

11-1-1968

Homiletics

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Recommended Citation

Hoyer, George W. and Moellering, Ralph L. (1968) "Homiletics," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 39, Article 72.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol39/iss1/72>

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HOMILETICS

In the issues of the 1968—69 year the homiletics section of *CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY* plans to comment on various difficulties in the preaching task. The objective, of course, will not be to join the group at the wailing wall who weep tears genuine or crocodile at the supposed demise of preaching, but to suggest positive approaches to meeting the new tests of proclamation.

Some queries have been received as to whether CTM will in a future year again prepare sermon studies for each Sunday. Your opinion on this approach is solicited. Meanwhile, for those who are aided by sermon studies paralleling their own Sunday-by-Sunday obligations, the following publications could be helpful:

Come, Immanuel, edited by Richard R. Caemmerer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968). These sermons will provide insights and approaches for the Advent-Christmas-Epiphany season.

The Promise and the Presence, by Harry N. Huxhold (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965). These are sermons that pull the propers into a unity around an Old Testament text. The volume covers the festival half of the church year.

The Word from the Cross, by Richard O. Hoyer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968). This is a Lenten series by the author of one of CTM's dialog sermons of last year.

Ha! Ha! Among the Trumpets, by Martin H. Franzmann (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966). These 15 sermons will provide insight and incisiveness for sermons to fit into the cracks remaining after the coverage by the volumes mentioned above. They are not only notable examples of the Word made contemporary by a noted exegete but are the best kind of evidence of

how impressive and expressive words still are in the midst of a visual and perverse generation.

The Sermon and the Propers, by Fred H. Lindemann (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958). This set of four volumes remains the best companion for the preacher who wishes to live and let live in the church year himself and his fellows in the people of God.

And then there is always *In Time . . . For Eternity*, by Justus Kretzmann and George Hoyer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963). Someone ought to use the remaining copies and preach on the Eisenach Epistles this year.

Obviously that list could go on and on, and could certainly go beyond publications issued by the publishers of this journal. Meanwhile, back at this year and this journal's homiletics offering . . .

In this issue Dr. Ralph L. Moellering addresses himself to the new situation (for preaching and for many another thing) that has developed with the newly burgeoning spirits of the youth of the coming generation. He is equipped to reflect on this area. For the past several years he has served as the pastor of University Lutheran Church in Berkeley, Calif., a resource preacher for those involved in the many-sided issues of that city and university community. Recently he has been appointed associate pastor for special ministries at the University of California in Berkeley. He will be teaching and writing to aid the church in arriving at new understanding of the youth movement.

The address that follows contains some of that thinking. Delivered at a chapel convocation for graduate students and pastors enrolled in refresher courses at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, it is geared to the Epistle for the First Sunday in Advent and may in

this way be helpful for the clergyman preparing his preaching assignment for the new season.

GEORGE W. HOYER

"THE CHALLENGE OF THE 'NOW' GENERATION TO THE CHURCH"

ROMANS 13:11-12

Introduction

"Listen, you old fogies over 30. Listen, and pay attention. You don't know what is happening in your own world. The world you made, the world you grew up in, barely exists any more. It's changing and changing fast.

"We are the people who are changing it— young people under 25, even under 20. Kids in the Peace Corps and Vista, instructors for Head Start and Upward Bound.... We teach in the slums and help the poor and the handicapped and the underprivileged. We join civil rights marches and anti-Vietnam demonstrations and sit-ins at city hall and the state capitol. We postpone settling down to the routine of jobs and pay check. Some of us are campus rebels and mods and even teeny-boppers, but many of us are otherwise conservative middle-of-the-roaders.

"Tradition is no sacred cow for us, and the past with all its errors and tragedies is yours, not ours. What's ours is the present, and, emphatically, the future." This is the provocative summary offered by a recent writer of the attitude that characterizes what has been labeled the "now" generation.

