

4-1-1957

Homiletics: Outlines on Ranke Epistles

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Recommended Citation

Mueller, Elmer E. (1957) "Homiletics: Outlines on Ranke Epistles," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 28, Article 20.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol28/iss1/20>

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HOMILETICS

Outlines on the Ranke Epistles

MISERICORDIAS DOMINI

1 JOHN 1:1-7 (key verses, 3, 7)

The longing for happiness is universal. Every human heart hungers for it. One day a troubled and distressed man came to an unbelieving preacher for help, for comfort, assurance, and peace of conscience. The godless preacher advised: "Forget about those things! Go to hear that famous comedian who is keeping his audiences in an uproar. He will rid you of your morbid broodings." After a moment of silence the troubled man groaned, "I am that comedian." One day, when his Christian friends were troubled and distressed, the apostle John, by inspiration, wrote to them this beautiful letter to comfort and assure them, to give them peace of conscience, to make them happy. In this first chapter, John says, in effect: If you want to be happy, if your joy is to be complete, it must be based on:

Fellowship with God

and let me assure you, you can

I. Trust in the Word of Life

A. Christ is the Word of Life (vv. 1-3)

1. He is Word, the Logos (vv. 1, 2). Cf. the Prolog (John 1:1, 2). He was "from the beginning" (v. 1). He was "manifested" (v. 2), the Word made flesh (John 1:14). Christ was manifested in the "Christmas miracle" (Luke 2:11), and in "Him dwelleth all the fullness of the God-head bodily" (Col. 2:9).
2. Christ is the Word of *Life* (vv. 1, 2). Eternal Himself, He is the Giver of life, the Creator (John 1:3). He came to give life to us (John 10:10). He spoke life-giving words: "I am . . . the Life" (John 14:6), "the Resurrection and the Life" (John 11:25, 26). He is the "Good Shepherd" (Gospel for today, John 10:11-16), the "true God and eternal Life" (1 John 5:20).

- B. The Disciples trusted in Him as the Word of Life (vv.1-3)**
1. They knew Him from personal experience (v. 1). "That . . . which we have heard" (His words); "seen" (the miracles); "looked upon" (His glory); "hands have handled" (after His resurrection). We know He is Christ, the Word of Life.
 2. They trusted in Him (v. 3). "That . . . One . . . declare we unto you." Trusting Him, they proclaimed His message faithfully, fearlessly. They were threatened, imprisoned, yet they preached Christ (Acts 4:10-12, 20). The records of the Book of Acts, of history, prove their courage and abiding trust in Him.
- C. You can trust Him as the Word of Life (v. 3)**
1. We speak to you of Christ, that you may have fellowship with us, fellowship with the Father and with His Son. Our coins are inscribed, "In God We Trust." Do we? Or is it just an empty phrase? Are we enjoying fellowship with God, or seeking for happiness in other things? Many seek happiness in material and temporal things—in money, in excessive living, in shady places, in power, etc. Where are you looking for happiness? God made you. God gave you a soul—a soul happy only in fellowship with Him; unhappy and haunted when separated from Him.
 2. Come to Him for happiness, for
 - a. Peace. Your sins are forgiven. His blood has cleansed you (v. 7).
 - b. Hope. Jesus is your soul's Hope, your sole Hope (John 14:6). He promises: "Lo, I am with you alway" (Matthew 28:20). Don't worry about the tomorrows in your life, for not one promise of God has failed or will fail.
 - c. Joy. "Rejoice in the Lord alway" (Phil. 4:4). Christian joy turns mourning into melody, the dark clouds of distress into the bright beams of May mornings. Let the worldly drown their sorrows. Let the ungodly search in a thousand places for happiness. Your joy is made complete (v. 4) in your fellowship with Christ, the Word of Life, in whom you trust.

