



Preach You the Word

Text: Martin H. Franzmann (1907-1976)

Tune: *Rheinfelsisches Deutsches Catholisches Gesangbuch*, 1666

Martin H. Franzmann was a scholar, Seminary professor, and gifted hymnwriter, the author of many texts which continue to bless the Church to this day. His hymn, *Preach You the Word* captures the imagery of the Parable of the Sower, but more than that, reinforces the comfort that it is God's work to send out His Word and to do the work of conversion and keeping of Christians.



Martin Hans Franzmann

Martin Hans Franzmann was born January 29, 1907 in Lake City, Minnesota. He received his Bachelor's Degree from Northwestern College in 1928 and received his Masters of Divinity from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. Franzmann was raised in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) in the time when the fellowship between the Wisconsin Synod and our Missouri Synod had not yet been broken. In 1954 he began his teaching career in 1936 when he was Called to teach at his alma mater, Northwestern. In 1946 he

accepted a position teaching in the Exegetical Department at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, a department he chaired as of 1954. However, Franzmann always fostered a love of all things British and eventually found the greatest outlet of that love when he was sent to teach at Westfield House of Theological Studies in Cambridge, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of England's theological school. He taught there until his death on March 28, 1976.

Franzmann was a highly gifted man who served his church not only in teaching and scholarship, but in the administration of the

Synod itself, as well representing the church abroad at conferences. He was congratulated for this work in 1954 when Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne (however, at that time CTS was still in Springfield, Illinois) awarded him the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity "for his outstanding academic contributions and achievements as well as for his service and dedication to Lutheranism and the work of the Lutheran Church." As a theologian his greatest contribution may well have been his outspoken resistance to the growing popularity of higher-criticism. As a professor he was highly regarded by his students. His knowledge of the Greek New Testament was remarkable, as several of his former students recall his ability to recite, from memory, large portions of the it. His work with hymnody began with his translation of two hymns, *Isaiah, Mighty Seer in Days of Old* and *Rise Again, Ye Lion-Hearted* for *The Lutheran Hymnal*. He went on to write several other hymns which have been included in Lutheran hymnals since. Some of his more popular hymns are *Preach You the Word*, *Thy Strong Word Did Cleave the Darkness*, *O God, O Lord of Heaven and Earth*, and *With High Delight Let Us Unite*. Finally, he was a gifted preacher, and his best sermons have been preserved in a volume entitled *Ha Ha! Among the Trumpets*.

Franzmann's hymn on the Parable of the Sower, *Preach You the Word*, skillfully weaves together several of Holy Scripture's teachings of the Word of God. The first stanza calls to mind 2 Timothy 4, where St. Paul warns of the day when men will not endure sound teaching, but couples it with Isaiah's promise that the Word of the Lord endures forever (Isaiah 40:8). From that first stanza and choice of images, we are taught that the Word of God does not depend on us, but its power is from the God who gives it. The next stanzas focus on the power of the Word, and that we do not always understand how the Holy Spirit works through it. The only task given by God is to preach the Word, to scatter His Word recklessly by telling it to all nations. We preach the Word, and God waters and tends to it, brining forth fruit where He wills. The final stanza is the comfort for preacher and hearer alike: it is not the job of men to tend to the Word, but "the Harvest Lord who gave the sower seed to sow will watch and tend His planted Word." Thanks be to God!