The evidence that "times are a'changin'" is widespread. Many parents are alarmed by the alleged generation gap and profess to be unable to communicate with their children. Youngsters complain that their fathers and mothers do not understand them. They dream dreams and see visions that seem impractical, if not ridiculous, to their pragmatic-minded elders. Even Lutheran young people are capable of "some wild

brainstorming" in burying the old and giving impetus to the new. In Fargo, North Dakota, a "public trial and execution" was conducted for the local Luther League, which was then replaced by YIL (Youth in Love). The pastor of Olivet Lutheran Church reported: "Our youth had caught a vision which they didn't want to have spoiled by the traditionalist practical-minded adults sitting around forcing old patterns on them. After we swallowed our wounded pride, and admitted our dispensability, things began to move." The new mood is reflected in the revision of the Walther League in fostering direct youth leadership to "assist in mobilizing area and regionwide happenings to give collective strength" to launch an issue-oriented ministry.

What we are confronted with, then, on college campuses and in our approach to youth generally today is not the lost generation or the beat generation but the restless generation— innovators and idealistic zealots creating a new way of life, the promise of tomorrow. Shocking to the traditionalists and perturbing for parents, the prospect is undeniably refreshing and exciting.

The church, as well as politicians, cannot ignore this amazing development. Since youth comprises a major voting bloc to whom appeals must be made, congressmen and state officials are becoming sensitive to their distinctive aspirations and drives. A constitutional amendment has been proposed to lower the voting age to 18. The communications media— TV, magazines, the press—are increasingly aimed in the direction of the "now" generation. The manufacturers of Oldsmobile felt compelled to produce the "Youngmobile." Unconventional fashion trends originate with the young and are imitated by their elders. These are the pacesetters who challenge, revamp, or discard the standards of the past in everything from educational concepts to sexual mores. Churchmen who wish to be alert to

the changing milieu in which the Gospel must be proclaimed and interpreted cannot overlook this striking phenomenon.

Perhaps they and all of us can "get with it" and find some points of connection if *we* recognize that what Jesus and the apostles instigated was (in a sense) a "now" generation, that the first century of our era was a period of decision that called for some of the same responses that excite youth today. When St. Paul wrote to the Christian colony at Rome, he stressed the urgency of immediate action to cope with the approaching crisis. Since the perils and promises of the future age were already breaking in on Paul's contemporaries, they had to stand up and prepare for involvement. They had to be alert to new developments and sensitive to signs of God's purposeful action in their world. Present responsibilities—ethical exhortations—were shaped by the impending consummation. Note well the accent on the present moment—on the word *now*. As an excerpt from the Epistle for the First Sunday in Advent, we read from the 13th chapter of the encyclical to the Romans, verses 11 and 12: "You know what hour it is, how it is full time now for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; the night is far gone, the day is at hand. Let us then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light."

I.

In both the Introit and the Gradual we open our minds to new insight as we cope with new situations: "Show me Thy ways, O Lord; teach me Thy paths." The Old Testament reading for the day is the new-covenant passage from Jeremiah, which promises the dawn of a new era in which broken relations will be mended and people will respond eagerly and spontaneously to the directives of their Lord. As with contemporary youth the outlook is hopeful for the future.

Christian hope has a future dimension, both horizontal and vertical, both in relation to the life that now is and that which is to come. Ultimately the victory gained by Christ will become fully evident in history or beyond history. The petitions of the Lord's Prayer will finally be fulfilled. Christian hope also has immediate prospects for attainment. Right now the declared followers of Christ should be aware of the near approach of the final salvation and judgment. And right now they should find the life and teachings of Jesus relevant and compelling. Right now they should be thinking and talking and acting as beneficiaries of God's grace. For Christians do not belong to the old order, the night, which will soon fade away, but they are part and parcel of the new order, the day, which is already on the verge of moving in and taking over.