II. *Walk in the Light*

A. God is Light (v. 5)

"In Him is no darkness at all." He never varies, never

wavers. He can be trusted, even when He leads us into the dark alleys of trial, sickness, sorrow, heartache, loneliness. He is "the Father of lights" (James 1:17). He is light for us, as David sings, "The Lord is my Light and my Salvation" (Ps. 27:1), for

B. Christ is the Light of the world (vv. 5-7)

Cf. Prolog (John 1:4,9). "I am the Light of the world" (John 8:12). This is good news, wonderful news, for every sinner bowed low with a besetting sin (the drunkard, the gambler, the proud, the greedy); for every person with a family problem, for every person with a heart burdened with grief, with the loneliness of a loved one taken away. He is the Light of the world whose blood cleanses from all sin, who showed how to meet temptation, who assures always of His love and mercy. Don't despair. He is near. He will warm your heart, cheer your spirit, never leave you nor forsake you.

C. We are to walk in the Light (vv. 6,7)

1. We are in darkness without God (v.6). By nature we are spiritually blind, dead, enemies of God. If we walk in darkness, we live a tragic lie; we walk with the wicked (Prov. 4:19; Ps. 82:5); we have fellowship with the devil (Eph. 6:12; 1 John 3:8). Let us "cast off the works of darkness" (Rom. 13:12,13).

2. We are to walk in the light with God (v.7). The darkness of sin is still there (Ps. 14:3; Eccl. 7:20). God has pronounced His curse upon sin (Rom. 3:10). There is only one way to come to Him — like the publican (Luke 18:9-14). But there is forgiveness (v.7) when we ask God for mercy (vv. 8-10). Thank God, we can walk in the light!

Ours is a blessed walk with God (v.7). The soldier, the traveler, longs for home, for a sight of the Statue of Liberty, the Golden Gate. St. Augustine said: "Our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee, O God." With our God, we are at rest, we are at peace, we have assurance for each day, for eternity. The screaming jet plane flashes by, and all the air seems to be smothered by the roar of the exhausts. We look up at our Savior on the cross, and all the wickedness of the world is smothered by the love streaming down from Calvary. We are privileged to walk in fellowship with the saints (v.3). We join the company of the courageous disciples, the Redeemed of all ages. We can walk with our shoulders back, with a confident stride, with our eyes

up, knowing that all is well now. And He will keep on making all things work together for our good, until we are there with Him in the light and glory and happiness of heaven. We can walk with confidence until we are in the presence of Christ and in fellowship with God forevermore. Then our joy will be complete!

Omaha, Nebr.

ELMER E. MUELLER

JUBILATE

1 JOHN 2:12-17

In this letter the aged John is writing to Christians whom he loves. The burden on his heart and in his letter is that they should love one another. What a great lesson for us! A Christian congregation is to be the body of Christ in that place, each member concerned for, and conveying spiritual life to, the other one. The disaster when that fails; the purpose of God when that succeeds. Just before this text John reminds that to love the brother is the "commandment" of Christ in the Upper Room. Where shall we get the resources for that love to one another in home and church? John says:

Cultivate the Love That Comes from God

I. *This is not the love that comes from the world*

- A. Not only God offers a kind of love. The world, too, makes its offer. The world is the sum total of people who are without the life of God—that have not found Him or have repudiated Him.
- B. The prime movers in the world, replacing the life and the drive of God in the heart, are "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." Comprehensive: the drives possessing the innermost will; the drive attaching to desire for possession; and the gratification of self first. Note how these drives have tried to conquer business, advertising, government, recreation, education. On every side, and through the flesh within, they are offered to the Christian to be the impulse for his living toward his fellow man.
- C. These are not of the Father. Instead of marks of life, they are marks of death. Instead of helps for doing the will of God and loving the brother (v.10), they are facilities for blocking that life and invoking the judgment of death (vv. 10, 11). They can't last; but this means not only that they stop but that the final Judgment of God comes upon them at the end. No, we

can't go to the world, much as we find our old flesh enjoying its method, much as we are preoccupied by its propaganda for flesh, self-indulgence, pride.

