then I am always God's new loaf, and whatever I do can't change that. What I do can't be that significant. They lie back and sun themselves in God's forgiveness. You know that Paul will have no truck with that view. Other people, however, hear Paul tell them they really are unleavened, clean, uncorrupted by the leaven of sin, and they can't believe it. "Paul," they say, "what you're saying is idealistic. It sounds good, it sounds religious, it's something that fits on Sunday." But when they try to put Paul's words to work on Monday, they seem to fade before five. "I know that I'll never be free from sin, I can never be uncorrupted, it doesn't apply to me." But Paul is talking about you. You are a new loaf, and that is because God didn't wait for you to get yourself uncorrupted.

You recall that the Jews were slaves in Egypt. If God had waited for the Jews in Egypt to free themselves on their own, He'd probably still be waiting (and today you probably wouldn't be able to tell the Jews from the Egyptians). But God didn't wait for them. Rather He declared them free,

and He told Pharaoh so, and He told the people so. And He told the people, "Now I have declared you free, so get out of Egypt and be free." That is what Paul is getting at. God has declared us new, uncorrupted people, and now he is urging us to get ourselves together and be what we are, look like what in fact we are.

God looked at Corinth, picked some out of that large loaf of a city and gave them a new start. God looked at Corinth, and He called some to believe in Him and from them He baked a fresh, uncorrupted loaf in the middle of that old loaf. Likewise in our time God looked at Godfrey and you and me and made us His unleavened bread. God didn't wait for us to set ourselves up and get ready for him. Paul says our Passover Lamb, Jesus, has been resurrected. "He is risen," that is the signal that our Passover Lamb has been sacrificed and that God has started His festival here in Godfrey before Godfrey people and Godfrey Christians had even gotten around to getting ready, before we had gotten around to getting rid of our old leaven. Let us therefore celebrate the festival.

And how do we celebrate? Not, says Paul, with malice, not with ill feeling and prejudice, not by creating the kind of fear in others that destroys their living, their hope, their freedom — and in the process ours too. Not, says Paul, with wickedness, where I buy my life and my future and my security at the expense of others. But rather we celebrate the festival with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. Sincerity shows itself in honesty and openness. Truth is trustworthiness and dependableness. Here again you fill in the specific examples of sincerity and truth that your job and your school and your family call for.

Let us celebrate the festival. It remains only to ask what is the festival, the celebration, that God invites us to join. Is it the

church service? No. Is it the church year (Christmas, Easter)? No, they are just the blueprints for the festival. The festival is nothing less than your life. When God turned you and me into an unleavened loaf, He turned our whole life into a celebration. When you go to work, you are celebrating. When you go to school, you are celebrating. When you wash the dishes, you are celebrating. To be a Christian is to know that life is God's party. The occasion? He is risen, He lives — and He is about to return. We know this life is the beginning of the party, that party which He keeps going on forever. And we are invited guests to the party! In this life we are just getting the party started, and in one sense we are waiting for Him to arrive. For you might say He is the life of the party. To be a Christian is to be joined to that life of the One who is risen. To be joined to Him in your baptism — as you are — is to be joined to His death and to carry in you the promise that you, too, will rise.

To be God's loaf of uncorrupted bread is to know that life is God's party. "Hmph!" you say, "Life doesn't look much like a party to me. Vietnam and Biafra are no banquets, life in Godfrey is not such a joy." Maybe even your life isn't much of a party. You're right, much of life doesn't look like a party, but that is because there are many people who don't know about the party and haven't accepted their invitations. And that means our job is cut out for us. Our job? Our job is to live life like a party. Not with the old ingredients, but with the new. Not just words of praise and joy, but with thoughts of praise and joy, plans of praise and joy, actions and hopes of praise and joy. Our job is to live life like a party so that when He arrives, the party will be in full swing, for He is risen, and the Risen One has said, "Watch, I come quickly." Indeed, Lord, come quickly. Amen.

HARVEY VON HARTEN III

CHAPEL ADDRESS

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Text—Isaiah 57:15

Thus says the high and lofty One
 who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy:
 "I dwell in the high and holy place,
 and also with him who is of a contrite and
 humble spirit,
 to revive the spirit of the humble,
 and revive the heart of the contrite.

In Christ Jesus dearly beloved:

I have great admiration for the historical people who say, "Our age will undoubtedly go down in history as the age of something-or-other"—say the age of effeminate men and women in bell-bottomed trousers. But I cannot but view these predictions with considerable reserve, and it is with the consciousness that I speak as a fool that I venture one of my own: "Our times will go down in history as the age of the slob and the era of the kook."

Not that there are more slobs and kooks now than there have been heretofore or probably shall be hereafter; the supply seems to be fairly constant. But they are noisier than they used to be, and are taken more seriously than they once were. And they have mastered the art of making all nonslobs and antikooks feel vaguely guilty for not being slobs and kooks also. You begin to feel that every year you have lived beyond thirty amounts to an accumulation of guilt.