Both liberals and conservatives agree: our country is in trouble. Some go so far as to say that our society is sick. We spend billions to race to the moon, and we lack funds to combat poverty. Never before have so many citizens been convinced that we are involved in an immoral military venture. Souls are seared with guilt feelings. Meanwhile, eruptions of violence testify to the desperate frustration felt by ghetto dwellers in our metropolitan areas. Revolutionary change confronts us on every hand. There is no escape. It is not time for sleep. We cannot evade our responsibility. A drugged and heavy-headed unawareness of movements around us is inexcusable. An inert, listless indifference to what is happening and what will soon take place is never desirable, but it is especially inappropriate at the beginning of a new church year when momentous decisions are in the making. [Refer to recent examples from current events.] "Know what hour it is, how it is full time *now*" for you to assert yourself. When Christ came originally, it meant a stupendous upheaval for the Greco-Roman world. Once again, under

God's governance, the old order may be disappearing and the new arriving. "Salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed."

The imagery used by the apostle is reminiscent of the daily miracle of returning light. It points to something that will inevitably come to pass—nothing can prevent tomorrow from dawning. If we postulate that "the night is far spent," the figure conveys the idea of something already near at hand; implicitly it carries the suggestion of a contrast as sharp as that between day and night. The darkness was the shelter beneath which wicked men were likely to perpetrate their evil deeds. Day and night consequently had their moral counterpart, and Paul could call on his readers to abandon the "works of darkness" and perform the works of light. The kind of practice that marks a person's life becomes so habitual a part of the self that it is like the clothes a person normally wears; but like those clothes it can be changed. The soiled and filthy garments of carelessness and self-indulgence can be laid aside. Instead of such apparel—so shabby and so vulnerable—the disciple of Christ can be equipped with the "armor of light," that is, be clothed with ideas and aspirations which are appropriate to the new day. "When the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the Law, to redeem those who were under the Law, so that we might receive adoption as sons." Christ's renovating activity also sets us free from old bondages and anachronistic policies in church and state, and gives impetus and direction to another "now" generation.

II.

Almost every analyst has contrasted the zestful sixties with the apathetic fifties. A decade ago college youths were notorious for their utter indifference toward international problems and social issues. Energies were concentrated on material aggrandizement, and

young people seemed intent on insulating themselves from all discomforts and avoiding any complicated involvement. Few were prepared to make financial sacrifices to implement personal convictions.

The Kennedy election in 1960 somehow sparked the imagination of youth and proved to be a turning point. The Negro revolt evoked broad sympathies. The more militant civil rights organizations recruited some of their primary support from college students. Indignation with the Establishment was voiced. A basic discontent with the prevailing system finally erupted in a full-fledged revolt in Berkeley in the fall of 1964, and the reverberations shook administrators and faculty everywhere. The long silence at American institutions of higher learning was broken with a roar of approval. Almost overnight the young people who had grown up during the years of Hiroshima and Sputnik, the computer and astounding technological advances, voluntarily and spontaneously shed their protective cocoon.

Now American youth, at least in some places, are saying no to the interminable rat race that strives to keep up with the Joneses. The pursuit of money does not strike them as a worthy endeavor. For them the question of identity—"Who are we?"—is most compelling. In this urgent search for self-realization there is a repudiation of ZIP-code, area-numbered, IBM card, anonymous society. Folk songs, irreverent exclamations, outlandish fashions, and the theater of the absurd are all visible indications of this inward disdain for the status quo.

"Zam! Pow! Crunch!" Marshall Fishwick writes in the *Saturday Review*, is the lexicon of the "now-pop-fluid-action-accidental-cool" generation. "The present instant," to quote George Kubler, "is the plane upon which the signals of all being are projected."

The Delphic Oracle for the "in" group today appears to be Marshall McLuhan, whose cryptic sayings have elicited comments

and reactions in many quarters. Presumably the Now People who are under twenty-five years of age advanced from adolescence to maturity under the domination of the tube. They are distinguished from their predecessors by a craving for participation. In the academic atmosphere the Now People are denouncing stale lectures and proposing student-initiated courses that stress relevance and personal involvement. In their recreation the new breed prefer unstructured dance forms that emphasize relaxation and freedom in foot and arm motions. Don Affeldt argues in *The Cresset* that "to a Now Person the blaring jukebox and the omnipresent transistor are not sources of aural tyranny. . . . [Instead they] shut out the external world and invite the hearer to explore his inner senses, or conversely, call him to unshackle himself from the constrictions of his superego in order to give full play to the self who yearns to embrace all things." From this perspective LSD can become the magic drug that expands consciousness, breaks down the limitations of normal shortsightedness, and allows for a maximum participation in new and previously unfamiliar areas of mental and spiritual exploration. How are we to react to these new developments?