II. *This is the love that God gives through Jesus*

- A. To have God's own power for love, we have to be told over and over again that our sins are forgiven for the sake of the redeeming work of Jesus (v. 12; cf. 1:9; 2:1,2). We are not autonomous, but as little children we are to depend over and over on that act of redeeming love by which our sins are covered and new life can appear.
- B. This is the love that when we find it operative within us, is a mark of God's own presence and activity in the heart (v. 13 a). The youngest Christian can have this experience of a father in faith; for that knowledge of God's work depends on Him who made us and redeemed us ("from the beginning," v. 14).
- C. This is the love that proceeds where Christians overcome world, flesh, and devil and that in the virility which is Christ's doing and is sustained by His indwelling moves on to self-sacrifice and tasks of love (vv. 13, 14). The veteran of the Cross finds his youth renewed as the eagle's where he fastens on this constant supply and becomes partaker of this victory. Cf. John 16:33.
- D. The demands of love to our brethren are always new and changing. But the power for it has ever been with us, and it requires the same pondering of Jesus' work under God, the same Word of His redeeming work, that we have always known, in order to grow in this love. Cf. 1 John 4:10, 11.

The church needs people who love one another. The times are against it; our civilization frustrates it; our flesh resists it. But here is God and His Christ. By richly employing His giving let us cultivate the love that is His gift.

St. Louis, Mo.

RICHARD R. CAEMMERER

CANTATE

1 JOHN 3:1-8

Everyone wants to belong. "Lostness," "rootlessness" — problems of our time. The Christian is a person who has overcome this problem. He belongs. He has been found by One who loves him. He has been made a "son of God." We are often unmindful of the rich meaning of this term. It changes our life. Something to sing about.

Christians Should Know Themselves as Sons of God and Live as Sons of God

I. *Christians are sons of God*

- A. Christians have been made sons of God by His love (v.1). This love is amazing, since it took us as sinners and elevated us to sonship. God did this through *the* Son, Jesus Christ. We are sons by virtue of our relation to the Son of God.
- B. As sons of God, we look forward to a glorious destiny (v.2). This underlines and furthers the inestimable privilege accorded to us. God has made us His in time. He means us to be His in eternity as well. V.2 b expresses the content of this destiny — to be fully conformed to Christ.
- C. Being sons of God manifests itself in a Christlike life here and now. Cf. vv. 3, 6, 7. "Sons of God" is no mere label pasted on us. It is a title with a real and living effect. As sons we become like the Son. We live the outgoing life of love. (Collect)
- D. This is the life. We have found our destiny. We belong. We are glad. Cf. the mood expressed in v. 1 again.

II. *Christians are faced with the danger of losing their sonship*

- A. We can forget what being a son of God means. We can forget that holiness is part of a Christian's calling. We can forget the striving for perfection. Gnostics of St. John's day. Modern easygoing Christians who forget the ethical responsibilities that flow from our status as sons. Sin regarded lightly.
- B. When we sin, we violate the holy will of God (v.4). When we sin, we indicate that we are under the sway of powers opposed to God (v.8 a). The majesty of God and the dread power of the Evil One serve to remind us of the horror of sin.
- C. Sin can disqualify us as sons of God (v.6 b). Persisted in, entertained, sin can cancel out our sonship and can reduce us to the bondage and lostness from which we were delivered.

III. *Christians will apply to Christ to retain their sonship*

- A. Fleeing this danger, Christians will seek God's forgiveness in Christ. Here is where God has spoken His Word of forgiveness. Christ takes away sin (v.5; Is. 53:5,6). The Father, for Jesus' sake, forgives penitent sons. (Luke 15)

B. Fleeing this danger, the Christian will seek from Christ the power to live the life as a son of God. Those who sin are under the power of the Evil One. Christ has broken this power (v. 8 b). His victory means power for us to serve Him.

C. The Christian, as a son of God, is enabled to live conformed to Christ. He will live thus in his calling. He will be Christ to all (v. 7 b). He will continue to strive for a greater conformity to Christ until he "shall see Him as He is."

We do belong. We are sons of God. Let this high privilege be in us a power to lead us upward to live as God's own Son has lived.

Yonkers, N. Y.