Both slob and kook live by simple creeds tenaciously held. The creed of the slob (according to the best texts) is: "I am as good as anybody; this is an undebatable proposition and a nonnegotiable position. *Hier stebe ich, ich kann nicht anders*, so help me, I." And the creed of the kook runs: "Any idea is valid so long as I entertain it. This is an incontrovertible proposition and a nonnegotiable position. *Hier stebe ich, ich kann nicht anders*, so help me, I." The fact that they cannot say, "So help me, God,"

takes something from the solemnity of their affirmations, but they make up for this by repetition and the use of solid punctuation, like bricks or bottles.

Slob and kook tend, of course, to cross-breed, with the result that one is confronted with many mixed types and it is rather difficult to obtain pure specimens for purposes of analysis. But the characteristics of the slob would seem to be these: He sees no face that has in it what he would fain call master. He sees no burning bush before which he is moved to remove the shoes off from his feet. He sees no daily beauty in another's life that makes his ugly. He may have the sexual morals of an alley cat, the social responsibility of a barnacle, and the vision of an earthworm; but this does not deter him from his huge embracing contempt for other men's morality. If someone demonstrates for decency, his answer is: "Why aren't you demonstrating against the establishment?" His ideal is a world full of slobs all slobbering it up together in a littered slob clubroom, where the assurance that he is everybody's equal is daily made double sure.

The kook is in an enviable position; he is the center of the universe and the measure of all things. He has met all arguments in advance and can deal with all contradiction, either by not listening or by screaming: "I have said it thrice, and what I say thrice is true." His ideal would be a world in which his voice is the voice of *the* guru, while millions sit cross-legged at his feet absorbing his syllable in meditative vacuity.

Neither slob nor kook is a new phenomenon. The first slob came into the world when man first heard and believed the words: "You shall be like God." The first kook was born when man first listened to that first "Yea, hath God said?"—when man's heart grew proud because of his beauty and he "corrupted his wisdom for the sake of his splendor" (Ezek. 28:17).

Slob and kook are religious phenomena.

Both are fighting against God, and both know that it is a losing battle. Both are scared to death (which makes them cruel, of course). The slob will leap head first into the nearest manhole if he ever has to face facts and shed the convictions of his slobbery. The kook will become a wall-climbing maniac if he ever has to face the fact that his *idée fixe* may become unfixated. Poor slob. Poor kook.

Poor us. You theologians have, of course, long recognized that we are not talking only of *them*; we are talking about us. If we say, as say we must, *Simul iustus et peccator*, we are saying: *Simul iustus et quod Anglice dicitur slob; simul iustus et quod Anglice dicitur kook*. We document slobbery every time we answer a brother's "Good morning!" with a *weltschmerzlich* grunt, and we demonstrate our kookery every time a theological (or any other) discussion generates more heat than light. We are all interested in what God has done about the slob and the kook. *Nostra res agitur*. The gospel of the Ascension concerns us all.

What has He done, this high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy? Between Him and the slob-kook there is a great gulf fixed; and it would remain forever fixed but for the one incredible fact that God is God and not man, that His love is like no other love we know. God did not take Polonius' advice: "Those friends thou hast, and their affection tried, fasten them to thy soul with hoops of steel." God had no friends; He had only slobbers and kooks to work with, and He knew their "affections" all too well — they were weak, ungodly, sinners, enemies. And yet, and yet He spoke in Christ the Yes to all His promises; He fastened us kooks and slobbers to His soul with hoops of steel — hoops of steel forged on an earth whose very air was agony to His Son ("How long am I to be with you?"), forged in a fire which only One could endure, al-

beit with a cry; forged with the hammer of wrath, beaten out on the anvil of suffering love, annealed by blood and water from Christ's riven side, finished with the power of love mightier than death, burnished with the shining splendor of the resurrection, made everlastingly bright and beautiful with the flashing finality of the ascension. Here are hoops of steel that no heat of hell and no fires of affliction can melt. Here is God's ultimate Yes to all His promises.

"Safety is no accident," the slogan says. Peace is not fighting. It is as simple as that. What is the "contrite and humble spirit" but the realization that the slob and kook are fighting a war that is over, are fearing a fear that is empty? God has set a higher value on the slob than even the most quintessential slob ever dreamed of putting on himself. He has given him *the* nonnegotiable position of being son of God (the position which *the* Son would not negotiate!). He has given the poor fighting, frightened kook an *idée* more *fixe* than any he has ever spun from his entrails: "I have loved you with an everlasting love." He has revived all us walking dead.

"God is gone up with a shout," we sing at the Feast of the Ascension. The church is God's reverberating shout, the shout of triumph of the Holy One, His triumph over all slobbery and kookery. That's what the Reformation was all about — that God's shout be heard again above the tinkling ornaments of ecclesiastical bravery. That's what this school is all about; that's what our ministry is all about. Shout! For heaven's sake, for God's sake, for the Ascension's sake — don't get lost in argument about it and evermore come out by the same door wherein you went — shout! For the sake of all poor slobbers and kooks on whom the blessing of the ascending Lord still falls — shout!

MARTIN HANS FRANZMANN