There are some positive things to be said in support of the "now" generation. There is much that would seem to be commendable in the vital accents among avant-garde youth. First of all, college students who champion the cause of the poor and the oppressed are in accord with the Hebrew prophets and the recorded ministry of Jesus. Disavowing carnal security and the accumulation of wealth as top priorities is altogether consistent with taking up our cross to follow Christ. Commitment to the goal of world peace or involvement in the struggle for social justice is fully in keeping with the mandate of Christian love and the criteria for valid discipleship, specified in our Lord's parable of the Last Judgment. The action is

the same, although the motives differ. A pietistic withdrawal from world affairs, on the other hand, is irresponsible.

Second, Christians can applaud the determination of the contemporary generation to emphasize immediate opportunities. What is happening *right now* is important. We should not be weighted down with the excess baggage of outmoded traditions, nor should we be paralyzed into inactivity by doubts and fears about the future. It is desirable to respond to the *kaïros*—the appropriate moment, the imminent crisis—as God projects it. Our Lord calls upon us to be involved meaningfully and constructively in movements for reform and progress *now*, not at a more convenient season or when we are more mature or after the battles have ended.

Nonetheless, there are critical reflections on the "now" generation that should also be mentioned. For one thing, there would seem to be a naive optimism about the expectation that a corrupt world will so readily be amended by youthful determination. The sobering lesson of history is that individuals and nations regress as well as move forward. When old demons have been banished, new ones arise to replace them. Theological insight into the inescapable perversity of human nature cautions us against becoming too enamored with present possibilities. The defects and pitfalls in current programs of reform may become all too evident from a later perspective. The "now" generation, in other words, is tempted to assume too hastily and too superficially that its own presuppositions, lofty ideals, protestations, and procedures for inducing change are unassailable. The older generation may be handicapped by too much pretension and phoniness, but who or what can guarantee the absolute and persistent integrity of the movement inaugurated by the peace enthusiasts or the Black Power champions or anyone else?

Then too, impatient youth sometimes be-

come utterly unrealistic in their demands for instantaneous change or uncompromising reform. They make few concessions to human frailty or the sheer inertia of time-honored institutions. Unwilling to settle for anything less than the ideal, they run the risk of jeopardizing the gains that are feasible. Often the goals that are sought are obscure and ill defined. So the question arises: Can the antinomian, sometimes nihilistic tendencies of the now generation be kept in bounds?

McLuhan advocates discarding the old yardsticks and criteria, and dispensing with old influences. But *now*-time, no less than every other epoch, is dependent on borrowed ideas and accumulated traditions whether its people admit it or not. Life is not merely an infinity of present instants. As new patterns replace the old, there should be a sense of continuity and not of cataclysmic disruption. Consecutive reason and systematic analysis are still desirable. All are the gifts of God's good creation. Both the old and the new stand under judgment.

Conclusion

The challenge we offer this morning to the "now" generation—and to the oldsters who are trying to understand it—is to sense

the divinely appointed end of all our endeavors, the consummation of the new life in Christ, which introduces an element of urgency while it delivers us from aimless drifting. "You know what hour it is, how it is full time now for you to wake from sleep. . . . The night is far gone, the day is at hand. Let us then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light."

In conclusion I ask you to join in a petition taken from a well-known *Student Prayerbook*:

Our heavenly Father, give us the courage and insight to seek out the defects in the way we think and live today. Make us intelligently critical of all mere inherited, conventional religion, as also of the affirmations and claims of science and education and social service. Keep us from holding on to pious error when greater truth has been discovered. We feel that Thou wilt not desert us because we think in different ways and dare to question old customs and dogmas. We have no fear of faith broken by open eyes and consecrated hearts. Help us in our modern quest, and make us as good followers of Thy Son in our day as were the men of old. Amen.

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