RICHARD E. KOENIG

ROGATE

1 JOHN 5:12-21 (key verses, 14-16 a)

Prayer has been called the "central phenomenon of religion." Faith, in Luther's judgment, is "prayer and nothing but prayer." It has been said that "praying is to religion what thinking is to philosophy." One of the first things that the average man thinks of when he thinks of religion is prayer. The nonpraying man is rightly considered religiously dead. But too often we think of prayer in terms of asking for something for ourselves. Therefore we must absorb the message of today's text:

The Confident Christian Prays for His Brother

I. *The Christian faith produces the confidence of prayer*

A. Christians "have" the Son (v. 12). "Have" means the same as, but it is more vivid than, "believe on" (v. 13), which has become pale through misuse and overuse. To "have" the Son is to possess Him, hold Him in your grip, cling to Him, have a claim on Him. This begins at the foot of the cross, through which He claimed us, because Christ's saving death for us gives us the Son and His power. A sermon on prayer must begin there. *Illustration:* A sick person whose life is being saved by a doctor's careful treatment "has" that doctor. There is a relationship of confidence and gratitude bordering on possession. *Parallels:* 1 John 2:23; 2 John 9.

B. Having the Son means being born of God (v. 18). We who have the Son have been born into a new life with new relationships and new confidences. The Son gave us a new life

when He gave His life. Being "born again" is a good metaphor for conversion. *Illustration:* The naturalized U. S. citizen is, in a sense, "born again." He has new allegiances, new privileges, new duties. Much more so is the new relationship of the Christian with Christ. *Parallels:* John 3:3, 7; 1 Peter 1:23.

- C. *Having the Son means being "in" the Son* (v. 20). The relationship gets more intimate as we probe deeper. Being "in" Christ is a tremendous New Testament concept (Eph. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Eph. 2:13). In this new relationship we are with others in the body of Christ. This involves confidences and contacts between ourselves and Christ and one another. *Illustration:* We are "in" the Son not as a key is in a box or a house is in a town but as a child is in a family or a church member is in a congregation.
- D. *This intimate relationship produces the confidence of prayer* (v. 14). Close friends talk to one another in confidence. Man and wife, much more than close friends, share some of life's deepest confidences. Now in the union that is even more intimate—that of the Christian and Christ—there should be perfect confidence. Cp. Luther's explanation of "Our Father": "God would by these words tenderly invite us . . . with all boldness and confidence. . . ." *Parallel:* Heb. 4:16.

II. *God hears and answers us when we pray according to His will*

- A. *God wants us to pray according to His will* (v. 14). Praying according to God's will is equivalent to praying in Christ's name. As we grow in faith, more and more our will should become merged with His will. *Illustration:* Business partners, men working together, married people, and others who are constantly together begin to think alike and to anticipate the will of the other. So it should be with the Christian. *Parallels:* Eph. 1:5; Gal. 1:4; Matt. 26:39. Cp. the third petition of the Lord's Prayer.
- B. *Prayers according to God's will are heard* (v. 14). This fact should produce confidence and assurance in us. It should be enough for us to know that God is listening to our prayers.
- C. *If God hears our prayers, we have obtained our requests* (v. 15). God's hearing and answering are made synonymous. The correct prayer, that is, the prayer according to His will, is always

answered. This explains passages which speak of the absolute response that God makes to prayers of faith (Matt. 7:7; 21:22; Mark 11:24; John 14:13,14; 15:7; 16:23—in today's Gospel—1 John 3:22). God answers prayers three ways: "yes," "no," and "not now." But with all three answers He has heard; and if the prayer is according to His will, which should also be your will, He has answered the request made of Him.

III. *God especially hears and answers prayers for the sinning brother*

A. *Praying for the sinning brother is praying according to God's will* (v. 16). Fellowship with God implies fellowship with men expressed in intercessory prayer (1 John 1:3). Prayer can be classified as confession, thanks, adoration, intercession, and petition. This text talks about intercession. Too often we limit prayer to petition. This shows immature Christianity. (*Illustration:* There's the boy who said he didn't pray every night "because there's some nights when I don't want nothin'!") Cf. the General Prayer. Let's do it personally and privately also. Instead of talking, gossiping, and clucking, "Tsk, tsk," over the sinning brother, we should pray for him.

B. *We are not commanded to intercede if the sin is "unto death"* (vv. 16, 17). "Sin unto death" is premeditated and persistent rejection of Christ (RSV—"mortal sin"; Goodspeed—"deadly sin"). It is difficult to classify sin. Be careful about judging. The purpose of this limitation is to avoid thinking that everyone is a brother in the life of God. V. 19 shows the contrast.

C. *By praying for a sinning brother a Christian can bring God's life to that brother* (vv. 16, 18). Fellow members of Christ's body handle the Word of Life and feed one another with it. This is done face to face and, as the text specifies, through the power of intercession. The end of all prayer is the perfection of the whole Christian body. *Parallels:* John 10:10; James 5:14, 20; 1 Peter 4:8.

Pray for your brothers. When you think of prayer, think of interceding for a member of Christ's body, not of getting things for your body. *Rogate* means "pray." Not only this week should have its rogation days, but also all of our life should be an unending rogation (supplication) for our brothers in Christ's body who need us to keep the life of God.

Berkeley, Mo.

HAROLD W. SCHEIBERT

THE ASCENSION OF OUR LORD

EPH. 4:7-13 (key verse, 13)

Do you ever try, as I do, to picture to yourself the simple everyday surroundings of the great events of Jesus' life on earth?

I wonder, for example, whether Joseph, Mary's husband, had a quiet, solemn voice and manner, as I picture him, or whether he was bluff, big, and hearty; or whether on Easter morning the frightened disciples, hidden away in the room, were ashamed and cross with themselves when the women set out to finish Jesus' burial; whether on the day of Jesus' ascension the sky was blue and clear, with just a few lazy white clouds floating here and there, or whether the air was warm with a touch of moisture in it, inviting a friendly walk at leisurely pace and promoting pleasant feelings of contentment.

On the fortieth day after His resurrection, after His followers had seen Him from time to time, Jesus was visible to them for the last time. On Mount Olivet, near Bethany, as He spoke words of blessing, He rose higher and higher till they could see Him no more.

He told them to wait in Jerusalem for great things that were to happen. They were to be part of them. In time, as they stood there, an angel told them Jesus would come again visibly.

As the disciples turned thoughtful steps back to Jerusalem, they must have encouraged one another. The best encouragement, beyond the intervening crises and climaxes He had foretold, must have been that He would come again and that where He was now, they would be also.

Till We All Come

- I. *We cannot see Jesus now, but He has not deserted us nor left us to our own devices (vv. 7-10)*
 - A. The final words of Jesus to His followers recorded by Matthew, for example, are: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."
 - B. Remember that the Jesus who ascended is the same Jesus who in His incarnation descended. Cf. Ps. 68:18. His concern is the same now as then. (Luke 19:10)
 - C. Jesus has taken His visible presence from us but has sent us His Holy Spirit, by whom Jesus is held before us as Savior and Lord. (John 15:26; 16:14)
 - D. We have received grace for salvation and for preparation to qualify us for particular gifts (v. 7). Cf. Rom. 12:3-8, 1 Corinthians 12.

II. *His gifts to men are for the good of His people* (vv. 11, 12)

- A. Those who are God's messengers and teachers to us are to be received as gifts from Christ with honor and especially with attentive, seeking hearts. (Luke 10:16; John 20:21-23)
- B. All gifts given by Christ to His church are for the good of all and are not to be held tightly nor competitively.
- C. Christ's gift of particular people for certain uses to His church are to mature and complete the Christians, to equip them in turn to minister and to edify others.
- D. One insistent question in church life is always: Are we building an institution or organization, or is our concern to serve and edify the body of Christ? (Rom. 14:18, 19)
- E. We must be clear not only in regard to what we have been saved *from* but also in regard to what we have been saved *for*.

III. *Finally, through the use of His gifts, we come to that fullness which Jesus has* (v. 13)

- A. Even the best of us lacks much, but even the weakest can grow stronger. We must not be satisfied to excuse our faults but use God's gifts of men who can help us to grow in knowledge, in faith, and in virtue. (Heb. 6:1, 2 Peter 1:5, 6)
- B. Pride is the direct enemy of edification.
- C. We can grow up in Christ till we all come to heaven where Jesus is. Cf. context following.
- D. It is only through knowledge and faith in relation to Christ that spiritual growth can occur, only in heaven will unity be perfect. (2 Peter 3:18)

Like the festival of the resurrection, the festival of Christ's ascension has a thrill of confident expectancy. We do not see Him now, but we shall see Him. We have received grace and grow by His mercy, till in heaven we all come to the perfection He has.

Portland, Oreg.

OMAR STUENKEL